Review: Phillip Guddemi
The Union Institute
Sacramento, California

I enjoyed reading *The Lost Drum* very much. The book takes as its subject matter the myths of a number of New Guinea societies including the Foi (where Weiner conducted fieldwork), the Yafar, the Marind-anim, and the Gimi. The enjoyment of reading the book had to do with the insights provided by a close reading of these myths in their cultural and Melanesian context. The myths themselves are challenging, coming as they do from a tradition in which what matters in stories seems far different from those things that are foregrounded by traditional Western techniques of narrative analysis (such as those that have descended from Aristotle to Western secondary schools).

In order to describe what matters in these myths, scholars seem to be forced to adopt what seem to be equally exotic techniques of reading, such as the obviation analysis that Weiner adopted from his mentor, Roy Wagner. Weiner also has to interpret the symbolism—a local, or Melanesian, symbolism, of course—of a number of Melanesian "forms of life," ranging from the everyday string bag and the ceremonial *kundu* drum to the "spectacular" Marind-anim rituals and cannibalism. It should not be minimized that a large part of the enjoyment of such a book comes from its presentation of these myths and these forms of life, in themselves and in their close relationships, as things worthy of an extended humanistic essay. There is a sense of insight in the book that comes from the skilled deployment of contextualizing clues in the course of Weiner's hermeneutic readings. Many of these contextualizing clues come from the corpus of Melanesian ethnography; some come from an analysis of Western phenomena such as paintings by da Vinci and Dali; and some come from theorists such as Lacan.

The "proof of the pudding" of the deployment of any or all of these is in the sense that they enlarge our understanding of specific Melanesian cultural products such as myths (and "art"). In short *The Lost Drum* is an experiment, or "essay," in hermeneutic reading of Melanesian texts and cultural productions; such multidisciplinary hermeneutical studies are an increasingly common genre of contemporary intellectual life, of which an example from a very different cultural area might be a work of anthropologically informed history and art history such as A. David Napier's *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox* (1986).

Weiner attempts to make integral to his interpretive practice a set of perspectives he has learned from a study of both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. He claims that what I am calling his hermeneutic approach is closer to psychoanalysis as practiced by Freud and in his works—which often use cultural materials such as myths and paintings to illuminate psychoanalytic dynamics—than it is to psychological anthropology as it has been practiced in the United States and elsewhere, which Weiner argues has uncritically taken as given a series of disciplinary boundaries among levels of analysis (p. 5). (These boundaries include those that are functions of a distinction between the social and the individual, a distinction that may have had to be maintained by psychological anthropology in the first place because of its need to defend its existence in an antipsychological, sociologizing era.) I think it is implicit that Weiner's concern, which as he states has been characteristic of psychoanalysis more than of much psychoanalytic anthropology, is with what Lacan called "the symbolic" and "the imaginary," as exemplified in cultural products such as myth, rather than with "the real" (in a sense), which could be seen as the goal of the sort of psychoanalytic anthropology he does not do. For example, the latter could be seen as concerning itself largely with such issues as the interiorities of individuals possessing biographies and life cycles, and with how social institutions such as initiations change these interiorities; these are not Weiner's issues.

Weiner criticizes "conventional" psychological anthropology for largely epistemological reasons, such as its dependence on conventional disciplinary levels of analysis. Many of his points are insightful and worth addressing by the field, but their brief and somewhat glancing exposition in chapter 1 has the unfortunate effect of seeming like a broad-brush dismissal of a whole school of thought, a throwing-the-baby-out-with-the-bathwater dismissal that does not seem to me to be fair to the latter's best moments and potential. I am not sure that all "conventional" psychological anthropology, of the sort that looks at individuals and life cycles, lays a claim to achieve "the real," and its distinction from what Weiner does may in fact be that it privileges a different type of data, that is, what is possibly miscalled "clinical" data (Poole 1982:141), which might better be thought of as homely personal accounts

and reminiscences (albeit generated by the anthropologist with certain questions in mind; see Levy 1973).

One hopes that Weiner is not overconcerned with establishing the validity of his type of hermeneutic approach, focusing on myth and ritual, as against all other possible or past types of psychoanalytic approaches, as if the former had to vanquish or supersede the latter rather than simply find a new niche and flourish. In fact he does not spend much time outside his first chapter in engaging other forms of psychoanalytic anthropology. To his credit, he concentrates on the performance of his own (a fruitful one, but why curse other people's fig trees?). I confess that I may have overinterpreted a few remarks of his, simply because I have a personal bias that anthropologists engage in too many of the wrong kind of internecine battles, and that it would be better for all of us (in our increasingly marginalized situation with respect to other, more-prominent disciplines) if we resolved to, so to speak, let a hundred flowers bloom—or, to use an analogy from a different politics, if we learned to hang together to avoid hanging separately.

But there is a further problem with Weiner's own analogy of his hermeneutic project with the analyses Freud and Lacan themselves made of cultural material. By making that analogy Weiner is being unfair to himself. The question is, is the flow of illumination one-way or both ways? That is to say, a truly dialogic anthropology (see Knauft 1996) would be one in which Western interpretive theories do not dominate the Melanesian cultural products they are used to illuminate, but rather one in which the psychoanalytic perspective and the Melanesian material are shown to engage in a dialogue, or dialectic, or "reproductive gift exchange" (to use, out of context, a phrase of Gell's [1992]). But this is of course not at all Freud's project, nor Lacan's. Freud was explicit that he was not writing as a classicist or art theorist when he used Oedipus and da Vinci to illuminate psychoanalytic "truths" about patients and, ultimately, about a universal human nature; and Lacan's goal and practice followed in Freud's footsteps in subordinating cultural analysis to general truths. This is precisely what someone in Weiner's position must not do, and in fact he does not. He is concerned preeminently with the Melanesian material and with a Melanesianist analysis of that material, an analysis that is Melanesianist before it is psychoanalytic.

That is to say that James Weiner, like Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner, whose works he explicitly uses, engages in the construction of an imagined Melanesia of a particular type. The Melanesia that lives in these authors' works is a network of tropes, and interpretations of tropes, which purport to give insight into a peculiarly Melanesian way of thinking and feeling, of conceiving the world (and human relationships within it)—to use Foucault's term, an episteme (1970). This episteme can be understood partly by its "internal"

relations within itself and partly by its contrast with a Western one (which is itself partly defined by the contrast). Anthropological outsiders attempt to bring this traditional Melanesian episteme into view by constructing it (in the sense that vision constructs, rather than reflects, the world we see) out of "traditional" cultural discourses, including myths. It is not assumed that this "Melanesianness" can be fully understood, only interpreted (viz. Lacan 1991:73, cited by Weiner [p. 180]). In that sense its construction is intended as experimental (the original meaning of "essay") rather than as a total system or a total truth. Weiner clearly views his psychoanalytic anthropology as a dialogue, or dialectic, between psychoanalytic perspectives and this project of constructing/elucidating a Melanesianness: "I want to widen the scope of such a new psychoanalytic anthropology by creating, in the context of the current formulations of Melanesian sociality, a meeting ground between Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan . . . and Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner" (p. 5). I will return to the question of on whose ground this meeting is taking place.

Weiner's use of "obviation analysis," a form of myth analysis developed by his mentor Roy Wagner, may seem to be in itself an application of universalistic theory but is, I would argue, another part of this construction of a Melanesianist perspective. To an unsympathetic observer such as I. C. Jarvie (1993), obviation theory, as it is used by Weiner and Wagner to analyze myths, seems like an occult formulation yielding what look like even more occult triangles. But obviation, as Weiner and Wagner view it, is not a method for torturing truth out of myths spread out on a triangular rack; rather, obviation is a method for divining the figure and ground implicit in a myth's narrative movement. As a methodology it forces attention to narrative sequence, to relationships within the narrative, and to the narrative's cultural background. In this way it contrasts itself to the early Lévi-Strauss's version of the structural study of myth (1963), which in its pure programmatic form (which was not, in my opinion, strictly followed by him in his later practice) arguably obviates (in a different sense) narrative and cultural context in the interests of a hidden binary structure of oppositions. In Weiner's work, obviation analysis seems to be used to show that a myth begins by foregrounding the nonconventional and proceeds to generate the conventional through the inner dynamics of its narrative movement—an interesting storytelling procedure, by the way, which guarantees a listener's attention by the myth's startling outset, and at the end provides a putative quotidian beginning (an "origin") as a signal of its narrative finishing.

I believe that there is an interesting relationship between Wagner's concept of obviation and the dialectic of concealment and revelation that Marilyn Strathern, for one, has identified as a Melanesian logic or "analysis." Strathern

(1988), following Biersack (1982) and others, sees exchange and ritual in a number of Melanesian domains (birth, initiation, ceremonial exchange, the growth of young people) as concerned with a bringing forth of what is hidden: hiddenness enables things to grow and develop in secret; revelation enables their social use and relationship to be established and transacted. This is also of course a logic implicit in Mountain Ok and Sepik versions, at least, of ritual initiation (Barth 1987; Tuzin 1980). Wagner's concept of obviation is, I believe, related by a "family resemblance" to this Melanesian logic. Wagner defines his concept of obviation as the expansion of point metaphor to frame metaphor that can work from macrocosm to microcosm or from microcosm to macrocosm (1986:31–32). In addition, Weiner uses obviation in *The Lost Drum* to describe shifts in mythic narrative from background to foreground and foreground to background, or from implicit to explicit and explicit to implicit.

Both the Wagnerian definition and the Weinerian practice can be summarized as, among other things, a playing with frames (see also Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974). Weiner's use of obviation, like that of Wagner before him, would seem to be in harmony with a view of Melanesian aesthetics as being one that prizes reframing via sudden perspective shifts, initiatory recontextualization of all one's previous experience, and ritual as revelation of what had been hidden (cf. Strathern 1988). Although Wagner makes universal claims for obviation analysis, it seems to have been taken up almost exclusively by Melanesianists, and perhaps its consonance with a particular view of Melanesian aesthetics is part of the reason for this. Weiner's use of the concept and technique of obviation analysis in this book makes this, I believe, visible; and therefore I consider Weiner's use of obviation analysis as part of (or at least consistent with) his "Melanesianist" project of showing how a purportedly indigenously Melanesian episteme constructs as well as expresses itself in myth and ritual.

So how do Lacan, and Freud, fit into this project? I asked earlier whether Lacan and Freud are used, selectively, to illuminate a construction/"invention" of an indigenous episteme or whether their universal claims at some point subordinate Melanesianness to a universal psychoanalytic perspective. As I indicated above, the answer is the former, that Weiner has constructed/selected a Melanesianist version of Lacan. The alternative would have been to delineate a Lacanian Melanesia, but Weiner makes this impossible for himself, wisely, by making a Strathernian and Wagnerian view of Melanesia analytically prior to his invocation of Lacan (and of psychoanalysis in general). Future Melanesianists, and above all, Melanesians, are of course free to reinvent Strathern and Wagner, or critique whether their perspectives actually bound a culture area. But my point is that Strathern and Wagner are

rightly primary in Weiner's analysis, because they are scholars who developed their analysis of what I call the Melanesian episteme in direct dialectical engagement with the regional ethnographic literature. The metaphor thus is hosts and guests: While Melanesians are the ultimate hosts here, in the analytic practice of *The Lost Drum* it is fair to say that Strathern and Wagner are the hosts, Lacan and Freud the guests, and that because of this Lacan does not have the run of the whole house. Lacan goes where Strathern and Wagner allow him to, and this is part of why the book has a feeling of ethnographic solidity rather than of yet another application (or free association) of Lacan to whatnot (a genre that I am sure Weiner has run across, at least in anthropology's junior sibling disciplines). I am still concerned that the prestige of Lacan as (to use a possibly ironic phrase) a name of a father of theory will obscure for some readers the centrality of Melanesian, or at least Melanesianist, concerns and epistemes to a study of this kind.

Weiner does succeed, in sum, in generating a fruitful dialogue between his chosen analytic perspectives and the Melanesian discourses and ways of thinking he describes with loving and detailed attention in *The Lost Drum.* Dialogue is a form of relationship, as both Bakhtin (1981) and recent Melanesian studies remind us, and relationship serves to validate the existence of both parties. I came away from this book with an image of Western and New Guinean versions of intellectual capital as valuables displayed alongside each other, to each other's benefit.

What haunts me most, though, is the final myth of the Foi about the origin of petroleum, and what that myth shows about a recent transformation of their sense of themselves. I have written about the incorporation of gold in the retellings of the origin myth of the Sawiyanoo people of Ama, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea (Guddemi 1996). Jorgensen has similarly noted Telefol myths of gold (1996). Like the earlier myths of the Foi about petroleum, these myths show that the new, valuable material that outsiders are searching for or finding on their territory is actually ancestral substance, intrinsic not only to the ancestral land but also to the constitution (in substance and history) of the mythifying people themselves. Such a mythic view engages the roots of money and external wealth, and the outsiders who are seeking after them, in reciprocity relationships with the local people themselves. As I noted in my paper on the subject, this figures wealth as wealth *for them* (Guddemi 1996). But in the recent myth of the origins of petroleum, the Foi have poignantly achieved a deeper understanding of the social relations intrinsic to wealth items sought by contemporary outsiders. They have understood that, after all, these relations are no social relations at all, at least for them.

Previously, in a number of myths, the Foi analogized petroleum to *kara'o,*

an oil from tree sap used for body decoration and traditionally traded to neighboring groups. But in the new myth the petroleum comes from Westerners and goes back to them. A white man flew over Lake Kutubu in an airplane and dropped a gold coin, which was eaten by a catfish. Another white man returned and ate the catfish (which Kutubu people had sold to him), swallowed the gold coin, and had diarrhea in the lake. The diarrhea is the origin of petroleum, transformed from the gold coin by the body of the white man (pp. 163–164). Weiner further elaborates that for the Foi "shit is an all-inclusive term for those things produced which have no inscriptive value or cannot carry or sustain a power relation" (p. 167). But white man's shit is something else again. It evidently has all sorts of inscriptive values, yet not ones that seriously include local peoples such as the Foi. It carries and sustains power relations, on a scale unimaginable not only to the Foi; but these are not power relations that the Foi can use to promote their own power or prestige. The Foi are waking up to a bitter accuracy of perception, as evidenced by this newest myth, which shows the modern economy of resource extraction as a closed circle of outsider self-production and self-consumption.

Perhaps only someone steeped in the profoundly relational traditional Melanesian episteme can appreciate the revolution in Foi thought that it took to conceive of this most recent myth. (Would we ever let Foi thought, such as that in this myth, catalyze a revolution in *our* episteme? Does dialogic anthropology really go both ways? For whom?) *The Lost Drum,* read closely and patiently, could be used to help enable, step by step, its sympathetic reader to achieve such a steeping in a different relational world, such an encounter with a different and profoundly human way of thinking and conceiving selves and others. Insofar as Weiner has made this possible, the book will have done its job.

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