Personal Views of an Enigma

Margaret Mead. A Life. JANE HOWARD. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1984. 527 pp., illus., + plates. $19.95.

With a Daughter's Eye. A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. MARY CATHERINE BATESON. Morrow, New York, 1984. 242 pp. + plates. $15.95.

Margaret Mead became a public figure in 1928 with the publication of her first fieldwork report, and she remained steadily in the public eye until her death 50 years later. Her quick intellect and enormous energy and drive took her rapidly to the top of her profession and then beyond it into ever wider spheres of activity. Although Mead was so well known, in many ways she was not known, even by those who worked closely with her. Her life and work have been an enigma, her greatness undeniable but hard to explain, her life shared with many but only a small part of it revealed to each. These two intensely personal books are both in part attempts to clarify the enigma that was Margaret Mead.

Margaret Mead: A Life by journalist Jane Howard is a popular life story based on Mead's writings and her papers in the Library of Congress but above all on interviews with some 300 of Mead's close friends, extended family members, and colleagues. In conversations held "on three continents, over five years" Howard has gathered a wealth of information, and from this she has made a lively and absorbing book.

Much of the early part of the story is familiar from Mead's own *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years*: the Pennsylvania childhood during which Mead began to think of herself as special, rejection at DePauw and the happier years at Barnard and Columbia, the close association with Ruth Benedict and Edward Sapir and more distant supervision by Franz Boas, three marriages (to Luther Cressman, Reo Fortune, and Gregory Bateson), the stints of fieldwork, each of which has become almost legendary (Samoa in 1926, Manus in the Admiralty Islands in 1928 and several times thereafter, the Omaha Indians in the summer of 1930, New Guinea with Reo Fortune from 1931 to 1933, Bali and New Guinea with Gregory Bateson from 1936 to 1939), the birth of her daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson, in 1939, and then war work during World War II and the study of cultures at a distance.

Howard's book becomes most valuable for the years after 1945, the last three decades of Mead's life, which Mead in her own account ignores almost completely. Mead's activities in these years ranged across so many fields and involved collaboration with so many people that even she, according to her daughter, gave up trying to make herself explicable. Howard bravely assays to chronicle these years. She documents Mead's interest in psychiatry, her love of interdisciplinary conferences, her participation in organizations ranging from the World Council of Churches to the New Alchemists, the ongoing teaching at Columbia and elsewhere, constant worldwide lecturing and travel, and eventually the accolades: 28 honorary degrees, 40 awards, and, in the mid-1970's, election to the National Academy of Sciences and to the presidency of the AAAS.

Howard does not finally try to summarize Mead from the welter of voices she has assembled. She recognizes Mead's important contributions to anthropology—her use of psychological concepts, her emphasis on the study of women and children, and the brilliance of her fieldwork methodology—but these cannot account for the public response to Mead's work or for the intensely felt personal interpretations of Mead that Howard was offered by so many of her informants. She writes of Mead's love of people, of her sturdy patriotism, of her distaste for hierarchies, and of her desire to be effective at every level, from teaching a friend how to make a proper salad to preserving the United Nations. But the real Margaret Mead continues to elude her, as much an enigma at the end of her quest as when it began.

Some of what Howard needed to know is offered by Mary Catherine Bateson in *With a Daughter's Eye: A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson*. Hers is a single voice, speaking honestly, eloquently, and sometimes wryly about her famous parents. She wrote this book as a tribute to them but also out of her conviction that her special knowledge of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson could not be a private possession but belonged to the wider world because of the force of their ideas in so many lives. Mead gave advice constantly on how to raise children. She wrote throughout her life about sex and gender. How did she raise her own child? What did she teach her daughter about being a woman? What can we know of her personal life that might illumine her ideas? Mary Catherine Bateson accepts these as valid questions, and she has generously and courageously chosen to answer them.

She reveals that her mother and Ruth Benedict were lovers for many years and that Mead had other intimate relationships, including one with a man and another with a woman that lasted through most of her adult life. For both of her parents, Bateson writes, intellectual sharing was a form of loving and sex a natural expression of intimacy of relationship. Bateson describes with great warmth the extended family her mother created for her, but she does not hide the pain of her parents' divorce and of the long periods all through her early years when she was separated from one or both of them. Of the breaking up of the home her mother had made for her after the war, she notes, "She left first, going away for almost a year in 1953 when I was thirteen." Three years later Catherine left, making the decision herself to spend her senior year in high school in Israel. Margaret Mead, who was a dominating figure in so many lives, did not then or later want to be accused of forcing her daughter into a mold not of her own choosing. Gregory Bateson, by contrast, treated as irrelevant all of Catherine's interests that did not coincide with his and repeatedly brought her into his work. She writes of Gregory Bateson's ambivalent relation to the intellectual legacy of his father, William Bateson, the famous geneticist, and of the hostility he had toward his mother, some of which was eventually directly at Margaret Mead.

Mary Catherine Bateson knew each of her parents not only as a child but also, through her own work in linguistics, communication, and anthropology, as a colleague. As such she had unique access to their ideas and ongoing concerns, and the threads that run through their lives are apparent to her as to few, if any, others. An aquarium and a globe stood side by side in the living room of her childhood, and she uses these as metaphors for their ways of thinking: for Bateson's interest in interacting living systems and for Mead's ecumenical-mindedness. It is the contrast between

her parents that intrigues her the most: Bateson's abstract intellectualizing, his pessimism about the possibility of change in human affairs, his defiance of social convention, set next to Mead's eagerness for ever more data, her confidence that she could effect change for the better, her care to observe social conventions at least outwardly. Mead had Catherine take dancing lessons and write proper replies to formal invitations and taught her how to wear gloves. The richness of a culture, she believed, was in its details. Bateson taught his daughter natural history and logic. Mead taught her to accept and respect cultural differences and to see the patterns in each.

There is much more in this splendid book. *With a Daughter's Eye* is a perceptive double portrait of Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, an invaluable addition to the record, and above all a profoundly human document in which, as the author intended, personal experience illumines larger issues and "knowledge and art and caring are all intertwined."

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An Argument for Moderation

The Culture of Technology. ARNOLD PACEY. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983. viii, 210 pp., illus. $17.50.

In this book Arnold Pacey says little that has not already been said by others, and he provides a somewhat limited perspective on most of the topics he addresses. Nevertheless, the book is quite worthwhile for almost anyone with an interest in technology policy and the social impacts of technology.

In the jacket blurb Elting Morison notes that Pacey "takes his charge from Francis Bacon," and Pacey himself makes reference to Bacon in several key passages in the book. But if Pacey is to be associated with a major historical figure, Aristotle or Thomas Jefferson would be at least as good a choice. In a very readable style, Pacey takes a peripatetic approach to a range of important problems and arrives at conclusions that closely approximate those which Aristotle's man of wisdom would reach in aiming for the Golden Mean between the extreme positions. Pacey indicates that he himself, though trained as a physicist, follows a lifestyle that tends toward the low-tech rather than the high-tech end of the spectrum and is a "near-vegetarian" environmentalist. But he closes the book by asserting that if human needs are to be met in "a civilized, humane way, we require a continuous, active dialogue, not the one right answer offered by either of the opposite points of view. . . . Openness, democracy and diversity are what will save us, not some environmentalist blueprint, nor any technocratic plan" (pp. 177–178). He sees this emphasis on open-ended, participatory, dialectical exploration of the unknown future as modeled on Jefferson's "controlling principle" (p. 123).

In moving toward this conclusion, Pacey intentionally uses a method that involves "shifts of scene between past and present—between agriculture and automation . . . [and] abrupt changes in geographical subject, from Britain to ancient Greece and then to Africa, and from industrial North America to rural South Asia" (p. 34). He has adopted this "distractingly kaleidoscopic" unconventional style to try to avoid what he feels are the "traps of linear interpretation" into which he fell in his previous book, *The Maze of Ingenuity* (1976). However harsh his assessment of his previous work might be, the new style works well in this book. Instead of marshalling a set of arguments to defend his thesis, Pacey has collected a number of personal anecdotes and second-hand accounts of specific situations that vividly illustrate and effectively support his basic theses.

Pacey focuses on the process of technological activity rather than on specific products, and he identifies a need for changes at two levels. He describes and demonstrates the virtues of a new type of engineer who is oriented more toward maintenance (and nurturing) than development (and creation of novelty) and who can take a broad interdisciplinary systems approach to problems. But he does not claim that engineers with this type of approach will be able to solve problems any better than the more narrowly oriented experts they would replace. The essential virtue of this new kind of engineer is the ability to work alongside lay people in addressing problems. And this is tied directly to the second level of change—the policy-making level, at which he shows how and why increased democratic participation is more desirable than control restricted to a small technocratic elite.

The knowledgeable reader might be tempted to criticize this book for saying nothing new. But the strongest criticism that can be made fairly is that Pacey does not seem to be aware—or at least he does not explicitly acknowledge—that the general thesis he propounds (that is, that the critical issue is increasing democratic control over technology) and many of the specific subpoints he makes (for example, concerning the difference between male and female attitudes toward technology) have been examined in considerable detail by American writers such as Paul Goodman, Carol Gilligan, Lynn White, Jr., Frances Moore Lappe, Wendell Berry, Buckminster Fuller, Thomas Szasz, Langdon Winner, and many others. But such a criticism, though valid on purely scholarly grounds, would mean that the most significant point about this book had been missed. This most impressive point may not even have been intended by the author: it is simply that the case for increasing democratic control over technology can be made forcefully without appeal to the work of these and other well-known (to some, notorious) American thinkers. It is a thesis that is equally defensible from the perspective of Western Europe, South Asia, China, or any other contemporary culture.

In sum, Pacey succeeds in presenting and supporting his radically moderate thesis so effectively that it is almost impossible to reject it. The more likely reaction of persons who find it threatening (persons at either extreme) is to try to dismiss it as nothing new. But if rational beings can agree on anything, it is that novelty is not a criterion for truth.

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A Field of Astronomy

Glimpsing an Invisible Universe. The Emergence of X-Ray Astronomy. RICHARD F. HIRSH. Cambridge University Press, New York, 1983. viii, 186 pp., illus. $39.50.

Hirsh has taken a new yet fairly limited and clearly defined specialty in science and examined its early growth to maturity in this brief and interesting work. The book benefits from its concentration upon the United States during the 1960's and 1970's—during this period the majority of x-ray astronomy research was performed by or sponsored by U.S. organizations. Hirsh touches upon the forerunners of x-ray astronomy (for example, ionospheric physics and solar ultraviolet and x-ray studies) that provided the instruments, methods, and community structure for its emergence.

The first non-solar x-ray observations were obtained from a rocket in 1962, and in the next half-dozen years about 30