

INDIA

CASE, MARGRET H., editor. *Heinrich Zimmer: Coming into His Own*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. vii + 148 pages. Photographs, index. Cloth US\$24.95 (£19.95 outside US); ISBN 0-691-03337-4.

Heinrich Zimmer (1890-1943) was a German Indologist and comparative mythologist whose enthusiasm for his subject helped Westerners see Indian thought not as something exotic but as another expression of the universal aspirations of the human spirit. The same enthusiasm led to certain excesses in his interpretations, however, and his work was not free from factual error (such as attributing avatars to Shiva [ZIMMER 1972, 122-25]). *Heinrich Zimmer: Coming into His Own*, a slim volume of essays from a conference on the great Indologist, may not suffice to lead the student beyond Zimmer's interpretations (for that one would need a more substantial book, one on the lines of NOEL's *Paths to the Power of Myth* on Joseph Campbell [1990]), but it does say enough about the man to reveal the private myth he is retelling through Indian models. These essays make it easier to go beyond the popular level and see why Zimmer stressed what he did.

Zimmer was dismissed from his university post for his anti-Nazi views in 1938 — admirably, he chose his half-Jewish legal wife over his “Aryan” mistress — and went to America via England in 1940. Owing to his early death of pneumonia in 1943, his reputation has rested largely upon the four posthumous Bollingen Series books edited by the mythologist Joseph Campbell: *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (1946), *The King and the Corpse: Tales of the Soul's Conquest of Evil* (1948), *Philosophies of India* (1951), and *The Art of Indian Asia: Its Mythology and Transformations* (1955), all published by Princeton University Press. The contributions in this volume broach — but only begin to clarify — the question of how much of these works is Zimmer and how much is Campbell; they point to the English translation (1984) of ZIMMER's own book *Kunstform und Yoga im indischen Kultbild* (1926) and denigrate, in comparison, *The Art of Indian Asia* (119-23). ZIMMER's *Hindu Medicine* (1948) is covered in a separate essay by specialist Kenneth G. Zysk (87-103).

Although Ananda Coomaraswamy's praise for Zimmer's work (and his contribution to the editing of the Bollingen books) is discussed, no Hindu is included among the essayists. The editors seem to have taken no account of the notion that a scholar should have his or her portrayal of a foreign civilization checked by an insider.

Whether, as the editor claims, Zimmer began the intellectual decolonization of India or whether he merely carried the colonization process to a new, less alienated level is a moot point. Certainly he was not only important but popular, and he will remain so as long as his romantic portrait of things Hindu conveys meaning to a wide range of readers.

I am limited in assessing Zimmer himself because I lack enough of that “touch of amorality” that ZIMMER considers so important for bringing myths to life (1946, 179). Still, it is obvious that Zimmer's portrayal of what we might call the little traditions within the Great Tradition of India sheds light on the diversity of that civilization, a diversity that has always exceeded the grasp of even a whole community of scholars. (“In choosing his sources, he preferred to ignore the usual star players: the *Rigveda*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, and the . . . *Bhagavad Gītā*, or even the . . . *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upanishads*” [55].)

Most interesting among the essays are those of Gerald Chapple and Matthew Kapstein. Chapple tells us that Zimmer was looking for (in his own words) “Schopenhauer's India” (68). Kapstein elaborates on the significance of this insight (105-18). Zimmer, never able to go to India, also never practiced any form of yoga. His understanding was based on experience not available to students who, like the Hindu *brahmacharya*, remained celibate. He wrote:

Eroticism in marriage is one means to the experiencing of one's godlike nature, where

the distinction between I and Thou disappears, where the world falls away, where pain and desire and all the other polar opposites are transcended. (117)

The more puritanical aspects of Hindu wisdom escaped him, along with the most revered sacred teachings. He also displayed little empathy with Western spirituality — despite an occasional sentimentalism (e.g., 54), his references to Western materials reveal that for him Christian tradition had “become meaningless” or merely “metaphoric” (9).

Kapstein agrees with Zimmer that *Om mani padme hum* means “O holder of the jewel and the lotus!” (feminine vocative, for Avalokiteśvara) and not “Hail to the jewel in the lotus!” as it is usually translated (112). ZIMMER cites as evidence the *Avalokiteśvaragunakaraṇḍavyūha* (1926, 227, 277). Is this the earliest appearance of the mantra? Do Zimmer and Kapstein mean to say that Avalokiteśvara was already seen as feminine before being identified with a Chinese goddess? The whole matter needs more elaboration.

The reader must refer to ZIMMER (1984) for a bibliography of Zimmer’s works. Although it is mentioned that the Bollingen books have been translated into European languages (80–81), there is no reference to the Japanese translation of *Myths and Symbols of Indian Art and Civilization* (ZIMMER 1988).

More could have been said on Zimmer’s relevance to the current discussion of the relationship between Indian philosophy and Western traditions — the romantic and original scholar shows himself more open to transformative motives in philosophy than many current philosophers. The book, however, must be left to speak for itself.

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HANSEN, KATHRYN. *Grounds for Play: The Nautāṅkī Theatre of North India*. A Philipp E. Lilienthal Book. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. xv + 367 pages. 24 b/w illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$42.50; ISBN 0-520-07273-1.

This is as rich a description and analysis of a “folk theater” form as can be found. Kathryn Hansen builds upon and considerably expands the accumulated insights and theoretical propositions of the recently renaissance South Asian folklore scholarship. Attention to the issues of women performers and characters is a special and important feature of this book.