Peter Brook has noted that “in the second half of the twentieth century in England . . . we are faced with the infuriating fact that Shakespeare is still our model” (qtd. in Brown 5). This prestigious status of Shakespeare still being our model equally brings the danger that his works are prone to intense study and processing. Shakespeare is such a powerful cultural symbol and his position so firmly established that contemporary writers like Tom Stoppard, Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker and Charles Marowitz feel that it must be challenged. He has become a multi-nationalized blend of so many different cultures and theatrical styles running through his works. It is difficult to contain him or historicize him because we are over-influenced by him. He is the most studied literary topic all over the world and a common factor in people’s association in literary culture. Anyone who has undergone an academic life is bound to carry with him some portion of Shakespeare all through his life.

Shakespeare’s plays brim with wisdom of life along with imagination and lyricism. His characters appeal to readers irrespective
of the barriers of race, language and country. We can observe a sort of humanistic truth embedded in his writings, which is as pertinent today as it was when his plays were first staged. Every age perceives in him what is appropriate for its concerns and every philosopher in every new generation finds a reflection of his own philosophy and every new lover finds his own portrayal in Shakespeare’s characters. In all his plays there is a certain universality which appeals to modern audiences, though the kind of theatre for which he wrote can never be duplicated. His response to social and political realities can be discerned only through analysis since he did not leave behind any kind of evidence regarding his intentions. Multiculturalists accept the fact that Shakespeare belongs to the world canon, a dramatist of varying degree and kind. We have passed through centuries where literature and philosophy have been “Shakespearized” and are embarrassed to find anything beyond his mental perception. Even without conscious effort we internalize the power of his writings. He succeeds in portraying the complexity of human thoughts and feelings. He is not simply projecting his views to the world, but is expressing reality itself. As Harold C. Goddard observes, “Shakespeare is life. There are almost as many ways of taking him as there are ways of living” (1). We get from him what we bring to him or what others have left behind before us. The
very name of Shakespeare and his literary output have a mythic effect, for his plays represent truths that transcend particular situations which are considered to be the idealistic conception of myths. We cannot reject him because he still exists and is experienced as a living presence. Anyone who is annoyed by canonical literature is in a way rejecting Shakespeare. Such persons cannot be considered cultural rebels or social revolutionaries; instead, they can be termed “sufferers of the anxieties of Shakespeare’s influence,” says Harold Bloom (xix). In his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Bloom argues that human character as we know it was not simply observed by Shakespeare, but “he invented us” (xx). While other writers interpret the reality of life, Shakespeare is not interpreting, but producing life itself.

In spite of all these factors, Shakespeare is not different from other writers in appropriating other sources. It was his egotism that prompted him to improve and transform the materials that he had borrowed. He altered hugely all the stories that he borrowed and interpreted issues in his own way. We cannot blame him for that, for all literary works are intentional products of their authors. When we compare and contrast the finished work of a writer with its sources, we can detect his intentions by considering what he has included or rejected. To quote Susanne Langer: “Art, and especially dramatic art, is full of compromises, for one
possible effect is usually brought at the expense of another; not all ideas and devices that occur to the poet are co-possible. Every decision involves a rejection” (qtd. in Vickers 147).

In any play, the forms of selections and rejections are characterized by their aesthetic conception by the author. Shakespeare makes all his different characters—whether they are Romans, Greeks, Britons or Italians—become Elizabethans, and their characteristics are made applicable to the universal man. In his plays “we can experience (albeit second-hand) a theatre bursting with variety, shifting freely into contrasting styles, astonishing us with richness of content and fluidity of form,” says Charles Marowitz (241). We admire and respect him, yet he is a political issue. His political spectrum is so wide that it can accommodate conservatives and radicals, atheists and believers. He was working politically by remodelling stories of power relations and human possibilities. He is considered to be our contemporary because he understands what is in men and women in any age and his observations are equally real and applicable to us. We draw upon five centuries of almost continuous interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays by actors and critics. Yet we cannot predict a continuing hold of Shakespeare over our imagination, since dramatists like Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz have started strongly reacting against him,
by projecting their own sense of existence and experience into Shakespeare’s drama.

At present “we are in an era of so called ‘cultural criticism,’ which devalues all imaginative literature, and which particularly demotes and debases Shakespeare” (Bloom xvi). When we go through the history of other ages, we observe that they have modernized him in their own images. They have re-angled and remodelled him and translated his plays into various forms so that every generation can enjoy it. The plays were adapted to the tastes of new theatres, actors and new audiences. The traditionalists may have an intention to preserve the integrity of his plays and to obtain the satisfaction that they have originally experienced from his plays. The moderators may tolerate a shift in emphasis as long as the spirit of the play is retained and the basic structure remains intact. But the contemporary playwrights hope to find a new expression of Shakespeare’s plays that is pertinent to the modern world. A new generation of playwrights has chosen to rewrite Shakespeare for the benefit of new audiences adapting them to changed political atmospheres. It is the cultural and political authority of Shakespeare that is challenged by these dramatists. They have taken different aspects of the plays and reconstituted them so that they enshrine other values. Tom Stoppard in his play *Rosencrantz and*
Guildenstern are Dead, Edward Bond in Lear and Bingo, Arnold Wesker in The Merchant and Charles Marowitz in The Variations on The Merchant of Venice have appropriated aspects of Shakespeare’s plays to project a different politics. In a sense the classics are meant to be distorted by subordinate cultures. It has become the practice among all modern artists to twist traditional materials and evolve new ones out of them and it has happened in literature also. It has also become fashionable to join the critical debate rather than to experience the play freshly and imaginatively for oneself.

The appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays began in earnest with the opening of the theatres after the restoration of Charles II. Writers in the Restoration period proudly announced that they had ejected from his works the hooliganism of a less sophisticated age and conditioned them according to their interests. The 18th century and Romantic Theatre altered him in their own ways and gave stress only to the major characters. They did not pay much attention to the comedies, but remade Shakespeare’s characters like Richard Ill, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Othello and Iago—characters who were likely to make a lasting imprint on the audience. The prominent actors at that time left out what they could not use and added what they fancied. Added to all these factors, the physical form of the theatre was also changing. Gun
smoke, the movements of the crowd, antiquarian interior scenes—all began to contribute their own effect to the theatre. Picturesque sceneries were often elaborated without a word of Shakespeare’s plays to accompany them. Moreover, the installation of electric lights in the theatres intensified the dramatic effect and actors took particular care in acting. Actresses were introduced on the stage, melodramatic elements and original interpretations of the characters in the plays were sought. Thus, throughout the centuries, there have been many interpretations and adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, all of which have contributed to his glory and reputation. It was the abundance of political appropriateness carried out between the Restoration and the early period of the 18th century which promoted Shakespeare as the contributor of cultural transcendentalism. There is so much viability in Shakespeare’s work that it can be re-thought and re-formed from age to age as indeed it has been happening since the end of the 17th century. It is quite natural that the modern theatre also has refashioned his plays in its own way. The change could be noted by comparing the old stage photographs with the present one.

It is now common knowledge that today Shakespeare’s plays are re-shaped to suit the taste and convenience of the modern audience and have gone to the extent of being banal and unrefined. Writers and
directors have no hesitation in attempting to disfigure Shakespeare’s halo. They may juxtapose, interlard or combine vernacular with Elizabethan madrigals in their remakings. The use of laser imagery and computer technology is also used in displaying Shakespeare’s plays in order to mingle Star Wars with the Wars of the Roses. It is an interesting fact that after his death every age has been trumpeting his works to their own tune. But there is a certain amount of difference in Shakespeare’s writing and modern writing. As Margot Heinemann observes, “Shakespeare’s theatre was more concerned with telling stories, whereas modern interpreters are no longer interested in making the sequence of events credible and concentrate on making us share the inner life of the characters” (qtd. in Dollinmore and Sinfield 238).

But “the basic concern is to inquire how to read the plays imaginatively: what can we do to ensure an active encounter in which Shakespeare’s words are the one fixed element in an image of our own lives,” observes John Russell Brown (3). We cannot prevent the modernization of his works; and the occurrence of change can be considered an opportunity to evaluate what we are doing and to judge whether it is to our own liking. A Shakespearean text is more vulnerable to these latter-day challenges by the very fact that it continues to occupy a high status in our cultural and socio-historical heritage. If his plays had
not been handled over ages by scholars and commercial entrepreneurs, they would have disappeared long ago. It is the constant critical and theatrical re-infleshments that make Shakespeare's writing more realistic to the English-speaking people than the characters created by Greek masters. His dramas are open to ever new criticism; and the interpretations of each play endow further layers and strata of reading. It arouses active and unprecedented response in the minds of the readers and viewers. It is possible for us to kindle our imagination on our own terms and enter the imaginative kingdom of Shakespeare. By way of processing and developing his plays, new interpretations, new perspectives and new substitutes for the plays emerge. On each play of Shakespeare, guides are available today with many kinds of explanations and analyses. It discusses how the play works as it is read or performed, and defines the central ideas and its contemporary relevance.

It may be taken into account that the resistance to Shakespeare's cultural authority originated from within the field of English studies. As Graham Holderness points out, “the break up of consensus in British political life during the 1970s was accompanied by the break up of traditional assumptions about the values and goals of literary culture” (ix). In the beginning literary texts were related only to specialized
journals and learned conferences, but later spread to the mainstream of intellectual life. It extended to the discourses of Marxism, Structuralism, Psychoanalysis, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, and so on. In our modern culture, the Shakespeare myth forms an ideological framework which can contain the affairs of a fractured modern society. In modern literature, a considerable volume of work prevails, offering counter-readings to Shakespeare’s texts and re-locating his reputation. Most of these writings are based on post-Structural linguistics, historiographical research and psychoanalytic theories. These writings address the past and the present in order to re-read culture in the context of true history.

“The classic is a timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present” (Forsyth 26-27) and is a literary ideal for other writers to follow. It represents the cultural consciousness of centuries of people and is enshrined with some kind of eternal truth. By its very status, it has attained an interpretative value and as a result invites continual re-reading. It is in the mobilization of the past and present that the politics of culture gets activated. Since the classic enjoys cultural superiority throughout the ages, naturally it gets entangled with our everyday life also. The function of the Rewrite is to negotiate with the classics and obtain cultural authenticity and derive intra-textuality. Bakhtin observes that “all new art is actually founded on a
relationship, a cultural symbiosis between itself and received culture, of which the classic forms a part” (qtd. in Forsyth 24). The Rewrite washes over texts at various intervals of time, adds and deletes a character here and there, alters beginnings and conclusions, changes motives and fills out the background of the representation of a given society “at a given time with the relevant historical, geographical, social, economic and cultural detail” (Vickers 145). It does not affirm or refute the classic’s status but tries to explore the evaluative systems which constitute and sustain literature. Contemporary dramatists alter and enlarge received knowledge and creatively misread the precursor text. Harold Bloom states that an authentic classical writer may or may not internalize his works’ anxiety, “but that scarcely matters: the strongly achieved work is the anxiety” (qtd. in Forsyth 30). It helps to bring out the multiplicity of modes of signification and is based not only on a specific text but in the re-reading of our past reception of a classic. It draws out different kinds of interpretations through which the classic has been transmitted.

It was a gentleman’s accord which was followed before the 1960s in putting new slants on to Shakespearean writings. Now this agreement has been invalidated and many of Shakespeare's plays are used only as a clothes-line by dramatists and directors to hang their plays on. Still there is some kind of assumption that the new work remains inherently
loyal to Shakespeare even if the remakings are unorthodox and extrapolated. It is now possible to produce as many stories from Shakespeare’s plays which contain a richness of contemporary parallels as they exist in the depths of the reader’s imagination. The adaptations proceed from the conclusions which they have already drawn from the reading of Shakespeare’s texts. The previous ages which also took their own liberties with Shakespeare would probably be amazed at the extent to which modern adaptors have gone in manipulating him. Their rewrites, revisions and moulding of the plays showed some sort of respect for Shakespeare, when compared to the collages, overhaulings, and rock musical versions practised by modern writers. Nevertheless, their attempt is to reassemble the stories by means of stunning devices but do not try to destroy the masterpieces as favoured by Artaud. Dramatists like Bond have taken pains to deny an affinity between Artaudian theory and their work. Marowitz on the other hand has promoted Artaudian ideas in his writings and in his productions. Another noteworthy incursion into Shakespeare’s classics is by Bertolt Brecht who chose only the plays inclined to his own ideology. He is realistic and dialectic in his approach, and brings out elaborate crowd scenes. The modern adaptors in turn, are making their plays thoroughly popular and commercial. They bring about musical versions of
Shakespeare such as *Kiss me Kate* from *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Catch my Soul* from *Othello*, *Westside Story* from *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Boys from Syracuse* from *The Comedy of Errors* and the like. These are obviously free treatments of Shakespeare's plays purposely meant to change the medium of expression and are deviations from their original sources. They contain songs, dances and comedies, and their priorities are also different. It is actually the myth and gist of the stories that the modern adaptors make use of in order to make their programmes lively, and they do not pay much attention to the real unity of the play. But the notable thing is that whether it is the musicalized version of Shakespeare or the Brechtian adaptations, the underlying principles are the same. They derive value from the original source by keeping new dimensions having contemporary relevance. In fact, by making use of the familiar characters and situations, they are making contact with the essence of the source text.

In adaptations, it is not only the form and content of the work that are changed, but also the purpose of the narrative. The dramatic format which Shakespeare followed suited his mode of writing to develop themes, stories and characters. But in rewriting, the case is different, as it assumes pre-knowledge of the source text. It attempts to cover the familiar notion in themes, situations and characterization but is more
concerned with the application of all these things in order to facilitate another concept. If the rewrites fail in their redistribution, they would end up as superficial and meaningless. Charles Marowitz in his Introduction to the Shakespearean adaptations has pointed out three basic qualities which are essential for adaptations. The first requirement is that the restructured play should have something specific to say and must not be a duplicate of the statements of the source text. Secondly, it should have the elasticity to bend in the desired direction. The third is “to recognize that when the ideas generated by the given material are not reconcilable with the work as it stands, it is polite to change the original rather than, out of respect or timidity, produce a set of changing incompatibles” (24). The Rewrite has the freedom to confront the intellectual structure of the play and can even form antithetical elements; but it should in no way wipe out the content of the original work. Sometimes, it also occurs that the classic is so subjugating that any counter argument only re-affirms its original authority.

Primarily, dramatic art is a social and psychological habit and a great deal of what theatre artists prepare is based on the need to feed and harbour the habit. In reworking Shakespeare, Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz have had to compete with a cultural icon that has stood the test of time. Yet their decision to attempt a change depends
on their realization that the prevailing stories are not the only possible ones. As Holderness observes, “to the materialist Shakespearean texts are identified, understood and accorded status by us in our social structure; they are part of our story-making” (129). The modern writers make use of the innumerable potentialities and possibilities that Shakespeare offers. They adjust to the myth of Shakespeare's plays in proportion to its power since they cannot be surrendered to successive cultures without retaining power relations. It comes as a negation to myth strategies that if a phenomenon becomes universal there is every possibility of it being adapted to changing conditions. The Shakespearean myths are consolidated and have every quality to be meddled with. If the Shakespearean works are meant for all kinds of people at all times, then their responsibility to speak sensibly to modern society becomes greater. Hence the adaptors' “rape” and raid Shakespeare's texts seems to be justified; and these versions continue to aspire to share cultural space with the Shakespearean myth and to extract significance from it. But these are legitimate and characteristic ways of extending cultures. The re-readings of Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz, or any re-reading of Shakespeare for that matter, can very well produce other radical re-readings as well. But in any case,
they will not disperse the cultural authority, but will only help to keep Shakespeare alongside the others.

Of late our understanding of Shakespeare has gone from text to source text and has now reached the point where his texts are used as paradigms for alternative versions of the texts. At present what matters from the immortal Shakespeare is to attain a modern experience, anxiety and sensibility. It can be attained only through splitting his works into new components and creating the very same sense of variety, vigour and vicissitude. As he has re-invented himself immensely and imaginatively, we also should re-invent him. The culture that makes him god will only produce a sort of criticism mixing abasement and appropriation. The guardians of Shakespeare’s reputation say that Shakespeare’s characters are true to life, but such people do not speak “intensely charged verse, sometimes rhymed, full of rare words, neologisms, archaisms, rhetorical constructions, classical allusions, cultivated ambiguities, multiple meanings, dense aural and rhymed patterning” (Taylor 407). The duty of the modern writer is to prove that the so-called dew drops of Shakespeare, when taken into one’s hands, are nothing but water.

Along with other contemporary dramatists, Tom Stoppard, Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker and Charles Marowitz also have sought to
interfere with the mythic relevance of Shakespeare in contemporary times. They felt that it was their obligation to make the plays as startling and unpredictable as on the day they were written. By defacing and remaking his plays, they have provided the most provocative and stimulating instances of Shakespearean writing in recent times. In fact they have helped to sustain Shakespeare and we all have been beneficiaries of their varied and original thinking. They have reconstituted the plays with diverse political purposes and made historicity and modernity march side by side. They stand in the forefront of Shakespearean adaptations assimilating and propagating the new inventions of rewriting. Their writings throw out a challenge to the morality, philosophy, manners, culture and the status quo of Shakespeare's masterpieces. As every interpretation of a myth can be considered to be a new myth, their remakings emerge as outstandingly original. By re-angling the classical texts and giving new meanings without altering the letter of the texts, they force the texts to give us new answers. It is not possible to draw a dividing line between the source works and the well-founded Rewrites, because Shakespeare is always in the background of the new play like a shadow. Instead of trying to eclipse him completely, one should be grateful to him for providing one with the source stories. Shakespeare was singular and unusual in his
writings and surpassed all other writers, proving that he was unique and inimitable. But contemporary writers cannot take him along with them forever, since their direction is different from his. It is only in the same way as Shakespeare had deviated from his predecessors Holinshed or Boccaccio that the contemporary dramatists under consideration have also deviated from the plays of Shakespeare to suit their times.

Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz certainly feed from Shakespeare’s plays. Their decodification of the texts derives from their familiarity with Shakespearean and other texts—an intertextuality. Their plays serve as critiques of his drama reacting against the admiration surrounding his revered texts and help modern readers/playgoers to form new insights about him and his work. Certainly their plays cannot be matched with the artifact, perception or philosophy of Shakespeare. Rather, their plays are related to the concerns of the present day society. They have created entirely new plays from the old though they look back towards Shakespeare as the profound originator in whose margins they survive. Although they cannot aim to be substitutes for Shakespeare’s drama, they nevertheless are plays possessing an integrity of their own. These dramatists have brought out their plays because of the uneasiness they felt in the way modern people approach Shakespeare. Shakespeare designed his plays
primarily to entertain the Elizabethan audience, but simultaneously to challenge and reveal various aspects of his society as well. Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz have consciously or unconsciously fed from his models and our reaction to them. Approaching from different ontological positions, these dramatists have tried to defamiliarize Shakespeare. But their efforts in turn may help critics and academicians to reform at least some of their ideas and attitudes towards Shakespeare. Around Shakespeare's plays we can observe both textual and intertextual history. The textual history refers to literary studies to discover the text and the intertextual attempts refer to the traditions that have grown around it by way of receptions and performances. Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz have brought into question both the textuality and intertextuality of the Shakespearean canon. Their attempt is to develop or react against certain cultural traditions. They feel that the notion of the classic drama is an outdated one that can and must be tampered with. The masterpieces of the past ages are fit for that age and need not necessarily be good for us. The appropriators feel that they have the right to speak about what has been said in a way that belongs to them. They can rightly respond in a straightforward manner to present-day feelings which everybody can understand.
Shakespeare’s plays seem to have ceased to retain its original Elizabethan force.

We have to evaluate each one of the versions of Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz on its own merits. Usually there are two levels of attack in a Shakespearean re-interpretation. One is the frontal assault and the other is the subversion from within. In the first case it is possible to produce a sense of disorientation by which two different sets of opposite ideas exist together in the same work. The success of such works depends upon the suitability of the new ideas to the original and how the original becomes revitalized by the induction of new ideas. In the case of the second, the source play is uprooted and then re-planted so as to arrive at a fresh argument. It can be one which the original playwright might have never dreamt of. In both cases, the new material feeds on and promotes the original work. There is another practice of prising a work away from the surface of the original classic, as it happens in Tom Stoppard’s play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. It retains its autonomy as a work of art but still remains thematically related to Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, operating from within its sphere. *Hamlet* functions only as pre-text for Stoppard; its cultural sovereignty is independent of the Shakespearean play on which it is based. It takes off from the unsaid, the “other” side of *Hamlet,*
which normally we are not concerned with. Stoppard challenges the Shakespeare myth by displacing the enigmatic princely hero from the centre, and replacing him with two ordinary men. We are awe-struck and dumb-founded at his audacity when he subverts our secure expectations of a Shakespearean tragedy. Belonging to the genre of the absurdist drama, it deals with illusion and reality and suggests that the final reality is nothing but death. Stoppard's interpretation of Shakespeare's play was in terms of absurdism, as was the trend of his times. In his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, we can experience a warmth, intimacy and passiveness that are similar to Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. We can also feel the chill of a bare, resigned and sensitive isolation which is characteristic of the plays of modern times. Stoppard is charmingly effective when he deviates from the original source and follows his own line of thought. He has succeeded in inducting our confusion and anxiety into a Shakespeare play. And all through his play there is an echo of our own uncertainty and inability to define moral absolutes. The conservatives may deplore that a fantastic classic has been tampered with, but the modern audience may uphold it as a thrilling aesthetic reform. Stoppard strikes a balance between invention and presentation and makes us realize the
possibility that even the oldest and the most familiar drama can still astonish and at the same time revive our strained sensibilities.

While Stoppard’s play depends for its effects on our knowledge of the negligible role his heroes play in *Hamlet*, the plays of Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker and Charles Marowitz rework the whole of their originals into new and self-contained units. In his plays Bond pushes back the icons of history into the background. He conveys the basic message that we are living in an inhuman world and his objective is a form of socialism where man can be free. In *Lear* Bond has attempted to reclaim the scope of Shakespearean tragedy for the contemporary audience by reshaping a classical model. He creates an original play from Shakespeare’s play *King Lear*, extracting from it certain ideas of cruelty and social order. He intended to re-orient the meanings of culture and myth in order to use them for socialism. However, he retains the established connotations of myth and moves into an idealistic conception of culture and cultural authority. Very realistically Shakespeare has pointed out in his play the pitfalls of social insecurity and senility in *King Lear*. We may read into the play a moral that unless we take care of our senior citizens, there is every possibility that we would be equally affected by the natural disasters and familial disintegrations to which we are eyewitnesses today. Whatever qualities
we may attribute to Shakespeare, he was not didactic in his intentions, whereas Bond is. But being a committed artist, Shakespeare could not but depict the real happenings around him. Bond has his own ideology to put in the place of *King Lear*. He has used the play's received knowledge as a starting point in order to reveal new statements and implications. In *Lear* what Bond has changed is the philosophical framework of the play in which it has been conceived. He has thoroughly re-routed the spirit of the work and meant things different from Shakespeare.

As we know, theatre is considered to be the most social of all literary forms and for its manifestation, a good audience is necessary. The change in the drama must be related to the change in audience, in the economic, social and institutional relationships. It is true that our society is full of violence and bloodshed. So, people who react against violence in drama are actually preventing playwrights from portraying reality. In these times aggression seems well on the way to being moralized; but this sense of morality may only lead to destructiveness. It is men with unjust social privileges who express an emotional interest in social morality. Bond has displayed rape and violence as familiar occurrences in modern society and has pushed forward to weaving his findings into the traditionally acclaimed *King Lear*.
to suit his times. The veritable thing which makes his play *Lear* modern is that he is realistic in portraying the chaos and confusion which have become the hallmark of modernism. Inspite of all his philosophy, Bond has few answers to solve our problems. He prompts us to re-evaluate and re-appraise the received wisdom portrayed by Shakespeare and our own lives. He says that the problem is not rooted in the general human conditions but in political systems. He advocates violence and oppression and suggests that a theatrical analysis of power structures and practical effects are necessary to overcome it. He tries to re-orient the myth of King Lear and use it for spreading socialism. In *Lear* Bond succeeds in portraying a society which is disturbingly similar to our own.

Being a social dramatist, in his play *Bingo*, Bond tries to demystify the capitalistic image of Shakespeare. He is dealing with a period of rural history which involves the enclosure of common ground creating great difficulty for the rural people. Shakespeare allied himself with the land-owning gentry, showing little consideration for the poor people. It is ironical that a man, whose plays analyzed and exposed the inhumanities of mankind, allies himself with those very same oppressive forces. Like any other man, he is also associated with the everyday cruelties of the world. Bond portrays Shakespeare as a failure in both his personal life and social life and whose actions ultimately lead him to
commit suicide. He alienates himself from the society and from his own family only to end up in destruction. He lacks far-sighted vision and views things only from his own point of view, and that exposes his limitations. His subjectivity uncovers his bourgeois tendencies and leads him only to impotence and helplessness. As in a socialistic set up, all the actions of characters in Bingo are inter-related. On Shakespeare's death, his daughter desperately searches for her father's will, proving that the parent-child relationship is a mockery. Through her action Bond shows the economic greed which dehumanizes society. In short Bond tries to dismantle the bardolatory and acclamation over Shakespeare, and attempts to prove that he is a self-centred man whose attitude to society is sterile. We praise him when we find his plays mimetic of nature; and when they do not resemble life, we praise him for being artistic. We are mystified by his otherness, his uniqueness and the like. Within our culture, he is enormously powerful. But power collapses or gets disfigured. Bond's view is that art is relevant to the solution of social problems, and that art, artists and society are inextricably intertwined in their relationships. He believes that being an incomparable artist Shakespeare should have showed some sort of moral responsibility to the society in which he was living. But contradictory to expectations and evaluations, he was unmindful of his
society. So Bond questions the moral authority of Shakespeare. Another factor in the play is that Shakespeare speaks very little. The flourishing use of language which made him famous now seems to have deserted him. He is reluctant to speak against injustices. Through his adaptations Bond struggles to free us from Shakespeare's charisma by questioning what we have been told about him. He is skeptical and suspicious of Shakespeare's power.

All of Shakespeare's plays are relevant and meaningful to us in one way or another, but certain plays become more relevant at certain periods because of the confluence of recent events and past history. Shakespeare's humanism dominates in his plays and they do not require a specific political or religious climate to survive. But our humanist values vary from generation to generation so that a less important area of the canon can suddenly become relevant. Arnold Wesker's *The Merchant* and Charles Marowitz's *Variations on The Merchant of Venice* belong to this category since they deal with anti-Semitism. It happens that when a modern sensibility interacts with a renowned play of the past, we find the original plays being revitalized. This occurs to Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* when Wesker and Marowitz react against it. Their plays are intensifications of particular aspects of the play on which they are
based. They help us to question some of the assumptions behind the attitudes which misread Shakespeare through the reverence of tradition. Yet they derive much of their power from the reference point of the source play. The historical vigour of the plays owes much more to the contemporary political history. The anti-Semitism of the 20th century provides a fresh interest to *The Merchant of Venice*. Since the play has such an edge, in recent years, many schools have removed the play from their curriculum. Whatever Shakespeare might have intended, his audience might have viewed the Jew as an object of contempt and ridicule. No Jew can read Shakespeare’s play without pain and indignation and most readers also express the same opinion. Now it has come to a point where this masterpiece has to be deleted from syllabi and rewritten for generations to come because of the invidious passions it has aroused. What Wesker and Marowitz do is to re-examine the much-discussed masterpiece once again.

History can never silence the echoes of Jewish voices through massacre and holocaust, as it happened during the Second World War. Instead it will persist as long as Jews exist; and in the history of the Jews, Shylock has played an inglorious part, hardly one that Shakespeare could have even contemplated. Both writers highlight the agony of Shylock which is deepened by the realization that an alien
world has punished him for attempting to intrude upon it. He has been severely penalized for trespassing into a Christian society to which he does not belong. He reacts vindictively and tries to rout them by using their own weapon, the mechanism of law. But it is too late for him to realize that law and order are in the hands of the influential who can very easily mete out injustice. Moreover, high-powered lawyers have the cunning to convert right into wrong and vice versa. In both the plays the decline of the legal system is excellently equated with the loss of faith in law and justice. Both rewriters help us to liberate ourselves from the deeper recesses of our consciousness into the immediacy of the post-Holocaust experience.

In re-reading the play *The Merchant of Venice*, Wesker has taken into account the contemporary feelings and opinions about Shylock’s role. His objection to the portrayal of Shylock as a pondering of conscience actually takes on a greater significance. In Shakespeare’s play law fulfills its legitimate task, but in Wesker, law makes us question its values. There is much change in characterization, language, structure and technique between the source text and Wesker’s rewrite. Since he reworks the whole of the source play, like Bond he retains very little of Shakespeare’s dialogues. The pivot of his play is the anti-Jewish feeling which existed in Venice in particular and in Europe in
general. The play is a citation of our indifferent and inconsiderate attitude to the minority race of the Jews. He focuses on the fact that society is condemning the Jews as a group and not as individuals. As Wesker himself has said elsewhere, his Shylock is a free spirit and it is this spirit that makes him accept a Christian as his friend. Unlike his predecessor, he invents a mocking bond for a pound of flesh, implying the supremacy of the human being over the state and its over-repressive authority. Through his play, Wesker projects the message of tolerance and warmth of heart, but he is under no illusion as to the difficulty in achieving them. He gives us an insight into the life of Shylock, which we could never possibly have imagined. The Merchant is a meaningful reaction in a post-Holocaust era.

Marowitz in his turn revisits Shylock so that the character may get a chance to voice his opinions to the present society. Both the playwrights have excavated and explored Shakespeare’s play which is often referred to as the cause and effect of anti-Semitism. Marowitz has helped to problematize Shakespeare at a time when Shakespeare’s work has been put into danger of being misrepresented by bourgeois culture. He opens the play with an act of terrorism and concludes it on a note of indignation and vengeance against the anti-Semitic feeling that Shakespeare’s play has spread over the centuries. His rewrite is a fitting
reply to the demands of a post-Holocaust era. It promotes a historically
effected consciousness of events that happened during the Holocaust
without undermining their awesome proportions by naming them. His
rewrite helps to deface the cultural after-life of *The Merchant of
Venice*. When we read the play, we are conscious of the legacy of anti-
Semitism which contributed to the Holocaust; but that consciousness
has also helped to alter and reshape our reception of the play. Marowitz
has rewritten the disgrace of Shylock to counter the subsequent history
of the Jew in which Shylock has played and continues to play a vital
part. He liberates Shylock from the fetters of a tainted literary history to
a world without any stigma.

Shakespeare’s England did not probably have a Jewish problem as
congeved by us in modern terms. Shylock has by all means grown too
large for us. These writers have helped us to cast off our anti-
Shylockism to a great extent. With vigour and vitality they explode the
bedrock of set beliefs of racial, national and religious differences
manifested in Shakespeare’s play, *The Merchant of Venice*. No other
literary work reacts against it so honestly and unrelentingly.

As it is pointed out in the introductory chapter, there are women’s
writings also on Shakespeare. *Lear’s Daughters* (1987) by The
Women’s Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein is α-re-visionary rendering
of *King Lear* from a feminist viewpoint. This play offers a deconstructed reading—to show how King Lear treated his daughters as objects and possessions and imprisoned them in the role of daughters. The story is re-told by an androgynous fool who refuses to be defined. The fool and a nurse, both employees in the household of King Lear, offer a critique of capitalism through their materialistic discourse. The dictator king is responsible for the poverty throughout the land and for establishing a regime of the rich and the poor. The play is both an exposure of the capitalistic and patriarchal attitude of King Lear.

Retelling a classical text to highlight the contemporary perspectives on the issues depicted therein is not limited to those by Shakespeare. The epic *The Mahabharata*, which forms the corner stone of Indian mythology, has been retold several times in English and in the vernaculars, substituting modern personalities for classical figures. The renowned writer Bhisham Sahni’s play *Madhavi*, in Hindi, is an excellent retelling, in feminist terms, of an apparently insignificant episode in *The Mahabharata*. The Trilogy in Malayalam on *The Ramayana*—*Saketam, Kanchana Sita* and *Lanka Lakshmi*—by C. N. Sreekantan Nair are subversive re-enactments of the traditional images of Rama, Sita and Ravana. There are also plays that focus on different angles of historical and legendary personages as well as works like those on Mahatma
Gandhi, Jesus Christ and *The Bible* which often become controversial as well.

It is a fact that the plays produced by Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz were not theatrical successes, barring *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* to some extent. Shakespeare is both great theatre and greater literature. The subversive rewritings of Shakespeare—chosen for study in this thesis—also have this equally significant twin dimension. They are subversions at production; they are still more powerful as retellings of an established literary canon so far considered inimitable and sacrosanct. An audience that is tuned to traditional productions of Shakespeare's plays may not have their minds conditioned to these subversive versions. Of course, theatrical production can subvert a work of art more extensively and radically than a literary text, particularly because of the range of possibilities that a performance medium provides. Visual transformation of the written text itself facilitates both conscious and unconscious subversion. Casting, costumes, dialogue delivery, stage effects, direction—all of these and much more—magnify, deepen and accentuate the subversive elements in a play. At the same time the text, being the source and stimulus of these subversions, necessitates literary analysis that can in no way replace a production-based study. The extent of subversiveness in
these plays is much more important in the thematic and literary aspect than in performance. The target and scope of this research project is confined to a critical analysis of the cause and effect of subversion in the all-time classic of dramatic imagination that Shakespeare is. This aspect, which is more literary and conceptual than dramatic, is treated with utmost concentration, leaving aside the production aspect to yet another field of theatre study.

In actualizing subversion literally, Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz have succeeded to a great extent though not in production. They have revisited, renewed, rekindled and rejuvenated Shakespeare. In making him our contemporary, these playwrights have succeeded better than any other dramatists of their time. Marowitz has observed that "an audience is often like the implacable face of a stopped clock which will resist all efforts to be wound to correct time out of an obsessive desire to maintain the integrity of its broken mechanism. It should be no wonder that art must occasionally give it a good shake to get it ticking again" (Marowitz 2001: 176). In bringing literary continuity to the plays of Shakespeare, Stoppard, Bond, Wesker and Marowitz stand tall.
Works cited


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