

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

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Multi-disciplinary International Journal
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Vol. XIII



Eds.

Amitava Roy, Bryan Reynolds, Papia Mitra, Sheila T. Cavanagh, Subir Dhar, Tapu Biswas

A

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Contents

From the Editors' Desk		i
1. The 'Rajarshi' in Rabindranath Tagore's Theatre	Amrit Sen	1
2. <i>A Tale of Two Plays: Edward II vis-à-vis Macbeth</i>	Papia Mitra	19
3. Feminist Trends in Congreve's <i>The Way of the World</i>	Suva Basu	34
4. Badal Sircar: European Drama in Adaptation – A Study	Tapu Biswas	45
5. Efforts of Shen Teh to rise to Showalter's "Female": an archetypal symbol of patience, fortitude and resilience in Bertolt Brecht's <i>The Good Person of Szechwan</i>	Sujato Ghosh	59
6. Asif Currimbhoy's <i>Om Mane Padme Hum!</i> : A Saga of Political Crisis and China's Imperialistic Extremism.	Kumari Priti & Ashutosh Singh	68
7. From Spectacle to Spectre: Interrogating the Draupadis of Saonli Mitra and Mahasveta Devi	Asmita Borai	80
8. "More Last Words": John Gay's <i>Polly</i> and the Radical Re-writing of the Margins of the Empire	Chandrima Das	92

9. So Far Yet So Close: a Reading of Intertextual Connections between Arthur Miller's <i>Death of a Salesman</i> and David Greig's <i>The Architect</i>	Pathik Khamrai	108
Our Contributors & Editors		117
The TI Manifesto		119

From the Editors' Desk

Dear Readers, Colleagues and Friends

Theatre International (TI) Vol XIII is here! The pandemic is peaking and raging across the globe like a tempest and the situation seems hopeless. But for that very reason this is just the right time to turn to our mentors and gurus like Rabindranath Tagore, Shakespeare, Einstein, Picasso, Camus, V. Woolf Beckett, Brecht, Yeats, Nazrul and such-like artists, musicians and painters. These intrepid men and women have lived and fought their way through decimating Plagues, devastating Spanish Flu, all-devouring World Wars and still continue with their work and dream on with unfaltering faith in Man, face the Brute head on and finally emerge on the far side of despair. To day at this terrible juncture in our collective history we must learn from and be inspired by such gurus that Man will not only survive but will and must prevail, that we will and must overcome sometime, someday.

Our beleaguered, embattled co-Editors from abroad and here in India have lost many of their beloved near and dear ones to the Covid Demon. Yet they have risens above the personal and the political to fight together shoulder to shoulder against all the demons, both inside us and outside. Across the globe from East to West and North to South we celebrate Durga, Protector of mankind and archetypal Mother Goddess who comes down to our burning earth from the frozen heights of the Himalayas every year to fight and slay the marauding demons menancing mankind. Tagore, Shakespeare and others of their ilk inspired by their own Durgas, their Muses, have slain the demons through their work and art and now show us the way forward. So holding hands across the continents, singing La Marsellaise together through winter snow, blizzards and sandstorms, famines and unnumbered fatalities we will march on for and with mankind against the Covid demon. For we are the Covid warriors who will be found everywhere where ramparts break and fall.

Man is not a useless passion, sein oder nicht sein we will overcome. Vive le Mankind. In Bangla "Joy Hoag!" In Hindi "Jai Ho".

Amrit Sen points out that to Rabindranath Tagore, a king is not simply a figure of material power but also an embodiment of spiritual energy. For this he draws upon the ancient Indian concept of Rajarshi, or the ruler who is at once a king and a sage and explores it through various plays. Ghosh in turn tries to explore Tagore's understanding of the concept. He points out that Tagore envisioned Indian history as the flowering of creative impulses of man set against the mechanical spirit cherished by Europeans: it is not just about wars but about the spirit of unity. Ghosh follows Tagore through the latter's metaphorical analysis of Ramayana, to the highly symbolical plays like *The Ascetic*, *The Sacrifice*, *Autumn-Festival*, *The Waterfall*, *Red Oleanders*, *The King of the Dark Chamber*. He underlines the common characteristics the various rajarshi figures share and presents a coherent picture of the literature. He then ties Tagore's obsession with the Rajarshi figure with revolt against both the Colonial State and the ugly version of violent insular nationalism that was on the rise then. Tagore's aim was to reconstruct society in a spirit of harmony and making people participate in the rebuilding. Ghosh brings this out clearly in his detailed analysis divided into three sections.

Papia Mitra makes a lengthy and comprehensive comparison between two Renaissance plays, *Macbeth* and *Edward II*. Both are political tragedies based on chronicle histories but contrast starkly with each other in the presentation of the characters and the moral atmosphere. *Macbeth* is about the fall of a tragic hero who loses everything but finally manages to die a warrior's death, though alienated from everything that gives value to life. *Edward II* is about a pathetic king who cannot win our admiration as a hero and who dies trembling in terror, yet has people who love him and mourn him. The death of Macbeth demonstrates God's hand in history and the new king re-establishes moral law. But Edward II's life and death are determined solely by materialistic factors and the end brings no bright new world.

Suva Basu takes up the text of *Way of the World* to explore how changed attitudes to women in the seventeenth century is reflected in its

literature, particularly in the above-mentioned play traditionally considered the acme of Restoration Comedy of Manners. Patriarchal attitudes are deeply embedded in the play specially in regards to female sexuality. Older post menopausal women who feel desire are mercilessly mocked and since they cannot bear children are dismissed scornfully as useless since anatomy is considered to be a woman's destiny. Basu argues however that Lady Wishfort who is the butt of such jokes can be regarded as a figure of resistance against male dominance, asserting her own desires and the female sphere against the male. Mrs Marwood can also be regarded as a figure of sexual liberation which males call 'license'. Finally, Basu presents a critical evaluation of Millamant as a woman who emphasizes trust and dignity as foundation of marriage rather than romantic love alone and foreshadows Ibsen's plays. The play foreshadows future ones dealing with social issues.

Tapu Biswas is a well-known critical analyst of Badal Sircar's plays and he does not disappoint in this article. He discusses in detail Badal Sircar's adaptations of various Western plays in Bengali. Sircar went beyond mere reproduction and instead altered the plays to suit Indian conditions and contemporary requirements. Biswas discusses six plays pointing out how they are parallels of other plays but yet are different. He successfully brings out the creative element in Sircar's adaptations.

Sujato Ghosh discusses whether the character of Shen Teh in Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* can be considered as a "Female" as Showalter has used the term in her feminist critiques. Shen Teh is exploited by everyone as is the norm for women in a patriarchal society; however her working as a prostitute can also be seen as a kind of equality with males since she is working with her body and getting paid for it. Nevertheless, she never loses her nurturing capacity. Even when she dons the disguise of a male and behaves as harshly as she had seen traditional males do, she remains a mother figure. Though Brecht explores primarily the dangers of capitalism and does not disturb the status quo regarding women he also ends up showing the restrictions on women and gives hope that through the capacity of motherhood a new kind of society more in tune with the earth can be created.

Kumari Priti & Ashutosh Singh explores in detail Asif Currimbhoy's historical-political play *Om Mane Padme Hum!* which is about Chinese Imperialism. The Chinese had conquered Tibet and wishes to commit cultural genocide of Tibetan people by forcing their own Chinese and communist culture on them. While the Dalai Lama flees to India as his people prepare a revolt the Chinese General tries to set up a rival Dalai Lama the play stresses however that ultimately the attempts fail. Kumari Priti & Ashutosh Singh have done an excellent job in setting the play in its historical context and relating it to Chinese Imperialism today.

Pathik Khamrai has examined the intertextual relationship between an iconic, famous play Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and a lesser known text, David Greig's *The Architect*. Texts influence each other and no play can be read in isolation, specially if they come from the same cultural milieu. The paper shows how both plays focus on the failure of the myth of 'American Dream'. Willy Loman was consumed by the dream of being a successful man and passes it on to his sons, but in the end he could not sell himself any more. His phoniness is exposed before his sons who reject him. Similarly the Architect Leo Black is very proud of the buildings that he had built which made him famous. But when the buildings become unsafe he refuses to allow them to be demolished because they are tied up with his image of himself as a successful man. Along with the creations, his family too crumbles. Finally both protagonists escape their failures through death. Pathik Khamrai skilfully brings out the common set of values and self-image that ultimately destroy both.

Chandrima Das takes up John Gay's *Polly*, the sequel to his *Beggar's Opera*. The play is interesting all the more because as the name implies the protagonist is a woman. She studies the ramifications of 'honour' that occur when a woman crossdresses as a man in search of her missing husband and moreover assumes the role of a pirate. Not only is it a strictly masculine role, it is also something outside the code of normal society. So Polly becomes doubly a transgressor. The pirates are also analysed as prototypes of Western conquerors. Above all Das highlights the play as a satire against contemporary British ethos.

Dr. Asmita Boral focuses on two adaptations of the story of Draupadi

in two differing genres. Saonli Mitra's *Nathabati Anathbati* is a solo dance performance where the dancer switches perspectives from one character to another. Boral critiques how Draupadi of the epic is presented as a sexual object, to be used and abused at will in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi or *Dopdi Mahajen* is a prose narrative about a female Naxalite commander, fighting for rights of the tribals against the oppressive power of the state. She is raped by soldiers to break her spirit; but she refuses to give up. She stands before her enemies naked and bleeding frightening them all by refusing to be modest and ashamed. Boral points out that in both cases the woman's bodily integrity is violated. But the naxal woman displays resistance in a way Draupadi couldnot and thus becomes far more her own woman transforming that same violated body into a weapon.

— Happy Reading

**Papia Mitra, Sheila T. Cavanagh
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For the Editors

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The TI Manifesto

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL, EAST-WEST Perspectives on Theatre: the title tells you where we are at. This is an international journal-cum-Dramabook. In the constitution of its Editorial Board, in its wide-angle global readership, in its range and scope of subject matter and focus, in its selection of experts and specialist writers this publication caters to the frontierless international community of the Performing Arts and Artists.

This publication hopes to enrich the Indian theatre culture in concrete ways—for the present dramatic culture lacks a creative correlation between theory and praxis. Our connections and involvement in University Performing Arts, Drama and Literature Departments makes **Theatre International** favorably situated to bridge the grey areas between pedagogy and performance. On the other hand, theatre is ultimately performance. Hence papers and articles on the productional aspects will find valuable place in all issues of *TI*.

Moreover, the realization that the theatre cuts across both culture and history is evident in the works of our avant-garde theatre thinkers. The University Drama Departments have every access to and special avenues of communication with theatre movements throughout India and abroad. *TI* is committed to the task of making the necessary intercultural linkages and disseminating the available material to theatre enthusiasts and professionals here. Likewise, *TI* can help make the intelligentsia abroad aware of the Indian, Asian and African theatre scene. Hence *TI* can serve as a medium and forum for international cultural exchange.

Both our masthead and our readership include and span high-IQ decision makers in the performing arts spread across the five continents—University Faculty, members of Akademis and theater ensembles, performing artists and intellectuals, the cultural avantgarde of Europe, America and Asia. The contents of *TI* will thus range from *Kathakali* to

Kabuki, from the *Yakshagana* to the *Guerilla theatre*, from the *Peking Opera* to the performative processes of the *African folk traditions*, from Tagore to T. S. Eliot, Shakespeare to Stanislavsky, Kafka to Karnad, reflecting and embodying the creative thrust of the global theatre scene.

TI has published and will publish *Special Issues* in future on Brecht, Tagore, Folk theatre, Political theatre, Theatre and Film, Translation, Adaptation and, of course, on Shakespeare among other subject areas.

The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India, under whose aegis *TI* is being published, has helped spearhead the new resurgence of both academic and popular interest in Shakespeare that emerged from the mid-seventies throughout Bengal and India.

Editorial Note

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