When I found the title of this book and a brief description of the content, I felt quite excited. It seemed to give a lot of background information on rituals of all sorts (i.e. Aboriginal Women’s Love Rituals; Ritual Clowing; Death Rituals; Religious Rituals; and Rituals in Politics), as well as more of the theoretical ways in which rituals are studied, interpreted, and explained. It also would provide me with multiple perspectives on rituals written by scholars, including those who find rituals meaningless.

Once I got the book though, my excitement lessened significantly. It is a dense book of almost 600 pages with only text, except for a couple of pages. And while I did enjoy reading some of the chapters, with others I felt I was in way over my head. For example, while I have always abhorred cock fighting, after reading about it in this book, I have a better understanding of the meaning and the ritualistic nature of it. However, I still very much abhor it!

The chapter that explored initiation rites of the Hopi made me aware of how children can feel completely disenchanted and can actually be traumatized when they find out that rituals they believed were based in truth, no longer are. I am thinking specifically about the ritual of Santa Clause.
The most accessible readings for me were the ‘Epigraphs’, especially the writing by Hsün Tzu; and the introduction.

After reading the chapter on the ‘Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving’ I will never look at Thanksgiving the same way again. I had no idea there were as many meanings and rituals as the authors of this work described. It was fascinating to read how these rituals and traditions have changed over the years, and how people from various cultures make Thanksgiving their own by substituting certain ingredients with those more meaningful to their specific culture or tradition. And another most interesting fact: passively sitting in front of the TV to watch a major sporting event has replaced the fun families had playing games.

I also enjoyed reading how ritual can be compared to neurosis, in terms of the need to have things be done a certain way... very enlightening! And now I can say I know more ways in which a ritual can go wrong – from small unintentional mistakes, to outright abuse – than I ever help possible.

So, while I learned a great deal and have much greater appreciation for the many ways in which rituals permeate life, how rituals have been (and are) studied and interpreted since time immemorial, any one reading this book to learn how to create rituals will be disappointed.