Michael W. Young, *Magicians of Manumanua. Living Myth in Kala-una.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Pp. x, 318, maps, illustrations. $24.95.

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Myth is one of our easiest contemporary philosophical concepts. As such it tends to express the fact that men may act, collectively or individually, in an apparently irrational way, and that oral or written tradition telling a touching or dramatic story linked with an imaginary past, or a very much transformed one, can be a dynamic factor in our minds, fostering actions as if by rule or law.

The choice of the word myth sterns from our Western classical education, and its explanation begins with the Greek stories that formed the basis of Aeschylean tragedies. The new fashion of using the term "foundation stories" does not shed any more light than the "myths of origin" used formerly. So it is well that Michael Young has kept the word myth, which makes easier reading in his discussion of Claude Levi-Strauss and Maurice Leenhardt who have done likewise.

There is happily no Greek reminiscence in this book to blur the picture. But one would have hoped for a wider discussion—in Melanesian terms at least, if not of the South Pacific as a whole. Anything close to the Trobriand Islands carries, ipso facto, a theoretical tone. The comparison with Malinowski is to the point, but New Caledonian myth

could have been looked at more closely, as well as the lessons we can derive from Raymond Firth's very complete analysis of the Tikopian tradition, and what can still be culled from the excellent material given us so early by Reverend Codrington. Too many in the new crop of eastern New Guinea scholars write as if nothing has ever been observed and analyzed in the eastern Pacific, even if in fact they are rediscovering what others have already shown—in Vanuatu, in Fiji, among Maoris, or in Samoa or the Solomons. Margaret Mead's funny idea that one should not read before going into the field, so as to bring in a virgin mind—as if such a thing existed—seems somewhat to still hold sway.

Michael Young goes much further and brings us back to the core of anthropology, through his own work as well as through his discussion of Claude Levi-Strauss's structural analysis of myth and of Maurice Leenhardt's experienced and intuitive approach to the same subject. Looking at the author's data, one point comes immediately to the fore: that the Western method of going about collecting life stories only lands a researcher in the middle of a whole collection of new myths. The Melanesian authors want to discuss their own status and function (so as to justify them) much more than recount small events in chronologically ordered sequences. This we know from the type of traditional vernacular literature elicited in New Caledonia, the Loyalty Islands, Vanuatu, as well as Maori oral traditions and others. Michael Young rediscovers (and it is good he does that job for an American public) the existence of different variants, more or less coherent, more or less contradictory, of which individuals or corporate groups consider themselves the owners, or part-owners. They do not easily accept the idea of making them public, at least in all details, even if they know that their particular version is well known by their neighbors. Young discovers too that the very same person, at different times, will not give exactly the same version. This should be expected and is current fashion all over the Pacific and elsewhere; the same rules play in Catholic or orthodox continental Europe regarding the lives of saints of the healer type, in what is called the Golden Legend.

Another aspect of myth that has rarely been shown so accurately (except by Elsdon Best for the Maoris of New Zealand) is the way a vernacular text of a myth contains, in detail, the recipe for the ritual actions that accompany it. In fact, this is typical of the region, although insufficiently shown in the literature where the necessary formulas to be chanted, and not spoken, have often not been given in the course of the myth. We must go back to the Maori *karakia* to learn how small pieces of poetry interspersed within the prose are in fact charms thought to be

effective per se. Many vernacular texts from other regions can be understood in the same way, even if much too well written English, German, or French translations have made difficult such a later analysis. Close comparison, as is possible in the South Pacific, can fill in some of the holes of our knowledge,

Magicians of Manumanua is one of the best cases in point. But why this reference to magic and magicians, which is taken for granted by the author? From the very first monographs on the area, and W. H. Rivers' still extraordinarily useful survey of Melanesia, we know that the different societies and cultures of the Melanesian arc and Fiji all show ways by which the entire environment—plants, animals, and atmospheric phenomena—is shared between corporate groups; each group is responsible for one or more ritual, the function of which is to insure the positive, or negative, existence of some factor such as the growth of yams, taro, or breadfruit, the multiplication of fishes, the control of the sun, the wind, or the rain, the abundance of mosquitos, and so on. The man who insures that there will be a good crop of breadfruit can. also cause every orchard to be barren. This double aspect has been known at least since Rivers and Leenhardt, and its existence has been confirmed everywhere since, although Western theologians ignore it and our Middle Ages have differentiated between the white and the black arts. It is such common knowledge among Christian village dwellers that it does not occur to them to state it; in any case the negative side has generally been hidden from missionaries, or any white man around, so as not to create trouble.

I have shown elsewhere, as regards Tanna in southern Vanuatu, the existence of a ritual designed to fill human bellies, or empty them, according to circumstance—the interpretations come after the facts—or to the whims of the ritual's owner. I have tried to compare this case, and others, with the fertility rituals described by Arthur Bernard Deacon for the Seniang area of South West Bay, Malekula, Central Vanuatu, who linked them with the *nembrbrkon,* a site inside a grove where a local group stacks the bones of its dead members and has its priest act out a rite the aim of which is to obtain the multiplication, or the control, of everything needed for human well-being, one species or environmental factor in each site. This means magic has nothing to do with this, the formula prayers being always addressed to a mythical being, or deified ancestor, his name being at times too sacred to be uttered. The presence of the dead is a witness to the fact that we have here straight religious phenomena.

Nevertheless I do consider that the ideological construction we have

over Melanesian and Polynesian island groups has been best put together and explained in Michael Young's timely study, if one only accepts the word magic as a convenience, keeping in mind the essential link between the mythical figure and the ritual. It is unfortunate that Malinowski's continuous use of the word magic has led in this case such a charmed life. Evidently Reo Fortune's *Sorcerers of Dobu* has been an unconscious model for the title of the book, although it does not figure in the bibliography nor in the discussion. Codrington and Rivers are not included either, which is a pity. The chance of available English translations or studies has brought in Levi-Strauss and Leenhardt, the latter for the very evident "alive" aspect of the myth studied, with its status, competition, and emotional connotations; the former for his celebrated structural analytical technique.

Levi-Strauss tends to think that few have understood the fine details of a method born from the very poor situation of South American anthropology regarding the study of myth at a certain time in history. In fact, Michael Young is not giving us a structural analysis of myth in Kalauna; he is using a structural approach to establish the links between living myths and a very much alive ethnography: his own. He does not need, as Levi-Strauss did, a logical tool to go further and deeper than what has been published in the literature. Michael Young works directly with the culture and has no need for a conceptual bridge to mediate between him and the people (although, like all of us, he forgot to ask certain questions when in the field).

The resulting study makes good reading, although less when the author inserts some Freudian touches to his picture. The problem was not an easy one, the danger being always to confuse analysis and description. Recounting the myth in other words is nothing other than adding glosses to a text without being sure of their validity. All clerics dealing with the Holy Scriptures know the difference. Part of this book is an attempt to make us understand the social and ritual content of the myths. It is often brilliant and persuasive, at times slightly repetitive, but that is the result of the rules of the game laid down by the myths themselves.

I was sorry to find that an important aspect of myth has been left out: a careful mapping of the place names cited in the texts, which would have brought to light either the geography of social and ritual relations, or the extent and detail of land tenure claims of the group owning each myth. Few researchers have been equipped by their training for solid mapping work in the field, although the work is much simplified today by aerial photographs. I tried to show long ago the importance of such

an approach, but the explorers in this field have been Gregory Bateson for the Iatmul in 1936, Douglas Oliver for the Siuai in 1949, and Ward Goodenough for Truk in 1951. But apparently one is not a prophet in one's own country and the American section of the anthropological profession is still not ready to accept this viewpoint. It seems nevertheless impossible to have a complete view of the information content of any oral tradition without analyzing this aspect in detail. Anthropologists are abandoning surveying techniques to geographers, who publish wonderful maps but are untrained in the job of examining the value of each point in space versus the rest of the culture to which it belongs. Methods of studying oral traditions in Central Africa have left out the spatial aspect of the information contained, except in very general terms, probably due to the fact that such enormous distances would have to be covered that nobody dares start such a herculean labor. In Melanesia, where distances are manageable, anthropology is still a one-man field; it is a pity that little account is taken of this lesson.

A case in point is Young's treatment of Goodenough island, twenty-five miles at its widest diameter; better analytical devices—regarding the spatial signification of the different texts given in translation—than the cursory maps published would have been appreciated. Although the author's text has left out all that was repetitive, which would evidently put off a nonspecialized reader, it is evident by what is said that the sequences are being played in a very precise landscape, along rivers and coastal areas and from one island to another. The hero of the myths is in each case described as doing this or that:, extraordinary actions justifying in each case a symbolic rite, translated in a chanted formula, each time at a given spot. These places should have been put in relation to the ritualized social relations (positive or negative) between corporate groups and the way land tenure expresses them at the same time as the identity of each group. The symbolic, that is social, value of the yam, taro, or banana exchanges, whether the result of negotiation or aggression, is enhanced by the fact that they come from such and such a garden, the location of which is known by both sides, the givers as well as the takers. The author is right in describing yams as being close to human: yams coming from one place have more prestige than yams coming from another; some locations might make yams unfit for consumption except for the owners of the land, or could have the consequence of lowering the prestige of the recipients. The map of the invisible world is intellectually superimposed upon the one dealing with human society, Anthropology has to be able to draw both maps, which would then show in analytical detail aspects of institutions and struc-

tures that cannot be satisfactorily brought out in words, and which no reader could otherwise begin to understand.

This perhaps too impassioned plea had to be put to the specialized reader. It must be then said that Michael Young has seen through very important facets of this Pacific island culture. I would not vouch, from what I have read, that he realizes that the so-called Polynesian societies are very close to the Melanesian societies in all respects. The frontier between them is in the author's choice of words: he does not use the word chief, although he could have done so. The consequences would have been as vague as anywhere else in the area where the word chief is put forward. The author deals with a situation where three men play a crucial role, and an inherited one, regarding the control of the universe for the benefit of the local human society. That is the definition of a chief anywhere in the area and especially in the eastern Pacific. Michael Young shows moreover how an upstart, coming from a junior line, builds himself a special position through the organization of a competitive festival, using both his curative prowess, his powers of divination in dreams, and veiled threats of using sorcery or negative fertility magic; the last instance is perhaps a protection against the dangers of wanting to become a "big man" when one is not born one. This is no specific Goodenough island situation.

The connotations in the area of the uses of both the words "big man" and "chief" are quite vague; we simply have no equivalent in our language to the concepts born from Pacific island societies. One of the interesting aspects of Michael Young's study is that this fundamental ambiguity of the Western anthropological knowledge on Oceania appears clearly, through the author's careful use of vernacular concepts. The competitive situation he describes in Goodenough island is not very far removed from the intensity and the dangers of competition Albert Wendt shows in any large Samoan village of today: how ambitions build up and range from temporary triumph to more or less well-accepted failure and misery. Living in a Melanesian or Polynesian village, where private life exists only for a few hours at a time in a faraway garden, is no small feat, and means, for us, an extraordinary capacity to control one's emotions, except through the institutionalized outlets offered by the culture. Fighting with taro, or with yams—and thus pushing murder and cannibalism into a faraway unromantic past—is a marvellous invention, a way of mobilizing energies and expressing anger and hostility in such a way that one will get back the expected compensation in food as well as in prestige, and at the same time a deep satisfaction, if one wins the day.

But in this culture so cleverly described, where shall one find the specificity of Goodenough island (outside of the linguistic aspect), if all Pacific islands societies tend to show the interplay of the same factors? One problem here is that the author, like Fortune on Dobu, deals only with one village and does not seem to have the information allowing him to compare the Kalauna society to all the other villages of the island. We are being offered as an implicit issue what personal comparison we can try on our own with the Trobriand Islands culture as described by Malinowski. This is not easy, as we do not know enough, if anything, of the cultures of Fergusson island and the Amphlett's, Goodenough's immediate neighbors. To be useful, scientific comparisons should proceed from place to place, so as to establish all the meaningful chains between institutions, and at each level of detail, where they change or are being reversed, Pacific islands societies acting as logical players in a widely dispersed game of doing different things with more or less the same pack of cards.

One of the aims of anthropology is to try and anchor deeply the analysis of the fundamental concepts built for itself by a given culture, what Bateson called *ethos* and what has often been described as "values." At this point Kalauna does have originality, trying to foster a model of leaders in the same way as Victorian England, but on another basis. Elsewhere the idea of leaders is that they must be fat and well fed so as to insure the fertility of the land. Here the choice is reversed, the careful use of food being an ideology, with charms being uttered in an attempt to make men and women capable of eating as little as possible, even leaving some food to rot as a token of the hoped for controlled food consumption. This very aesthetic view of how man should deal with his environment ought to be looked at in conjunction with better information on that precise environment: the different value of soils available, the amount of arable land versus that which is too mountainous to be gardened, and so on. Are there physical factors, compared with other islands, or other village situations, that could explain this trend? Is it Kalauna's interpretation of things in Goodenough island, a way of differing from the rest of the villages, or is it specifically Lulauvile lineage in Kalauna, or Goodenough in the Massim area? Somebody will have to tell us, some day. We are given some indication that the concept of *manumanua* holds sway on a wider area than the rather small one intensively studied here. The interlocked conceptual systems which it is part of are certainly of the better explained ideological worlds in recent years. The concept of *unuwewe,* bringing a leader to exact revenge by creating an imbalance in the normal functioning of the universe and

thus playing against his own kin, is related to innumerable cases in the area. A man, in a situation to exert such power but not obtaining the social recognition that is his ambition, and thwarted in one of his schemes, compensates for the loss of face (or of *mana* in Codrington's or Maori words) through recourse to the invisible world. One can send grubs or a plague of mosquitos to another group, but a hurricane or drought will hurt everybody. A person who decides to employ such a mythical revenge will need to be able to stand firm before all the emotional pressures. In our own world how could anyone keep family and kin affiliations if thought to be responsible for a tragedy of such magnitude, endangering everyone's capacity for survival?

I would suggest that the specificity of Kalauna here is to show us how the conceptual system based on the ambiguous (negative and positive) control of the universe can be pushed to its logical limits, upon which a quasi philosophy can be built. There is no need to look for any Freudian or Yungian aspect in this. Every item recorded by Michael 'Young, in myth and in life stories, is cohesive with all the others. If competition uses as much of the negative powers as the positive ones (instead of relegating the first to the realm of the untold, and what should be the unthought), we have an extraordinarily pessimistic view of life:, both for the ancestors, the cultural heroes, and the living people. Kalauna perhaps has gone further than elsewhere. I would like to know what its women, who are rarely allowed to speak in this book, have to say about all this, since through their stillborn children or through their own deaths, they are the principal victims of any leader's *unuwewe.*

I would nevertheless say that Michael Young should not be astonished, as a result of all the tragedies described, to see even brothers break apart, Quarrels between siblings are a universal factor, and in Melanesia maybe the most important factor of social change: the exiled brother must be given a new status elsewhere, which tends to make the local society receiving him each time a bit more complex. Quarrels have never ceased and there are still examples every day. All communities have perfectly good reasons for breaking apart perhaps once a generation, and all would reclaim—give a wife and access to land—somebody having seceded, or having been excluded from his own group. Villages grow by attracting unattached individuals around a hereditary chief or a big man—people fleeing from somebody's wrath, from the fear of sorcery, or from retribution for their own witchcraft activities. All sorts of people will agglomerate around the "posts" of one place, creating thus a temporary opposition between a local, well-endowed aristocracy and a certain form of pleb, until intermarriage manages to blur the earlier

distinctions and grandsons belong to more or less everybody, classificatory-wise. Then tensions can start to enter in, big man-type ambitions to flourish, and the community is doomed to explode in its turn, at the same time as prophetic cults and millennial movements bring a new cohesive factor answering the problems brought in by the white man's presence. Island situations, as well as our own, are eternally dialectic.

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