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Yoshiko Kawachi*

Hamlet and Japanese Men of Letters

Abstract: Shakespeare has exerted a powerful influence on Japanese literature since he was accepted in the second half of the nineteenth century. Particularly *Hamlet* has had a strong impact on Japanese men of letters and provided them with the impetus to revive the play in contemporary literature. In this paper I discuss how they have utilized *Hamlet* for their creative activity and enriched Japanese literature.

Keywords: Shakespeare translation and appropriation, Shakespeare's impact on Japanese novelists, Novelization of *Hamlet*, Modernization of Japanese literature

Shakespeare was introduced into Japan during the period of her modernization or Westernization. In 1871 his short biography and Polonius' speech, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be,/For loan oft loses both itself and friend./And borrowing dulleth th'edge of husbandry" (1.3.75-77), were introduced in the translation of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*, a best-seller. Why was the book widely read? In the beginning of the Meiji era, the old, hereditary class divisions were abolished, and leadership came primarily from groups of former samurai. After that, with careers opened to talent, bright but socially handicapped youths tried to seek distinguished positions in society and exercised diligence in studying and working with their motto: "Success in life." *Self-Help* taught them that the essential virtues were endeavor, diligence, thrift and patience.

In 1874 Charles Wirgman, an English correspondent for the *London Illustrated News*, published his inaccurate translation of the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy in the *Japan Punch*. From then onwards *Hamlet* has been translated into Japanese and adapted to the stage repeatedly. In 1875 Robun Kanagaki, a fiction-writer, published a story of *Hamlet* whose title was *Seiyo Kabuki Hamuretto* [A Western Kabuki Hamlet] in a newspaper, and in 1880 he rewrote it using Joruri (ballad drama) style and gave it a new title, *Hamuretto Yamato Nishikie* [Hamlet with Japanese Woodblock Prints]. But it didn't include the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy.

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In 1881 or 1882 Shoichi Toyama, Professor of the Tokyo Imperial University, attempted to translate *Hamlet* into Japanese. His word-for-word translation was entitled *Seiyo Joruri: Reigen Oji no Adauchi* [*Western Joruri: Revenge of an All-powerful Prince*], but it was not completed. In 1882 Toyama, Ryokichi Yatabe and Tetsujoiro Inoue published their translations of the “To be, or not to be” soliloquy in *Shintaishi-sho*, Japan’s first anthology of new style poems. Toyama rendered it into “Which is better, to die or to live?”, whereas Yatabe provided it with a loose translation, “Should I live long, or not?” It is worth noting that their translations profoundly influenced the younger poets and stimulated their appetite for writing. For instance, Tokoku Kitamura, a romantic poet, wrote a dramatic poem, *Horai Kyoku* [*An Air from the Isle of Eternal Youth*], and Toson Shimazaki, not only a romantic poet but also a pioneer of Japanese naturalist, wrote *Hikyoku: Biwahoshi* [*A Doleful Air: A Strolling Lutist*]. These men of letters were attracted by the troubled heart of Hamlet and sympathized with his philosophical dilemma.

Shoyo Tsubouchi (1859-1935) is the first translator of Shakespeare’s complete works. When young, he attended the lecture given by Professor William Houghton at the Tokyo Imperial University and got a poor mark in the final examination, because he wrote an analytic characterization of Queen Gertrude from his viewpoint based on moral justice found in Kabuki and Joruri. But this failure gave him a chance to consider the essential differences between European and Japanese literature. He started writing *Shosetsu Shinzui* [*The Essence of the Novel*] to advance a new theory about novels and published it in 1885. This was the first literary criticism in Japan, in which he tried to enhance the value of the Japanese novel as a work of art. While studying the English novel, he wished to reform the Japanese novel which had been rejected with contempt by Confucians before the Meiji era. His critical essay led to the modernization of Japanese literature. Therefore, he is now called “the father of modern literature.”

Tsubouchi translated *Julius Caesar* into Japanese in 1884 and gave it a title, *Shizaru Kidan: Jiyu no Tachi Nagori no Kireaji* [*Caesar’s Strange Tale: Residual Sharpness of the Sword of Freedom*]. He became a teacher of Tokyo Professional School, the predecessor of the present Waseda University, where he founded a literary department in which Shakespeare became a main curriculum subject. His translation of *Hamlet* appeared in 1907, and it was staged by the Bungei Kyokai (The Association of Literature and Arts) founded by him. In this production, the “To be, or not to be” soliloquy was not omitted. In May 1911 he revised it for the performance by the Bungei Kyokai at the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo. This was the first faithful production of *Hamlet* in Japan.

The years from 1903 to 1911 witnessed a *Hamlet* boom. In 1903 Otojiro Kawakami, who had returned from Europe, performed an adaptation of *Hamlet* by Kayo Yamagishi and Shunsho Doi. Although the story was changed to that of

a contemporary nobleman's struggle, this was the first performance of *Hamlet* under its original title in Japan. But he omitted the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy in his stage presentation, possibly because the actors were unskilled at elocution (Kawatake, 239).

In 1903 an unforgettable event occurred. On May 22, Misao Fujimura, a sixteen-year old boy who obtained advanced education, threw himself in the Kegon Fall at Nikko. On a tree trunk, he carved his will, in which he wrote: "Horatio's philosophy is entirely worthless. I can't understand universe at all. So I decided to commit suicide." His melancholy and dilemma must have been influenced by *Hamlet*. His philosophical suicide gave a great shock to the youths. Considering literature was harmful for them because it would make them feel despair and pessimism, raise skepticism and attempt suicide, the government prohibited them from reading novels.

Fujimura was a student of Soseki Natsume (1867-1916) at a high school for the elite. Later he mentioned Fujimura's suicide in his novels, *Wagahai wa Neko de Aru [I Am a Cat]* (1905) and *Kusamakura [The Travel Sketch]* (1906). Moreover, he wrote about a suicide in his psychological novel, *Kokoro [The Mind]* (1914). He must have regretted that he could do nothing for his student.

Natsume learnt Shakespeare from Professor J.M. Dixon in the Tokyo Imperial University. In 1900 he went to study abroad at the government expense. Professor William James Craig taught him English poems in London. Returning home, he succeeded to Lafcadio Hearn's post, and gave a lecture on *King Lear*, referring to Craig's edition of *The Arden Shakespeare*. In addition, he wrote a short essay, "Professor Craig," a masterpiece in portraiture.

Although Natsume obtained a reputation for correct interpretations and independent criticisms, he never translated Shakespeare's plays into Japanese. Looking at the performance of *Hamlet* translated by Tsubouchi, he thought there was a great disparity between Shakespeare and the Japanese and that the words used for translation were not necessarily appealing to the audience psychologically ("Tsubouchi Hakase to *Hamuretto*," 286-91). Natsume, who had a gift for clever criticism on Shakespeare, used his technique in his own creative works. He was a rugged individualist and a pro-European. Besides, he wished literature in his country to be as flourishing as that in Elizabethan England ("Sengo Bunkai no Susei," 453-60).

There were several Japanese men of letters who undertook the challenge of novelizing *Hamlet*. Probably they had to direct their efforts to fill in the cultural and social gaps between Elizabethan England and the present-day Japan. Why and how did they novelize this great tragedy?

Naoya Shiga (1883-1971) was a leading novelist of the Shirakaba group. This group was against naturalism which had been the main current in modern literature of Japan under the influence of Zolaism, and it claimed to stand for idealism and humanitarian principles. Seeing the performance of *Hamlet*

translated by Tsubouchi, Shiga disliked Hamlet's flippancy, and rather liked Claudius' personality. Moreover, he couldn't find evidence of Claudius' murder of his brother except in the ghost's speech. These provided his starting point for writing *Kurodiasu no Nikki* [*Claudius' Diary*] in 1912.

In a word, this is a kind of psychological novel. The author uses a form of diary to describe the inner life of Claudius caught in a dilemma between his love for Gertrude and his distrust of Hamlet. He has loved Gertrude, a good and weak woman, for three years, but he is ashamed of his marriage to her immediately after the death of his brother. He wishes to be a good husband to her and good father to Hamlet. He hopes Hamlet understands his passion, but Hamlet doesn't. Therefore, he begins to hate Hamlet.

To tell the truth, Claudius never poisoned his brother. Suffering from Hamlet's misunderstanding, he writes in his diary, "When did I poison your father? Who saw it? [...]. Did you hear it, know it, or imagine it? You are the shallowest dramatist in the world. You and other people will make me mad!" (*Kurodiasu no Nikki*, 13).¹

Several years later Shiga saw a film in which Johnston Forbes-Robertson played the leading role, and he started writing *Hamuretto no Nikki* [*Hamlet's Diary*]. This time he felt pity for Hamlet as a young man with a troubled heart. Although he couldn't complete the work, his rough draft shows clearly his own design. In this diary Hamlet wonders if he is Claudius' son, but he hates both Claudius and Gertrude. Moreover, he does not believe Ophelia who has the same womanhood as Gertrude. The story is short, but we know that Shiga intended to describe the characters from his humanistic viewpoint.

Hideo Kobayashi (1902-1983), a literary critic and novelist, was an ardent admirer of Shiga. In 1931 he wrote *Oferia Ibun* [*Ophelia's Literary Remains*], a beautiful but sad letter from Ophelia to Hamlet. He described poetically the inner life of Ophelia. In her letter she writes:

[...]. If I stopped writing, I couldn't even die [...]. You said to me, "Go to the nunnery," but it's you that should die [...]. And, how futile this world is! [...]. I was dreaming [...]. This world is nothing but a dream [...]. To be, or not to be, that is the question [...]. Ah, I remember your splendid words. You must solve the question. It doesn't matter to me if you solve it [...]. Life is full of complexities, but it ends so simply [...]. Now I feel lonely. (*Oferia Ibun*, 364-69)

Just before writing this work, Kobayashi published *X eno Tegami* [*A Letter to X*] in which he confessed his own love affair with a mad woman. Probably his sympathetic attitude toward Ophelia reflects his sad experience. Like Shiga, he

¹ Citations from Japanese men of letters were translated into English by Yoshiko Kawachi.

was a moralist rather than an artist. In his essay, "Hamuretto ni tsuite" [On Hamlet], he anatomized Hamlet's dual personality and wrote: "Hamlet is not only a pessimist but also an opportunist. He is skeptic and single-minded. He is a brave avenger and clever coward" (25).

The Meiji era ended in 1911, and the Taisho era started. Governments in the late 1920s and the early 1930s acted strenuously in defense of the national entity and private property. Many people were arrested for suspected violations of a peace reservation law. Ideological and political extremism must have been partly a by-product of "Taisho democracy" whose manifestations were the institution of the party cabinets and the introduction of the manhood suffrage. In addition, industrialism was increasing, and accordingly the population rapidly concentrated in urban areas and the number of the white-collar workers jumped appreciably. The urban intellectuals enjoyed a middle-class life while absorbing foreign culture.

In 1929 the Taisho era ended and the Showa era began. In the early 1920s, Japan built a democratic society, but the ghost of militarism was starting to walk. The Manchurian Incident occurred in 1931, and the war spread the Chinese mainland in 1937. Almost all the people believed Japan would be a victorious nation, but there were those who denounced war. During World War II which lasted from 1939 to 1945, Japanese novelists were under the control of the military authorities and couldn't write freely. But Osamu Dazai (1909-1948) continued his creative activities.

Even now Dazai is one of the most popular novelists among the younger generation. His family represented the intellectual elite in the northern district, but he had an inferiority complex and felt that he was a complete outsider at home. He became decadent and nihilistic, and entered the political movement organized by Marxists. After he attempted a double suicide, he was sunk hopelessly in self-hatred, and finally he was sent to mental hospital. Prior to drowning himself with his sweetheart, he published *Human Lost* (org.) which furnished a basis for his autobiographical novel, *Ningen Shikkaku* [*A Man Disqualified*] (1948).

After completing *Human Lost*, he stopped writing avant-garde novels and began to utilize the themes in European classics for his works. In 1941 he wrote his first long novel, *Shin Hamuretto* [*New Hamlet*], in the form of a *Lesedrama*. In his letter to Masuji Ibuse, a novelist, he explained his motives to novelize *Hamlet*: "I want to write about my past life and my wounded feelings. This may be an 'I' novel, but it has a dramatic form. I intend to write a novel in a new style" (Takeo Okuno's "Commentary," *Shin Hamuretto*, 306).

In *Shin Hamuretto*, Dazai described without restraint both his psychology and his contemporaries' state of mind. This novel bears several similarities to *Ningen Shikkaku*. Hamlet is a nihilistic playboy, unreliable son, and jester. He says to himself, "I am a fool! Why should I live? [...]. All men are pitiful. [...]. I never have contempt, hatred, anger and jealousy [...]. Pity is my

only emotion. I've lived with this emotion for twenty-three years [...]. I think people are pitiful, but I can do nothing. My words and actions do not agree. I am a sluggard. I am a fool" (*Shin Hamuretto*, 244-47). This monologue reminds us of the words spoken by the hero in *Ningen Shikkaku*. It deserves special attention that Dazai played a fool and questioned about life like Hamlet.

In his preface to *Shin Hamuretto*, Dazai wrote:

My intention is neither to append notes nor to give a new interpretation to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. I only play with writing. Borrowing the characters and the situations from the play, I will depict an unhappy home. This novel has no academic or political meaning [...]. This is nothing but a psychological experiment [...]. This is a story of a young man living in the past. I will describe what happened to a family (strictly speaking, two families) in three days. Please read my novel again in your spare time and compare it with the original. (146-47)

In his novel, Hamlet is skilful at fencing, riding and composing poetry, but he is not an enthusiast. Laertes dislikes Hamlet because he is a nihilist and libertine. Gertrude is old enough to wear a full set of false teeth, and Hamlet thinks her remarriage is ridiculous. Claudius looks on Hamlet's whims as youthful follies and wants to be friendly with him. But he does not expect much of Hamlet.

Dazai wrote a few things that Shakespeare didn't write. First, Hamlet gets Ophelia pregnant, and she makes up her mind to bear and bring up his child alone. Second, Polonius maligns Claudius with the rumor that he killed his brother, but Claudius admits that it is because of his want of natural virtue that such a rumor spreads through the whole country. Third, Polonius plans a drama in which he, Horatio and Hamlet play the roles of bride, bridegroom, and ghost.

Gertrude is shocked to see the play, but Claudius is not. Polonius explains that he performed it to seek justice because he saw Claudius' murder of his brother. Hearing this, Gertrude drowns herself in the river. Claudius doubts that Polonius loves her, and kills him. He says to Hamlet, "Gertrude is too weak. I am not wrong. Look at me! I am living patiently in such a corrupt world. I'll never die! God will love a lonely man like me. I must be stronger. I have to forget love and vanity and fight for the honor of Denmark. I am crying more bitterly at heart than you." But Hamlet says, "I cannot believe you. I doubt you until I die" (293-94). The story ends with these words.

Neither Claudius nor Hamlet dies in the novel, but we feel a kind of terror. Because Claudius appears to be a good man but he actually murders his brother. Besides, he has an illicit love affair, and starts a war to camouflage his predicament. He says to Hamlet, "War broke out. Laertes' ship was attacked by Norwegian warships, and he was killed in action. We must win. Please work as a commander." But Hamlet answered in a blunt way, "No, I will be a weak soldier" (291).

Claudius is not a conventional villain as seen in the Elizabethan drama but a modern villain. Dazai disliked a hypocrite and a snob. Moreover, he was deeply conscious of Japanese militarists while writing this novel. He wrote: "It is such a man like Claudius that has tormented us until now" (398). We must pay attention to the fact that Japanese militarists made a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor several months after he finished writing this novel.

Dazai had an experience to be locked up in a jail when he participated in illegal movement from 1930 to 1932. I think not only his doubt and conflict which he experienced in his life but also his obsessive fear of war is expressed in characters' speeches. For instance, Gertrude complains that war is meaningless (229). In addition, Hamlet says to Horatio, "I don't know which is better, patience or escape, combat or compromise, and deception or conciliation. 'To be, or not to be.' This is the question that I cannot resolve" (223). I consider their words convey a kind of internal conflict which Dazai felt, and that their fear of war and anxiety for the future reflect his own. *Shin Hamuretto* is a kind of an antiwar novel. As an anti-establishment writer, Dazai spoke for his contemporaries who had an unspoken fear of war.

When the war ended in Japan's defeat in 1945, many novelists returned to their writing. They wrote for the public who were hungry for literature as they were for food. Tsuneari Fukuda (1912-1994), a critic, dramatist and translator of Shakespearean drama, performed his translation of *Hamlet* in 1955. Prior to this stage production which marked the beginning of an epoch in the history of postwar Japanese theatre, he wrote *Horeisho Nikki* [*The Horatio Diary*] in 1949.

The hero in the novel is David Jones, a famous English director and actor of the Old Vic Company. Directing *Hamlet*, David plays the role of Horatio. He is a man of common sense and of noble character like Horatio, but he is attracted by the charm of Isabel, a beautiful but wanton actress who plays the part of Ophelia. Moreover, Albert, an actor portraying Hamlet, loves Isabel. Therefore, David, Isabel and Albert consider their love problems while playing their respective roles on the stage. Fukuda imagined that Ophelia went mad because she loved both Hamlet and Horatio.

This is a love story and not a war novel. But the setting of the novel is laid in London during World War II. David tells Albert about the madness of war:

We do nothing. We cannot do anything [...]. Now everybody loses confidence in these unusual circumstances. But I believe in the human intelligence which has been cultivated through a long history and rewarded with good results. Twenty years had barely passed since the last war (i.e. World War I) before we became involved in the present war. However, we need not scorn our foolishness nor lose all hope for our humanity. (*Horatio Nikki*, 51-53)

This must have been an opinion given by a Japanese intellectual who was in the dilemma of action and inaction in wartime. Probably Fukuda intended to express how much men of common sense looked for their own *raison d'être* while suffering from the madness of war.

Shohei Ooka (1909-1998), Fukuda's friend, wrote *Hamuretto Nikki* [*The Hamlet Diary*] in 1955. Under the influence of Kobayashi, he majored in French literature at the Kyoto Imperial University. During World War II he was sent to Mindoro Island as a cryptographer. He was captured and taken prisoner, but he could return home after Japan was defeated.

In 1948 he published *Furyo-ki* [*A Record by a War Prisoner*] in which he tackled the problems of life and death straight on. In 1952 he wrote a war novel, *Nobi* [*A Field Fire*], in the form of a memorandum by a mad soldier of the defeated army wandering through Leyte in the Philippine Islands. This fiction including true stories describes trauma of a returned soldier. It is definitely a masterpiece in which Ooka delved into the problems of war and sins.

Why did Ooka decide to novelize *Hamlet*? In 1953 he went to the United States to study at Yale University. At New Haven, he saw at least ten times the film of *Hamlet* in which Laurence Olivier headed the cast. After coming back home, he wrote *Hamuretto Nikki* under the idea that *Hamlet* was not a domestic tragedy but a political drama. In his essay, "Sakusha no Kotoba" [An Author's Statement], he wrote, "My plan is to describe Hamlet as a fascist suffering a bitter defeat" (522).

Ooka's real purpose was to politicize Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In his novel, Hamlet is a Machiavellian prince claiming his throne. He considers it his duty to take revenge for his father's murder. He makes the soldiers believe the appearance of a ghost, for he wishes to gain the enthusiastic support of the soldiers missing his dead father. Horatio, an Italian, seems to be a Machiavellian, too. He becomes a conversational partner of Hamlet after the fall of Florence. Hamlet seeks advice from him, because he is quite familiar with political changes in Florence. Besides, Gertrude is politically motivated when she agrees to marry Claudius on the condition that Hamlet be made the princely heir for Denmark in future. Believing there are royal powers in the womb, the noblemen express their approval for her marriage. At first Hamlet consents to it because he thinks it's the best way for both her and his safety. But he becomes disappointed at her lust and obscenity and therefore he decides to take his revenge on Claudius and Gertrude.

Fortinbras is a keen politician. Afraid of his betrayal, Claudius makes military presentations to fight him. Claudius orders Polonius to collect blacksmiths to build guns, and sends Laertes to France to buy rifles. Ooka attached greater importance to the passage of Fortinbras' army through Denmark to Poland than Shakespeare. He said in his afterword, "I wanted to lay special emphasis on the US Army Forces occupying Japan after World War II"

(*Hamuretto Nikki*, 175). In addition, he was deeply conscious of the Korean War dragging from 1950 to 1953. It is worthy of note that he provided a detailed description of armaments and war in this novel.

Polonius is not a nobleman but a wealthy squire supported by the bourgeoisie. He thinks Ophelia's marriage with Hamlet will bring honor to his family. When Hamlet pretends to be insane, however, Polonius spreads a rumor that he is a madman.

Hamlet is self-possessed enough to regard a ghost as an illusion. When the ghost appears on a vessel bound for England and says, "I am Polonius killed by you. I am in the Purgatory with your father. He and I are one in body and mind," Hamlet says, "Please calm yourself. Sooner or later I will be like you by heavenly dispensation. I will hold myself responsible for my sin" (*Hamuretto Nikki*, 119). Writing these words, Ooka must have asked the forgiveness of the war dead in the Philippine Islands. Psychological trauma which he suffered on the home front is reflected on this ghost scene.

Ooka sometimes utilized his experience at the front for his novel. For instance, Hamlet's lines spoken at the funeral of Ophelia, "A soldier prefers to kill himself instead of becoming a captive" (147), must have reminded Ooka of strict orders given to the Japanese soldiers during World War II. Moreover, a grave-digger's gloomy song, "King becomes a clown, when he loses a crown. We are indeed living in a degenerative age" (145), reflects a general feeling of unrest spread among the public in postwar Japan.

At his death, Hamlet says to Horatio, "I wrote the truth in my diary," and hands it to him. Horatio sends it to his friend in Paris with a letter saying, "This is the diary of my former master who died tragically [...]. It's dangerous for me to keep it because Fortinbras forbids us to tell the truth [...]. I'm now an instructor at Wittenberg University. I don't want to be a prince's adviser and companion again [...]. I know from Hamlet's life of the danger that befalls a man in the position of princely heir. He became truly insane while feigning madness [...]. How many people died! Their death was meaningless." (162-67). While writing this letter, he remembers that Hamlet said, "Not Hamlet but his madness did all!" (149).

According to Horatio, Hamlet was a doer rather than a thinker, and his odd behavior caused many deaths. Horatio talks to himself, "I am a Florentine. God damn it! I lay a curse on Hamlet. This is my conclusion" (167). After Hamlet's death, Fortinbras becomes the ruler of Denmark. But peace cannot be established, because he contrives to invade Poland and Russia with the guns collected by Claudius.

In this manner, Ooka wrote more clearly and extensively on Fortinbras than Shakespeare. He depicted Fortinbras as an imperialist, Polonius as a realist, Laertes as a democrat, and Hamlet as a tragic hero who feels a kind of internal conflict. Hamlet has faith in neither himself nor others. He is skeptical about the

Purgatory, but he says, “I wish I could go to the place where I could see my father and Ophelia, even if it were the Purgatory” (171). Probably he wishes to be freed from his unrestful life. But Ooka ended the story by remarking, “Hamlet’s dying words, ‘The rest is silence,’ became empty of all meaning, and his desire was not realized” (172).

Hamuretto Nikki was written by a highbrow novelist grasping the whole truth of war. I consider Ooka wanted to convey his message from the war generation who had a hard time. In his novel Hamlet makes an effort to cope with political and social chaos, but he cannot respond to the change of the times and becomes a victim of circumstances. His melancholy and ungovernable rage may be the same as Ooka’s. In his essay, “Sakusha no Kotoba,” he said, “I rewrote Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, for I felt acutely conscious of a chaotic situation in postwar Japan” (522).

After World War II, American occupation of Japan continued until 1952. It wrought amazing changes in Japanese society and culture. For instance, economics and education were democratized; women who got suffrage in 1945 were emancipated from discriminative treatment. As a result, nowadays the Japanese appear to enjoy a peaceful life. But I doubt whether all of them are entirely satisfied with the present situation. There are those who cannot relieve from their ennui. And what is even worse, there are those who are feeling a lasting displeasure or a baseless fear in everyday life.

Akio Miyazawa (1956-), an avant-garde director, who was interested in the absurd drama, tried to express an inexplicable disgust that attacks ordinary people of today. He staged *Tokyo/Fuzai/Hamlet*, and in 2005 he made it into a mysterious novel titled *Fuzai [Nowhere Man]*.

The events in this novel are shown in a flashback, and the story begins with Tokiko Matsuda’s suicide. She is Akihito Mure’s sweetheart. In rural districts where the descendants of secret Christians in the Tokugawa Period live, acts of violence, incest and suicides occur, and murders are committed. A young man who seems to be involved in the affairs is missing. Considering this person is Mure, young people go to Tokyo to look for him. But they cannot find him. He never appears after all, as if he were Godot in Samuel Beckett’s play.

The characters in the novel are country folk, and they speak their rustic dialects. They feel the lure of Tokyo, and desire strongly to escape from their town. In addition, they are full of fears and under stress, because there is a rumor that a ghost clad in samurai armor appears on the riverbank. As a result, violence happens, and incest occurs. For instance, an ordinary housewife has a sexual relationship with her brother-in-law; Tokiko commits incest with her elder brother; their mother elopes with a man.

Hamlet is nowhere to be seen in Miyazawa’s *Hamlet*. Miyazawa gave an analysis of the internal cause of the characters’ gloomy doubt, and clearly

revealed the state of their mind. Thus he lucidly described a modern dehumanized society in the form of a connected narrative.

As mentioned above, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a great tragedy which is full of mysteries and ambiguities, has given inspiration to Japanese novelists and aroused their appetite for writing. Indeed each work is a reflection of *Hamlet* mirrored through the Japanese language and culture. Novelists gave their own interpretations to the play and incorporated them into their own works. Having read their "Hamlets," I noticed that they shared common characteristics.

First, they attempted to write what Shakespeare didn't write in his drama. For instance, they tried to unveil the mysterious personality of Hamlet by focusing on Claudius, Ophelia, Horatio and Fortinbras, while building their characters from their unique imagination.

Second, they sought to fill in the gaps between drama and novel. Shiga, Fukuda and Ooka adopted the diary form to write their novels, because it was convenient for them to express the hero's inner monologue, or the delicate shades of his psychology. In Japan there is an old tradition of court diaries including *Kagero Nikki*, *Sarashina Nikki* and *Murasakishikibu Nikki* written by women from the tenth century to the eleventh century. The "Nikki" is not so much a day-by-day narrative of their whole life as a description of their memorable experiences, and it has a strong personal and confessional tone. Employing the form of the "Nikki," each novelist depicted graphically the psychology of Claudius, Horatio and Hamlet. Moreover, Shiga and Dazai used the technique of "I" novel, which was imported from Europe in the Meiji Era, in order to describe vividly the characters' state of mind and feelings.

I have discussed the novels based on *Hamlet*, which were written before, during, and after World War II. I consider Japanese men of letters discovered modern agony in Hamlet's affliction and that they tried to express it in their works. Especially the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy provided them with a literary stimulus. This well-known phrase is a typical example to show the problem of the cultural gaps that cannot be bridged by language, because there is no proper term for "to be" in Japanese. Therefore, the interpretation of "to be" has been problematical to literary men. Many translators rendered "To be, or not to be" into "To live, or not to live" or "To exist, or not to exist" or "Life or death." But the recent changes in the Japanese phraseology and the development of Shakespearean criticism have given variety to the translation of this passage. For instance, some translators put "To be, or not to be" into "To do, or not to do" or "To act, or not to act." In this manner, there are several kinds of translations in which every translator exerts his ingenuity, but they do not always convey in a single word the broad meaning of Hamlet's philosophical dilemma.

Yushi Odashima, who translated the complete works of Shakespeare in a colloquial style in the 1970s, rendered "To be, or not to be" into "To maintain the *status quo*, or to change the *status quo*." The *status quo* means "the state of

things as they are, or existing state of affairs.” I consider his translation reflects the mentality of the postwar generation who didn’t undergo appalling experiences during World War II. For the war generation, “Life or death” was the most real and serious problem. They must have been more profoundly conscious of this Entweder-Öder question than the postwar generation. I am of the opinion that Odashima’s translation appeals strongly to the present-day Japanese people leading a luxurious life on the one hand, but on the other hand, experiencing the groundless and vague fear under the environmental and occupational stress. Thus Japanese translation of Hamlet’s soliloquy includes the possibility of pursuing change in people’s spiritual life.

Now I cannot but sense Shakespeare’s enormous influence over the mind of the Japanese. Especially the intellectuals attracted by Hamlet’s introspection have considered how they should live, and found in the play issues that they could adapt to their own needs and purposes. It is not too much to say that Shakespeare who conveyed ideas through writing has developed the mentality of the Japanese people.

In this manner, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* exerted a deep influence on the development of Japanese literature. I consider the process of its growing popularity is roughly parallel to the modernization of Japanese literature as well as that of Japanese theatre. While novelizing *Hamlet*, Japanese men of letters depicted their own feelings and expressed themselves without restraint. In a word, they utilized this tragedy to arouse their imagination and show their creative power. It is worth noting that Shakespeare enriched their literary accomplishments and played an important part in their efforts to modernize Japanese literature. Without doubt Shakespeare is not only a universal dramatist but also a cultural icon to the Japanese.

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