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Some Japanese Shakespeare Productions in 2014-15

Abstract: This essay focuses on some Shakespeare productions in Japan during 2014 and 2015. One is a Bunraku version of *Falstaff*, for which the writer himself wrote the script. It is an amalgamation of scenes from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and those from *Henry IV*. It was highly reputed and its stage design was awarded a 2014 Yomiuri Theatre Award. Another is a production of *Much Ado about Nothing* produced by the writer himself in a theatre-in-the-round in his new translation. Another is a production of *Macbeth* arranged and directed by Mansai Nomura the Kyogen performer. All the characters besides Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were performed by the three witches, suggesting that the whole illusion was produced by the witches. It was highly acclaimed worldwide. Another is a production of *Hamlet* directed by Yukio Ninagawa, with Tatsuya Fujiwara in the title role. It was brought to the Barbican theatre. There were also many other Shakespeare productions to commemorate the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth.

Keywords: Shakespeare, adaptation, Bunraku, Kyogen, Falstaff, Much Ado about Nothing, Macbeth, Hamlet, Japanese traditional theatre, Yukio Ninagawa

Bunraku Falstaff

In the year 2014, there were many Shakespearean productions in Japan to commemorate the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. Among them was a Bunraku (Japanese traditional puppet theatre) version of *Falstaff*, for which I wrote the playscript in the pseudo-classical, rhythmical Japanese called *gidayu-bushi*. In Bunraku, the playscript is to be chanted by chanters called *gidayu*, who not only narrate the story but also act out the voices of the dramatic characters to the accompaniment of *shamisen* music; and the puppeteers move the puppets accordingly.

It was the third time that Shakespeare was adapted into Bunraku after the western-dress *Hamlet* in 1956 and *The Tempest* in 1992 (revived in 2009).[1]

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[1] For the first production of the Bunraku adaptation of *The Tempest*, see Fujita.

It seems both were not very successful because the adapters simply follow the basic storyline without truly understanding the essence of Shakespearean drama. For example, at the end of the adaptation of *The Tempest*, Kagetaka (Antonio) is suddenly guilt-ridden and offers to kill himself, and Saemon Fujinori (Prospero) acknowledges no "thing of darkness" as his (*The Tempest* 5:1:275-76)[2]. In this adaptation which turns *The Tempest* into a banal fairyland story with a happy ending, one cannot deny Miki Nakamura's comment that "an insight into human psychology may have been lost" (Nakamura 59).

Therefore, when I was commissioned to adapt Shakespeare into Bunraku, I had a thorough discussion with Seiji Tsurusawa, a holder of "Important Intangible Cultural Property" (a Living National Treasure) as the *shamisen* player, who planned the project. Tsurusawa had been impressed by Anthony Quayle's performance of Sir John Falstaff in the 1979 BBC production of *Henry IV*, and suggested recreating the colossal, humorous character on Bunraku stage.

Curiously enough, a comical braggart talk of defeating ever-increasing imaginary enemies is also found in Japanese classical drama. In a Kyogen play called *Sora'ude* (Pretending to be strong), Taro-kaja attempts to make an excuse for having lost his master's sword, telling his master through *shikata-banashi* (talking with gestures) that he fought with many enemies. He makes up a story that the fought with four or five to begin with, then with fourteen or fifteen, and ended up killing seventy or eighty until his master proves that there was no fighting. The resemblance with Falstaff's braggart talk is quite striking.

However, in order not to make our adaptation a superficial transplantation of Shakespeare's "story" into Bunraku, we spent much time discussing the essence of Falstaff's character and what meaning we have in presenting it in Bunraku now. We concluded that the very essence of Falstaff is his carefree epicurean character. His Epicureanism is the opposite of Prince Hal's stoicism, and although stoicism is not only essential in heroes like Hamlet and Brutus but also exhibited by many industrious Japanese people almost as national traits. It may be worthwhile to show Japanese that Falstaff's worldly epicureanism, especially his reluctance to fight, is important to live in the international world. Pace Maurice Morgann and his *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1912), Falstaff is a coward, but being a coward (or being afraid of fighting) is shameful only in a honour-bound society, and it is actually important to acknowledge our unwillingness to fight as true human nature if one hopes to live in a peaceful world.

In Japan, there are movements to "revise" the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and to allow the Japan Self-Defence Forces to

[2] Quotations from Shakespeare refer to the Riverside edition.

participate in military activities more freely. A Nobel-winning novelist Kenzaburo Oe and others formed the Article Nine Association to appeal for preserving the Article 9. Because Falstaff is a celebration of exuberant life force, his honor-renouncing speech—"Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honor? A word" (*1 Henry IV*, 5:1:131-34)—could be an effective protest against war.

Furthermore, the meaning of "the rejection of Falstaff" at the end of *Henry IV, Part 2* may be reversed if Falstaff is not feeling miserable but appalled to find his Hal, now King Henry V, has no intention of enjoying himself in plump Jack's company but bound in honour to go on fighting a war. Thus, I decided to add Falstaff's final lines, à la Coriolanus, to proclaim that "[t]here is a world elsewhere" (3:3:135), a world where there is no war.

That was the main idea underlying our new adaptation, but there are of course other considerations. Falstaff is a very Rabelaisian character with enormous desires and must be presented as an epitome of "élan vital"; he must be an incarnation of "physis" (nature) as opposed to "nomos" (law and order). To present him as such, it is effective to employ the hilarious main plot of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Both Tsurusawa and I were fully aware of the success of the Kyogen version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* called *The Braggart Samurai*, premiered in 1991, adapted by Yasunari Takahashi, my father-in-law. We decided that our new adaptation should be an amalgam of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV*.

The Bunraku *Falstaff* begins with a scene reminiscent of Act 2 Scene 4 of *1 Henry IV*, in which Prince Hal sees drunken Falstaff sleeping; then Falstaff wakes up, introduces himself to the audience (*nanori*), and finds his "sake" bottle empty. He then thinks of a trick to entice the merry wives to fall in love with him and to make them offer him money. Later, the merry wives find out that they have received identical love letters and try to punish him; they pretend to fall in love with him, give him their own love letters, and scramble for his love. Here, we adapted a scene from the famous Bunraku play, *Immoseyama Onnna Teikin* (*The Teaching for Women*), in which Princess Tachibana and a low-class girl Omiwa seek the love of a young nobleman named Motome. In my adaptation, the two women use the traditional rhetorical love expressions and, under the pretence of fighting for Falstaff's love, beat up Falstaff.

Falstaff, with his swollen face in the colour of autumn leaves, pulls himself together and tries to rob passing-by travellers of their money, as instigated by Prince Hal (an episode of the robbery at Gadshill). When Falstaff gets the money, Prince Hal wearing a *Han'nya* (devil) mask threatens Falstaff away. Later when Falstaff comes back to their usual tavern, he boasts of his courageous fight against ever-increasing enemies. But Prince Hal reveals that he

was the one with the *Han'nya* mask. Falstaff, however, boasts that he knew it was Prince Hal and that he pretended to be a coward to prevent the future Lord from being injured. This excuse amuses Prince Hal immensely.

Then they enjoy playing the role of the Lord scolding the Prince, but when Hal pretends to be the Lord, he coldly denounces Falstaff. Before Falstaff could protest, the husbands of the merry wives rush in, and accuse Falstaff of having attempted to seduce their wives. Falstaff protests that it was not he but the wives that sent love letters and attempted seduction, and he produces their love letters as evidence. However, when he reads them aloud, he finds that they are actually tavern bills, listing up what he has consumed. The husbands and the wives start to demand the money and chase Falstaff up a tree. At the height of the upheaval, a messenger comes in to announce the death of the Lord and the Prince Hal's accession to the throne. Falstaff rejoices that his world has come but Prince Hal as a new Lord banishes him. Falstaff is shocked, but soothes himself by thinking of finding a peaceful country in which there is no war. Falstaff goes down from the stage and exits through the aisle of the theatre. Probably this was the first Bunraku performance in its long history that the puppeteers carry the puppet through the aisle.

This is the outline of the Bunraku *Falstaff*, but there are other significant elements which contributed to the success of the production. Mitsuru Ishii's stage design, introudcing a colossal cherry tree in full bloom and giving a huge depth to the Bunraku stage, was awarded a 2014 Yomiuri Theatre Award for design of the year.[3] Seiji Tsurusawa's composition of music was so versatile that it incorporated *Greensleeves* played by *shamisen*. The head of the Falstaff puppet, specially made for this production, is innovating in that it can move its eye, eyebrows, and mouth all at the same time. It requires the virtuoso manipulation of Kanjuro Kiritake the puppeteer. Lastly the excellent chanters, Hanafusadayuu Toyotake for Falstaff, Rosedayuu for Prince Hal and Ohaya (a merry wife), Sakihodayuu for Ohana (the other wife), and Yasutayuu for the others, chanted the playscript beautifully.

[3] Ayako Takahashi in *The Japan Times* summarizes Ishii's work as follows: "the work's designer, Mitsuru Ishii, explained how bunraku sets are normally just flat backdrops, 'but most of my work is with theater—musicals, opera and the like. So I proposed a three-dimensional stage that's higher than usual and has a multitiered system allowing sets to be switched without changing scenes in the dark as is usual in bunraku. Also, some of the costumes are very detailed and use Swarovski crystals,' he said—teasingly urging audiences to watch out for the Bard himself making cameo appearances at the beginning and end of the show" (27 August 2014).

Much Ado about Nothing in a Theatre-in-the-Round

Another Shakespearean production I was involved in was a production of *Much Ado about Nothing*, which I newly translated and directed, performed in a theatre-in-the-round at the campus hall of the University of Tokyo, April 27-29. This was my first attempt at directing a Shakespeare play, but it attracted more than a thousand spectators and was well received. Shinobu Takano a well-known theatre critic referred to it as one of the three best productions in 2014.

The reason I picked up *Much Ado* for the anniversary production was that I thought the play is the most misunderstood of Shakespeare's canon and that if it is performed in a theatre-in-the-round so that the audience may join the "noting" process, then it might be possible to clarify the true nature of the play.

It has been pointed out that *Much Ado About Nothing* is also a play about "noting," because "nothing" and "noting" were pronounced in the same way in the Elizabethan age. When the young Count Claudio from Florentine asks his friend Benedick if he noted Hero, the daughter of Signor Leonato, he answers:

> Benedick. I noted her not, but I look'd on her. (1:1:164)

We may define the word "to note" as "to take notice of something and have some impression or interpretation about it." Claudio's first "noting" of Hero is expressed in his own words: "In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady ever I look'd on" (1:1:187-88). But later it changes to the effect that she is "an approved wanton" (4:1:44).

Here lies a very Shakespearean problem concerning perception: Can we trust the world we see? Is the world as we see it? The confused Claudio exclaims: "Is this the Prince? is this the Prince's brother? / Is this face Hero's? are our eyes our own?" (4:1:70-71). Claudio wants to deny the certainty of his own perception, just like Troilus who cannot admit his Cressida's betrayal: "Was Cressida here? [. . .] She was not, sure. [. . .] This she? no, [. . .] this is not she [. . .] This was not she" (*Troilus and Cressida* 5:2:125-42). Or like King Lear, who cannot accept his own daughters' callousness: "This is not Lear. Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?" (*King Lear* 1:4:226-27). Examples abound in Shakespeare's plays: Macbeth doubts his own perception, saying, "nothing is / But what is not" (*Macbeth* 1:3:141-42); Duke Orsino doubts his own perception, referring to "A natural perspective, that is and is not" (*Twelfth Night* 5:1:217); Helena cannot trust her own perception, for she feels Demetrius as "Mine own, and not mine own" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5:1:191-92).

Usually the audience is detached from this confusion and observes it from a very clear vantage point, but in *Much Ado* Shakespeare seems to entice the audience to share this confusion, for in an early stage of the play a little confusion is in store for the audience.

In the very first scene the audience is told that Don Pedro the Duke of Arragon will woo Hero as a surrogate for lovesick Claudio, but then immediately after that, Leonato's brother Antonio comes in and tells him thus:

> Antonio. The Prince and Count Claudio, walking in a thick-pleach'd alley in mine orchard, were thus much overheard by a man of mine. The Prince discover'd to Claudio that he lov'd my niece your daughter, and meant to acknowledge it this night in a dance. (1:2:8-13)

The audience, who "knows" that the Prince is going to woo Hero for Claudio's sake, will be bewildered by this "inaccurate" report. Why did Shakespeare add this confusing scene? Naturally many directors find it unnecessary and it has become customary to cut this scene in usual productions. Starting from a 1804 Philadelphia production, distinguished directors such as Edwin Booth, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and Kenneth Branagh deleted this scene; David Garrick and John Philip Kemble even corrected Antonio's line and erased the misunderstanding (Cox 104).

Nevertheless, considering the later development of the play in which the certainty of "noting" is problematized, we may argue that this is significantly the first instance of a series of misperception enacted in this play. To be sure, from the privileged viewpoint of the audience, we may say that Antonio is mistaken and so is Claudio who believes through Don John's lie that the Prince intends to marry Hero himself. Accordingly we often discard Antonio's statement as irrelevant and blame Claudio for his credulity, but if we place ourselves at the level of the dramatic characters' awareness, we cannot blame Claudio, for his fault of misperception is no more than Antonio's. Moreover, Benedick and Beatrice, two of the wittiest persons in this play, are as misled as Claudio is. Benedick wrongly criticizes Don Pedro for having stolen Hero from Claudio:

> Benedick. Yet it had not been amiss the rod had been made, and the garland too, for the garland he might have worn himself, and the rod he might have bestow'd on you, who (as I take it) have stol'n his bird's nest. (2:1:227-31)

Beatrice, too, jokes upon Claudio's "jealous complexion" (2:1:295) based on the assumption that Don Pedro has stolen Claudio's Hero.

In brief, Antonio, Leonato, Benedick, and Beatrice are all mistaken in their perception; later many other characters demonstrate their misperception including Dogberry and his companion, who take Borachio and Conrade as privy to the crime of Deformed the thief. And the misperception of Don Pedro, who avouches that Hero is a whore, is fatal.

All these people are mistaken in their "noting," but often Claudio alone is severely criticized for his credulity. In the introduction to the third-series

Arden edition of the play, the editor refers to Claudio as "a cad" and notes that in order to mitigate "Claudio's 'mistaking' in the final fifth of the play," a production often emphasizes his youth, prematurity, and vulnerability (McEachern, 19, 86-87). In the second-series Arden edition, the problem is summarized as follows:

> A graver problem arises over Claudio, Swinburne's 'pitiful fellow', Andrew Lang's 'hateful young cub', Ridley's 'miserable specimen', and Harbage's 'least amiable lover in Shakespeare', the exoneration and indeed rewarding of whom at the end is held to outrage all good feelings. He is doubtless meant for a brave, inexperienced youth, shocked out of romantic devotion by an unsuspected and cunning enemy and, himself a wounded victim, not overblameworthy for his appalling error, and so not disqualified for future happiness. Yet to convey this needs sensitive skill.
> (Humphreys 54)

I would argue that if Claudio is such an unmanly despicable person, the denouement in which he is reunited with Hero could not be happy at all. Of course, when Beatrice cries "Kill Claudio" (4:1:289), above-mentioned critics would readily agree with her, but Benedick who asks "Is Claudio thine enemy?" (4:1:300) thinks differently.

This difference in "noting" is the very key of this play: from Beatrice's viewpoint, Claudio is "a villain, that hath slander'd, scorn'd, dishonor'd my kinswoman" (4:1:301-03), while from Don Pedro's viewpoint, he is a noble gentleman who is betrayed by his bride-to-be. Some argue that he is not a true lover in that he asks Don Pedro as a surrogate to woo Hero for him, but we should take it into consideration that surrogate wooing was common in nobility; otherwise, we have to blame Henry VI, for Suffolk's surrogate wooing of Margaret, and decide that Duke Orsino in *Twelfth Night* is not a true lover because he employs Cesario to woo Olivia.

We tend to condemn Claudio from the audience's privileged viewpoint, which transcends the structure of "noting." Indeed Claudio did an outrageous thing to Hero, shaming her and renouncing her at the very moment when she expects him to swear his eternal love; but we have to admit that Claudio's fault lies only in his misconception, which is shared by the honorable Don Pedro.

If we turn back to this play's basic motif that "noting" is very frequently mistaken, it would be difficult to penalize Claudio's credulity; instead we should observe how Claudio behaves based on his misperception. He is a man of honour and is shocked that his honour was on the verge of being outraged by the very lady he was about to bestow his eternal love. It is natural that he should accuse her vehemently in tears. Leonato believes in his daughter's guilt because he knows Claudio loves her and because he witnessed Claudio "Wash'd [her foulness] with tears" (4:1:154). If we imagine how much Claudio is mortified

and grieved from Hero's betrayal, then we can also imagine how he feels in his accusation. I would argue that the play is all the more dramatic because we can understand not only Beatrice's anger at Claudio's renouncing of Hero but also Claudio's distress in having to accuse her.

And later, when Claudio finally realizes that he was mistaken in his "noting," he repents of his conduct. The mourning song sung at Hero's tomb in Act 5 Scene 3—"Graves, yawn and yield your dead" (5:3:19)—suggests the resurrection of the dead like that of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*. We can appreciate the joy of the play all the more if we can believe in the miracle of resurrection. It may not be too much to say with Sean Benson that for Claudio, Hero's return "can only be compared to a resurrection that, like that of Christ, is a perfect herald of joy" (Benson 48).

Surprisingly, this scene was cut in most productions from Garrick until the 19th century (Cox 224), which no doubt contributed to the misunderstanding of this play. This mourning scene may look unnecessary because Hero is actually not dead, but again such a view is made from the privileged vantage point of the audience: for Claudio, who believes that he has killed his beloved Hero, this scene of repentance and prayer for resurrection is imperative before the "miracle" happens to him. As Northrop Frye suggests, the theme of "death and resurrection" in Shakespeare's early comedies anticipate later romance plays (Frye, 87-88); or we may even say with Beatrice Groves that the theme of resurrection is generally prevalent in Shakespeare's comedies.

In conclusion, an ideal production of this play would be the one that makes the audience experience the "noting" at the level of the dramatic characters' awareness. In order to make this happen, I had an acting place surrounded by the audience almost like the Elizabethan thrust stage, and had actors mingle with the audience—actors sit in the audience seats instead of exiting, start speaking from the audience seats before coming into the acting place, and hide themselves behind the audience's back when they eavesdrop and comment on the scene—so that the audience feel as if they were witnessing the happenings together with the actors. In order to make the audience feel, for example, as if they were attending the real nuptial ceremony in Act 4 Scene 1, I ask the actresses playing the role of the maids Ursula and Margaret to be seated in the audience seats and to respond excitedly to the bride's entrance and so forth. I wanted the audience to be as shocked as Beatrice is to see Claudio's conduct; and I wanted them to witness Claudio's heartfelt concern to see Hero swoon because of his cruel rebuke before he is almost dragged out of the place.

Considering the fact that "noting" is a pivotal motif in this play, one may wonder why the balcony scene to trick Claudio and Don John to believe in Hero's infidelity is not staged in Shakespeare's text. One simple answer would be that it was impossible to stage such a perfect trick in Elizabethan outdoor theatres, where no darkness could be produced: the trick must be so perfect that the honour-bound Don John should declare as follows:

> Upon mine honor,
> Myself, my brother, and this grieved count
> Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night
> Talk with a ruffian at her chamber-window (4:1:88-91)

and later again, swearing on his honor:

> But on my honor she was charg'd with nothing
> But what was true, and very full of proof. (5:1:104-05)

According to Borachio, the trick was successful because of the darkness and of his villainy (3:3:157-58). Even if the modern lighting technology makes it possible to produce the night's darkness, it would be impossible to stage a perfect trick to convince the audience that Don John had to conclude that Margaret in Hero's dress is none other than Hero herself.

At the same time, Don John says to Don Pedro and Claudio, "O plague right well prevented! So will you say when you have seen the sequel" (3:2:122-23), and the audience would be more or less disappointed to find that sequel is not to be staged. Directors often try to compensate for this loss by making the audience share a bit of the "noting." I checked one of the play's sources, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, in which the gentlewoman-in-waiting (equivalent of Margaret) puts on the dress of the princess (equivalent of Hero) and is mistaken for her because of her dress. Costume could be an indicator of the wearer's social status in Elizabethan England, and it might help the audience accept Don Pedro and Claudio's mistaking if Hero's dress is demonstratively presented to the audience. Therefore, in my production, immediately after Don John says, "So will you say when you have seen the sequel," I made Margaret come out into the acting area with Hero's dress in hand, eager to put it on for the sake of Borachio, who also silently comes out with a wry grin to meet her. It is very interesting that the play is written in such a way that there is a plenty of time for Hero's dress to be lent out to Margaret before Hero re-enters.

One cannot emphasize the importance of "noting" in this play too much, and important "notes" are often made on stage rather than on page. For example, in Act 1 Scene 1, where Don Pedro and his bastard brother first greet with Leonato, we have the following conversation:

> Leonato. [*To Don John*] Let me bid you welcome, my lord, being reconcil'd to the Prince your brother: I owe you all duty.
> Don John. I thank you. I am not of many words, but I thank you.
> Leonato. Please it your Grace lead on?
> Don Pedro. Your hand, Leonato, we will go together. Exeunt.
> (1:1:154-61)

From this conversation, we learn that the reticent Don John is recently reconciled to his brother Don Pedro, but what else? A curious thing is that here Don John opens his mouth for the first time in this play and speaks very sociably, although this is the only line he speaks until Act 1 Scene 3, when he furiously gives vent to his dissatisfaction and complaints.

Yutaka Oda, the talented actor who used to belong to Waseda Little Theatre, played Leonato. Having learned that Leonato later at one time has a wish to have his daughter married to the Duke of Arragon, Oda as Leonato became very eager to please Don Pedro. As a result, an accident happened in the rehearsal: even while Don John (Genya Mihara) condescended to be polite to Leonato, saying "I thank you. I am not of many words, but I thank you," Leonato turned his back to Don John and tried to entertain Don Pedro (Yonho Cho), saying "Please it your Grace lead on?" It was a moment when the audience could clearly "note" that Leonato greeted to Don John merely for form's sake and that the presence of Don John is not really appreciated. Don John had no other choice but to shut his mouth and to follow Don Pedro and Leonato, but the audience was led to "note" that Don John was infuriated, which naturally led to Act 1 Scene 3 where he explodes his anger.

Such "noting" is only possible in performances, and I hope those notes will make our understanding of Shakespeare's plays richer.

Mansai *Macbeth* and Minimalist Shakespeare

After I adapted *Richard III* into a Kyogen play named *The Country Stealer* (2007, revived in 2009) for Mansai Nomura the Kyogen performer,[4] Mansai and I intended to create another adaption of Shakespeare, and he presented staged reading of *Macbeth* in 2008 using my translation. The reading was so successful that he made it into a full production without adapting it in 2010 at Tokyo; it was revived at Tokyo, Osaka, Seoul, and New York in 2013, and at Paris, Sibiu (Rumania), Tokyo, Nagoya, and many other cities in 2014.

What is unique about this production is that Mansai as the director rearranged the play so that it is to be performed only by five: Mansai plays Macbeth, Natsuko Akiyama plays Lady Macbeth, and Keitoku Takada, Keita Kobayashi, Keiji Fukushi—three representative actors of the renowned theatre company "Tenjo Sajiki" now transformed into "Banyuu Inryoku"—play the three witches and others. Focused on the existence of the three witches who manipulate Macbeth's fortune, Mansai decided that all the characters other than Macbeth and his wife—Banquo, King Duncan, Macduff, and so forth—are all

[4] See my article, "Kabuki *Twelfth Night* and Kyogen *Richard III*: Shakespeare as a Cultural Catalyst," *Shakespeare Survey 64* (2011): 114-20.

illusory characters played by the witches: the three actors playing the witches change their roles instantly to impersonate different characters. This deepens metatheatrical aspect of the play, and the idea is also philosophically intriguing in that everything except himself and Lady Macbeth is illusion: as Macbeth says, "nothing is / But what is not" (*Macbeth* 1:3:141-42).

Macbeth's conscience is tormented because he thinks he has killed Duncan, but Takada, who plays Duncan, appears again as a witch after the murder scene and laughs at Macbeth. Fukushi as a witch simply puts on armour on stage and becomes Banquo, clearly showing to the audience that Banquo is a witch in disguise. In this play world, in which all the people other than Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are illusory, speeches often turn out to be very deep. When Macbeth bids Banquo to attend the party to celebrate his accession,

> Macbeth. Fail not our feast.
> Banquo. My Lord, I will not. (3:1:27-28)

Fukushi answers in such a tone as if to say that he would join the feast even if he were killed. This would make an intelligent audience grin.

In this production, Mansai focuses on a contrast between humans and nature. The modern audience may find it hard to believe in the existence of the witches; Mansai therefore interpreted the malicious witches as that part of nature which counterattacks against humans. In my interview with him about this play,[5] Mansai mentioned a Kyogen play called *Kusabira* (Mushrooms) to elucidate the point: in that play, a new mansion is inhabited by huge human-size mushrooms and when an exorcist prays for their extinction, mushrooms threateningly increase in number. It is a comic play, but it also shows nature's devastating power over humans, and Mansai said that he wanted to regard the witches' power as uncontrollable nature's strength.

In Mansai's mise en scene, the three witches emerge from rubbish bags. Mansai argued that many kinds of rubbish produced by humans are gradually destroying environment. He said that nuclear power plants is a good example: we have distorted nature and got energy from nuclear fusion, but distorted nature will strike us back; we are yet to solve the problem of the disposal of nuclear fuel waste, for one thing. According to Mansai, when humans follow their desires, they are producing negative legacy, or rubbish. That is why Mansai added his own prologue to the play:

> Things in the Universe. Dust in the universe. Stardust. Dregs and refuge of civilization. Strains of societies. Distortion of humans. The scum of society / human trash. Cosmic dust. Stardust or useless scraps of stars. Civilization of

[5] The interview is printed in a pamphlet for 2013 and 2014 production of Mansai's *Macbeth*.

> trash. Perversity of societies. Wicked human beings. The scum of society / human trash. All things in the universe.[6]

This is followed by Hecate's announcement that "by the strength of [sprites'] illusion" Macbeth will be brought "to his confusion" (3:5:28-29).

Mansai approached to *Macbeth* in a very Japanese way, employing the aesthetics and techniques of Japanese classical drama such as Noh and Kyogen. The simple stage setting with *fusuma* screens was an image of Japanese tearoom. Because a tiny tearoom is an epitome of the universe, Mansai succeeded in capturing the whole universe with his minimalist staging.

Ninagawa Shakespeare

One of the great Shakespeareans, Yukio Ninagawa[7] continues producing his Shakespeare productions with never-failing energy. In 2014, he directed all-male *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar*, and in 2015 he directed *Hamlet* and *Richard II*, and will direct *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in October 2015. Now, he has only six more plays to complete the whole canon.[8]

Although I am involved in these productions as a chairman of the Shakespeare Committee at the Saitama Art Theatre, I was more deeply involved, as a translator, in Ninagawa's production of *Hamlet*, which is his 8th production of *Hamlet*.[9] Tatsuya Fujiwara, who in 2003 played Hamlet at the age of 21 under the direction of Ninagawa and won many theatre awards for his energetic acting, are now playing a more grown-up Hamlet. The stage set was the same as the celebrated stage designer Setsu Asakura (1922 - May 2014) designed for Ninagawa's productions of *Shimoya-man'nencho Story* (2012) and of Kara's *Shiraito Falls* (2013): shabby Japanese old-fashioned terraced houses. In the rehearsal, which started at the end of 2014, Ninagawa emphasized a point that we have to make clear why we Japanese are performing *Hamlet*. He was obviously conscious that this production would be transferred to the Barbican in

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[6] Quoted from the English subtitle officially used during the tour. I supervised the subtitle.

[7] My writing of Chapter 16 "Ninagawa Yukio," in *The Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 269-83 is superseded by Alexander C. Y. Huang's "Chapter 3: Yukio Ninagawa" in *Great Shakespeareans: Hall, Brook, Ninagawa, Lepage*, ed. Peter Holland (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 79-112.

[8] They are *King John*, *Henry V*, *Henry VIII*, *Timon of Athens*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*. Sainokuni Shakespeare Series counts Shakespeare's plays as 37, excluding *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Edward III*, and *Sir Thomas More*.

[9] Ninagawa directed Hamlet, with Mikijiro Hira (1978), Ken Watanabe (1988), Hiroyuki Sanada (1995), Masachika Ichimura (2001), Tatsuya Fujiwara (2003), Michael Maloney (2004), and Satoru Kawaguchi (2012) as Hamlet.

London in May 2015 (it was premiered at Saitama Arts Centre in January and toured in Taiwan in March 2015) together with his much acclaimed *Kafka on the Shore*, originally written by Haruki Murakami and was premiered at Saitama Arts Centre in 2012.

The production of *Hamlet* starts with a projected statement to the effect that this is the 19th-century Japanese, where Shakespeare was first introduced, and they are now attempting their final rehearsal of *Hamlet*. All the cast line up on the stage and take a bow and then start their *Hamlet*. The appearance of the ghost is presented with the solemnity of Noh theatre, but its mysterious omnipresence is expressed with dummy ghosts shown through different doors and windows almost simultaneously.

Some of the ideas were already employed in Ninagawa's previous *Hamlets*. The scene of the play-within-the play is revealed through the Kabuki technique of *furi-otoshi* (the dropping of a huge curtain), and would take away the audience's breath with the tableaux vivants of a gorgeous *hina*-doll exhibition of *hina-matsuri* or the girls' Doll Festival, introduced in Ninagawa's former productions of *Hamlet* (1978, '88, '95): gorgeously kimono-clad actors pose as *hina*-dolls placed on red-carpeted tiers and the player-King and the player-Queen on the top tier start to come down the tiers as they speak their lines. When Claudius stands up during the performance, the doll exhibition is overturned in slow motion, which suggests a maimed rite: because *hina-matsuri* was celebrated for girls' happiness, the overturned dolls also adumbrate Ophelia's misfortune.

One of the new things in this production is the *mizugori* (cold-water ablutions) of Claudius (Mikijiro Hira), which represents repentance in a Japanese way. Another is the introduction of a feeble, mumbling, naked Fortinbras (Kenshi Uchida), entering serenely on the music of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 Largo. He may be a representation of today's "herbivorous boys" with no desires and ambitions. This is quite contrary to his former interpretations of Fortinbras: Ninagawa used to make violent Fortinbras invade Elsinore, sometimes entering on a real motor bike, sometimes massacring the remaining characters with a machine gun,[10] but from 2003 onwards he makes Fortinbras kiss Hamlet.

The cast offers new interpretations as well. Award-winning Hikari Mitsushima as Ophelia decides that Ophelia is not simply submissive and obedient; the reason why Ophelia returns Hamlet's letters to him, as ordered by Polonius, is because she herself strongly wants to understand what is in Hamlet's mind. At the beginning of the nunnery scene, therefore Ophelia is trying to probe into Hamlet's mind, still believing that she alone can truly communicate with him, although her belief is utterly denied by Hamlet's frenzy.

[10] Fortinbras with machine guns was introduced in Ingmar Bergman's *Hamlet* (1988).

Ran Ohtori as Gertrude expresses motherly love so much so that Fujiwara Hamlet also expresses his distorted affection towards her, reminiscent of the perverse mother-son relation in *Shintokumaru*, in which Fujiwara starred from 1997 to 2008.

All in all, Ninagawa's new production of *Hamlet* does integrate what he has attempted through his outstanding career.

Other Shakespeares

The long-established theatre Company Bungaku-za launched "Shakespeare Festival" in 2014-15, with three full productions—*Measure for Measure* in February, *As You Like It* in March, and *King Lear* in January 2015—and lots of staged reading. Hitoshi Uyama[11] directed *King Lear*, starring the authoritative, seventy-year-old Toru Emori, who was an invalid for a while. Uyama emphasized the senile feebleness of the king. The production lacked the king's tempestuous furious outburst and Lear appeared in a wheel chair when he carried the dead Cordelia. With eighty-one-year-old Kikuo Kaneuchi as Fool, seventy-nine-year-old Yoshisada Sakaguchi as Gloucester, and sixty-year-old Seiji Toyama as Kent, the production did demonstrate what "The oldest hath borne most" (5:3:326) means. Old-aged Fool seems to have become a recent trend, and when Theatre Company Subaru also produced *King Lear* in June 2014, Fool was played by eighty-seven-year-old Hiroyuki Nishimoto, who passed away in April 2015.

Eighty-two-year-old actress, Misako Watanabe, also played King Lear in a production by Makoto Sato, the artistic director of the Za Koenji theatre. Somewhat like Mansai's *Macbeth*, Sato rearranged *King Lear* to be performed by only three actors: beside Watanabe, Sotaro Tanaka plays Fool, and the versatile Jun Uemoto as Lear's shadow plays many roles including Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, and Edgar. The play is shortened to 90 minutes, and several characters like Gloucester are cut, but the production offers a deep, suffocating, philosophical world. The production was first staged in May 2013, and was revived in June 2014 and May 2015.

In a somewhat similar vein, the playwright and director Takeshi Kawamura rearranged *King Lear* to a 105-minute play and renamed it as *King Lear in the Wilderness*, starring seventy-two-year-old Akaji Maro in the title role in March 2014. Although the play is renamed, it is basically as Shakespeare

[11] Uyama also directed *Twelfth Night* in April 2014, *Pericles* for Kato Kenichi's company in February 2015 and will direct *Troilus and Cressida* in July 2015. Seisuke Yamasaki, who played many roles in Kato's *Pericles*, directed *Hamlet* in September 2014, and will direct *Romeo and Juliet* in July 2015 for his own company.

wrote it; the idea of focusing on Lear's psychological struggle is the same as Sato's. It has a suggestion of *Waiting for Godot.*

More importantly, Keitoku Takada, who played one of the witches in Mansai's *Macbeth*, co-directed a full-length *King Lear* for his company Banyuu Inryoku in May 2014. The production was originally performed at the 1991 Japan Festival; Shakespeare scholars who attended the 1991 International Shakespeare Conference held at Tokyo may remember having seen this avant-garde *King Lear* together with *The Braggart Samurai*, a Kyogenized Falstaff play, at the Tokyo Globe. After the Tokyo Globe, it went on tour and was performed at the Mermaid theatre in London, the Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon, and Cardiff, Wales in 1991. This psychedelic *King Lear* has its design inherited from Shuji Terayama's theatre company Tenjosajiki (Upper Gallery). Takada dexterously played King Lear who gradually loses his sanity, as he did twenty-three years ago.

There are countless Shakespeare productions at Tokyo and it seems they are increasing in number. We have to say with Feste that "[Shakespeare], sir, does walk about the orb like the sun, it shines every where" (*Twelfth Night* 3:1:38-39).

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