Book Reviews

An Anthropologist at Work. Writings of Ruth Benedict. Margaret Mead. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1959. xxii + 583 pp. $6.

The subtitle states that this book is about the work and writings of Ruth Benedict (1887–1948), whom the author regards as a "figure in transition." By *transition,* Dr. Mead seems to mean that Ruth Benedict was the intellectual link between Franz Boas, her teacher and later her colleague, and the present-day studies of national character which are so well represented by Dr. Mead and her associates. I am sure, however, that any reader will be far more interested in the insights this book affords into the always-fascinating question of how a renowned scholar happened to enter his particular profession and make his special contributions to it than in any finely reasoned analysis of his role in the history of science.

As a scholarly profession, anthropology has drawn more than its share of nonconformists who are comforted by its findings that each culture has its own values and standards of behavior and that the demands of our own society are no more right in an absolute sense than those of any other. Ruth Benedict, however, seemed to be an exception. Her outward calm, mild demeanor, and Mona Lisa smile seemed to indicate a good adjustment to her world. The error of this inference is startlingly disclosed by the materials published for the first time in Dr. Mead's book. These materials reveal a tortured, nonconformist individual who finally found a creative outlet, and we hope relief, in anthropology. From this point of view the book might well have been entitled "The Making of an Anthropologist."

Dr. Mead does not present the life of Ruth Benedict as an ordered, direct, biographical narrative. Instead, she has assembled what might be called case history materials which can be read in any order. While a few poems, essays, and key scientific articles are republished, the more interesting materials consist of unpublished essays, poems, fragments of diaries, an intended book on Mary Wollstonecraft, and correspondence between Ruth Benedict and Edward Sapir, Franz Boas, and Margaret Mead. Margaret Mead, who was Ruth Benedict's intimate from 1922 until her death, inevitably looms so important that the book is partly autobiographical.

Ruth Benedict's diaries and an unfinished autobiographical sketch, "The Story of My Life . . ." (pages 97–112), expose with surprising candor the black depressions and self-doubts that made her early life almost insupportable. These feelings, however, were so carefully concealed that Ruth Benedict was in effect two persons, a private self and a social self. The double pattern began in her earliest childhood, when Ruth Benedict shut part of herself off from her friends and family and lived in a secret world of imagination. This imagination later found expression in poetry which, however, was written under a nom de plume. It was not until she was well established in anthropology that Ruth Benedict's somewhat secret literary endeavors were abandoned and her private and public selves merged in creative professional work.

The inner torments and introspective search for an answer to life continued well into adulthood. Ruth Benedict tried teaching and embraced social causes to no avail. In large measure, she saw her difficulty as a consequence of being a woman in our own culture, and she worked on biographies of famous emancipated women. The only one of these published is that of Mary Wollstonecraft which appears for the first time in the present book. "So much of the trouble," she wrote in 1912, "is because I am a woman. To me it seems a very terrible thing to be a woman." Her final success consisted partly in overcoming this handicap. But in 1913 she said, "There is one crown which perhaps is worth it all—a great love, a quiet home, and children" (page 20), and "My jobs have never been an end in themselves, always just a means and a subordinate means" (page 128).

This hope of release seemed realized in 1914 when she married Stanley Benedict, a biochemist, and wrote, "I have attained to the zest for life . . . I have looked in the face of God. . . ." (page 129). But the relief was transient, the fits of doubt and depression recurred, the need for self-expression continued, she had no children, and she and her husband separated in 1930.

Resolution of her difficulties did not immediately follow her introduction to anthropology. She first took anthropology courses in 1919, and in 1922 at the age of thirty-three she took a Ph.D. in anthropology under Franz Boas at Columbia University, where she remained most of her subsequent years. But for some time during the 1920's, Ruth Benedict continued to express herself in poetry. Some of the most fascinating portions of the book contain letters between herself, Edward Sapir, and Margaret Mead, all poetically minded, who discuss their poems and their largely fruitless efforts to publish them.

Gradually, Ruth Benedict devoted her efforts more exclusively to anthropology, in which she found a peculiarly appropriate answer to her personal needs. Boas had been interested in the diffusion of the elements or ingredients of cultures and their integration in the lifeways of particular societies. Benedict was less interested in diffusion or history than in how each culture synthesized these elements and stamped them with over-all patterns that emphasized special values within the total range of possibilities. Thus her personal unorthodoxy found free play in reviewing the many possible patterns in which one or another kind of personality might feel at home.

Benedict's outstanding contribution to anthropology was to stress the distinctive pattern of each culture, and she did this in literary or value terms. In *Patterns of Culture* (1934), which first expressed her views most fully and brought her international fame, she adopted Nietzche's characterizations, "Apollonian" and "Dionysian," to contrast the frenzied behavior patterns of the Plains Indians with the serenity of Pueblo life. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword,* an amazingly incisive and penetrating analysis of Japanese behavior (written in Washington during World War II and published in 1946) still deals essentially with adult behavior patterns and pays comparatively little attention to the psychoanalytic techniques which had become fashionable by that time.

To outward appearances, success as a woman and as a scholar had resolved Ruth Benedict's inner conflicts during her later years. In 1926 she had written (page 153), "I know to the bottom of my subconsciousness that no combinations of circumstances, no love, no well-being will ever give me what I want. But death will." The full measure of her success came late, just before her death in 1948: the presidency of the American Anthropological Association, the first full professorship held by a woman at Columbia University which she had served so well and so long and the privilege of attending the hallowed and heretofore-all-male faculty meetings, the Annual Achievement Award of the American Association of University Women, and many other honors as well as a research grant from the Office of Naval

Research. The grant was unbelievably large compared with the "slim pickings" of earlier years.

Since the book deals to a large extent with the development of anthropology, wherein Dr. Mead sees Ruth Benedict as playing a transitional role between Franz Boas and the kind of national character studies being carried on by Dr. Mead, a few comments are in order. Ruth Benedict can properly be considered transitional to the approach which seeks to understand national character by paying attention to infant care and child training. It should be noted, however, that just before World War II, Ruth Benedict, Ralph Linton, Abraham Kardiner, a psychoanalyst, and others held a series of important symposia at Columbia University. This was the turning point in the development of what was called the "culture and personality" approach. It is surprising that Dr. Mead does not mention this.

It should be made clear that the transition to the culture and personality and national character approaches was but one of many transitions from the broad range of interests involved in Boas' work. Dr. Mead's statement (page 429) that when Ruth Benedict returned to Columbia University after the war she had to work "in isolation in a department which had been sedulously swept bare . . . of any signs of the Boas tradition" is both unkind and inaccurate. The appointment of Ralph Linton and W. D. Strong to the department just before the war and my appointment just after meant a diversification of the tradition, not a break with it. Dr. Mead herself says (page 345) of the so-called "Boas school" that "there was actually no such thing." Boas was the intellectual grandfather of most American anthropologists, and few advocates of any contemporary approach would presume exclusive rights to his mantle.

As a scientific exposition, Dr. Mead's book must be taken with the qualifications just suggested. As a fascinating source of insights into a remarkable woman presented by another remarkable woman, it will well reward any reader.

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Solving the Scientist Shortage. David C. Greenwood. Public Affairs Press, Washington, D.C., 1958. 69 pp. $2.

Many speeches and reports that have been made over the past few years about the apparent shortage of scientists are summarized in this publication. After a sketch of the nature of the problem and the educational outlook, Greenwood turns to efforts (mostly proposals) from governmental groups, private (mainly industrial) groups, and professional scientific and engineering groups. From an extensive bibliography he then selects a large number of recommendations for action. Probably his most significant suggestion is that for a single major organization to carry through various inquiries and to develop major and consistent lines of action.

Almost everyone has "gotten into the act" on manpower needs. A wide range of viewpoints and vested interests is represented by the proposals Greenwood reviews. To bring any order out of this mixture of special pleading, confusion, and contradiction would require many more than the 68 pages he has used. His eclectic approach, with brief descriptions of some industrial activities but without analysis of their significance, leads to citation of isolated authors and to contradictory proposals.

On the role of women in science and engineering, on page 13, he notes that in the U.S.S.R. women currently constitute 50 percent of all professionals. Then, on page 59, he cites a survey made in 1957 reporting that "only thirteen per cent of the nation's college women are there primarily to receive an intellectual training" (one wonders what percentage is reported for the men!) and then proposes that all the 87 percent with "other primary purposes" be dropped out of college. Just how this is to be done, when, and by whom, and whether this would not cut even further into the potential womanpower pool, is not mentioned.

Greenwood's proposals range widely in diversity and difficulty of accomplishment. On page 52 (number 26 under "Industry") he states, "canteen meals in industrial plants should be scientifically planned to provide the maximum amount of energy-building nutrients." On page 57 (15 under "Government") he states, "The Defense Department would be reduced in size to a small policy-making and coordinating agency, as has been proposed independently by Donald Douglas, Sr., chairman of the board of Douglas Aircraft." Does he want to try to do this?

Just how all these "shoulds" are to be accomplished, by whom, and with what finances is never mentioned. Consider, for example, page 62 (3 under "Colleges and Universities"): "The number of engineering places available in the nation's colleges should be doubled immediately"—*immediately* no less!

In his comments on grade school and high school Greenwood cannot avoid poking at the so-called "progressive educationists," whatever that may mean. However, note the contradictions here: on page 60 (item 10) he says, "All steps should be taken to make the teaching of the technical subjects as inspiring as possible" (what does "inspiring" mean?), while on page 61 (item 10) he states, "Any steps which teachers can take to raise the academic tension in schools, and remove the 'Let's learn for fun attitude,' would be deeply appreciated by the majority of business and industrial leaders." Is he proposing that in school, in business, and in industry learning and creative work be made distasteful? Why do people do creative work anyway?

In short, Greenwood's approach is eclectic and uncritical; his book lacks synthesis, is contradictory, and is filled with impossible "shoulds."

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The Black Fens. A. K. Astbury. Golden Head Press, Cambridge, England, 1958 (distributed by W. Heffer, Cambridge, England). xi + 217 pp. Illus. 42 s.

Of all regional divisions on the palimpest of Britain's cultural and physical geography, the Fens are the most distinctive. Formed from the lower flood plains of rivers draining to the Wash, on the east coast of England, the Fens are low, dead flat, and highly fertile and are kept free of water only by means of a complex artificial drainage system. The region has two distinct parts: silt Fens in the north, with essentially mineral soils, and black Fens in the south, with peat soils. A. K. Astbury's book *The Black Fens* represents yet another addition to a vast literature of British regional studies. Most have an almost purely local interest. Astbury's work, however, deserves wider attention, because of the unusual interest and agricultural importance of the black Fens.

The Black Fens is written in the didactic, slightly chaotic, British style typical of many such regional studies. Astbury addresses himself mainly to the reader with nonprofessional interests. Lack of bibliography or documentation reduces the volume's usefulness for American readers.

The Black Fens covers the formation, physical characteristics, hydrography, farming, settlement, transportation, and reclamation of the English peat Fens. Expressed thus, the coverage sounds fairly complete. However, the principal emphasis is on past and present waterways (perhaps not too surprising in a discussion of an area that would be largely submerged without artificial drainage). Much of this is rather tediously detailed for the casual reader; much of it also seemed rather speculative to me. Because of the author's focus of attention, little space is left for matters that do not have to do with running water. This is a pity,