

Bravely Fought the Queen –A Critical Overview

Uma Biswas

Director, actor, dancer, teacher and writer, all rolled into one, Mahesh Dattani is one of India's best known playwrights. He was born in Bangalore in 1958 and has made significant contribution to the development of Indian English drama. But before we can appreciate Dattani's position and contribution in the literary landscape of Indian drama, it would be useful for us to have a glance into a brief history of Indian English plays.

A Brief History of Indian English Drama

India has a long and fertile history in drama, starting from the Sanskrit plays of Vedic age. Dramatists down the ages have always highlighted on the ancient and rich culture of India through their plays. But most of these plays were written either in Sanskrit or in vernacular languages. Natyasastra, the oldest of the Indian texts on the theory of drama, claims for a divine origin of drama and having a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves. Dramas were written and performed in ancient India to commemorate the seasonal festivals of the Vedic Aryans. The most renowned playwrights of the ancient era were Ashwghosh, Bhasa, Sudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha, Bhavabhuti, Visakhadatta, Bhattanarayana, Murarai and Rajeshkhora. The Indian culture, custom and mood are presented in Indian theatre through natya, lasya, mudra etc. and dramatises the eight basic emotions of love, joy, anger, sadness, pride, fear, aversion and wonder.

Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory for a decade but after that the Indian drama declined in its popularity due to subsequent foreign invasions. When the British invaded India, the crippled Indian drama regained its strength. With the introduction of English theatre in India, the concept of divine or quasi-divine hero faded away as English theatre brought realistic

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Lord of the Flies

About the Author (William Golding)

- Born in Cornwall on 19th September 1911.
- He attended Marlborough Grammar School, then went to Oxford with the intention of reading science but eventually graduated in English in 1933.
- He became a teacher.
- In 1939 he married Ann Brookfield and a year later volunteered for the Royal Navy in which he served until 1945.
- He had witnessed the two World Wars, the First World War as a child while in WWII, he participated in action. He took part in the D-Day landings in Normandy and rose to the rank of the lieutenant.
- After the War ended, he returned back to teaching taking up a job at Bishop Wordsworth's School, Salisbury and after his superannuation he became a full time author.
- *Lord of the Flies* (1954) in his first published novel and it was made into a film in 1963.
- His other notable publications include *The Inheritors* (1955), *Pincher Martin* (1956), *The Brass Butterfly* (1958), *Free Fall* (1959), *The Spire* (1964), *The Hot Gates* (1965), *The Pyramid* (1967), *The Scorpion God* (1971), *Darkness Visible* (1979), *Rites of Passage* (1980), *A Moving Target* (1982) and *The Paper Man* (1984).
- He won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and The Booker McConnell Prize in 1980 and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983.
- He died on 19th June, 1993 at the age of 81 years.

Possible Sources of the novel

Although the adventure-island-story tradition can be traced back to a host of novels like R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, yet the most notable influence had been R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Islands* (1858). Even the names of the characters Ralph and Jack have been taken from the novel while Peterkin, the third boy in *The Coral Islands* emerges as two boys, Peter and Simon, in *Lord of the Flies*.

A Comparative Study between The Coral Islands and Lord of the Flies.

Matthew Arnold's The Study of Poetry: A Critical Overview

Uma Biswas

The essay, 'The Study of Poetry', was first published as an introduction to the edition of *The English Poets* brought out by T.H. Ward. The essay can be divided into two parts. In the first part Arnold puts forward his theoretical observations on poetry emphasizing on the nature and function of poetry. The second part gives a survey of English poets from Chaucer onwards. The essay is important as it shapes Arnold's critical creed and has most of the ideas that he has regarding criticism.

Main points of the essay and its critical evaluation.

- Poetry has an immense future and it will soon replace the crumbling religion and philosophy as a resort for the spirit of mankind. Religion is based on supposed facts which are not infused with a spirit of enquiry. Philosophy, on the other hand, is too abstract. Compared to these, Poetry deals with ideas which are closely related to human nature and hence more appealing to mankind. Even science will be incomplete without poetry. Religion and philosophy are mere shadows of knowledge but Poetry is the very essence of knowledge. It is a criticism of life and its power of sustaining man will depend on the power of its criticism of life.
- The high function of poetry to sustain mankind demands that the standards of poetry should be high because only poetry of a high order of excellence can serve the high destiny of poetry. Charlatanism, by which Arnold means a confusion of distinctions between the excellent and the inferior, sound and unsound, true and untrue should not enter into the sphere of judging poetry. Arnold then makes one of his most famous pronouncements in the field of literary criticism, that, "poetry is a criticism of life

Robinson Crusoe- A Critical Overview

Uma Biswas

Originally published in 1719, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* continues to enjoy an immense popularity among young readers till date. The novel is often considered to be the first English novel. It is ostensibly an adventurous tale recounting the various incidents in the life of Robinson. Ernest A. Baker has considered *Robinson Crusoe* as "the first novel in the complete modern sense." The first and foremost characteristic feature that immediately strikes the readers is the meticulous detailing of facts. It is a unique blend of minute and inexhaustible realism and of the curiosity that keeps the mind on the stretch to the very end. Several sources for the story of Defoe's novel have been identified by scholars. The principal source is generally considered to be a book called *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* written by a sea-captain named Woodes Rogers. This book contains an account of the actual experiences of a Scottish sailor, named Alexander Selkirk, who spent four years all alone on an uninhabited island called Juan Fernandez. He spent a solitary life of about four years on the island and was eventually rescued by Captain Woodes Rogers. Although Selkirk's story has a close resemblance to Crusoe's tale, it is not a simple adaptation of it for there is much else that is beside.

A close reading of the novel shows that the plot on the whole is not only improbable but fantastic as well, and yet, the readers never pause to question the narrator's credentials or his veracity. Defoe's genius lies in his ability to secure that "willing suspension of disbelief" which is essential for our complete and unchallenged acceptance of a story as true. Thus Defoe had established the vogue of realism in prose fiction in England. However the story has a strong allegorical purport. Literary critics have identified a deep symbolic significance in the novel. E.B. Benjamin points out that, *Robinson Crusoe* is far more than the account of

Suggested Reading List for Robinson Crusoe.

1. Ellis, Frank.H (ed.) *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Robinson Crusoe: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Eaglewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1969.
2. Watt, Ian- *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: Chatto and Windus, Ltd. 1957.
3. Hammond, J.R.- *A Defoe Companion*. London: Macmillan Press, 1993.
4. Byrd, Max. (ed.) *Daniel Defoe: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Eaglewood and Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976.
5. Sutherland, J. *Daniel Defoe: A Critical Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Suggested Reading List on Matthew Arnold

1. Tillyson, Geoffrey. *Criticism and the Nineteenth Century*. London: Bloombury, 1951.
2. Garrod, H.W. *Poetry and the Criticism of Life: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures for 1929-1930*. Virginia: Russell & Russell, 1963.
3. Trilling, Lionel. *Matthew Arnold*. University of Michigan: Norton and Company, 1939.
4. Saintsbury, George. *A History of English Criticism*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2004.
5. Watson, George. *The Literary Critics: A Study of English Descriptive Criticism*. University of Michigan: Hogarth Press, 1986.