

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

Vol. VIII

Essays on the Theory & Praxis of World Drama



Eds.

Antony Johae
Amitava Roy
Sheila T. Cavanagh
Subir Dhar
Tapu Biswas



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SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY OF EASTERN INDIA

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL, Vol. VIII

East-West Perspectives on Drama

Edited by

Antony Johae, Amitava Roy, Sheila T. Cavanagh
Subir Dhar, Tapu Biswas

TI, Vol VIII showcases the significant new research work by the younger generation of scholars and critics from California to Kolkata, USA to India. Included here are exciting academic approaches to Bratya Basu's *Hemlat*; on Renaissance Hermaphroditism; gender War, Sexuality, Master-Servant relationships, the dialectics of Tragedy in *Shakespeare's major plays*; Lady Macbeth and the Law of Karma; Australian Aboriginal Political Theatre; Edward Albee's *The American Dream*; Folk elements in Habib Tanvir's *Bahadur Kalarin*; Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *The Girl who touched the Stars*; Badal Sircar and *Hindi Theatre*.



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From the Editors' Desk

This VIIIth volume of *Theater International* (TI) brings together excellent scholarly research work and vibrant critical essays from some of our most brilliant younger generation of academic activists on the global scene.

This year's Kolkata Book Fair (29th December – 10 January 2015), the annual coming-together of the World's Book Elite saw the much-awaited release of Bratya Basu's *Select Plays in English Translation*, edited with Introduction and commentary by Prof. Amitava Roy. At the release ceremony Prof. Roy described Bratya Basu as "The most Postmodern and most Shakespearian of our playwrights" which immediately initiated a raging debate among the theatre experts and academics across the East-West cultural scene. The debate has been recently joined by such theatre experts and scholars like Bryan Reynolds, Robert Gordon, Antony Johae *et al.*

Here we bring you an incisive, pioneering, look at Bratya's *Hemlat* vis-a-vis Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Samuel Kolodezh, the outstanding young theater activist from University of Irvine, California, USA. In our opening salvo 'Waiting with Anticipation: Bratya Basu's *Hemlat*, the Prince of Garanata', Kolodezh cuts through the dizzying voids and slippery aporias that haunt the princes of Elsinore and Garanata as much as their "makers" and their far-apart eras, with a deft and double-edged sword of Intellect and Imagination. Drawing upon the profound and pioneering thought-forays of Gilles Deleuze, Antony Kubiak and Bryan Reynolds on Hamlet and his haunted world, Kolodezh uses the English translation of *Hemlat* (Edited by Amitava Roy, Suchandra Ghosh and Tapu Biswas) to establish the thrust of his arguments:

"Hamlet anticipates action rather than waiting for himself to act.
I argue that through anticipation, Hemlat is able to act in a time-

out-of-joint and succeed where Hamlet fails. Rather than falling into the void of the past's demand, he re-evaluates it in a perpetual question and answer. Thus times, spaces, text, affects and narratives are all re-mixed and played with, folded and evaluated with agency. Through play and evaluation, the 'let it be' of Hamlet turns into the 'let it become' of Hemlat..."

Dr. Shruti Lahiry, noted teacher of Renaissance Literature Courses, focuses on the contested question of interchangeability of Gender, the image of Hermaphrodite, masculinity and femininity, the recurring Identity crises among transgender and transvestite in "*Gender Endangered: A Study of Shakespeare's Females*," Dr. Lahiry brings together a series of Renaissance illustrations and paintings ranging from Niccolo Bellinda Modena (1545) to Thomas Strothards' *Queen Elizabeth at Tilbury* (1805) and the costumes used by the Kings and Princes to focus on Renaissance approaches to LGBT in Shakespearian and other texts. The paper is a kind of multimedia cultural text that explores questions vehemently debated in our times from California to Calcutta. Our Readers will surely be aware of the hullabaloo (or "hullabol" to use the Hindi term) over the same-sex marriages supported by President Obama passed by a hairs - breadth Judicial verdict of 5 - 4 in the USA, the repercussions in the Vatican and the UK; and the on-going furious debates regarding 'hijras' defined by the Judiciary as "the Third Sex" and the LGBT community being accorded 'rights' that the conservative section in India cannot stomach. Dr. Lahiri's paper is most relevant now though the context is Early Modern Europe and England.

Dr. Paramita Chaudhuri retains the focus on Shakespeare in "*Menaechmi – The Comedy of Errors – Bhratibilas – Angoor: Sagas of an evolving Master – Servant Relationship*," her wide-ranging exploration of the Master – Servant dialectic, but travels across countries and continents (Greece, Rome, Persia , India) and genres and subgenres (theatre, fiction, film). She takes us on a fascinating trans-cultural tour of conflicts and collaborations involving

class, caste, gender across the globe from the ancient past down to the immediate present.

Known for her immaculate scholarship and the ability to present "heavy" researchwork in a popular vein, Dr. Chaudhuri presents a socio-cultural-historical perspective that would remind Indian readers of how "Dalits" and "Outsiders" have been traditionally treated in some regions of the Indian sub- continent. She concludes her meticulously researched paper with popular Hindi and Bangla films exploring the Master- Servant relationship:

"One of the common motifs of all these trans-cultural adaptations is master-servant relationship which shows a steady evolution, matching the changing colours of the socio-economic scenario grappling with the issue of domination vs collaboration between classes across the globe."

Dr. Pinaki Roy, marshalls an impressive array of sources and documents to relate war, sexuality, belligerence and bawdy primarily in Shakespeare but also in Jonson, Marlowe, Webster *et al.* Love and War (in the title "*Farewell and Arms: War and Sexuality in Shakespeare*" Roy alludes inter-textually to Hemingway who spent most of his life trying to highlight his "macho" image) have been down the ages interchangeable and the imagery of the one interpenetrates that of the other, as evident in the popular saying "All's fair in Love and War." Dr. Roy's provocative exploration highlights for us the interrelations between battles, bodies, bawdy and the "badtamizdil". (Hindi for the wayward heart) that creates "the subtle knot that makes us man."

Australianist Swati Roychowdhury takes us to the political protest theatre of the Australian Aboriginal in "*Political Shakespeare: Aborigine performance of A Midsummer Nights' Dream in Australia*," She reconstructs Noel Tovey's nativized Aboriginal version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* produced at the Sydney Wharf Theatre to reveal what can and has been done

to and with a canonical White Mastertext from the subversive yet appreciative perspective of the "Australian Dalits."

Dr. Lipika Sikdar, renowned Shakespearian scholar and author of the path-breaking *Shakespeare in the Media* (1947-2008, India) in "*Lady Macbeth and the Law of Karma*" approaches the multi-faceted Lady from the Hindu-Indian religious, philosophical and spiritual perspective of Karmic laws. From about the turn of the century from the Indian sub-continent have appeared a novel trend of evaluating Shakespeare from the religious- philosophical perspective of the Sacred Books of the East (the *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, the *Koran*, *Buddhist tripitakas*) and from the dramaturgical perspective of Bharata's *Natyashastra* and the Rasa theory. Notable 20-21st century exponents of such approaches include C.D. Narasimhaiah, S. Ramaswamy, Papia Mitra, Lipka Sikdar among others. Dr. Sikdar had earlier followed the lead of Amitava Roy- Emily Nixon's famous Indo-Canadian production of *Lady Macbeth* to interpret Lady Macbeth from the standpoint of the esoteric Tantric philosophy. Her current Karmic approach to lady Macbeth is an interesting addition to the on-going "Look East" policy in Shakespeare Studies as also the Make – in – India' philosophy of Prime Minster Narendra Modi.

Research scholar Smrity Sharma in "*Race, Culture and Love: the Dialectic of Tragedy in Othello and the Critics*" ably summarises the critical animadversions of the anti-Othello brigade from the last two centuries and attacks and subverts, "the Noble Moor" into a "villainous Moor."

Rituparna Saharay, M. Phil. from Rabindra Bharti University in her paper on Habib Tanvir's production of *Bahadur Kalarin* explores how the legendary Tanvir melded Folk and classical elements in his work while interweaving current traditions of culture and dramaturgy. Saharay places Tanvir in the context of his great contemporaries like K.N. Panikkar, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad; focuses on their project

of 'going to the roots' and the Folk in order to create the idiom of contemporary Indian theatre not depending on Western models.

Dr. Sujato Ghosh reveals the nullity and void at the heart of contemporary American culture and the degeneration of the once – sustaining ideal of the American Dream in his detailed analysis of Albee's *The American Dream*.

Research scholar Bidisha Munshi and Rumki Srimani, both from Visva - Bharati, the central University founded by Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan, West Bengal explore Mahesh Dattani's works: *The Girl who touched the Stars* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Bidisha's thoroughgoing commentary reveals how "Dattani's women characters (like Bhavna, the Kalpana Chawla figure in *Girl who touched the Stars*) in spite of being marginalized possess a will of their own to resist the forces hazardous to their survival."

Rumki Srimani in *Bravely Fought the Queen* explores the dark corridors of the familial selves in the traditional Patriarchal oppressed and suppressed Indian family, the "hidden and secretive" homosexual relationships, the sufferings of the women and their claustrophobic households. Dattani's tragic presentation of blighted lives living in 'each others Hell' is ably analyzed in Srimani's close "explication du texte."

TI closes with Dr. Tapu Biswas' pioneering archival research work on the great Indian theatre exponent Badal Sircar's plays and their translations and productions in Hindi. Dr. Biswas needs to be congratulated for doing what others have only commented on patchily. This is a major research document of our times.

Happy Reading,

Antony Johae
Amitava Roy.
– Eds.

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