

obituary

Margaret Mead, 1901–1978

MARGARET MEAD died on 15 November 1978 just a month before her 77th birthday. Thus ended a unique career. Boundlessly energetic and phenomenally productive (her bibliography runs to nearly 4,000 items), alert to every new development in the humane sciences, sensitive to urgent social issues and with a talent for working with and through others, she achieved a world-wide fame.

Her place in the history of American anthropology is assured; for she played a decisive part in its transformation from a narrow academic specialism into a modern humane science with world-wide interests. But she will also have a place in the social history of the United States for her catalytic influence on the development of educational and moral ideals and values after World War II. Field work, she often proclaimed, was the 'living stuff' of anthropology and she made over 20 field trips between 1925 and 1975. But in between spells of writing, teaching and organising research, she also travelled indefatigably in America and abroad, to lecture, to preside at conferences, to advise academic bodies or governmental agencies, and so on. But whatever the occasion might be, she always took her stand as an anthropologist, drawing attention to the many alternatives mankind had invented for dealing with the common problems of personal and social life.

Margaret Mead was born on 16 December 1901 in Philadelphia. As her father was a Professor of Economics and her mother an early student of sociology, she could say with pride, in her autobiography *Blackberry Winter* (1972), that she grew up in a 'social science' family. To their influence was added that of her grandmother, whose example inspired the ideals which made Dr Mead essentially an educator.

Dr Mead came into anthropology by chance. After a miserable year at De Pauw University she moved to Barnard College in New York in 1920. While completing her degree in psychology she was drawn into Franz Boas's circle. What most influenced her, however, was her friendship with Ruth Benedict, Boas's assistant, which was to last a lifetime of close collaboration. Anthropology was in a ferment just then.



Functionalism, with its emphasis on fieldwork and the analysis of the internal integration of primitive societies, had been launched in England. In America the complementary 'configurationist' movement, later to come to brilliant fruition in Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) was under way. And in the background loomed the figures of Freud, Jung and later Piaget. Mead took something from each to form her guiding principle that culture shapes character, is learned and is lived by individuals.

Mead's fieldwork began in 1925 with her study of a group of adolescent girls in Samoa. She found that unlike American girls, they suffered no emotional crises in the transition to adulthood, and she attributed this to the benign sexual mores and family system of Samoans. Addressing herself to the general public in her deliberately 'novelistic' best-seller *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) she drew the moral. A new image emerged of anthropology as a science of public enlightenment. Later, reacting to straight-laced anthropological criticism, in a conventional monograph, and journal articles, she presented the technical anthropological and psychological data on which she based her book; and she did likewise with all her subsequent fieldwork.

Dr Mead's next field study, shared

with her second husband Reo Fortune (her first was the archaeologist Luther Cressman) took her to the lagoon-dwelling Manus of the Admiralty Islands, New Guinea. Here, supplementing ethnographic observation with ingenious psychological tests, she found that contrary to some psychologists' theories children were not naturally animistic. A puritanical, competitive culture made fearful animistic adults of them. Her second popular book, *Growing Up in New Guinea* (1931) was another best-seller.

In 1931, after a depressing interlude in a disintegrating Omaha community (described in Mead's *The Changing Culture of an Indian Tribe*, 1931) they returned to New Guinea. Three strikingly different tribes were visited. There they were joined by Gregory Bateson, fresh from his Iatmul field work. Discussions with him crystallised an hypothesis that cultural patterns incorporated different psychologically identified temperamental types. Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935) developed this hypothesis to explain the startling contrasts in the norms of sexual identity and behaviour in these three tribes. The book, like its predecessors, was severely criticised by some anthropologists. But her argument that what are now called 'gender' differences are culturally inculcated not biologically determined, brilliantly anticipated the position vigorously maintained by women anthropologists today.

Mead elaborated this theme in lectures and articles in both popular and learned journals. Fourteen years later she refashioned it in *Male and Female* (1949), her most influential book. Comparing observations in seven non-Western cultures with the American scene, she examined the cultural variations in the roles of men and women in the reproductive process and in the socialisation of children, and related this to the way the oedipal conflict is resolved, thus drawing attention to the significance of the father in character formation. Here again she anticipated what has become a topic of major research activity among psychologists, anthropologists and some behaviour biologists.

Breaking with Fortune in 1936, she

married Bateson; and this partnership led to the field study in Bali (1936–1939) which they claimed, with some justice, to have been a major advance in anthropology.

In Bali they were faced with a complex oriental civilisation very different from primitive New Guinea, though, as before, their concern was primarily with culture-learning, the ways as they put it 'living persons embody their culture'. Their main innovation was the huge and minutely detailed photographic documentation that foreshadowed the post-war rise to prominence of the ethnographic film. Their fieldwork concentrated on interpersonal relationships and interactions, particularly of parents and children in the context of child-rearing and socialisation processes that were central to Dr Mead's interests. Her imaginative psychological commentary on the photographic record in their book *Balinese Character* (1942) and in other publications, provoked controversy but also stimulated new approaches in ethnological psychology. The 'anthropology of the body' is a new field of research concerned with problems of the cultural specification of postures, gestures, and body images and processes, and it owes much to the pioneering work of Bateson and Mead.

World War II brought unexpected challenges to American anthropologists. Dr Mead worked with various governmental agencies concerned with the war effort. But most important was the leading part she played in the international team of specialists assembled by Ruth Benedict to compile reports on the 'national character' of the belligerents. Field work being ruled out, they resorted to studying 'culture at a distance', through interviews with immigrants and analysis of literary, film and archival sources. As the publications of the team showed—notably Benedict's celebrated study of the Japanese, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) and Mead's passionate morale-booster *And keep your Powder Dry* (1943)—the method was remarkably effective, so much so that the project was continued until 1951 (with 120 participants!) under the auspices of Columbia University.

The war and especially, by Mead's own account, the shock of Hiroshima, brought home to her the urgent need for a new social and moral vision in western, especially American society. The war had broken down the cultural isolationism which she had helped to expose in her popular books. It had also, she learned, produced unprecedented changes in New Guinea. This led her, in 1953, to return to Manus, accompanied by a student couple.

She found the community completely transformed. Partly owing to the war and to Australian government agencies, but mainly to the charismatic leadership of one local man, the people had abandoned their entire traditional way of life and were rapidly adopting western institutions and ideals. Examining these changes in her *New Lives for Old* (1956) Dr Mead concluded that a unanimous primitive community, once convinced of the desirability of western cultural ideals and institutions, can, given inspired leadership, radically change its way of life in a generation. Thenceforth she advocated the wholehearted support by anthropologists of speedy westernisation in primitive communities with the right leadership and aspirations. She visited the Manus thrice again thus keeping benevolently critical track of their progress in self government, in family life, and in personality development, until 1975.

Watching Manus inspired in Dr Mead an abiding concern with the problems of changing society. Thus orientated, between 1953 and 1975 she also visited the other groups in which she had earlier worked, as well as the growing urban centres in New Guinea. Preoccupied now with the problems of reconciling continuity and change in cultural development (as in her book *Continuities in Cultural Evolution*, 1964) she travelled widely in America, the Caribbean, Europe and the Southern Hemisphere, often enough to participate in academic or policy-making activities, and so to enlarge her understanding of urgent world issues. The key to a more enlightened and humane future, she believed, lies in the way the culturally specified relations of successive generations of grandparents, parents and children, where character is shaped and culture is transmitted, are managed. She stressed in particular the models of the alternatives anthropology has revealed for handling the universal problems of intergenerational conflict.

Never hiding her light under a bushel, Margaret Mead yet disdained pretensions to originality. On the contrary she constantly stressed her indebtedness to others, friends, famous scholars, students and predecessors. But as the long list of visiting professorships, honorary degrees, other academic distinctions, and awards and prizes conferred on her testifies, the pre-eminence of her scientific achievements, her devotion to America and her dedication to the ideals of human betterment were widely esteemed. A phenomenon like Margaret Mead could perhaps not have emerged in any other country than modern America. From her base in the American Museum of

Natural History, where she worked, and taught from the time of her appointment as an assistant curator in 1925 to the end of her days, she exercised a decisive influence both on the development of the social and human sciences in America and elsewhere, and on American educational, and moral values and cultural ideals. But she will undoubtedly be best remembered, as she would herself have wished, as one of the most creative anthropologists of this century.

Meyer Fortes

Bernard Halpern

BERNARD N. HALPERN, one of the first workers on antihistamines, died in Paris on 23 September 1978, after suffering for several years from an incurable and painful illness.

Born in 1904 in Russia, Bernard Halpern came to France after some very difficult childhood years, to complete his advanced studies for a degree of Doctor of Medicine (1936). In order to study, he worked for several years as a technical assistant in the physiological laboratory at the Ecole pratique des hautes Etudes, under the direction of J. Gautrelet.

In 1937, Halpern took over as director of the pharmacodynamic research laboratory of the Société Rhône-Poulenc. He left this position in 1945 to join, as a research worker, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and to direct the Pasteur-Vallery-Radot laboratory at the Broussais hospital. In 1949, he was nominated Director of Research at the CNRS; ten years later, he added to these functions those of Director of Laboratories at the Ecole pratique des hautes Etudes. In 1961, Halpern was awarded the Chair of Experimental Medicine at the College de France, a chair formerly held with distinction by Claude Bernard, and was elected a member of the Academie des Sciences in 1964.

After early work with J. Gautrelet on the action of snake venoms, Halpern devoted himself from 1942 onwards to the study of synthetic compounds behaving as antihistamines, at the Rhône-Poulenc laboratories

This research topic was, it must be said, initiated some years earlier (1937) by G. Ungar, J.-L. Parrot, and D. Bovet, who used in their experiments compounds belonging to the sympathomimetic and sympatholytic groups obtained from E. Fourneau's laboratory at the Institut Pasteur. In the same year (1937), D. Bovet and A. M.