

**Bruce KAPFERER, *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983, Pp. 312; 7 figs., 58 photos, notes, bib., index, map, (clothbound) \$32.50, (paper) \$18.50)**

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Bruce KAPFERER, *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983, Pp. 312; 7 figs., 58 photos, notes, bib., index, map, (clothbound) \$32.50, (paper) \$18.50)

Folklorists, anthropologists and performance theorists have long been intrigued and fascinated by the emergent productive power of ritual. What new means and methods are available in the analysis of ritual and ceremonialism? How do rituals manipulate symbols to produce complex meanings? Several useful recent books have examined these questions, such as *Calus: Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual* by Gail Kligman; *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance* edited by Frank Manning; *Wizard of the Four Winds: a Shaman's Story* by Douglas Sharon; *The Art of the Festival* by Robert J. Smith; and *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual* edited by Victor Turner, to mention only a few.

Bruce Kapferer is without a doubt one of the modern innovative anthropologists. His breadth of knowledge, sensitivity, ability to penetrate to the most profound levels of thought, and depth of communication make him well suited to take on the semantic and hermeneutical analysis of a single ritual complex. Kapferer has selected Sinhalese demon exorcisms as performed in southern Sri Lanka as the subject of *A Celebration of Demons*. He reveals music, dance, and comic drama as key aesthetic forms in the elaborate performances of all-night-long demon ceremonies, analyzes their role in the organization of ritual experience, and develops the cultural logic underlying Sinhalese cosmological beliefs.

To produce new insights into an already reported and described phenomenon is always a difficult task. However Kapferer is able to achieve a more profound depth of perception and understanding of exorcism ritual in part through a dynamic performance-based analysis. He explicates ritual and myth in vibrant creative transformative interaction. Kapferer clearly states his position:

I will stress....ritual as performance. It is in performance that ritual gains its efficacy, and, in my view, reveals itself as essentially the "hermeneutic" of culture — a method whereby a culture analyzes itself. Exorcism transforms a patient from illness to health by engaging a patient and others in the logic and process of its own hermeneutic. (p. 177)

*A Celebration of Demons* is divided into three broad sections. The first examines the relations of the socio-cultural context to the dominant political, economic, and ideological forces. The second shifts to an analytical description of an exorcist performance in which the author uncovers the basic demon exorcism structures. The third section develops the argument that the aesthetics of performance — the role of music, song, dance, and drama — are crucial in the transformation of the patient's world of experience and meaning and the modification of his or her image within the immediate social group. Kapferer

describes the demon concept as potential disorder within the Sri Lankan sacred hierarchical ideological system. Typically subordinated to the deities of this sacred hierarchy, the demons — masters of illusion and deception — disarrange the hierarchy and, thus, exert control over human beings. After gaining this power, they are able to cause illness in individuals. Demons symbolize destruction, violence, and death, and provide a metaphor of the individual's struggle in modern Sri Lanka.

This book may be more time consuming and complex than most publications. I found the style and depth of analysis demanding, although extremely comprehensive and intellectually exciting. With the exception of the specialist in the study of Sri Lanka, many folklorists might be seeking information on three levels: data, method, and theory. Although presented in depth, the descriptive data on exorcism rituals unfold gradually and are linked with the theoretical development of the volume. Thus, it is difficult to form in one's mind a brief descriptive picture of the ritual. An initial modest description of a single exorcism ritual would have proved useful to those who are not specialists in this culture area. Kapferer's method of analysis is also somewhat difficult to follow. It seemed to me that the results of involved analysis were often presented without adequate descriptive data to enable the reader to evaluate for himself or herself the full analytical methodology. The theory is of course most fascinating and Kapferer draws upon a broad range of ideas and publications in developing the logical argument and cultural logical explanation of exorcism rituals. Clearly in terms of the latter the volume is at its best, although the methodology and descriptive data also bring new materials and insights to the understanding and analysis not only of exorcism rituals but also of other rituals, ceremonials, and festivals. In this sense, the book certainly would be invaluable to students of folklore.

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