

Literary Research Review

Edited by

Dr Debnita Chakravarti

Contents

Introduction	1
1. Boundaries Of The Self: Vignettes Of the Female Gothic In Wuthering Heights And Villette <i>Dr Malini Mukherjee</i>	11
2. Call of the Unknown: Journey of The Post Office at Home and Beyond <i>Dr Gautam Sengupta</i>	19
3. Sir Francis Bacon's Prescription for Meaningful Education <i>Dr Santanu Ganguly</i>	27
4. Sense/Nonsense: Reading Sukumar Ray's Abol Tabol <i>Debolina Guha Thakurta</i>	33
5. Privacy and Theatre: In Search of a New Intersection <i>Dr Angshuman Mukhopadhyay</i>	48
6. Floating Signification: Language Maintenance in the Diaspora(s) <i>Indrani Ray</i>	59
7. Nawal El Saadawi and Feminism in the Arab World and its Global Significance <i>Dr Kalapi Sen</i>	75
8. Postcolonial Deconstruction: A Critique of the Gender Dynamics in the Novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie <i>Suchetana Sarkar</i>	83
9. A Brief History of Transition: From Print Comics to Webcomics <i>Divyani Sharma</i>	99
10. Alienation effects in Mother Courage and Her Children <i>Aliah Zafar</i>	114
11. The Representation of the Queer in the Field of Literature <i>Rhea Chatterjee</i>	117
12. Ibsen and Euripides: The classical Greek dimension in Modernist Theatre <i>Sneha Singh</i>	124
Contributors	133

Sense/Nonsense: Reading Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol*

Debolina Guha Thakurta

The great Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung once stated that the pendulum of the mind oscillates between sense and nonsense and not between right and wrong. This oscillation concerning sense and nonsense brings forth the plausible oblique relation between the two. Nonsense, a supposedly meaningless proposition, lexically stands as 'foolish', 'impractical', 'absurd', 'whimsical' and so on. Such lexical authoritative synonyms communicate 'meaning', and if meaning formation is the prerequisite of signification, then nonsense is always already sense. Sense, as understood through certain conditions of truth, either corresponds to the sense organs, or as a 'constitutional tact' allows 'adjustment, recognition and maintenance of the proper'¹. However, to endow a definition to 'nonsense' is to attribute a definitive 'sense' or meaning to the otherwise undefinable. The domain of sense is ascertained through normative meaning formation whereas nonsense embodies neither truth nor falsity but is essentially prosaic and commonplace negative of sense. Nonsense rather breaks the 'ground rule' of the normative or the shared reality of everyday transactions and creates 'its own set of rules, fundamental to an aesthetic experience.'² To comply with this non-normative meaning formation, readers shall willingly suspend their disbelief and enter into what Tolkien would call the 'sub-creation', where a talking plant, a dragon with an overcoat acquires legitimisation. As readers, we engage into the delightful world of phantasmagoria; however, the incongruities and absurdities appear to be the work of intense imagination and genius, a work of 'fine art'. Such absurd presence of talking animals often generate aesthetic shock, as we have failed to associate normative meaning to the commonly perceived 'non-normative' visual, primarily because the commonsensical reading is exclusionary in nature, where animals are 'divided into' or 'labelled as'. Therefore, as Susan Stewart begins by pointing out the two universes, that of common sense and nonsense, she finds it difficult to distinguish between the two. Her argument settles on how common sense pertains to coherence, order and integrity while

1 'Nonsense as a Fine Art' in *Quarterly Review*

2 Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 1976

The PG Section of the Department of English, Shri Shikshayatan College, publishes an academic journal every session. In its tenth year, a compilation of essays was planned as the first ISBN publication of the department. Twelve essays were chosen for the volume, with contributions from both teachers and students as has been the practice with the journals. Between them, they map the landscape of English literary studies with remarkable diversity and distinction. Spanning several centuries of artistic output, the essays offer new readings of both canonical and alternative works, bringing together the classical and the contemporary in interesting comparisons and contrasts. Demonstrating a wide range of theoretical standpoints, the essays in this volume bear testimony to the richness of the discipline both as it is structured in classrooms and in its more unconfined avatars outside. Read individually or as a collection, the volume will provide stimulating and thought-provoking approaches to and interpretations of texts both familiar and novel to all students of the discipline.

This volume hopes to be the first of many to grace the research efforts of the postgraduate section of the Department of English, Shri Shikshayatan College. The effusive response to the call for papers and the stellar quality of the contributions have been heartening, and have provided hope for taking this publication initiative forward in the years to come.

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