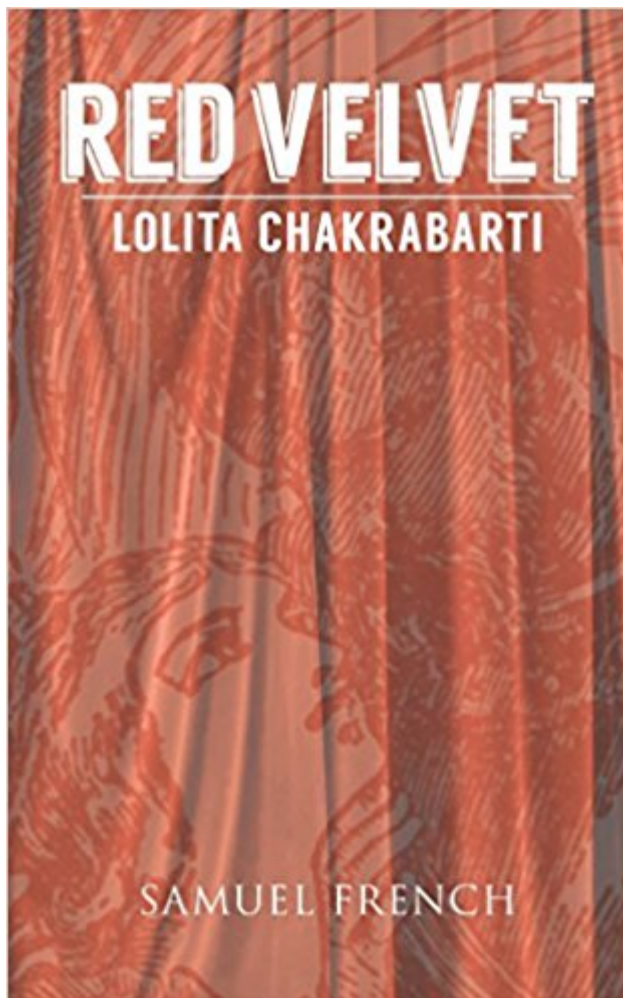


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# Red Velvet



## Synopsis

Red Velvet is about the nineteenth century black American actor Ira Aldridge. In a theatre dressing room in Poland, an elderly and sick Aldridge prepares to play King Lear. The intrusion of a young female journalist forces him to look back on the defining moment of his illustrious career. Thirty years previously, Edmund Kean, one of the greatest actors of his generation, collapses on the Theatre Royal stage in London, and Pierre Laporte, theatre manager and friend, asks Aldridge to replace him as Othello. At the same time Parliament is preparing to vote in favour of abolishing slavery in all British colonies. Opinions are fiercely divided. Aldridge performs successfully at the Theatre Royal but the reactions of the cast and critics are complex and divisive. He is not allowed to fulfil his engagement and the betrayal of a dear friend changes the course of his life. Red Velvet examines the world of the theatre, where comedy and tragedy are synonymous. The play discusses friendship, betrayal, the art of acting and prejudice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The story of Aldridge's painful reception is an interesting subject for this first full-length piece by Lolita Chakrabarti . . . and it's powerfully imagined . . . Chakrabarti smartly draws parallels between the world of Shakespeare's Othello, the 1830s and our own society. She writes shrewdly about the theatre's role as an instrument of both social progress and conservatism . . . an arresting and sometimes very funny play. (Henry Hitchings Evening Standard 2012-10-17)A striking new play about theatre itself . The playwright Lolita Chakrabarti brings this fascinating story to vivid life in Red

Velvet . she tells her story with clarity and wit (Charles Spencer Telegraph 2012-10-17)A play that first playfully, then powerfully, examines progress on the stage as a reflection of the wider world. It's a cracker of a play: gripping, intelligent and passionate . this is a fine, subtle play that not only depicts the ugliness of prejudice in action, but also touches on wider questions about how change is achieved in theatre and society. (Sarah Hemming Financial Times 2012-10-16)A thought-provoking piece of social history ... Red Velvet is a fascinating play based on the true story of Ira Aldridge, who in 1833, became the first black actor in a leading role on the London stage (Janet Street-Porter Independent on Sunday 2012-11-25)A sharp, entertaining play ... it is interesting on the craft of acting, but the personal and racial story is central, skewering certain ignorant terrors not entirely dead today ... Chakrabati poignantly frames the play ... wicked fun is had, too. (Libby Purves The Times 2012-10-18)[It] puts prejudice - racial and sexual - on trial, but it does so with imaginative flourishes, and extends its inquiry beyond the obviously political ... fresh and sparky. (Susannah Clapp Observer 2012-10-21)Fiery and funny in equal measure ... Red Velvet is more satirical than angry, full of good-natured theatre folk tying themselves into hysterical knots ... a confident, clever curtain-raiser. (Andrzej Lukowski Time Out 2012-10-23)Chakrabarti's wonderful new play ... the play's achievement is to animate the themes of racism without descending into preachiness or I-told-you-so sermonising ... it's hilarious to watch. But the play resists the temptation to mock the Victorians without mercy. It's all done with warmth and a sense of proportion. (Lloyd Evans Spectator 2012-10-27)keenly aware of the ludicrousnesses of life . . . a very funny piece indeed. (Telegraph)the issues Red Velvet raises have never entirely gone away. (Guardian)Lolita Chakrabarti's 'Red Velvet' captures the drama and angst...surrounding Aldridge's groundbreaking performance (Theater Mania)an endlessly fascinating story that everyone should know (Theater Mania)you can experience firsthand what it must have felt like to be part of one seriously rattled London theater audience in 1833 (The New York Times)a last scene that is captivating, and thoroughly devastating (New York Theater)I defy you to attend 'Red Velvet' and not want to know more about Ira Aldridge (New York Theater)A crucial point of change in London's culturally diverse history is played out upon the stage . . . The play will force you to think about the political subtext of theatre and about issues easily translatable to present-day stagecraft and politics. (Maddi Howell, Books Editor York Vision 2014-10-07) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Winner of the 2012 Most Promising Playwright Evening Standard award, Lolita Chakrabati's Red Velvet tells the story of Ira Aldridge, the first African American to take to the lead on a London stage.

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An amazing play. I hope to see it performed some day. Its economy, eloquence, and clarity are remarkable. Somehow, though, I don't think the title does it justice.

Not as well executed as I would have liked. Perhaps the constraints of the original staging did not allow for this, but I would have liked to actually see the political unrest outside of the theater that paralleled the dis-ease with the first black actor playing Othello inside of the theater. I had hoped to be able to teach this play in tandem with Othello in a course on Shakespeare and Adaptations (in which, for example, I would also pair The Merchant of Venice and Grace Tiffany's novel, The Turquoise Ring). I still might do that, and have the students research the political unrest referenced in the play in order to write their own "footnotes" regarding the socio-political context.

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