Introduction

Graham Holderness

In Britain, from the nineteenth century onwards, the default ‘setting’ for Shakespeare’s plays (by which I mean costume, mise-en-scène, and assumed historical and cultural context) has been medieval and early modern: the time of the plays’ composition (late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries) or the time of their historical location (medieval Britain or Europe, ancient Greece or Rome, etc.). In this visual and physical context, *Twelfth Night* would normally be performed or imagined in Elizabethan or Jacobean, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* in medieval, *Julius Caesar* in ancient Roman dress and settings. In the historical context of their original production, the plays were performed in contemporary dress with minimal mise-en-scène; through the Restoration and eighteenth century in fashionable modern dress and increasingly naturalistic settings. Today in Britain, Shakespeare can be performed in any style of costume, setting and cultural context, from the time of the plays’ reference to the immediate contemporary present, and often in an eclectic blend of some or all. But strong forces of tradition and cultural memory tie the plays, in their visual and physical realisation as well as their language, to the medieval and early modern past. We see this attachment in film versions of the plays and of Shakespeare’s life. We dress Shakespeare in the costumes of all the ages, but we know that he truly belongs, as in the various portraits, in doublet and ruff.

So Britain has always experienced Shakespeare as something of the past, always capable of modernisation. When Shakespeare was first imported into Japan, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, following the opening of Japan to the outside world effected by the Meiji empire, these cultural bondings with the plays’ own past did not travel with them. Shakespeare was an exact contemporary of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Hence, although it would have seemed natural for Shakespeare productions to be set back into the Edo period (1603–1867), aligned with Shakespeare’s own time or the time of the plays’ reference, in practice this did not happen. Although initially, from the 1880s, the stories of Shakespeare’s plays – derived from Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare*, often mediated through Japanese novels – were adapted into *kabuki*, Shakespearean drama proper, in the form of complete translations, was received in Japan as the work of a modern Western dramatist more aligned with the present than with the past. ‘Shakespeare first arrived in Japan with Ibsen, Chekhov, Gorky, George Bernard Shaw and trams.’¹ Nor was there any

immediate synthesis between translated Shakespeare and the native traditions of Japanese theatre, *noh* and *kabuki*, although *kabuki* began in Shakespeare's lifetime, and *noh* emerged in what we call the Middle Ages.

Thus, early Japanese Shakespeare was assimilated to the modernising and westernising tendencies of the Meiji regime, and kept well away from that very recent but dangerous feudal past of Edo Japan to which at least some of the plays should surely have been seen to belong, even though, as Kishi and Bradshaw point out, 'Shakespearean poetic drama is closer to traditional Japanese drama like *noh* or *kabuki* than it is to modern Western realistic or naturalistic dramas like that of Ibsen or Shaw', and 'the Japanese were politically and socially far closer to feudalism than contemporary British or American readers and audiences'.²

Although some early productions saw Shakespeare adapted into *kabuki* (such as the 1885 *kabuki* adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* based on a Japanese novel, in turn a version of the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare*), dominant forces in Japanese theatre, like those in society in general, were relentlessly modernising and westernising. In 1886, the Engeki Kairyo Kai (Society for the Reformation of Theatre) was formed in order to shift the drama away from tradition and towards modernity. The theatre became dominated by the *Shingeki* (New Drama) movement, and Shakespeare was incorporated into this climate of reform.

The story of Shakespeare in Japan is one of an importation which is seen alternately as a welcome ambassadorial gift, or a hostile colonial imposition, but always as the modern counterpart of Ibsen and Shaw, Gorky and Chekhov. And overall, the modernist tendencies continually triumph. The *Shingeki* movement, which assimilated Shakespeare to Western modernity, has been correctly identified as 'a form of deference towards the west, rather than the discovery of a culturally relevant idiom',³ yet dominated both early (1900–1914) and later (post-World War II) Japanese Shakespeare. Between the two World Wars, Shakespeare faded away in Japan with the rise of nationalism and the resurgence of militarism and xenophobia. By the 1960s, once Japan had recovered from the damages of World War II and acquired a new economic self-confidence, theatrical practitioners returned to Shakespeare, but were more interested in aligning Shakespeare with modern Japan than with an increasingly distant Edo tradition.⁴ Shakespeare's plays were reimagined into modern contexts of contemporary Japanese business and crime, or the Vietnam War, or colonial Hong Kong.

Japanese society is everywhere presented as quintessentially modern, urban, commercial and industrial, technologically sophisticated – not least by the Japanese themselves. And yet, as Mulryne observes, 'a peculiar mix of past and present ... characterises Japanese society today'.⁵ Even within the great cities, and more so beyond them, the Edo past is lovingly preserved, reproduced and displayed. Almost thirty million international tourists enter Japan each year to visit the old capitals of Kyoto and Nara, drawn by the magic of Edo castles, ancient temples, swords and samurai, geishas and sumo, maple

leaves and cherry blossom. Where in all this is the real Japanese Shakespeare, the contemporary of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the equivalent of our Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatist in doublet and ruff?

By the end of World War II, the westernised and modernised Shakespeare of *Shingeki* was about to be qualified by the emergence of a much more authentically Japanese, historically-conscious form of Shakespeare reproduction. The year 1955 saw the first Shakespeare post-war production in Japan, a *Shingeki* version of *Hamlet* translated and directed by Tsuneari Fukuda. But in 1957 Fukuda directed his own play, *Akechi Mitsuhide*, a story of murder, betrayal and revenge among sixteenth-century samurai lords. The story is drawn from history, but modelled on the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. By connecting Shakespeare to the Japanese past, Fukuda set out to 'transplant Shakespeare to Japanese soil'.⁶

In the same year, Akira Kurosawa released his great film of *Macbeth*, *Kumonosujo*, known in the West as *Throne of Blood*, praised as 'the most complete translation of Shakespeare into film'.⁷ Here the plot of *Macbeth*, without Shakespeare's language, is brilliantly relocated to feudal Japan. Kurosawa followed up his version of *Macbeth* in 1960 with a modernised film of *Hamlet* – *The Bad Sleep Well* – and much later in 1985 with his samurai version of *King Lear*, *Ran*.

Meanwhile, in the theatre, Yukio Ninagawa, who began working with Shakespeare in the 1970s, staged in 1980 what is perhaps the greatest ever Japanese production of Shakespeare, his *Macbeth* set in medieval Japan. Ninagawa deployed the full panoply of Japanese cultural traditions to anchor Shakespeare into the past: Edo costumes and armaments, cherry blossom, sliding doors, the framing device of a Buddhist altar.⁸ Later Ninagawa produced *The Tempest* in an equally traditional style, as 'A Rehearsal of a *Noh* Play on the Island of Sado' (the island to which Zeami, the great playwright of *Noh*, was exiled).⁹

Across that period of thirty years (1957–1987), these great theatre and cinema artists finally resolved the conflicts between Shakespeare and Japan by setting the plays back into their own beloved but disputed past. These 'Samurai Shakespeare' productions were initially received in the West and in Japan with wild enthusiasm, though not without some critical reflection on the dangers of 'exoticism' and 'orientalism'.¹⁰ Kishi even uses the term 'samurai Shakespeare' as a critical reservation, and puts Kurosawa's *Ran*, together with the American samurai epic *The Last Samurai*, as a piece of 'inflated but hollow magniloquence'.¹¹

After this great florescence of 'samurai Shakespeare' (1957–1987), the theatre in Japan returned to its *Shingeki* roots, preferring modernity to tradition. But the phenomenon of Edo Shakespeare became a definitive cultural moment, and many subsequent productions allude or pay homage to the work of Fukuda, Kurosawa and Ninagawa. However ultra-modern a Japanese Shakespeare production may be, it will also have the facility to acknowledge the country's own past as one of Shakespeare's multiple global histories.

Certainly by now Shakespeare has found a hospitable dwelling place in Japanese theatre, film and criticism. Over the last twenty years a solid and robust

body of scholarship and criticism has established Japanese Shakespeare as an important branch of the phenomenon now familiar to us as 'global Shakespeare'. This special issue of *Critical Survey* features works by leading scholars of Japanese Shakespeare, from both Japan and around the globe, which build on and extend that body of work. The authors variously offer contemporary research and criticism in the areas of translation, theatre practice, film, the novel and manga, revaluing many current assumptions and critical positions. The theatrical, fictional, film and media work highlighted by these articles demonstrates convincingly that Japan has found its own ways of handling Shakespeare.

Looking again at the history of Japanese Shakespeare translation, Daniel Gallimore examines the underlying reasons for the unusual choice of plays incorporated into Tsubouchi Shōyō's *Selected Works*. In 1927, just before completing the first Japanese translation of Shakespeare's *Complete Works*, Tsubouchi (1859–1935) selected eight of his translations for inclusion in his own *Selected Works*, which were published in fifteen volumes in conclusion to his career as one of the leading exponents of cultural reform of his generation. His choice is idiosyncratic as it omits the plays that had become most popular during the period of Shakespeare's initial reception in late nineteenth-century Japan, but includes a number that were relatively unknown, such as *Measure for Measure*. This article suggests likely reasons for his selection, before discussing the comments he makes on each play in his translation prefaces, and thus provides an overview of what Tsubouchi had come to value about Shakespeare.

Turning to the theatre, Ted Motohashi and Tomoka Tsukamoto provide a detailed study of the innovative and influential stage production of *Othello* by Miyagi Satoshi. In Japan, Shakespeare's *Othello* has been staged overwhelmingly through the racial relationship between the two protagonists, Othello and Iago, at the expense of another protagonist, Desdemona, partly because of the prominence of racial and military perspectives in European modernity, and partly because of the relatively scarce textual presence of Desdemona. Despite the tremendous efforts and contributions of feminist criticism to rectify the imbalance, this female protagonist has been enclosed in the realm of a patriarchal framework that divides women between 'chaste wife' and 'villainous whore'. Miyagi's adaptation and staging of *Miyagi-Noh Othello*, presented at Shizuoka Arts Theatre in 2018, was a remarkable attempt to address this issue, by transforming the whole play into a memory recollected and enacted by the Ghost of Desdemona, through utilising the Japanese 'Mugen-Noh' format. Through his mimetic dramaturgy employing the 'division of speech and movement' method, Miyagi succeeded in recovering not only Desdemona's testimonies regarding her affectionate and passionate relationship with Othello, but also multiple women's 'her-stories' hidden and disregarded by male-centred histories authorised by the Venetian ruling class. The detailed analysis of Miyagi's unique and innovative production will unravel the complicated relationship between actors' words and their bodies in theatrical productions, as well as offer a fresh insight into the hitherto underrated aspect of *Othello* as an alternative story of inducing everyone's suffering into spiritual atonement by

reviving the love which has always already been present even in a society torn by racism, genderism and militarism.

Graham Holderness offers a new discussion of the intricate relationships between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the famous Japanese drama *Kanadehon Chushingura*, originally a puppet play based on the legendary tale of the 47 Ronin. Historically, the striking resemblances between the two entirely independent dramas provided many opportunities for cultural symbiosis and misprision. As Daniel Gallimore suggests in his article, *Hamlet* was well received in Japan because of those similarities, but at the same time Shakespeare could not be fully understood through such an entirely Japanese appropriation. The complexity and contradiction of this cultural clash is brilliantly captured in Harue Tsutsumi's play *Kanadehon Hamlet*¹². Here, a troupe of nineteenth-century *Kabuki* actors are seen struggling in 1897 to stage a foreign play called *Hamlet*. Although Tsutsumi's play is about the cultural differences between Shakespeare and native Japanese dramatic tradition, it also exposes the obvious parallels between the two revenge dramas, in both of which the hero seeks revenge for the death of a lord, produces a play, kills the king's chief retainer and so on. There is comedy in the representation of *Kabuki* actors resisting Shakespeare and trying to turn *Hamlet* into *Chushingura*. But there is a deeper irony as the common elements between the two sources keep coming into view.

Turning to Shakespeare films, Kitamura Sae presents research on the kinds of transformation enacted on Western Shakespeare films when they are received into Japanese cinematic culture. Using William Shakespeare's name is considered helpful for marketing films in English-speaking regions because of the authority that this name wields. This article reveals a different marketing landscape in Japan, where film distribution companies are indifferent to associations with Shakespeare. For example, when Ralph Fiennes' *Coriolanus* (2011) was released in Japanese cinemas, it was retitled *The Proof of the Hero*; the Shakespearean association was deliberately erased from the Japanese title. Such a marketing policy should be situated within a wider trend of promoting non-Japanese films in Japan. It is possible to point out three major reasons: the unpopularity of American comedy films, the relative unpopularity of theatre, and Japanese distributors' heavily localised marketing policies, which are often criticised by fans on social media.

Alex Watson returns to the work of the great master of Japanese Shakespeare on film, Akira Kurosawa, but focuses not on his three Shakespeare adaptations, but on the 1980 film *Kagemusha* or *Shadow Warrior*. Here, Kurosawa presents the sixteenth-century Takeda clan engaging a lower-class thief to act as a 'shadow warrior' to impersonate their recently deceased leader, Takeda Shingen. In this article, Watson examines *Kagemusha* as a critical engagement with Shakespeare's English history plays and 'shadow' counterpart to Kurosawa's trilogy of Shakespeare adaptations *Throne of Blood* (1957), *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) and *Ran* (1985). The film is ostensibly a *sengoku-jidai-geki* – or a samurai film set in the Warring-States period. However, in keeping with Shakespeare's dramatisation of English history, Kurosawa creatively reworks

historical sources, incorporating stories of intergenerational rivalry and fulfilled prophecies, to depict the transition from medieval civil conflict to the early-modern nation-state. Kurosawa also deploys the motif of the double to explore the distinctively Shakespearean themes of power as performance, engaging in a dramatic examination of Machiavelli's ideas about politics. Watson argues that Kurosawa's use of the double posits a theory of influence, drawing on Japanese cultural traditions, in which doubling can achieve a form of transcendence through self-annihilation.

The next article examines some examples of Shakespeare adapted into Japanese novels. Kaori Ashizu discusses four *Hamlet* adaptations produced in twentieth-century Japan: Naoya Shiga's 'Claudius's Diary' (1912), Hideo Kobayashi's 'Ophelia's Testament' (1931), Osamu Dazai's *New Hamlet* (1941) and Shohei Ooka's *Hamlet's Diary* (1955). Though differently motivated, and written in different styles, they collectively make something of a tradition, each revealing a unique, unexpected interpretation of the famous tragedy. Read as a group, they thoroughly disprove the stereotypical view that Japan has generally taken a highly respectful, imitative attitude to Western culture and Shakespeare. *Hamlet* has certainly been revered in Japan as the epitome of Western literary culture, but these adaptations reveal complicated, ambivalent attitudes towards Shakespeare's play: not only love and respect, but anxiety, competitiveness, resistance and criticism, all expressed alongside an opportunistic urge to appropriate the rich 'cultural capital' of the canonical work.

Of all the distinctively Japanese cultural forms, manga stands out as a uniquely innovative and widely popular phenomenon. Andreea Șerban shows how over the past two and a half decades manga has undergone a process of globalisation, of Western domestication. Manga versions of Shakespeare's canonical works have long been appreciated for their educational value and 'friendly' introduction to Shakespeare's dense, multilayered texts. Starting from two Western manga transmediations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, this article focuses on new interpretations given to the character of Ophelia and her interactions with Hamlet, as they become more and more public and monitored. Șerban shows that manga brings to light (or life?) fresh aspects of the two characters under analysis, particularly through the use of *chibi*, enriching the number of Ophelia's afterlives either by means of aggression or modern technologies.

Bringing the issue right up to date with modern media technology, Kyoko Matsuyama discusses the Japanese animation *PSYCHO-PASS*, the setting for which is a future Japan where every citizen's mental health is monitored and analysed, and where citizens can be terminated according to the state of their mental health. In such a dark and dystopian setting, the motifs from the many bloody quotations of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* are used in the three-episode multiple murder case of young schoolgirls. Matsuyama shows how *Titus Andronicus* is used to give relevance and sophistication to serial murder, and how the bloodiness of serial murder can give a different impression to audiences by the use of literature.

Notes

1. Tetsuo Kishi and Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare in Japan* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 2.
2. *Ibid.*, 3.
3. J. R. Mulryne, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage*, ed. Takashi Sasayama, J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.
4. Akihiko Senda, 'The Rebirth of Shakespeare in Japan: From the 1960s to the 1990s', trans. Ryuta Minami, in Sasayama, Mulryne and Shewring, *Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage*, 17.
5. Mulryne, 'Introduction', 2.
6. Kishi and Bradshaw, *Shakespeare in Japan*, 47–49, 129.
7. Graham Holderness, 'Radical Potentiality and Institutional Closure: Shakespeare in Film and Television', in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 189.
8. Senda, 'The Rebirth of Shakespeare in Japan', 22–25; Tetsuo Kishi, 'Japanese Shakespeare and English Reviewers', in Sasayama, Mulryne and Shewring, *Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage*, 115–118.
9. Kishi and Bradshaw, *Shakespeare in Japan*, 85–86.
10. *Ibid.*, 80, 95–96.
11. *Ibid.*, 136 and 142.
12. Harue Tsutsumi, *Kanadehon Hamlet: A Play*, trans. Faubion Bowers, with David W. Griffith and Hori Mariko, *Asian Theatre Journal* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1998), 181–229.