Week: 04. Module: A –Shakespeare's Universalism

Unit: 08: Shakespeare Our Contemporary

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A08 Shakespeare Our Contemporary

The word ''contemporary' refers to both "living or occurring at the same time" and "belonging to or occurring in the present". In this unit, we will be looking at Shakespeare as our contemporary and examine how this 16th-century British author is modern, current, and immediate to us as fashionable. Of course, the title of the unit recalls Jan Kott's book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964). This unit refers to it but is not limited to it.

In a session revisiting his *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* in 1988, Jan Kott narrated an incident in the life of Victor Hugo and his son walking on a beach at the Channel Islands in the late 1850s. After discussing their long exile, the son asked the father what he was planning to do. Hugo replied that he shall watch the ocean. "After a moment, the old man asks the younger, 'What will you do?' His son replies, 'I shall translate Shakespeare.' And went on to become a Shakespeare translator. Kott explained Shakespeare's contemporaneity and his timelessness is represented by the infiniteness of the ocean and the specificity of time of Hugo's reality of his exile (1855-70 in the Channel Islands) which made Shakespeare a contemporary (Is Shakespeare Our Contemporary?, 1989, p. 11).

While Shakespeare meant for his Elizabethan audience synchronically, he was understood diachronically by the Restoration dramatists like Dryden and Davenant; the Georgian revivalists like Rowe, Garrick, and Malone; Victorian scholars like Bradley and Dowden; Modern scholars like Jan Kott, the contemporary Alternative Shakespeareans like Drakakis, Hawkes, Dollimore, Greenblatt, Ania Loomba and others. They have been trying to contemporize Shakespeare by finding him a local habitation in times, places, languages, cultures and ideologies across the world. What Shakespeare mean then, depends on the depth and breadth of the receivers' horizon of understanding.

When we address the contemporaneity of Shakespeare, we need to understand 1) what he meant to his contemporaries, 2) what he meant to later generations, 3) how he meant in his time, 4) how he means now, and 5) how he retains his contemporaneity.

What Shakespeare meant

It is generally argued that Shakespeare is universal because of his themes. Right from Shakespeare's days when Ben Jonson commented him as the "soul of an age" and also "of all time" critics have been waxing eloquent on Shakespeare's 'immortality' and universality. However, this is a double-edged sword. Does it mean that he makes sense in time or other contexts at all times?

The universal themes help Shakespeare to mean to his contemporaries and everyone. However, more than these, how he puts it across that justifies the lasting impact of his works. Those who admire Shakespeare's immortality place him in the realm of universal, which like Plato's Universal is everywhere, but nowhere specific. They take him away from the particular, and so, interpreting Shakespeare as someone who is everywhere, is to see him nowhere, to no one in particular, and not to any specific condition, and lacks the specifics that locates him in space and time of the present.

EMW Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943) tells us how Shakespeare meant during his time. It helps us to place Shakespeare's works in the context of the ideas that shaped his society. An

understanding of the beliefs and practices of the Elizabethans help in explaining Shakespeare by telling us what Elizabethans meant by them. He unravels the idea of the world order in terms of the Great idea of the Great Chain of Being in the Elizabethan Age. Tillyard lists the Greek and Egyptian metaphysical ideas which the Elizabethan world received from Hermes Trismegistus, Porphyry, and Plotinus through the Renaissance. These ideas about Angels, Stars, Fortunes, Macrocosm, Microcosm, Four Elements, Four Humours, Sympathies, Correspondences, Music of the Spheres, and Cosmic Dance had a considerable influence on how the Elizabethans understood reality around them.

One example is Shakespeare's idea of order. Tillyard believed that the hierarchically-structured and divinely-ordained English monarchy in Shakespeare's History Plays reflected the belief of the English society. Shakespeare takes this metaphysical idea from the idea of the 'the Great Chain of Being'. His Ulysses' long speech accusing the Greek of disregarding for 'degree' as the reason for their failure to conquer Troy, points fingers at the disruption of order. Whether this was Shakespeare's perception of the need for an order can be debatable:

> When that the general is not like the hive
> To whom the foragers shall all repair,
> What honey is expected? Degree being vizarded,
> The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.
> The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
> Observe degree, priority and place,
> Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
> Office and custom, in all line of order;
> And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
> In noble eminence enthroned and sphered
> Amidst the other; whose medicinable eye
> Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,
> And posts, like the commandment of a king,
> Sans cheque to good and bad: but when the planets
> In evil mixture to disorder wander,
> What plagues and what portents! what mutiny!
> What raging of the sea! shaking of earth!
> Commotion in the winds! frights, changes, horrors,
> Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
> The unity and married calm of states
> Quite from their fixure! O, when degree is shaked,
> Which is the ladder to all high designs,
> Then enterprise is sick! How could communities,
> Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
> Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
> The primogenitive and due of birth,
> Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
> But by degree, stand in authentic place?
> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And, hark, what discord follows! each thing meets
> In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters

Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead:
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides,
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking.
And this neglection of degree it is
That by a pace goes backward, with a purpose
It hath to climb. The general's disdain'd
By him one step below, he by the next,
That next by him beneath; so every step,
Exampled by the first pace that is sick
Of his superior, grows to an envious fever
Of pale and bloodless emulation:
And 'tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot,
Not her own sinews. To end a tale of length,
Troy in our weakness stands, not in her strength. (*Tro*. 1.3)

Scholars like AP Rossiter (*Angel with Horns*, 1961) have pointed out the lack of any such grand scheme or intricately patterned cycle in Shakespeare's history plays. For example, Elizabethan England, though Christian in religion and Protestant in denomination, had not completely given up their pagan past and beliefs. Many of them continued to believe in fairies, goblins, witches, witchcraft, magic etc.

The witches in *Macbeth* can conjure storms, make a ship standstill in the storm for long enough to make its master 'peak and pine', "untie the winds and let them fight/ against the churches….", and foretell future. In 1542, the English Parliament passed the Witchcraft Act making witchcraft a crime punishable by death. Although it was repealed five years later, it was restored by a new Act in 1562, two years before Shakespeare's birth. When Shakespeare was active, James I, who had a keen interest in demonology and even published a book on demonology, passed a law in 1604 transferring the trial of witches from Church to court.

Shakespeare's reflection on witchcraft under the influence of Reginald Scott's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1582) and the new king James who revived interest in witchcraft and demonology. These seem to have influenced Shakespeare as his conflation of classical and local Irish and English fairies show:

> Kit-with-the-canstick, tritons, centaurs, dwarfs, giants, imps, Colcars, conjurers, nymphs, changelings, incubus, Robin Goodfellow, the spoorn, the mare, the man in the oak, the hell-

wain, the Fire-drake, the puckle, Tom Thumb, hobgoblin, Tom-tumbler, Boneless, and such other bugs (Ch. 15).

Shakespeare refers to 'witch' 69 times in his plays. He refers to humour (161 references), ghost (54), 'fairies' (38), magic (18 references), witchcraft (17 references), goblin (9) etc., reflecting the importance of these in his world. It is the ordinary characters who become the mouthpiece of the social beliefs, as Marcellus of *Hamlet* does:

> Then [at Christmas], they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
> The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
> No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
> So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

In those days of exploration and travel, contemporary travelogues, discourses about the discovered countries and the arrival of Moors and Americans in London can be found in plays like *Othello, The Tempest, A Midsummer Night's Dream* etc. As some scholars argue, it is the general belief in cannibals that led to the creation of the hideous character Caliban, whose name is an anagram for cannibal.

- He had been cannibally given, he might have broiled and eaten him too (*Cor*.4.5).
- Compare with Caesars, and with Cannibals, (*4H2* 2.4).
- That face of his the hungry cannibals
  would not have touch'd (*6H3* 1.4.)
- Butchers and villains! bloody cannibals! (*6H3* 5.5).
- And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
  The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
  Do grow beneath their shoulders (*Oth*. 1.3).

If their metaphysical beliefs and popular practices were means to ideologically condition the subjects of the state and religion, emerging beliefs represented practices of dissent and resistance. The new discourses of travel and science that challenged traditional worldview are also reflected in Shakespeare's works.

In the same way, metaphysical and physical conditions make Shakespeare mean to the people across time, space, languages and cultures. His reception proves this.

What Shakespeare means

An interesting and controversial book that tells us about understanding Shakespeare diachronically is Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. However, to understand how Kott receives Shakespeare in his horizon of understanding, we need to look at Kott and his work. Kott's analogies became materials for new conceptions as Peter Brook's *King Lear* (1971) and Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) show.

Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* got wide attention and got translated into 19 languages. Like a New Historicist work. It read Shakespeare in the context of the political realities of the Cold War and gave a fresh approach to Shakespeare. Without employing the tools of conventional literary criticism, Kott used the political and cultural events of post-war Eastern Europe to make an alternative reading of Shakespeare by focussing on characters' psychology and the fissures within the text.

Kott was a leading proponent of Stalinism in Poland after its Soviet takeover. After the anti-Stalinist movement in October 1956, Kott left the party and defected to the United States in 1965. He explains the connection between historical totalitarianism and contemporary power-politics. Old kings and modern despots depend on the same grand ideological and administrative mechanisms hatched in the middle Ages to plunder, with cumulative cleverness.

Kott's work is written from a local point of view. More than a pedantic exegesis, it is used Kott's traumas and national tragedies to locate Shakespeare in his present. He read Shakespeare in the light of the Stalinist regime and post-war Poland and juxtaposed him with Ionesco and Beckett to show the absurdity and futility of the prevailing political systems.

Kott makes Shakespeare our contemporary to read topical concerns in him. He observes how Hamlet turned a political weapon in post-war Poland:

> "The *Hamlet* produced in Cracow a few weeks after the XXth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party...was a political drama par excellence. .... 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark' — was the first chord of Hamlet's new meaning. And then, the dead sound of the words, 'Denmark's a prison,' three times repeated... In this performance, everybody, without exception, was being constantly watched.

Kott was influenced by the unconventional treatment of history and politics in Woszczerowicz's *Richard III* (1963), a work which depicted how his power whitewashed cruelty and manipulation, and also how tyrants replaced tyrants. This was like the struggle for the crown in the 14th-15th centuries, as presented in Shakespeare when the struggle for power ends with the monarch's death and a new coronation. In each of the histories, the legitimate ruler drags behind him a long chain of crimes. He has rejected the feudal lords who helped him to reach for the crown; he murders, first his enemies, then his former allies; he executes possible successors and pretenders to the crown... But from banishment, a young prince returns... But every step to power continues to be marked by murder, violence, treachery...

This resonated well the Polish survivors of Stalinist "Cult of Personality", and only ended up with Khrushchev who came to power giving tall promises. This was a reading which also resonated with the anti-Soviet bloc for ideological reasons and facilitated his defection to the capitalist bloc, the United States during the thick of the Cold War in 1965.

Traditionalists criticized Kott's synchronic reading of Shakespeare using contemporary realities as it coloured Shakespeare with political interpretations. The Polish scholar Przemysław Mroczkowski challenged Kott's reading by giving a diachronic interpretation to Shakespeare in *Shakespeare: Elizabethan and Alive* (1966). Today, the title *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* is nothing more than a cliché. It is now rather accepted that Shakespeare exists in contemporary contexts and realities and makes sense in the contemporary world.

Kott's work came up again in recent discussions only when Elsom revived its catchy title after forty years later through his *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary* in 2003.

How Shakespeare meant

We know that Shakespeare used the materials from other playwrights and authors to create plays. Robert Greene was furious and called Shakespeare a "crow beautified with our feathers." He was annoyed by the upstart's success in transmuting ordinary material into something rich and strange. So, it was not the story that mattered, something uniquely Shakespearean mattered. Looking at

Shakespeare away from his time and place has its disadvantage also as we do not recognize how he responded to the needs of his time. This is one of the reasons why people enjoy his tragedies more today than his comedies, which were hugely successful because of their many topical allusions, which are lost today.

Were his plays contemporary enough to make his audience think about their society? Shakespeare certainly responded to the concerns of his society. In his plays, one can find references about his contemporary political issues like the gunpowder plot, rebellion; social problems like drinking, gambling, prostitution, plague; social realities like racism, patriarchy, and slavery; economic issues like business, trade, exploration and colonisation; popular beliefs in magic and witchcraft; and more subtly he also responds to the concern of his patrons. More subtly still, he mirrored the concerns of his age.

Let us take the example of the word 'incertainity' which Shakespeare uses 9 times from 1597. When the word appeared first in his *Sonnets* ("Incertainties" 107.7, "certain incertainty" 115.11), the Lord Chamberlain's Men were not sure about their future due to a dispute with the owner of the plot of land where their playhouse, The Theatre stood at Shoreditch. In July 1597, the production of Jonson's *Isle of Dogs* at the Swan forced a closure of the theatres and imprisonment of Ben Jonson for a while. In 1598 when Shakespeare acted in Jonson's *Everyman in His Humour,* the word appears in *Henry IV Part I* ("aids incertain" 1.3.25). Speculations about ageing queen were rife in 1600 with "affairs … still incertain" (*Julius Caesar* 5.1.104).

Shakespeare and his company had a narrow escape from death when Charles Percy and other followers of Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex commissioned them to "revive a play about "the deposing and killing of Richard II" on 7 February 1601 at the Globe. The queen, like Richard II, was thought as misled by favourites, and they were also similar in that in the case of both there was a general uncertainty about a successor. Elizabeth and her government were conscious of the parallel. Her censors had denied permission to the scene depicting the king's abdication earlier. The deleted scene appeared again in the 1608 version of *Richard II*, printed after the death of Elizabeth.

Unknown to Shakespeare, the conspirators were preparing the ground for the overthrow of Queen Elizabeth by planning to march into London the next day. Essex was the out-of-favour lover of the queen and a friend of Shakespeare's patron Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton. After a failed coup. Essex and his friends, including Southampton, were arrested. Essex was executed on 25 February 1601. Shakespeare also had a personal tragedy in the death of John Shakespeare in September 1601. Times were uncertain for Shakespeare.

The ageing Queen's ill health and rumours plunged London into a grim phase of confusion and uncertainty in 1602-03. Her relatively stable reign spared of the kind of bloodshed and foreign threats during the days of her father Henry VIII. People were anxious if the kingdom would witness bloody Catholic-Protestant division and more deaths. The spirit of the times is well reflected in *All's Well that Ends Wells* ("incertain grounds" 3.1.17) of 1602, and *Timon of Athens* ("encertain pomp" 4.3.241) of 1603. *Measure for Measure* of 1603/04 speaks of "lawless and incertain thought" (3.1.138) and *The Winters' Tale* of 1604 speaks of "all encertainties" (3.2.184), "Incertain lookers on" (5.1.35). The use of the word, though unconscious, reflects the anxiety about the uncertain, doubtful, dubious state of affairs of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Shakespeare, by then had become the King's Man, a royal servant with the duty to wait upon the king. He knew a thing or two about the uncertainty of politics.

In his *Essential Shakespeare* (1932) J Dover Wilson argues that these political developments made Shakespeare create the personification of 'incertainty', Hamlet. He argues that *Hamlet* was Shakespeare's attempt to understand Essex who was in a fit of melancholy and depression when he wrote *Hamlet* in 1600/01 and is best expressed in the famous soliloquy, "to be or not to be." Similar passages about incertainty are found in other plays of the period also. In *Measure for Measure* Claudio exhorts his sister Isabella to save him from execution:

> Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
> To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
> This sensible warm motion to become
> A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
> To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
> In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
> To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
> And blown with restless violence round about
> The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
> Of those that lawless and incertain thought
> Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible! (3.1)

When Elizabeth died on 24 March 1603, London had no less than eight theatres—The Globe, the Rose, and the Swan in Southwark; the Blackfriars and St Pauls in the walled city, The Boar's Head, The Curtain and Fortune further north. Together, they could accommodate some 10,000 people, that is, 5% of London every afternoon. It could create discourses through the stories they told. Authorities were also aware of it and they censored play scripts strictly through the stationer's register. Negative suggestions about the queen in Ben Jonson's *Isle of Dogs* forced a closure of the theatres and imprisonment of Jonson. Elizabethan censors did not permit the staging of *Richard II* with its abdication scene. When the queen lays dying in March 1603, all these theatres were closed down by the order of the authorities who feared crowds. It was their way of managing people, and they closed down the theatres on the grounds of immorality, profaneness, diseases, plague etc.

The phase of palpable social and political uncertainty continued with the new king, James IV, a protestant with a catholic mother and a catholic wife. He was a very erudite theologian with a couple of books to his credit and a shrewd politician. As officers changed, Shakespeare's patron Lord Chamberlain lost his job, and a royal order banned Sunday theatre. He also promoted William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Augustine Phillips, John Hemmings, Henry Condell, and Richard Armin as King's Men. Was it an extravaganza of a profligate king or as a shrewd crowd management move by an astute king?

Theatres remained closed in summer 1603. The reason was a devastating plague that killed 30,000 people at a rate of 1000 people every week in July and 3000 people per week in September 1603. The Globe was in the Southwark, then notorious for prostitution, bear ring, too many inns, was the "suburb of sinners" (Thomas Dekker) Puritans attributed it to the theatre, the den of sin and wanted it to be closed down.

He hoped to unite Scotland and England under one title and longed to be the King of Great Britain, not just of England alone. He even issued a new pound coin in gold, 'the unite' with the inscription *Great Britain*, instead of Elizabeth's *England*. James was a man of grand ideas and also loved showing off his power and pomp. He made Shakespeare and company the King's Men, got the Bible translated into

English. In December 1603, the King's Men performed eight out of the twenty plays staged at the court during the conference organised to discuss the translation of the Bible into English. As the King's Men, Shakespeare and his men were in the court attending on the king when diplomatic missions visited the King.

James enjoyed the power he had and displayed it with a sense of drama. Those officers who served James in vulnerable moments were the highest regarded and as a friendship between men and their bonding played an important role together with his attachments to his male courtiers led to rumours and speculations about homosexuality. Not only that he had a personal drama company, the King's Men, but also made dramatic moves creating dramatic moments.

James's books *Demonology* (1597) against witchcraft and *Basilikon Doron* (1599) against Puritan reform did not stop him yielding to the puritan demand to ban Sunday theatre and convening a conference which led to the translation of the Bible into English. After and silencing them James also made Shakespeare's theatre company the King's Man, that is, royal servants. Later, when Walter Raleigh and friends were about to be executed for plotting against the king, James's messenger dramatically stopped the execution at the last second announcing the king's mercy. Mercy was the theme of *The Merchant of Venice* which the king made the King's Men play twice at the Court in 1604-05.

Shakespeare's new play for the season, *Measure for Measure* was a fable of justice, morality and power which reflected what he saw in James's court: power, responsibility, moral decline, justice, mercy and drama. This unsettling comedy of sex reflects the Jacobean world he knew. This problem comedy moves between the court and the brothel. We also come across nunnery and prison and has a corrupt judge who is the sister of a defendant. When Isabella the nun appeals for mercy for her death-convicted brother, Angelo has an indecent proposal—the nun has to sleep with him in return. Its moral ambiguity reflected the real court than its ideal portrayals. Isabella claims that Angelo raped her, and Marina claims to sleep with him. Ambiguity reigns supreme in the play as Mariana claims that she is not married, a maid or a widow:

> Duke Vincentio: What, are you married?
> Mariana: No, my lord.
> Duke Vincentio: Are you a maid?
> Mariana: No, my lord.
> Duke Vincentio: A widow, then?
> Mariana: Neither, my lord.
> Duke Vincentio: Why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife? (5.1)

The duke, the all-powerful architect of the confusion alone can solve it. His punishments and rewards stun the characters into silence with its drama: Angelo is married to Mariana, but is sentenced to death until Claudio is produced back from the dead; to save himself from his execution Lucio is to marry the prostitute who he got pregnant; Isabella is proposed without giving her time to respond.

The crowd-disliking and learned king of *Measure for Measure*, like the erudite-orchestrator magician Prospero of *The Tempest* erudite Duke leave the affairs of the government to his deputy Angelo. Prospero-like, the Friar fools Angelo through clever orchestration of events, reveals himself, displays an overdose of mercy, and even offers his hand in marriage to the nun.

Although the character of the Duke is as mysterious as that of King James, Shakespeare safely sets his play in far-away Vienna. He was conscious of how Ben Jonson had ended up in jail for his indiscretion

first for satirising Elizabeth in the *Isle of Dogs* and later for using foul language against the Scots in *Eastward Hoe*, forgetting that James was the king of Scots too. Shakespeare, instead, cashed in James's Scottish roots by and staging *Macbeth*, the king of Scots.

From these small examples, we can understand how Shakespeare meant in his time to his people.

How Shakespeare means

In the same way, Shakespeare means subtly through alternative Shakespeares. John Drakakis wrote how Shakespeare studies have changed over time, reflecting the changes in academia.

> The preoccupation with institutions and the politics that derive therefrom is thought to distinguish British Cultural materialism, with its ardent politics, from the more professionally urbane, politically reticent American new historicism. It is no accident that systematic commodification of knowledge has proceeded alongside an increasingly radical turn in the humanities and in the study of Shakespeare in particular in both in Britain and the United States. (Drakakis, 1996, pp. 241-42)

In the first volume of *Alternative Shakespeare* as we find Shakespeare studied sexuality, queer, postcolonial, psychoanalytic studies. Apart from such studies of Shakespeare from the perspective of different concurrent social concerns and discourses, Shakespeare is also presented on the page, stage, screen, and digital formats. On the page, he appears in translations, pictures, comics, and in genres such as plays, novels, stories, poems etc.

In painting, British artist John Everett Millais's oil on canvas "Ophelia" (1851-52) is a remarkable mid-nineteenth century painting depicting Ophelia singing while floating in a river just before she drowns. It influenced many artists including Salvador Dali and filmmakers like Laurence Olivier. The many Shakespeare paintings by Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) include: 1) "Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel" (1789); 2) "Ariel" (1810) from *The Tempest*; 3) "Titania and Bottom with an Ass's Head" (1780/90), 4) "Titania awakening" (1785/90), 5) "Robin Goodfellow Puck" (whereabouts not known, 1787/90) from *A Midsummer Night s Dream*; 6) "The Witches appear to Macbeth and Banquo" (missing, 1785/90); 7) Macbeth consulting the Vision of the Armed Head (1793) from *Macbeth;* 8) "Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers" (1812) from *Macbeth*; 9) "Prince Hal and Poins surprise Falstaff with Doll Tearsheet" from *Henry IV, Part 2* (lost, 1795/90); 10) "Henry V sentences Cambridge, Scroop and Northumberland" (1786/89) from Henry V; 11) "King Lear casting out his daughter Cordelia" (1785/90) from *King Lear*; and 12) "The Ghost appears to Hamlet" (lost, 1796) from *Hamlet*; 13) "The two murderers of the Duke of Clarence" (1780–1782) from *Richard III*; 14) "Falstaff in the laundry basket" (1792) from *Merry Wives of Windsor*; 15) "Romeo stabs Paris at the bier of Juliet" (1809) from *Romeo and Juliet*.

In sculpture, Shakespeare is represented in various ways. Apart from the figures of Shakespeare ranging from the bust in Stratford-upon-Avon Church to thinking and flamboyant figure in Westminster Abbey, his characters are also presented worldwide. An important one that means to many of the visitors to Verona is the stature of Juliet in the garden of her house. Thousands of lovers leave their notes and padlocks symbolising their love near the statue.

The most significant developments in Shakespeare today are not in the academic world, but in his reimaginations in different cultures around the world. On the page, Shakespeare appears as translations. An adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Neil Gaiman has even won a literary award for a literary work, redefining the concept of literary work. From animation movies from Disney

adapting Shakespeare as in *Lion King* (*Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet*) to TV serials and movies try to contemporize Shakespeare.

Film representations contemporize Shakespeare invariably. An example is how female characters are treated. Unlike Shakespeare's marginal or underdeveloped heroines, Vishal Bhardwaj gives both centrality and agency to his heroines. Vishal Bharadwaj's Lady Macbeth/Nimmi (Tabu) in *Maqbool* is a woman with a shady past who shares an illicit relationship with her partner don Abbaji's trusted henchman. Passionate Nimmi sensually ensnares Maqbool and dictates him to declare his love, commanding "Say… 'give back, my love'", pointing a loaded gun at him. She convinces him to kill the don. Similarly, Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) makes its Lady Macbeth (Isuzu Yamada) sit on a mat without ever raising her head, still, makes her speak in an incessant high-pitched monotone, expressing her stance. The stoic Ophelia (Anastasiya Vertinskaya) in Grigory Kozintsev's Russian *Hamlet* (1964), remains stoically still despite Hamlet's contempt and dresses up for her father's funeral. Bharadwaj's manipulative Gertrude (Ghazala / Tabu), caught between maternal love and erotic desire is more assertive even in the terrorism ridden Kashmir of 1995.

Language

One of the reasons for the spurt in the number of Shakespeare films, novels, operas and other cultural reimaginations of Shakespeare's 37 plays and 154 sonnets could be attributed to his contemporaneity. They locate Shakespeare in the present time and space and make him influence the world through words, ideas, and values. Even otherwise, his legacy is interconnected with the English language which he helped to stand on its feet. Those who insist that Shakespeare has to make sense fully to be present and he does not do so because of his archaic language should realize that a tenth of the words he used were not familiar even to his contemporaries. Maybe, we are more familiar with many which were unfamiliar to his contemporaries. Of the 1700 odd new words he coined in English, we regularly use many of them like elbow, label, dawn, lonely and bedroom every day.

Shakespeare's contemporaneity

Shakespeare our contemporary

Shakespeare has been treated as contemporary by many writers of all ages. Ben Jonson's predictive eulogy, that Shakespeare was "the soul of an age", and some lines later somewhat contradicting, that he "not of an age, but for all time" summarizes this. Shakespeare is both contemporary and universal. Since a literary work appeals because of the resonance it makes in the context of the reader, Shakespeare's popularity could be attributed to his synchronic resonance and his universality to the diachronic resonance he has made.

The influential scholar and author of *The Elizabethan World Picture* located Shakespeare within his Elizabethan world to show how he made sense. Going further, James Shapiro argued how Shakespeare made sense to the people of his times by analysing Jacobean plays like *Timon of Athens, The Merchant of Venice, Measure for Measure* and *Macbeth* in a TV series. He was not merely writing a story, but responding to the social realities of his times, subtly and evocatively within the limits of the freedom of expression he had as an Elizabethan/Jacobean citizen.

When the Polish academic and theatre critic Jan Kott's 1961 book was translated into English as *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964), the theme of his contemporaneity got a popular appeal because of its New Historicist perspective. Kott puts Tillyard's cosmic order upside down and reads how history, the impeccable rollercoaster of history, crushes everybody and everything. Man is determined by his

situation, by the step of the grand staircase on which he happens to find himself" (39). Kott sees in Shakespeare's History Plays Shakespeare' use of the Tudor myth to politically legitimize the king: "there are no bad kings or good kings, kings are only kings. Or let us put it in modern terms: there is only the king's situation, and the system" (14).

It led to the proliferation of alternative Shakespeares. In the first version of *Alternative Shakespeares* edited by John Drakakis in the 1980s when Kott's influence was still evident, Kott is seen not only inverting the Elizabethan World picture order but seen as invoking disorder as in the modernist and existentialist works and in the Theatre of the Absurd : (Dollimore & Sinfield, 1980, pp. 212-13). By the time the second volume of *Alternative Shakespeare* (1996), none of the authors or even the editor thought of mentioning Kott, not because of any disagreement with the idea 'Shakespeare our contemporary', but because it had become very pedestrian by then. By the time of its third volume, WB Wrothen uses Kott to introduce the digital phase, "Shakespeare 3.0",

> Shakespeare may remain our contemporary, but to recall Polish director Jan Kott's massively influential book of that title (first published in Poland in 1964 and almost immediately translated into English) is to mark a sea change in our access and imagination of Shakespearean drama…. And as much as Kott worked to bring the critical discourse of contemporary theatre to bear on isolated "literary" critique of Shakespeare, so too the rise of digital culture marks the a potentially profound shift in the identities of drama, particularly the ways in which we imagine the interface between writing and performance. (Wrothen, 2008, pp. 54-55)

Stephen Greenblatt thinks Shakespeare is contemporaneous as he critiques Donald Trump's rise to power. He reads the political events in Shakespeare's world in terms of contemporary events and explains how the Catholic insurgency against Elizabeth and James are reflected in *Macbeth*, saying, how the terrorists are, in fact home-grown "disaffected, unstable youths prone to dreams of violence and martyrdom." After radicalizing them, these locals are lured abroad to training camps. After their training, they are smuggled back and are made to blend with the ordinary people, making it difficult to identify them. The Gunpowder Plot can be linked to Shakespeare's own family.

It works the other way also. A BBC radio documentary 'Shakespeare and Terrorism' explains how the CIA found out that Osama bin Laden frequented Shakespeare's house at Stratford upon Avon on Sundays when he was a teenager. Lincoln's assassin John Wilkie Booth was an actor and fan of Shakespeare and was inspired to kill Lincoln under the influence of the concept of freedom and the assassination in *Julius Caesar*. One may say that acts of terrorism expose the iniquity that lies behind terrorism itself, and this makes *Macbeth* a "total response to the idea of the Plot", and that Macbeth "himself the Gunpowder Plot" (Holderness and Loughrey). Applebaum who locates *Macbeth* in the contemporary reality identifies in more contemporary terms, "Macbeth is jihad" (Appelbaum 43), making Holderness respond, saying "Macbeth is emphatically not jihad, though he commits an act of terrorism."

You can understand share even if you do not use the archive and place Shakespeare within his historical context. Today Shakespeare studies become more meaningful when one finds him as someone who appeals even to the non-academic people outside the Anglophone world. That world no longer takes Shakespeare as a reverential figure representing Englishness. New generation finds in him material to be worked and reworked and used and messed around with, almost like what the Restoration dramatists did.

They see in Shakespeare a language and a universally available language. Once language becomes yours, you are free to use it as you like it. It is a language like which has a history and is conditioned by its previous uses. It resonates with how it is used. The unconventional ways of using Shakespeare communicate better. It is reflected in a love story across the border as between Palestine and Israel and India and Pakistan. When the Internet is used to perform Shakespeare, making Shakespeare digital, RSC productions or Beijing opera productions very distant.

Similarly, the 2012 Globe production of Shakespeare's 37 plays in 37 different theatre styles reiterates that the ways and in the degree in which Indians, Russians, and Japanese apply Shakespeare lead to great Shakespeare productions that resonate well with their local audience and to the international audience. They give him local habitations and names away from Stratford or London, where he is free not to speak in English. This makes Shakespeare contemporary in more ways than one. As traditionally argued, his themes are 'universal' as they are about the fundamental human condition.

In 2017, Hyderabad based experimental theatre group The Lord Chamberlain's Men staged Adam Long and Danier Singer's *The Cmplt Wrks of Wllm Shkspr* as a "high-speed roller-coaster type condensation" in which three players condensed Shakespeare's 38 plays under two hours and subverts Shakespeare. This encapsulation concentrates on popular tragedies *Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and Rome and Juliet*; reduces all 16 comedies in just five minutes, renders *Othello* as a rap, and the History plays as a running commentary of a football game "with kings and queens playing the game for the crown." It allows the actors to interpret the texts in different contexts and reflect on contemporary social and political developments mainly through satire.