
An interview with Professor Jonathan Locke Hart

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Abstract: Professor Jonathan Locke Hart answers our questions about Comparative Literature in Canada, Canadian indigenous literary traditions, Shakespeare, and the dominance of American academia, and the English language. He refers to a wide range of texts and scholars, his personal experience as a poet and scholar, and comments on the potential future of our shared disciplines.

Keywords: indigenous literary traditions, Shakespeare, Eurocentricism, Canadian Literature, Comparative Literature

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Porter and Azadibougar: Could you please tell our readers a bit about the history of Comparative Literature in Canada and how the discipline has evolved during the 2000s?

Hart: Although I have covered some of this ground in different places, for instance, in “*CL History: Northrop Frye, Milan Dimić and Comparative Literature*” in 2012 and “Comparative Literature in Canada,” in *Comparative Literature Around the World: Global Practice* in 2021, I would be happy to telescope. In the article in 2012, I discussed Frye and Dimić, scholars and teachers I knew, but their significance for Comparative Literature in Canada is my main concern. I first audited and attended Northrop Frye’s lectures and seminars in Toronto in the 1970s and first met Milan Dimić in the 1980s in Edmonton.

Frye was instrumental in the founding of Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto in the 1960s, and Dimić had a similar role in establishing Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta about the same time. These two programs were the earliest in English Canada and the first was nearly closed and the Department of Comparative Literature at Alberta ceased to be a free-standing department and morphed into a program in different configurations and lost its

autonomy, having been a department with undergraduate and graduate programs. Comparative Literature at Toronto had never had an undergraduate program but survives as a center of graduate studies. My own experience included being Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Alberta and Northrop Frye Professor in Comparative Literature at Toronto. I had also helped to assess important programs in the field in English and French Canada. British Columbia, McGill and Carleton had let their commitment to Comparative Literature slip. Western and Brock are still active in the area. The period since the late 1980s has not been kind to the study of language, literature and the humanities in Canada and a number of Western countries. As Bill Readings, J. Hillis Miller and others have argued, the university in the United States and in the West had turned into technical schools and were in ruin. In *The Burden of the Past*, Walter Jackson Bate examines English poetry in terms of the weight of tradition and uses an illustration of Henry Fuseli's "The Artist Moved by the Grandeur of Ancient Ruins," from 1778-1779 in the Kunsthau Zurich, but Readings is looking at the ruin of the university more as a rubble of something once grand as the university is subject to market forces that has left humanities, literature and philosophy in shambles. How can the university be a place for thinking? Can the student be a thinker or is now a consumer amid ruined thought? What is knowledge amidst market pressures? Can disciplines like Comparative Literature help or hinder that critical thinking? Will this university after the 1980s impede thought and become a bureaucratic machine? What kind of environment can there be for individual thinkers and a community of thinkers? Such are the questions Readings raised in the 1990s and which Miller explored after the untimely death of Readings.

Frye and Dimić overlapped in Canada from 1966 to 1991. Both were important to their universities, to Comparative Literature at their schools in Canada and studies internationally. Moreover, Frye and Dimić were dedicated teachers and supervisors. I learnt from both of them. Frye said his books were teaching books. Dimić contributed as an editor and a research director in Comparative Literature and to the executive of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association and the International Comparative Literature Association. Following their example, I tried to build on what they did and witnessed that their universities and other institutions tried to undo or undid what they had done. I see teachers and colleagues as examples and have written on these two figures as well as others in the field, such as Marshall McLuhan, Harry Levin, J. Hillis Miller, Edward Said, Barbara Johnson. I hope these figures in literary studies in a multi-media world may speak to students, teachers, scholars and the public now and to come. They were not naïve about the challenges: nor am I. My own appointments have been in English, history, medicine and biology and I have lectured or taught in Comparative Literature in France, the United States, Canada and China as well as English or literary studies in Estonia, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, England, Canada, the United States, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, India, and elsewhere. The strain on literary studies, Comparative Literature, humanities and related fields is international and not in Canada alone. I remain optimistic despite the emphasis on utility and the neglect of nature and culture in face of the usual impulse to power and profit. Humane letters are in danger of being of being a vanishing alphabet. Perhaps one at a time and together we can make

a small but incremental difference in the pleasures and textures and concerns of the language—the poetics and rhetoric and signs and words. Literature matters even if it is fragile and vulnerable in a difficult environment. I try to research, write and teach or, as Harry Levin would say, compare the literatures, despite the challenges. Mathematics and poetry can be beautiful and difficult to a degree that few understand at the highest level, and this is particularly true of physics and mathematics, but that makes them even more vital to culture and society. These scientists are to be cherished. The interplay of poetry and mathematics, humanities and science, allows us to explore questions of beauty, truth and justice. These are ancient and enduring questions.

In a utilitarian world, these questions can be scoffed at or trivialized, but they matter. Theoretical science and poetry may not seem practical but teach mathematics and language precisely because language and reading are so difficult, they should be pursued. Literatures are ways into possible worlds. The exhortation at the end of my essay, written some time before but published in 2021, was to create and compare literatures in its different kinds.

Porter and Azadibougar: Canada has two official languages, English and French; how does this bilingual policy impact the development of literary studies in general and Comparative Literature in particular?

Hart: When I visited the University of Montreal, I was impressed how, in a city that I had partly grown up in, there were so many multilingual students from all over the world. During this visit, a colleague and I reminded the university how fortunate it was and how ideal the city and university were for Comparative Literature. This university, along with Alberta, had a department of Comparative Literature, but such departments, even in a bilingual and multicultural country, are always vulnerable. For some reason, Canada, which was strong in Comparative Literature and should have advantages, has not maintained the discipline even if there is a journal and an association that has tried hard over the decades to make strides. I am an optimist, but the universities are letting down the side in humanities and literature in Canada.

Perhaps in times of change or crisis, people have nostalgia for a national language and solid ground and not the questioning, comparative and multiple points of view. Innovation and traditions have interplay, need to have some give. Nostalgia, although natural, can be an obstacle. Canada should celebrate its Indigenous peoples, languages and cultures and that it has French and English and many other languages. This is an advantage and not a detriment. French and English are key languages in Canada and internationally. The encouragement and recognition of Indigenous and settler cultures, languages and literatures and story-telling would go a long way to help understanding and set the tone for a renewed Comparative Literature.

Porter and Azadibougar: How do you see the role of Canadian indigenous literary traditions in

shaping the national tradition? What are the differences between “literature” in its indigenous sense and what modern European languages institutionalized as such?

Hart: Indigenous traditions were here before the Norse came to Greenland and Newfoundland, which became a British colony and then chose to become part of Canada in 1949. The Norse, according to Bill Handwerk, came to Newfoundland in 1021. In *The Smithsonian Magazine*, Handwerk’s article, “New Dating Method Shows Vikings Occupied Newfoundland in 1021 C.E.,” he argues that tree rings provide evidence of a solar storm that allows scientists to find the precise year of Norse settlement. Tim Folger wrote in the same magazine in March 2017 in an article, “Why Did Greenland’s Vikings Vanish?” Folger speaks with archeologists about the end of 400 years of Viking settlement there in 1424 and the complex reasons for the end of the settlement—and there are different theories, but dangers of fishing of the ocean, small population, economic collapse, pandemic and climate change may have contributed to the demise of this highly literate culture. Folger ends by speaking about Sigríð Björnsdóttir and Þorsteinn Ólafsson, a couple who married at Hvalsey’s church, settled in Iceland, and, in 1424, needed to have witnesses and letters and to prove their marriage in Greenland. The Vikings had adapted to Greenland and had been in Newfoundland, where L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, following the discovery of the settlement in the 1960s, is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Of course, the Indigenous populations such as the Dorset people, the Inuit, the Cree and many other groups were—for thousands of years—throughout the Americas, in Canada, the United States and other settler countries. Their interaction after Columbus was much greater than that before Columbus. I worked at Ste. Marie Among the Hurons where I was staff supervisor one summer in the late 1970s, a reconstruction of a site north of Toronto near Midland where French Jesuits met the Ouendat or Hurons, 1639-1649 and I was interested from an early age in nature, ecology and the environment, which can be seen in my poetry and prose. This contact between settlers and Indigenous peoples and the effects of the Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain and was exported to Europe and the world, are central facts of people’s relation to nature, culture, economics, society, culture, science, art and literature in Canada and places worldwide.

For instance, Poem 11 of my poetry collection, *Dreamwork*, raises some of the issues regarding my own ancestors and their relation to Indigenous peoples in 17th-century New England with a specific historical event in mind—on King Philip’s War in 1675-1676:

11.
They surrounded the marsh
And in the hush of night
Killed the guards, with stealth
Crept in and lit the dwellings
And shot woman and child
As they ran out asleep

Call this settling with the Indians.

This poem also reminds us that people move as some of my ancestors moved from France to England and others from England to the American colonies and British North America losing the United States officially in 1783, so my family was split. Questions of identity are complex in Canada and everywhere. My own poems about the past are sometimes about family in France, England, North America, or about the Chinese past, influenced by the Tang poets, or about geography of all the places I have lived or taught or visited across the world. In this poem, I explore the excess and conflict and cruelty of the conflict between settlers and “Indians,” with the irony of the last line resting largely on the word “settling.”

History and poetry—reading—can be unsettling, unsettle our sense of self and other, identity and estrangement, otherness or alterity. Reading poetry and literary works, and related cultural texts visually and textually, are at the center of what I do as a poet, historian and literary critic and scholar. Rhetoric and poetics are very important, and millennia of biblical and poetic commentary and exegesis, including Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Book 3 of *Rhetoric* on style, are ways we can come to understand language, mind, soul, body—word and world—possible and fictional worlds, art and reality, mimesis and anti-mimesis and all that lies between, the liminal or threshold. The drama or theatre of meaning between speaker and audience, writer and reader—the oral, aural and written—all of which Aristotle understands in tragedy and epic and in political speech. I have written about ecology, empire, colonies, poetics, rhetoric in many places over decades, for instance in *Representing the New World, Comparing Empires, Empires and Colonies, The Poetics of Otherness, Aristotle and His Afterlife, Making and Seeing Modern Texts* as well as in many other books, talks and articles. Oral and written culture, as Jacques Derrida discusses in regard to Plato, is not so easy a division. After all Homer is part of an oral tradition and theatre is written and spoken, performed. I have a collection that I edited on J. Hillis Miller to appear in Paris soon and a monograph on Miller that will appear with Routledge. Miller raises many of these issues. I have long written on works that appear in a number of languages, and have done so sometimes in French and but often in English, on Indigenous peoples and writers and figures from many backgrounds and not simply about European people and cultures and writers. The oral and written break down when considering Indigenous discourse.

Besides teaching literature and history and collaborating with Native Studies, I supervised Indigenous students and was active in other events and projects. In the 1990s and beyond, I helped to organize conferences with an important Indigenous component, which became, for instance, the edited volumes, *Explorations in Difference* and *Natives and Settlers*. Some key figures, such as Sharon Venne and Harold Cardinal, were involved in these conferences. My former student and later a distinguished professor, Paul DePasquale, rooted in the Grand River and the Mohawk community, was a key to the second conference and to Native or Indigenous Studies generally in Manitoba and Canada. Another former student, Naomi McIlwraith, a former student whose Métis background allowed her to write an accomplished book of poetry made of Cree and English. I

have written about both DePasquale and McIlwraith. They both bring their Indigenous experiences and perspectives to Canada and its varied culture and literature and enlarge and deepen our understanding.

There are many fine Indigenous writers, speakers and artists in Canada, the United States, in the Americas and throughout. I will mention some of these I have written on as part of my recommendation of them. Some of this material can be found in books David Porter of Hunan Normal University helped to edit: *Collection of Jonathan Locke Hart* (Six Volumes, Shanghai Jiao Tong UP, 2021). Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), Buffy Sainte-Marie and Jeannette Armstrong are poets and artists I wrote about in different contexts. In *The Poetics of Otherness*, for example, I analyze “History Lesson” (1979, 1991), in which Jeannette C. Armstrong mixes satire and elegy to create a time-lapse poem, beginning the poem with the dramatic image of a mob bursting out of Columbus’s ship—Armstrong calling him the familiar Christopher only, perhaps to stress the irony of him bearing Christ to the Indigenous peoples. This poem appears in a collection or anthology, *Native Poetry in Canada*, as does Marie Annharte Baker’s poem, “Coyote Columbus Café” (1994). Both poems that represent and reinterpret Columbus from an Indigenous point of view. Recently, I discussed Thomas King’s poetry collection, *77 Fragments of a Familiar Ruin* (2019). King, partly of Cherokee and Greek descent, is a distinguished writer of prose and now of poetry. Poem 60 gives a sense of King’s art: it is another Coyote and doctor poem with a like structure to earlier poems on this topic—when the animals call Social Services because Coyote says he will jump in the sea never to surface. I also wrote about Tomson Highway’s *Laughing with the Trickster: On Sex, Death, and Accordions* (2022), given first as the CBC Massey lectures of 2022 and which is comprised of five chapters about language, creation, sex and gender, humor, and death then a “A Brief Guide to Cree” and “Reading List.” Highway, an adept story-teller, has gifts in music, drama, and literature and reorients Canada and the world, putting Cree before English when he begins with a page of phonetic Cree. And so, here is a glimpse in poetry and prose, of how Indigenous literature enriches Canadian literature and culture and makes gives a distinct sense of place. After all, Indigenous peoples are by definition there first and here in Canada first, so in some senses, they are a foundation and a way of reorienting how we look at Canada and Canadian literature and those elements of any place. We need to listen to their stories and read their books and open our hearts and minds to their individual talents and their wisdom and talents, hear their words and their music.

Porter and Azadibougar: The dominance of American academia, and the English language, has given shape to Comparative Literature for decades—and more recently to World Literature. What major “alternatives” to the American Comparative Literature are there—specifically out of “Western” academia?

Hart: It seems to me that there are always interesting things going on in places across the world, including the West just as there are some differences within such a large, diverse, and dynamic

country as the United States. My own personal experience in the American academy was on and off at Harvard from the mid 1980s to the present, where on and off I have held various kinds of appointments in English and in Comparative Literature as well as at Kirkland House and the Herbaria there. At Princeton, I held visiting appointments and at the University of California, Irvine, I was invited as a visiting researcher. I was also the Killam Visiting Professor at Bridgewater State University, so all I can say is that each university was different and to generalize about American academia. Moreover, I was at the School of Criticism and Theory in 1988 at Dartmouth, where Thomas M. Greene, Edward Said, Geoffrey Hartman, Michael Riffaterre and others were. At Harvard, Princeton and Irvine, I have known, researched, taught or worked in Comparative Literature such as Harry Levin, Barbara Johnson, Sandra Berman, J. Hillis Miller and others. The United States fostered these great and distinct talents. The universities they were at—Yale, Columbia and the schools I have mentioned—allowed scope for this individuality. Miller, for instance, as well as others of the so-called Yale School, denied being put in a school and even the label of deconstruction. When reading each of these figures, I get a sense of their distinct styles, the texture of their works.

In Canada, as I mentioned above, I had colleagues who made a difference in Comparative Literature, such as Frye and Dimić, and figures like Wladimir Kryszynski, E. D. Blodgett, Eva Kushner and Linda Hutcheon, also had international reach in the field. I came across other fine scholars through my service to the American Comparative Literature Association and International Comparative Literature Association, such as Gerald Gillespie, Eugene Eoyang, and Haun Saussy, and Dutch and Belgian scholars like Douwe Fokkema, Hans Bertens, Theo D'haen. Moreover, I visited literary studies and Comparative Literature universities in Spain, Portugal, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, and elsewhere and there are too many people to mention here (the Acknowledgments of my books set out my thanks and debts to these and other people). What I found was an array of talented scholars at the early, middle, and later stages of their careers. I do not wish to give a long list of names, but I think that Europe has always been a creative place for writers, teachers, and scholars and has helped to define Comparative Literature. Take my colleagues in Comparative Literature at the Sorbonne-Nouvelle—Jean Bessière, Philippe Daros, Stéphane Michaud, and Alexandre Stroeve—and the students in my doctoral seminar on otherness, in the spring of 2009—all very distinctive and accomplished, and there I was in Paris with such a long history of Comparative Literature and, for instance, theories of otherness or alterity that had influenced the United States and the world. Although we could go back to Plato or Aristotle to find notions of sameness and difference, metaphor and allegory, the seeds of modern examinations of alterity or otherness, I focus on Paris to stress that this city, France and Europe, are creative and have affected many other places. So teaching a doctoral seminar on alterity in French and English to students who sometimes had other languages as their mother tongues, such as Chinese and Russian, embodied otherness in the old Sorbonne building at the heart of the ancient University of Paris in a great intellectual center of Europe and the world. Emmanuel Lévinas, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, and others write

about *altérité* and related terms and the world came to take notice. They affected many disciplines, including Comparative Literature, and the very individual brilliance of these writers or theorists cannot be produced in the humanities in a systematic way that does not allow for that individuality.

So there is no one American Comparative Literature and it is part of an international exchange of ideas, words, culture, a changing configuration, and this instance of a heterogeneous notion of otherness opens a horizon, one instance of distinctiveness. Derrida and Miller, whose long friendship Miller discusses in *For Derrida* (2009), both explore alterity or otherness in difference and deconstruction, their own distinct versions of them. They are their differentiated selves to the other, friends who share but not the same. In looking at language and reading closely and carefully individual poems, novels, essays, plays and different genres—literature and theory—such general notions of national literatures, cultures, Comparative Literatures become more and more intricate and even dissolve. Generalizations meet the riddle of particularities. When we move away from reading literature closely, we are in danger of hasty generalization and abstractions that pass for theory.

Porter and Azadibougar: You have worked in China for a good number of years; what potentials do you see in Chinese academia for the development of the discipline and its future growth? What factors might hinder the evolution of the discipline, in your opinion?

Hart: I think and have long thought that China and Chinese students and scholars had and have enormous talents and potential. Chinese universities have invested in humanities, which is admirable. At Peking University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Shandong University, as well as those universities I have given talks or classes to, such as Tsinghua, Sun Yat-sen University, Nanjing University, Nanjing Normal University, Fudan University, and the many universities I visited in China over more than 30 years, there is great potential and accomplishment. What I encourage most in China, as I have elsewhere, is for students and scholars to be themselves, to find an individual way of seeing, reading, writing, teaching, as part of a community, but as themselves. We all are part of a republic of letters, a larger national or international community of scholars and teachers in Comparative Literature.

I think that China, an ancient culture with many capable people, has and will make contributions through those talented people, sharing those gifts with others worldwide and not simply in China. There are many aspects to Comparative Literature and it depends, for better or worse, on the losses and gains of translation. The Chinese language and works, the great Tang poets, are all a treasure to share, to read, poem by poem. It is better to read or share one poem well than to set out abstractions. At least that is true of Western works, and China has many traditions in literature, interpretation, reading, writing, philosophy and much else. From a global point of view, which may be quite different from the internal logic of Chinese culture, language and literature in all its variety and accomplishment, discovering how the poems, novels, non-fiction work is a gift. East and West, good reading and writing are rare and Chinese Comparative Literature can make

such a contribution. Quality matters.

Porter and Azadibougar: This special issue partly addresses the way Eurocentrism has made a “minor” language of many of the world’s important languages, oftentimes making them institutionally inaccessible. How can universities overcome the present state?

Hart: This is quite a challenge. We live in a world, at least in the English-speaking world, in which universities are being turned away from their origins in the University of Bologna and the University of Paris in the West at least. Science is very important so STEM subjects deserve a great deal of attention, esteem and funding. Schools and universities in Britain, Canada and the United States have stressed languages less and less since the 1960s and the demise of classics from the turn of the 20th century or the advent of the First World War foreshadowed that demise of languages. Translation became all. We had many languages ancient and modern at my school but that started to erode even when I was a student. In any case, none of us can know all the languages we should or need in Comparative Literature. I think that all that can be done is that each country stress the translation of literary works into its own language and should talk about translation as being a key to Comparative Literature even when the field was never comfortable with translation and even resisted it. In teaching, we can be bilingual or team-teach so we have the languages we need in class. In some research projects, we can work in teams to have the languages necessary as inadequate as that might be. Our knowledge is always tentative and limited and asymptotic and incomplete.

It is the ignorance of languages that have made for world literature. In a perfect world, we would know all the languages as if before the Tower of Babel. But our world is imperfect with imperfect people in it. Thus, it is really that governments, society, business and cultures generally, at least in the English-speaking countries, do not seem to stress the learning of foreign languages. They also have large immigrant populations that are often, at least to begin with, bilingual or multilingual. Language becomes a matter of the home. Despite the media and technology of an age beyond the old forms, countries still attempt to emphasize the national language and national literature.

I prefer to see the world made up of individuals and an array of cultures and languages and each is part of a multi-polar world of comparative literatures, of translation. The French, the Estonians, the Chinese, the Koreans, the Argentinians, the Turks could all study world literature in their own language and perhaps in another foreign language of their choice. Let each culture show agency and devote resources to the learning of languages and a world literature in relation to its own literature and language. No language is minor.

Porter and Azadibougar: Has world literature achieved the aims it projected (e.g. widening literary studies, transcending Eurocentrism, or giving access to more of the world’s literary traditions)

around 2000, in your opinion?

Hart: I think of world literature as an umbrella term for literature in the world. If it has interested people to read literary works and to do it well, then it has made a contribution. European literatures and languages have long borrowed from languages beyond Europe. English has about a million words and has borrowed worldwide. There is Chinese world literature and English world literature and Nigerian world literature or more accurately in Chinese, in English and the more 500 languages in Nigeria (including English). To complicate matters languages like Chinese, Hindi, Tagalog, English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese are spoken in many countries, so there is a transnational aspect to the university, nation, literature and culture. It seems, then, that the more we look into this question, the more intricate it is. Once more, in a perfect world, we could read the literatures of these 2,000 or more traditions, one work at a time, and well. Were there time and knowledge enough. We try in this imperfect world to do what we can and to improve matters one step at a time. And it takes time. Nor is it good to reverse any imbalances by creating new ones knowingly.

Porter and Azadibougar: World Literature has been criticized as a homogenizing, capitalist, or imperial project. On the one hand, translating everything into English does carry the risk of subjecting the diversity of the world literatures to the idiom of English; on the other hand, some of the world's literary traditions can sometimes become accessible to a wider audience as world literature only through translation into English. What determines the dynamics of translation and how the final product functions in the field?

Hart: This goes both ways. English should be translating everything it can. Other languages should do the same. If resources are scarce, then writers, readers, teachers, publishers and others choose what should be translated. This can be haphazard. All languages, great and small, need the enrichment of other languages: the same is true for literatures. Stories follow routes, tales travel as people do. There should not be one world literature but respect for all literatures, cultures and languages, including Indigenous languages. World literature need not homogenize, be capitalist or imperial: it can be much more varied and reflect or refract the many languages, literatures, and cultures.

Porter and Azadibougar: William Shakespeare has influenced literature and cultures around the world. What future potential is there for collaborating between world literature studies and Shakespeare studies?

Hart: When I wrote my first book on Shakespeare decades ago (the first draft was completed in

1983), I examined the relation of irony—rhetorical and philosophical—to Shakespeare’s making English history in the history plays, I discussed Socrates, Goethe, the Schlegels, Tieck, Solger, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and others, so here was English in relation to the ancients and moderns on the Continent. I have written about German Shakespeare, was connected with the rebuilding of Shakespeare’s Globe in London, edited a collection of scholars in Asia in *Shakespeare in Asia*, have published on films of *Hamlet* in China and the Hugos translation and ideas of Shakespeare, edited special issues and collections on Shakespeare and the Renaissance, produced a study that included Shakespeare and Obama and the study of language, wrote a monograph of Shakespeare and his contemporaries and so on.

English countries, including Ireland, have adapted Shakespeare. The German Romantics thought Shakespeare’s irony was a kind of katasropic creation and he helped the French and Germans to move from classicism to Romanticism. Voltaire helped to bring Shakespeare to France but then turned from him, but the Hugos embraced Shakespeare. Goethe considered Shakespeare closely. Shakespeare is not of Renaissance England alone but of Britain now. North America has adopted and adapted him. Russian, Japanese and Chinese Shakespeare—in film, theatre, scholarship—have increased our understanding and enjoyment of Shakespeare. Shakespeare moves in time and space and his art, like the automobile and computer and other inventions, belong to all peoples as we move forward. Li Bai and Du Fu influenced Ezra Pound who influenced many other poets, including me. Adaptation is as important as translation.

Shakespeare can be experienced through television, film, theatre, reading and other ways and is accessible. Each language and literature make him its own over time. In teaching in China, I have taught with others and we talk about a sonnet or a scene and the students then compare their translations and will relate Shakespeare to Chinese opera, a figure in Chinese literature they think like Shakespeare, derive a greater sense of English and Chinese accordingly. I know that, as a poet, I am very pleased to find something in Homer or Li Bai that transforms my writing. Those writing in Aramaic, Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and other languages have taught me as a writer and scholar. They have helped to make my world literature. Perhaps we each have our own world literature. I have learned from Shakespeare. I tell my classes that someone born in a village in China might become one of the most accomplished Shakespeareans. I assume he or she would write in Chinese and English and would teach other scholars and students and beyond in the wider world. Focusing on Shakespeare or a like writer in other cultures means that we each can read closely his or her work or see it. Focus is a good thing. Coverage is fine but not without close viewing or reading, reading the signs: without close attention to visual and verbal signs, our interpretations can be vague and abstract.