

Anthropology 404: Video 2

“Trance and Dance in Bali”

Written and Narrated by Margaret Mead

[Margaret Mead]: The little disciples of the witch dance and prepare to receive the witch's instruction. This is the witch in her old supernatural paraphernalia; hairy legs, tangelos breasts, long finger-nails. But without the mask, will turn her into a supernatural figure. Beside her is her daughter, who has been rejected by the king of the country. In revenge for the flight to her daughter, she is now training her little novices to spread pestilence and death. Kneeling in front of her they answer her instruction of how to spread plague. They go off and the next scene shows a pregnant woman among a group of people who have fled their plague stricken village to wander the road. This is a birth scene where the pregnant woman, played by a man, gives birth to a child wild witches lurk about to feel the newborn child. A doll, which is stolen by the witch child, tossed in the air, killed and returned dead to its mourning relatives. The villagers mourn for the dead child, putting on a theatrical display of grief. The witch child and witch, lurk about and tease the mortals, to whom they are not yet quite visible. As they become visible, the mortals chase the witches. The witch child is caught and held by the hair, a demeaning gesture. In just a minute now you will see the witch in her supernatural form, at the gate of the temple, attacked by the emissary of the king, who fails to conquer her. She wears over her face, a white cloth; the cloth in which a mother carries her baby. And now, coming down the temple steps, the witch dances alone; a figure both frightening and representative of fear itself. She bends back and gives a high, eerie laugh. These are the frightening witches into which the beautiful little girls of the ballet have been transformed. Again, the witch dances alone. And here is the dragon, arrived to confront her. As she represents death, he represents life. And they have a long altercation in ancient ecclesiastically Javanese, while she holds him by his beard and scolds him. These are the dragon's followers, falling to the ground at the glance of the witch; up again when she turns her back, down again when she looks at them. She trips through their rank, runs away and as her back is turned, up they get again, rush to the attack, but as she turns, her glance forces them back, back, back, back and she stands and laughs at them, laugh. And then turns away indifferent. This is slow motion, followers of the dragon advance, their krisses raised in the air, ready for the attack, but falling down again before her glance. Normal speed, the witch dances again and then two by two, they run up and attack her. She doesn't resist, she is as limp as a rag dog, but overcome by her power, they fall and lay in deep trance on the ground. And two more come up also. Members of the trance club come and arrange them on the ground, while another pair attacks the witch. They lay, arranged in two rows in deep trance, convulsively twitching. And the dragon comes back to revive them, walking between the rows, followed by his priest, who sprinkles the holy water over them. Revived, they go off stage, not out of trance but in a cataleptic state in which they come back in, dancing. The witch, meanwhile, is falling into a deep trance and being carried away. The dance, in slow motion. Here comes women, also in a ballet formation. They do not attack the witch. But at a scream given by one of their number, they suddenly go into trance (word is inaudible 10:45) and with loosened hair, turn the krisses against their breast. Falling forward, on the krisses that are held in their taught arms. This one is struggling as they attempt to disarm her. In the background, you see the men, also in trance (word is inaudible 11:23), and here in slow motion, you see the women. The fumes of the incense that is being carried among them to calm them, blends with their loosened hair. This old woman has said that she would not go into trance when the others begin turning their krisses

against themselves, she joins them. If anyone becomes too violent, they are disarmed. There are frequent periods like this, of slow turning and then someone gives a violent scream and they again turn their krisses on themselves. The priest of the dragon moves among them, sprinkling holy water. Now, at normal speed, you see the men, bending their krisses back against themselves and unlike the women, often falling on the ground. See how that kriss is bent? No one is hurt, if anyone is hurt, the people say the trance is not real. A male trancer is being carried off into the temple in a stiff, cataleptic state. Another one is disarmed, a third puts his head into the dragon's mouth and the dragon holds him by the hair to calm him. Another falls to the ground, in a particularly violent seizure. Another trancer is being carried off, into the temple court; and another. In slow motion again, you see the look of contorted, screaming agony on the face of this trancer. Inside the temple courtyard. The people arrange the trancers in groups to be brought out of trance. Here are a group of boy kriss dancers, laying along the wall in deep shadow, are given incense and holy water. They pat the holy water on their chests and hair. This is the old woman who said she wouldn't go into trance today. Laying now in deep trance, supported by her husband. And another woman is being brought back to herself by having her hair done up. This one is still in deep trance and children with anxious faces watch from the background. The trancers bury their faces in the fumes of the incense and slowly come out of trance. Here is the old woman again, unwilling to come back to herself, remembering her dancing. Until finally the priest brings special offerings to the spirit that possesses her, to persuade it to leave her body. The priest lays his offerings of flowers and rice on the ground while she continues to dance, recall-strickly (word is inaudible 17:39). At last, she holds out her hands for the holy water, as a sign that she is willing to come out of trance. A dog comes and eats the offerings that are being presented to the spirit. The old woman rises, still half (word is inaudible 18:12), and walks over to where the closing ceremony is being held. With the dragon masks behind them, the principle actors in the play come for a final ritual offering, before the ceremony has ended. A chicken is brought, which is to be offered by the priest of the dragon. The white-haired old man on his right, played the front legs of the dragon. The chicken is offered. This black-haired man is the man who played the witch and who's been laying in a stiff cataleptic trance (words are inaudible 20:05) of the kriss dance. Even with the offering, he does not get quite out of trance, breathed in the incense, takes the holy water and sprinkles the old man who played the front legs of the dragon. The ritual is finished. Here we see an old man, just coming out of trance; not yet quite himself. The play is over, but it will be given again and again, as the Balinese reenact the struggle between fear and death on the (word is inaudible 21:04). And life protecting ritual on the (word is inaudible 21:07).