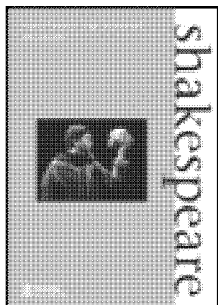


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Report on Shakespeare and Japan: A One-Day Conference

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SPECIAL ISSUE: SHAKESPEARE AND JAPAN
Report on *Shakespeare and Japan: A One-Day Conference*

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On Tuesday 26 February 2013, The Centre for Adaptations and The Centre for Textual Studies hosted *Shakespeare and Japan: A One-Day Conference* at De Montfort University, Leicester. The opening address was given in Trinity House Chapel by Professor Dominic Shellard (Vice-Chancellor, De Montfort University), who discussed his visit to Tokyo during the Cultural Olympiad when De Montfort worked with the British Library and the British Embassy to take a Shakespeare First Folio to Japan. Professor Shellard then introduced David Warren (former British Ambassador to Japan and Visiting Professor at De Montfort University), who proposed that there is no better way to actively promote the UK in Japan than through the “theatrical touchstone” of Shakespeare and his plays, which not only have a resonance today, but form part of the continuing fruitful relationship between the British and the Japanese. After a short break, Professor Mark Thornton Burnett (Queen’s University Belfast) delivered the opening keynote lecture, offering a rereading of Akira Kurosawa’s *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), a Japanese adaptation of *Hamlet*, paying specific attention to the context, content and genre of the film. Disavowing its initial reception as a political critique, Burnett highlighted a complex web of intertextuality, in which previous screen *Hamlets* are alluded to, including the British adaptation directed by and starring Laurence Olivier (1948).

After lunch, Professor Gabriel Egan (De Montfort University) chaired the first session, entitled “Shakespeare in Japan | Japan in Shakespeare”. Elaine Ng Hui Ru (Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham) examined *Kuninusubito* (2007), an appropriation of *Richard III*, in which Asian practitioners “adopt and adapt their own theatre traditions to (re)present their ‘culture’ on stage” through an intermingling of Japanese theatre traditions and pop culture references. A different perspective on contemporizing Shakespeare was offered by Kaoru Edo (Tokyo Shakespeare Company) and Tetsuhito Motoyama (Waseda University Tokyo), who stated that the play, *The Three Daughters of Lear* (1995) shows no intention of creating a “Japanese Shakespeare” through contemporary allusions; instead, it engages with *King Lear* directly without attempting to amalgamate cultures. They suggested that Shakespeare “no longer demands a cultural buffer for the audience to appreciate the issues explored in the plays”, using a quotation from Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871) to exemplify this: “what could be seen from the old room was quite common” (94). Mike Ingham

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(University of Hong Kong) and Kaoru Nakao (Osaka University) highlighted the “natural reciprocity” between classical Noh theatre and Shakespeare, despite asserting that Kabuki, Kyōgen, Seigeki and Shingeki are “the theatre forms on which Shakespeare’s reputation in Japan rests.” However, after giving a rousing monologue in Japanese, Jonah Salz (Ryukoku University) made a case for Kyōgen (single episode, improvised chanted and spoken pieces). He argued that, as the comic partner to Noh for 600 years, Kyōgen is “an effective device for interpreting Shakespeare’s inter-act comical situations, tension-breaking monologues and slap-stick scenes”.

Session two, “Shakespeare in Japanese Culture”, was chaired by Takako Kato (De Montfort University). Daniel Gallimore (Kwansei Gakuin University) led a sea-change in proceedings, observing a parallel between the period in which Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935) produced his Shakespeare translations and Japan’s transition from a “vulnerable naval nonentity to a major trading power”. To demonstrate this, Gallimore presented materials detailing Tsubouchi’s view of his translations as sea voyages and his engagement with the maritime imagery and settings of Shakespeare’s plays. Hiro Fujisawa (Kinki University) underlined a significant difference between English and Japanese *Othellos* with regard to their representations of suicide, illustrating that Japanese directors and translators, from the Meiji period to the present, have not hesitated in showing Othello stabbing his throat, unlike English performances which typically involve a stab to the stomach. One of the reasons for this, according to Fujisawa, is the belief in Japan of “death as something beautiful”. Through the lens of *As You Like It* (2006), Bruno de Almeida dos Santos (Federal University of Bahia) emphasized that individual interpretation based on cultural, psychological, historical, and political contexts, determine treatments of adaptations, while K. Hilberdink-Sakamoto (Nihon University) discussed the linguistic transpositions that Shakespeare’s plays go through while still retaining their resonance, focalizing the translation from French to Japanese in Takarazuka’s *Romeo and Juliet* (2010). The possible negative effects of individual readings of the plays intertwined with the buzzword of the day, “intercultural”, when they were explored by Ryuta Minami (Shirayuri College Tokyo), who claimed that Shakespeare has been “fragmented, misquoted and abused” in Japanese advertisements through slogans such as, “To buy or not to buy?”

The event closed with a keynote lecture by Professor Alexander Huang (George Washington University), who analysed the trajectory of Asian-themed Shakespeares in the United Kingdom from 1955 to the present day (with particular emphasis on the Edinburgh International Festival 2011 and the World Shakespeare Festival 2012). Professor Huang argued that border-crossing productions by both British and foreign companies reinforce Shakespeare as a “world heritage site”, complicating “the notion of globalization as necessarily just Anglophone Westernization”. An appropriate conclusion to events, this speech provided ample discussion on Shakespeare in the “post-national” age. Ending with a drinks reception, *Shakespeare and Japan* offered contrasting views on intercultural Shakespeares across a variety of mediums, periods, and cultures. The vast array of papers proved that discrepancies between Japanese and British Shakespeares are not solely borne out of cultural differences; rather, contrasting interpretations are evident in both countries, in which Shakespeare continues to thrive.

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