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Paragons of Loyalty on the Japanese Stage

J. Thomas Rimer

The nō is at once a simple and complex art. The narratives are usually terse and straightforward, but the language in which they are conveyed is elaborate and filled with a wide variety of literary and cultural allusions. The performances themselves follow codified, set rules easily understood by performer and audience alike, but are complex in execution. The two plays under consideration here, both in the category of “real world plays” in the nō repertory, are “realistic” in relation to the religious and ghost plays in the nō tradition but are highly abstract when compared to works of the modern drama (*shingeki*) in Japan.

Western scholars and adepts of the nō are not surprisingly most often caught up in the details of the forms of performance and technique, a facet of the nō which is, of course, a source of inexhaustible fascination. But there is another element involved in the art of nō, and one that deserves more attention than it is sometimes given: the need to examine with care the themes of the plays themselves, and, by extension, of the deeper cultural significance of those themes. There are many crucial aspects of Japanese culture reflected in the types of incidents or stories used in constructing classical nō texts; these often signify social and spiritual values that were, and often remain now, important in Japanese society, even though these values are not necessarily directly articulated or commented upon within the play texts themselves.

Sometimes, therefore, it is a useful exercise for us to draw back and observe the way in which a particular value or set of values remain constant in Japanese society. Such a continuity of values can thus provide a recurring element that can underlie a wide variety of dramatic circumstances. These values and attitudes serve as the building blocks that can undergird and sustain individual dramatic narratives. Their existence helps in turn to explain the continuing popularity of certain plays in the repertory.

One of these subjects, both in the theatre and in prints alike, is certainly the concept of loyalty. Of course, every society has its own version of this profound social and personal value. In the case of Japan, these concepts, usually ascribed to early Confucian influences on Japanese society, were certainly long in place by the time of the work of Zeami and other early nō playwrights in the late fourteenth century. The concept of loyalty was thus able to serve throughout the tradition as a theatrical framework onto which to construct a wide variety of dramatic possibilities. Indeed, as I will point out below, the virtue of loyalty as a dramatic subject has still continued on, shifting into new guises, as a valuable source of moral energy in the modern theatre as well, where loyalty is still capable of rousing strong emotional responses in audiences in the twentieth century, and even today.

The importance of loyalty within the larger Japanese social fabric has always been understood and articulated by Japanese intellectuals of every period. It is surely no surprise then that one of the first important Japanese authors who made an attempt to explain Japanese society to Western readers, once the country was opened to the West in 1868, was Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933). In his 1899 book *Bushido: the*

Soul of Japan, which has remained a classic for many generations, he goes to considerable lengths to explain the concept of loyalty as a fundamental building block of Japanese society. In particular, he remarks that “of the causes in comparison with which no life was too dear to sacrifice was the duty of loyalty, which was the key-stone making feudal virtues a symmetrical arch” (Nitobe 74).

Such a conception (if perhaps somewhat colored by the author’s Quaker beliefs and certain other aspects of his Western education) may not have perfectly matched the older descriptions and views; nevertheless, this short book, later translated into Japanese, has long been considered both in Japan and abroad as an important explanation of the “warrior ethic.” Without making the error of reading directly backwards from Nitobe’s account to the cultural suppositions of the periods in which *Ataka* and *Mochizuki* were first composed and performed, the juxtaposition of Nitobe’s generalizations can nevertheless suggest certain resonances with these *nō* performance texts.

Ataka, so well translated, described, and explicated by Kenneth Yasuda, deals with one of the most celebrated examples of loyalty in the Japanese cultural tradition, that of the warrior monk Mushashibō Benkei (1155–1189) towards his master Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–1189), the young general and ill-fated romantic hero, who often appears in *The Tale of the Heike* (Heike monogatari) and is the subject of a number of works in the *nō* and kabuki repertory.¹ In the various theatrical and artistic renderings of his life, there are certain incidents involving both men that appear again and again: Yoshitsune’s success in defeating the Heike, the enemies of his Genji clan, in a series of battles at Ichi no tani, Yashima, and Dan no ura; his relations with the imperial court; and, most tragically, his flight and eventual death in the north of Japan, pursued by the forces allied to his half-brother Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), who decided to turn against him. Perhaps the most celebrated and touching account of this particular event forms an important section in the poetic diary of Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (Oku no hosomichi).

Ataka is concerned with one particular incident in Yoshitsune’s travels as he attempts to avoid his enemies. *Ataka*, incidentally, refers to a spot in present-day Ishikawa Prefecture, near the Sea of Japan, which serves as a border crossing, where the events of the play take place. This incident, by the way, serves not only as a basis for *Ataka* but for the kabuki play *Kanjinchō* (The Subscription List), first performed in 1840, and for one of Kurosawa Akira’s first film successes, his 1945 *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger’s Tail* (Tora no o wo fumu otokotachi).

The dramatic thrust of the play concerns Benkei’s desire to protect his master from harm; his soldiers are therefore disguised as itinerant mountain monks (*yamabushi*). Yoshitsune is disguised as their porter. In the *nō* play, Benkei’s loyalty is expressed in his various ingenious ruses to get through the barrier, including his “reading” of the Subscription List (which does not exist), supposedly being used to collect donations for the rebuilding of the Tōdaiji temple in Nara. But the most startling ruse of all is undertaken when the Border Official’s men become suspicious of the porter, saying that he looks as though he might indeed be Yoshitsune himself. Desperate measures are needed. Benkei takes them:

SHITE (Benkei): (to the KOKATA, Yoshitsune): Well, I’m surprised. To look like Lord Hōgan [Yoshitsune] will be the memory of a lifetime for this stupid fellow! How angry I am! While the sun was still high, I thought we could stretch our legs and get on to Noto. But here you drag along behind us, though you carry such a light pannier. That’s why people suspect you. Lately I’ve become more and more disgusted with you. I must teach you a lesson. I must teach you a lesson. Snatching up the diamond staff, I beat him repeatedly, shouting, “Pass on!” (Yasuda 121–22)

For the servant to beat the master seems an impossible breach of loyalty, yet Benkei undertakes this shocking act as proof of a still higher loyalty and thus saves, for the moment, his master’s life.

¹ See Yasuda (91–132).

Mochizuki, like *Ataka*, concerns figures also seemingly identified as real historical persons, although, from the materials available to me at the moment, I cannot verify the fact. In either case, the suggestion of historical veracity lends weight to the dramatic account.

Here the loyalty that forms the basis for the *nō*'s dramatic tension is that of Kozawa no Gyobu Tomofusa, a retainer, towards his master, Yasuda no Tomoharu. The plot configurations, however, are somewhat different: Benkei defends his living master Yoshitsune; in *Mochizuki*, Yasuda has already been murdered by Mochizuki no Akinaga. What Kozawa now seeks is retribution and revenge. In the end, Kozawa and Yasuda's son manage to kill their enemy.

Allied to the concept of loyalty is that of revenge, the major force that drives the powerful actions in *Mochizuki*. The combination of loyalty and revenge makes for the creation of the kind of strong emotional entanglements that can be found in theatrical traditions around the world in all periods, from Greek tragedy to Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, and beyond.

Relatively little is known about the author of *Mochizuki*, often attributed to Sa'ami, a playwright of the Muromachi period (1392–1568), about whom little is known, but the text seems to echo both the dramatic structures and range of emotions found in a whole series of widely-performed *nō* plays concerning the famous Soga brothers, many written by a playwright named Miyamasu (about whom few biographical details exist), also of the Muromachi period.

In 1193 the two Soga brothers, Jūrō and Gorō, after many strenuous efforts, were able to hunt down and kill Kudō Sukestune, an important retainer and adviser to the Shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo, who, as noted above, had by this time already done away with his own half-brother Yoshitsune (who was being hunted down in *Ataka*). The Soga vendetta came about because Kudō had murdered the father of the two brothers seventeen years before. Yoritomo admired the two for their commitment and bravery, but found it necessary to punish them for undertaking a private vendetta against a public official.²

The inclusion of the performance of a musical recitation about the vendetta of Ichiman and Hakoō toward the end of *Mochizuki* is therefore not only an effective dramatic device, but indicates that, by the time of the composition of this *nō* play, stories of such vendettas as that of the Soga brothers were widespread and much appreciated by their audiences. Another popular *nō* play attributed to Miyamasu, *Hōka-zō* (The Hōka Priests), also follows the plot lines of *Mochizuki* in a number of respects.

The theme of vendetta continued to fascinate the Japanese public in later periods as well. There is perhaps no better example of the intertwining of loyalty and revenge in a work for the stage than the immensely popular puppet play *Chūshingura* (translated by Donald Keene as "The Treasury of Loyal Retainers"), more often seen these days in its familiar adaptation for kabuki actors. Here, Yuranosuke and his followers take revenge on the villainous Moronao, who was responsible for the death of their master Enya Hangan. *Chūshingura* also draws on historical incidents for the outlines of its narrative.

On the surface, it would seem that there is little connection between such traditional dramas of loyalty and the kinds of theatrical works written in Japan in the modern period. I would like to suggest, however, that despite the many changes that have come to Japanese society since the opening of the country in 1868, the venerable theme of loyalty continues to reappear, albeit in new guises, in order to inspire new and powerful theatrical experiences for Japanese audiences. There are paragons of loyalty to be found in the modern Japanese theatre as well.

By way of example, I would like to comment on two well-known and much-admired plays by Kinoshita Junji (1914–2006), considered by many the finest dramatist of postwar Japan. Both of these works remain admired icons in the *shingeki* repertory, the modern spoken drama that takes its heritage from Chekhov and Ibsen. In terms of Kinoshita's strong social concerns, his work has sometimes been compared, both in form and in importance, to that of Arthur Miller for the American stage.

² See Kominz for a comprehensive and thoughtful account of the development of Japanese revenge drama in all periods, with a special focus on the kabuki traditions.

Kinoshita's development as a playwright, echoing his own deep political and social convictions, began with his exposure to Japanese left-wing theatre productions in the 1930s, and in particular with the work of the playwright Kubo Sakae (1900–1958), an important figure in the previous generation, whose epic drama about the difficult lives of the farmers in Hokkaido (the northernmost island of Japan), *Land of Volcanic Ash* (Kazanbaichi), first produced in 1938, led Kinoshita to compose his own first plays of social protest.³

Along with his political convictions, however, Kinoshita also continued to focus on another aspect of his dramaturgy: an abiding concern for making use in the modern theatre of authentic Japanese subject material from all historical periods; more specifically, he sought to find a means to develop a stage language capable of expressing emotions that could be perceived as natural and authentic by his audiences. This desire led him to experiment with dramatizing Japanese folk tales; in particular, his 1950 one-act play, *Twilight Crane* (Yūzuru) was an immediate success and is now a modern classic.⁴

In both categories of Kinoshita's work, the political and the historical, the theme of loyalty often remains paramount. However transformed by the pressures and ideals of modern society, the playwright believed, this deeply imbedded cultural value was still capable of energizing his dramatic structures.

Any number of Kinoshita's plays might be used to illustrate the importance to the author of such loyalty, but two in particular can provide trenchant examples of both types of his continuing concerns.

The first of these, *Requiem on the Great Meridian* (Shigosen no matsuri) is perhaps Kinoshita's most ambitious play, which since its first production in 1979 has been given quite a number of stage revivals, a relatively rare occurrence in the world of *shingeki* (whereas revivals of classic texts are the norm for *nō* and *kabuki*).

Kinoshita attempted to achieve a number of goals with this play. The first of them was to use traditional material and themes—here, a dramatization of several chapters of *The Tale of the Heike*—to be realized on stage as a modern, spoken drama. All the major characters in the *Heike* are highly familiar to Japanese of all ages, through traditional theatre works, literary accounts, and woodblock prints, but they are seldom portrayed on the modern stage.

Allied to this use of such historical characters was Kinoshita's wish to create a spoken stage language which, while creating a believable sense of the earlier historical period, might be flexible and rich enough to allow him to sketch out the inner feelings of his characters. Finally, he wanted to find a means to provide a larger contemporary philosophical commentary on the crucial events he chose to depict.

To help achieve this last aim, Kinoshita makes use both of Readers, who address the audience directly, and a kind of vocal chorus, often called a *sprechtchor*, which occasionally appears on stage in order to comment directly on the actions of the principal performers. This is not an inappropriate strategy, as *The Tale of the Heike* itself began as a kind of medieval performance text, chanted by storytellers who incorporated a wide variety of material into the flow of their individual performances. Until he composed this play, Kinoshita's dramaturgy had largely remained in the realistic mode, but for his present purposes he decided to make use of what might well be seen as his contemporary version of a *nō* chorus. In addition, individual characters in the play also move in and out of the chorus and so perform dual functions, somewhat analogous to the traditional *nō* model, in which the chorus occasionally incorporates lines that could, logically, be spoken by the *shite*.

Requiem on the Great Meridian is particularly appropriate for consideration here, as the play concerns episodes in the longer narrative of Yoshitsune's rise and fall. Indeed, Yoshitsune and Benkei play significant roles in the earlier sections of Kinoshita's play. In *Ataka*, the victorious battles are over, the Heike clan has been defeated, and Yoshitsune is already being hunted down. Here, Kinoshita chooses to dramatize an earlier phase in Yoshitsune's career, capturing him in the full flush of victory after his success at the battle of Ichi no tani. But the playwright's real emphasis in *Requiem* is

³ There is an excellent translation by David Goodman.

⁴ For Brian Powell's translation of the text, see Rimer and Gessel (712–28).

elsewhere, centering on the tragic fate of the Heike warriors who are now embroiled in battle and are well on their way to losing the war between these two competing clans. Yoshitsune himself is not the central figure in Kinoshita's drama. His focus centers on the fate of the Heike.

In *Ataka*, Benkei owes his absolute loyalty to Yoshitune. Kinoshita has chosen a different protagonist, Taira no Tomomori, the fourth son of Taira no Kiyomori, the head of the Heike clan and long the most powerful man behind the Imperial throne.⁵ Tomomori owes his absolute loyalty to his clan and, more specifically, to his brothers, who are also distinguished generals in their own right. In the *nō*, interior doubts and revelations by the characters concerning their own feelings and actions are not always directly articulated, other than by the use of occasional poetic and suggestive language, but here in *Meridian*, Kinoshita seeks out a means to create characters who are capable of directly explaining—and examining—their own motives. In Kinoshita's text, it is clear that Tomomori recognizes that his loyalty is absolute, but it is clear that he has grasped the difficulties of the situation, both in terms of his own future and that of his clan. Tomomori cannot help but attempt to seek some meaning in the hopelessness of his predicament, while remaining fully aware that there may be no solution to be found.

TOMOMORI: ... throughout the day before the Heike left [the capital in defeat], however, Shigehira and I tried to persuade the others that it was all right ...
But in the end, feeling that it was something that was bigger than us, the two of us left the capital aimless and dejected. At that time something slipped silently away from my heart. It's now that I realize that the fate of the Heike must already have been clear to me then. But if it was so clear, then how could I stand by and look on? (Kinoshita 104)

The moral framework behind the narratives of any particular *nō* play is seldom held up to question within the text itself, because these works were conceived within the confines of that framework, one assumed by playwright, actors, and audiences alike. Kinoshita, however, as a modern playwright, finds that he is compelled to draw back from his characters and their immediate situation, in order to observe them from other perspectives. Therefore, he adjusts his vision, observing the actions and emotions of Tomomori and the others from the vast spaces of the universe, an entirely different experience from any found in the traditional Japanese theatre.

Beginning with the lines “the summit of the sky; the heavenly vortex; the single point at which the heavens are pierced beyond infinity by that single line which stretches out from the centre of the earth,” spoken by the Reader, the opening sequence plays a powerful part in establishing a set of flexible boundaries for the moral framework the author sets forth. That flexibility opens up a channel allowing the emotions of the individual characters to be revealed and permitting them to articulate the nature of their own mental states. This long opening speech of the play sets up those floating boundaries. The latter part of that lengthy speech runs as follows:

The celestial meridian, invisibly spanning the sky, traces a great arc in the Void; an arc which the moon now cuts, at an angular velocity each hour of fourteen degrees thirty minutes, a quarter of a million miles into the beyond—as it does so the force of its gravity acts with its greatest power on that earth on which the soles of your feet now rest.

If it could be that the earth on which the soles of your feet now rest were the surface of the sea: amidst the swell, the surrounding waters, as they are pulled towards that point on the earth, soon reach their brim, to spread and stretch out, filled to the full, high tide—amidst this: there, straight, you stand. (Kinoshita 62)

⁵ Tomomori also figures in a number of plays in the *nō* repertory, among them as the *nochi-jite* in both *Funa Benkei* (Benkei in the Boat) and *Ikari kazuki* (The Anchor Draping).

It is within this vast space, empty of religious or political certitudes, that Tomomori (and we who make up Kinoshita's audience) must attempt to maneuver.

Kinoshita has chosen from a number of various references to Tomomori in the lengthy text of *The Tale of the Heike* and made use of these incidents to construct his central narrative. Prior to the beginning of the play, Tomomori's son has been killed at the battle of Ichi no tani; Tomomori himself was able to ride into the sea and so avoid his own death but remains deeply ashamed that he survived his son. Through this incident he has learned just how precious his own life is to him. Such a consciousness puts him at once at variance with any conception of absolute loyalty, and it is just this tension that Kinoshita seeks to make use of as a driving force in the play.

In a later incident, Tomomori has been lent a famous horse belonging to his older brother Munemori, a gift from the Retired Emperor Go-shirakawa. In the course of the battle, Tomomori lets the horse go back to the shore when his boat sets sail; some of his followers want to shoot and kill the horse in order to keep such a precious animal out of the enemy's hands, but Tomomori insists that the horse had earlier been of help to him and should not be harmed. When the horse reaches shore, however, the animal is, of course, immediately captured by the rival Genji forces.

There are many other forceful moments in the *Tale* beside these of which Kinoshita makes use, culminating in a scene towards the end of the play with Tomomori's admonition to his brothers: "With so much death you will taint yourself with sin—are they so fine that you need to risk your soul?" He makes this speech shortly before choosing his own death by drowning.

TOMOMORI:

"My eyes have witnessed all I have to see.
Now I must end this life of mine."
Lord Tomomori, in a double suit of armor,
Plunged down to the depths of the Dan no ura seas.

MALE VOICES:

Determined not to lag behind their lord,
Hand linked in hand some twenty samurai
Leapt off the boat to find one resting place below. (Kinoshita 253)

As Kinoshita notes in his essay about the play, "Tomomori ... somehow knew full well that nothing could be done about fate, but in spite of this—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say *because of that*—he was attached to life, he was active and vigorous, fully engaged right up to the moment before the destruction of the Heike" (343). For Kinoshita, this inner tension gives him the opportunity to create a character "... that does remind one of the heroes of Greek tragedy ... who only succeed in their goals by denying their human selves" (345).

If *Requiem on the Great Meridian* provides a modern re-examination of the tensions involved in the functioning of traditional values of loyalty in samurai culture, another play of Kinoshita, his 1962 play *A Japanese Called Otto* (*Otto to yobareru nihonjin*) is equally a play about loyalty, but this time not to a person or to a group, but to an abstract ideal, in this case, international Communism.⁶ The play dramatizes the difficulties of carrying through such a personal loyalty, and Kinoshita's dramatic structure is quite convincingly suspenseful. Virtually all the characters in the play are based on the lives of actual persons who were active during the years just preceding the outbreak of war in Europe in the late 1930s.

In the play, "Otto" is the code name used by Ozaki Hotsumi (1901–1944), an important Japanese intellectual, expert on China, and a writer for the Asahi newspapers. The need for a code name came about because of his membership in the Soviet spy ring of Richard Sorge (1895–1944); Ozaki, through

⁶ For a complete translation of the play by Lawrence Rogers, see Rimer (101–97).

his powerful and high-level government connections, was able to supply crucial information to the Soviet government, through Sorge, that concerned the probable actions of Japan toward the Soviet Union at the beginning of World War II. Sorge and Ozaki were both apprehended by the Japanese police in 1941, imprisoned, and executed in prison in 1944.

The historical events themselves are fascinating ones, and by documenting in theatrical form this important moment in Japanese history, Kinoshita is able to provide on stage not only a variety of highly dramatic encounters (taking place in a variety of locales), but uses them to underscore the personal pain and inevitable ambiguities felt by those who are determined to seek to carry out a loyalty to some unattainable ideal. In that sense, Tomomori and Otto do in fact resemble one another. For the purposes of the play, Kinoshita has changed the names of the characters (Ozaki, for example, becomes THE MAN, and Sorge JOHNSON) but he has drawn on the details of the actual historical events with accuracy and great skill. The play involves quite a number of characters, some from Europe and the United States, others from China and, of course, from Japan. On the level of plot tensions and resolutions, the play is a genuinely effective one that still holds the stage and has been revived on a number of occasions.

In Otto, the ambiguous nature of The MAN's central loyalties looms large. He is a secret agent, a dedicated Communist, who witnesses with alarm the destructive actions his country is carrying out in China; he believes that the Soviets may be able to thwart the Japanese military action and wants to provide as much information as he can to help bring about such a possible defeat. In this sense, his loyalty to the Soviet Union, and to the ideals of Communism, at first seem absolute; indeed, during the course of the play he undertakes a number of personally dangerous assignments in order to further his dedication to this ideal.

In this endeavor he is joined by the Soviet spy Richard Sorge, but as they continue to work together, Sorge comes to realize that Ozaki, for all of his willingness to further what both realize is an important international cause, remains psychologically and spiritually still a Japanese. Therefore, his loyalties are ultimately divided. This tension is beautifully caught in the title of the play. In one sense, as a Communist, "Otto," with his European name, transcends his nationality; but at the same time, he can never escape being who he is, a Japanese. It is this tension, this divided loyalty, which fascinates Kinoshita and which propels the drama forward.

At a crucial encounter in the play, Ozaki tries to articulate his position to Sorge.

MAN: ... given that I'm a Japanese living in Japan, as long as I don't organize my thoughts as a Japanese, no resolution will be forthcoming ... I don't want to get on my high horse. Or turn myself into a hero. This means that I want to work together with you in the accomplishment of these actions, that is, through our belief in the liberation of humanity and the establishment of basic human rights. (Rimer 166)

Sorge's reply, long committed to his usual course of action, is laconic.

JOHNSON: What's needed, Otto, is doing what you do undiscovered. That's all. Once you're discovered it's all over. When that happens your fine abstractions will fly out the window. (166)

At an earlier point in the play, the issue of the fissure in Otto's personal conception of loyalty is brought to his attention by Madame Sung, a character based on the famous American left-wing journalist and lover of Sorge, Agnes Smedley (1892–1950).

SUNG: The one thing that sets you and Johnson apart—Japan is forever living within you as your motherland. Within Johnson, however—he once said so quite clearly—“until Germany is reborn as the Germany of ideals, Germany is not my motherland.” The Motherland within Johnson is the one solitary nation in the world where socialism now exists. (139)

JOHNSON himself, sensing this ambiguity in the MAN, has worries that he may not be the ideal agent for his purposes.

FRITZ: The person you had in mind from the start ... that's Otto, right?

JOHNSON: It's Otto.

FRITZ: Why didn't you contact him to begin with? Was it because you were out of touch for so many years?

JOHNSON: He was the most appropriate candidate for a number of reasons.

Since returning to Japan his position in Japanese society has risen quite a bit. It would seem that the police have absolutely no interest in him. It's just that ...

FRITZ: Just what?

JOHNSON: It's just that he's too much a Japanese. He carries Japan within himself much too much (*pause*). But it can't be helped.

All right, let's have Joe get in touch with him. (163)

JOHNSON does so, and the play continues on to show the various actions the two took to gain and transmit information to the Soviet Union before both are arrested.

In the Epilogue to the play, the MAN, now in prison, is questioned by the PROSECUTOR, who in fact had been a former friend. He is infuriated that the MAN will say nothing to defend himself. He senses that there is some patriotism in the MAN's attitude and urges him to write a proper confession; but on his side, the MAN continues to say nothing. The PROSECUTOR finally explodes.

PROSECUTOR: (*shouting*) What the hell kind of attitude is that?! How long do you intend to remain silent, all full of yourself? (*pause*). Okay.

From now on we'll investigate you not as the Japanese you are, but as the ringleader of a Comintern international spy ring!

MAN: Regarding my activities up to this point, I can say only one thing.

That is, I had the foreign name of Otto, but I was a true Japanese, and acting as such, I was most certainly not in error.

Curtain (195)

It would appear then, certainly on the basis of these two plays, that the subject of loyalty continues to resonate in the value system of modern and contemporary Japan. Moreover, it seems clear that, whatever the historical shift in cultural values, the results of pursuing such loyalty can be fatal, indeed tragic, in both traditional and modern Japanese culture. In that sense, there seems to exist a striking continuity in these diverse historical periods: older values are still preserved and recognizable today.

Nevertheless, there is one obvious difference. In the modern and contemporary eras, when such loyalties are expressed on the stage, it can no longer be simply taken for granted that they exist. Now, loyalty needs to be explained, perhaps justified, to the audience.

Such being the case, what new methods and devices are possible to a modern dramatist which were not available in the dramaturgy of the older traditional theatre?

Kinoshita would approach this question, which he does in a number of his essays, by insisting on the importance of what he himself has learned as a playwright from his close study of Shakespeare. And indeed, any number of modern playwrights, actors, and directors in Japan have said the same.⁷

The first Japanese productions of Shakespeare began in the late nineteenth century. The earliest were adaptations, then soon afterwards, through performances using translations into Japanese made by the scholar and professor at Waseda University, and sometime director, Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935). Through such early efforts, the perceived model of Shakespearian drama became a major source of inspiration for several generations of Japanese playwrights. Kinoshita himself translated a dozen or more of Shakespeare's works into Japanese, among them *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. Through such a necessarily close study of these texts, he was able to observe every detail of Shakespeare's language and dramatic craft. Kinoshita's translations, incidentally, are among the most admired of those prepared in the postwar period.

Kinoshita has written of the powerful continuities he finds between the dramaturgy of classic and modern Western plays. While in Japan, he points out, kabuki has little to do with *shingeki*, he finds a crucial connection between Shakespeare and the modern theatre around the world.⁸

Generally speaking, the speeches in old European plays, for example, original Shakespeare, are all written logically. ... even if you were to analyze [the speeches] with the *shingeki* realism we are considering now, the meaning would all hang together. Admittedly, expressions are in poetic form, and there are plenty of exaggerated expressions, which one does not find in so-called realistic plays, but these can be seen as artistic exaggerations of genuine feelings. Providing, then, that you have the skills to express these on a large scale, you can imbue it all with realism. (Kinoshita 267)

In Kinoshita's view, therefore, a modern Japanese playwright can learn to perfect his craft from studying the language and dramaturgy of such classic Western playwrights as Shakespeare and Molière but not from traditional Japanese theatre.

Kinoshita, in his essay "The Essence of the Dramatic," analyzes in depth a number of scenes from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in order to ascertain the basis for creating true dramatic tension in a theatrical work. His emphases may ultimately have more to do with his own convictions than providing an altogether objective analysis, but it is clear from what he has written that Shakespeare had a continuing and powerful effect on his own dramaturgy.

In discussing dramatic confrontation, for example, "with its two powerful men grappling with each other," Kinoshita insists that "... the dramatic does after all involve self-denial and, even if one party does win and the other loses, it is vital that there is self-denial in the one that loses" (Kinoshita 312). Certainly, this is the case with the two Kinoshita protagonists described above, Tomomori and Otto.

Elsewhere, Kinoshita adds another element—one which he sees as a necessary tension between the author *himself* and political and social realities of his or her material.

... it is often said that drama is a conflict, but an objective presentation of a conflict between A and B, however skillfully written, will at the most result in an "interesting play," not in a drama. The tension between A and B has to come from the tension between the author and those in conflict. (347)

⁷ For the importance of Shakespeare in the modern Japanese theatre, see Kishi and Bradshaw; Sasayama and Mulryne.

⁸ Younger playwrights in Japan, however, since Kinoshita's time, have begun to incorporate certain devices borrowed and adapted from traditional Japanese theatre, especially kabuki. The increased possibilities for social commentary through stylization and fantasy in the work of these dramatists, beginning with such writers as Terayama Shūji, Betsuyaku Minoru, Shimizu Kunio, and others, have brought a new richness to the contemporary Japanese theatre. For an overview of some of these newer developments, see Powell (178–87).

If this is his conviction, it is not surprising then that much of Kinoshita's most significant work involves a serious critique, implicit or explicit, of his own contemporary society.

It is this critical edge, then, that now makes a simple and unquestioning articulation of any element in the Japanese cultural and moral system virtually impossible. Now, nothing can be assumed. Attitudes must be examined, questioned. But it is important to remember as well that this is not to deny the continued existence of those very elements—in this case, the virtues of loyalty—in the social and moral structure of the country. But in our times, those paragons of loyalty are now required to look inside as well as outside themselves.

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