Donald Tuzin, *The Cassowary's Revenge: The Life and Death of Masculinity in a New Guinea Society,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, 256 pages.

Reviewer: *John Barker*
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The late Annette Weiner revealed in her important *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (1976), that Malinowski had misunderstood the Trobriand Islands. Far from being under the thumbs of their menfolk or imprisoned in the domestic sphere, Trobriand women held a status equal to men. By not paying sufficient attention to what women actually do and by overvaluing the male symbolic domain, Malinowski had overlooked a fundamental reality. Weiner argued that other Melanesian societies were equally due for non-androcentric reassessments. She went further. In the Trobriands one finds an example of "universal womanhood"—a place where women had developed their full natural potential. Viewed honestly, the Trobriand Islands thus provided Western men and women with an example of womanhood in a non-patriarchal setting: a demonstration of the inherent strength within women.

I thought of Weiner's ethnographical reappraisal of the Trobriands as I read Don Tuzin's engaging, provocative and ultimately discomforting study. The books have much in common, even as they reach for contradictory conclusions. Weiner celebrates the centrality of women as the biological and symbolic progenitors of an ever-reproducing community. Tuzin mourns the loss of male domination in a Sepik society, linking the recent abandonment of the elaborate male cult (*Tambaran*) with societal breakdown and death. Like Weiner, however, Tuzin wants to convince us that the experiences of a distant Melanesian people hold direct lessons pertaining to the battles over gender in our own society. As in Papua New Guinea, he claims, masculinity in the West is slowly dying. And, as in New Guinea, many are eager to finish it off for good.

This is Tuzin's third, and probably final book on the Ilahita Arapesh. Ilahita is a huge village (by New Guinea standards) of some 2 000 people located in the East Sepik Province. Tuzin was fortunate enough to begin his work in Ilahita just as a magnificent *haus Tambaran* (men's spirit house) was being erected in preparation for an initiation the following year. This exhilarating and exhausting experience provided convincing evidence of the authoritarian power of the *Tambaran* over most aspects of local life, a power demonstrated in the thousands of hours men lavished upon feasts, speeches, construction and artistry; in the brutality of the initiation rites; and in the unstinting hostility expressed towards women. In 1985, Tuzin returned with his family after a 13-year absence. Eight months earlier, a group of senior men "killed" the *Tambaran* by revealing its secrets before women in a church service, denouncing the cult as the work of Satan.

The Cassowary's Revenge opens with Tuzin's troubled return to Ilahita. His 13 years "of writing, lecturing, and nostalgizing added up to an emotional investment in all that the villagers were seeking to destroy" (p. 5). The sense of hurt went to a deeper level as Tuzin observed the anguish of old friends, both "traditionalists" and those who had embraced the new revival, as they struggled to restore or create order in the chaos left by the withdrawal of the *Tambaran*. On the surface, the event seemed to mark the triumph of a long missionary campaign to replace the cult with evangelical Christianity. But the fervour of the revivalists, and the social disruptions their enthusiasm caused, proved too much even for the missionaries. In any case, as Tuzin shows in a nuanced discussion of the South Sea Evangelical Mission in Ilahita, the revivalists found mission Christianity to be too timid. They were looking for the Apocalypse that would break the "Stronghold of Satan" (p. 32). The revivalists were not content with overturning the *Tambaran*; they needed to vanquish everything associated with it. Since the *Tambaran* was predominantly a secret male cult, this entailed a concerted attack on the ritual privileges of male cult initiates, including control over fertility magic and sexuality. Suddenly released from the authoritarian hold of the *Tambaran*, young men and women of all ages found themselves liberated to make their own choices and to talk back against the accustomed control of their male elders. For their part, males discovered that without the sanction of the cult, physical violence provided their sole resort to retain control.

The demise of the Ilahita *Tambaran* was spectacular, and thus fully in keeping with the cult itself, one of the most elaborate ever described in the region. Tuzin goes to some lengths in the three central chapters of this book to show that the Ilahita cult was not only unusual, it was of recent birth and in many ways destined to die. The charter myth of the *Tambaran* concerns Nambweapa'w, the cassowary-woman of the book's title. Tuzin argues that the story is a variation of the Swan Maiden story, found in various renditions throughout the world, with the important exception of large parts of Oceania. He believes that the story diffused into the Sepik region via Malayan intermediaries sometime in the mid- to late 19th century. The Ilahita version of the story varies from both generic swan maiden tales and even from versions told by neighbouring peoples in its heavy stress upon male legitimacy and moral vulnerability. It is no coincidence that the elaboration of the Nambweapa'w story occurred at the same time as the Ilahita imported and elaborated the *Tambaran* cult practised by their neighbours and that Ilahita itself grew to its enormous size.

The story of Nambweapa'w resonated with key cultural themes concerning death, spiritual powers and marriage, and thus served as a key support for the authoritarian *Tambaran* regimes. But the story also expressed the key contradiction of the cult. The *Tambaran* derived its power from the first woman; a secret kept from today's women. Just as the first woman crushed the head of the first man, after discovering his deception, so too was the *Tambaran* itself ever at risk. The myth told of Nambweapa'w's two sons, punished for disobeying her, one sent to America. In 1984, then, the revivalists

followed the prophecy told in the cult's own myth. The leaders of the movements—most of whom were women—killed the cult. And within a few months, Tuzin arrived from America and was inevitably identified by some with Nambweapa'w's long-lost son.

While Tuzin obviously failed to bring the hoped-for millennium to Ilahita, he does assume the prophet's mantle in the final two chapters of this book. The death of the *Tambaran* turned the world upside down and represents the final, long-feared (by men at least) revenge of Nambweapa'w. Under the old regime, men's fear of women was nurtured by their perceived need to dominate them. The complex, laborious and often excessively violent demands of the cult sublimated much of their aggressive impulses, "resulting in a relatively low incidence of actual violent acts by men against women." In the new order, the men no longer fear women and thus no longer dominate them in the forms of "ritual menace and rhetorical violence." These have been replaced by the "real thing." In post-*Tambaran* Ilahita, wives have turned on husbands who, without recourse to ritual sanctions, rely on their own fists. From valuing their wives as vital links between kin groups, they have come to see them as "chattel" to be bought and sold. The ironic outcome of the cassowary's revenge, then, "is not the liberated savagery of women, but the unsublimated savagery of men" (p. 177). Things are falling apart, and the present mix of church, state and commercial options open to the Ilahita are unlikely to provide disrupted lives with a new social centre.

Tuzin saves his most provocative prophecies to the final chapter, "Sanctuary." The parricide of the *Tambaran* marks the death of masculinity in Ilahita. But masculinity is dying elsewhere, nowhere more visibly than in the United States. Just as the *Tambaran* was allowed to whither for a decade before its murder, so to American males have lost their exclusive occupational and associative prerogatives during the 20th century, "culminating in a traumatic, ideological assault on masculinity during the latest generation" (p. 187). Just as the end of the male cult unleashed the demon of domestic violence upon Ilahita, the "assault" on male privilege has had unforeseen negative consequences contributing to family breakups, sexual abuse of children, drug wars, racism and even the growth of the radical militias. Without "sanctuary" to air their insecurities and anger against women, many men, Tuzin asserts, will turn to actual violence.

Tuzin makes these assertions, but he does not try hard to substantiate them or to win over sceptical readers. He no doubt recognizes that most readers will find his social analysis of the ills of America unconvincing and distasteful (as indeed I do). Unlike Weiner's triumphant celebration of "universal womanhood" as expressed in the Trobriand Islands, Tuzin has written an elegy on the death of masculinity as dramatized by the Ilahita Arapesh. The book ends in a dirge of defeat. In the death of the *Tambaran*, Tuzin believes, we can perceive a universal insecurity within men which, if not addressed, can lead only to disaster. Not unlike the Ilahita *Tambaran* cult itself, however, Tuzin's construction of the death of universal manhood appears grossly out of scale with its surroundings, obsessively focussed in its ideology and overbearing in its hyper-vivid prophecies.

Sam Migliore, *Mal'oucchiu: Ambiguity, Evil Eye, and the Language of Distress,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, xiv + 159 pages.

Reviewer: *Paul Antze*
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At first glance this appears to be yet another in the long line of "evil eye" studies so familiar to medical anthropologists. However, Sam Migliore contends that his book is different, and he may be right. Rather than looking to the literature on social control, moral transgression or the culture-bound syndromes, Migliore draws his theoretical inspiration from the later Wittgenstein and from the Sicilian playwright, Luigi Pirandello. For all their differences, he argues, both these figures were passionate advocates of context and ambiguity as central to the meaning of human activity. Migliore's point is that theories and explanations of "the evil-eye complex" are bound to lead us astray, since the power of *mal'oucchiu* in Sicilian culture depends precisely on its ambiguity.

The book is unusual in another respect. Migliore carried out his field work among the sizable community of Sicilian-Canadians (some 25 000) living in Hamilton, Ontario. Most members of this community either came from or can trace their ancestry to the town of Racalmuto in central Sicily. Migliore himself was born in Racalmuto and grew up in Hamilton. This is his community; his informants include his parents, relatives and friends. Migliore's insider status may help in part to explain his distrust of theoretical abstractions. He knows well that his informants will be among his first and closest readers, and he wants to tell a tale that both he and they will recognize as true.

Like many ethnographers, Migliore developed a special relationship with one informant. It was the healer Don Gesualdo who first opened his eyes to the complexity of *mal'oucchiu*, and it was while serving as Don Gesualdo's assistant that he gathered most of his data. Migliore also came to regard Don Gesualdo as his intellectual collaborator in many ways; in fact he stresses that "the model of the evil eye complex I present . . . belongs as much to him as it does to me" (p. 29).

Migliore elaborates this model in his third chapter, first by locating *mal'oucchiu* within two distinct networks of indigenous terms, one organized under *disgrazia*, or misfortune, the other under *sortilegio*, or the power to disrupt the natural course of events. He notes that Sicilian-Canadians have their own version of the witchcraft/sorcery distinction made famous by Evans-Pritchard, but that they place *mal'oucchiu* under a third heading, *ittatura*, or "evil-casting," which shares