

Gender,” “Female Victimization in Philippine Balladry,” and “The Ballad of Domestic Tragedies and Applied Folklore.” The essay on the viscera-suckers is a particularly deft piece of scholarship, and presents a solid case for this *asuang* being developed by Spanish religious leaders to co-opt the traditional leadership roles of women, “a process of disenfranchising the most powerful Filipino women and a politics of gender that has deep roots in the Spanish conquest of the Philippines” (94). More work is done with Spanish roots in the essay “The Philippine Folktale Hero Juan Tamad.” The role of luck is clearly shown as the circumstance that allows the mediation of opposing dualities, in a very Lévi-Straussian structural analysis.

Two other essays deal with contemporary issues with psychological and political connections. “Mythology and the ‘Inkanto’ Syndrome” looks at supernatural illnesses and has interesting echoes of the American preoccupation with UFO encounters. “Talismanic Magic and Political Leadership” draws lessons on how culture helps define power, with a discussion of the People Power Revolution and subsequent coup attempts.

Finally, there is a strong dose of performance theory with the essays “The Performance of Folk Narrative in California’s Filipino Communities” and “Filipino American Erotica and the Ethnography of a Folkloric Event.” Both of these essays show evidence of careful observation and well thought-out conclusions and are excellent examples of the kind of ethnographic work that folklore has in common with anthropology.

The ordering of the essays does not seem to follow any plan, either thematic or chronological, but this in no way weakens the collection as a whole. The notes for each essay are located at the end of the book, just before the references; this is a little inconvenient but is not a serious drawback. In fact, it is difficult to find anything to critique about this body of work. The variety and the liveliness of the analyses make it a very entertaining and informative read.

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INDONESIA

SEARS, LAURIE J. *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales.*

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996. xxii + 349 pages. Map, illustrations, selected glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$49.95; ISBN 0-8223-1685-4. Paper US\$16.95; ISBN 0-8223-1697-8.

This book is about the tales told in the Javanese shadow-puppet (*wayang*) theater, specifically the *wayang purwa*, which uses flat, leather puppets, as presented in the Central Javanese court town of Solo. This being said, the statement should at once be amended, because the author presents us with anything but a typical discussion of these tales, which have in the past been presented in the scholarly literature as the “essence” of Javaneseness. Rather, she wonders whether *wayang* “ever was the dominant expression of a Javanese philosophy, religion, or ‘worldview’” (11), and points at various interests that have shaped our perception of the shadow theater in such a way as to give the impression that it was.

Primary among these were Dutch colonial and scholarly interests that “discovered” *wayang* in the nineteenth century and, true to contemporary ideas, found this oral tradition to be a degenerate derivative of the original, written Indian *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* tales. At the same time, however, they saw in it proof of Java’s deep Indic roots, the development of which was thought to be usable as a defense against a vigorous Islam, which was seen as threatening Dutch interests, especially after the revolt in Java from 1825 to 1830.

As the author endeavors to show, however, Islamic influences had long penetrated the *wayang*, giving new meanings to old stories as the medium was adapted to the new context presented by the influences of this new worldview. Especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, she points out, Islamic authority became discernible in the stories and performances in a process that molded Javanese belief and Islam in conformity with each other. While a synthesis of Javanese and Muslim ideas occurred, however, this was not everywhere strong enough to counter the pressure of European ideas, especially among those Javanese who were most directly affected by colonial rule.

An important European input among Dutch-speaking Javanese intellectuals, among others at the Solo court, was the Theosophical movement, which saw in the *wayang* tales the remnants of earlier philosophical heights attained under Indian influence. The author mentions several times that at base *wayang* is a village tradition, and when puppeteers (*dhalang*) performed at the courts they had to adapt their style and message to their audience; indeed, the skill with which this was done was the mark of a good *dhalang*. Little mention is made, however, of village audiences and their views of the performances, other than that villagers often did not care for the intellectually tailored versions of the tales produced by court- and academy-trained puppeteers. One problem is the author's rather formal definition of religion, which sees as such only Islam and other officially recognized faiths, thus ignoring such religious phenomena as ancestor veneration, beliefs in the spirit world, and the like, which are classed as mysticism. Yet it is these latter phenomena that have traditionally been important in *wayang*, at least at the village level.

Instead, the tales are seen as allegorical commentaries on the present by a past thought to be recorded in them. Commentary is indeed an aspect of *wayang* presentations—the puppeteer, especially through the clown characters, often refers to local situations, pointing out anything from the peculiarities of visiting scholars to the human foibles of the local notables. Yet it might be questioned whether sly references to colonial rulers would have been to the taste of a village audience socially far removed from the centers of power, or whether these audiences might have had other concerns.

Although reference is made to the fact that *wayang* is presented in connection with religious events and life-crisis rituals, the author sees *wayang* primarily as theater. In so doing she does not do full justice to an important aspect of it, namely the function it has, at least in the village context, of connecting the present generation with the past and the ancestors. These things are mentioned (236–38), but tend to get lost in the general deconstruction of the literature on the subject.

Even within the intellectual sphere there is no unanimity about various aspects of *wayang*. Dutch scholars saw the source of many of the tales, the Indian *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, as the “real” stories and denigrated the spinoffs generated by puppeteers as degenerate. In conjunction with this point of view, a discussion ensued concerning which tales were to be considered as stem (i.e., “real”) tales and which were “only” branch or secondary stories. This debate largely ignored the fact that “real” *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* stories were very rarely presented and that the public preferred the so-called branch stories.

Efforts were also made to determine the meaning of the stories, again without much success, because as social commentary the meaning of a story can change with the context of its telling, so that new meanings continually adhere to old stories. In this, of course, they do not differ from other symbolic statements, which is what allegories in effect are. As was discussed elsewhere, the meaning of symbols is dependent on the understandings that the audience brings to them, making symbols at once multivocal and giving them great communicative powers. The meaning of the stories, therefore, is not fixed but rather changes with the context and the audience. This is best summed up by a powerful metaphor used by the author

(190–91) in which the tales are seen as “waves in an ocean of stories that absorbs and carries the stories along through the centuries.” To this we might add that this “ocean” contains not just the *wayang* stories themselves but also the scholarly commentaries that have influenced them over time, including the present one. Just as things floating in water may sometimes end up for a while in pools and eddies, so, too, may certain styles of telling or fashions in interpretation pick out aspects of these tales, only to have them reabsorbed by the larger whole in different contexts, leading to ever-changing perceptions of them.

The author gives a glimpse of these changes in the very lively final two chapters, which discuss what is happening to the tales under the influence of both the current regime’s efforts to control their message and the mass media’s “telling” of them in print. New presentations primarily meant for puppeteers, and new forms created by the academy in Solo, have widened the perceptual context, while moving the stories from the screen to the printed page has freed them from older stylistic limitations. The effect of these changes will depend on the outcome of the continuing discussions about the meaning of the stories, discussion that are, in effect, also debates on what it means to be Javanese today. In brief, the book is worth thoughtful consideration, even if the reader may disagree with some of its arguments. It certainly is no book for the neophyte.

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INDIA

HAWLEY, JOHN STRATTON and DONNA MARIE WULFF, Editors. *Devī: Goddesses of India*. Comparative Studies in Religion and Society. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. xiii + 352 pages. Maps, illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index. Paper n.p.; ISBN 0-520-20058-6. Cloth n.p.; ISBN 0-520-20057-8.

Devī: Goddesses of India is a well-written, engaging anthology devoted to furthering our understanding and appreciation of the multifaceted ways in which India’s goddess traditions are negotiated and become meaningful in practice. Edited by John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff, the essays in this volume draw from scholarship and ethnographic fieldwork conducted throughout India; they offer insightful interpretations of the continual reinvention of the goddess traditions in relation to contemporary gender and social issues. As such, this volume is a significant contribution toward “clearer contact with the feminine dimension in religious experience” (1).

The essays in *Devī* are divided into two broad sections: goddess as supreme and as consort, and goddesses as mothers and possessors. This organization of the essays allows the reader to fully appreciate the richly detailed accounts of *devī* worship against compelling and sometimes polemical social contexts of devotion. In part I the authors explore feminine qualities of the goddess traditions; the essays play with the slippage between *devī*’s positions of independence and of consort with masculine counterparts. Coburn discusses the sixth-century *Devī Mahatmya* in which the goddess is independently feminine. Humes addresses the *śakti* tradition of the great goddess as practiced in Vindhyachal. Though the great goddess is understood for her transcendent qualities, Humes adroitly contextualizes the process of renegotiation in contemporary practice, exploring ways in which the *Vidhya Mahatmya* is becoming subordinated to the panregional appeal of the Mahatmya. Kinsley explores *devī*’s qualities of *maya*, *prakṛti*, and *śakti* as manifested in Kali. Kali’s attributes are, in this case, not counter-