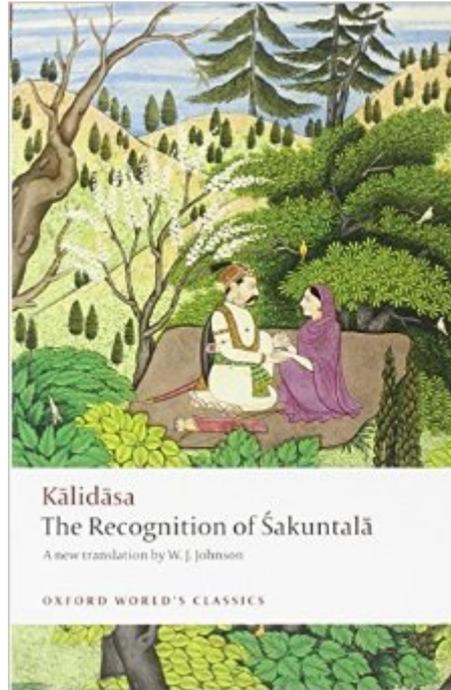


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The Recognition Of Sakuntala: A Play In Seven Acts (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

Kalidasa's play about the love of King Dusyanta for Sakuntala, a monastic girl, is the supreme work of Sanskrit drama by its greatest poet and playwright (c.4th century CE). Overwhelmingly erotic in tone and in performance, *The Recognition of Sakuntala* aimed to produce an experience of aesthetic rapture in the audience, comparable to certain types of mystical experience. The pioneering English translation of *Sakuntala* in 1789 caused a sensation among European composers and writers (including Goethe), and it continues to be performed around the world. This vibrant new verse translation includes the famous version of the story from the *Mahabharata*, a poetic and dramatic text in its own right and a likely source for Kalidasa. The introduction discusses the play in the aesthetic and cultural context of ancient India.

About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

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Customer Reviews

W. J. Johnson's introductory essay is thorough and informative, pitched at the general reader but never condescending. It begins with a brief outline of what is known of Kalidasa's life and an

assessment of the place of Sakuntala in the canon of world drama. A succinct and illuminating outline of the plot and structure of the play follows. The Recognition of Sakuntala tells the story of the love between King Dusyanta and the beautiful Sakuntala, who lives in the woodland hermitage of her foster father, a devout ascetic called Kanva. Sakuntala and Dusyanta contract a secret love match after which the King returns to his court leaving her his ring as a keepsake. Shortly afterward, distracted by thoughts of her lover, Sakuntala neglects her duties of hospitality and becomes the unknowing victim of a curse: her beloved will forget her until she produces some token of recognition. When she subsequently appears at Dusyanta's court visibly pregnant, she is rejected unrecognised. Even worse, when she tries to produce the ring to prove her story, she discovers that it was lost in her journey. After her public humiliation, Sakuntala vanishes into a heavenly beam of light (provided by her mother, the nymph Menaka). When the missing ring is later found in the belly of a fish, Dusyanta remembers his lost love and is plunged into despair and remorse. He is eventually called into service by Indra, king of the gods, to battle a gang of troublesome demons. On his way home, Dusyanta visits a celestial hermitage where he is fortuitously reunited with Sakuntala and meets his young son destined to be Bharata, a world emperor. Johnson's summary provides a useful orientation to the world of the play and its style.

The original translation by Sir William Jones of this famous Indian play was popular across Europe and read by prominent poets including Goethe and Schiller in the late 1700's. Sir William Jones was also a member of Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke's politically influential Literary Club and the translation by him, this is not it, was a small hit across Europe. It inspired some stylistic influence upon Goethe and Goethe must have read this about the time of the end of his "Italian Journey" where he later gained some creative energy after a dry spell following the massive success of his "Sorrows of Young Werther". (Sir William Jones is most famous today for observing that the similarities in Latin, Sanskrit, Persian, English and other, now called, Indo-European languages could not be just an accident). This modern translation by W.J. Johnson is a good effort; however, for a variety of reasons loses something in translation as it was written to be performed in at least two languages, Sanskrit and Prakrit, and also involved a lot of body language which at times was almost like a dance. Sir William Jones' translation is more vibrant and historically relevant, and other translations of his of Oriental translations as well as original poems, had an impact on 17th and 18th century European literature. Jones was a romantic supporter of the American revolution, even meeting with Benjamin Franklin in Paris to attempt a resolution to the crisis and play Franklin a

game of chess. Jones' most famous and widely popular poem, while he was alive, was "Caissa, or, The Game of Chess" which would have gotten Jones through many important doors and meetings. The play "Sakuntala" was written in the 4th or 5th century CE in India and is considered one of India's great plays.

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