

Book Reviews

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Ibsen in the Decolonised South Asian Theatre. Edited by Sabiha Huq and Srideep Mukherjee. London and New York: Routledge, 2024. Pp. xvi + 244. £130.00 Hb.

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Post-colony is a political space that emerges out of a complex response to the erstwhile colony and the memory of a tradition that is perhaps merged forever with the historically imposed socio-economic order. While emancipation is the perceived status of the post-colony, in terms of sociocultural as well as religio-moral fields, the post-colony faces many challenges as far as construction of identity is concerned, and the biggest one lies in metamorphosing into a cohesive state of nationhood following a standard pattern of governance such as democracy. The anticipated infrastructural issues combine with anticipated, especially in the subcontinent, clashes of identity. Perhaps the questions of gender, commercialized forms of religion and familial unit identities take the most time to settle. Irrespective of the purer strands that preceded the colony, the postcolonial culture has to *find* itself looking at multiple origins. And, more often than not, the negotiations with hybridity remain brooding over the one being formed.

The influence of the European colonial powers over matters theatrical has been examined at length. But the contact between early modern reformist tendencies of the West and the reformist necessities developing in newly formed nations via theatre is a specific zone that has demanded targeted analysis. This book aims to do so while focusing on the theatre of Henrik Ibsen, which has been celebrated for addressing issues relevant to the contemporary time and space, including the Indian subcontinent, with varying degrees of religious and regimented regional tendencies that mostly followed the Western democratic patterns of governance in their formulae of nation building. However, the models adopted from the constitutions of countries like the United States of America exposed fissures and factors that needed interrogating. Ibsen's theatre presented a perfect frame that could be adapted and re-presented to a world which echoed the contemporary dilemmas.

Ibsen presented a dramatic space that resonated with issues ranging from gender to religious anachronism. Perhaps his plays allowed a better scope for camouflaging the criticism that may have been unwelcome in the euphoria of the new nationals. Such a strategy of camouflaging issues has its own specific dynamic and created the 'new theatre aesthetics' (p. 7) which, Huq and Mukherjee mention, were strangely overlooked by Western commentators.

Ibsen in the Decolonised South Asian Theatre, a volume aimed at advanced students of theatre, literature and culture, looks at this contact between the West and the East through

multiple perspectives. The book considers the social and political relevance of adaptations of Ibsen's plays in South Asia while focusing on aesthetic concerns, not overlooking folk appropriation, the idea(s) of tradition, postcolonial spatiality and the metanarrative constructs. From activism to syncretism, many arenas come under scrutiny. Along with historical developments are presented adaptations, translations, reinventions and performance analyses of plays such as *An Enemy of the People*, *Ghosts*, *Peer Gynt*, *Brand*, *The Pillars of Society* and *A Doll's House*, from both theoretical and theatrical perspectives. For instance, Astri Ghosh, in her '*Peer Ghani and Peechha Karti Parchhaiyan*' approaches *Peer Gynt* from a translator's point of view, looking at the history of Ibsen in India, and discusses what she calls the 'subjective process' (p. 223) of translation. As translation is often used to incorporate current political concerns, this article touches upon another kind of contact, 'an organised rebellion against the conventional style of acting of the time' (p. 222), that is exceedingly relevant in the history of Indian theatre. Tapati Gupta, while speaking of adaptations in her '*Unheard Voices and Refracted Essence: Bangla Adaptations of An Enemy of the People and The Pillars of Society*', focuses on majoritarian tendencies of larger democracies and the possibility of truth.

If one has to desperately find fault with the book then one may mention that it focuses more on *A Doll's House* than on any other single play. The justification for this is quite obvious; the fact that there is an overwhelming need to go back to *A Doll's House* speaks volumes about the state not only of South East Asia, but of the world. The currency of Ibsen's plays as templates, and as parallel locations, in itself is a point of contention. What is interesting is how the postcolonial constructions of identity, developing in the so-called developing countries, negotiating with their own cultural and historical traditions, allow Ibsen to blend in seamlessly. This is where the volume finds its greatest success, in dealing with Ibsen, but going beyond to paint an unflinching portrait of the current scenario via interrogation of the aesthetics of adaptation.

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Actor-Network Dramaturgies: The Argentines of Paris. By Stefano Boselli.

New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2023. Pp. 289. £109.99 Hb; £109.99 Pb; £87.50 Ebook.

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Argentine critic Daniel Link famously noted that the Argentines who migrated to Paris in the 1960s were fortunate not to find there what they sought (avant-garde, countercultural communities, parties) but a perfect setting to become unrecognizable to themselves – independently of the great public recognition many of them garnered. Rather than emulate the paths of previous Argentine Francophiles, they forged new identities, breaking free from rigid labels and classifications. Those same lines of flight, through the Parisian heterotopias, might have led them into a complex web of alliances, extending even beyond the human realm.

As its title anticipates, Boselli's book leverages ANT (actor-network theory) to navigate the rhizomatic network of Argentine theatre luminaries in the City of Light from the 1960s to the 1990s. Through meticulous research spanning France and Argentina, Boselli unveils the intricate associations among playwrights, directors and performers, encompassing a diverse array of agents – from designers to large cultural phenomena, as well as illnesses, wine and neighbourhoods. Chapters explore Jerome Savary and his Grand Magic Circus, Alfredo Arias and his group TSE, and the receptiveness of the Parisian cultural milieu to Argentine creators. Copi (*nom de plume* of writer, actor and cartoonist Raúl Damonte Botana) functions as a key