

"people without history." Each shows the selectivity that has frequently been at work in the ways boundaries have been drawn around the event and limitations placed on its interpretation by previous scholarly or "authoritative" representations. Changes in meanings that have occurred before, as reactions, become themselves active agents in the ongoing transformative and reconstitutive processes. What is sought is the authenticity of experience rather than a reliance on the authority of an "authority." Hovering uncertainly over the endeavor is Clio, the muse of epic poetry and history (not to be confused with another of like name), either drifting tangentially or clumping dogmatically between the variously proffered interpretations of events. Authors seem often to be forcing the boundaries of language, with frequent recourse to trope and metaphor, in order to grasp within the limits of the printed page the problems of multilevel interpretation and representation. This does not always make for easy reading, and some exponents manage the narratives and complex interpretations more briskly and directly than others.

"The past, which we are mythically confident is knowable as such, is only known through symbols whose meaning is changed in the reading of them and in the preserving of them" (355). Thus, says Dening, the conventions of the "dramaturgical entertainment," which is the pursuit of meaning, "include not just the text and its structure but the reading and the cultural rules of reading as well" (368), reminding us again of how much of the reflexivity current in anthropology and, in particular, historical anthropology,

had an earlier vogue in literary criticism. Altogether, this is a fine collection of essays by extremely able practitioners of the art of reflecting on the nature of historical events and their relations to different and sometimes multiple cultural orders. Many good points are made, and assumptions that we know what we know are frequently challenged, to provoke further thought. Dening may appropriately have the last comment: "What a complicated two-way 'Mirror for Man' anthropology has turned out to be once we understand the poetics of an ethnographic moment" (369).

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*Samoa Medical Belief and Practice*, by Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1990. ISBN 1-86940-045-3, viii + 272 pp, photographs, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. Paper, NZ\$32.95.

The Macphersons have written an exemplary account of Samoa's indigenous medical system. The book is a combined sociological analysis and practical handbook of Samoan medicine. The authors write in easy style for a multiple readership that includes Pacific scholars, medical practitioners who work with migrant Samoan communities, and Samoan healers (*fofo*) and their patients. The book documents the technicalities of Samoan medical belief and practice and serves as an effective introduction to medical sociology or anthropology.

The Macphersons interviewed 33 Western Samoan healers, 22 of them in depth, over a ten-year period. The authors were related to many of the healers, and this perhaps facilitated their access to the diagnostic and treatment sessions they observed and recorded. The Macphersons themselves and their children also received treatment from *fofo*. Roughly equal numbers of men and women practice as traditional healers. They learn their skills in an unofficial apprenticeship, typically with an experienced healer of their kin group. Thanks to the Macphersons' recorded interviews, the voices of Samoan healers speak throughout the book.

Samoans experience wellness as a form of physiological and social balance; illness, conversely, is an effect of imbalance or disharmony in a number of spheres, including body temperature, but more importantly in social and spiritual relationships. Patients and healers alike begin with a concern to discern whether an illness is a Samoan disease (*ma'i samoa*) or a foreign one (*ma'i palagi*). *Fofo* claim powers over the former and will refer patients who appear to be suffering from illnesses not recognized as indigenous to hospitals. There is coordination between Samoa's dual Western and indigenous medical systems: each side refers some of its failures to the other.

The Macphersons emphasize the variability of Samoan medical belief and practice. Beyond a broadly accepted core of beliefs about the body, illness, and curing, healers use a variety of medicines and procedures to treat disease. Samoan medicine is dynamic

as well as diverse. In a convincing historical analysis, the authors argue that there was an efflorescence of medical knowledge after European contact. They describe this as a paradigm shift away from traditional beliefs that ascribed illness to supernatural displeasure, and a medical practice that, apart from body massage, was simple and limited in scope. Evidence suggests that few endemic diseases afflicted precontact Samoa—notably filariasis, yaws, and ophthalmia. Clearly responding to devastating, introduced European diseases, Samoan etiology broadened to admit causes of illness other than supernatural agency.

Correspondingly, medical therapies multiplied as healers augmented prayer and libations of kava to the gods with an expanding pharmacopoeia. The Macphersons find evidence in early dictionaries and other historic records to suggest that only nine plant species were used medicinally in the 1860s, and just eleven species forty years later at the turn of the century. Ethnomedicine today uses many more. The authors suggest that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Samoan healers developed pharmacological knowledge through experimentation, but also borrowed therapies from neighboring Tonga and Fiji, and from Melanesian and Chinese workers brought to Samoa as plantation laborers. Moreover, many Samoans served as Christian missionaries in the Loyalty Islands, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and elsewhere and returned home with pharmacological knowledge and plant cuttings borrowed from other Pacific medical systems. Samoan medicine retains its dynamism; the authors document

indigenous medications that incorporate aspirin and onions.

In addition to four sorts of massage, the Samoan medical kit consists principally of coconut oil-based potions, poultices, vapors, and cold- and hot-water infusions of plant material. Many pharmacological recipes are stored and recalled in the form of memorized formulae that rehearse necessary ingredients and the procedures for preparing and administering the medicine. For example, a formula for a treatment for intestinal worms states (in translation): "Place bark scrapings from the *milo* (*Thespesia populnea*) in a piece of clean cloth (gauze), infuse in water and drink the solution" (203).

As is typical of many Pacific medical systems, pharmacological recipes are often confidential. The trade secrets of Samoan healers, however, are protected by a further form of copyright: the general belief that a medicine only works if prepared by the person who owns it. This no doubt facilitated the Macphersons' investigation of pharmacological knowledge and their inclusion of medical formulae in their book.

The Macphersons conclude with thoughts on the future of indigenous medical practice in Samoa. They note that Western medicine, like Western religion, far from replacing Samoan medicine has augmented it, even accelerating its development. Samoan medicine remains popular because Samoan disease persists. The authors suggest that some Samoan illnesses reflect tensions generated within the Samoan kinship system that regulates access to resources. An urban hospital may be unable to comfort such patients, but a village healer who knows the local

situation may prescribe a successful treatment.

The Macphersons argue that the act of consultation with a healer is itself therapeutic, in that family members typically accompany a patient. An illness provides its victim legitimate claims on public attention. (Similar interpretations have been suggested for *musu*, the Samoan emotional state of conspicuous silence, and also for adolescent attempts at suicide.) A skillful healer offers a family a forum to disclose and talk through its conflicts. Treatment regimens often include a day-long fast in which an entire family takes part. The authors also suspect that many of the chemical constituents of the Samoan pharmacopeia are indeed physiologically effective.

This book presents a detailed description of a contemporary, and indigenous, Pacific medical system—one that will find ready use in Pacific studies, medical anthropology, and sociology classrooms. It will be important to follow developments in Samoa's medical systems as doctors and *fofo* alike confront the health problems of Polynesia in the 1990s: diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, cancer, and AIDS. The book's cover photograph evokes something of the interplay of tradition and modernity within the Samoan life-style, public health, and medicine. A *fofo*—obviously a grand old lady—sits on a lava boulder in a banana plantation placidly clutching her Bic lighter and glowing cigarette.

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