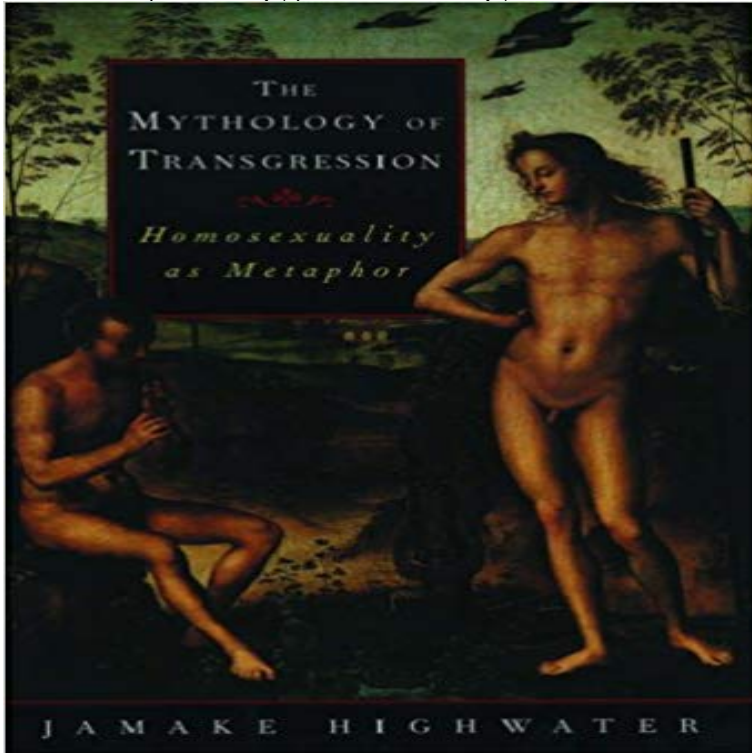


The Mythology of Transgression: Homosexuality as Metaphor



Jamake Highwater is a master storyteller and one of our most visionary writers, hailed as an eloquent bard, whose words are fire and glory (Studs Terkel) and a writer of exceptional vision and power (Anais Nin). Author of more than thirty volumes of nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, Highwater--considered by many to be the intellectual heir of Joseph Campbell--has long been intrigued by how our mythological legacies have served as a foundation of modern civilization. Now, in *The Mythology of Transgression*, he uses his remarkable narrative powers to offer a personal and extraordinarily far-ranging examination of how people who stand outside of society--by dint of their sexual orientation, physical appearance, ideas, artistic inclinations, or ethnic heritage--often achieve lasting, even profound influence upon the culture at large. Drawing from a stunningly rich variety of sources ranging from the arts and literature to biology, physics, psychology, and anthropology, Highwater looks at his own outsider status--as a gay man, an artist, and an orphaned Native American--in an attempt to explore how mythologies from ancient times to the present have shaped the ways we think about social abnormality and alienation. Throughout, he points to a paradox at the center of Western values--the competing notions that the outsider is at once sinful and wise, that in everyday life the transgressor is ostracized, while in our most durable folklore and religious legends, heroes must break the rules to achieve greatness. Focusing in particular on homosexuality as a modern metaphor of transgression, Highwater brilliantly mixes personal anecdotes with wide ranging research, leading us on a tour through the history of social conformity and rejection, citing examples that span from Judeo-Christian-Islamic doctrines of good and evil, to the Navajo Nations

ambivalence toward the nature of sexuality, to Carson McCullers's treatment of physical deformity in the novella *Member of the Wedding*, to Descartes's theories of dualism. He also pays special attention to the debates currently raging in science regarding the biology of homosexuality and provides an engaging discussion of why we are motivated to seek a genetic basis of sexual orientation in the first place.

Jamake Highwater has long been celebrated as a writer uniquely suited to give voice to the social outsider. Often provocative, always fascinating, *The Mythology of Transgression* is a tour de force of eloquent scholarship, a book that will prompt discussion and debate on the subject for years to come.

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