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The Ethnography of Malinowski

The Trobriand Islands 1915-18

Edited by
Michael W. Young

Routledge Revivals

The Ethnography of Malinowski

Bronislaw Malinowski is one of the founding fathers of modern social anthropology and the innovator of the technique of prolonged and intensive fieldwork. His writings about the Trobriand Islands of Papua were in their time the most formative influence on the work of British social anthropologists and are of perennial interest and importance. They produced a revolution in the aims and field techniques of social anthropologists, and the method he created is that now normally used by anthropologists in the field.

Malinowski's field material remains compulsory reading for students. First published in 1979, this book draws from the major monographs of Malinowski to compile a selection of his writings on the Trobriand Islanders. In presenting a concise Trobriand ethnography in one volume, Dr Young gives balanced coverage of economic life, kinship, marriage and land tenure, and to the system of ceremonial exchange known as the Kula. He also provides, in an introductory essay, a critical assessment of Malinowski the ethnographer, and gives a brief account of the Trobriands in a modern perspective.

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Introduction

I

The Trobriand Islands are a cluster of coral atolls which lie some 100 miles due north of the eastern tail of Papua New Guinea. They are inhabited by a people of Melanesian stock who speak an Austronesian language unique to themselves, though it is related to others in the region. The Trobriand Islands were named by the French explorer D'Entrecasteaux in 1793, but it was Bronislaw Malinowski who placed them firmly on the anthropological map. He lived there for two years during 1915–18 and subsequently wrote prolifically about the islanders' language, culture and society. His major monographs, all classics, are: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), an account of the system of ceremonial exchange known as the Kula; *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929), a study of Trobriand courtship, marriage and domestic life; *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (1935), which deals with horticulture and land tenure (vol. I), and with the language of magic and gardening (vol. II). In two short monographs, *Baloma: the Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands* (1916) and *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1926), Malinowski examined, respectively, Trobriand magico-religious beliefs and the principles underlying social control in Trobriand society. In addition to these works Malinowski wrote a great deal more which was directly inspired by his Trobriand researches. For example, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927) invokes Trobriand familial relations in an attempt to modify Freudian theory. The substance of most of his articles and longer essays on the Trobriands, however, was usually tidily incorporated into one or another of the major monographs.

More than forty years after its completion, Malinowski's Trobriand corpus remains the most famous, if not the most copious and exhaustive, ethnography in the anthropological literature. The

Trobrianders have occupied a place in the limelight of academic debate and generally enjoyed a fame out of all proportion to their numbers or the size of their miniscule islands. This has been due to two things: first, the uniqueness and exotic appeal of the Trobrianders themselves, whose culture has indeed proved to be richer than so many of their Melanesian neighbours, and second, the tireless and insistent publicity given to them by Malinowski. Like an impresario he conducted them to the centre of almost every anthropological (and popular) controversy: the nature of the family, the ignorance of physiological paternity, free love and adolescent sterility, the roots of the Oedipus Complex, the 'meaning' of kinship terminology, the rationality of magic, the sources of law and order, the interpretation of mythology, the mainspring of economic incentives, the function of ritual . . . There was practically nothing in Human Nature and Society about which the Trobrianders, through Malinowski's erudite advocacy, did not have something interesting to say.

Fame is not synonymous with familiarity, however, and it is unusual today for non-specialist readers to tackle more than one or two of the monographs. Reasons for this are not hard to find, for set against their individual scientific value and literary virtues, they are, as a body of writings, disjointed, riddled with internal redundancies and saturated with tiresome, outdated polemics. Malinowski has frequently been criticised for failing to present a coherent, synoptic account of Trobriand culture, from which the latter might be seen (in Clyde Kluckholn's words) 'not from the vantage point of the Kula or of sex or of garden magic, but from a more embracive perspective which helps us to understand the interrelationships of these various "institutional systems"' (1943:213). Malinowski regretted this lack himself, and in 1929 blamed ill-health and the urgent need to establish his doctrine of functionalism, both of which had required him to work up his material in piecemeal fashion (Firth 1957:10). But there were also theoretical inhibitions. It is clear from the *apologia* with which he concluded his last book on the Trobriands that he regarded 'an ultimate theoretical assessment' of the various institutions his monographs had dealt with as transcending 'the proper task of the fieldworker' (1935(I):455). Such coy restraint is uncharacteristic, and it is more plausible to suppose that it was his oft-noted inability to think in terms of social systems, rather than a self-confessed 'methodologi-

cal puritanism', which prevented him from writing a generalised account of Trobriand culture.

The present volume makes no claim to substitute for the omission. Obviously, the required synopsis would need to have been born of the mind and pen of Malinowski himself; it cannot be effected by any scissors-and-paste synthesis. It seemed worth while, however, to attempt to reduce by judicious paring the 2,500-odd pages of the Trobriand corpus to a wieldy number, which would then constitute an 'essential' Trobriand ethnography between two covers. There could be no question, of course, of assembling anything like a 'total' ethnography within the limits of a single volume, and much of interest and value has had to be sacrificed. Thus, I have ruthlessly omitted detailed descriptions of technology, gardening activities, sexual behaviour, much mythology and magic, and all linguistic material. Another victim, alas, has been the 'imponderabilia of everyday life' (including case material) which gave such colour to Malinowski's narratives but added so inordinately to their length. It may be protested, not unjustly, that with the excision of purple passages, polemical tilts and rhetorical asides, little will remain of the idiosyncratic flavour of Malinowski's style. If this is so (and the reader must judge), it is regrettable but necessary, for the purpose of this book is to offer a concise ethnography of the Trobriands in Malinowski's own words, rather than an anthology of Malinowski's Trobriand writings. This is a fine but crucial distinction.

Other notable deletions I have been forced to make are the many disquisitions on fieldwork practice and method which introduced, concluded or otherwise punctuated Malinowski's monographs. Here again, I must plead that they are not as directly relevant to the 'function' of this book as they were to his own when he wrote them. In their original contexts they were impassioned and didactic declarations of a revolutionary fieldworker's manifesto – as influential within the profession as anything he ever wrote. Partly to redress this omission, I give below some attention to his prescriptions for fieldwork in offering an assessment of his accomplishments as an ethnographer.

Since his death in 1942, much has been written about Malinowski's life and works. A major evaluation was the collection of essays by twelve of his most distinguished pupils, published under the title *Man and Culture* (Firth 1957a). (This work should

be referred to for a comprehensive bibliography of Malinowski's writings, plus a list of other items which had been published about him before 1957.) A great number of additional critiques, assessments and intellectual portraits have appeared during the last twenty years by American, British and French authors, notably: Harris (1968), Hatch (1973), Métraux (1968), Stocking (1974), Symmons-Symonolewicz (1958, 1959, 1960), Voget (1975) and Wax (1972); Barnes (1963), Forge (1972), Jarvie (1964), Kuper (1973), Leach (1966a, 1966b) and Richards (1969); Lombard (1972) and Panoff (1972). Much of this literature is highly critical of Malinowski's theorising; his British intellectual descendants, particularly, have been less than kind to him. But then, he himself gave no quarter to his own antecedents. This literature is also testimony to the fact that, for all his failings, his memory is still remarkably green. In great measure this is due to his Trobriand works. He gave them vitality and they in turn assure him of his immortality.

II

Bronislaw Malinowski was born of aristocratic parentage in Poland in 1884. He studied mathematics and physics at the University of Cracow and in 1908 was awarded a PhD. Shortly afterwards he turned his interests to anthropology – converted, he was later to claim, by reading Frazer's *Golden Bough.* In 1910 he went to England and studied under Edward Westermarck and C. G. Seligman at the London School of Economics, where he wrote his first book, *The Family Among the Australian Aborigines* (1913). With Seligman's help he obtained finance to undertake field research in New Guinea. He visited Australia on the way, and was there when the Great War began. As an Austrian subject he was technically an enemy alien, but the Australian authorities permitted him to proceed to the Territory of Papua, where his movements during the next few years appear to have been quite unrestricted. There is no substance to the myth that he was 'interned' in the Trobriands.

At the age of thirty, then, Malinowski began his career as an ethnographer with five months' fieldwork among the Mailu and neighbouring peoples on the southern coast of Papua. It was a rather unpromising start. His posthumously published personal diaries depict this period as a harrowing one of recurrent sickness,

lethargy and dejection. Except for a few weeks towards the end, he appears to have spent more time in the company of European residents and visitors than he did working among the Mailu (whom he found 'coarse and dull'), and it seems clear that he owed a great deal more to his missionary host, the Rev. W. J. V. Saville, than the rather perfunctory acknowledgment in his published report would suggest. *The Natives of Mailu* (1915), however, is no brief survey, but a quite solid compendium of descriptive ethnography which, while set in a conventional framework and lacking the textual richness so characteristic of his later monographs, is by no means inferior to other anthropological works of the time.

Of Malinowski's second expedition to New Guinea in 1915 – his first crucial year in the Trobriand Islands – there is unfortunately no detailed record. His choice of the Trobriands was apparently adventitious; though perhaps less so was the decision to pitch his tent in Omarakana, the 'capital' of Kiriwina. After six months he understood the language well enough to dispense with an interpreter, and thenceforth he worked entirely in the vernacular. By the end of this expedition he was a thoroughly seasoned fieldworker, and had matured into the superb ethnographer whose example was to revolutionise social anthropology.

Precisely what steps he took to achieve this maturity we do not know, but the evidence for it is plain in the celebrated *Baloma* essay he wrote in the Australian interlude of 1916. In this short monograph on the subject of Trobriand beliefs, Malinowski foreshadows in style and plan the major works which were to follow. There is the discursive form, the methodological disquisition, the weaving of ethnographic context, the illustrative use of cases, the confidential tone of the author as he builds a mosaic of interlocking detail in describing an institution. One of his favourite expository devices is to exploit the observing 'I' by self-dramatisation, to place himself squarely in the event and describe what he sees. Such devices enabled him better to convey his understanding of an unfamiliar idea or custom, and they heighten the reader's interest by their engaging effect. *Baloma* is a brilliant performance. In a judicious balance of fact, theory and viewpoint, Malinowski had found his true voice.

In September 1917 Malinowski returned to the Trobriands for his last extended period of fieldwork. This was to conclude his baptism by fire, unique documentation of which is provided by his

personal diary of that year. It shows the man, bruised and wearied by the experience, but determined to complete what he'd begun, and in a far more vigorous frame of mind than he had ever known in Mailu. After his return to Australia he married, but was delayed from returning to England by ill-health. His first Trobriand epic, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, was published in 1922, and the same year he commenced full-time teaching at the London School of Economics where he remained until 1938. Caught in America by the outbreak of war, he was persuaded to stay as a Visiting Professor at Yale. It was there that he died in 1942, at the age of fifty-eight.

His extraordinarily productive 'London years' saw Malinowski emerge triumphant as the undisputed leader of social anthropology in Britain. From 1927 he occupied the first Chair of Anthropology in the University of London, but even before this he had established his famous teaching seminar, and had already earned a considerable popular reputation as a pundit and polemicist. Many of his students have written glowingly, if also ambivalently, of this time of intellectual ferment (e.g. see Powdermaker 1966:33–45). Malinowski's brilliant teaching was imbued with his Trobriand experiences, and work on the cycle of monographs went hand in hand with the development of his 'functionalist' viewpoint and with the vigorous publicising of the revolution in anthropology that it would bring. One of Malinowski's most eminent pupils has recalled how the typescript of *Coral Gardens* was discussed 'page by page' in the seminar of 1932–3 (Fortes 1957:157) – evidently something of an ordeal in view of Malinowski's inability to take criticism kindly. Fortes (*ibid.*) also hints that Malinowski's compulsion to present his theories and his ethnographic discoveries in the form of an assault on the *ancien régime* was as tiresome to his listeners as it is preposterous to the readers of his books. In brief, most of the Trobriand ethnography was composed while its author was strenuously engaged in asserting his academic supremacy, and whether or not the battles were more imagined than real, his ethnographic writing was vitiated by the parade of grotesque Aunt Sallys and the rustle of straw men.

Before saying any more about the shortcomings of Malinowski's ethnography, let me recapitulate the circumstances of his positive fieldwork achievement.

As early as 1913, W. H. R. Rivers had written:

> The essence of intensive work . . . is limitation in extent combined with intensity and thoroughness. A typical piece of intensive work is one in which the worker lives for a year or more among a community of perhaps four or five hundred people and studies every detail of their life and culture; in which he comes to know every member of the community personally; in which he is not content with generalized information, but studies every feature of life and custom in concrete detail and by means of the vernacular language. It is only by such work that one can realize the immense extent of the knowledge which is now awaiting the inquirer, even in places where the culture has already suffered much change. It is only by such work that it is possible to discover the incomplete and even misleading character of much of the vast mass of survey work which forms the existing material of anthropology (quoted by Kuper 1973:20; see also Urry 1972).

Now none of Malinowski's mentors (Westermarck, Seligman, nor yet Rivers himself) had managed to fulfil to the letter this prescription for first-hand, intensive research, and no one rightly knew what its consequences would be. Until this time, most ethnographic information had been collected by amateurs – missionaries, colonial administrators and travellers – though much 'survey work' had been done by Rivers, Haddon, Seligman and others of their generation. It was clear, at any rate, that academic opinion in Britain at the time was favourably disposed to innovations in ethnographic method, and Malinowski, through his Trobriand fieldwork, amply provided them. It was, in short, a matter of the right man being in the right place at the right time; though such was the man's charismatic influence that he was able to persuade a whole generation of his followers that 'social anthropology began in the Trobriand Islands in 1914' (Leach 1957:124).

What were these innovations that Malinowski introduced? First of all they comprised the necessary conditions for intensive work as mentioned by Rivers: the anthropologist must spend a long time in one place and remain in close contact with the people throughout, and he must communicate with them through their own language. Second, there were the actual strategies and techniques of data collection, to which Malinowski attached somewhat cumbersome labels: (1) The method of 'statistical documentation of concrete

evidence', which involved the recording of maps, censuses, genealogies, statements of norms and the observation of actual cases. The aim was to construct 'synoptic charts' which summarised the range and interconnections of customary behaviours associated with a focal institution. Such information, abstracted in a series of charts, would provide an outline of 'the organization of the tribe and the anatomy of its culture' (1922:24). (2) Another set of materials, which Malinowski called 'the imponderabilia of everyday life', should be collected 'through minute, detailed observations'. These are to flesh out the anatomy of the culture and give human sense to the tribal structure. (3) Finally, the fieldworker must accumulate a *corpus inscriptionum*, consisting of 'ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulae'. These were 'documents of native mentality' which, as in historical scholarship, could be studied as texts by independent analysts. 'These three lines of approach', Malinowski asserted, 'lead to the final goal, of which an ethnographer should never lose sight. This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world' (*ibid.*:25). With this humanist credo few anthropologists would quarrel, though 'the final goal' has proved to be a good deal more elusive than Malinowski's simple directives for attaining it might suggest. None the less, a quite remarkable advance in ethnographic sophistication followed the application of these discovery procedures. Malinowski's prescriptions, as Adam Kuper has put it, 'reflect a perception of the systematic divergence between what people say about what they do, what they actually do, and what they think' (1973:30). 'Savages', Malinowski showed, could be all too human in their perverse complexity.

Now certain problems presented themselves as a direct consequence of conducting fieldwork the way Malinowski had done. They were unsought, often unarticulated, and yet quite inescapable. As far as the scientific task was concerned, there was the problem of a super-abundance of data, an extravagant wealth of detail which accumulated over the months of patient observation and questioning. Materials proliferate like thickets, and Malinowski advocated a firm hand:

> In the field one has to face a chaos of facts, some of which are so small that they seem insignificant; others loom so large

> that they are hard to encompass with one synthetic glance. But in this crude form they are not scientific facts at all; they are absolutely elusive, and can be fixed only by interpretation, by seeing them *sub specie aeternitatis*, by grasping what is essential in them and fixing this. *Only laws and generalizations are scientific facts*, and field work consists only and exclusively in the interpretation of the chaotic social reality, in subordinating it to general rules (1916:212, original italics).

In this early formulation, Malinowski shows a sophisticated awareness of the necessarily creative role of the investigator, who deludes himself if he claims to be merely 'recording facts'. Ultimately, such views were to mature into a 'scientific theory of culture' which was rooted in the rather trite axiom that Man has biological needs which Culture satisfied (1944). This fully-fledged schema was Malinowski's contribution to Grand Theory, hatched from Durkheim but transmogrified by behaviourism into an unwieldy and essentially unilluminating bio-cultural functionalism. His earlier functionalism, however, which he had begun to articulate in the late 1920s, was of a more sociological and less pretentious variety. He seems to have discovered retrospectively that as a preliminary guide to the collection and sorting of facts according to their institutional contexts, and as a check-list of possible interconnections between institutions, elementary functionalism provides an invaluable heuristic aid. Indeed it does, as so many who have followed in the Malinowskian fieldwork tradition have found for themselves. It should be said, however, that there is no *necessary* connection between the manifold, multi-levelled ethnographic data which Malinowski's field methods produced, and the kind of laboured, holistic functionalism by which he interpreted them in his last monographs. Other scholars, including his own pupils, have re-interpreted the same data in the light of other theories – thereby paying fulsome tribute to the excellence of his ethnography in being able to do so. Malinowski's early functionalism, then, which amounted to little more than the way things hang together in a culture, can be regarded as a sort of charter for the way he wanted to present his ethnography.

III

There were other problems which arose as a consequence of intensive fieldwork by participant-observation to which Malinowski gave relatively scant attention, and for which he cannot be said to have proposed solutions. These were to do with the very immersion of the anthropologist in his tribe: heightened observer-effect, increased moral commitment, and the personal traumas of (to use a psychoanalytical concept) the countertransference of the fieldworker. Such problems, indeed, have only fairly recently been given their due as worthy of consideration, yet they are quite integral to the fact that the anthropologist is a human subject observing other human subjects, and that his presence affects their behaviour even as theirs affects his own.

In this area of humanistic concern, to which anthropologists are becoming increasingly sensitive, Malinowski made his own contribution, but it was circumscribed and it was flawed. To take first the 'vivid life' (Leach) of his ethnography which, in taking 'full account of the complexity of human nature' and seeing man 'in the round and not in the flat' (Frazer), was such a warm contrast to the dry and bloodless ethnography of his predecessors. But by the most exacting criteria his Trobrianders rarely come alive as individuals; they are more usually described in terms of generalised psychology and standardised emotions. Again, all too often he brought Trobriand Man to life only to parade him as the embodiment of a theory, and finally to kill him off as a pastiche of his own ideas. As Leach (1957:128–9) has argued, for example, Malinowski went too far in his attempt to demonstrate the 'rationality' of his Trobrianders; it was all very well to demolish the belief that primitives were pre-logical, but it was absurd to credit them with the super-rationality of scientists. More generally, anthropology may well be an art as well as a science (among other things 'the art of taking a warm interest in the particular while seeking it in the universal', as Robert Redfield (1954:11) put it in praising Malinowski), but with its vested interest in mankind's diversity, social anthropology can hardly be satisfied with facile demonstrations of the universal in the particular, and Trobriand Man could not long serve as the only paradigm for Primitive Man. Could anything be more pompous, patronising and plain silly than the opening sentence of the Author's Preface to his final monograph on the Trobrianders?

> Once again I have to make my appearance as a chronicler and spokesman of the Trobrianders, the Melanesian community so small and lowly as to appear almost negligible – a few thousand 'savages', practically naked, scattered over a small flat archipelago of dead coral – and yet for many reasons so important to the student of primitive humanity (1935(I):xix).

Consider next the somewhat incompatible demands between scientific 'objectivity' and the personal involvement of the field-worker's 'subjectivity'. Despite his incorrigible self-dramatisation and his claim that 'the facts of anthropology attract me mainly as the best means of knowing myself' (1932a:xxv), Malinowski did not propose any theory which included the observer in its frame of reference. This was at least partly due to his basic orientation: the field of enquiry was wholly external to himself. He mentions the 'personal equation' of the investigator only to caution against selectivity in observation and recording, and he counsels the keeping of an 'ethnographic diary' of events as a corrective measure (1922:20–1). Paradoxically, however, the field diaries which Malinowski himself kept (1967) constitute an entirely different form of document – one which, in laying bare his prejudices, gives the lie to his public image and puts his sincerity severely to the test.

Malinowski valued intellectual honesty, and he could be outrageously candid within the frame of his public image. The 'confessions of ignorance and failure' which conclude the Trobriand works (1935(I), Appendix II) amount to a remarkably self-critical catalogue of his 'errors of omission and commission'. Yet there is a flavour of exhibitionism about the recital, a hint of mock-modesty to disguise a gentle boast that he could well afford, secure in the knowledge that he had done a more thorough job of ethnography than anyone before him. Extreme candour, then, may have been yet another of his publicity tricks. But like everyone else, Malinowski cultivated one kind of honesty commensurate with his public self, and nurtured another kind for his private self. It is the hiatus between them which is revealed by the *Diary*, and is exemplified by the discrepancy between the view of Malinowski as a man who 'achieved a great measure of personal identification with the people he lived with' (Richards 1957:17–18) and the impression conveyed by *Diary* entries such as the following:

> As for ethnology: I see the life of the natives as utterly devoid of interest or importance, something as remote from me as the life of a dog (1967:167).

In short, his much-vaunted powers of empathy are little in evidence in the figure who emerges from the *Diary* as (in Clifford Geertz's black characterisation) a 'crabbed, self-preoccupied, hypochondriacal narcissist, whose fellow-feeling for the people he lived with was limited in the extreme' (1967:12).

In Malinowski's defence, it must be said that innovating as he did the social anthropologist's role of participant-observer, he was without the psychological security afforded by existing precedents. The very ambiguity of his status and life-style was clearly unsettling. He had broken through the caste-barrier which at the time stultified understanding between Europeans and Melanesians, and he was associating with Trobrianders on approximate terms of parity (see Wax 1972). Add this 'betrayal' of White caste-solidarity to the fact that he was a Pole, an enemy alien, a pompous and condescending intellectual with a thinly-disguised antipathy towards missionaries and colonial administrators*, and we need not wonder that his only European friends appear to have been traders. On the other hand, the fact that he lived in a tent in a native village does not mean that he was warmly accepted by Trobrianders either, and his feeling that 'the native is not the natural companion of the white man' (1922:7) was probably reciprocated. A *modus vivendi* of

* With one or two exceptions (see his favourable comments on the Rev. M. Gilmour's account of the Kula, 1922:500n.), this antipathy led him to belittle and scorn their ethnographic endeavours. See, for example, his heavily patronizing and patently insincere Foreword to the Rev. W. J. V. Saville's book on the Mailu (1926), and his vituperative reply to A. G. Rentoul, a District Officer who presumed to question some of Malinowski's findings on Trobriand beliefs about conception (Rentoul 1931, 1932; Malinowski 1932c). On the other hand, he seems unaccountably to have ignored the ethnographic notes of Dr R. L. Bellamy (1908, and bibliography in Black 1957), who had been Assistant Resident Magistrate and Medical Officer on the Trobriands for a full ten years by the time of Malinowski's arrival, and who, furthermore, had excellent credentials from Malinowski's own mentor Seligman, who had quoted Bellamy extensively in his account of the Northern Massim (1910). Bellamy sheltered Malinowski on his arrival, taught him some of the language, and it was even suggested by Malinowski that they should write a joint book on 'the sociology of the Trobriand people' (Black 1957:18). Bellamy turned the offer down, however, and went off to fight in the Great War. Subsequently his friendship with Malinowski soured, and he was later to charge – somewhat obscurely – that Malinowski had undone in two years much of the work that he had accomplished in the Trobriands during his ten years as a government officer (Black 1957:18–19).

mutual tolerance was established, but Malinowski called the tune:

> In fact, as they knew that I would thrust my nose into everything, even where a well-mannered native would not dream of intruding, they finished by regarding me as part and parcel of their life, a necessary evil or nuisance, mitigated by donations of tobacco (1922:8).

Thus, while the 'ethnographer's tent' seems to have symbolised for him the breakthrough in method which he accomplished (Wax 1972; Malinowski 1922: Plate I), the breakthrough in European–native relationships remained incomplete. A tent, after all, erects and maintains more social distance than any native house.

It is only fair to point out, too, that the chronic sense of alienation which permeates the *Diary* is a common psychic experience of anthropologists in the field, and it is intensified by homesickness, nostalgia, loneliness and sexual frustration – all of which Malinowski suffered in full measure. 'Ethnological problems don't preoccupy me at all', he writes towards the end of his diary. 'At bottom I am living outside of Kiriwina, although strongly hating the niggers' (1967:264). As George Stocking has suggested in a most perceptive review of the *Diary*, Malinowski in the Trobriands invites comparison with Conrad's Mistah Kurtz in the Congo, 'alone with his instincts in the heart of darkness' (1974:283). The intense ambivalence which he displays towards his informants and their culture is a symptom of this alienation rather than proof of any character defect, and there is much evidence in the *Diary* of his moral struggle to overcome it. He oscillates between cold detachment and warm involvement, bleak despair and manic exhilaration, though it appears to have been professional ambition harnessed to an almost Calvinistic attitude to the redeeming power of hard work which 'saved' him in the end (cf. Geertz 1967). Much later, from the pinnacle of his career in London, he could look back indulgently at his ordeal and even write of himself as one 'whose heart is in Melanesia' (1932b:xxi).

Raymond Firth has declared that Malinowski's *Diary* 'cannot be ranked as more than a footnote to anthropological history' (1967:xviii). But each tradition comes to write its own history, and in the history of the 'humanist', 'confessional' genre of 'reflexive' anthropology it will surely warrant a page or two (cf. Stocking 1974). Reactions within the profession have ranged from glee at the

debunking of a myth to indignation at the indelicacy of exposing a dead Master's private musings. There is unlikely to be consensus as to the *Diary*'s value, or to the propriety of publishing it in the first place, though I would incline to agree with I. M. Lewis (1968:348) that had Malinowski lived longer, 'it would surely not have been greatly out of character for him to have authorized publication'. As one who relished shocking his contemporaries he could have promoted it as the cap-stone of a career bent on creating a romantic image of the anthropologist-as-hero; and with what disarming self-mockery he would have nudged the pendulum (doubtless invoking his Slavic perversity) and proclaimed the anthropologist-as-anti-hero! Did he not preach that social reality was located somewhere in the gap between ideal and real, between what people say they do and what they actually do? Likewise, he would have been true to his theories in his very human inconsistency.

In his review of the *Diary*, Lewis (1968) asks rhetorically whether the Trobrianders got the ethnographer they deserved. His impression is 'probably not', but whatever Malinowski's personal relations with them may have been, 'could anyone else have more effectively trumpeted their name around the world?' (1968:349). The implied answer is, again, 'probably not'; but no one has thought to ask the Trobrianders whether they wanted (or still want) their name broadcast for reasons which to them must appear dubious. We cannot answer Lewis's question because we do not know what Trobrianders in 1917 thought of Malinowski. There is a tradition which recalls him as the 'Man of Songs' (Hogbin 1946), and a recent worker on Kiriwina discovered that he was remembered as an expert at shooing spirits away (J. W. Leach, personal communication). (Curiously enough, he mentions in his diary an occasion when he sang the words 'Kiss my ass' to a Wagner melody to chase away witches (1967:157).) But oral traditions are notoriously selective, and such judgments of posterity are probably of little significance. Until recently, the only documented response of a Trobriander to Malinowski's writings is a complaint that he got the ranking system wrong (Groves 1956). A somewhat different kind of testimony comes from a Catholic missionary who spent thirty years in the Trobriands, and whose mastery of the language is indubitable (see Baldwin 1944–5; 1949–50). He writes, not implausibly:

> It was a surprise to me to find that Malinowski was mostly remembered by the natives as the champion ass at asking damnfool questions, like, do you bury the seed tuber root end or sprout end down? Like asking, do you stand the baby or the coffin on its head or on its feet? I preferred not to refer to him at all with the white people who had known him. He had made them uneasy, and they got back at him by referring to him as the anthrofoologist and his subject anthrofoology. I felt too that this was partly a reflection of native unease – they did not know what he was at. Partly again because he made of his profession a sacred cow; you had to defer, though you did not see why; and if you were a government official or a missionary, you did not appreciate the big stick from one whose infallibility was no more guaranteed than your own (Baldwin n.d.:41).

From the same source, here is a positive appraisal of Malinowski's work:

> Malinowski's research I think was as exhaustive as it could be, short of completely absorbing the Trobriand language. I was continually surprised on referring back to him, to find that his enquiry had already impinged upon some discovery that I had supposed was all my own. His analysis too was masterly. He seems to have left nothing unexplained, and his explanations are enlightening even to the people who live there (Baldwin n.d.:17).

But Father Baldwin enters a caveat:

> It is curious then, that this exhaustive research and patient, wise, and honest explanation should leave a sense of incompleteness. But it does. I feel that his material is still not properly digested, that Malinowski would be regarded in some ways naïve by the people he was studying. That the people he describes would still seem somewhat foreign to the Trobrianders themselves. I was surprised at the number of times informants helping me with checking Malinowski would bridle. Usually when a passage had been gone over more than once, they would say it was not like that. They did not quarrel with facts or explanation, only with the colouring, as it were. The sense expressed was not the sense they had of