Nathan der Weise and the Enlightenment: East, Tolerance, and Universal Ethics

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Abstract

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Nathan the Wise ("Nathan der Weise," 1779) is considered one of the major works of the Enlightenment. Lessing reflects on religious tolerance, humanism, and reason as the

highest virtues. Despite Nathan the Wise has long stood as a symbol of Enlightenment ideals: reason, religious tolerance, and universal morality, controversies followed after Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1978). Criticism of approaches that present the East only as a passive figure has become particularly acute. Positioned during the Crusades, yet deeply embedded in the 18th-century German intellectual milieu, the drama offers a vision of interfaith harmony via its famed "Ring Parable" and the moral wisdom of its Jewish protagonist, Nathan. Literary discourse constructs the East as a symbolic space in which the West defines its identity. While postcolonial and critical critics criticized the limitations of Lessing's Enlightenment universalism, e.g., Edward Said's critique of Eurocentric discourses (1978). The critique of secular tolerance of recent scholarship remains in support of the play as an ongoing appeal for tolerance. Scholars, e.g. Shmuel Feiner (2012), Von Schwerin-High (2013), Albrecht Classen (2021, 2023) and more posit that Nathan der Weise is a foundational text of intercultural ethics, as well as of moral cosmopolitanism. Engaging with ongoing debates on Enlightenment humanism and pluralism, they support the standpoint that Lessing's vision retains pedagogical and philosophical relevance in contemporary discussions on religious coexistence, civic virtue, and universal dignity. The article analyzes the significance of the play in historical, cultural and literary contexts. It explores and synthesizes the contemporary approaches, positioning them within the broader contestation over the Enlightenment's legacy in a global, postcolonial world. Paying particular attention to the cultural and religious dimensions that make the drama an early literary bridge between the East and the West, we focus on the East as a cultural topoi in Lessing's drama to reinforce universal humanist ideas and to affirm the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Keywords: Lessing; Tolerance; Nathan the Wise; Critique; Enlightenment.

Introduction

The German Enlightenment (Aufklärung) was closely associated with the spread of ideas of reason, science, and tolerance. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's drama "Nathan the Wise," which is also a philosophical treatise, was written during that period. The work is set in Jerusalem, which was historically a crossroads between East and West and an arena of conflict. The East appears in Lessing's drama in two main meanings: 1. Geographical-historical context, i.e. Jerusalem as a meeting place for different cultures and religions. 2. Metaphorical meaning, i.e. the East as a symbol of wisdom, humanism and tolerance.

We focus on these two aspects in order to discuss and determine how Lessing uses the theme of the East to present his Enlightenment ideas. The plot of Lessing's drama unfolds during the Third Crusade (1189-1192), which is not accidental. This era is known for the confrontation between Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land, which ended in 1192, an agreement signed between Richard I the Lionheart and Sultan Saladin, according to which Christian pilgrims could freely enter Jerusalem (Tyerman, 2006:464–465; Riley-Smith, 2005:213), the Chronicle by Roger of Howden, an English historian as a historical source describes in detail the campaign of Richard I to the Holy Land. (Riley, 1853). However, as centuries passed after the Agreement, Lessing (1729-1781) lived in an era when Europe was still trying to escape from religious wars and dogmatic fanaticism, when in Germany, Jews were often victims of persecution and discrimination. Against this background, in the Nathan the Wise (1779) the author courageously created a Jewish character, Nathan, as a bearer of humanistic wisdom and morality. The closeness with the famous Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, who was a figure of the German Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), undoubtedly influenced the construction of this character. Nathan reflects the idea that wisdom and humanity are not determined by religious confession (Sorkin, 2012; Valeur, 2016). In this context, the main character, Nathan, is conceptualized not only as an individual hero, but also the personification of the entire culture and

philosophical values of the East. He represents deep wisdom, peace and humanism against a background where religious confrontation and violence were still relevant. Both political and literary discourses construct the East as a symbolic space in which the West defines its own identity. After Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1978), criticism of approaches that present the East as a passive figure has become particularly acute. The concept of the East has long been shaped by competing narratives in philosophy, historiography, and literature.

The goal of the present research is to explore various scholarly approaches highlighting the diverse interpretations of the meaning of the East. to Lessing's drama especially in the light of the modern criticism.

The Enlightenment Context: Reason and Moral Equality

The play is set in 12th-century Jerusalem, representing the Eastern world, allowing the author to explore a multicultural environment and the issues of religious coexistence. The choice of Jerusalem as the setting for the drama is not accidental: the city is a symbol of the coexistence and conflict of three main monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The drama is nourished by the Enlightenment thinking of the 18th century, which was based on the ideas of the superiority of reason and tolerance. Consistent with the views of and writings on the humanism and rationality of the Age of Enlightenment by other philosophers of the Enlightenment, such as Voltaire (Betts, 1984) and Herder (Sikka, 2011), in Lessing's world, the East may even be more rational and humane than the West. The East appears not only as a centre of conflicts, but also as a space for multicultural dialogue.

The characters, Nathan, a Jewish merchant, and Sultan Saladin, a Muslim ruler, represent different cultures, but they are united by common humanistic values. To quote Hillenbrand (2005:503) "Saladin is then used as the mouthpiece for the pre-Enlightenment position

which asserts that only one of the three monotheistic religions can be right."

Edward Said famously conceptualized the Orient not as a real geographic or cultural entity, but as a discursive construction through which the West asserts its intellectual and cultural dominance. As Said (1979:12) argues, "Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; it is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts." Said's position is echoed and deepened by Jacques Derrida's (1976:158) deconstructive critique of Western logocentrism, particularly his claim that "there is nothing outside the text," suggesting that the East, like all categories in Western discourse, is textual and may have lost any stable referent to historical reality. It encapsulates Derrida's challenge to any metaphysical grounding outside of the language, which directly supports readings like Said's that "the Orient" is a textual, constructed object rather than a stable and empirical reality. Deconstructivism is particularly relevant to post-structuralist and postcolonial analysis. … Derrida's model of deconstruction, the critical examination of contradictions and hierarchies in texts and discourse, questions the binary oppositions that often reinforce power imbalances and entrench dominant ideologies" (Beridze, 2025-40).

Ali A. Mazrui, a renowned Kenyan political scientist, offers a more dynamic and balanced view, emphasizing the East's active role in global history and cultural exchange. In Cultural Forces in World Politics (1990), he writes that "the flow of culture has not been one-way; Islam and Africa have sent back influences to the West," thus challenging the unilateral model of cultural diffusion. Literature adds another dimension to this discourse.

Meanwhile, European Romantic literature often portrayed the East as an exotic, mysterious realm, a mirror in which the West both admired and criticized itself, as seen in Western re-imaginings of "One

Thousand and One Nights" or the orientalist musings of Byron and Coleridge. Taken together, these perspectives from Said's poststructuralism to Mazrui cultural dialogism, reveal that representations of the East often speak less about the Orient itself and more about the West's ongoing struggle to define its own identity in relation to an imagined Other.

To quote Nisbet (2013:1) Lessing "was a cosmopolitan and one of the first to use the neologisms Kosmopolit and Weltbürger (citizen of the world)." Lessing's articulation of tolerance in Nathan the Wise is rooted in Enlightenment principles. The play emphasizes rational discourse, ethical behavior, and shared humanity as bases for transcending sectarian conflict. It can be underscored that Lessing intended to re-found religion on the basis of rational morality, portraying tolerance not merely as coexistence but as mutual respect grounded in reason. In the play, the titular character's insistence that only the deeds of the wearer shall prove the true ring encapsulates this ethos shifting the legitimacy of belief from confessional alignment to ethical conduct.

In modern literary criticism, opposing positions emerge around the text: on the one hand, Lessing is considered as a bearer of the humanism of the Enlightenment era, and on the other hand, critics note the stereotypical depiction of Eastern culture in the text. Of particular interest are the positions of literary critics and researchers who compare Lessing to William Shakespeare, for example, with such dramatic figures as Shylock ("The Merchant of Venice") or Othello. Argued by Feinberg (2002:234), these Shakespearean characters represent the "other" ethnically or religiously and this humanistic problem shapes the discourse on self-knowledge and relationships with the other: "Nathan remains the other, as much of an outsider as his predecessor, Shylock. It fails because the Jew's arguments are misunderstood, challenged, distorted. It fails because the memory-laden past constantly erupts into the present, into the dream world of the theater and into our own reality." To further quote Feinberg (ibid) "Shakespeare's Jew,

in black clothes and a ubiquitous bowler hat, is Nathans counterpart, even his alter-ego. The suitcase in Shylock's hand has the same metonymic function as the cart in which Nathan stores his belongings. Both are wandering Jews, scarred and vulnerable; acknowledged at best, and at worst, ostracized." Nonetheless, von Schwerin-High (2013: 276) counter argues and even adds a critical layer to this analysis by noting that Lessing's pluralism sought not only passive tolerance but active moral recognition of religious diversity: "What distinguishes Lessing is his deliberate extension of agency to all religious traditions," she writes, highlighting that Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike are treated as fully moral actors in the play. This distinguishes Lessing from more hierarchical Enlightenment figures who valorized Christianity as the implicit moral apex.

Eastern Wisdom and the Parable of the Three Rings

We believe that Nathan the Wise is an Enlightenment drama, the main ideas of which are based on free thought, tolerance and religious pluralism. The East in this context somehow echoes the ideas of Enlightenment philosophers, including Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). According to Spinoza's teachings, God is universal and not limited to one particular religion, to quote "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus," Chapter 14: "God's justice and love belong to all people equally, regardless of religion," and to quote "Ethica," Part I, Proposition 15: "God is the foundation of nature, and nothing can exist apart from him; he is not a personal God belonging to a particular religion God is all that exists." This idea is also at the heart of the "Parable of the Three Rings." The East, which appears as an alternative to European dogmatism, corresponds to Lessing's philosophical and enlightened position. In Nathan the Wise Lessing adapts the medieval parable of the three rings, a story that first appeared in the *Gesta Romanorum* ('Deeds of the Romans'), a Latin collection of moral tales compiled in the 13th–14th century. The tale was later popularized by Giovanni Boccaccio

in *The Decameron* (1353, Day 1, Story 3), where it features a Jewish merchant and Saladin debating the true faith. Lessing reworked this narrative into a foundational allegory for religious pluralism, using the three rings to symbolize Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as equally valid paths to truth" (Von Schwerin-High, 2013).

One of the most impressive and key scenes is the dialogue between Nathan and Saladin, the Muslim Sultan of Jerusalem. This meeting takes place at a critical moment when Saladin, due to financial difficulties, plans to extort money from Nathan. The central theme is the dialogue that begins between them on the issue of the truth of religion. Saladin asks Nathan a question that is very dangerous for Nathan:

"Since you are now so wise: so tell me once – What for a faith, what for a law has dawned on you most?" (Lessing, 2004:56 III, 5).

However, Nathan is not confused. He does not choose a direct answer, he does not say that Judaism is true, but begins the conversation with the famous parable of the three seals, which completely changes the dynamics of the conversation. The parable tells the story of a king who had a precious ring, which the king passed on to his son as his heir. However, once, when the king had three sons, he imperceptibly had two exact copies made. Before his death, he gave each son a ring - so that none of them knew which was the real one. After the father's death, they began to argue about who was the true heir.

The idea of the parable is clear: the truth about religions can be lost without a trace. What is more important is how a person lives his faith - with dignity, love and justice. In this way, Nathan tries to wisely soften Saladin's attack and turn the conversation to morality. Lessing's Saladin as a wise and humane ruler, who admires Nathan's wisdom:

Nathan! Nathan! Lieber Mann! Jetzt bist du wirklich ein Weiser (Lessing2004:106)

Literal translation: Nathan! Nathan! Dear man! Now you're truly wise.

Caroline Warman (2016:106-108) offers excerpts of English translation of the play by "the acclaimed translator of Schiller, Francis Lamport, has gone back to the original and produced the following version:"

Nathan. If, Sultan Saladin, you feel
That you might be that wiser man –
Saladin. I? I am dust, am nothing! God!
Nathan. What is it, Sultan?
Saladin. Nathan! Your judge's thousand thousand years
Are not yet past. His judgement seat is not
For me. Leave me, dear Nathan, go – But be my friend.

The dialogue between Nathan and Sultan Saladin clearly reveals Nathan's nature, his inner calm at a critical moment, and he is also a good diplomat. With this scene, Lessing conveys his main humanistic message: true religious morality is not dogmatic or violent - it is deliberative, ethical, and based on mutual respect. And it is through this dialogue that Nathan becomes not just a representative of the East, but its cultural and spiritual peak - the face of tolerance and peace.

Feiner (2012)[125] also cautions against dismissing Lessing on anachronistic grounds. He asks: "Can we find paths leading from Lessing's didactic, symbol-laden play from medieval Jerusalem to Berlin of the Enlightenment and from there to present-day Jerusalem?" This tempered defense supports a dialogical rather than dogmatic approach to Enlightenment legacies. Feiner further points out that: "Nathan, the Jewish merchant, who has lost his wife and his entire family in a horrible pogrom, and Leo von Filnek, a member of the Templar order and a Crusader whose life was spared by Salah a-Din after defeating him and his Christian brethren, meet for a dialog in which, with amazing

[125] While we quote Feiner, S. (2012). Lessing's Nathan the Wise: A View from Jerusalem. *Milestones: essays in Jewish history dedicated to Zvi (Kuti) Yekutiel, eds. Immanuel Etkes, David Assaf, Yosef Kaplan*, 219-277, we refer to its English translation shared by the author on: https://www.academia.edu/35808942/Shmuel_Feiner_Lessing_s_Natan_th e_Wise_A_View_from_Jerusalem_Lessing_Yearbook_vol_40_2012_2013_157_166

understanding, they settle long-standing historical accounts in the blood-soaked relations between Jews and Christians."

Lessing used this plot as an allegory to show: no religion has absolute truth, but all have equal value and importance. Lessing's presentation of religions in this way sharply contradicted the views of ministers of any church in the world, especially the Christian church's claim to unquestionable truth. Lessing's public confrontation with Johann Melchior Goeze, Hamburg's chief Lutheran pastor, underscores the institutional power of religious orthodoxy in late 18th-century Germany. As Nisbet (2013:492–520) documents, Goeze's denunciations of Lessing's publication of Reimarus' radical theological fragments led to state-enforced censorship, including a ban on Lessing's further theological writings. This episode reveals the constraints on Enlightenment critiques of religion, even as Lessing's defiance, culminating in Nathan the Wise championed intellectual freedom through indirect means. Nathan creates a clear contrast – he does not judge, and does not make decisions with bias. His presence in the space of Western culture is the author's call to reconsider prejudices towards the East and its peoples. Nathan appears to us as a bridge for dialogue between the East and the West. Saladin is a figure who embodies the ethical ideals of the Enlightenment, he breaks cultural stereotypes and is a clear example of how people and religions should interact in a world where difference should be perceived not as a threat, but as an opportunity for dialogue and mutual understanding.

Lessing's Nathan the Wise is often seen as an Enlightenment call for interreligious tolerance and humanism. However, as various authors' interpretations show, the pluralistic structure of the play is not universally acceptable or neutral. It is against the background of these different reactions that the mechanisms that determine the approaches to the different within Western universalism emerge. While Lessing's Nathan the Wise advocates religious tolerance, Karl-Josef Kuschel in his work *Vom Streit zum Wettstreit der Religionen. Lessing und die Herausforderung des Islam* (1998:120-135) contends that its dialogue

remains constrained by Christian-Western presuppositions. The play's moral universalism, he argues, subtly subordinates Islam and Judaism to a secularized Christian ethic, rather than engaging them as independent theological voices. Muslim thinkers often express skepticism about the kind of religious pluralism that Lessing portrays. Tariq Ramadan (2004:81) critically notes: "The Western discourse of universality often ignores the particularities of Islamic epistemeology." He criticizes (2004:78–82) Western secular universalism for marginalizing Islamic perspectives but does not link this to Lessing. Rather he advocates for a pluralism rooted in Islamic ethics, not Enlightenment harmonization (Ramadan, 2004:120–125). On the other hand, European thinkers such as the theologian Hans Küng, emphasize the importance of mutual respect among religions and the pursuit of a global ethic that transcends doctrinal differences. For instance, in Christianity and the World Religions, Küng (1986) explores paths of dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, advocating for understanding and cooperation among faiths. Küng (1986:124) interprets Lessing's Nathan the Wise as a pioneering model of interreligious dialogue, one that balances tolerance with theological integrity. For Küng, the play avoids both relativism and hierarchy, instead proposing a 'humanistic coexistence' where differing faiths engage as moral equals. As Martinson (2016:6-7) points out, central to Kuschel's thesis is the claim that Lessing promoted an "Islamic humanity" ("Menschlichkeit"), opposing religious orthodoxy and engaging constructively with Islamic thought. Moreover, as Lessing's Sultan Saladin embodies such virtues as reason and tolerance not despite his Muslim faith but because of it, drawing on historical annals of Saladin's enlightened rule (ibid). Martinson juxtaposes Barbara Fischer's (2006/2007) counter-opinion to Kuschel's reading of Nathan the Wise as a "pro-Muslim play" ("ein promuslimisches Stück"), questioning why Lessing assigned the Ring Parable to Nathan, a Jew, rather than Saladin, if its rendered message were inherently Islamic. Monika Fick, as Martinson explores, stresses Lessing's deep roots in Protestant Christianity, suggesting his framework rema-

ined indebted to Christian humanism despite its inclusive gestures. To Fick this co-equality is essential for understanding Lessing's rejection of a Eurocentric moral hierarchy.

Albrecht Classen (2021:10) extends the arguments around Lessing, advocating for Nathan the Wise" to be read worldwide not just as German heritage, but as part of a "world literature of tolerance." Classen contends that the play offers a "shared ethical language" that can bridge the divides between East and West in educational contexts. As Classen (2023:4) underscores, Lessing's message "transcends all times and cultures," arguing that Lessing's ethics shall be viewed from the perspective of the anthropological universalism. Classen's arguments position Nathan the Wise as a humanist manifesto against intolerance and division.

Nathan the Wise exemplifies how literature can model civic ethics and democratic pluralism without collapsing into relativism. This is reflected not only in religious tolerance or philosophical wisdom. It also deals with issues of family, fatherhood, and identity. Nathan, as a wise and calm representative of the East, is a man with a deep emotional world, a father who raised Recha with love and wisdom. Recha, who seems to be his biological child, is actually a girl of Christian origin, whom Nathan took in as a father after the girl's parents died in the Crusades. This decision was not easy for Nathan, especially at a time when religious conflicts were raging:

"Ich nahm das Kind, ich zog es auf – als wär's mein eigen Fleisch und Blut" (Lessing, 2004:94–95).

(Literal translation: "I took this child and raised her – as if he were my own flesh and blood").

Recha, for her part, sees in Nathan not only a caregiver, but also a safe harbour in this world. At one point, when she doubts his own identity and asks himself who she is, Nathan calmly answers her:

"Was tut's, mein Kind? Du bist – Du bleibst mein Kind" (Lessing, 2004:94).

(Literal translation: “What does it matter, my child? You are, and you will be my child”).

Nathan’s words define parenthood not biologically, but morally and emotionally. For him, parenthood is about responsibility, dedication, and respect. Nathan’s paternity also contradicts the socio-religious expectations of the time, which often based identity on blood ties. Nathan shows that people and relationships are much deeper than just origin or faith. Recha carries the morals and values she learns from him with her—as a daughter who, through Nathan, learns about humanism and the true nature of love. With the final revelation of Recha's identity (when we learn that she is actually related to Saladin), Nathan's fatherly figure is further strengthened: he remains the only stable and emotionally stable pillar in Recha's life, despite the new discoveries. Nathan thus teaches us that fatherhood is not just a matter of origin - it is a choice that becomes a reality through love, sacrifice, and cooperation. As a bearer of Eastern wisdom, he shows the Western world how to live with care for others, regardless of one's beliefs.

Nathan teaches us that fatherhood is not just a lineage it is a choice that becomes a reality through love, sacrifice, and support. Thus, Nathan represents not only Eastern wisdom, but also a guide for the Western world, how to live with care, solidarity and love, regardless of faith, origin or past.

Wilfried Wilms (2002:317) underlines the performative dimension of tolerance in Nathan the Wise, pointing out that: “Lessing challenges the idea of the imagined ideal of all people in a world-state beyond competition,” however, he preaches tolerance through dialogue, relational ethics, generosity, and cross-cultural exchange. This emphasis on praxis resonates with modern theories of deliberative democracy and civic virtue. As Wilms (2002:306) argues:

> I am describing the final scene of Lessing's Nathan der Weise, a scene and a play canonized not just in German literature, but also in the liberal Enlightenment reception of that literature and its tradition.

> In Nathan, rationality successfully overcomes a series of obstacles and works its way into a traditional 'Lebenswelt' dominated by prejudice that does not shy away from murder and even genocide. We observe how rationality surpasses, most importantly, the limitations of cultural heritage and blood-based bonds, and watch it ultimately defeat the dumb stubbornness of religious dogma that locks some of its actors into irrational dead end.

Lessing's play, while not explicitly political, invites us to ask: what shall be erased to achieve tolerance? Wilms (2002:312–313) examines Odo Marquard's skepticism toward Jürgen Habermas' model of communication, which can be described as driven to consensus. Marquard argues that Habermas' pursuit of "*Einheit" or* universal consensus risks suppressing "*Vielfalt*" or diversity. In Habermasian discourse, dissent is merely a temporary phase on the path to unanimity, and ultimately it can render "pluralism obsolete." Marquard warns, that communication stagnates once consensus is achieved. In his perspective, consensus can reduce communication to a monolithic repetition of the same opinion. Connecting his critique to Nathan the Wise, Wilms questions whether Lessing's vision of tolerance, celebrated admitted as proto-Habermasian, might expose difference to hazard under the guise of universalism. Wilms picks on the "three rings" parable and its promotional effect of a natural religion that transcends doctrinal conflicts to compare to the Habermas' cosmopolitan project *The* Postnational Constellation, and to juxtapose with Carl Schmitt's darker critique of the universalist claims, that tolerance can disguise intolerance.

As pluralism becomes a defining feature of 21st-century societies, scholars increasingly turn to Nathan der Weise as a resource for civic education. Lessing's play is a valuable didactic tool for promotion of the interfaith dialogue, while the main messages of the play can be adapted to contemporary curricula.

From Karl S. Guthke's (2018:229) perspective, Lessing adopts a providential worldview akin to Isaac Newton's, where divine order governs human affairs, leaving no room for randomness: "Newton's theological determinism is also Lessing's, as can be seen in the postscript to his edition of Jerusalem's essays or in Nathan der Weise. To quote Guthke (ibid) "Providence seems vindicated, chance has been expelled," which means that Lessing adapts Newton's belief in God's rational design structures of the universe, manifestation of which is gravity. In Nathan the Wise, the plot's resolution implies a hidden divine logic, not mere coincidence. The play's contrived "happy ending" as Nathan's lost family was restored, suggests providential orchestration where interfaith harmony is achieved, which is not a chaotic chance.

Conclusion

Against the background of the contradictions to what extent Lessing creates a universal model of intercultural coexistence, and to what extent he uses the East as an idealized, romanticized background for presenting Western ideals, the study is relevant in defending Lessing's "Nathan der Weise." Modern scholars revive its core vision: that mutual respect, moral conduct, and rational dialogue can bridge even the deepest divides. While critics from postcolonial and critical theory rightly interrogate the structural limitations of Enlightenment tolerance, Lessing's play continues to inspire a vision of peace founded on ethical engagement rather than dogmatic superiority. Rather than dismissing it as outdated, modern defenders urge us to critically inherit Lessing's idealism to build a world where difference is not feared but respected and understood. With our explorations on the Lessing's play, while having revisited stipulations by the global scholia, we conclude that the East in the drama is not only a historical backdrop, but also a symbol of humanist values; Nathan and Saladin represent archetypes of dialogue and ethical coexistence; Nathan the Wise is a text that serves to build cultural bridges, where the cultural heritage of the East corresponds to the core values of the Enlightenment. Lessing does not

view the East as an exotic world, but as a space from which the West can learn humanism, tolerance and ethical reasoning, intelligence and humane values. The drama, with its symbolism and allegorical structure, is still relevant today in discussions of cultural dialogue and religious tolerance.

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