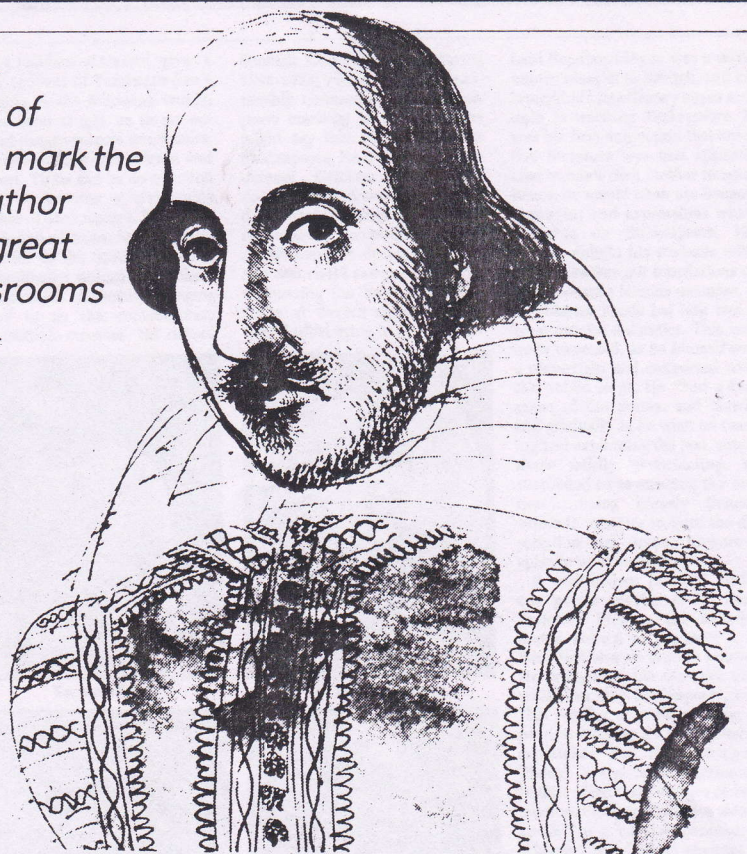


There has been a great tradition of Shakespeare teaching in Bengal. To mark the bard's birthday on April 16, the author recounts the feats of some of the great teachers of Shakespeare in the classrooms



SHAKESPEAREANA is a long tradition in Bengal. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has observed, "I do not know if any other country or people in the world has ever made one author the epitome, test, and symbol of literary culture as we Bengalis did with Shakespeare in the nineteenth century. Homer may have been something like this to the Greeks, but that is too distant a parallel. It was a cult which we had made typically Bengali, although the deity was foreign". (*The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian*). This has been possible because Shakespeare, since the beginning of English education in Bengal, has occupied a place of honour in the curriculum. Calcutta can take pride in the fact that its educational institutions have had some of the most eminent teachers of Shakespeare.

# THE BARD IN THE CLASSROOM

By ASHOKE SEN

Initially, these teachers were mostly Englishmen or Indians of European extraction. Of the first two celebrated teachers of Shakespeare in Bengal — Henry Vivian Derozio and David Lester Richardson — the former was an Eurasian, while the latter, an Englishman. Derozio, who was on the staff of Hindu College, had the reputation of being an inspiring teacher. Since he died unaccountably young — at the age of 23 — and thus had a very short career, not much is known about the method of his teaching. Suffice it to say that, some of the major figures of the Bengali Renaissance, like Reverend Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay, Ramgopal Ghosh and Parichand Mitra were his pupils. Richardson, who joined Hindu College as a Professor of English, was known for his inspired reading, clear elucidation and original criticism. An ardent admirer of his Shakespeare reading was Lord Macaulay himself, who once wrote to Richardson, "I may forget everything about India, but not your reading of Shakespeare, never." Richardson succeeded in infusing a true love of literature among his students, and thus, his teaching of Shakespeare went beyond mere reading of the text. He encouraged his students to recite and act out the various characters of Shakespeare's plays in the classroom. Thanks to his teaching, many of his students were even inspired to produce their own creative pieces. One such student was the great Michael Madhusudan Dutt, later to become the most important poet in the 19th century Bengali literature.

Succeeding Richardson, there were other Englishmen like Char-

Ashoke Sen is a freelance journalist.

les H. Tawney (1864-92), John Mann, Henry Rosher James and J. W. Holme (1910-23), who were all reputed Shakespeare teachers. They all taught at Presidency College. James had a superb gift for reading and Holme edited the *Old Arden As You Like It* in 1914. Tawney was an outstanding scholar. One can gauge the quality of his scholarship from his critical edition of *Richard III* (Macmillan, London 1888). Analysing the character of the protagonist, Tawney writes in his Introduction: "It is true that Richard's character is not calculated to awaken tragic pity, but it is almost too great to beg for it". His annotations were often prepared keeping in mind the needs of his Indian pupils. Being well versed in Sanskrit, he could draw parallels from Indian classics when such occasions arose. His Shakespeare teaching, thus, had a "comparative" approach.

One gets a lively account of Professor Holme's Shakespeare teaching in Subodh Chandra Sengupta's memoir: *Tchi no dibasa*. Writes Subodh Sengupta, "What I appreciated most was his transparent and clear literary vision. He was most averse to prolixity. In defining the chief characteristic of the Renaissance, Professor Holme had used the simple phrase 'apotheosis of Man'. Three scores of years have gone by since then and during this time I have read a good number of books on the Renaissance, but I have yet to come across a shorter and lucider

definition of the term". (Translation mine)

One of the first Indians to have made a name as a Shakespearian scholar was H. M. Percival, who taught at Presidency College for 31 years (1880-1911). Born in a Christian family at Chittagong, he was a product of the Dacca and Presidency College. Later, he was educated at London and Edinburgh universities where he studied a variety of subjects, including the Classics, Philosophy, English and French literature. His interpretations and criticisms

were essentially his own, though he was at fault with all the current Shakespearian criticisms of his time. One can feel the originality of his mind in the critical editions of Shakespeare he did at the request of his pupils. They are *As You Like It* (Calcutta, Longmans 1910), *The Merchant of Venice* (London, OUP 1912), *The Tempest* (Calcutta, 1929), *Anthony and Cleopatra* (CU, 1955). A firm believer in the maxim "Brevity is the soul of wit", he once observed to his pupil Professor Prafullachandra Ghosh, that Bradley's thesis in *Shakespearean Tragedy* might have been stated more effectively in one-fourth of the space he had taken up. About his interpretations of Shakespeare, we should turn to Professor P. C. Ghosh's account in the Silver Jubilee Number of Presidency College Magazine. Writes Professor Ghosh: "It revealed to us a new world of beauty and thought into which the profane herd of critics were never allowed to intrude, ... A philosopher in outlook he perhaps overemphasized the ethical import of Shakespeare's plays, but in his interpretations he often hit the mark nearer than many of the present day critics to whom only the play is the thing and anything else nothing".

Professor Manmohan Ghosh (of Presidency College (1896-97, 1903-21) was another eminent teacher of Shakespeare. An elder brother of Aurobindo Ghosh (Sri Aurobindo), he had made a name as a poet even during his undergraduate days at Oxford. He was steeped in Shakespeare since his childhood, and it is said that

he had *King Lear* and *Macbeth* read aloud to him at his deathbed. A vivid account of Manmohan Ghosh's teaching is found from the reminiscences of the late Sri Phanibhusan Chakravarti, his pupil and one time Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court:

"He entered the heart of the play to be read, but it was the entry of a living and like-minded artist into the workshop of another. ... (In) reading a play of Shakespeare with us, he would leave us outside, proceed inside himself, and from there would go on discovering to us the play's artistry, its evolution, and its mode of character delineation. ... With Shakespeare's writing for a cue, he seemed to go on re-creating the play in his own soul. ..."

(*Shakespeare Commemorative Volume*: Presidency College, Calcutta 1966.)

The legendary Prafullachandra Ghosh taught at Presidency College and Calcutta University for over three decades (1908-39). As a teacher of Shakespeare, Professor P. C. Ghosh combined the best of H. M. Percival and D. L. Richardson, and added something distinctively his own. Thus, in his lectures one could find the latter's animated reading, as well as the former's superb textual interpretations. Professor Ghosh did set great store by textual scholarship. It was his firm belief that the establishment of an accurate reading is an essential pre-requisite to the proper understanding of a Shakespearian text. To this end he would spare no pains. In case of a doubt he would consult the *Folio* and *Quarto* headings and search all source books. He would always come to the class equipped with *North's Plutarch* and *Holinshed's Chronicle*, and compare them

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"Prafullachandra Ghosh used to describe character after character before us. His dusky, portly form would metamorphose into a beautiful Desdemona before our mind's eye"

— Lila Majumdar

# SHAKESPEARE

(Continued from page 2)

with Shakespeare's texts when necessary. His interpretations of Shakespeare were entirely his own and he seldom made any references to criticism or critics, though he was well aware of them. A great admirer of Samuel Johnson, he followed Johnson's down-to-earth rational approach in his interpretations.

Professor Ghosh's strong point was his reading, with which he used to hold his students spell-bound. Lila Majumdar, the noted Bengali authoress, herself a brilliant student of English literature, describes Professor Ghosh in action:

"He would take our class once a week. His lectures would be always on the last two periods of the day's time-table. Two hours allotted for the lecture would often turn out to be three and a half hours. He would take up a Shakespeare play and finish it at one go. It will not be quite correct to say that he read them; neither did he act them out, because that implies an element of artificiality. Perhaps one should say that he bestowed those plays on us. Profullachandra Ghosh used to describe character after character before us. Even his dusky, portly form, would metamorphose into a beautiful Desdemona before our minds' eye. It was beyond my imagination that so many characters could be made to speak through one voice. Yet, no histrionics were there. He did not stir his hands or legs - the whole thing was achieved through his voice. It seemed (as if) some divine spirit had possessed him. The walls of the classroom vanished, and silently we would be transported to some world of beauty. Gradually, students from other classes or colleges would crowd near the door. A pin-drop silence prevailed. Reading over, the Professor and his listeners would silently go their separate ways, enthralled." Lila Majumdar further observes, "It is a pity that despite his vast erudition, Professor Ghosh did not write even a single line for students of the future. Today his name has only been reduced to an adage". (Pakdandi: Translation mine.)

A favourite disciple of Profullachandra Ghosh, Prof Subodh Chandra Sengupta, has, for over thirty years (1929-68) taught at Presidency College, Calcutta and Jadavpur universities. Even today, at the ripe old age of 91, he is involved in Shakespeare studies. His Shakespeare criticisms have been internationally acclaimed. The present writer recalls, how proud he felt in finding Prof Sengupta's *Shakespearean Comedy and Shakespeare's Historical Plays* mentioned on the recommended reading list of the B.A. (Hons) English course at his alma mater in Britain. Unlike his celebrated mentor, reading was not Prof Sengupta's strong point, but in his Shakespeare criticism he has always shown an originality of approach, which on occasions has gone against the views of such established scholars as E. M. W. Tillyard or Living Ribner. "His lectures were all very well-structured", says Professor

Sunanda Sanyal, "and I don't remember any of my classfellows at the university, who would not take notes at his lectures. Perhaps his 'drawback' was that he was never ever humorous in the true sense of the term, but he dealt with the most difficult aspects of Shakespeare studies, like the problem of authorship, where there is very little scope for humour in the first place. He handled such problems with great aplomb. He taught us how to judge "internal" evidence "external" evidence and so on. The "internal" evidence part of it was quite useful, as they helped us to develop some kind of critical outlook".

A few years' junior to Professor S. C. Sengupta and a *satirha* in the true etymological sense - both being pupils of P. C. Ghosh - Sri Taraknath Sen had a long innings (1934-1971) at Presidency College and the Post-Graduate department of Calcutta University. He is universally acknowledged to be the worthy successor of Professor Ghosh, and he too grew into a legend even during his life-time. He belonged to the great tradition of Percival and P. C. Ghosh, yet he was different from them, being more of an artist than either of his two illustrious predecessors. His concern was with "the craft of literature, the constructional aspect of a work of art, its design, rhythm and technique. This interest in the minutes of craftsmanship he succeeded in passing on to his pupil". (Taraknath Sen: A Memoir)

In the words of Professor Arun Das Gupta, a favourite pupil of Taraknath Sen, the latter's "reading of Shakespeare" was like "an initiation into a secret chamber. Images, ideas, words, objects of thought were unlocked by his voice and those abstractions took flesh. The elements of content and form became 'two communicating vessels', to use Hauser's metaphor, 'whose contents mix in a sort of endosmosis'. His nimble mind would move back and forth and in each of the parts there was something of the other parts. That is how he would weave the texture of his discourses. It became a simulacrum of the text. Forging and retaining the link with every single detail of the work, it yet possessed an independent life".

In a personal letter to the present writer, Ketaki Kushari Dyson, poet, essayist and translator, a product of Presidency College and



Manmohan Ghosh

now a resident of Oxford, gives a vivid account of Taraknath Sen's teaching in the following words: "Taraknath taught us in an enclosed library cubicle downstairs. The atmosphere was solemn and earnest. There can be no question of it - he was a memorable teacher of Shakespeare. Following the Arden editions, he would unravel for us the textual subtleties methodically, unhurriedly, like a true scholar, especially bringing home to us the contemporary Elizabethan nuances. He delved



Taraknath Sen



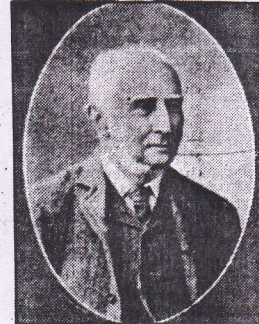
Prfullachandra Ghosh

into Latin root-meanings, showed us how the pauses in the spoken words of verse drama meshed with gestures. He made us very aware of the richness of the verbal pattern and at the same time never let us forget a moment that it was drama, meant to be acted on the stage. Now, when witnessing a performance of Shakespeare in his native land, I sometimes wonder how much of the original nuances the audience is really getting.

"Perhaps the only problem with Taraknath's teaching was that it was too earnest. He seldom smiled. Sometimes this solemnity could become a little oppressive for us youngsters. . . . The dark passions were brought home to us, but the fun and frolic side of Shakespeare was perhaps not emphasized enough. Possibly that was a bit of Taraknath's personality coming through, with its high seriousness. Levity and frivolity didn't seem to exist in his world. Sometimes we girls felt rebellious about this. But there can be no denying that all in all, being taught Shakespeare by him was an unforgettable experience. He imprinted on us the essentials of how to study those great texts, from looking at source-material to surveying pattern of sounds and images. It is a lesson that lasts a lifetime".

One must not get an impression from the foregoing account that Presidency College had a monopoly of eminent Shakespeare teachers. There was, for example, Prof. J. C. Scrimgeour at Duff (now

Scottish Church) College during 1896-1925, whose name was inextricably connected with Shakespeare teaching in the city. One might say that his passion was Shakespeare. He founded the now defunct Calcutta Shakespeare Association and was its first President. Prof. Scrimgeour had the reputation of knowing the texts of all Shakespeare dramas by heart, and one could not get away with misquoting the Bard in his presence. A devout churchman, he would often bring in Shakespeare



Charles H. Tawney



Harry Hugh Melville Percival

to illustrate his scripture lessons. He laid a good deal of emphasis on the proper reading of the text, and his own reading often rose to the level of stage acting, which enhanced the students' understanding of the plays. There was another reputed teacher of Shakespeare - Arthur Mowatt - at Scottish Church College in the 1930s. According to Amiya Majumdar, who was taught by Professor Mowatt, "He did not do any 'acting' like Scrimgeour. His approach was different. To test how much the students were able to grasp the sentiment, dialogues and suspense of the play, he himself, first would read out a bit from the play, and then ask one of the students to read it. Whether the student had comprehended the meaning, he would be able to gauge from the reading. Arthur Mowatt always used to come to the class well-prepared. His teaching was measured - he would read out a bit, explain and offer his criticism, and then try to find out how the students were responding. He did *Macbeth* with us. His reading and exposition of the line, 'The multitudinous seas incarnate' still rings in my ears. Teaching was a kind of mission to him".

IN THE twenties and thirties, Vidyasagar College had a galaxy of distinguished Shakespeare teachers. There were in the College such luminaries as Lalit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, Kunja Lal Nag and Jitendra Lal Banerjee. Professor

Lalit Bandyopadhyay was a well-known essayist in Bengali, and he brought his fine literary sense and taste in teaching Shakespeare. It was his firm conviction that creative literature was best appreciated in one's own mother tongue, hence, he would often use Bengali synonyms and expressions while lecturing on Shakespeare. He used to delight his students with extempore Bengali translations of Shakespeare's famous passages.

Professor Kunja Lal Nag was a great one for dramatics. This was quite expected, as he himself was a playwright and connected with the public stage. He "had a real sense of the drama, and slowly and gradually as he went on reading and explaining the text, sometimes mildly gesticulating, he succeeded in re-enacting the scenes . . . using homely Bengali words in mimicry to spice the description of some humorous episode or situation".

A well-known political leader and public speaker of his time, Professor Jitendra Lal Banerjee (better known as professor J. L. Banerjee) was an erudite scholar. He brought in his erudite skill while teaching Shakespeare, and "his reading of great passages of passion became an unforgettable experience for the listeners". Though not given to histrionics, in time of reading passages of dark passion, Professor Banerjee would speak "in a curious penetrating whisper" that had an element of pensiveness about it. His reading itself served as an illuminating interpretation and detailed explanations of difficult words or passages were often not necessary. His own editions of Shakespeare's plays were quite popular with the students of the time.

Bangabasi College had on its staff some of the finest teachers of Shakespeare. To start with, there was the Reverend E. M. Wheeler, who being a pupil of D. L. Richardson, imbibed his mentor's lively Shakespeare reading. His zest and passion in reading helped the students to understand and appreciate Shakespeare better. Wheeler, however, did not split hair with the details of the text for elaborate explanation. He was happy with the general trend of the thought contents and pointed out the niceties of aesthetic appeal. He would, before reading an act of Shakespeare play, give a preface, and having finished the reading of the act, provide a commentary. His interpretation was always original, and even if it was a departure from the conventional explanation propounded by such august authorities as Verity or Deighton, he would not flinch from his stance.

During his tenure (1918-47) at Bangabasi College, Professor Jitendranath Chakravarty was another big name in Shakespeare teaching. A great admirer of Verity, Professor Chakravarty's forte was close analysis of the text and its etymological explanation. Being a reputed teacher of Old and Middle English at Calcutta University, it was perhaps natural that he would be interested in the linguistic aspects of Shakespeare's plays. Nirendranath Roy was another celebrated Shakespearean scholar at this college. So renowned was

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for his Shakespeare teaching, that students from other colleges would crowd the class-room to listen to his lecture. He translated *Macbeth* and *The Merchant of Venice* in Bengali and founded 'Shakespeare Parishad' which had staged many Shakespeare plays in Bengali. His book *Shakespeare: His Audience and His Readers* (1965) is an important contribution to Shakespeare studies.

At Ripon (now Surendranath) College, Shakespeare was taught by Professor Prafulla Kumar Guha, who also taught at Calcutta and later at Jadavpur University. As a teacher he commanded a great deal of respect from his students, and this was evident in the maximum attendance he could draw from the students in his classes, which were always very crowded.

Reminiscing about Professor Guha's teaching, Professor Shanta Mahalanobis, who was his student in the Post-graduate class of Calcutta University, says "He could make Shakespeare come alive. There was interpretation, there was comment, but to present Shakespeare in a class of about one hundred students, and to be able to command pin-drop silence at the kind of reading and the kind of sheer enjoyment that he could communicate, was in itself an achievement.

"He did not perform in the class. Nor were there any gestures, but it was his stentorian voice, and his ability — a very rare ability — to enact the scenes through subtle nuances and inflexions of voice, and to be able to do it in scenes that required both male and female presentation, simply amazed us. Also he had this remarkable memory that could enable him to quote at random from just any other Shakespeare text to make his point. He made us realize that Shakespeare's comic spirit, the cordiality and geniality in his comedies, his tremendous tolerance of human beings was not just restricted to one play (*Much Ado About Nothing*) we were meant to study, but it extended over all his comedies.

"Professor Guha, at least in class, was a very vital person. I remember, at particular scenes, he would simply throb with excitement. His eyes would sparkle, his voice would tremble, as he was totally engaged in reading and the interpretation of the reading. While reading, he could send out vibrations to students to respond exactly the way he responded to the text".

The great tradition of Shakespeare teaching in Calcutta, is alas, a thing of the past. But this, perhaps, one would have thought was something inevitable, in conformity with the general decline in standard. The Bard one gathers, even in his own native land, is not as popular as he used to be. Yet, here in Calcutta, things are not as gloomy as they seem, when we have amongst us scholars like Professor Jyoti Bhattacharya, Bhabotosh Chatterjee, Debabrata Mukhopadhyay, who have kept the tradition of Shakespeare teaching alive in the city. Mention must also be made of the efforts of young dons like Amitava Ray, who are trying to popularize Shakespeare by staging his plays in Bengali.

**MUTT & JEFF** by Bud Fisher

MUTT, I HEAR A BURGLAR DOWN-STAIRS!

YES, I HEAR HIM TOO!

MUTT, BE CAREFUL HE DOESN'T HARM YOU!

HE WON'T!

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**Tarzan THE T-1 STORY** by EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

TARZAN'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY! SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO TARZAN MADE HIS FIRST APPEARANCE IN PRINT IN THE OCTOBER 1912 ISSUE OF THE ALL STORY MAGAZINE! IT WAS AUTHOR EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS'S SECOND PUBLISHED STORY. PUBLICATION IN BOOK FORM FOLLOWED IN 1914.

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS (1875-1950), THE CREATOR OF TARZAN, WAS A MASTER STORYTELLER. ONE OF HIS MOST IMAGINATIVE CREATIONS WAS PELLUCIDAR, THE MONK AT THE EARTH'S CORE. HERE STONE AGE PEOPLE AND ANIMALS FROM THE ICE AGE COEXIST AND STILL THRIVE. HERE TWO DIFFERENT RACES OF MEN AND MONSTERS UNKNOWN TO THE SURFACE WORLD.

THE T-220, THE PEPPELIN, CONTINUES TO SEARCH FOR HIS FIRST COURSE TO THE HOLE AT THE EARTH'S CORE. HAS BEEN RECALLED FOR SERVICE. ONCE AGAIN TARZAN LEADS AN EXPEDITION TO PELLUCIDAR. FIVE HUNDRED MILES BENEATH THE EARTH'S SURFACE.

LOOK, THERE'S A SUN IN THE SKY!

A SUN THAT NEVER SETS. THERE IS NO NIGHT IN PELLUCIDAR, CHAKA.

AND NO WAY OF NAVIGATING BY THE POINTS OF THE COMPASS, EITHER.

BUT HOW WILL WE BE ABLE TO NAVIGATE TO THE CITY OF SARI, TARZAN?

CAPTAIN HINES WILL BE ABLE TO NAVIGATE BY HIS INSTRUMENTS AS LONG AS HE FOLLOWS JASON KORDLEY'S RADIO SIGNAL.

IMAGINE HAVING TO NAVIGATE BY INSTRUMENTS IN A WORLD WHERE THERE IS CONSTANT SUNLIGHT.

BUT HOW DO THE PEOPLE OF PELLUCIDAR FIND THEIR WAY AROUND IN A WORLD WHERE THE SUN STAYS IN THE SAME PLACE AND A COMPASS IS USELESS?

THE NATIVES OF PELLUCIDAR ARE BORN WITH A HOWLING INSTINCT. NO ONE CAN EXPLAIN IT, BUT ANYONE WHO HAS BORN HERE CAN ALWAYS FIND HIS WAY HOME.

BUT THEY HAVE NO NATURAL DEFENSES AGAINST DISEASES FROM THE SURFACE. LIKE AN INFLUENZA VIRUS, AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE RETURNED HERE.

TARZAN, IT'S A PTERANODON! THEY'VE BEEN EXTINCT ON THE SURFACE FOR MILLIONS OF YEARS.

YOU'RE RIGHT, CHAKA. ONLY HERE THEY'RE CALLED THOMPONS AND THEY'RE NOT HALF AS STRANGE AS SOME OF THE THINGS YOU MAY SEE.

IF WE'RE LUCKY WE WON'T RUN INTO ANY KOKSARS, HOKS, OR ANAKS.

TARZAN'S DESCENDANTS OF THE 16TH CENTURY SPANISH MAIN.

STARRING: TARZAN, HINES, JASON KORDLEY, AND HARROLD BLESS.

A RACE OF INTELLIGENT REPTILES THAT ONCE DOMINATED PELLUCIDAR.

**BRENDA BOSTON RECORDER** by ASHA

IS THIS THE FLOTT? I'D LIKE TO SEND A BOUQUET OF WHITE ROSES.

THE NAME IS RAVEN GRAVES.

THE MESSAGE IS: THANKS FOR THE ENCHANTED EVENING. YOU BROUGHT ME BACK TO LIFE.

ALL RIGHT! TODAY I START ON A PULITZER-PRIZE-WINNING PROJECT!

IT'S AMAZING HOW A LITTLE DOSE OF ROMANCE CAN BOOST YOUR ENERGY AND CLEAR YOUR HEAD!

BRENDA, COULD YOU COME INTO MY OFFICE?

GABBY AND PESKY AND I WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT RAVEN GRAVES.

SORRY, HANK, BUT I'M NOT INCINED TO DISCUSS MY PERSONAL LIFE AT A STAFF MEETING.

LISTEN, I HAVE A GREAT IDEA FOR A SERIES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I THINK YOU'D BETTER COME INTO MY OFFICE.

AND SO GABBY AND PESKY LAY OUT THEIR CASE AGAINST RAVEN GRAVES, ALLEGED VAMPIRE.