

From John Wren-Lewis

c/o 1, Jalan SS 1/22B

Petaling Jaya

West Malaysia

March 13th 1983

Dear Mr. Beamish,

When Tony Williams-Hunt first mentioned your name to me it sounded very familiar, and when he later showed me your photograph I was convinced that we had met somewhere when I was still living in England, before 1972. Did we by any chance meet in one of those Brains Trusts which Anne Symonds used to produce for BBC Europe? - or perhaps in some other programme from Bush House? I was a frequent broadcaster from there in the 1960s, when I was managing research for ICI but doing a lot of writing on the side, mainly about science and religion. I left ICI in 1972 to cross the Atlantic and devote myself full time to writing and teaching, and became very heavily involved with the burgeoning science of dream psychology as a result of marrying Ann Faraday, author of two standard works on the subject. Which is why I am now in Malaysia and writing to you - and although the explicit purpose of this letter is simply to ask you to forward the enclosed, since Ivan Polunin in Singapore cannot think of any other way to find out the present address of Mr. Robertson, I think I owe it to you to outline the underlying story, which I think you will find interesting. And if of course you have any information you can give me yourself after hearing it, that will be a bonus for me.

Ann and I came here last November from a three-year stint in India, to try to set the record straight about the legendary "dream tribe" of the Malaysian highlands. I don't know how widespread this legend is in England, but so-called "Senoï dream therapy" is a million-dollar business in the U.S., though most of its practitioners wouldn't know a Senoi if they met one in the street, and none has been nearer to the Malaysian highlands than a one-day tourist trip to Kuala Lumpur. This movement received a severe shock in the late 70s when rumors began to get around that serious anthropologists who knew the Senoi well denied any knowledge of the discipline of dream-control which they are supposed to have invented according to the legend, (which goes back to a few remarks made by H.D. Noone in the 1930s and a series of reports produced in the 1950s by an American psychologist called Kilton Stewart ~~afterwards~~ on the basis of a few brief field trips with Noone.) It didn't take long for the "Senoï dream therapists" to start a rearguard action of trying to discredit the more modern anthropologists by suggesting that the wicked Malaysian government has duped them into seeing only a small captive selection of Senoi whose traditional dream culture has been carefully brainwashed away as a potential threat to the government's militaristic ambitions (Stewart maintained that "Senoï dream control therapy was the royal road to abolishing war.") This kind of nonsense could do real harm to the cause of anthropology in Malaysia if the government gets to hear about it in its present somewhat sensitive mood, and there might even be unfortunate repercussions on the Orang Asli themselves, so we feel it is a matter of some importance to set the record straight - which includes trying to uncover, as much as we possibly can, the real genesis of Stewart's theories and what Noone really claimed to have discovered about the dream cult of the Senoi.

One of the mysteries in this business is that Noone himself committed not a single word to print on the subject of Senoi dream cults, though according to Richard Noone's biography of him (The Rape of the Dream People, Hutchinson, 1973), he told his family and friends that he intended to make his name academically from his discoveries in this area of "psycho-anthropology." Everything which Richard Noone actually recounts of his brother's views, however, comes word for word from an earlier biography,



Noone of the ulu by Dennis Holman (Heinemann 1958), which in turn is a close paraphrase of Stewart's reports published after H.D. Noone's death. A number of people have tried in vain to find traces of the papers which, according to the two biographies, Pat Noone gave in Cambridge in 1934 and 1939 respectively. It is of course known that his field notes were destroyed by the Japanese, but surely there must have been copies of the papers on file somewhere in England? - or failing that, some contemporary press reports of them? If you have any suggestions to make about this I should be very grateful indeed to hear them. Richard Noone is dead, and no-one I've asked in the British publishing world knows if Holman is still alive or not; nor have I had any luck in finding the present whereabouts of Noone's two sisters. Geoffrey Benjamin of the National University of Singapore says he searched the Cambridge records when he was doing his own PhD there and could find no trace that Pat Noone ever registered for a PhD, though the biographies state that he was all set to produce one when war broke out, and had even had a summary of his ideas discussed by Cambridge professors - again, something of which there is no other record, according to Benjamin.

Meantime, back in the U.S., the proponents of "Senoi dream therapy" are making great play with the one document in which H.D. Noone actually mentions Senoi dreams - some notes he wrote on "Temiar Dream Songs" for a recording made by the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation in 1941 and later reissued by an American organisation called the Ethnic Folkways Library. Although these notes say nothing whatever about Temiar dreams beyond the bare statement that the tribe sometimes gets its inspiration for songs from the dreams of hala's, the document is held to prove that "it's all true" that Noone discovered an unique dream cult amongst the Temiar, and not just a brain-child of Kilton Stewart in his enthusiasm for promoting dream therapy as the cure for war. What is more, the co-author of the notes, E.D. Robertson who was in charge of the recording, is cited as an independent witness to the authenticity of the Stewart claims about the Senoi. So imagine our delight when Ivan Polunin assured us that E.D. Robertson was none other than the man who used to manage the BBC overseas service, whom he had last met at your house. Ivan couldn't lay his hands on either of your addresses, but I knew I could get yours from Tony Williams-Hunt, who had mentioned you when we first met him some months ago - and this is how I come to be writing to you now.

Tony, you may be interested to know, has helped us a lot, including taking us to stay in his village and helping us set up a discussion about dreams which went on well into the night. He has met several anthropologists over the past few years, and told us he had often thought of writing a book about Semai religion, having been told that none has yet been done. When Geoffrey Benjamin heard about this he was extremely enthusiastic and offered to help Tony in any way he could, including having him down to stay at his house for discussions - and since he is quite a power in the anthropological world these days, we may have been instrumental in getting Tony launched as a writer.

I do hope that Ivan Polunin was right about the identity of E.D. ~~Robertson~~ Robertson, and that you will be able to forward the enclosed in time for him to write to me before I leave Malaysia for Australia early in April. And I should be delighted to hear from you too, if you have any suggestions at all to make about further lines of enquiry that might prove fruitful.

Yours sincerely,

*Jocelyn Wren-Lewis*