

WULFF, DONNA M. *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization. The Vidagdhamādhava of Rūpa Gosvāmī*. AAR Academy Series 43. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985. X+270 pages. Glossary and bibliography. Hardcover US\$14.95 (for members US\$9.55); ISBN 0-89130-608-0.

This highly readable monograph represents a significant addition to the scholarly literature on the use of drama and of theatrical conventions in the Vaiṣṇava devotional tradition of Northern India—a development which became especially significant from the sixteenth century onward, and which continues to be reflected in a number of living performance traditions.

The text Wulff has chosen to analyze offers an intriguing if somewhat unusual point of entry into this dramatic tradition, for the *Vidagdhamādhava* (“Clever Kṛṣṇa”)—one of two full-length Sanskrit dramas composed by the Bengali theologian Rūpa Gosvāmī (fl. c. 1500–1550)—is set in the ornate and highly complex style typical of courtly poetry of an earlier period, and hence cannot have been comprehensible even to many of Rūpa’s contemporaries. It may indeed have been a “closet drama” never intended for performance, and for this reason, Wulff does not treat of such topics as staging conventions in the Vaiṣṇava theater. What she argues, however, is that the play was meant to provide a dramatic illustration—a *réalisation*—of the theological concepts and mystical practices more systematically expounded in Rūpa’s other major writings, the *Bhaktirasāmytasindhu* (“Ocean of the nectar of devotional moods”) and the *Ujvalanīlamanī* (“The radiant sapphire”). From this perspective, the choice of a dramatic format is significant, since Vaiṣṇavism—the devotional worship of Lord Viṣṇu, the “preserver” god of Hindu mythology—centered its worship on the earthly *avatāras* or “incarnations” in which the Lord, like an actor, assumed a physical role upon the cosmic stage to perform wondrous deeds that were characterized as *līlā*—divine “sport” or “play.” Consequently Vaiṣṇava authors were partial to theatrical metaphors, while much Vaiṣṇava worship was expressed through genres of performance in which the god’s *līlās* were graphically recreated, often by consecrated actors who were considered to temporarily incarnate the deity and his legendary companions. The achievement of Rūpa Gosvāmī and the other preceptors who, at the order of the great Bengali mystic Caitanya, settled in the Braj region of north-central India to contemplate and celebrate the deeds which Kṛṣṇa had once performed there, was to link the charming narrative of Kṛṣṇa’s pastoral *līlās* to a systematic theology and mystical praxis. This was effected through a reinterpretation of classical Indian aesthetic theory, with its seminal concept of the transformation of *bhāva* (transient, personalized emotion) into *rasa* (universalized aesthetic or, in Rūpa’s interpretation, mystical, experience which can be endlessly recreated and savored). Drama had been central to the development of this theory, since classical aestheticians regarded it as the highest and most inclusive form of art, and it retained its importance in the Vaiṣṇava reformulation.

After an opening discussion of “The Centrality of Drama in Kṛṣṇa Devotion,” Wulff offers in her second chapter a brief but lucid exposition of the devotional metamorphosis of the *bhāva-rasa* theory in Rūpa’s writings; for anyone unfamiliar with this influential current of Hindu thought, this provides a useful short introduction, with references to other English sources. Wulff then turns to the *Vidagdhamādhava* itself, devoting her third chapter to a synopsis of its meandering, seven-act plot—really a series of romantic vignettes, each of which elaborates upon some facet of the amours of Kṛṣṇa and his favorite mistress, Rādhā, amidst a pastoral dreamscape of moonlit

forests, lotus-covered ponds, contented cows, and anxious go-betweens—for much of the dialogue concerns the machinations and vicarious thrills of Rādhā's *sakhīs* or girlfriends, as they hatch schemes to bring about the lovers' rendezvous or to smooth over their periodic and tumultuous quarrels. In later chapters of sensitive (if occasionally a bit cloying) analysis of the play, Wulff suggests that the rambling storyline—which may strike the contemporary reader as no more than a series of variations on a somewhat overdone theme—is itself evocative of Rūpa's theological system, offering less a cohesive plot than a succession of self-contained episodes, each intended to evoke one of the fundamental devotional moods. Wulff's argument is underscored by the evidence of such living traditions of Vaiṣṇava performance as *rās līlā* (described briefly in her opening chapter) which, albeit in a livelier and more popular form than Rūpa's drama, nevertheless encodes some of the same devotional paradigms within a similarly repetitious and episodic framework (Hein 1972, Hawley 1981).

In lieu of a full translation of the *Vidagdhamādhava*—which perhaps only an initiated Kṛṣṇa devotee could love—Wulff provides us with a charming and profusely annotated rendering of its concluding act, in which (among other things) Kṛṣṇa, with the connivance of the ever-hovering *sakhīs*, woos Rādhā in drag (disguised as the goddess Pārvatī), while simultaneously allaying the suspicions of Rādhā's jealous husband and mother-in-law. Significantly, this sample act (and presumably the remainder of the drama) consists largely of couplets and short lyrics—sixty-two in all—loosely held together by short prose speeches which advance the convoluted and improbable plot. Thus the play is, in effect, a sort of *padāvalī* or verse anthology—another literary form favored by Vaiṣṇava theologians—in which the story offers a dramatic frame to showcase a succession of brilliant and allusive verses. In this sense, it resembles other Indian performance genres, such as the *rāga* structure of classical music with its endless variations on a basic vocabulary of simple themes, and the similarly rambling and poetry-dense verbal improvisations which characterize *kathā*—the Vaiṣṇava art of oral storytelling and textual exegesis.

Following the translated excerpt, Wulff devotes several chapters to literary and theological analysis of the drama's major characters, noting that the figures of the *sakhīs* seem to have been intended as primary religious models for the audience; for although Rādhā epitomized the soul's love for Kṛṣṇa, she had come to be regarded, by Rūpa's day, as the embodiment of his *śakti* or feminine energy, and it had become unthinkable for a devotee to usurp her role in the divine romance. Instead, aspirants were to identify with her female companions (or even with the maid servants of the latter), who shared a certain intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, but derived their greatest delight from the contemplation of the love of the primal pair—a spiritual voyeurism epitomized in the scene from Act Seven in which two of the *sakhīs* ecstatically contemplate the deserted bower in which Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa have recently dallied, reading in its crushed flower petals and bits of scattered ornaments an account of the passionate love-play that transpired there (86–87). For the fullest appreciation of this aspect of Rūpa's drama, however, it is advisable to supplement Wulff's analysis with a deeper study of the meditative practices advocated in Rūpa's other writings and in those of later preceptors in his tradition, particularly the elaborate visualization technique known as *mañjarī sādhanā*, through which the initiated adept quite literally assumed a role in the "play" of Kṛṣṇa—typically that of a maidservant privileged to witness the love sports of the divine couple (Haberman, forthcoming). While Wulff's study offers the foreign reader a sophisticated and appreciative introduction to the symbolism and emotional meaning of the text, the primacy of the *sakhīs* becomes fully comprehensible only in the light of sectarian esoteric practice. Such an understanding suggests a further in-

sight into the elaborate obscurity of the drama itself, for indeed an inordinate number of its verses are *double entendres* (for which Wulff offers parallel translations). The fact that nearly everything in the *Vidagdhamādhava*, it seems, is to be understood on two levels takes on new significance when we realize that the author and his companions, in their own experience, constantly commuted between worlds—the dusty Braj country, in which they served as the venerable preceptors of a growing devotional community, and that other, luminous and vernal realm delineated with the inner eye, in which they rejoiced in the intimacies of a playful god.

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HAWAII

COLUM, PADRAIC. *Legends of Hawaii*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987 (First published 1937). Xvi+220 pages. Illustrations by Don Forrer. Cloth US\$30.00; ISBN 0-300-00376-5. Paper US\$9.95; ISBN 0-300-03923-9.

Although this is an old book, it is of continuing interest to those interested in Polynesian legends. For the most part it contains samples of the collections of Abraham Fornander, who once edited *The Polynesian*, lived in the islands for over forty years, and was acquainted with Hawaiian royalty and storytellers. The legends were collected over one hundred years ago by Fornander from various people and sources, but primarily from students at a mission school on the Island of Maui. The collection was later kept at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum. Colum was invited to take any of the stories which were suitable for children and publish them separately. He found that they represented a wide representation of the Polynesian area, with motifs of romance in particular, with travels to alien, spiritual places by demigods.

Colum began his work in 1923, studying both Hawaiian and the Fornander Collection, but his stories are re-told versions based on a variety of sources and Polynesian areas, with most published elsewhere.

There are nineteen stories in *Legends*, each with a summary in the "Notes" section of the book. The reader would do well to compare the actual story given with the notes for there we learn to what degree Colum has restructured and condensed the stories. For example "The Princess and The Rainbow" is said to be reshaped to "bring out the fairy-tale elements that are in it" (207). Presumably this refers to the fabrication of events and powers surrounding the Princess's journey to find the Prince, for it has nothing to say about fairies.

There is a great deal of cultural symbolism in the tales: Canoe-Guiding Star,