

Unit: 02: Canon and Culture: Universality of Shakespeare

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Shakespeare is banded along with the greatest writers in literature. Some writers and books are considered authentic, valuable and worthy of study. How and who draw the list of great writers and books. This can become controversial because it excludes more than it includes. Certainly, it is not fair to say that literary merit is linked to the number or power of the speakers of a language.

Objectives

This unit aims to help you to:

1. become familiar with the concept of canon,
2. understand the socio-cultural operations of power involved canonisation,
3. analyse how Shakespeare is canonised within and outside England,
4. reread the inclusion and omission of Shakespeare in the literary canon, and
5. prepare you to evaluate Shakespeare’s position in the literary canon

In this module, we will look at five units. The first two—Canon, and Canonising Shakespeare—try to locate Shakespeare as a British phenomenon. The last three units—Shakespeare’s universalism, Imperial promotion of Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s Universal Appeal— try to locate him outside England and explore the relationship between canonising Shakespeare and the British interests.

Canon

Canon is a loaded word. The word ‘canon’ is derived from the Greek word *kanon* which meant a measuring rod, or standard. Based on that Canonical works are regarded as exemplary and authoritative. The word came to be used about the Bible to refer to which books in it had the stamp of approval. The Church classified some books as canonical, some as apocryphal and some as non-canonical.

Literature has been defined as highly valued writing. The experience of reading certain books was considered higher than that of others. The set of works accepted by common consensus as embodying what is valuable in a subject became the canon of that subject. The literary canon of literature is the set of authors and texts handed down as being great by generations. In literature, some works are regarded as canonical and Shakespeare has been part of the canon of English literature from his own time and that of literature itself shortly afterwards.

This involves three concepts: a set of authors and books, approval and hands down, and the idea of greatness. The Church determines the canon on its idea that the authors of the canonical texts of the Bible were ‘divinely inspired’. In literature, poets are said to be inspired by the muse and drink from the springs of the helicon or the “milk of paradise” as Coleridge would put it (“Kubla Khan”). The rise of modern literature could be linked to the downfall of religion. When the religious values were replaced by the secular ones, the vacuum created in religious canon was filled by literary texts. Literary scholars, mostly from university departments, decided their canonicity.

The decision about which works are to be canonized is a subjective one. The stamp of approval for the decision came from authorities who wielded power at that time. In the case of literature, the authority to decide canonicity is a problem. The principles on which this decision is to be taken remains

problematic. Arguing that it is not possible to evaluate literature in the abstract since work is not produced in a vacuum, Arnold Kettle thinks that "Literature is a part of life and can be judged only in its relevance to life. Life is not static, but moving and changing" (*An Introduction to English Novel*).

Canon implies that canonical works have lasting value. The word 'classical' is used concerning canonical literature. Italo Calvino who discussed the question gives 14 definitions of a "classic":

1. The classics are those books about which you usually hear people saying: 'I'm rereading...', never 'I'm reading....'
2. The classics are those books which constitute a treasured experience for those who have read and loved them, but they remain just as rich experience for those who reserve the chance to read them for when they are in the best condition to enjoy them.
3. The classics are books which exercise a particular influence, both when they imprint themselves on our imagination as unforgettable, and when they hide in the layers of memory disguised as the individual or the collective unconscious.
4. A classic is a book which with each rereading offers as much of a sense of discovery as the first reading.
5. A classic is a book which even when we read it for the first time gives the sense of rereading something we have read before.
6. A classic is a book which has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers.
7. The classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed.
8. A classic is a work which constantly generates a pulviscular cloud of critical discourse around it, but which always shakes the particles off.
9. Classics are books which, the more we think we know them through hearsay, the more original, unexpected, and innovative we find them when we read them.
10. A classic is the term given to any book which comes to represent the whole universe, a book on a par with ancient talismans.
11. 'Your' classic is a book to which you cannot remain indifferent, and which helps you define yourself in relation or even in opposition to it.
12. A classic is a work that comes before other classics, but those who have read other classics first immediately recognize its place in the genealogy of classic works.
13. A classic is a work which relegates the noise of the present to a background hum, which at the same time the classics cannot exist without.
14. A classic is a work which persists as a background noise even when a present that is incompatible with it holds sway (Calvino, 1991).

Most of these definitions are applicable to Shakespeare. However, as canon changes with time, the value of work becomes debatable. This makes canon not only a body of texts but also a set of reading practices. A work becomes canonical because of its interpretations and the critical response it receives.

However, as these are responses to specific, and not eternal, experiences and tastes. Every interpretation is an attempt to formulate the signification of the text in the specific context of the horizon of the reader's experience. So, an interpretation is an understanding of the meaning of a text. While meaning implies unquestionability, signification is circumscribed by the context of the generation of that interpretation. The concept of value changes with time and so does our notion of "good writing" conditioned by aesthetic values of a particular authority, also would change.

Some major critics who examine the question of canon formation are Paul Lauter who regards canon debate as political question serving the needs of a democratic society to address the "central questions about the direction and configuration of an institution's programs" (*Canons and Contexts*) and John Guillory for whom canon debate signifies "a crisis in the form of cultural capital we call literature" (*Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon*) and so, a cultural question.

Modern critics like Terry Eagleton, who problematizes the concept of literature as "highly valued writing", argues that even a train timetable could be literature if it helps the reader to philosophically reflect on time and travel. Eagleton questions the notions of objectivity and universalism in literature, even claims: "Shakespeare, for example, can cease to be literature" and thinks that the ideas like 'literary canon', "great tradition" and 'national literature' constructs "fashioned by particular people for particular reasons for a certain time." He radically maintains that "there is no such thing as a literary work or tradition which is valuable in itself", and that "Value is a transitive term: it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in light of given purposes". If the value of writings is judged by the different people who read them, at different times, can the canonisation of Shakespeare be justified?

It is pointed out that the "studies of Shakespeare's critical and cultural reception have demonstrated the socially constructed character of the Shakespeare phenomenon and canon" (Ivo Kamps, Ed., *Materialist Shakespeare*). Formation of literary canon involves the operation of social forces which shape literature by legitimizing some authors and works at the expense of others. This recognition of 'artistic merit' entails cultural familiarization of authors and works through institutionalization and social recognition. The power struggle for social legitimacy and discourse formulation involved in canonisation is aimed at monopoly over intangible cultural assets. Unequal monopoly results in unequal power of agents and agencies involved in the process allowing them to determine their power as well as that of others, skewing the objectivity of canonisation.

Shakespeare as English Canon

Shakespeare is quintessentially English. Not just because he wrote in the English language, but also because he reflects its history, culture, attitudes, concerns, and values. That he was born and lived in England, wrote in the English language, is associated with London, theatres reflect the Elizabethan England's social customs and values, and has contributed to the development of English language and literature entitles him to be placed in the English Canon.

His contemporaries' and later generations' high esteem towards him, the accumulated high volume of critical scholarship on him, and his popular appreciation as the national English poet made Shakespeare culturally worshipped as a genius who represented the values of England. Shakespeare was very rooted in his culture and language and responded to the conflicts of his age. There is ample textual evidence of his response to England's social and political developments such as the painful transition from Catholicism to Protestantism, the pangs of the birth of modern age from feudalism, scientific

temper challenging superstitions, the emergence of linguistic nationalities, growth of trade, migration and colonisation; fascination for the brave new world, the politics of war, white society's xenophobic response to blacks and Muslims, and the emergence of the voices for women.

EMW Tillyard's *Elizabethan World Picture* (1959) gives an account of the major ideas of the world order within which Shakespeare operated. These include ideas such as Angels; the Stars and Fortunes; the Analogy between Macrocosm and Microcosm; the Four Elements; the Four Humours; Sympathies; Correspondences; and the Cosmic Dance. How much how contemporary readers respond to these ideas reduce Shakespeare's universality is obvious.

When the early English maritime explorers staged *Hamlet* and *Richard II* aboard the ship of Captain Keeling, they were taking Shakespeare across the globe, although unknowingly. The surviving transcripts of General William Keeling's journal give an incredible story of the staging of *Hamlet* and *Richard II* on board an East India Company ship off the East African coast in 1607.

5 [September 1607]. *I sent the interpreter [Fernandez], according to his desier, aboard the Hector, whear he brooke fast, and after came aboard mee, wher we gave the tragedie of Hamlett.*

30 [September 1607]. *Captain Hawkins dined with me, wher my companions acted Kinge Richard the Second*

31 [March 1608]. *I envited Captain Hawkins to a ffishe dinner, and had Hamlet acted aboard me: wch I p'mitt to keepe my people from idleness and unlawfull games, or sleepe.*

If it is true, Keeling's naval crew of amateur players were the ones who initiated the global export of Shakespeare canon which eventually became the major colonial cultural tool.

Modern literature departments, especially English Departments began to disregard traditional canon as outdated and instead of teaching literary masters like Shakespeare, preferred contemporary writers, who they thought represented the multicultural, multi-ethnic and pluralistic modern society. Coming down heavily on the white male-dominated British literature canon "a Cultural Stonehenge", and suggesting it to reflect the realities of the present, the British historian Lisa Jardine recommended, "For the sake of the new forward-looking, plural and multicultural British nation, we must stop teaching the old canon as the repository of authentically British values."

Toni Morison also emphasizes the ideological and cultural dimension of canon construction saying, "Canon building is empire building. Canon defence is national defence. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature and range (of criticism, of history, of the history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principles, the sociology of art, and the humanist imagination) is the clash of cultures. And all of the interests are vested". The English canon and the changed canon reflect this spirit.

But when the East India Company played Shakespeare at Calcutta theatres in 1755, they were more conscious of its cultural importance. The English colonial period took Shakespeare across the globe. How he became the national poet of England is a complicated story. He was certainly celebrated during his time, but, he was not unique. Although Ben Jonson eulogises him like that.

He was forgotten within 50 years of his death in 1616. Theatres were closed in 1642 because of Civil War. However, when King Charles II, who became king following the Restoration, permitted two acting companies—Duke's Men and King's Men—there was a sudden requirement of lays. The easy solution was to revive or revise the pre-Civil War plays. This led to the revival and revisions of

Shakespeare plays. As unrevised plays were unpopular, Shakespeare was performed differently in the Restoration stage. Slowly, the adaptation of his plays appealed to the Restoration audience.

A six-volume illustrated edition of Shakespeare plays by Nicholas Rowe appeared in 1709, and Alexander Pope's edition of Shakespeare appeared in 1723-25. A commemorative statue of Shakespeare got installed at Westminster Abbey in 1741. Shakespeare Ladies Club, established in the 1730s, demanded for Shakespeare in the original. As the production of his original plays became successful, Shakespeare once again dominated the box office. David Garrick, known for his lead role in *Richard III*, championed the cause of Shakespeare in the original and organised the Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769. The grand spectacle of Shakespeare characters in procession through London, chanting "Shakespeare forever!" proved a great success. This set in motion the great Shakespeare cult some 150 years after his death. Garrick's Ode exclaiming "Tis he. 'tis he – the god of our idolatry" represents the mood of the Jubilee. This spirit continued with a later British Arthur Murphy (1727-1805) writing in *Gray's Inn Journal* (Vol. 41) that, "With us Islanders, Shakespeare is a kind of established religion in poetry" (346). Bardolatry projected Shakespeare a kind of poetic genius and a demi-god.

We still find the questions raised by Shakespeare, who lived at the dawn of the modern era, but when the British drew the plan to introduce western education among the natives, they also hoped to spread English culture and values among the colonised. This resulted in the clash of cultures.

It is a fact that India managed to Indianize Shakespeare over a while. But, the canonicity of Shakespeare remained a measure of Indian literature for a long time. And despite the many attempts to ignore him, Shakespeare returns stronger each time he is side-lined.

Shakespeare as Universal Canon

No living or dead writer ever commanded so much of critical scholarship and so many adaptations. I suggest you google the word 'Shakespeare'. In less than a second, you will find about 185 million results from all across the world. That makes him truly universal. If Shakespeare's presence in far-flung places is proof of his universalism, how he got there is also equally important.

Harold Bloom, in his *The Western Canon* (1994) argues for the inclusion of Shakespeare next to Dante at the very centre of the Western canon and wants him to be a measure to judge other writers. In this book, he reiterates the traditional eligibility for canonicity and his idea of the western canon. He reacts against the critics who see literature is an instrument for cultural, social and political changes, and are reluctant to accept Shakespeare's eminence, his aesthetic supremacy and the originality of his plays. Bloom condemns "Feminists, Afrocentrists, Marxists, Foucault-inspired New Historicists, and deconstructors" and asserts that the strength of the "canonical is manifested in the quiet persistence of the strongest writers" (278). His 'Preface' to his *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1997), also attacks the "Neo-Marxists, New Feminists, New Historicists, and French-influenced theorists who demonstrate "their cultural materialism by giving us a reduced Shakespeare, a pure product of the 'social energies' of the English Renaissance" (xv), and ridicules the revolutionary pretences of "our academics, who persuade themselves that they speak for the insulted and injured of the world by denying the aesthetic primacy of Shakespeare" (xvii). His adoration of Shakespeare increases in his later book, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998) where Bloom is a romantic and practical critic overawed by Shakespeare and restates that Shakespeare is the most influential human author ever.

Responses to Shakespeare come from everywhere in the world; On the occasion of the quarter centenary of Shakespeare's birth, Polish theatre critic Jan Kott wrote *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*

redefining the course of modern Shakespeare studies. After the quarter-century of his death, the question raised is *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?* However, modern Shakespeare scholarship seems to move in circles concerning Shakespeare's universalism.

In his *Shakespeare in Swahiland: In Search of a Global Poet* (2016), Edward Wilson-Lee sets himself upon the quest for the key to Shakespeare's "universal appeal", which he calls the "the Holy Grail of Shakespeare studies". He speaks of an Edward Steere, a Christian missionary in Zanzibar who translated Lamb into Swahili. Today, more than an Elizabethan product, Shakespeare is regarded as a world phenomenon. His neutral universality makes it easier for his cultural adaptations across languages, cultures, nationalities and ages. Peter Brooks emphasizes Shakespeare's "neutral universality" saying, "What he wrote is not interpretation: it is the thing itself" that he is of everybody.

While the other missionaries wanted to unite humanity under a common God, Wilson-Lee says that Steere "believed in the possibility of shared thought, language, culture ... a common humanity which reversed the fragmentation of human society after the Tower of Babel" and hoped to bring harmony through Shakespeare, who Steere thought was universal. This was the general spirit of the colonising British and the western missionaries who worked in the British Empire.

The ambivalence about Shakespeare's universality was first expressed in 1623 by his contemporary Ben Jonson. Ben Jonson called Shakespeare "Soul of the age!", but went on to claim that "He was not of an age but for all time!" But, how is the soul of age, is "not of an age but for all time" is a paradox that is to be resolved.

While Ben Jonson confirmed the cliché that Shakespeare was universal and that his plays transcend culture, Samuel Jonson in the preface to Shakespeare in 1765, confirms that Shakespeare's plays had "long outlived his century," and argued that the secret to their durability was universalism.

His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can but operate upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply and observation will always find. (Samuel Jonson: "Preface to Shakespeare")

The influential critic Jonson's opinion got widely accepted and in the meantime, along with the English language which covered the world and with English education Shakespeare's plays reached everywhere as the Imperial English Empire repeated Johnson's argument. English authorities and English-educated natives highlighted Shakespeare's texts, characters, situations and quotations. This gave rise to a notion that certain facet of life celebrated in Shakespeare's texts are eternal in form and universal in content.

All over the world, he has been hybridized and localised. English colonial powers took him to the places where he was least likely to survive. He did not merely survive; rather, he thrived in hostile conditions. That Shakespeare is also local is epitomised in the construction of the new Globe Theatre in 1998. When we appreciate its faithful reconstruction near its original location, and as we applaud not only the reproductions of his plays as they were four centuries ago, we fix him thoroughly in England. But it also stages Shakespeare adaptations in regional languages which locate Shakespeare themes in local formats responds to local contexts and realities. Are these two at the two ends of the universal debate in Shakespeare? Or are they the two sides of the same coin? Is there any contradiction here in claiming that Shakespeare is universal?

No other writer has indeed exploited so many themes of universal appeal. We tend to believe that no other author has created characters and situations of such variables such as breadth and depth. The 19th-century French novelist Alexandre Dumas, had said, "After God, Shakespeare has created most". Well, technically it is incorrect. His Spanish contemporary and prolific writer Lope de Vega (1562-1634) has written more plays and about 400 of them have survived.

Universal means something applicable to all cases. But, is what is true for Shakespeare is true for the rest of the world? Shakespeare was limited by his context. Look at this way. He was a white, Christian, Caucasian male of Elizabethan London. Each of these specifications has hundreds of other possibilities. So, how can his views and themes be applied to the people whose skin could be black, brown or yellow; who could be Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist by religion; who could be racially Semitic, Dravidian or Mongloid, who could be sexually male, female or transgender; and who could be contemporary to Shakespeare, living today or living tomorrow?

Shakespeare's universal appeal defies logic. He has never been out of England. If he did tour the countryside with his troupes, it was confined within England. His plays, as far as we know, were not staged outside England during his lifetime. If one wants to answer the question how did Shakespeare whose horizon of experience was circumscribed to England could appeal to those who don't speak English, and in far off places, even after a gap of four centuries, the answer is that "he was not for an age, but for all time", as Jonson had put it.

The Imperial promotion of Shakespeare

When Shakespeare was introduced into colonial regional languages, the British hoped that his universality would make the colonised people accept Shakespeare and through such western literature, a channel could be made to spread English values to the rest of the world.

Shakespeare was introduced into India mainly as part of Western education. He was performed earlier in theatres to the elite audience. Even this was a part of the imperial agenda to inculcate English values into Indian society and to strengthen the base of English power in India.

Thomas Babington Macauley's (First Secretary in India from 1839 to 1841) Minutes on Indian Education dated 2nd February 1835 spelt it out as clear as it could be: "we must at present do our best to form a class of persons Indian in blood and colour and English in taste, opinions in morals and intellect." Did English education, symbolised by Shakespeare, fashion the value systems of the English-educated natives is a serious question. Western education used educated natives to disseminate Shakespeare through translations in large numbers and used these in the curriculum of their schools and colleges.

However, the early introduction of Shakespeare was not in the original. It was through Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). 1807 was an opportune time as the debates about the renewal of the Charter of the East India Company in 1813 was going on in the British Parliament.

As a result of the renewed charter, giving the natives western education became the responsibility of the Company. Christian missionaries from the west took up the charge as it served their proselytising purposes also. It was the first generation of the western-educated natives who translated the Shakespeare first from Lamb's *Tales* and later from the text, faithfully. Many regional translators followed them.

It is important here to note that the Spaniards never promoted Lope de Vega in their colonies nor were the Sanskrit dramatists like Kalidasa and Bhasa ever promoted in India as the British did in the case of William Shakespeare.

They turned Shakespeare into a cultural and academic industry and a profitable one. Shakespeare was indeed worth this commodification as it returned more than their investment. But, this should not reduce Shakespeare's universalism to a mere capitalist gimmick.

Shakespeare's universal appeal

If the power of influence on other writers after him is a measure for his universality, Shakespeare possesses it in abundance, as he has influenced more writers in more languages and times than any other writer not only since his time but in the history of mankind.

There is something about Shakespeare. His "God-like non-partisanship" as Erich Auerbach would put it, was remarkable. He never caricatured or flattened his characters. Instead, he makes them believable, and they mirror many we come across and we often feel that we are those characters. This makes Shakespeare open to multiple readings. There is no wonder that he is the most favourite in re-readings and multiple renderings, which celebrate death-of-the-author theories.

When we read him, he speaks to each of us in ways that he does not speak to others. In effect, the whole world loves Shakespeare, but not the same Shakespeare. Shakespeare does not mean the same thing everywhere and to everyone. It is not necessary and not possible to mean so.

When the 2006 film *Shakespeare Must Die* was banned by Thailand alleging that it's staging of *Macbeth*, resembled a Thai leader, its director commented, "When Cambodians watch this, they'll think it's Hun Sen. When Libyans watch it, they would think it's Gaddafi."

While the Englishmen might read nationalist spirit in the *Henriad*, the colonised nations might find postcolonial discourses in *The Tempest*. The new Globe theatre has featured many Shakespeare plays so far: from Japanese Noh version to Indian Kathakali version. The 2012 Globe to Globe Festival (2012) saw the performance of 37 plays in 37 languages by companies from around the world, in an attempt to discover how important Shakespeare is today.

Almost all countries have embraced Britain's greatest playwright for a host of reasons and purposes. Why does the world claim Shakespeare as its own is worth looking at and throw up many challenges? In Shakespeare, we find his responses to the question about nation-state, religious freedom, ethnic and gender identities. When these became important, he responded to them in a non-partisan manner. This makes him relevant even today because when we find such questions repeated today, we often take recourse to quote Shakespeare, in response.

Because Shakespeare tells us about the quintessential human condition, he eloquently explains how we think, feel, and how our psyche works in a host of situations. Let us politics as an example. He was not a radical writer. Still, he was in political trouble for staging *Richard II* on the eve of Essex Rebellion in 1601. He could have lost his head. His plays are widely used for political purposes. Tsarist Russia banned incendiary plays like *Macbeth* and *Richard III*; Poland banned *Antony and Cleopatra* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Nazi Germany banned Shakespeare's historical plays, but interpreted *Hamlet* into a narrative of Germany and used the *Merchant of Venice* to aid its anti-Jewish propaganda; Mao's cultural revolution banned Shakespeare in China from 1966-77 for not promoting the state ideology.

Shakespeare was banned also for moral reasons. In the US, prisons have banned Shakespeare from its library, Schools have banned the *Twelfth Night* for promoting homosexuality and *The Merchant of Venice* for its anti-Semitism. A certain English physician bowdlerized Shakespeare to produce *Family Shakespeare* appropriate for women and children (1807-18), English King James I banned *Macbeth* for 5 years for its witches and incantations. The British could not legitimately stage *King Lear* from 1788, and it was banned from 1810 till 1820 in deference to the mentally ill King George III.

A Delhi University professor runs a journal dedicated to a single play, *Hamlet*; English professors from Kerala to Kashmir often get the nickname 'Shakespeare'. It is not infrequent to see Soldiers in the battlefield getting motivated in the Middle East and Africa, with *Henry V's* "Once more to the Breeches" and "St. Crispin's Day."

All over the world, schoolchildren get exposed to Shakespeare in English or translation as part of their curriculum; Kerala celebrated the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Vasco da Gama with a production of *The Tempest* in Malayalam. There are a host of reasons for educated people to translate Shakespeare into regional languages. Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania translated *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice* into Swahili even as he was leading the liberation struggle of his country.

Thinkers like Karl Marx quotes extensively from *Timon of Athens* and thinks that "Shakespeare excellently depicts the real nature of money" ('Money' in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844):

"Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold? No, Gods, I am no idle votarist! ... Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair, wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant. ... Why, this will lug your priests and servants from your sides, Pluck stout men's pillows from below their heads: This yellow slave will knit and break religions, bless the accursed; Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves and give them title, knee and approbation with senators on the bench...etc.

and

"O thou sweet king-killer, and dear divorce 'Twixt natural son and sire! thou bright defiler Of Hymen's purest bed! thou valiant Mars! Thou ever young, fresh, loved and delicate wooer, Whose blush doth thaw the consecrated snow That lies on Dian's lap! Thou visible God! Etc

Jonson's "small Latin and less Greek" comment is popularly misunderstood as a belittling one. It appears in the poem he wrote for the First Folio. Jonson's comment amplified the effect of his calling upon Greek and Latin masters and the whole of Europe to pay homage to Shakespeare, who is greater. Today, the whole world acknowledge his greatness.

It is not unusual that new literary movement or theory to attack at Shakespeare and gain attention. Later, however, it is also not unusual that they return to him with greater vigour to validate their theories. Shakespeare corpus is so large that the academic world cannot ignore him. His later adaptations, translations, and direct and indirect critical works fill libraries. He influenced the cultural and political history of Europe since his day. However, it is English education in the colonies that ensconced him in the literary appreciation of half the world; the other half got to appreciate Shakespeare through translations and adaptations on stage, page, celluloid and the Internet.

But he transcended his age as he deals with eternal themes and archetypal characters. He vocalizes the thoughts of men and women of all ages and status, and portray the conflicts between self and society,

and reality and appearance. He also responds to the structural conflict in all societies: religious/secular, rural/urban, nature/nurture, fascism/democracy, honour/desire; virtue/vice etc.

Shakespeare's plays are used to respond to contemporary events. The revival of *King Lear* during the Cold War to portray the starkness and absurdity of the age is an example. His works, like a tower in the literary landscape, cannot be ignored but is seen as a measure for many purposes.

Recently, we find a slow return to canon and Shakespeare and Harold Bloom has been leading the move, defending Shakespeare against the onslaught of theory. Using more than 300 books for each of the four—Theocratic, Aristocratic, Democratic and Chaotic—ages of literary history after Vico's cyclic view of history, he established Shakespeare as the central figure of the western canon by studying Shakespeare concerning other major writers—who influenced and influenced by Shakespeare, and observes:

Greatness in the West's literature centres upon Shakespeare, the touchstone for all who come before and after him, whether they are dramatists, lyric poets, or storytellers. He had no true precursor in the creation of character except for Chaucerian hints and has left no one after him untouched by his ways of representing human nature. His originality was and is so easy to assimilate that we are disarmed by it and unable to see how much it has changed us and goes on changing us. Much of Western literature after Shakespeare is, in varying degrees, partly a defence against Shakespeare, who can be so overwhelming an influence as to drown out all who are compelled to be Iris students. (Western Canon 525)

Bloom thinks that Shakespeare is a touchstone of literary strength, sets the standards and limits of literature, and deserves to be at the centre of the western canon because of his supreme aesthetic and creative prowess, disinterestedness, original thought, psychological depth; the power of invention, linguistic energy, rhetoric and cognitive acuity, accurate representation of reality, and remarkable ability to convey a strong sense of character.

Many theory-oriented studies on Shakespeare in the last quarter of the previous century question Jan Kott's contention. An example is *Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?* Kott, an émigré in the US and speaks English with a heavy Polish accent. He describes émigré as a person who has lost everything but his accent. As long as Shakespeare retains his accent, he remains an émigré in many languages and cultures which have made him their own. But we do not want him to lose that. Do we?