

The Bookery

Weatherford, J. (2010). *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

A review by Annet Chu

Jack Weatherford is a cultural anthropologist who specializes in tribal cultures. In his history book, he reintroduces the greatest political and military leader of all time: Genghis Khan (in power from 1206 to 1227). Weatherford's writing style is lively; he presents the Mongol empire as if he were writing a story, with clear descriptions of the historical figures. The descriptions that he provides bring the dead back to life without a moment of dullness. The depictions of the historical events and figures are remarkable because they are readily relevant to contemporary culture. Weatherford exposes the constructive side of Genghis instead of the cruel, barbaric side of the conqueror. The book is divided into three sections: Genghis Khan's rise from a group of tribes, Genghis Khan's Mongol empire, and Genghis Khan's impact on the modern world.

Leadership lessons are explored in Part 1 of Weatherford's book. He describes how Genghis developed laws that transformed a tribal society into a great civilization. Although Genghis worshiped the Eternal Blue Sky, he accepted different religious beliefs in his court. His understanding of and appreciation for diversity is noteworthy and is a valuable skill that individuals must learn in order to be diplomatic, well rounded, and harmonious in the contemporary world.

The essence of the historical narrative begins in Part 2, in which Weatherford reveals how Genghis and his sons expanded their empire to Central Asia and Europe. The attacks are well described, but the final chapter in this section is the most fascinating, as Weatherford explains how Mongolian women ruled the court. The men in charge of the court were occupied with their leadership roles in the battlefields, and sometimes they were simply too drunk to rule; hence, their female counterparts guided the court.

In the last part of the book, Weatherford mostly reveals how Genghis's grandson Khubilai Khan (in power from 1260 to 1294) successfully ruled China during the Yuan Dynasty. He strived for fairness in ruling his people and established public schools for all children, including peasants. During the dynasty, capital offences were significantly reduced. Although this period was a humiliation for the Han descendants in China, Khubilai led the country through a period of discovery, which opened doors to the outside world.

The glossary provides an introduction to Mongolian terms and is essential, as understanding a culture requires some understanding of its language. For example, the term *anda*—which means sworn brothers—is readily used to describe Mongolian relationships between men; it emphasizes the importance of relationships between people who are not biologically related in Mongolian culture.

Finally, the bibliography in this book is a hidden gem because it includes written sources about the Mongols by authors from different cultures. *The Secret History of the Mongols*, a text that documents the Mongols from their own perspective, is also continually referenced throughout Weatherford's book. The references show that Weatherford consulted and explored multiple perspectives relating to Mongolian history and culture. Weatherford's literary style is dynamic, and the book is for a general readership. Readers must remember that historical narratives are subjective portrayals of historical events; as the common saying goes, "One can be a hero in one country and a terrorist in another." Although Weatherford has shone light on the Mongols, he has no intention of denigrating the societies that were conquered. What Weatherford presents is extensive research of the Mongol empire from the Mongols' perspective. The book is a primer on Mongolian history and will suit anyone open to learning about leadership, culture, and history.

Martin, D. (1995) *Thinking Union: Activism and Education in Canada's Labour Movement*.

A review by Larissa Zariwny

The central thesis of *Thinking Union* is that we lack knowledge of labour unionism, and D'Arcy Martin presents and defends this thesis masterfully. *Thinking Union* is a personal account of Martin's role as a labour union educator, starting from when he was first hired by the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) Steelworkers Canada ("Steelworkers Canada") in 1978. It is an engaging *tour de force* of his voyage through union events and exploration of union values, norms, beliefs, and culture. Martin seamlessly weaves stories about his union experience with lessons on how union educators and unions should meet their objectives. For example, when he describes how he first joined Steelworkers Canada and started to set up labour education courses, Martin provides the reader with firsthand information about what is needed to plan a successful labour union course (p. 16-19).

Thinking Union is directed at union workers, organizers, activists, and labour union educators. However, his objective is to tell us a candid story of his personal experiences and impart his knowledge. Martin appeals to a broader audience that has a more limited knowledge of union education; however, his writing and use of the labour union terminology is not over-simplistic or stylistically hat-in-hand.

Martin grabs and leads the reader through his experiences, both positive and negative, and along with educational content, he teaches us that union education is not the easiest endeavour. He does not let the negative aspects and experiences of unions and union education rattle his passion for educating union workers and empowering them with the desire and motivation to fight for their rights. Martin, for example, supported David Patterson in the national union election of 1985, but his defeat frustrated Martin. While explaining Patterson's loss, Martin writes about the downside to union democracy and union education (p. 78). Furthermore, in the summer before Martin decided to join Patterson's campaign, he tells how he had grown weary of the politics of unions, including educating union workers about the cultural and social

challenges that came with “gender politics, staff layoffs and management betrayals” (p. 64). However, Martin’s denouement is that he realizes “the union movement is not perfect, but it is the most rich, satisfying, and caring learning environment [he had] ... ever encountered” (p. 140). Martin’s arrival at this conclusion makes him realize that he does indeed want to continue working as a union educator, “helping to prepare the next generation of leaders and to get ready for the next wave of changes” (p. 140).

Martin’s non-conventional titles describing subject matters can be confusing to the reader, particularly if the reader is attempting to find information on a specific subject matter. For example, “We Shall Take Our Freedom and Dance”; “Initiation Time; Union Culture: A Bird’s Eye View”; and “Coming to Terms; Civil War Time” do not give the reader a sense of what Martin will be writing about. This trend continues with the subject matters within subjects of his book. The subject “gender education” covered in “Coming to Terms” is self-explanatory, but the subject “Creative Sparks and Conscious Romantics” located in the same chapter is not. At times, the reader is required to do some digging in Martin’s book to find specific information related to labour education. For example, within his chapter entitled “Merger Time”, there is valuable information, where one would not expect to find it, about what Martin describes as the setting of objectives for a courses which include the “know,” the “feel,” and the “do” (p. 116).

After reading *Thinking Union*, it becomes evident how important union education is to the development of not only union leaders but to imparting knowledge to union workers, giving them the ability to fight for their rights. But over and above the educational aspect, it is easy to get caught up in Martin’s storytelling. For example, while discussing the role of women and the gender politics in unions, Martin states that his “privileges as a man, and as a person of influence in the union were up for a challenge” while dealing with the potential changes for women’s rights in the workplace (p. 56). The relative ease with which one can relate to Martin through his personal stories, struggles, triumphs, and storytelling method is the reason I retained more from Martin’s book than from a different literary approach.

Martin’s choice of a title for his book, *Thinking Union*, suggests two interesting mental pictures. One thought is that although unions are, for the most part, a group of unidentifiable workers, they are entities that think—they have ideas, they reason, they have opinions, they suffer tribulations, and they have rights, and these are to be respected. The other picture that comes to mind from Martin’s title is that workers need to continually and consistently think like a union—they need to organize as a unit to protect and further their collective rights.

What Martin’s book lacks in educational context and structure it makes up for with Martin’s experiences and firsthand knowledge. If Martin’s book is to be criticized, it is only for his middle-class socio-economic bias and his left-of-centre political leanings. He does not come from a working-class background; however, his passion, as revealed through *Thinking Union*, is firstly as an educator, and because of this, Martin is able to speak with authority on labour education.

Abram, D. (2010). *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

A review by Rachelle Chinnery

If you are a person who can't help but pick up and admire a beautiful stone, or who keeps the dried bit of an interesting plant on the window sill, or if you have a place in your home where beach findings collect, then you are part of an identifiable culture. There is a growing number of us. We want to be a part of the natural world, and collecting aesthetic souvenirs is part of how we connect. I don't think I know anyone who doesn't at least have a small dish of rocks or shells.

I bet David Abram has a bowl of rocks. In fact, I bet he has rooms of cool stuff—then again, maybe not. Since he seems to spend the better part of his time outdoors, he probably doesn't need to. After reading his second book, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*, you might not need to either.

Abram's first book, *Spell of the Sensuous*, connected the dots of so many pieces of information about the human role within the natural world. It was a true example of what interdisciplinary thought and study are doing for knowledge in general. In one philosopher comes the package of anthropologist, ecologist, creative writer, and world explorer. Only a person with such broad interests could string together theologies, cosmologies, and linguistic theory to offer up an explanation of how we landed in the digital age so disconnected from the physical world and the natural environment. His second book, *Becoming Animal*, is a poetic excursion into nature; it's a "walk the talk" of *Spell of the Sensuous*.

Becoming Animal describes the polysensory lived experience of Abram's research [1]. We are taken on walks through the forest, sojourns with sea lions and grey whales, and an extended stay in the Himalayas with shape-shifting shamans. Most of these encounters are within the scope of the average imagination. Others are simply beyond any imagining within Western understanding. This book, much more so than Abram's first, was a test of his credibility. The boundaries of my belief systems were abraded and left a little raw more than a few times with descriptions of shape-shifting humans. Towards the peak of Abram's experiences in "other-than-human" realms, I was left wondering if perhaps he had taken a side step off his noodle. But I did read on.

As Abram's accounts of shamans and healers became less and less credible, I found myself reminded that this was the point of his writing and research. There are other ways of being in the world that are utterly inexplicable and incomprehensible within Western thought paradigms. *Becoming Animal* does an admirable and eloquent job of illustrating that. Toward the end of the book, Abram seemed to speak directly to me in saying how he had tried

to delineate some of the dimensions of our perceptual oblivion, exploring an array of ways to recover our attunement without abandoning intellectual rigor. Corporeal sensations, feelings, our animal propensity to blend with our surroundings and be altered by them, our

bedazzlement by birdsong and our susceptibility to the moon: none of these ought to be viewed as antithetical to clear thought. Our animal senses are neither deceptive nor untrustworthy; they are our access to the cosmos. Bodily perception provides our most intimate entry into a primary order of reality that can be disparaged or dismissed only at our peril. (p. 307)

Much of the writing in this book reminded me of the right brain exercises we were encouraged to do in art school but with an eye to sharpening all of the senses, not just vision. Ten pages at the start are dedicated to observing the inherent nature of "shadow"—not one paragraph was a yawner. Abram is such a poetic writer that even when he goes on a wordy walkabout, it's hard to mind. It is very much a lived experience account built on a meandering stream model.

For example, toward the middle of the book, in the chapter "Mind," he manages to segue from a sense-laden forest hike to the arena of phenomenology, cognitive science, and the embodiment theories first examined in 1632 by Baruch de Spinoza, a Sephardic Jewish scholar who challenged (his older contemporary) Descartes' segregation of the mind from the body. Yes, there is a chapter break at this segue, but we are reminded of the warp and weft of this book's physical structure: theory, sensation, observation, repeat. He follows a thread of "out of body experience" into the digital age laboratories of cognitive scientists and then back to medieval Europe before bounding off into the forest again. But I like Abram, so I'm game to follow.

Convincing the world of yet another overarching paradigm is no mean feat and while eco-philosophy comes none too soon in my opinion, I can just (actually I can't) imagine what it took the scientists of early times to convince the masses the world was round; that the sky was not a covering, sheltering dome; that we evolved from primates, who in turn evolved from amoeba. Or the early religious proponents who promoted One God and creationism. When you look at the context of what we have opened our eyes to in the past and what we have closed them for, Abram and the new breed of eco-philosophers have their work cut out for them. But we do believe what we need to believe. For me, something between science and non-science seems wise. I enjoyed Abram's take on how science and new-age spiritualism converge:

Commonly reckoned to be at odds with one another, conventional over-reductive science and most new-age spiritualities actually fortify one another in their detachment from the earth, one of them reducing sensible nature to an object with scant room for sentience and creativity, the other projecting all creativity into a supernatural dimension beyond all bodily ken. (p. 300)

Bingo. I come back not just to the embodied mind, but the embodied body-world as ultimate destination. A kind of perceptual fitness training is required to loosen the cultural grip on the senses to allow deep contact with the world. Being of the earth lets me be alive in my own skin—here, where I am now, as I am living—not living in preparation for an abstracted, postmortem, celestial retirement.

Footnote

1. Abram's essay "Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth"

Markides, Kyriacos C. (2001). *The Mountain of Silence: A Search for Orthodox Spirituality*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

A review by Debby Ritsco

The highly acclaimed Cypriot scholar Kyriacos C. Markides, Ph.D., is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Maine. Markides was raised in the Greek Orthodox faith but eventually drifted into agnosticism; however, his interests in the sociology of religion, mental illness, violence, and international terrorism inspired his own spiritual journey homeward through an exploration of the lives and teachings of mystics, healers, miracle workers and monastics around the world. From research in his troubled native land of Cyprus to monasteries high up on Mount Athos in northern Greece, Markides unveils a unique form of mysticism within Orthodox Christianity. Furthermore, Markides suggests that Orthodox spirituality offers a rich spiritual invitation for Western Christians to integrate the head and the heart and to regain a more expansive view of Christian life. Although Markides has published several books, the mystic tradition within Christianity is best exemplified in *The Mountain of Silence: A Search for Orthodox Spirituality*.

On October 29, 2005, in a spiritual workshop at the St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Sobor in Winnipeg, Manitoba, I had the awesome privilege to meet Markides and receive an autographed copy of his book. His seminar, which included a slide presentation, was exhilarating as he took us on a spiritual journey with him and his beloved monk friend Father Maximos up the "Mountain of Silence" or Mount Athos. Markides also volunteered as Father Maximos's personal chauffeur while Father Maximos established churches, convents, and monasteries in the deeply divided country of Cyprus. By so doing, Markides was re-awakened to the magnificent spirituality within Greek Orthodox spirituality.

The harsh topography of the land and the tragic history of the Cypriots amidst the mystic silence of Mount Athos is representative of our personal journeys to or back to God. By viewing the slide presentation prior to reading the book, the reader acquires an authentic appreciation of the hostile environment in which the monasteries are planted—peaceful huts or cells nestled away from the mundane and chaotic world.

Markides places himself in a strategic position to elicit a pure form of spirituality through continuous dialogue with Father Maximos. He also provides an appropriate setting for a tantalizing read, spiced with light-hearted humor while they traverse the long, narrow, meandering mountain road. Moreover, Markides brilliantly portrays "the confluence of an inner and outer journey," enriched with pure Christian spirituality devoid of ethnicity, national propaganda, or apostolating overtones. Markides acknowledges and endorses the role and the power of spirituality in a complex and confusing world. The most encapsulating revelation is that many of the monks inhabiting Mount Athos are former professional scholars who have sacrificed the conveniences of modern society for simple one-room cells in order to embrace a deeper, more

authentic, and more meaningful relationship with God. Interestingly, although women are forbidden from the Mountain of Silence, the Blessed Theotokos, or Virgin Mary, is the monastics' patron saint.

For cradle Orthodox Christians who have wandered away from Greek or Eastern Orthodoxy, *The Mountain of Silence* is a beckoning call, an illuminating light to draw us back to the spiritual traditions of our forefathers. For other individuals seeking a pure and authentic walk with God, this brilliantly written book is an excellent precursor and a remarkable introduction to that spiritual journey.
