

Reviews

*Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist 1884–1920.*By **Michael Young**

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In the first volume of his long awaited biography of Bronislaw Malinowski, Michael Young provides the reader with a very detailed and absolutely comprehensive picture of the first 35 years of the life of the famous founding father of social anthropology. To write this authorized biography — ‘informally commissioned by BM’s youngest daughter Helena Wayne with her sisters’ approval’ (p. xii) — the author ‘conducted fieldwork’ (p. xiv) in archives and libraries in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Europe, the U.S.A., and Mexico; moreover, Helena Wayne granted him unique access to family papers, her father’s early diaries, unpublished papers and his extensive correspondence. The outcome of the author’s field research is a ‘bulky biography’ (p. xxii), an impressive volume of 690 pages.

After the table of contents, the list of illustrations, the acknowledgements and a linguistically rather naïve note on orthography and pronunciation, the author gives a brief personal assessment of Malinowski and the biography he has written on this ‘fascinating figure’ (p. xix) in the introduction to this volume (pp. xix–xxix). The author mentions the aims he wants to pursue with this book and discusses its history and the reasons why he wrote it — providing the reader with interesting autobiographical data, too. In this first volume of the biography Michael Young ‘seeks to explain why, and how [Malinowski] became an anthropologist’ (p. xxi). To achieve this aim the author describes the interplay of Malinowski’s life and his work starting from his protagonist’s birth and ending at the moment when Malinowski left Australia to sail for England with his pregnant wife and his Trobriand Island field notes — ‘the ethnographic riches that would secure his legacy’ (p. xxi). Young also attempts to ‘demystify Malinowski’s achievements as a fieldworker’ (p. xxi) — therefore the last eight chapters of the volume are devoted to his Papuan fieldwork. The author rightly characterizes his book not only as a ‘literary biography’ — and in a number of chapters he manages to describe the sometimes ‘Conradian’ odyssey of the anthropologist in a Conradian style — but also as a ‘psychological biography’ that attempts to present Malinowski’s ‘point of view, his vision of his world’ (p. xxiii). The introduction is followed by a selective Lacki-Malinowski genealogy (p. xxx).

The book is divided into three parts and there are 24 plates between the pages 258–259 and 18 plates between the pages 514–515. The first part covers the years 1884–1910 and consists of eight chapters. In this part the reader learns everything about Malinowski’s family, his relation to his parents, his friends, his school and university education in Cra-

cow and Leipzig, his (bad) health condition, his travels, and his first love affairs.

The second part covers the years 1910–1914 and consists of six chapters. Here the author reports on Malinowski’s studies, his life and his loves in London. He gives an excellent synopsis of the anthropological scene in England. We learn how Malinowski consolidated ‘his intellectual and institutional position with respect to British anthropology’ (p. 226), how and why he started to revolutionize it, and how Seligman raised funds for him to do field research in Melanesia. This part of the book ends with the description of Malinowski’s trip from London via Colombo to Australia where he attended the 84th meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

The third and final part of the volume covers the years 1914–1920 and consists of 14 chapters. The author informs the reader about Malinowski’s work, his life and his love affairs in Australia as an ‘enemy alien’, his periods of field research in Papua, first on Mailu in 1914–15 and then on the Trobriand Islands in 1915–1916 and 1917–18, and his stays in Adelaide and Melbourne, where he met and finally married Elsie Masson. This part of the volume offers new insights into Malinowski’s life in Papua New Guinea and especially into his field research there. Young’s description of Malinowski’s times in the field and his ambivalent feelings towards field research somehow demystifies Malinowski’s achievements as a fieldworker. Nevertheless, the chapters on how Malinowski collected his data and how he worked on them for publication also clearly reveal that he was an eminent scholar and rightly deserves his fame as one of the founders not only of modern anthropology but also of anthropological linguistics. Michael Young finishes the first volume of Malinowski’s biography with the report on the Malinowskis leaving Australia for London.

The book ends with a list of abbreviations, endnotes, a bibliography and a very useful index.

The detailed and comprehensive first volume of Michael Young’s biography of Bronislaw Malinowski offers a bonanza of facts on, and insights into, the dazzling personality of its protagonist and the people that played a role in his life. It is very well written and the biographer reaches all his aims listed in the introduction. I would like to emphasize that Michael Young managed to write a literary biography in the best sense of the term. There are a few typos and the bibliographic references are in part incomplete and inaccurate, but all such criticism is carping.

To sum up: Michael Young has written an extremely detailed and rich biography on the first 35 years of Bronislaw Malinowski. It is fascinating to read this literary biography and to see how the biographer manages to present to his readership Malinowski’s ‘point of view, his vision of his world’. Michael Young has to be congratulated for this biography ‘in the strict sense of the term’ — and I am sure that I am not the only one who is eagerly waiting for the publication of the second volume of Young’s Malinowski biography.

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