

PREFACE

Born in Dublin, educated in Ireland, England, and Germany, and living for over thirty years in East Asia, I have been intrigued by the effect of cultural presuppositions upon representation and interpretation. If variations in cultural expression within Europe initially fascinated me, they were as nothing compared with the challenge of grounding the differences between Western and Eastern cultures.

Appointed by the University of Hong Kong in 1965 to teach Western literature, the attraction of intercultural study developed into an incomparable adventure, turning my comfortable assumptions upside down, as I began to understand their relativity, but also helping me to escape deeper frustrations. Encountering other cultures, our “own” is distanced and defamiliarized, the first essential step in really understanding it, let alone any other one. Computing other value systems now assumes different dimensions as they no longer necessarily confront each other from separated, clearly demarcated positions, but begin to interpenetrate. The visual art of theater has benefited from such opportunities. What do these developments tell us about the needs they externalize?

This book develops a preliminary study, *Shakespeare and the Politics of the Sign*, expanding it into topics that have been neglected in discussions of intercultural theater. I am indebted to Jeremy Tambling for earlier criticism and to other colleagues at the University of Hong Kong, above all Ackbar Abbas and Ian McLachlan for their critical friendship. At the University of Dublin I would like to thank the graduate students of my course in cultural theory and, especially, Barbara Wright for all her support.