

Kuniyoshi Munakata*

Noh Creation of Shakespeare

Abstract: This article contains select comments and reviews on *Noh Hamlet* and *Noh Othello* in English and *Noh King Lear* in Japanese. The scripts from these performances were arranged based on Shakespeare's originals and directed on stage and performed in English by Kuniyoshi Munakata from the early 1980s until 2014. Also, the whole text of Munakata's *Noh Macbeth* in English (Munakata himself acted as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in one play) is for the first time publicized. The writers of the comments and reviews include notable people such as John Fraser, Michael Barrett, Upton Murakami, Donald Richie, Rick Ansorg, James David Audlin, Jesper Keller, Jean-Claude Saint-Marc, Jean-Claude Baumier, Judy Kendall, Allan Owen, Yoshio ARAI, Yasumasa OKAMOTO, Tatsuhiko TAIRA, Hikaru ENDO, Kazumi YAMAGATA, Hanako ENDO, Yoshiko KAWACHI, Mari Boyd, and Daniel Gallimore.

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Introductory

In 1974, I had a chance to show Hamlet's first soliloquy as a "Noh Dance" for the music class of Professor John Ward at Emerson Hall at Harvard University. As I was still unable to sing in English, I just spoke the speech and showed the dance (motion) in Noh style. (Cf. *Eigo Bungaku Sekai*, 1975). Then, I was invited to play the same dance at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, and was offered the work of directing a new Irish play at the theatre. Unfortunately I was unable to accept the work.

Back in Japan in 1975, I continued my study of Noh dance and chant under Makio (now Manzaburo) Umewaka and completed *Noh Hamlet* in English in 1981, the script and the song music.

I have already written on various publications (Cf. *Shakespeare Translation*, 9 and others) on the difficulty of Noh chanting in English and how "The Noh Shakespeare Group" with hardships premiered *Noh Hamlet* and *Noh Othello* in English. On the musical notations for singing and instruments, see

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Hamlet in Noh Style, Noh Othello in English and Japanese, and Noh Adaptation of Shakespeare.

In this paper, I will record some precious comments and reviews on *Noh Hamlet* and *Noh Othello* in English, and publicize for the first time the whole text (script) of *Noh Macbeth* and some important comments and reviews on *Noh King Lear*.

Noh Hamlet

John Fraser, Director, “The London Shakespeare Group,” seeing “Noh Hamlet” at Daigo-so Noh Stage in Iwata City, Shizuoka Prefecture, November 7, 1982):

I know very little about Noh. I’ve seen it two or three times when I’ve been in Japan before. But this time I was most impressed, because it helped me get a glimmer of understanding of Noh because I knew what *Hamlet* was about... I was tremendously impressed with what appeared to me as a long meditation, or certainly the incredible stillness, which went on for such a long time. It seemed to me to be true, in a Noh spirit, to the kind of dilemma and torture of whatever Hamlet was experiencing. It seemed to me that he had a lot of things to ponder. But the incredible thing is that it is impressive purely as a feat, and as it was in the middle of the play it lent a very beautiful mood...

Well, I should say, not a criticism, that I don’t think it reveals a lot of *Hamlet*. It reveals a lot of Noh. But then, you see, Shakespeare himself hardly ever invented plots; he changed them... So you are actually following the Shakespeare tradition in taking Hamlet and doing him in Noh style. But it is not really the play that Shakespeare wrote; it’s from Shakespeare, but a Noh version... Nevertheless, I’m sure that I can use some ideas in our productions which are unique to Noh and which you are using now.

Munakata: If we had a chance to perform *Noh Hamlet* in England, what do you think the response of the British audience would be?

Fraser: They would be, as I am, so impressed, because it is so different from anything we can see in England. It is so completely Japanese. That is what makes it so fascinating. It may not be a large audience in a great big theatre playing for several months, but for discriminating people, I think they would be fascinated. And I wish you luck with it.

Michael Barrett, Representative of the British Council, Japan:

All the members of “The London Shakespeare Group” were captivated by your adaptation of “Hamlet”, and even those of us who knew something of the Noh theatre already felt deeply moved by the new insight made possible by your cultural bridge.

Upton Murakami, Professor of English at Waseda University, author of *Spectators' Handbook of Noh*; seeing *Noh Hamlet* at Yarai Noh Theatre in Tokyo, in February, 1983:

It was the most wonderful esthetic experience! I had never imagined that such a marvelous fusion of Shakespeare and Noh could be possible. Even *kabuki* based on Noh are not like Noh, really nor was the performance of Yeats' play "At the Hawk's Well" which I saw at Suidobashi Noh Theatre. So I was deeply satisfied with "Noh Hamlet" and greatly surprised by it. It was the real 'Shakespeare' in content and really Noh in form. Especially the sequence following the 'grave scene'—her dance was pure Noh in its highest form of expression... You will wonder what I would criticize. There isn't much. The intermissions were long—not any longer than 2-Act Noh, but there they have *ai-kyogen* to fill in—which was impossible of course (the Grave-Diggers Scene is, I have always felt, Shakespeare's *ai-kyogen*—but it would not have been wise to attempt that). The necessity of five acts is unavoidable—two acts, like Noh, would require compression (and condensation) that would be too intense for the spectators. What was produced was just right, leaving the full essence and sense of *Hamlet*.

Donald Richie, critic on Japanese films and theatres, "‘Hamlet’ Seen as Noh Drama," *The Japan Times*, March 30, 1985:

This week, March 24, there were at the National Noh Theatre just two performances of a most interesting theatrical experiment—Kuniyoshi Munakata and the Noh Shakespeare Group's reworking of "Hamlet" as a Noh.

Horatio, wearing the garb of travelling pilgrim, says that he has been travelling, telling the sad story of the deceased Prince of Denmark. Now he has come to this "small, island country," and is readying to tell us the story, when he is confronted by, apparently, Hamlet himself.

"To be or not to be," chants Hamlet in the *shidai* style, softly, rhythmically, his words taken up by the chorus. He then remembers the dead Ophelia—a *kosode* kimono lying on the stage symbolizes her—and weeps (fan to brow) remembering.

Then he meditates and the chorus chants his growing illumination. "If death be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. To be or not to be is *not* the question." Shakespeare turns Buddhist: "To live in the present is the only way of living."

Here, since there is no *ai-kyogen*, there is an intermission. Then, Horatio watching, Hamlet again relives his death, the final duel. Each bout is rendered in terms of final dance forms of the Noh, Hamlet's fan becoming sword, poisoned up, etc. Members of the chorus are the voices of Gertrude,

Claudius, Laertes, even Osric, as the final lines of Shakespeare support the final dance of the Noh.

In the epilogue Hamlet's death coincides with his *monogi* or costume change. The dressers reveal his silver brocade under kimono and, for the first time, mask him. It is the young-man's mask of traditional Noh. Hamlet is now properly dead and finally, having satisfied Buddhist belief by repeating his actions—the final duel—one knows not how many times, may enter nirvana.

He also now gives his only Japanese line (the play is in English) which is: *Omoeba kari no yado*—life is a lying dream. Then as the chorus informs us that (a Buddhist sentiment straight out of Shakespeare) there is a divinity that shapes our ends and that the rest is silence, the silver-brocaded, transfigured Hamlet slowly glides away along the *hashigakari* while the chorus calls for “flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.” These are very moving, these last beautiful moments, partly because Hamlet and Zen prove uncommonly complementary, and partly because Shakespeare and the Noh have so illuminated each other. I do not know how a Noh “Lear” or a Noh “Othello” would be but this Noh “Hamlet” proved quite feasible...

In these “Hamlet” performances the music (all parts from the standard repertoire) brilliant upheld the action. The ending, for example, was sustained by the steady broken rhythms of the *hayashi* while the skirl of the Noh flute became the silver Hamlet and his accompanying flights of angels...

I think all these elements—speech, dance, music plus Shakespeare—would have come even closer together if the play had not been given in English. Even though “Hamlet” does happen to be in that language, Noh plays are usually not—and it is the Noh which is naturally the stronger element in this combination. The reasons for my objection are apparent. The Noh is about, as its name suggests, perfection. No one ever saw a Noh play less than “perfect,” though there are, of course, degrees of perfection in Japan. Thus when the level of the music was so high as in this performance and where the motion was at least professional-looking, one was disturbed by pronunciation which could not be perfect since English was not the tongue of any of those performing. And such lines as “incestuous, murderous, damned Dane” call for more than conversation classes can provide.

This having been said, I have nothing but praise for the idea and for the method in which it was carried out. Professor Munakata (who was the *shite* Hamlet in these performances) has been busy with “Hamlet” Noh dramas for some time now. There have been five of them (each one different) since 1982. This one is the most cut down, the most simplified, and the most Noh-like... In the program Munakata says that he with suitable humbleness

aimed at the highest aesthetic quality of the Noh—*yugen*. For all I know, he may very well have created it—particularly in those beautiful, those even transcendental final moments.

‘Noh Hamlet’ in the US

In 1985, I was invited to teach a course and direct “Noh Hamlet” at the University of Nebraska in Omaha. After two months of intensive training and rehearsals, the American premiere of *Noh Hamlet* was realized on November 20-24. A review of the performance was written by Rick Ansorg, and a partial extract of the review is as follows:

Rick Ansorg, “‘Noh Hamlet’ a Cross-Cultural Experience,” *Omaha World Herald*, November 21, 1985:

For open-minded playgoers, “Noh Hamlet” which opened this week should be a strange and striking experience. Its blend of Zen mysticism and Shakespearean tragedy may not be more than the sum of its parts. But it is a cross-cultural experience that is unlikely to be seen here again.

For playgoers just seeking entertainment, “Noh” news isn’t such good news... The play previously had been staged in Japan, where it caused a furor among purists who argued that Noh – a dramatic form dating to the 14th century – should be performed only in Japanese.

The UNO production should add fuel to the fire. Not only is the production in English. It also features a Western cast, another departure from centuries old tradition. Munakata, who plays Hamlet with grave intensity, is the only Oriental in the cast with a speaking or singing part...

Munakata also has made some significant changes. In one scene, Hamlet is visited by Ophelia’s ghost, who forgives him. He then has the courage to answer his own famous question, something Shakespeare didn’t do in the original.

“To be or not to be is no longer the question,” he declares. “To live in the present is the only way of living.”

“The Noh Shakespeare Group” toured through the U.S. in the summer of 1988, starting performances in Macon in Georgia, South Carolina, Connecticut, Harvard University, Montana, Utah, and three Universities in California.

Later, I received a long and beautiful letter from the Reverend of North Madison Congregational Church in Connecticut:

The Reverend James David Audlin, September 6, 1988:

...you do us great honor by showing respect to our Western culture: by saying, in effect, that there is value in Shakespeare that transcends language

or culture and may be transposed into the medium of Noh. In so doing, you open Western eyes not only to the magnificence of the Noh tradition, but also to the depth and power of Shakespeare's works from another point of view... The greatest cultural treasures... are ultimately universal, treasures to be cherished, protected, and enjoyed by all humanity... Shakespeare's powerful insights into the human psyche, and the arresting beauty of his language, speak to all people everywhere. So too the intense interior vision of Noh, its undiluted power depicting the energy of thought, has always been to Westerners who discover it, a fascinating discovery. Even though I know very little Japanese, when I watch a traditional Noh performance, I am always deeply moved... What you have gloriously succeeded in doing is to bring about both Noh and Shakespeare in an exciting new way... But unless I know the story well I can only guess at the higher levels of appreciation... I need not guess any more. In your production, for the first time, I have actually tasted them... For Hamlet to "sit" *zazen* with the *koan*, "To be or not to be..," before Ophelia's grave, and then rise up and say, "That is not the question," that "He [she] only wakes who casts the world aside," opened up for me an insight into Hamlet's character and motivation that I have never had before.

The Reverend referred to *Noh Othello*, also presented on the tour with *Noh Hamlet* at the East-West Fusion Theatre in Connecticut.

The entrance of Desdemona's ghost as "Tsure," similarly, brought out the sense of "grue" (to use the Middle English word) in the scene as never before have I felt it....The Rev. Russel Hicks and I discussed this subject. To the above, Rusty replied that Noh is more than "theatre," to be performed before an audience for its entertainment.

"Noh Hamlet" as Solo Performance

After the two-act *Noh Hamlet* performances, I condensed it into a short version as a solo performance, removing everything non-essential. This format made it easier to tour. In a letter about the performance from Jesper Keller, a member of Denmark-Japan Society, he wrote:

Jesper Keller, September 20, 1990 :

I write to you to express my gratitude for a deeply moving, and very beautiful experience. I am a Dane, who holds in great respect and value the works of Shakespeare, especially I value the play of our great Danish Prince, Hamlet. As an admirer of these plays, I went to your performance of selected scenes from Hamlet, at the SAS Scandinavia Hotel, on the evening of Sept. 18, two days ago. Naturally, I felt a hint of skepticism, but was also rather

curious: could that really be done. The result was one of the most captivating experiences I have ever experienced, fully as moving as when performed in the traditional way by the late Sir Laurence Olivier. Considering my total ignorance of the deeper aspects of the tradition of Noh-theatre, I think that is amazing. Another thing that happened during your performance, was that the young woman accompanying me had her spiritual self “opened”....

The following four extracts refer to the solo performances of *Noh Hamlet* I showed in Europe in 2012-13.

Jean-Claude Saint- Marc, December, 2012:

L’occasion a été donnée, en décembre 2012, aux habitants de la Côte d’Azur, en France, d’assister à un spectacle original et de grande qualité. Maître UEDA (Munakata) est venu leur proposer d’abord dans la Principauté de Monaco, puis à Cannes, une adaptation pour le Théâtre NOH d’extraits de « Hamlet », la célèbre pièce de Shakespeare. Le spectacle fut précédé d’une présentation fort intéressante permettant à chacun de mieux apprécier l’esprit dans lequel a travaillé Maître UEDA : concilier deux traditions théâtrales qui n’ont jamais eu de relations entre elles et montrer ainsi les correspondances possibles. Pour cela, Maître UEDA a choisi de conserver la langue originelle de Shakespeare mais en utilisant une mise en scène, un jeu, une gestuelle et une expression sonore grâce à un travail subtil sur les intonations, qui plongent le spectateur dans une atmosphère qui, manifestement, rattache « Hamlet » au Théâtre NOH. Cette impression extraordinaire s’est trouvée confirmée par l’ajout à l’œuvre de quelques réflexions du personnage qui prolongent et enrichissent le texte, sans déformer la pensée du grand dramaturge anglais. Les spectateurs de Monaco et de Cannes, parmi lesquels on pouvait trouver des étudiants en littérature et en philosophie, ont manifesté leur extrême satisfaction, d’autant plus qu’après chaque représentation Maître UEDA a souhaité, de manière très sympathique, répondre à leurs questions et expliquer son parcours personnel, ses recherches et ses ambitions pour créer des liens entre les cultures et montrer que celles-ci se répondent et s’enrichissent mutuellement. Les spectateurs, enthousiastes, ont seulement regretté que Maître UEDA, pour des raisons pratiques fort compréhensibles, n’ait pu présenter que des extraits de son adaptation, avec la seule participation de l’un de ses élèves qui a efficacement tenu le rôle d’Ophélie. Espérons que Maître UEDA aura d’autres occasions de nous présenter de nouvelles réalisations et qu’en particulier il aura la possibilité d’adapter dans l’esprit du Théâtre NOH d’autres œuvres du théâtre universel !

Jean-Claude Baumier, President, Cannes Japan Association:

Your performance and conference were both new to most of the audience. I received many positive and complimentary feedback since then. I was impressed how young people reacted during the questions/answers part. It was a very successful event altogether. The Lycee Head Mistress told me that after her studies she did a postgraduate work on Paul Claudel's writings and had a curiosity toward the Nô theater but could never satisfy it until then. The other teachers who attended were all interested, and to most of them it was a discovery.

Judy Kendall, December 2012

Thank you for the extraordinary performance, and text, of *Hamlet* as Noh play. I came to see you perform this in Altrincham last week and was very impressed, as were my fellow members of the Yorks/Lancs Haiku Group. I particularly admired the way you used the Shakespeare text, and repetition of certain elements to create what seemed to me a very authentic Noh feel.

Allan Owen, The University of Chester, October, 2013

Your performance of *Noh Hamlet* was an unforgettable theatrical version of *Hamlet*. As a spectator I was both drawn in to the work and challenged by it. The rhythm of the whole performance gave me time to really exercise my imagination, to connect with Shakespeare's verse in a starkly intimate way. The line that went straight to my heart was 'All that lives must die.' I have read and listened to this many times, but never heard it in the way I heard it that night.

The post-performance discussion was very much appreciated and we would very much welcome you back to perform next time you are in the UK. I have put a short clip of the work on the Facebook pages of your Centre for Research in to Education and creativity through Arts Practice (RECAP)

Noh Macbeth: the Whole Script

In 1987, I wrote or arranged the script *Noh Macbeth* in English with the song music, and the NSG premiered it, with me as *shite* (Lady Macbeth and Macbeth), as well as my directing, at the Daigo-so in Shizuoka Prefecture. The whole script is as follows:

Act One:

SPEECH

Doctor: I am a Doctor of physic to serve Macbeth, the King of Scotland.
And this is the Gentlewoman attending on Lady Macbeth. Now,

Gentlewoman, I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

Gentlewoman: Since his majesty went into the field. I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

Doct.: A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching! In this slumber agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?

Gent.: That, sir, which I will not report after her.

Doc.: You may to me: and 'tis most meet you should.

Gent.: Neither to you nor any one; having no witness to confirm my speech.

[Withdraw to *wakiza*.

Ashirai music starts. Enter Lady Macbeth with a taper.]

Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise, and upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her, stand close.

Doc.: How came she by that light?

Gent.: Why, it stood by her; she has light by her continually; 'tis her command.

Doc.: You see, her eyes are open.

Gent.: Ay, but their sense is shut.

Doc.: What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

Gent.: It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

SASHI SINGING (Soft, non-rhythmic)

Lady Macbeth: Yet here's a spot. Out, damned spot! Out, I say!— What, will these hands ne'er be clean?

SAGE-UTA SONG (Low-pitch, soft, rhythmic)

Chorus: All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten
Your little hand, your little hand.

AGE-UTA SONG (High-pitch, soft, rhythmic)

Chorus: Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep! Macbeth does murder sleep! The innocent sleep, Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care, The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath, Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast --

SPEECH

Lady Mac.: Who was it that thus cried? Go get some water, And wash this filthy witness from your hand.

(Non-rhythmic singing) A little water clears us of this deed; A little water clears us of this deed; How easy is it then! How easy is it!

AGE-UTA SONG (High-pitch, soft, rhythmic)

Chorus: Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean? Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand, from my hand? No, this my hand will rather. The multitudinous seas incarnadine, incarnadine, Making the green one red.

SPEECH

Lady Mac.: One: two: why, then 'tis time to do't. — Hell is murkey! — Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard?
(*Kakaru:* Turn to singing) Only look up clear; to beguile the time, look like the time; Leave all the rest to me!

KAKERI DANCE

(*Kakeri:* a short dance often revealing hidden secrets.)
Yet who would have thought the old man To have had so much blood in him?

SPEECH

Gent.: She has spoke what she should not; Heaven knows what she has known. I would not have such a heart in my bosom / For the dignity of the whole body.

Doc.: Go to, go to; you have known what you should not. This disease is beyond my practice. Therein the patient must minister himself.
(*Sashi* singing) What's done is done, cannot be undone. Give me your hand. To bed, to bed!

SAGE-UTA (Low-pitch, soft, rhythmic)

Chorus: Fair is foul, and foul is fair; There's no art to find the man's construction in the face.

AGE-UTA (High-pitch, soft, rhythmic)

Chorus: So foul and fair a day we have not seen,
So foul and fair a day we have not seen. Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets;
More needs she the divine than the physician.
God forgive us all! God forgive us all!
[*Lady Macbeth*, supported from behind by the *Doctor*, exits;
Gentlewoman following them.]

NAKAIRI (Exeunt during the performance.)

AI-KYOGEN Interlude (in English or Japanese)

(A *kyogen:* comedian relates the story or legend of the play.)

Act Two:

[*Hayafue:* fidgety flute music; Enter *shite*, *Macbeth*.]

SASHI SINGING (Strong, non-rhythmic)

Macbeth: Bring me no more reports; let them fly all;
Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane, I cannot taint with fear.

Chorus: The spirits that know

All mortal consequences have pronounced me thus:

‘Fear not, Macbeth; no man that’s born of woman

Shall e’er have power upon thee.’ Then fly false thanes, And mingle with the English epicures:

The mind I sway by and the heart I bear

Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear. This push will cheer me ever, or disseat me now.

HATARAKI DANCE (displaying the physical strength)

NORU SINGING (Strong, ride on the big rhythm)

Macbeth: Better be with the dead,

Chorus: Better be with the dead,

Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,

Than on the torture of the mind to lie In restless ecstasy.

Macbeth: Duncan is in his grave; After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well;

Chorus: Duncan is in his grave;

After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well;

I have lived long enough: my way of life Is fall’n into the sear, the yellow leaf;

And that which should accompany old age, As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have; but, in their stead,

Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath, Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

[Enter *waki-tsure*, a messenger.]

SPEECH

Messenger: Gracious my lord, as I did stand my watch upon the hill, I look’d toward Birnam, and anon, methought, the wood began to move.

KAKARU (Turn to singing, strong)

Macbeth: Liar and slave!

Chorus: If thou speak’st false, upon the next tree Shalt thou hang alive, till famine cling thee:

I begin to doubt the equivocation of the fiend That lies like truth: ‘Fear not, till Birnam wood Do come to Dunsinane:’ and now a wood Comes toward Dunsinane.

I ‘gin to be weary of the sun,

And wish the estate o’ the world were now undone, Ring the alarum-bell! Blow, wind! Come, rack!

Macbeth: At least we’ll die with harness on our back.

[**Haya-tsuzumi:** fidgety drums. Enter waki Macduff. He calls on *hashigakari*]

SPEECH

Macduff: That way the noise is. Tyrant, show thy face! If thou be'st slain and with no stroke of mine, my wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still. Turn, hell-hound, turn! I have no words; my voice is in my sword: thou bloodier villain than terms can give thee out!

KAKARU (Sing, non-rhythmic, strong)

Macbeth: I bear a charmed life; which must not yield To one of woman born.

Macduff: Despair thy charm;

Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely Ripp'd.

Macbeth: I'll not fight with thee.

[*Kakeri* fighting music; they fight, and Macduff wins. Re-enter *waki-tsure* messenger.]

SPEECH

Messenger: The queen, my lord, is dead.

NORU (Strong; ride on the big rhythm)

Chorus: She should have died hereafter;

There would have been a time for such a word.

Macbeth: Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

Chorus: To the last syllable of recorded time, And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way, the way to dusty death, The way to dusty death.

Macbeth: Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, told by an idiot, Signifying nothing, signifying nothing —

Chorus: The grace of Grace be on the soul of Macbeth!

On the soul of Macbeth!

[**Exeunt.**

This play, *Noh Macbeth* in English, was given the “Nikkei Newspaper Award” for its originality and the performance. In 1989, it was invited to be performed by the same cast on the grounds of Yawata-Jinja Shinto Shrine in Shizuoka City. The performers were in full Noh costumes, and the performance was broadcast by Shizuoka Cable Network TV for ninety minutes.

Noh King Lear: Comments and Reviews

The following extracts are from reviews and comments on *Noh King Lear* in Japanese, performed in Tokyo in 2007-10.

Yoshio ARAI: Starting with *Noh: Hamlet* in English a quarter century ago, followed by *Noh: Othello*, *Noh: Macbeth*, and so on, performing himself in English, and also by *Noh: Othello*, *Noh: Hamlet*, and others in Japanese performed by professional Noh actors, Kuniyoshi (Munakata) UEDA has arrived at the excellent production *Noh: King Lear* in Japanese. The remarkable performance was premiered at the Cerulean Tower Noh Theatre at Shibuya in Tokyo on 27 of October, 2007, with the eldest acting female Noh performer, Madam Reiko ADACHI, 82, as *shite* Cordelia. The last scene was a culmination of *Noh: King Lear* only to be experienced by the audience on the day. The Noh dance by Lear and Cordelia exemplified their spiritual reunion which was an exquisite fusion of Shakespeare and Noh, or a beautiful combination of East and West cultures.

Yasumasa OKAMOTO: Of all Shakespearean Noh plays so far written and directed by Kuniyoshi (Munakata) UEDA, *Noh: King Lear* is the best as a Noh play. The main reason is Act Five was successfully and most beautifully made into “*fukushiki*” or dual world style of Noh, with the ghost of Cordelia appearing to save her dying father as if to bring him into Heaven. Both *shite* (Madam Reiko ADACHI as Cordelia) and *tsure* (Yoshihisa ENDO as King Lear) performed very fine. Expected to be repeated by other performers also.

Tatsuhiko TAIRA: Ueda’s *Noh: King Lear* achieved the art of “*Satori* or enlightenment.” This is the best of Shakespeare’s drama in the style of Noh. In this adaptation the leading role is not King Lear, but Cordelia. Ueda cut most of the scenes in Act I-IV. The opening speech is Cordelia’s: “All bless’d secrets, / All you unpublish’d virtues of the earth, / Spring with my tears!” (IV.iv). Ueda succeeded in developing Shakespeare’s theme of love and redemption of souls between Lear and Cordelia... In the later scenes King Lear appeared on the stage holding Cordelia’s body represented by a *karaori*-kimono... so pitiful and so tragic, but I felt relieved when Cordelia’s ghost danced together with the ghost of Lear. The moment Reiko ADACHI as Cordelia danced on the stage, I felt completely Zeami’s concept of “*yugen* or mysterious and profound beauty and *Makoto no Hana* or true flowers.” I believe Ueda’s *Noh: King Lear* is a valuable contribution to the Harmony and Combination of Cultures between Japan and England.

Hikaru ENDO: *Noh: King Lear* was the best quality production, making me intoxicated. In addition to its beautifully adapted script, it has the perfect effect of catharsis through the unique description of the world of after death in the end which leads all audiences into satisfaction. Feeling peace and inner contentment as souls, Lear and Cordelia exit slowly without any words. This last scene clearly implies the most important song “There are two worlds: One is of language, the Other is of mind” by a Lear’s clown.

UEDA's successful adaptation and the superior performers attained to catharsis which we cannot see in the tragedy of Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Kazumi YAMAGATA, from the English abstract of the review of *Noh King Lear* in Japanese, *The Bulletin of the ISHCC* No. 13: This article aims at elucidation of the motif of this Noh play

King Lear by referring to *The Old Testament* "The Book of Job", and of course, Shakespeare's *King Lear* for comparison. The writer surmises, by this way of procedure, Ueda's work can open its hidden secrets to the spectators. Ueda has chosen his main motif from around the end of Shakespeare's work, which seems to me more than right way in making up the Noh play out of Shakespeare's work. This way of saying naturally leads my eye to "The Book of Job" which provides the consummation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

That is to say, starting from "The Book of Job", going through Shakespeare's *King Lear*, we arrive at Ueda's work. When looking into minutely this three-fold structure, we can judge Ueda's superb dramatic ability, and this work of Ueda's Noh play exposes its dramatic power, which is so moving.

Hanako ENDO: I was very pleased to see the fourth performance of Ueda's *Noh: King Lear*, ... its opening scene, I thought, was the most essential in the performance... Cordelia talking to "unpublished virtues" and "the earth",... The way she mentions "unpublished virtues" and "the earth" looks as if she is already dead, coming down from the heaven in order to tell something to people on the earth like some of other noh performances. Act four in *King Lear* is, in fact, the scene witnessing the truth and human beauty, because all bloody and tragic scenes such as the banishment of Cordelia, Lear being deceived by his own daughters, Gloucester being hollowed his eyes out, and Goneril and Regan fighting for Edmund. In *Noh: King Lear*, because of the omission of villainous characters, it seems that the world where "unpublished virtues" grow with Cordelia's tears is already purified. It could be said that "unpublished virtues" would absorb all taints on the earth, making the world filled with love and truth. Although the tragedy of *King Lear* is based on betrayal and the death of good people, *Noh: King Lear* is the beautiful adaptation implying salvation and enlightenment.

Noh: King Lear is definitely the masterpiece with the combination of traditional Japanese culture and British legacy.

Yoshiko KAWACHI: Recently cross-cultural performances of Shakespeare are increasing. This tendency is desirable because they are helpful for making Shakespeare worldwide and simultaneously promoting each country's native

culture overseas. Kuniyoshi Ueda, who studied Noh during his youth, has entertained a lively concern for the fusion of Shakespeare and Noh, and tried to exploit the possibility of a new drama.

Ueda's *Noh: King Lear* is absolutely unique. He came up with various ideas to change Shakespeare's text into Noh text. He omitted the first half of the play from the original, and let a *Kyogen* actor tell the story of Lear's life. His play begins with the scene of a touching reunion between Cordelia and Lear.

Reiko Adachi, an old feminine Noh performer, played movingly the 'shite' (leading role). The 'tsure' (companion) was Yoshihisa Endo as Lear. According to John F. Danby, to understand Cordelia is to understand the whole play.

Changing Cordelia from a reflection of divine salvation to that of Buddhist mercy, Ueda succeeded in developing Shakespearean theme of love and redemption in his Noh play. When Cordelia's ghost invited Lear to the next world, the spectators understood Zeami's concept of 'yugen,' quiet, mysterious and profound beauty. In addition, they purified themselves through the last scene showing the promise of celestial bliss. *Noh: King Lear* is the fruit of many years of effort. Ueda appears to have given an affirmative answer to his own question, "Can I perform Shakespeare's drama in the style of Noh?" This play is not Shakespeare's work but Ueda's "creation." I believe his experimental attempt is a valuable contribution to the cultural exchange between Japan and England.

Mari BOYD, professor of theatre at Sophia University: Professor Ueda's *Noh: King Lear* (2007) was revived at the Kioi Hall under his direction. It featured Reiko Adachi (1925-), a woman noh performer, as Cordelia and Yoshihisa Endo as King Lear. The stage designer was Koen Yokoi. The production, performed in Japanese, was a feast for the eyes—bright, gorgeous, and spectacular. The art design was suggestive of an elysian flower arrangement...In the wide central space magnificently costumed performers glided, interacted and danced, their elaborate costumes creating a swirl of rich colours and patterns. Just this was enough to bring Zeami's concept of *yūgen* to mind. Entranced by the visuals, I forgot I was watching Shakespeare. But soon the speeches and chanting brought the verbal and diegetic aspects of King Lear to the forefront of my attention. Then I realized that only two characters, Lear and Cordelia, had managed the "sea change into something rich and strange". Intercultural theatre takes many hybrid forms. Theatre critic Marvin Carlson identifies seven types based on the extent of assimilation into the receiving culture. One type he cites brings the foreign into a new combination with familiar elements. Often the discrete forms from the various cultural traditions are apparent on stage, and the

dynamic interaction of disparate qualities generates a defamiliarizing effect, which challenges the audience to create their own meaning. Sometimes the blending is on a conceptual level and harder to discern in the production. The present case is an excellent example of the former kind of theatrical interweaving.

Since the 1980s, the playwright-director Kuniyoshi Ueda has been a practitioner of this kind of intercultural theatre. Today he is an expert par excellence in Shakespearean *noh*. In this hybrid, the *noh* performance code is applied in a flexible manner to Shakespeare's plays so that the resultant work both breaks and fulfills the genre expectations of the viewers. Yet it takes courage to trim a five-act tragedy into a short two-scene *noh* about redemption and to give the *shite* role to Cordelia, who in the original *King Lear* has fewer lines than even Goneril's mild husband, the Duke of Albany.

Scene One of *Noh: King Lear* begins in the middle of Act Four of the original work, when Cordelia, now Queen of France, arrives at Dover; this scene includes a brief choral reminder of her initial silence early in the story when she refused to use fancy words to express her love for her king and father. Then the tormented Lear enters and the process of reunion, forgiveness, and love unfolds. Scene Two opens at the end of Shakespeare's Act Five, with Cordelia already dead. Lear too dies, hopeful to the last that Cordelia may still be alive and speak. Her ghost enters. Here the speeches are not from Shakespeare but from Professor Ueda's own hand. The spirits of the father and daughter conduct in unison a dance symbolizing redemption.

The week before I saw this play, I had the opportunity to attend director Suzuki Tadashi's four-language intercultural version of *King Lear*. The difference was striking. What was excised from Professor Ueda's play was retained and magnified by director Suzuki. The result was a ferocious Dionysian display of greed, jealousy, deceit, and malice.

Cordelia, shrunk to a very minor character, was overwhelmed by the forces of evil. Professor Ueda's desire seems to be that like effective *noh* drama his play "will lead [the viewer] to a kind of *satori* or enlightenment". He takes Lear's last hope for Cordelia's life as something that is attained not in this world but on another plane. In the closing moments of the play, the words Lear longed to hear her speak when he was alive seem to be expressed by her spirit and the Chorus on his death.

Thus the harmony of words, behavior, and mind-heart, which the *ai-kyogen* (i.e. the Fool) had earlier noted was nattainable for Lear in his embodied state, is now assured. Unlike tragedies in which the body-politic seems to be bled of positive human abilities and left anemic to carry on as best it can, Professor Ueda's Shakespearean *noh* grants us a flourishing sense of spiritual plenitude.

Daniel Gallimore: If the Romantic critic William Hazlitt's observation that 'The *Midsummer Night's Dream*, when acted, is converted from a delightful fiction into a dull pantomime' is one that has been proved wrong by most productions of the play I have seen on the Tokyo stage, I think he was right at least about *King Lear*: 'It is then the best of all Shakespeare's plays, for it is the one in which he was the most in earnest.'

The play has a bearish, overwhelming quality that is hard to snap out of. It makes you want to talk but you feel imprisoned by your words: as Lear says, like 'a poor, bare, forked animal'. This quality of earnestness would seem to make it particularly suited to Noh drama, the art of perfection above all theatrical others, as the scope of Lear's tragedy combines with the rigour of Noh to provoke a response that may just as well be ratiude for the gift of life as one of sadness.

I saw Ueda Kuniyoshi's Lear adaptation at the Cerulean Tower Noh theatre in Shibuya last May, and have to admit I prefer the intimacy of the traditional setting to the proscenium arch of the Kioi Hall in Yotsuya, where the adaptation was staged this April. In particular, the Noh *hashigakari* is effective at expressing a central metaphor of the play of life as a journey or transition. As Edgar puts it, "Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither. / Ripeness is all."

In other respects, however, the adaptation was unchanged from last year, and still achieved the refined aesthetic effect at which this style of cultural fusion excels. The adaptation was divided according to the conventional tripartite structure of Noh drama, or *jo-ha-kyu*. A lengthy prelude (*jo*) covered Cordelia's return from exile in France and reconciliation with her father at the end of Act 4. A soldier appears bringing orders for the couple's imprisonment, leading into the shorter, more complex (*ha*) section which included some of Lear's greatest lines: 'Ripeness is all', 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods'. In fact, most of the lines (with the exception of 'Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!') were taken from the last two acts. Finally, the Fool appears to tell the story of King Lear, concluding with a song which is worth quoting in length as it so clearly expresses the point of this production:

There are three worlds:
The world of words, the world of behaviours,
And the world of mind and heart;

The three are all important,
But, until they accord with one another,
Lear will not be saved.

I suppose it is this holistic interpretation that made this adaptation a truly transcultural one.

Lear (played by Endo Yoshihisa) really was Lear with his great white mane and oldman's *okina* mask, but fitting that he should play the second as the *tsure* (companion) to Adachi Reiko in the main *shite* role as Cordelia. Born in 1925, Adachi is the oldest female Noh performer in Japan, although you would not have guessed so seeing her face hidden behind her mask. One line missing from Ueda's adaptation was that early sign of Lear's madness in Act 2, Scene 4, reeling at his daughters' ingratitude:

O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
 Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow,
 Thy element's below!

Some critics argue that these lines signify not only Lear's misogyny but also the suppression of the female nature within him; it is this failure to recognise his innate gentleness that leads to the tragedy. If that is so, then in this adaptation Lear finds in Cordelia not only a daughter but a mother. For foreigners also, the sounds and appearance of the Noh adaptation may well offer something that they can't receive from Shakespeare productions in their native language. This was a production that took me quite by surprise but then as Hazlitt's contemporary Charles Lamb said (also quoted in Prof Ueda's programme notes) 'the play is beyond all art'.

Hikaru ENDO: This was the third time for me to see UEDA's *Noh: King Lear*; therefore I had no more expected to be moved. However, the moment Madame ADACHI as Cordelia appeared on the stage from the left, I tensed up completely, and was so moved that I could not bear sobbing or crying silently.

Madame ADACHI produced her words so beautifully and so melodiously, calling to the herbs still unknown to humans: "All blessed secrets, / All you unpublished virtues of the earth, / Spring with my tears!" What a touching, what a moving scene in the very beginning of the play! The later scenes were so pitiful, and so sad, but... Then I felt completely relieved when the ghost of Cordelia appeared, saying "Look up, my lord.

Come this way", and danced together with the ghost of Lear. I wish the play be repeated every year as long as both Madame ADACHI, the eldest female Noh performer of Japan, and Master ENDO be up and doing.

Postscript

In addition to the plays mentioned in this paper, there are other Noh plays of mine in Japanese: *Othello* (1992), *Thomas Becket* (97, based on T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*), *Cleopatra* (2000, *Antony and Cleopatra*),

Hamlet (04), *Double Nora* (05, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*), and *Potomac Cherry* (12).

All of the plays were premiered with Reijiro Tsumura of Kanze school as *shite* (main performer) except *Hamlet*. The latter was co-directed by Hideo Kanze, Manzaburo Umewaka, and Kuniyoshi Munakata, with Yoshiaki Ito of Kanze school as *shite* and Mansaku Nomura as *ai-kyogen* (comic player between scenes).

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