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 Hiltebeitel'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 Hiltebeitel, 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.

REFERENCES CITED:

HILTEBEITEL, Alf

1976 *The ritual of battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

1988 *The cult of Draupadī*, volume I. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Indira Viswanathan Peterson
Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, MA 01075 USA

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 rhetoriticians 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

gnosis—often ironically sacred in its pervasive profanity. Discussions, and examples on examples, of satire (57–240) and humor (245–406) form the two major parts of the book.

Satire abounds in ancient Indian farce and other genres. Renouncers and prostitutes are mockingly brought together in their lack of loving attachment to the phenomenal world (124). Fathers mock the sexual capacities of their sons:

> Since a baby could pass through that lady's hole,
> How could this stripling play the sexual role?
> His pecker's a splinter—it should be a pole. (83)

Rollicking and boisterous travesties of love, the erotic, adultery, cuckolding, dirty old men, kings, judges, comptrollers, generals, and doctors are paraded forth, one following on the other. Thus, on the doctor (177):

> He can't extend the life you've led
> Though for that he'll charge his fees;
> His skill's in running from the dead
> And in performing moneyectomies!

And doctors are joined by astrologers, brahmins, Buddhist monks and Buddhist precepts, Jains, yogis, and tantrics.

This great chain of satire, of exposing the pretenses and weaknesses of numerous, prominent characters of ancient Indian cultural and social orders, is accompanied by Siegel's analytical comments on satire and society. In the main, these are true but trite. For example: "The objects of satire attempt to make the profane seem holy, and the satirist attempts to make the holy seem profane. Everything is the opposite of what it seems in satire. The world stands on its head" (193).

The second major part of the book, on humor, continues the parade with characters that laugh at themselves, and through themselves at others: fools, holy fools, drunken fools, allegorical fools, theatrical fools (the vidusaka), tricksters, divine tricksters, royal tricksters (Tenali Rama, Birbal, Gopal Bhar), animal tricksters and laughing deities. Here again the translations often are hilarious and telling:

> Though controlling breath, that vital part,
> And expounding scriptures learned by heart,
> Gurus die—their souls must part—
> Just like the passing of a fart! (399)

However, the section on humor suffers the same faults as that on satire. Reflexively, Siegel says it himself. He puts together a wonderful spoof of a conference of scholars on the vidusaka, with himself as one of the participants (285–290). Listening to the ponderous goings-on, the vidusaka ruminates: 'Why does Siegel do so much talking? He should give the others a chance, especially since he's stolen most of his ideas from them anyway.' As usual, the vidusaka exaggerates for effect, if with some point. Siegel gives us a scintillating and very human overview of the numerous varieties of Sanskrit comedy—a genuinely valuable compendium of funny genres and characters. But this is not a book of original perspectives nor of ideas, although the potential for these certainly is there.

For example, Siegel argues that, "Implicit in the comic sense of life is the notion of . . . an eternal game upon which personal, domestic, and social structures are built in a work that is but distraction from the play. Comedy is access to the primal game

. . . the logos that is revealed in laughter is a controlling principle that exists to make sure things go out of control " (292). And further on, " It seems uniquely Indian that part of the deity's function should be to amuse " (365). And further still, " Comedy is an uncertainty principle. It proves relativity with each laugh . . . . In the world of comedy, absurdity itself is the logos " (376). I haven't the space to go into this, but there are potentially interesting implications for a fresh understanding of South Asian cosmologies and their relation to comedy, play, and so forth, were Siegel to develop and integrate these notions, and relate them to the work of David Shulman, Louis Dumont, Bruce Kapferer, and others. (I also might note in passing my own attempts to relate play to the idea of an uncertainty principle, in my *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events.*) As it is, like laughter itself, this book shakes up, fragments, and reorders experience on various levels. But also, like folly, the work is not informed by any sustained and sustaining argument.

In the Epilogue, one of the most amusing sections of this book, Siegel sets out in search of the comic tradition in presentday Delhi. This shift from the study of texts—of carefully crafted and bordered artifice—to the ongoing flow of life is instructive. Wherever he looks, Siegel is sent elsewhere in search of humor—to Bengal, Andhra, Kerala, the ' traditional village,' and so forth. The playful impulse, that most elusive and slippery of phenomena, is always the absent joker, who appears when least expected—the note on which the book ends.

I'm told that Siegel is at work on a book on Indian magic and magicians. He himself is no mean adept of textual sleight-of-hand—and the following tale is especially for him, with wishes that the coming book be as much fun as the present one. Once upon a time, when I was a youngster, an Indian magician named Kuda Bux came to perform at my family's resort hotel in Canada. Kuda Bux was billed as ' The Man With the X-Ray Eyes,' because with his eye sockets entirely stuffed and covered he would do anything a seeing person could, claiming that this art had taken him a decade of study in the high Himalayas. This trick of his fascinated and tormented us, but remained utterly elusive. Kuda fell ill and stayed with us a lengthy period. One afternoon we intruded on the privacy of his room and insisted then and there that he do his trick and read a text provided by us. We stuffed and smothered his eye sockets with fresh dough and swathed his entire head in cloths and towels, and in his lap we opened a Bible to a random page. He commented that the print was very small, raised his mummy's head, and with what I still hear as a grin in his voice, asked, " Could I have my spectacles, please? " Satiric? Humorous? Or . . . ?

REFERENCE CITED:

HANDELMAN, Don
1989 *Models and mirrors: Towards and anthropology of public events.* Cambridge University Press.

Don Handelman
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Jerusalem, Israel

VAUDEVILLE, CHARLOTTE. *Bārahmāsā in Indian Literatures. Songs of the Twelve Months in Indo-Aryan Literatures.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986. xv+139 pages. Glossary of Indian words, bibliography, index. Hardcover Rs. 70, ISBN 81–208–0185–7.