

## Drama

# An encounter with Shakespeare

A presentation of extracts from the Bard's plays by students of the Darul Ihsan University

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**A** common conception is that anything to do with Shakespeare is something that goes above the head of those not familiar with the writer's works. When presented and explained by the right set of people, however, Shakespeare's works are simply a delight. Last week, the students of the Department of English Language and Literature of Darul Ihsan University celebrated Shakespeare's birthday with the presentation of such a programme.

The programme titled "Shakespeare: Presentation and Discussion" consisted of recitations and dramatisations of six extracts from the Bard's plays. The quality of the show that the students of the department presented, under the direction of two of their lecturers, was of a high calibre.

The programme began with a recitation from the holy Quran followed by an introduction from one of the two lecturers responsible for directing and organising the event, Ms Habib, who briefly introduced the programme, commented that, though all the students present were familiar with the works of Shakespeare they most probably have not seen his works performed on a stage, where they belong. She said, "The purpose of the presentation

was to give all of them a glimpse of how his plays might be performed."

A student next came and briefly gave the background information regarding the first extract from *The Merchant of Venice*. The billowing cream curtains parted and there stood Shylock and Salarino. The two Third Year students may have been wrapped up in shawls in a slightly Roman way, but the small black Jewish cap helped Shylock to look his part.

This was followed by an announcement for a recitation from *Hamlet*. The announcer mentioned that Hamlet was a university student "like us", making the audience laugh. The serious issues regarding "Hamlet," the theme of revenge and Hamlet's persistent desire to die was explained before the actual performance. Naturally, the passage chosen was the famous "To be or not to be" speech. The choice of reader, however, seemed unusual. A female Hamlet in a black velvet evening gown with a black head scarf was a bit of a surprise. She delivered the passage with great solemnity and grace and mesmerised the audience. Later on, one of the directing lecturers told us that in theatre history, "Hamlet" has been played quite a number of times by famous actresses, such as Sarah

Bernhardt in the 1900s. And in any case, in Shakespeare's times men were always playing women's roles.

Next we were told about the tragedy of *Macbeth*, about the famous characters of the play and their lust for power. The scene chosen was where Lady Macbeth goaded Macbeth into committing the murder that he had earlier sworn to commit. When the curtains parted, Macbeth was already onstage and Lady Macbeth entered with a candle in one hand and her speech in another. The entrance was dramatic and her performance quite gripping.

The morose Macbeth, played by a fresher, was in black. The second year student playing Lady Macbeth, clothed from top to toe in blood red, was a very convincing Lady Macbeth. She thunderously delivered the dialogue about killing a baby and seemed to scare the entire audience. And then again, after talking of the assassination plan to kill Duncan, she whispers "What cannot you and I perform upon the unguarded Duncan". In the last part of this, after they both finished their dialogues, Lady Macbeth blew out the candle and the two of them stood still in the darkness. When Lady Macbeth turned and made her red cloak swish around her as they both walked off the stage. That was one scary lady.

This was followed by a scene from the comedy *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The announcement mentioned that the scene might help the men in the audience who needed help with their love life, making everyone all the more eager to watch what was being presented. The Roman shawls reappeared; the student who earlier appeared as Salarino was now Vincentio, while another Third Year student played the Duke's role. This short scene was mostly advice on how to woo a woman: to give her jewels if she doesn't appreciate words of love, to keep on complimenting her no matter how ugly she is, and to never give up no matter how many times she asks you to leave her alone because she doesn't really mean what she says. There were some crucial dialogues here, especially

where Vincentio said that that "Man is no man, if with his tongue, he cannot win a woman".

What followed was the dramatisation of a rather large extract from the historical play *Richard III*. The background information that we were given was rather gruesome - that the disfigured Richard killed everybody in his way to the crown, including his brothers and his nephews. The chosen scene took place a few months after he had killed the prince of the ruling family and had only recently killed the king too. The curtains parted and Lady Anne was seen mourning in front of her father-in-law's corpse. The deformed Richard, in all black, swaggered onto the stage and Lady Anne immediately launched into curses and oaths. Her anger was portrayed perfectly and Richard, played by a third year student, made Richard both evil and attractive at the same time. He blamed her for the deaths of her husband and her father-in-law, he innocently pleaded that it was his desire for her that made him kill those two ("He that bereft thee, lady, of thy husband, did it to help thee to a better husband"). She spat on him. He even went down on his knees, opened his shirt and offered her his sword so that she could kill him, but of course she didn't ("Take up the sword again, or take up me").

He used his words so craftily that her hatred began to dissolve and she even agreed to take his ring ("To take is not to give"). They had a row of one-liners till she was convinced that he loved her. She left him to take care of the corpse and we heard Richard tell us that this was just a part of his plans and that he will later get rid of her. He is justifiably self-satisfied since, as he said, even with his disfigurement he has won her in her heart's extremist hate. The audience loved the way his character's wicked side was further revealed when he was by himself on the stage. Both these students tapped into their dramatic potential and gave the scene great emotional pith.

The last act of the presentation

was an adaptation. The extract, taken from the historical play *Henry V*, included some dialogues that were in French. In this version the dialogues were translated into Bengali so that King Henry was shown as wooing a Bangladeshi princess, instead of a French one. The very entrance of Henry, at the beginning of the scene, was met with roars of appreciation; he appeared in royal costume, including a crown. He tried to convince the princess that he loved her. When Kate, played by a fresher, replied in Bengali that she didn't understand

what he said, the students truly identified with her. Who doesn't feel like that when they first faced Shakespearean English? Henry, played by a Second Year student, philosophised that she would be happier marrying a plain soldier like him rather than a man clever at words. Everytime Henry mentioned Bangladesh or tried to speak in Bengali or when Kate spoke in Bengali the audience burst into laughter. In typical Bangladeshi fashion, Kate was coy and said that she would marry Henry only if her father gave the consent. Henry pronounced that he will consent to it and crowns her as his queen. The performance was a theatrical delight and an apt end to the proceedings.

The entire presentation had

been prepared by the students in just about two weeks time, with the help of their two lecturers, Hasina Habib and Shaila Sultana. Considering the time factor involved and also that the students here have little access to regularly watch Shakespeare's works, unlike in an English College, they had done a commendable job.

The last part of the show was a

discussion on Shakespeare's



Richard III and Lady Anne

works. The Chairman of the Department, Dr. Sadruddin Ahmed, expressed his appreciation of the presentation and thanked all the participants. The Q & A session began with questions about the identity of certain recurring figures in Shakespeare's sonnets, which lead to the question of the identity of Shakespeare himself. There were other questions, such as the evaluation of Shakespeare by his peers and other writers. This lead Professor A Hossain to read out two poems on Shakespeare, an Urdu poem, written by Iqbal, and then a Bengali poem by Rabindra-nath. He observed that it is worth noting that Rabindranath calls Shakespeare "Bishwokobi" in this poem, whereas now that title is used to describe Rabindranath himself. The discussion, like the presentation, lasted around forty-five minutes.

Judging from the discussion of the audience who were talking about the different characters presented at the show as they left the hall, the programme was a sure success.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Art Show

A solo painting exhibition on Liberation War titled 'Days of 71' by Abu Selim is being held at the Drik Gallery, House # 58, Road # 15/A, Dhammudi R/A. The exhibition will run till May 16.

### Contemporary Indian Bengali Films

Arganta Film Society in association with the High Commission of India has arranged a 8 daylong film session on 'Contemporary Indian Bengali Films' in connection with the celebration of Arganta Film Society's 25th anniversary being held at the Indian High Commission Auditorium.

Screening schedule: Paroma on May 15 at 6:30 p.m. and Uttar on May 16 at 6:30 p.m.

### Comics

A comics exhibition titled *La bande dessinée contemporaine en France* (Contemporary comic strip in France) is being held at the La Galerie de l'Alliance Française de Dhaka. A series of 24 posters with extracts of contemporary comics as well as stamps of the French post using characters of the strip cartoon will be displayed at the exhibition. The exhibition will be open to the public till May 27.

### Satyajit Ray Retrospective

Satyajit Ray Retrospective organised by Zahir Raihan Film Society is now being held at the auditorium of the High Commission of India at Road No. 2, Dhammudi. Screening schedule: Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne(The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha) and Hirak Rajar Deshe (The Kingdom of Diamonds) on May 18 at 3:00 & 6:00 p.m. respectively. Sonar Kella( The Golden Fortress) and Joi Baba Felunath(The Elephant God) on May 19 at 3:00 & 6:00 p.m. respectively. Shatranj Ke Khilari(The Chess Players) and Ganashatru( An Enemy of the People) on May 25 at 3:00 & 6:00 p.m. respectively. Shakha Prashakha(The Branches of the Tree) and Agantuk( The Stranger) on May 26 at 3:00 & 6:00 p.m. respectively.



Lady Macbeth presenting her inciting speech



King Henry persuading Kate to love and marry him

## BTW

3:00 Opening Announcement

3:20 Open University

3:45 Shukhi Poribar

4:00 Khabar

4:05 Pushitithaya

4:20 Sports Programme

5:10 Lal Shabujer Pala

5:40 Shadhinota Toamr Jonhye

6:00 Khabar

6:10 Shobor Jonnya Shiksha

6:35 Special on International Family Day

7:00 News Headlines

7:05 Sangeeta

7:30 Drama Series: Ocean Girl

8:00 News in Bengali

8:30 Drama Series: Counter Strike

9:00 News Headlines

9:05 Drama Series: Ora Kojona

9:30 TV Serial: Masnad

10:00 TV Serial: Shaktimaan

10:30 News in English

10:55 Sur Lahori

11:30 Khabar / The News

11:45 Closing

**EKUSHEY TV**

12:00 Ekushey Midday

12:20 Bangla Film: Abder

2:40 Drishti

3:00 Ekushey Headlines

3:05 Drama Serial: Hakarbin

3:30 Amader Kotha

4:00 Chitrogeeti

4:30 Expedition to the Animal Kingdom

5:00 Circus Circus

5:30 Drishti

5:55 Ajker Potrikay

6:00 Ekushey Headlines

6:05 Classic Cartoons

6:30 Chardike

7:00 Deho Tori

7:30 Ekushey News

8:00 Drama Serial: Agun Laga Shondha

8:30 Serial : Choto Golper Shombar: Poth Jana Nai

9:00 English Series: MacGyver

10:00 New Drama Serial : Bondhaborashu

10:30 News: Simulcast from BTV

11:00 Ekushey Late Night News

**STAR GOLD**

6:30 World Business Report

7:30 Asia Today Inc. Asia Business Report

8:30 Asia Today/World Business Report

9:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

10:30 Woodland Bollywood News

11:00 Geet Bahar

12:30 Hardtalk

10:30 Correspondent

11:30 Holiday

12:30 Holiday