



JANE BELO TANNENBAUM
1904–1968

JANE BELO TANNENBAUM was born November 3, 1904, in Dallas, Texas, the daughter of Alfred Horatio Belo, Jr., and Helen Ponder Belo. After her father's death in her very early childhood, she traveled in Europe with her mother and sister until the family settled in New York. In 1922, after a year at Bryn Mawr College, Jane Belo traveled with friends in Egypt, the Sudan, and the Middle East. It was this trip, she said, especially the slow voyage up the Nile, that awakened her curiosity and excited her interest in anthropology. After her return, she studied for a year at Barnard College and then, in 1924, went to Paris. There she took courses at the Sorbonne and became interested in experimental work in psychopathology. Also while in Paris she married George Biddle, a painter, with whom she later traveled in the Caribbean, where most of their time was spent in Haiti and Cuba. She also taught at the Hessian Hills School, Croton on Hudson, and through her teaching became interested in children's art. She herself began to paint in water colors and oil, her lifetime avocation.

In 1930, together with her second husband, composer and musicologist Colin McPhee, she set out via Paris for a six-month trip to the Dutch East Indies. This turned out to be, instead, a nine-year sojourn during which she became deeply committed to research on Balinese life and art. These were also years of travel and cultural ex-

ploration. In her own summary description, she wrote:

In the 1930's [we] traveled . . . to Ceylon, Singapore and Indonesia. [We] spent some time in Java before settling in Bali, and made a thousand mile trip through Sumatra. From Indonesia as a base, [we] made trips to Siam and Cambodia, China, especially Canton, Shanghai and Peking, and Japan, the Philippines, Samoa, Fiji, Hawaii, the New Hebrides, New Zealand and Australia. Traveling to Bali [from New York] was about as short whether one went by way of Europe and the Indian Ocean or across the Pacific. Once the return was made by way of Madagascar and South Africa, visiting and filming trance and dance performances in Zululand and Zwaziland.

All this was, of course, before the days of travel by airplane with the comforts devised for jet tourists.

The years in Bali were extraordinarily fruitful ones. Living in her Balinese house, built in the village of Sayan, she came to know and work with many of the people who were captivated by Bali and Java, among them, the painter and musician Walter Spies, who had settled in Bali in 1927; Claire Holt, a student of the dance and Indonesian art, whom she had known in New York; another dancer, Katharane Mershon, and her dancer-photographer husband Jack, had built a house at Sanur; and a Viennese ethnologist and photographer, Hugo Bernatzik. In addition, there was the ever-swelling stream of celebrities who were "discovering" Bali.

Jane Belo concentrated on the study of ceremonial life, trance and other aspects of religious behavior, and children's art. As a method of observing and recording Balinese life, she turned her great visual gifts to photography, both still and motion picture; her photographs are part of the irreplaceable record of the period. For three years, 1936–1939, while Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead (whom she had met on a return trip to New York) were working in Bali, Jane Belo and Colin McPhee became part of the interacting, cross-stimulating group who were carrying out systematic research and developing new theories on research methods. Jane Belo's main publication came out of her work there, beginning with "A Study of Customs Pertaining to Twins in Bali" (1935) and "The Balinese Temper" (1935/36).

In 1940, Jane Belo married Frank Tannenbaum in New York and entered a new phase of her life that centered around Columbia University, a farm in Putnam Valley, where she and Frank both worked and welcomed their friends, and a camp in the Adirondacks, which was part of her childhood. It also involved travels in the New World, again in her own words, to "the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Venezuela . . . and throughout the Caribbean area," because of Frank's commitment to the study of Latin American civilization. In these years she completed her undergraduate studies at the Columbia University School of General Studies and the graduate work necessary for a doctorate in anthropology, which increasing ill health prevented her from obtaining. For three years, 1947-1950, she was a member of Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures, the research program inaugurated by Ruth Benedict and directed after her death by Margaret Mead. Here she worked with the Chinese and the French Groups and made major contributions to the analysis of French national culture. In the 1960s she was an active member of the Columbia University Seminar on Content and Methods in the Social Sciences. In spite of the deepening shadow of ill health, she continued with her writing and painting. She loved the outdoor world and on the farm and in the Adirondacks she rode, walked, swam, and played with her dogs.

Jane Belo was a gifted human being. Though she made no claim to scholarship, she was scholarly in her specialized knowledge of her field and her perspective on anthropology. She was a brilliant fieldworker whose interest focused primarily on the exploration of new ways of obtaining field data—through photography, through work with children, through work with projective techniques, in which she herself was innovative, and through analysis of art and artistic performances. Her area was Bali, but in another sense the world at large was the subject of her delighted attention. She had great beauty, but what she cared about was the beauty of other lives and gifts, other ways of thinking and looking at the world. She was a talented painter, and in her very quiet way she did a great deal to underwrite

the talents of young artists and writers. She belonged fully to the intellectual life of the twentieth century and her mind continually moved to the growing edge of knowledge. She was always modest about her own attainments and generous toward the attainments of others—children, whom she loved, friends, and the large group of those who were complexly related to the life she and Frank made together. And she had the dignity, the light and penetrating wit, and the charm of gentle manners that belonged, perhaps, to another, earlier world.

On the last evening, as we sat talking about spring coming to the farm, I was still discovering new facets of her personality, staunch courage and a special, smiling tenderness toward the living. She died the next afternoon, April 3, 1968.

RHODA METRAUX

American Museum of Natural History

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