

problem; it requires indeed a study of practice. The book shows that the author is thoroughly familiar with the text she analyzes, as well as with related texts. Mulholland proves herself to be equally at home in the fields of medicine, botany and pharmacology, and deals competently with the linguistic problems of a difficult text. The result is a detailed, solid and well argued study, which should be read by anyone interested in Thai or Southeast Asian traditional medicine, and which is invaluable for anyone who wants to study Thai medical texts.

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#### INDIA

DUBUISSON, DANIEL. *La légende royale dans l'Inde ancienne, Rāma et le Rāmāyaṇa* [The royal legend in ancient India, Rāma and the Rāmāyaṇa]. Paris: Éditions Economica, 1986. xii+296 pages. Bibliography. Paper FFr 145; ISBN 2-7178-1095-1. (In French)

Of the two Indian epics, the *Mahābhārata* has received greater attention from scholars in comparative mythology and Indo-European studies, than has its counterpart, the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In *La légende royale* Daniel Dubuisson sets out to show that the *Rāmāyaṇa* no less than the *Mahābhārata* contains a structural core that is a reflex of the Indo-European ideology proposed by the comparative mythologist Georges Dumézil. Dubuisson's study demonstrates both the benefits of applying the Dumézilian theory in its general outlines to the Sanskrit epics and their descendants, and the serious limitations of any study which argues for the primacy and superior value of Indo-European ideology as the conceptual framework for these texts, which cannot be fully understood with reference to this ideology alone.

In his analysis of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Dubuisson uses the methods of contemporary French theories of narrative and discourse to expand on the structuralist theory of Dumézil, in which he argues that the myths and early epics of the Indo-European-speaking peoples express a tripartite and trifunctional ideology that pervaded every aspect of Indo-European culture and thought (136-139). Dubuisson suggests that the Indo-European ideology is exemplified and played out on two planes of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: the narrative plane, and the "plan actantiel," a paradigmatic structural design. In the "plan actantiel" the three Dumézilian ideological functions (moral sovereignty; physical strength and valor; and fecundity and productivity) are transposed from mythic to epic material, so that epic characters such as Rāma systematically manifest the 'functional' personality traits of mythic (in this case Vedic) divinities or personages such as Indra. On the narrative plane, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as in other Indo-European epics, a series of events—e.g., the errors (*fautes*) of the hero—tie together the threads of the narrative at three "nodal" points which form a structure of their own.

In the first part of the book, Dubuisson tackles the "plan narratif," isolating as the "nodal points" three problematic deeds of the hero Rama, at least two of which have troubled scholars and pious exegetes alike, all of whom would like to establish the morally exemplary nature of Rāma as the "prince sans blame" and an *avatāra*, an incarnation of God: the slayings of the monkey Vāli and the quasi-brahmanical demon Rāvaṇa, and the double repudiation of the chaste queen Sītā. Through a series of comparisons of the treatment of the above episodes in Indian and Southeast

Asian *Rāmāyaṇas*, with the standard Sanskrit “Vālmīki” *Rāmāyaṇa* (circa 5th c. B.C.E?) as his focal text, Dubuisson demonstrates that Rāma’s three questionable deeds during his forest exile represent the “trois fautes” of the warrior-king, that each error is linked to one of the three Indo-European functions, and that together the three incidents form an Indo-European schema of the initiation of the sovereign-to-be. Some parts of Dubuisson’s arguments are more convincing than others; for instance, the discussion of the character of Rāvaṇa is better supported by evidence than the analysis of the second rejection of Sītā. Nevertheless, the author succeeds in showing that the reference to Indo-European trifunctionality helps us perceive an inner logic in the epic narrative, eliminating the need to resort to theories of heterogeneous origins for the plot, and apologetic justifications for the “embarrassing incidents.”

Having given Dubuisson credit for skilfully explicating the “three errors,” however, I must point out that he is hardly justified in using the trifunctionality thesis to come to the following conclusions: 1. The most significant structure of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is learned (“savante”), aristocratic, and emphatically Indo-European, while “folk” sources (“quelques ballades colportées dans le peuple”) could not have contributed anything significant to this epic (286); and 2. The development of the character of Rāma as the *avatāra* (divine incarnation) is meaningful only insofar as it can be explained with reference to Indo-European “facts” (284). In this view, anything in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that cannot be explained with reference to Indo-European ideology can be dismissed either as structural complications which lie outside the concerns of the Indo-Europeanist (284); or as being “folk,” and therefore presumably non-Indo-European, and therefore not worth considering! The problem with this attitude, besides its obvious arrogance, is its refusal to confront the complex, rich, and intensely Indian picture of Rāma as the renouncer-king and *avatāra* that ultimately emerges from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and makes the *Rāmāyaṇa* a cherished, living text in its cultural milieu (See the author’s casual acknowledgment of the complexity of the character of Rāma, p. 150).

Dubuisson’s failure to come to terms with the *Rāmāyaṇa* at the level at which the text transcends tripartite ideology is most clearly revealed in his flawed analysis of epic characters in the second part of his book. In this analysis, character is strictly determined by its Dumézilian functional reference, and is expressed through a mimetic transposition of earlier mythic models. This rigid view of character and structure prevents Dubuisson from acknowledging that Indo-European ideology has not existed in the Indian context in splendid isolation, but has itself been shaped and enriched by its fruitful interaction with indigenous traditions, which must be accounted for in any “reading” of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as we know it in its various versions.

In order to view Dubuisson’s work in a proper perspective, one need only turn to the excellent blend of Indo-Europeanist and Indologist approaches in the work of Alf Hiltebeitel. In his careful work on the *Mahābhārata* (in *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata*, and in a series of articles) Hiltebeitel has in effect defined those features of the Indian epics to which Indo-Europeanists must be sensitive, and which Dubuisson has ignored or dismissed in his work: 1. While speaking of the Indo-European functions, one must treat the epic as an autonomous genre. 2. Consequently, one must acknowledge that Indian epic characters have a “psychology” (not to be confused with naturalistic psychology) which can be independent of their Indo-European mythic and functional background. 3. The questions of ascetic values, violence, sovereignty and *dharma* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* must be studied in relation to their treatment in the *Mahābhārata*. 4. The metaphysics of the Brahmanas and Upanishads; the theology and psychology of *bhakti* expounded in the Puranas; and “folk” and clearly

non-Indo-European traditions, can all give deep insights into the transformation of the Indo-European ideology of the three functions in its Indian milieu. Particularly interesting in the last regard is Hildebeitel's ongoing work on the relationships between the "Indo-European" aspects of the *Mahābhārata* and the folk cults of Draupadī in their South Indian cultural matrix, which is an amalgam of Indo-Aryan and non-Indo-Aryan elements (See Alf HILTEBEITEL, 1988). Dubuisson should take his cue from Hildebeitel, who proves that Dumézilian theory need not be an ideological straitjacket, but can instead be the stimulating starting point for exploration in Indian texts and phenomena. Attractive as structural paradigms are in their symmetry and neatness, they cannot yet compare to the scholarly challenge of the living, breathing, changing nature of a text in its cultural environment.

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SIEGEL, LEE. *Laughing Matters: Comic Tradition in India*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987. xviii+497 pages. Bibliographic essay, illustrations, index of Indian texts and authors cited, subject index. Cloth US\$40.25; ISBN 0-226-75691-2.

Did you hear the one about the monkey that fucked the Buddha in the ear? Not likely, if you don't read Sanskrit and are forced to rely upon the puritanical translations of 19th and 20th century indologists, whose concern was to retain the modern Western spiritualism of great Eastern traditions. But without a doubt (278), if you take Lee Siegel's humorous and often bawdy tout of ancient Indian literature. I enjoyed it a great deal, and highly recommend it to you, but more for what the book is than for what it sometimes pretends to be. The book is funny, witty, voluminous, highly informative, very well written and flowing in its poetry and prose and in its shifts from one section to another. However the endpaper blurb claims that, "Siegel develops an original theory of comedy and laughter, applying it to reveal the humor in the ancient works." That framing of the text is a bit of madcap irony in its own right.

The parameters of the book are laid out in the Prologue (3-53). Ancient Indian rhetoricians and literary theorists understood comedy as an aesthetic mood (cf. the *Natyasatra*, 2nd Century C.E.), rather than as a binary mode of cognition and sentiment in opposition to tragedy, as in the ancient West. They drew a basic distinction between laughing at others and laughing at oneself, that Siegel argues is parallel to that between satire and humor. Satire unmasks the pretenses of the high and the powerful, and indicts folly through socially and psychologically acceptable forms of aggression. Humor, on the other hand, celebrates folly through socially and psychologically acceptable forms of regression (52). For the one who laughs to be consumed with laughter was equated by Abhinavagupta and others with transcendence and pure