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Revisiting American Literature

Select Short Stories and Poems



Editors

Prem Kumari Srivastava
Nidhi Madan



This critical edition proposes to offer its readers an annotated anthology of poems and short stories from American literature, as prescribed by the University of Delhi under the current CBCS syllabus for students of B.A. (Honours) English. Along with a succinct chronology, this anthology provides an introduction to American Studies in India followed by informative headnotes on the two genres prescribed herein, namely poetry and short stories. The texts provide fairly detailed annotations and the two sections into which the book is divided are followed by well-researched articles by contemporary scholars of American Literature.

The critical readings on poetry and short stories raise pertinent questions rather than just providing settled understandings and readings of them. Furthermore, in the broad spectrum of interpretations that they do offer, they enable the readers to perceive literature of the Americas as both canonical and its obverse, while simultaneously raising issues related to race, gender and native populations. This anthology is an attempt to present a tenuous connection between America's past and its multi-ethnic present. Besides conveying the experiences of both the author and the reader in writing or receiving the text respectively, they depict literature as a contestable terrain where questions of genre formation, nation-making and the individual as a site of identity-creation and identity-in-crisis also emerge.

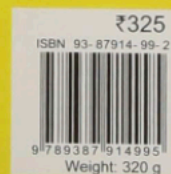
The last section covers the prescribed background topics along with a selected bibliography. This comprehensive anthology offers a spectrum of multifarious pertinent discourses and ideologies to enhance the students' understanding of what constitutes American Literature.

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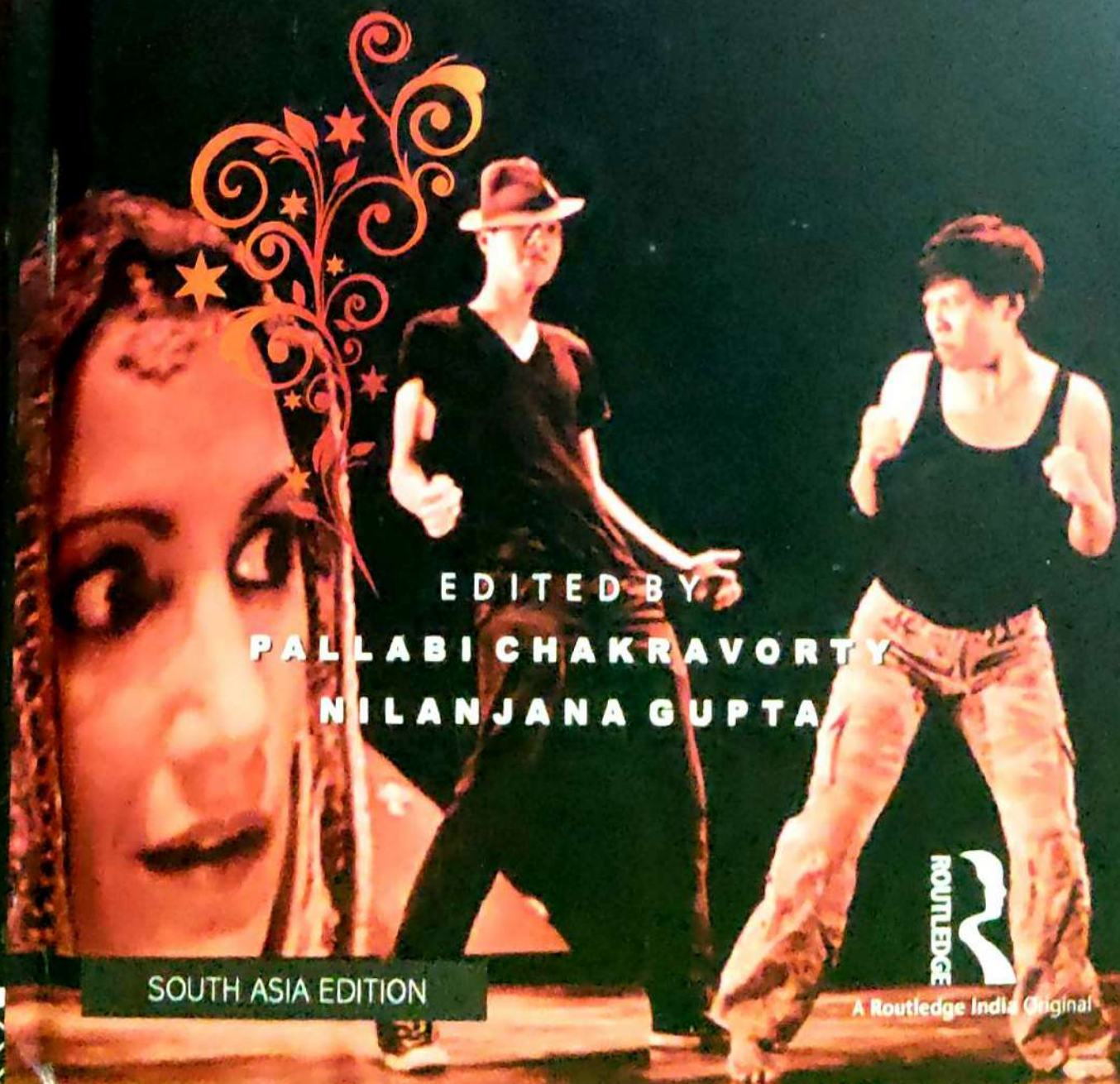


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dance matters too

MARKETS, MEMORIES, IDENTITIES



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PART II

- 7 **Corporatization of dance: changing landscape in choreography and patronage since economic liberalization in Bengaluru**
VEENA BASAVARAJAIAH 95
- 8 **Negotiating space for dance within the spectrum of contemporary performing arts in a globalized India: the experiences of an Indian arts manager**
ARSHIYA SETHI 107
- 9 **Bollywood dance: desire for the 'Other'**
INDRANI DASGUPTA 124

PART III

- 10 **Rasalila remixed: tracing the dances of an image**
PIKA GHOSH 137
- 11 **Why dance today in India? A philosophical approach**
JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC CHEVALLIER 168
- 12 **Playing dance and dancing music: the work of intimacy in *kathak***
AMEERA NIMJEE 176
- 13 **Embodiment, reflexivity and practice-as-research in Indian dance: a case study**
PRARTHANA PURKAYASTHA 190
- 14 **Remixing *Natya*: revanta Sarabhai's *LDR* and Post *Natyam* Collective's *Super Ruwaxi: Origins***
SANDRA CHATTERJEE AND CYNTHIA LING LEE 202

PART IV

- 15 **Dancers and critics: re-viewing Tagore**
AISHIKA CHAKRABORTY 225

BOLLYWOOD DANCE

Desire for the 'Other'

Indrani Dasgupta

To think of Hindi movies without a song and dance sequence is unimaginable. The centrality of these songs and dance sequences is not only a reflection of its popularity but the universality of these dance picturizations in the domain of a cultural artefact like movies configures and defines the society itself. As the most significant feature of Hindi popular cinema, the song and dance sequence, in the words of Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, "occupies the constitutive limit of Bollywood cinema,"¹ however, it even tends to circulate outside its cinematic contexts. From being played on stage, to Broadway productions, to community centres, at marriage celebrations, to television serials, at fitness clubs and being performed on the margins of global events like Indian Premier League (IPL), Bollywood dance sequences are now culturally, in Sangita Shresthova's words, a "global phenomenon."²

Before I move any further, I want to explain the epithet 'Bollywood' and how I have used it in this chapter. The value and the meaning of the term Bollywood are constantly being read and interpreted variously as part of an intense academic debate, ranging from the pejorative to the subversive. The signification of the epithet is a parodic reminder of Hollywood musicals, paying some sort of homage to the multimillion-dollar American film industry and regarded by many scholars and stakeholders of Hindi cinema as belittling the contributions of the Indian artists and technicians alike. However, this valuation of the epithet 'Bollywood' as reductive and descriptive of a second-hand imitative copy of the American genres of musicals is countered by another section of academics and participants of this cinematic form as a term which encapsulates a series of images and signs that seek to fabricate and refashion an identity in tune with the desire to articulate a pan-Indian self. As Sohini Chakraborty

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
Introduction	1
PREM KUMARI SRIVASTAVA	
Chronology	17
NIDHI MADAN	

PART I Storying America

The American Short Story: Special Focus on Poe, Fitzgerald and Faulkner	25
RITIKA SINGH	
1. The Purloined Letter	44
EDGAR ALLAN POE	
2. The Crack-Up	69
F SCOTT FITZGERALD	
3. Dry September	89
WILLIAM FAULKNER	

Critical Readings

1. Oddities of the Common: The Art of Detection in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter"	105
INDRANI DAS GUPTA	

"Look at that clock," he said, lifting his arm pointing at the clock. She stood before him, her face lowered, a magazine in her hands. Her face was pale, strained, and weary looking. "Haven't I told you about sitting up like this, wanting to see when I come in?"

"John," she said. She laid the magazine down. He stood on the balls of his feet, he glared at her with his hot, sweating face.

"Didn't I tell you?" He went toward her. She looked up then. He caught her shoulder. She stood looking at him.

"Don't, John. I couldn't sleep...The heat, something. Please, John. You're hurting me."

"Didn't I tell you?" He released her and half struck her half flung her across the chair, and she lay there and watched him quietly as he left the room.

He went on through the house, ripping off his shirt and on the dark, screened porch at the rear he stood and mopped his head and shoulders with the shirt and flung it away. He took the pistol from his hip and laid it on the table beside the bed, and sat on the bed and removed his shoes, and rose and slipped his trousers off. He was sweating again already, and he stooped and hunted furiously for the shirt. At last he found it and wiped his body again, and, with his body pressed against the dusty screen, he stood panting. There was no movement, no sound, not even an insect. The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars.

CRITICAL READINGS

1

Oddities of the Common: The Art of Detection in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter"

INDRANIDAS GUPTA

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling everything "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities." (Poe, "Letter", 327)

This line from Edgar Allan Poe's short detective story "The Purloined Letter" puts into perspective what we understand by anything termed as 'odd' and something as 'ordinary'. The art of detection, of solving a mystery follows this train of thought where the odd, the uncommon, the unorthodox, and the incongruous is dismantled to reiterate the common, the conventional, and the congruous. Yet, as this above line suggests, often what we understand by the term 'odd' is a misreading of what is supposed to be ordinary.

Featuring the analytical detective, C Auguste Dupin, Edgar Allan Poe's detective stories spawned several imitations, the most famous being Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844) is one of the most popular and significant of the three