

## Culture



**Gilbert HERDT, ed., *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982. 367 pages, US \$32.50 (cloth)**

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[See table of contents](#)

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extraconjugaux. Ou encore lorsqu'il montre comment l'échange de sœurs n'aboutit pas nécessairement aux mariages prescrits ou préférentiels de la cousine croisée et peut fonder des structures matrimoniales complexes. De même lorsqu'il explique que ces systèmes fonctionnent en contradiction des postulats biologisants en permettant systématiquement aux femmes de changer de maris même si elles n'ont pas résidé avec eux assez longtemps pour élever leurs enfants. Enfin, on se rend compte que ces systèmes matrimoniaux sont pensés et communiqués au niveau d'un schème global de réciprocité abstrait fondé sur les échanges polyandres et polygynes plutôt que sur la circulation probabiliste des individus entre les groupes de descendance rendant ainsi dominant le principe de l'alliance.

Somme toute, l'auteur parvient à nous convaincre de la justesse de la citation de Jean Pouillon qu'il utilise : « ... l'imagination est inférieure à la réalité... ».

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Gilbert HERDT, ed., *Rituals of Manhood : Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982. 367 pages, US \$32.50 (cloth).

By Dan Jorgensen  
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In the journals of the fifties and sixties New Guinea was a land of fuzzy descent groups which set the stage for big men manipulating reciprocities. These days inflections of gender catch our eye while ritual and myth insist on their share of attention. *Rituals of Manhood* links these concerns, and while it would be impossible to match the enthusiasm of the editor's self-congratulatory preface, this collection of essays is both useful and important for the variety of new material it provides and the analytic diversity it displays.

Herd's psychologically oriented discussion of the first stage of Sambia initiation clamours for more attention to the experiential side of initiation. His concern is with emotion, and after much posturing and throat-clearing he develops an analysis of the erotic implications of fellatio, which is integral to the Sambia rites. Here he argues that a triple identification of breast-flute-penis weds desire to ideology. Our sense of déjà vu is fulfilled in Herd's suggestion that this has something to do with little boys and their mothers. A defect of the analysis in this case is that while there is a good deal

of attention paid to the novice's view, we hear little of what the initiators think they are up to. By contrast, Poole's richly textured account of the first phase of Bimin-Kuskusmin rites highlights the prismatic quality of rituals that at once divide boys from men while transforming novices into initiates. Here a sensitive treatment of the material reminds us that with most symbols meaning is multivocal and a great deal depends on how (and from what standpoint) one looks at them. The initiators' view of the rite is significantly different than that of the novices. Poole rightly refuses to dismiss this merely as hazing or simple deception, and his analysis would suggest that structuralist interpretation of such materials without hermeneutic treatment (focusing on the *reading* of texts) is doomed to interpretative inadequacy. Here the power of polysemy is critical.

The Ilahita Arapesh, like other peoples of the middle Sepik, have a very elaborate men's cult with a progression of rites organized through initiatory moieties. Tuzing provides a good overview of this cult, sketching the system as a whole. This serves to situate a provocative analysis of the moral implications of the radical disjunction between everyday civility and ritual violence. His problem is to understand how good men can do "bad things" in the service of the cult, and he hints that skepticism and qualms over ritual violence point towards a crisis of faith among seniors. The argument is not entirely persuasive, partly for its failure to examine the disjunctive nature of ritual itself (Turner might have helped), and partly because a critical difference between ritual violence and ordinary violence is that the former is not supposed to result in real damage (mock war is *not-war*, makes a joke of the threat). At the same time, Tuzin's account has the real virtue of setting the analysis of ritual side by side with some sense of everyday contexts.

One of Tuzin's notable observations is that Ilahita rites seem to create the fantasy of a masculine world that is complete in itself, echoing Wagner's suggestion that the gender problem in New Guinea is best understood as a dialectic between feminine sufficiency and masculine contingency. No better case for this view could be made than in Schieffelin's account of the Kaluli *bau a*. In the *bau a* rite youths (both as novices and the next batch above them) retire to forest seclusion and for a number of months form a society all their own. During the course of this period novices are inseminated (anally, not orally as among the Sambia) in the interests of promoting their growth, incidentally epitomizing an ideological claim to masculine sufficiency through self-generation. Schieffe-

lin's account is rich and offers a fascinating view of Kaluli cosmological notions, all the more notable since this ironically puts paid to the editor's inflated claims for the value of direct observation : Schieffelin's material comes exclusively from discussions with informants since the *bau a* ceased to be performed before Schieffelin arrived in the field.

An impetus for this volume in the first place was Read's original account of the *nama* cult of the Gahuku-Gama, and two of the contributions to the collection flesh out this picture with descriptions of similar rites among related peoples. Newman and Boyd discuss initiation among the Awa, particularly those aspects dealing with the purging, supplanting, and augmenting of bodily substances. Making excellent use of a variety of materials, they sketch the outlines of a grammar of gender idioms transmuted in theories of the body. Hays and Hays analyse closely similar material for the Ndumba but focus on the analytically significant issues of opposition and complementarity. Their application of these formal notions is always firmly grounded in the ethnography, and they are the only contributors to the volume to juxtapose male rites with women's rites. The sense of a whole that emerges has intriguing ramifications, and one finds, for example, Ndumba women masquerading as men in richly suggestive contexts. Here there is grist for many analytic mills.

Aside from Patricia Hays, who presumably provided much of the material on Ndumba women's rites, the only other woman to contribute to this volume is Deborah Gewertz, who describes initiation among the Chambri of the Sepik. Strangely, there is no development here of the obvious questions concerning women's participation in and views of male initiatory performances. Instead, her account focuses on Chambri initiation as a sort of drama of affinal relations, linking the rites to an elaborate moiety structure. The style and problems are generally Batesonian and reminiscent of *Naven* with an underlying preoccupation with symmetries and oppositions. This is by far the most "social structural" approach in the collection, and as such offers a contrast with the more symbolically oriented pieces.

Keesing's introduction is in fact a review and thematic survey. He suggests some good possibilities for comparative analysis, argues against the inadequacy of simple-minded ecological interpretations, and situates cult ideologies in the perspective of gender politics. Curiously, a couple of recurrent themes seem to have been overlooked. One of the most striking of these is the fact that virtually all of the rites have critical phases in the forest, with a

marked preference for stream sites. Schieffelin and Poole are the only authors who really seem to recognize this as a leitmotif in initiations, and one wonders if Gell's Umeda work has fallen on deaf ears. Secondly, most of the authors make much of the separation of novices from their mothers (and women generally), but little attention is paid to the fact that all these rites also require a distance between *fathers* and their sons : the critical phases of the rites invariably require the participation of a man whose identity (whether as mother's brother or as stranger) is always that of *Other*. Better use of general theoretical approaches to ritual might have paid dividends here. Despite such quibbles, however, the book delivers the goods : after *Rituals of Manhood* it will simply no longer suffice to glibly allude to male initiations in Melanesia without seriously asking just what on earth these rites mean.

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Peter METCALF, *A Borneo Journey into Death*, Philadelphia, The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982. 275 pages, US \$23.00 (cloth).

By Dorothy Ayers Counts  
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Headhunting ; erotic, drunken funeral parties that last for days ; corpses kept in jars ; ceremonies that involve cleaning the bones of decomposed bodies... This is the stuff of lurid adventure fiction, the kind of exotic customs that titillate *National Geographic* readers : these are some of the elements of the mortuary rites of the Berawan of northern Borneo. Clearly, as Rivers noted in 1926, we cannot rightly assume that death is everywhere experienced in the same way. But, can an anthropologist place these rituals in their cultural context so that they are seen to be the reasonable response of logical people to a different experience of death rather than the bizarre rites of incomprehensible savages ? Metcalf's book is an attempt to communicate the rationale of behaviour which responds to another understanding of death. He succeeds magnificently.

Metcalf decided to focus his research on Berawan mortuary rites precisely because they are exotic and "strikingly different to anything familiar to most Westerners" (p. 19). The rituals are in two stages : the funerals held immediately after death for almost all Berawanese, and the rare secondary disposal of remains. Metcalf presents the material in chronological sequence, describing and discussing the