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Eds.

Subir Dhar, Ronan Paterson, Bryan Reynolds, Papia Mitra

A Special Publication of
Tagore Gandhi Institute /
The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India



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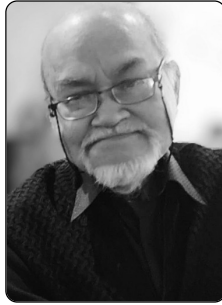
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In Memoriam

Shakespeare Society of Eastern India & Tagore-Gandhi Institute
mourns the passing away of



Amitava Roy
(1947–2024)

Professor Emeritus, Bankura University,
Former Shakespeare Professor & Head, Department of English,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Former Director, Shakespeare Centre for Advanced Research,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Executive President, Shakespeare Society of Eastern India,
Globally renowned Theatre Director and Actor.
You left thousands of students and admirers disconsolate
on 12th April, 2024
Farewell and Rest in Peace after your journey's end.

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From the Editor's Desk

This is the first volume of *International Journal of Cultural Studies* that is being published after the death of Professor Amitava Roy. In previous publications he always had a quick look before the journal went to print. But as this is no longer possible, this volume is coming out fearfully alone so to speak. As always the content remains multifaceted, drawing upon various disciplines from Shakespeare's stage to Manipuri ballads to criminal cases recorded by the British to women who lived through Partition. Of special significance is that many of the articles are from the North-Eastern region. This volume is also distinguished by the fact that we are concluding it with a short poem that focuses on what culture truly is. All in all this, is a rich feast which we invite all our readers to enjoy.

This volume commences with a paper by **Dr. Tapu Biswas** who focuses on the essential Shakespeare. He goes back to the basics of what an Elizabethan theatre was like both in its physical structure and the mentality of the audience. In order to fill the seats the plays needed to be entertaining and attention grabbing, not merely intellectual. The physical constraints of the stage also had to be kept in mind – as for example when the characters are conversing or exiting and entering. Dr. Biswas argues that Shakespeare created his dramas not out of a vacuum but by taking into consideration these material conditions. One must thank Dr. Biswas for reminding us of the simple basics that shaped Shakespeare's creativity.

Dr. Shinjini Basu analyses how the British during colonial rule used criminal cases to formulate a connected narrative about the natives and to create the legal structure to rule them. The records tell us that European criminals were differentiated from Indian ones, by being rarely convicted or punished for their crimes. It was taken for granted that white people could not be guilty. But the natives did not allow this to go unnoticed as Basu's analysis of a 1893 text documenting such discrepancy demonstrates. The article is rich in factual knowledge and is a good source for researchers.

Dr. Madhuchhanda Ray Choudhury studies the presence of toxic femininity in du Maurier's gothic story "The Apple Tree". The now dead

wife in the story presented herself as a perfect woman, always suffering as she tried to please her husband. The husband was trapped into accepting her psychological dominance. After her death her husband tries to chop down a withered apple tree that to him symbolises her; but the tree survives and goes on to bear hideous fruits and finally its roots trap the man till he dies. It is an interesting study of how women make use of the tools of patriarchal society to create a hell for men from where they cannot escape; Ray Choudhury suggests that ultimately such toxic femininity will destroy equally toxic patriarchy from where it sprung.

Monikinkini Basu focuses on another extreme of toxic masculinity. In India body building has become associated with masculinity so that gyms that promise hypermasculine six pack abs have become popular. Basu points out that such centres along with healthy diet offerings have come up in IT sectors showing how one industry can have economic impact on other industries. Before people who were fanatics about body building were usually influenced by film stars. But now people who frequent such places are more interested in having the perfect body. Yet this obsession is psychologically unhealthy.

Dr. Arnab Chatterjee critically reviews the prison narrative of Barindra Kumar Ghosh, an Indian revolutionary who fought against the British and was imprisoned. It describes his life in a colonial prison. The barbaric treatment meted out to the prisoners by the British is an indictment of their boast of being civilized. Chatterjee rightly points out that this book is an important document of the colonial era and should be read more extensively.

Genia Nuh speaks of how the fall of Twin Towers affected the lives of Muslims. According to her that incident led to the development of 'Neo-Orientalism' which projected the Muslims as the enemy 'Other'. In this context she takes up the text, *The Domestic Crusaders*, a play by Wajahat Ali. The play traces the mundane lives of three generations of Pakistani Americans. While the older generation cling on to their traditional lifestyle and values, the younger generation identifies themselves as Americans. They try to fit in with the culture of the whites but continue to be discriminated against. Nuh observes that the play brings out how the West tries to impose its own narrative upon the rest of the world to dominate other cultures.

Dr. Sujato Ghosh revisits Tony Morrison's *The Beloved*. The protagonist is a slave who had suffered so much that she chooses to kill her daughter to save the child from the same kind of suffering. It is emblematic of the trauma that generations of blacks had suffered at the

hands of their white masters. Ghosh emphasises that the text is not a simple linear narrative of evil whites and innocent blacks, but more about how the trauma of slavery kills the souls of the slaves as well.

Dr. Huidrom Suraj Singh discusses the megalithic culture in Manipur. Petroglyphs and wooden crafts have been discovered from monoliths of that period. They are important tools to understand the culture of the age. Suraj Singh gives us a fascinating glimpse of the various kinds of artifacts used by the Manipuri people and their historical and religious significance.

A joint paper by **Dr. Yoganarasimhachari and Dr. Vijayalakshmi** embodies a sociological study of the importance of Anganwadis who are social workers appointed by the government to over see the health of poor mothers and children especially in rural regions. The authors give a detailed representation of their work, the impact and the implementation of government polices. They conclude that without such workers the poor would be in even worse position and they give a few suggestions on how to improve both their own situation as well as that of their patients.

Dr. Prasanta Ghoshal demonstrates how digital space has changed the very notion of character and storytelling. In digital space, text is accompanied by visuals, often animated, and audio. This produces a psychological effect different from that of previous static flat print texts. Again in this age of AI, various AI assistants interact with the human user as if they are human companion themselves. Thus virtual space helps us in destressing. Ghoshal pays particular attention to a YouTube channel called 'Oddly Satisfying Videos' where the random patterns in the video manage to maintain a balance between instinctual chaos and required equilibrium.

Swarnendu Dam turns his attention on queer literature in Bengali. His topic is specially the fiction by Krishnagopal Mallick which had been neglected so far. However, he also focuses on the English translations of these books since the translation makes the fiction available to a broader class of audience. Mallick's credit lay in his successful transformation of everyday life in Kolkata into an erotic space for queer people without dragging in politics or notions of identity crisis. Dam points out that the act of translation however can be considered political as it aims to bring back a forgotten part of legacy in Bengal back to public consciousness.

Dr. Pangeijam Sanjeev speaks about the anguish and helplessness peculiar to poverty stricken people. He chooses N. Kunjamohon's "The Taste of Hilsa" to show that poor people cannot even rejoice in their accomplishment. The protagonist had caught a big hilsa fish and the family

would have delighted in such luxury. But he was forced to sell it so that they could have money for meals. Sanjeev analyses how the story brings out the fact that the myth of hard work leading to success is an illusion and instead of flavour of the fish the characters taste the flavour of failure.

Dr. Sharmila Thingbaijam conducts research on traditional avenues of education in Manipur society. Such education can be oral, sport-oriented, or festive. The elders teach through them societal mores, cultures and crafts of the ordinary people that is handed down from generation to generation. Thingbaijam points out that even today such informal education is imparted along with for illiteracy among the Meities and suggests that policy makers should understand their importance.

Lakhibai Yumnam speaks of the notion of home as she finds it in Zadie Smith's *NW* and *Swing Time*. The migrants are always in a quandary never finding a home for themselves as opposed to a house. Yumnam points out that in these fictive pieces the protagonists, though outwardly successful never truly leaves their multiracial neglected childhood neighbourhoods behind always yearning for rootedness.

Mitsuko Takahashi and **Dr. Sarika Srivastava** focus on the prosperity of Gujrati diaspora in Japan. They trace the past of the community in various places in Japan. The Gujrati community is expansion-oriented and thus they have come to Japan for business. They are prosperous and promote chain migration of their community members which lead to more wealth generation. Their children are given typically an international education to enable to have more career options. But as Takahashi & Srivastava concludes it is difficult to get interviews and thus more research is needed to buttress these conclusions.

Suropriyo Chakraborty analyzes the representation of identity, violence and human resilience as represented in Naga literature. Nagaland had been wrecked by bloody ethnic conflicts for a long time and the presence of the Indian army can be regarded as either allies or hostile forces to be eliminated. Numerous people have died in the conflict and families have disintegrated. The economic and social chaos is depicted brilliantly through the literature of the survivors of such extended violence.

Debdatta Mitra deconstructs the glamour of Marilyn Monroe as projected by Capitalism in the West. Hollywood had always been a patriarchal structure and women were merely seen as commodities. Monroe rose to fame based on selling her beauty. When she tried to break out of established female stereotypes the studios limited her choice and even her

suicide became fuel to further a narrative. Mitra observes that till the end she is controlled by the male gaze.

Mayuri Bhakat emphasizes the importance of folk masks in popular performances. The materials with which they are made, the non-verbal communication they convey all also speak of their regional roots and the culture they come from. But as Bhakat points out the digital era while making such folk art popular has also robbed them of their essence by following the capitalistic model.

Deepesh Chaturvedi engages with an ancient, yet ever new theme, — that of corruption in Indian administration. Right from the time of emergence of *janapadas*, India had seen corruption emerge as ancient literature can well testify. *Mahabharata*, *Manu*, *Kautilya et al* have dealt extensively with various types of corruption and suggested ways to deal with them. Chaturvedi concludes that ancient texts have provided sensible wherewithals to deal with these problems and how to promote ethical persons.

Chhoton Babu Molla critiques the marginalized voice of Dalit women in Bama's "Karukku". Such women are doubly marginalized — by their caste in broader society and by their gender within their own caste. The female protagonist being born a dalit is subjected to every kind of social and economic discrimination and is given no dignity. Again as a woman she is also oppressed. Such is the fate of Dalit women every where. Molla finds that Bama demands through literature the realisation of aspirations of Dalits.

Dr. N. Rebika Devi explores Manipuri ballads on local flora. Manipuri people long had ballad like songs to narrate events from the past and many of them focus on the significance of some of the flowers. Devi particularly emphasises the ballad singing of the local flower Kombirei. The story behind the flower is a mythical one focusing on gods and their entanglement with mortal lives. Devi points out that such ballads are not just entertainments but also transmit cultural values.

Yengkhom Sushma Devi takes up the theme of hybrid identity among the Diaspora. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *Before We visit the Goddess* speaks of the migrant experience, of second generations who are trapped in a no-man's land as regards their essential identity. It is only when the heroine connects with her Indian heritage she finds stability in her life.

Priyanka Sana and **Dr. Zothanchhingi Khiantge** analyses how the poetry of Whitman had influenced the songs of Lana Del Rey, a pop icon. They discuss the history of both in detail and show how Del Ray

acknowledges the impact Whitman had on her. She proclaims her American individuality and fantasises about a paradise when she can be open about her desires.

Langonjam Chingkheinganba Meitei discusses the importance of education in creating culture. India had always acknowledged the importance of education and today it is an even more crucial tool for intergenerational communication.

Dr. Kh Joshiya critically analyzes Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya's Novel, *So Many Hungers*. The novel traces the origin, development and impact of Bengal Famine. However, the hunger is not only physical; there is also hunger for freedom. The Gandhian ideal was deeply influential. Joshiya brings out how the two factors dominate the novel leading to the hope of a new struggle and new India.

Dr. Sundari Irengbam comments on the representation of women in *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa. The setting is that of Partition and the violence suffered by women in so many dimensions is emphasised. There are several female characters all of whose lives are dominated by men in their world. They are strong women yet all must shoulder the consequences of their relationships with men. Irengbam argues that the novel encourages readers to explore the nuances of female life in a crucial violent moment of history.

The last critical research paper in this volume by **Dr. Satya Prakash Prasad, Ms. Shafaque Zehra, Mr. Abhishek Jha** centrally examines Thi Bui's graphic novel, *The Best We Could Do*, through the lens of postcolonialism, with a focus on spatial negotiations – physical, cultural, and symbolic – within the refugee experience. Bui's adept negotiation of contested spaces and her challenge to prevailing narratives are critically analyzed within a postcolonial framework. The paper draws upon insights from theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Aijaz Ahmad to contextualise Bui's narrative strategies, highlighting the significance of spatial negotiations in reshaping perspectives and confronting assumptions.

Last of all we have a poem by **Subrata Bhowmick** that sums up the difference between what we call 'civilization' and 'culture'. Civilization promises progress but regards the world as a Capitalistic market while culture teaches empathy and virtue.

Happy Reading

Subir Dhar & Papia Mitra

The Essential Shakespeare: Bard and the Canon, Publication, Stage and Audience

Tapu Biswas

Abstract

The name of William Shakespeare needs no introduction. Even at a time when syllabi are being extensively revised and reformulated reducing the old pattern of reading a number of his plays to only one or two, he has hardly been shown the door. Often, a prescribed representative tragedy or comedy proved to be so interesting that students fell in love with the bard and his age. This may have been due to the intrinsic artistic quality of the text concerned or due to the mushrooming of the Shakespeare industry which was concomitant with the rise of the British empire. This paper focuses on contextualising the bard in his age with close reference to the structure of the Renaissance stage and the past stage conventions with an eye to a noticing of how these shaped the dramatic texts. It also includes reference to the contemporary audience who would enjoy scenes of violence and supernaturalism on the stage.

Keywords: Shakespeare, stage, audience, Globe Theatre.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was the eldest son of John Shakespeare, a ‘glover’ or glove maker who accumulated some wealth and rose to local prominence in Stratford. The son focused on both money and social standing. On the gateway to his house and property bought with the profits of his theatre business, the name ‘William Shakespeare’ is followed by the word ‘Gent’ i.e. ‘Gentleman’ or landowner, equivalent to the epithet ‘Babu’ in Bangla and Hindi. In our own tradition thus, ‘Babu’ Shakespeare may have meant something akin to a zamindar.

Mary Arden, Shakespeare’s mother, was the daughter of a substantially

wealthy landowner too. The Arden Editions of Shakespeare's plays derive this series name possibly from Shakespeare's mother. She may have been in Shakespeare's mind when he called the forest in *As You Like It* "The Forest of Arden" where most of the characters from the Court go to and at the play's end return from.

In November 1582 a marriage license was issued to Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway a woman eight years his senior. In May 1583 only six months later the couple had their first child. In 1585 they had twins, Judith and Hamnet.

There are in existence more than sixty documents and half-a-dozen signatures which relate to the name of William Shakespeare. But there is no documents in existence yet which tell us which school he attended or what he did during the undocumented six years of his life when he left Stratford and ended up in London.

There is no record of Shakespeare attending the local Stratford Grammar School, which had a good reputation for teaching Latin language and literature. Possibly he did not attend the Grammar school either. If we go by the jibe flung at him by Ben Jonson his rival, colleague and later a friend, perhaps Shakespeare had "small Latin and less Greek". We may find it incredible that even without going through school, college or university, Shakespeare could write 37 (thirty seven) plays which display a vast amount of knowledge and learning - legal, ornithological, political and many more other disciplines ranging from the Arts to the Sciences. However, we should remember that our very own Rabindranath Tagore also had no formal schooling or higher education, but together with Shakespeare towers over everyone else as the two greatest poets and creative writers the world has ever seen. Not being 'University Wits' or men with formal degrees never bothered them. The ways of genius can never be explained or measured by ordinary, normal human calculations.

Lacking documentation, there are many conjectures and legends about why Shakespeare left Stratford and what he did before going to London. One such legend has it that Shakespeare was forced to leave Stratford to escape conviction because he had 'poached' or hunted deer in the reserved private forest area owned by a local Chief Justice. Another legend tells us that he worked for a few years as a school teacher which experience helped him to paint so many pedagogues in his plays. No one knows how he entered the theatre in London as playwright, actor and theatre expert,

or how he entered the highly profitable but uncertain theatre-industry of his time as a business partner of a man named Henslowe.

Some Indian writers have jocularly suggested that in the so-called 'lost' years of his life, the Bard visited our own Indian shores settling down in the Eastern parts of the subcontinent and assuming the name of *Sheikh-pir* ('pir' meaning a Muslim saint or seer), and then visiting southern India where he became *Sheshappa Ayer*. In this fanciful vein, the Dark Lady of the sonnets may be equated with Kali, a Goddess who dances on her husband's chest as does the dark lady symbolically on Shakespeare's body.

It is however true that there are many references in Shakespeare's plays to India (especially in *A Mid Summer's Night's Dream*). Professor Kalyan Ray of Morris College, USA, has woven a rich pioneering novel out of Shakespeare's conjectural travels in India and fittingly named it *Eastwards* (2004).

In 1592 appears the first reference to Shakespeare as actor and playwright. An envious, spiteful rival playwright and pamphleteer, the University Wit Robert Greene warned the other University Wits about a new Pretender who has just emerged:

...there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *johannes factotum* is in his own conceit, the only Shake-scene in a country¹.

The term 'upstart crow' is a learned allusion to Aesop's crow who in the fable strutted about in borrowed plumage or feathers not of his own, just as an actor struts on stage mouthing fine words that are not his own. By calling Shakespeare a 'crow', Greene also perhaps hinted that Shakespeare had borrowed lines and phrases from the University Wits in order to adorn his plays. But such borrowing was a common practice in the Elizabethan times. But Greene also alludes to a line from Shakespeare's play *Henry VI*: "Oh, tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide" (1.4.138), which he parodies by replacing the words 'woman hide' by 'player's hide'.

Greene's comment is important too because it indicates that by 1592 Shakespeare had both acted and written as a dramatist.

A list of Shakespeare's thirty seven (37) plays and the poems which he wrote between 1588 and 1612-13 is appended here.

Plays

1. *The Comedy of Errors* (1588–1593)
2. *Love's Labour's Lost* (1588–1594)
3. *Henry VI Part II* (1590–1591)
4. *Henry VI Part III* (1590–1591)
5. *Henry VI Part I* (1591–1592)
6. *Richard III* (1592–1593)
7. *Titus Andronicus* (1592–1594)
8. *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593–1594)
9. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1594–1595)
10. *Romeo and Juliet* (1594–1596)
11. *Richard II* (1595)
12. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594–1596)
13. *King John* (1596–1597)
14. *The Merchant of Venice* (1596–1597)
15. *Henry IV Part I* (1597)
16. *Henry IV Part II* (1597–1598)
17. *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598–1600)
18. *Henry V* (1598–1599)
19. *Julius Caesar* (1599)
20. *As You Like It* (1599–1600)
21. *Twelfth Night* (1599–1600)
22. *Hamlet* (1600–1601)
23. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597- 1601)
24. *Troilus and Cressida* (1601–1602)
25. *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602–1604)
26. *Othello* (1603–1604)
27. *Measure for Measure* (1604)
28. *King Lear* (1605–1606)

29. *Macbeth* (1605–1606)
30. *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606–1607)
31. *Timon of Athens* (1605–1608)
32. *Coriolanus* (1607–1609)
33. *Pericles* (1608–1609)
34. *Cymbeline* (1609–1610)
35. *The Winter's Tale* (1610–1611)
36. *The Tempest* (1611)
37. *Henry VIII* (1612–1613)

Poems:

1. *Venus and Adonis* (1592)
2. *The Rape of Lucrece* (1593 -1594)
3. *Sonnets* (1593-1600)
4. *The Phoenix and the Turtle* (1600-1601)

The above list represents the generally accepted canon of Shakespeare's plays, a 'canon' being those texts acknowledged or proved to be solely written by Shakespeare established through internal and external analysis, as well as by the existence of the "foul papers" or the playwright's rough drafts, actor's copies and printer's proofs, the publication of the First Folio edition of the plays in 1623 and the existence of Quarto texts during Shakespeare's life time. (A 'Folio' is a printer's measure which is the size of a foolscap sheet of paper folded once. A Quarto is that sheet folded twice). Eighteen Quartos were in existence during Shakespeare's lifetime in possession of his theatre company which was owned by Philip Henslowe. Incidentally, a good Quarto is one that has support of Henslowe's records, and a Bad Quarto is one that is a pirated version or a stolen version of a play-text not having any acknowledgement to the author or his theatre group. For example *Hamlet* has both a Bad and Good Quartos in existence. In 1623, seven years after Shakespeare death, Heminge and Condell his co-actors and members of his theatre group known as the Kinsmen, published a collection of thirty seven plays written by Shakespeare known as the First Folio of 1623. Why they did this was explained by them in their own words:

We have but collected them, and done an office to the dead,
to procure his Orphanes, Guardians; without ambition either of

selfe-profit, or fame: onely to keep the memory of so worthy a Friend & Fellow alive, as was our S H A K E S P E A R E, by humble offer of his playes, to your most noble patronage. Wherein, as we justly observed, no man to come neere your L.L. but with a kind of religious addresse; it hath bin the height of our care, who are the Presenters, to make the present worthy of your H.H. by the perfection.²

Heminge and Condell thus justified their publication of Shakespeare's plays just over half a dozen years after his death by saying that they had done so for the world to have Shakespeare's plays as he wrote and conceived them. It was his friends' and colleagues' assertion therefore that all that is contained in the First Folio is authentic Shakespeare.

The First Folio was equally a homage to Shakespeare's memory by his colleagues but it was also a commercial venture in whose introduction Heminge and Condell urged the readers to "Buy it First". One of the most recent books on the First Folio is Chris Laoutaris's *Shakespeare's Book: The Intertwined Lives Behind the First Folio*. Containing only thirty six of Shakespeare's thirty seven ascribed plays, the First Folio offered printed texts of eighteen plays for which no earlier print or manuscript version survive. Prior to its publication, only nineteen plays attributed to Shakespeare had been printed in a 'quarto' format. The First Folio omits *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre* as it was thought to be co-written with George Wilkins. It also omits Shakespeare's poems and sonnets together with some other alleged collaborative efforts by Shakespeare like *Edward III* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *The Book of Sir Thomas More* from which three pages supposedly in Shakespeare's hand exists. The First Folio also contains Ben Jonson's famous encomium : "He was not of an age; but for all time"³ and an engraved portrait of the Bard by Martin Droeshout. Heminge and Condell printed 750+ copies of the First Folio of which 235 are extant, 82 of which are in the Folger Shakespeare Library. Chris Laoutaris's book "concentrates on roughly four years, from 1619 to 1623, [and] he unravels the historical events, the persons and lives, that contributed to the making of an iconic text" (Supriya Chaudhuri, reviewing Chris Laoutaris's book in *the Telegraph* of 18.08.2023 –Calcutta edition). Laoutaris's book also brings together most of the names associated with the manufacture and making of Heminge and Condell 's First Folio: Richard Burbage, Edward Blount, William and Isaac Jaggard, Leonard Digges, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, King James I *et al.*

The Elizabethan/ Jacobean Stage and Audience

Both Queen Elizabeth (d.1603) and King James I loved the theatre and frequently ordered command performances of plays by Shakespeare and others to be performed in the Court for visiting royalty, ambassadors from various countries and other contemporary VIPs of that sort. The Puritan reaction against plays, players and playhouses made theatre work an uncertain though profitable business, but it also stigmatized actors as ‘vagabonds’ and ‘immoral devils.’ It necessitated the patronage of the queen, king or great lords for the actors to survive and do their work. The theatre companies therefore had to seek protection by claiming that they were the Queen’s men, or the King’s men or the Lord Chamberlain’s men.

The Puritan reaction forced the theatre groups out of performing within the legal municipal area of London and to cross the Thames and to operate from the left bank of the river where various theatre houses like the Globe or the more sophisticated Blackfriars were set up. On one side of Shakespeare’s Globe theatre were houses of ill repute, of prostitution called “nunneries” in Elizabethan street language. We may remember that when Hamlet attacks and abuses Ophelia in Act III, Sc I, he tells her repeatedly “Get thee to a nunnery, go”. On the other side of the Globe was the Bear Garden, a stadium meant for gamblers fond of bloody spectacle and carnage who placed bets on the outcome of bloody battles between a bear tied to a pole and several hounds which attacked the bear.

We can also remember in this context the direct reference to this in *Macbeth*. “They have tied me to a stake,/ I cannot fly./ But bear –like, I must fight the course.” (*Macbeth*, Act V Sc VII). From this it should be clear that while the plays of Shakespeare and University Wits like Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson may have offered intellectual enjoyment to some percentage of an elite audience, to keep houseful audiences regularly the performances they had to be at least as exciting as what the ‘nunneries’ and the Bear Garden offered.

The physical structure, the various parts and sections of the play houses of Shakespeare’s time and their general appearance can be glimpsed from several sketches and drawings like the one that is popularly known as the De Witt drawing not of Shakespeare’s Globe but of the Swan theatre, a representative theatre of the time.



De Witt's drawing

When Shakespeare arrived in London, soon after 1585, theatrical exhibitions were given in (i) public theatres, (ii) private theatres, (iii) the halls of royal palaces, and the Inns of Court. Of the public theatres the most important then were 'The Curtain' and 'The Rose'. In 1599 Shakespeare's Company acquired the Globe on the Bankside and later the Blackfriars theatre. Shakespeare's company also regularly played at the Queen's and the King's court, but his plays were mainly written for the public theatre for which he organized his stage craft.

The public theatre differed from the other two types chiefly in being 1) dependent on daylight; 2) open overhead; 3) partially seatless; and 4) not using painted scenes. The typical public theatre was also a round or octagonal structure. The circular inner area had no seats and was called the 'pit'. The throng of spectators who stood here and watched the performance of a play were known as the "groundings". The admission cost was one penny.

More expensive seats costing up to 2 shillings 6 pence were available on the tier of galleries built on three sides of the stage.

The stage (the entire scenic apparatus of the theatre, included 1) the out-stage which was a rectangular platform around 42 feet wide projecting into circular area, from the back wall. This was also called the thrust or the apron stage, and it was surrounded by the standing groundlings on three sides. Above the stage was a thatched roof but there were no side or front curtains. In the stage floor there was a trap door through which supernatural beings (like Hamlet's father's ghost or the witches in *Macbeth*) ascended or descended. At the back were two projecting wings, each with a door opening out of the stage. The recess between them, of uncertain shape and extent, formed a kind of inner stage. Above this was an upper rooms which included the actors' Tiring House with a window or windows opening out into a balcony or gallery from which a curtain was hung, by means of which the inner recess could be concealed or disclosed. In the modern proscenium theatre of our time, the stage is treated as a picture framed by the proscenium arch, seen by the audience like any other picture from the front only and shut off from view at any desired moment by letting the curtain drop. But on the Elizabethan stage in which there were no front curtain, a scene (or act) could terminate only in one of two ways. Either the persons concerned in it walked off or were carried off the stage or a change of place and circumstances was indicated or supposed without their leaving it. Both these methods were used. The first was necessary only at the close of the play.

For this reason an Elizabethan play rarely ends on a climax such as the close of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, the overpowering effect of which would be gravely diminished if, instead of the curtain falling upon Oswald Alving's helpless cry for "the sun", he and his mother had to walk out of the stage. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* ends with a real climax, because the catastrophe *ipso facto* leaves the stage clear. But the close of even the most overwhelming final scenes of Shakespeare is relatively quiet, or even, as in *Macbeth*, a little tame. The concluding lines also often provide a motive for the (compulsory) clearing of the stage.

In the Tragedies, the dead body of the hero has usually to be borne ceremoniously away as in *Hamlet* and *Lear*. In *Othello*, Desdemona's bed was apparently in the curtained recess, and at the close the curtains were drawn upon the two bodies, instead of their being borne away as usual.

The close of the History Plays often resemble the dispersing of an informal council after a declaration of policy by the principal person as in *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *King John*.

In the Comedies, the leading persons often withdraw to explain to one another at leisure what the audience already knows (*Winter Tale*, *Tempest*, *The Merchant of Venice*) or to carry out the wedding rites (*As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*); or they strike up a musical measure and thus (as in *Much Ado About Nothing*) naturally dance off the stage. Sometimes the chief persons withdraw before the close, leaving some minor character – Puck, (*A Mid Summer's Night Dream*, or Feste the clown (*Twelfth Night*) – to wind up the whole with a snatch of song, and then retire himself.

But the most important result of the exposed stage was that it placed strict limits upon dramatic illusion, and it thus compelled the resorting, for most purposes, to conventions resting on symbolism, suggestion, or make-believe. It was only in costumes or dress that anything like simulation could be attempted – and here the Elizabethan theatre companies were lavish to the extreme.

Painted scenes, even had they been available, would have been useless when perhaps a third of the audience would see, behind the actors not the scenes but the people in the opposite gallery or the gallants seated on the stage. Especially where complicated and crowded actions were introduced, the most beggarly symbolic suggestion was cheerfully accepted. Jonson, in the spirit of classical realism scoffed at “three rusty swords” whose clashing had to do duty for “long jars of York and Lancaster”. Shakespeare, while representing the battlefield of Agincourt upon the stage of the newly-built Globe in 1599, himself apologized and expressly appealed to the audiences’ imagination - “Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.” (*Henry V*, Act 1, Prologue).

The Elizabethan popular audience had no experience of elaborate realism on the stage and were used to an ideal treatment of space and a symbolic treatment of properties from the earliest theatrical exhibitions. Though things were beginning to change, every audience accepted as a matter of course the representation of distant things or places simultaneously on the stage, Sidney in 1580 had ridiculed the Romantic plays of his time for showing “Asia on one side and Africa on the other”, and indicated by labels. But Shakespeare in 1593 could still represent the tents of Richard

III and Richmond within a few yards of one another, and depict the Ghosts speaking alternately to each. The audience accepted the presence on the stage, in full view, of accessories not relevant to the scene in the course of performance. A stage property requisite for one set of scenes, but out of place in another, could be simply ignored while the latter were in progress: just as modern audiences see, but never pay attention to the scenery, the footlights, and the prompter's box: As G.C Hoare Smith mentions in the Warwick edition of *Henry V*, "Properties either difficult to move, like beds, or so small as to be unobtrusive, were habitually left on the stage ... whatever scenes intervened."⁴ In Jonson's play *The Case is Altered*, a heap of dung (used to hide and cover gold) remains on the stage during the intervening scenes in rooms, palaces and shops. Similarly, in George Peele's *David and Bethsabe* the spring in which Bethsabe bathes, and in his *The Old wives' Tale* "Cross", all of which belong to unconnected parts of the action were left on the stage.

It follows from this that the supposed locality of a scene could be changed without any change in the properties visible on the stage, or even of the persons. Some properties which previously had no dramatic relevance would suddenly acquire it, and vice versa. A tree, for instance, hitherto only a stage property out of use, became a tree and signified, probably, a wood. A change of scene could also take place without any break in the dialogue eg. in *Romeo and Juliet* (1.4.5) Romeo and his friends are at first in the street and later in the same scene in 1.4.114 the Folio tells us that they are in Canpulets' hall, and Capulet presently enters to meet his guests.

The Inner Stage:

An audience for which the limitations of the actual stage meant so little, might be expected to dispense readily with the concessions to realism implied in providing an actual inner chamber for scenes performed within and an actual gallery for those performed aloft.

It is probable that the use of the 'inner stage' was in general restricted to two classes of scene: first, where persons within formed an integral though subordinate part of a scene of which the main issue was decided on the outer stage. Example of these are the play-scene in *Hamlet* and the one in *The Tempest* where Prospero and Miranda are discovered playing chess, and second, a scene which though engaging the whole interest, is supposed to occur in an inner chamber – Desdemona's chamber, Prospero's cell, Timon's cave, Lear's hovel, the Capulets' tomb.

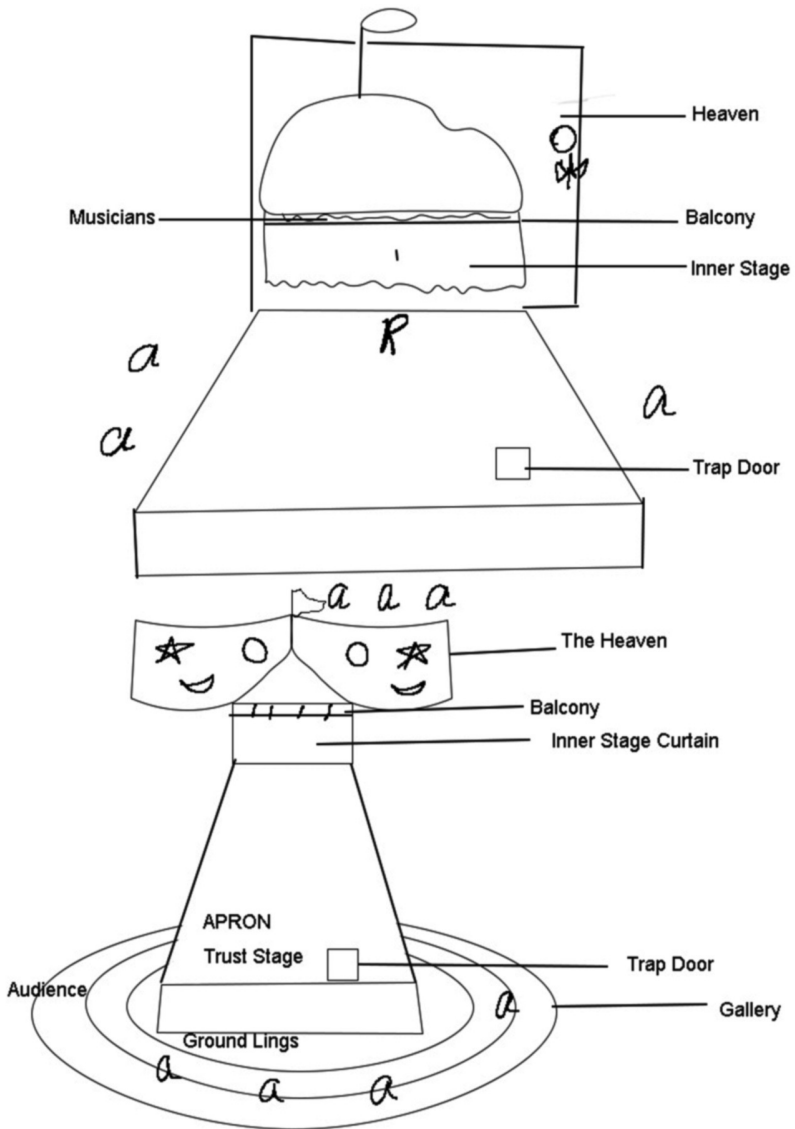
The Balcony:

The balcony was an extremely favourite resource of the contemporary playwrights, and its existence in part explains the abundance of serenades, rope-ladders and other upper-story scenes in Elizabethan drama.

From the balcony, Juliet discoursed with Romeo, and Sylvia with Proteus (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*), Richard III addresses the London citizens from the window above the Balcony, the Pedant of *Taming of the Shrew* hails Petruchio and Grumio below and Squire Tub in Jonson's *Tale of the Tub* puts out his head.

Most of these details about Shakespeare's stage are available in two excellent books: E.K Chamber's *The Elizabethan Stage* (in 4 volumes) published in 1924 and Leslie Hotson's *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (1929). Some idea can be had also from on the spot reports on Elizabethan plays. From the satire on watchmen and playhouses in Dekker's *The Gull's Horn-book* (1609). we learn of the atrocious behaviour of the rich gallants of the time who sometimes sat on the stage itself and pulled at the costumes of the actors to test the quality of the cloth used. We also learn that Ben Jonson called the "groundlings" the "understands". The Globe theatre could hold a full house audience of 3500 - 4500 approximately. These were filled mostly by people who came from the shires, the provinces and the districts and the outskirts of London to spend a full day on pleasure and entertainment, and the acquirement of information and education which the theatre of the time offered potentially. This should be easy for us Indians to understand. We regularly see large groups of people who come to the metropolis from outside the city limits. Such visitors in great groups who visit Kolkata have a special routine for this trip. They go to Alipur Zoo, the Indian Museum, the malls and markets, as also the theatre houses of north, central and southern Kolkata for much of the same reason as their Elizabethan counterparts five hundred years ago.

We have already presented De Witt's sketch of the Swan theatre. Now we present a simplified sketch of the Elizabethan theatres pointing out most of the details of the structure.



Simple sketch of Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage

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Footnotes

1. From Robert Greene's *Greenes Groats-worth of Witte* (1592). <https://artsci.wustl.edu/ampersand/upstart-crow-shakespeares-feud-robert-greene>, 17th June 2024.
2. 27 July 2024, *Shakespeare Online*, <https://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/firstfolio.html>.
3. Jonson, Ben. "To the Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare". 16 June 2024, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44466/>.
4. 16 June 2024, https://www.bardstage.org/globe-theatre-props.htm#google_vignette.

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