

CORRESPONDENCE

AGAIN ON FONTENROSE'S REVIEW OF *THE CULT OF THE SERPENT*

Ordinarily, I should prefer to ignore the rather minor matter of usage of the one or two English words about which Mr. Joseph Fontenrose still cavils; after all, our respective statements concerning my *Cult of the Serpent* speak for themselves (*Asian Folklore Studies* 42: 292; *ibid.*, 43: 333). But he has laid down a challenge that I must not pass up: Would I, he asks, "point out to us just one 'physical parameter' [*sic*] of higher primates' fear of snakes (p. 210) and tell us how one measures it? . . . I gather he means responses . . . factors. Tables 5-7 do not seem to measure parameters [and this] is nothing more than a vogue word."

Careful readers of my book will easily verify that I have not used the expression "physical parameters" on p. 210 or elsewhere, but that I speak of the "physiological," "physicochemical," or "biochemical" parameters of the manifestations of elementary fear. I enumerate these categorically as early as on p. 8, stating that they can be "assessed by *quantitative* physical and chemical means in individual test subjects." I repeated the enumeration on p. 211, with references to the technical literature where one can find details about *how* the parameters are measured (refs. 16 (p. 280), 2, 12-17 (p. 302)). Specific instances of instrumentally recorded measurements of body chemistry as affected by viewing a snake, or even pictures of the animal or hearing verbal references to it, are exemplified on p. 210 itself, as in the experiments of Schroeder and Rich (ref. 6, p. 302), May (pp. 240-241; figs. 100, 101; and p. 305 (ref. 79)), and others. Mr. Fontenrose has either overlooked or not assimilated all this information in his anxiety to comb through my narrative to trip me up on my choice of words! Moreover, contrary to his thinking, tables 5-7, which reflect *overt* behavioral responses, were not intended to demonstrate physiological responses though the *covert*, concomitant biochemical / electrical parameters of these, too, were available for quantitative assessment had the investigators wished to explore them!

Where I do use them, the words "factor" and "response" neither clash with, nor are an improvement upon, "parameters" as employed in other contexts. Indeed, it is the environmental factors and genetic-hormonal responses (with cultural factors superimposed) that define and set limits on parametrical investigations. "Parameter," according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, is a "quantity constant in case considered, but varying in different cases." This is exactly the sense in which the scientists whose work I cite employ this word. And so do I. Mr. Fontenrose priggishly depreciates my perfectly sound usage of this word to the level of its "vogue" and incorrect meanings—to which, of course, it is prone in the hands of those who employ it fashionably in absurd contexts far removed from mine. Sir Ernest Gowers (*The Complete Plain Words*, London, 1973, HMSO, p. 79) gives several examples.

Incidentally, my actual sentiments about Mr. Fontenrose's *Python* are best gauged from my original remarks, not from how he—on my behalf—interprets them in his all too brief reply to my rebuttal of his review of my *Cult of the Serpent*.

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NOTE: With the above contribution we consider this discussion closed and thank the contributors for their cooperation. The Editor.

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ON UCHIBORI'S REVIEW OF *A BORNEO JOURNEY INTO DEATH*.

I am not in the habit of responding to reviews. But Uchibori Motomitsu's recent review of my *A Borneo Journey into Death, Berawan Eschatology from its Rituals* (See *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 43, 1984: 324-326) so grossly misrepresents the book that I am obliged to do so. At several points he insists that the Berawan lack ideas about eschatology. But that is precisely what they *do* have. How anyone could read the book and not see that is beyond me. There are indeed topics concerning which they have no doctrine, notably the acquisition of souls in gestation or infancy. A major point of my analysis was to avoid imposing upon the Berawan organised beliefs that they do not in fact exhibit, and this requires some delicacy. Uchibori says that the Berawan have "meagre" eschatology, and that only the last two chapters deal with "genuinely ideational aspects." On the contrary; the discussion of the conception of the soul in death runs throughout the book. It is particularly explicit in chapters four, six, eleven and twelve, in addition to the final two chapters.

I suspect that Uchibori is attempting to advertise his own work on the death rites of the neighboring Iban by denigrating mine on the Berawan. I for one am well aware of the importance of his work. This tactic is unnecessary and unbecoming.

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REPLY TO DR. METCALF

I should like to clarify five points concerning my review on Dr. Metcalf's book.

1. I believe that the role of a review is to present the reviewer's personal reading of the book rather than merely to summarize its contents.

2. The personal reading should be as critical as possible, if the reviewer appreciates the value of the book seriously. And I am aware of the valuable contribution Dr. Metcalf's book made to the anthropological study of death.

3. The reviewer should explain his own research background in order to make understood what led him to the particular way of personal reading.

4. As for the notion of eschatology, my understanding is that it is more concerned with the image of after-life and the final fate of the dead rather than with the concept of soul and its relation to death.

5. It is far from my intention to degrade the Berawan mortuary complex or Dr. Metcalf's work on it.

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