

Searching for a “Modern Woman” in
Shakespeare:
The Merchant of Venice in Meiji Japan

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to illustrate, through the performance history of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the relationship between two different but intertwined phenomena in Meiji theatre: the introduction of Shakespeare's works as part of the theatrical repertoire and the development of professional "actresses" (*joyū*). Both began as attempts to modernize the Japanese theatre and thus elevate its cultural status by making it more similar to Western drama, which was notably different from Japanese traditional drama such as *kabuki* in its primacy of the spoken word over song and dance and the importance it placed on being "real" and "natural" on stage.

When Kawakami Otojirō and his acting troupe toured the United States and Europe in 1899-1901, they encountered Western drama firsthand; Otojirō's wife Sadayakko saw the performances of Western actresses such as Ellen Terry in *The Merchant of Venice* and became effectively the first Japanese actress. Inspired by the performance of Terry as Portia and Henry Irving as Shylock, the Kawakamis created a Japanese version of the play entitled *Sairoku* [Shylock]; it proved so successful that it was repeatedly performed throughout the tour. The productions of *Sairoku* also provided the West with an opportunity to encounter Japanese drama, which they considered serious and comparable in many ways to Western drama, unlike the preceding acrobatic performances from Japan.

Upon his return to Japan in 1902, Otojirō began a new form of theatre called *seigeki* ("straight theatre"), which he modelled on the Western productions he had seen on tour. The *seigeki* series began with an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* set in contemporary Japan, followed by the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* (1903). With the script translated by Doi Shunsho, who had accompanied the troupe on their Western tour, the production became the first example of a Japanese woman playing a cross-dressing Shakespearean heroine.

Kawakami was not the only one experimenting with the idea of the actress in a Shakespearean production. In 1906, the Bungei Kyōkai led by Tsubouchi Shoyō produced the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* with an all-male cast, including Doi Shunsho as Portia. In 1907, Ichikawa Sadanji II, a prominent *kabuki* actor who had just returned from the West, also produced the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* with actresses in the roles of Portia and Nerissa. Osanai Kaoru saw this production as a precursor of the *shingeki* movement and

commended both Sadanji and the actresses, but his only criticism concerned the choice of a Shakespearean play, which he saw was not “modern” enough. The *shingeki* movement led by Osanai and other men of his generation saw the contemporary naturalistic drama of such dramatists as Ibsen, Maeterlinck and Shaw as ideals to aspire to; to them, Shakespearean drama was a “classic” but hopelessly outdated. This shift in the interest was clearly exemplified in the Bungei Kyōkai production in 1911, which took place in the newly built Imperial Theatre. The celebrated 1906 production of the trial scene from *The Merchant* was repeated, but it was entirely eclipsed by another play in the program: *A Doll's House* by Ibsen, in which Matsui Sumako played the role of the heroine, Nora. The production convinced the audience of the importance of having actresses in productions of naturalistic drama, while many received the impression that Shakespeare could do without an actress; it marks not only the beginning of the age of the actress in Japanese drama but also the relocation of Shakespeare from the stage to the study, which lasted until well after World War II.

When Japan officially opened its door to foreign countries in 1869, it became its political and cultural imperative to modernize (i.e. Westernize) the country as quickly as possible in order to maintain its independence and avoid the fate of colonization. Translation of the canonized texts of Western literature thus began as part of this national project to modernize, and Shakespeare was no exception. Along with other east Asian countries such as China and Korea, Japanese intellectuals “translated his [Shakespeare’s] plays and poems to enlighten the public and modernize their cultures so as to preempt Western colonialism”; a Japanese translator of Shakespeare, as a result, became not only “a harbinger of modernization and Westernization but also [...] an arbiter of their own native cultural heritage” (Ōya 1400).

As the Japanese theatre sought to “modernize” itself based on the model of the contemporary Western theatre, one of the main issues it encountered was the “Actress Question” (*joyū mondai*)¹, the discussion of which took place between the 1890s and the 1910s (Kano 15). As women were effectively banned from performing on the commercial stage between 1629 and 1891, part of the “reform” of the theatre advocated by Meiji intellectuals was the argument that actresses should perform the female roles instead of *onnagata* (female impersonators) if Japanese theatre were to be as modern and sophisticated as Western ones. Toyama Masakazu, one of the founders of the Theatre Reform Society (*engeki kairyō kai*) in 1886, argues that “as long as female roles are performed by men, an elevated form of theatre is impossible. Unless you are a woman, it is impossible to portray the emotions of a woman” (my trans.; 143), an argument which can be explained as an attempt “to provide the theatre as an ‘elevated’ form of art to the ‘men of the middle class and above’ [...] and to enclose the female performers into the

framework of respectability” (my trans.; Ikeuchi 22). On the other hand, Shakespeare slowly became part of the repertoire of the Meiji theatre through a complex process that began with not direct translation but adaptation into existing Japanese art forms, both narrative and dramatic. The drive for a more “authentic” form of Shakespeare reception—performances based on direct translation of Shakespeare’s plays—can also be seen as part of the attempt to modernize / Westernize Japanese culture.

As “modern” Japanese theatre was gradually established and Shakespeare became part of its repertoire, Shakespeare’s (translated) text and the newly emergent Japanese actresses’ bodies were linked together, for they were both perceived as more “real” and “natural”—hence, modern and Western—than adapted Shakespeare and the bodies of traditional *onnagata*. Focusing on the translations and performances of *The Merchant of Venice*, a play that enjoyed an unusual popularity on the stage in this period, the present paper attempts to shed a light on this relationship between the translated texts of Shakespearean plays and the bodies that embodied them in Meiji Japan.

“Realistic” versus “Natural” Acting: Kawakami’s *Sairoku* and Its Western Audiences

On May 2, 1899, Kawakami Otojirō, an actor-manager famous for his *sōshi shibai* (“patriot plays”) boarded the ship to the United States with his acting troupe, including his wife Sadayakko, a former geisha who would later be considered by many to be the first “actress” in modern Japan. In January of the following year, Kawakami saw Henry Irving and Ellen Terry perform *The Merchant of Venice* in Boston; as he had already had basic knowledge of the plot, presumably by reading

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Ninniku Shichiire Saiban, a free translation of Charles and Mary Lamb’s adaptation of the play, the title of which he mentions in his memoir, he was able to understand much of the performance. Even though the production was quite “different” from what he was used to seeing in Japan, “the way they [the actors] spoke and acted was so impressive that [the Kawakami troupe] left the theatre in awe even though [they] did not understand everything” (my trans.; Kawakami, *Otojiro Sadayakko* 30).

Inspired by the performance, Kawakami decided to create his own Japanese version of the play; as a result, their version of *The Merchant of Venice*, or *Sairoku* as it would come to be called later, was performed the next day. Very hastily prepared, the production lacked any proper script to speak of, and the actors were instructed to improvise their speeches. When Sadayakko complained to her husband and asked him what she was to say on stage, Otojiro told her to say anything—even meaningless gibberish would do—as long as it was spoken “with forceful speech and gestures, so that it would look passionate” (my trans.; Kawakami, *Otojiro Sadayakko* 31).

On the day of the first performance in Boston, a local newspaper advertised it as follows:

This afternoon, at the Boston Theatre, the Imperial Japanese company will present for the first time Shakespeare’s celebrated drama, “The Merchant of Venice,” in the Japanese language. This undertaking at the hands of these oriental actors doubtless will go far to show the progress which the Japanese are making toward American ideals in the dramatic art. “The Merchant of Venice” will be presented in an elaborate manner, with scenery

painted especially for the production. (“Shakespeare in Japanese”)

The advertisement, although rather condescending in tone, shows that the audience in Boston were promised serious drama from the troupe, as opposed to the usual acrobats and jugglers from Japan. Tara Rodman argues for the special significance of Boston for the Kawakami troupe, where their performance was appreciated by what she calls a “modernist audience,” “a self-aware group of spectators who, although not located in one of the conventional centers of modernism, was attuned to international artistic developments” (Rodman 490).

The text of the script for *Sairoku* does not survive, but from what can be gathered from reviews and Kawakami’s memoir, it is a Japanized version of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Sairoku (Shylock) is a greedy fisherman from Hokkaido and Osode (Portia) is a young lady who disguises herself as a lawyer. Kawakami admits that the play was rather short and condensed, with “mainly the trial scene and two or three more scenes added to it” (my trans.; Kawakami, *Otojirō Sadayakko* 31).

Despite the haste with which it was put together, *Sairoku* must have been successful in Boston, as it was also performed in Washington, New York, and London later. Although it is unclear whether the script was revised (or written at all) between the performances, Inoue Rie suspects that it must have been (129). Several reviews of the New York performances survive, ranging from complimentary to severely critical. Sadayakko seems to have been well received on Broadway, if somewhat condescendingly; her performance as Osode (Portia) is invariably described as “pretty” and “winning” (Inoue 125-29). Otojirō as Sairoku

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(Shylock) was sometimes commended for his “masterful realism” (quoted in Inoue 129) but criticized by Clement Scott, a well-known British theatre critic who was writing for the *New York Herald* at the time, as “primitive and pantomimic”—“interesting, but somewhat grotesque” (quoted in Inoue 126). It can be construed from these reviews that the “realism” in Kawakami’s performance as Shylock resided mainly in his gestures and facial expressions, which probably offended a British man of theatre like Scott, who would have believed that the essence of a Shakespearean play was in his language. It was one thing for the exotic Japanese performers to present plays about *samurai* and *geisha*, but quite another to tamper with Shakespeare. Scott’s scornful attitude towards a Shakespearean adaptation in a foreign language was indicative of the way in which Shakespeare was perceived in the nineteenth century; since the eighteenth century, Shakespeare had been “recast as the national poet of England at a time when English was turning into the hegemonic medium and unifying symbol of an expansive world empire,” resulting in the strong association of Shakespeare’s greatness with his language and hence belittling attitude towards Shakespeare translation and productions in other languages (Delabastita 226). It may not be entirely coincidental that George Bernard Shaw, criticizing the Romantic deification of “the Bard,” coined the word “bardolatry” in 1901, almost contemporaneously with Kawakami’s performance. At the height of the Shakespeare worship, a non-English-language adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* would have seemed like an act of sacrilege. Nevertheless, the production was a success and was to be repeated not only in American cities but also in London and Paris.

On the other hand, the reviews focusing on the “realism” of the

Kawakami troupe’s performance was indicative of the fact that their art was considered serious and comparable to Western drama:

Reviewers consistently described their style as realist, lauding this realism as the result of serious training and artistic skill. This skillfulness fit the paradigm of anti-modern Japanese artistry, but it also aligned with the association of modern actors with a realist style so that descriptions of the Kawakamis’ acting as “realist” suggested that the troupe’s work should be considered modern by Western standards. (Rodman 502)

According to Rodman, the Kawakami troupe was received as “modernist” especially in Boston, where there was a growing interest in Japanese art and objects comparable to the *Japonisme* in continental Europe.

As theatre historian Watanabe Tamotsu argues, the Kawakami troupe’s American and European tours were important on several accounts: “Firstly, their tours enabled the West to come in contact with Japanese drama for the first time; secondly, they gave birth to Kawakami Sadayakko as an actress; and thirdly, they had great influences on the works of Kawakami Otojirō and Sadayakko after their return to Japan” (my trans.; Watanabe 338). At the beginning of the tour, “she [Sadayakko] was *onnagata*” (my trans.; Watanabe 338), trained as a *geisha* in the conventions of *kabuki*-style song and dance; however, as she came in contact with the “great [Western] actresses” including Terry, she became aware of the differences between them and herself and began to learn from their “more natural demeanor,” resulting in “the first amalgamation of the acting styles of Japanese

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traditional drama and modern Western drama” (my trans.; Watanabe 339-40). For example, Otojirō recalls Sadayakko’s makeup and facial expressions being criticized at the start of the American tour:

At the beginning, Sadayakko made up her face like a Japanese *onnagata*; then, foreigners saw this and said, “That is a face of a dead person; her face is dead.” [...] So she decided to powder her face less and use her own eyebrows. In addition, a Japanese dancer would be scolded if she smiled even a little when dancing in front of her mentor; in the West, a dancer must keep smiling throughout the dance. So it was funny that they [i.e. the Westerners] told Sadayakko to smile all the time while she was dancing. (my trans.; Kawakami, *Ōshū Manyūki* 10)

A famous photograph of Sadayakko that adorned the cover of *Le Theatre* magazine in Paris thus features her dancing with more “naturalistic” makeup and smiling faintly, which provides an interesting contrast with her traditional Japanese attire.

Through their experiences in the West, both Otojirō and Sadayakko were exposed to the dramatic concepts not known to the Japanese at the time, such as the primacy of the spoken language, as opposed to song and dance, and the importance of naturalness in drama, which had been largely absent in *kabuki*. *Sairoku* could be the first instance of Japanese actors coming in contact with western drama and seriously attempted to incorporate it into their acting techniques.

***The Merchant of Venice* (1903)**

After the Kawakami troupe’s return to Japan in 1902, they began

to produce a new type of theatre, which Otojirō called *seigeki* (literally, “straight theatre”) to distinguish it from the Japanese traditional theatre. While the term *seigeki* was originally coined by Mori Ōgai in order “to distinguish spoken drama from opera,” Kawakami also implied that his *seigeki* performance was a “correct performance of Western drama” as he attempted to “physically reproduce the kind of stage he had seen during his overseas tours” (Levy 208). The first of this project was an adaptation of *Othello* set in contemporary Japan, in which Sadayakko played the role of Tomone (Desdemona in Shakespeare’s play). Otojirō explained the rationale for choosing *Othello* as follows: “in general, many of the Bard’s works have women as main characters, so it is impossible to perform them without good actresses; among these plays, *Othello* is easier to perform compared to others” (my trans.; Kawakami, “The Reasons” 21). Intriguingly, Otojirō chose *Othello* because he thought it was essentially a play about men and did not require “good actresses.” As a result, the first Shakespearean role played by Sadayakko in Japan was “not the ‘modern girl’ with strong personalities that can be seen in other Shakespearean plays, but the chaste wife of the officer of the Japanese Imperial Army, a role which strengthened the definition of genders, which benefited the reorganization of genders in modern Japan” (my trans.; Ikeuchi 69). This points to the fact that there were two sides to the rise of the actress in Japan: on one hand, women being allowed to perform on public stage certainly gave them more freedom and career opportunities that would have been unthinkable in pre-Meiji Japan; on the other, the preference for the more “natural” presences of actresses over *onnagata* was based on an “essentialist and expressive understanding of gender” as opposed to the “theatrical and performative understanding of gender exemplified

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in *kabuki*” (Kano 23), resulting in promoting a more conservative notion of how Japanese women should behave.

Following *Othello* by only four months, the courtroom scene from *The Merchant of Venice* became the second *seigeki* production of the Kawakami troupe. The production is significant as the “first translated production of an English play” (my emphasis and trans., Mizuno 100); that is, it is not a Japanized adaptation but a direct translation of the scene from Shakespeare’s play. The text was translated by Doi Shunsho, who had accompanied the Kawakami troupe to their Western tour as an interpreter and who would later play the role of Portia for Bungei Kyōkai in 1906 and 1911. As the first Japanese performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Sakuradoki Zeni no Yononaka*, was a *kabuki* adaptation, in which the role of Tamae (Portia) was played by *onnagata*, Sadayakko’s Portia was probably also the first instance of a Japanese actress playing a cross-dressing Shakespearean heroine.

Doi Shunsho’s translation of Shakespeare’s text is mostly straightforward and rather colloquial. Shylock, for example, speaks in what appears to be a Tohoku dialect, with a sentence ending *-degasu*. In contrast, Portia’s famous “quality of mercy” speech is written in an extremely formal style:

夫れ仁は心の徳、愛の理にして人の至情に基く。仁は天地物を生ずるの心にして、春の膏雨の如く、草木これに潤ふて化成す。仁は己れを愛し人を愛するの謂ひにして之れを行ふものと受くる者と両つながら幸せらる。仁は衆善の源、百行の基にして至大至高なる天地の徳、仁は王冠の上に輝き帝笏の頂に位し、凡ての尊嚴威力を支配する無上の君徳。[...] コリヤ猶^ヂ太^ウ人、此の仁愛の何たるかを辨へなば、たとへ其方の要求は正義であるも、仁愛が其

中に籠らねば、我々は一生神の救ひに預かることは出来ぬぞよ。
(Doi, 19-20) [*Jin* is a virtue of the mind, the reason of love; it is based on the genuinely human sentiment. *Jin* is what allows heaven and earth to exist; it is like the gentle spring rain that moisturizes grasses and trees, making them grow. *Jin* means to love yourself and to love others, and it blesses both the one who acts upon it and the one who receives it. *Jin* is the source of various good deeds and the basis for all human doings, as well as the virtue of the greatest and the most exalted heaven and earth; *Jin* shines above the kingly crown and is placed at the top of the imperial sceptre, ruling every dignity and power as the highest virtue. [...] Now, Jew, if you have no understanding of this *jin-ai*, although your claim is just, we may never see divine salvation if there is no *jin-ai* in it.]

In the first few lines of the speech, Doi translates “mercy” into *jin*, which is usually translated as “humaneness” or “benevolence”; it is one of the five Confucian virtues and is considered the center of Confucianism (Zhou 1-2). Later in the speech, the word *ai* [“love”] is attached to *jin*, making the compound word *jin-ai*. Although *jihī*, a word with a Buddhist connotation, has been the popular choice among translators including Tsubouchi, Doi’s translation chooses to use a Confucian term to translate “mercy.”

In many ways, Doi’s translation strategies anticipate the choices that would be made by Tsubouchi Shōyō three years later, which will be discussed later in this paper; Tsubouchi is generally favorable of his student’s translation, although he offers a few criticisms and suggestions for improvement:

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As Shunsho, who has read the original, has translated the script, there is no mistake in the meanings of individual words; however, the script as a whole is more like an annotation than a translation and, in a way, sluggish. Secondly, because sentences often end with the same suffixes (there were multiple sentences ending with *-gasu* lined up one after another, for example), they became too difficult to enunciate and the pace naturally slackened. Even the phrases which the original author [i.e. Shakespeare] intended to be mere fillers on stage were translated with gravity, and the actors, on their part, spoke every single word carefully and with great emotional involvement, [...] I sometimes felt rather sorry for the original author. (my trans.; Tsubouchi, “Meijiza” 1)

Although the photographs from the performance show Sadayakko’s Portia (disguised as a lawyer) dressed in a similar fashion to Ellen Terry’s Portia, it is doubtful how similar Sadayakko’s performance was to Terry’s. Terry’s performance as Portia, which the Kawakamis and Doi saw in Boston, was considered notable at the time for her unabashed femininity, even in disguise. Portia in Doi’s translation, on the other hand, does not give the impression of being feminine; theatre critic Seiseien comments that “this role [Portia] would have been more significant if, in the next scene, her true colors as a woman were revealed” and states that “it is a pity” that Sadayakko did not have the chance to perform Portia as a woman (my trans.; quoted in Inoue, III, 115). Instead, the comments on Sadayakko’s performance as Portia are mainly focused on the delivery of her lines—Tsubouchi gives a mostly favourable review:

as I understand, the enunciation of Portia’s lines was taught [to Sadayakko] directly by the translator [i.e. Doi] and was sometimes good. In any case, it is impressive that she should have memorized that long speech and spoken it fluently. However, she was so fluent that the “mercy speech” sounded plain as if she was drinking warm water, which could not be helped. (my trans.; “Mejjiza” 2)

Similarly, Seiseien also commends Sadayakko’s improvement: “as the lines are difficult, it could not be helped that she spoke them fluently as if she had been reciting them; however, her elocution was much easier on the ears as she had gotten used to the Japanese stage” (my trans., quoted in Inoue, III, 113-14). Inoue explains the focus on memorization and elocution as follows: “although it is now taken for granted that actors should memorize long speeches, the standard at the time was the *kabuki* actors, who would do no such thing” (III, 115). As a whole, the production was a success that filled the Meiji-za theatre for six days.

After *The Merchant of Venice*, the Kawakami troupe went back to producing an adaptation of Shakespeare with *Hamlet* set in contemporary Japan. As *The Merchant of Venice* seems to have been successful enough to be performed subsequently in Yokohama and Osaka (Mizuno 198), it is unlikely that Otojirō regarded translation less interesting or profitable than adaptation. According to the testimony of the painter Yamamoto Hōsui, who created stage properties for the production, *Hamlet* was created in a hurry (quoted in Mizuno 199); the lack of time may have been the reason why it was an adaptation rather than a full-scale translation, which would have to be commissioned to a translator in advance. This *Hamlet* was to be the last Shakespearean

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production by the Kawakami troupe.

As the Kawakami troupe stands in between *kabuki* and *shingeki*, their attempts are often categorized as *shimpa* (“New School”); the word, however, distinguishes them from *kabuki* (*kyūha*, “Old School”) but not from *shingeki*. In fact, there is evidence that they sometimes were called *shingeki* by critics (Watanabe 370). On the other hand, men of theatre such as Tsubouchi Shōyō, Osanai Kaoru, Ichikawa Sadanji II, and Shimamura Hōgetsu were aiming for an even more drastic reform of the Japanese theatre, which would later become known as the *shingeki* movement. The trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* was performed three times between 1906 and 1911 (excluding provincial tours) by their companies, each with different aims and cultural impacts.

***The Merchant of Venice* (Bungei Kyōkai, 1906)**

In 1906, Bungei Kyōkai produced the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* at Kabukiza. It was “an all-male staging of Shoyo’s translation” (Kishi and Bradshaw 21), in which Doi Shunsho, who had translated the scene for the Kawakami troupe, played the role of Portia. According to Mizuno, the significance of this production lies in the facts that Tsubouchi Shōyō’s translation of *The Merchant of Venice* was used for the first time and that “it marked the beginning of the age of translation in terms of introducing English drama” (101); that is, *The Merchant of Venice* was translated, not adapted, for stage. Shylock was performed by Tōgi Tetteki, who originally hailed from a family of *gagaku* musicians. Tōgi’s Shylock and Doi’s Portia were “critically acclaimed” (Mizuno 101).

Tsubouchi’s translation of the trial scene is notably different from the later translation he published in his *Complete Works of Shakespeare* series. Tsubouchi is known for revising his translations throughout his

career, and the differences between his two translations of *The Merchant* are reflective of the changes in both the theatrical language and the spoken Japanese language between late Meiji and early Shōwa. The language of Portia in the “mercy speech” in the 1906 version gives the impression of being extremely formal and *kabuki*-like:

あゝいや慈悲なまさけは強ふべきものではない。慈悲は春の小雨の如くに静かに自然に人を潤す。その徳澤は二重にして、受くる者にも福さいはひあれば、授くる者もまた福さいはひなり。畢竟さいはずるに慈悲は人君の偉徳じひにして、衆徳あつまの會る所ぢや。[...] ぢやによって、シャイロック、其方の申條は義理には悖らず、掟には叶うてゐれども、此道理をよう思へ。只一圖に義理を責め、政道の表のみを強ひて立て抜かうとするときは、罪深きは人の身の常ぢや、誰れ一人現世すくひの救拯を得るものがあらうぞ。(1906) [O no, mercy is not something to be forced. Like gentle spring showers, mercy moistens us quietly and naturally. Its virtues are twofold; it is a blessing to the receiver, whereas the giver is also blessed. Ultimately, mercy is the great virtue of a monarch and the place where all the common virtues gather. [...] Therefore, Shylock, although your claim does not go against the social duty and or break the law, think of this human truth: if you only claim the duty and try to see only the face of government, none of us shall see salvation in this life as it is human nature to be sinful.]

On the other hand, the language of the same speech from the *Complete Works* version of 1933 is much more colloquial and presumably closer to the spoken Japanese of the time:

慈悲は據よんどころなく施すべきものではない。慈悲は、春の小雨の自おのづ

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からにして地を潤すが如くに、^{くだ}降るものぢや。其徳澤は二重である。慈悲は、之を興ふる者にとっても幸福であれば、受けるものにとっても幸福なのぢや。慈悲は最も^{おほ}偉いなる人に在って、更に最も^{おほ}偉いなる美德となる。[...] だから、猶人よ、お前は頻りに正義を主張するが、正義ばかりで裁判したなら、吾々共の中、只の一人でも救はれるものはあるまい。(1933) [Mercy is not something that one is forced to give. Mercy is something that falls, like spring showers voluntarily moisten the earth. Its virtues are twofold. Mercy brings happiness to the giver, and also to the receiver. When it resides in the greatest person, mercy becomes the greatest virtue. [...] So, Jew, although you claim justice, if trials are based only on justice, there is no one among us that shall be saved.]

Despite the changes in the spoken language, however, Portia's language in both versions is formal and masculine. In the *Complete Works* version, this stands in great contrast to her language as a woman. For example, when she is talking to Nerissa, woman to woman, she sounds like an excited female student:

賭をしてもいゝことよ……お前とわたしが青年の^{なり}服装^めをして行くんだがね……きっと私の方が活潑で以て、小意気なの、短剣の付け具合なんかも品がよくってね。それから、聲は聲變り前といふ調子で話すの、ぴい／＼聲よ。それから、ちょこ／＼歩きなんかはしないでね、大股に歩いて、大口を叩く小綺麗な青年のやうに、喧嘩をした話をしたり、^{ほんと}事實らしい^{うそ}諺を吐いたりするの。

(141) [I can bet on this—you and I will go in the disguise of young men—I will be more active and smarter than you, wearing my dagger in a more sophisticated manner. I will talk

like my voice has not changed yet, with a piping voice. What’s more, I won’t toddle but walk in big strides, telling stories of my fights and telling lies as if they were true, like a pretty young braggart.]

Especially, the suffix *-koto* in the first sentence is one of the indicators of *teyo-dawa kotoba* as recognized by the Meiji writers (Sakai 7-9). In 1933, Japanese “women’s language” was available as a linguistic resource for Tsubouchi, which he utilized to portray Portia as a “modern girl,” a young, lively and intelligent woman.

There is also a notable cut in the 1906 version: the reaction of Portia and Nerissa to their respective husbands, when they say they would sacrifice their wives in order to save Antonio from Shylock:

BASSANIO. Antonio, I am married to a wife

Which is as dear to me as life itself;

But life itself, my wife and all the world

Are not with me esteemed above thy life.

I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all

Here to this devil, to deliver you.

PORTIA. Your wife would give you little thanks for that

If she were by to hear you make the offer.

GRATIANO. I have a wife who I protest I love.

I would she were in heaven, so she could

Entreat some power to change this currish Jew.

NERISSA. ’Tis well you offer it behind her back,

The wish would make else an unquiet house. (4.1.278-90)

Twenty-six years later, Tsubouchi commented on the latest production of the scene by Ichikawa Sadanji II at the Tokyo Gekijō theatre (1933), criticizing the fact that these lines had not been cut for the production: “as the other scenes were not produced on stage, Portia’s aside was redundant and distracting” (my trans.; Tsubouchi, “Shakespeare in Japanese translation,” 7).² Both the language and the cut indicate that Tsubouchi’s intention was to translate and produce the trial scene as an entity in itself, as a kind of one-act play. As a result, the true identities of Portia and Nerissa were rendered insignificant, and the element of gender in general was downplayed. In contrast, the 1933 translation of the entire play displays Tsubouchi’s awareness of the gender issues, as the formal and masculine language of the disguised Portia in the trial scene is contrasted with her language in the previous scene, highlighting the constructed and performative nature of her temporary masculinity.

Tsubouchi’s vision of Portia as a character can be seen in an essay dated January 1907, entitled “Shylock and Portia”: traditionally, Tsubouchi explains, Portia has been portrayed as “a beautiful, brisk, eloquent, and rather tomboyish woman who belongs in a comedy. [...] Portia is indeed a *saijo* [an intellectual woman] and can be interpreted as a sort of woman similar to Seishō Nagon in some ways” (289-90). Tsubouchi contrasts this “traditional” representation of Portia with Ellen Terry’s portrayal of the character, which is reported to be that of a kind-hearted and generous princess: “Terry’s Portia was indeed sophisticated and noble, like an empress, illustrating well the feminine qualities of grace and meekness” (my trans.; Tsubouchi, “Shylock and Portia,” 289). Indeed, Terry’s Portia was sometimes criticized for being overly feminine, especially in the trial scene, “where even in disguise she made little attempt to hide her femininity” (Drakakis 117-18). The fact

that Tsubouchi chose Doi to perform the role of Portia, when considered together with his textual choices, seems to indicate his wish to portray Portia in the trial scene in a more “traditional” way, as *saijo* who is not overly feminine but intelligent and virtuous.

***The Merchant of Venice* (Ichikawa Sadanji, 1907)**

A year after the Bungei Kyōkai production, another production of *The Merchant of Venice* took place at Meiji-za, with *kabuki* actor Ichikawa Sadanji II as Shylock. Sadanji was one of the many Meiji men of theatre who had travelled to the West. Together with his friend and mentor Matsui Shōyō, a theatre critic / translator / playwright who was one of the disciples of Tsubouchi, Sadanji travelled through France, Germany, England and the United States in 1907, where he not only attended the performances by the eminent actors and directors of the day (Sarah Bernhardt, Max Reinhardt, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Gordon Craig, to name a few) but also attended Beerbohm Tree’s acting school for three weeks in London, where he mainly took courses in elocution and facial expression (Higashi 311).

Osanai Kaoru, Sadanji’s life-long friend and later colleague as they established Jiyū Gekijō together, recalls the impact of the trip on the young *kabuki* actor as follows: “he came back to Japan as a completely transformed person, who had great artistic awareness” (my trans.; Osanai, “Sadanji,” 678). Immediately after his return from the West, Sadanji began to reform Meiji-za, the theatre he had inherited from his father. Together with the Westernization of the theatre building itself and box-office reform, he also began to educate women to be actresses, selecting four young women from prominent *kabuki* families: his sister Sachiko (Shōchō), Kawarazaki Suisen, Ichikawa Suisen II and Ichikawa

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Kyokubai (Danjurō IX's daughters). When he produced *The Merchant of Venice* in the refurbished Meiji-za in 1907, Kyokubai played the role of Portia and Shōchō played Nerissa.

Tsubouchi Shōyō recalls in 1907 the impression of watching Sadanji's performance in *The Merchant*, which he has called “a feminine Shylock” (my trans.; Tsubouchi, “Performances of Translated Shakespeare,” 4). Osanai Kaoru was extremely excited by his friend's production: “I was impressed with everything—the script, the actors, the direction, the stage equipment. It felt like the path I was meant to take was clearly shown to me” (my trans.; “Sadanji,” 680). In other words, Osanai felt that Sadanji's production of *The Merchant of Venice* was the precursor of the *shingeki* movement in Japan. In another essay, written immediately after he attended the performance, he comments more extensively on the performances of the four actresses:

Firstly, what surprised me was the fact that none of them looked too short in posture. Their speeches and gestures were also unexpectedly not conformed to the old format. What is regrettable, however, is the fact that none of them yet has sufficient facial expression – this is a general misfortune for Japanese women, who have been imprinted by their ancestors that facial expressions are a kind of evil. A lady who wishes to become a new Japanese actress must first break free from this old morality and experiment with facial expressions, even within her daily life. In addition, the endings of their speeches were too sweet. This, however, will soon be corrected if they practice masculine voice techniques. Shōchō's Nerissa was best when it came to clear diction. [...] One could not have asked for

more from Kyokubai as Portia in her first “test” performance. None of them was good at her makeup. All in all, it was a great first stage; they surely will succeed if they capitalize on their techniques and practice more. (my trans.; “Theatre Reviews,” 226-27)

While most of Osanai’s comments on the actresses are favorable, his main criticism is that they were “overly feminine—or *Japanese feminine*,” to use Indra Levy’s terminology (239). Here, being feminine on stage is associated with being Japanese as well as being old-fashioned, in comparison to the modern, Western actress as “the ultimate ideal” (Levy 240).

Significantly, Osanai’s only major criticism against Sadanji’s production concerned the choice of the program: “This may sound arrogant, but from the perspective of the twentieth-century youth such as ourselves, Shakespeare is already too easy [*amai*]; *The Merchant of Venice* is the easiest among his plays; structurally, the trial scene is one of the easiest scenes in *The Merchant of Venice*” (my trans.; 237). Instead of Shakespeare, Osanai suggests, Sadanji should try producing the works of more “modern” playwrights such as Ibsen, Maeterlinck and Shaw. His suggestion would come to fruition two years later; the first production of *Jiyu Gekijō*, which Osanai and Sadanji started together, was *John Gabriel Borkman* by Ibsen. In a significant departure from Tsubouchi and his generation of theatre reformers, Osanai’s generation placed Ibsen over Shakespeare as a source of inspiration (Levy 210-11). *Shingeki*, the “New Theatre” that they aspired to, necessarily included actresses to represent the female characters on stage, but not Shakespeare.

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***The Merchant of Venice* (Bungei Kyōkai, 1911)**

In 1911, Bungei Kyōkai selected *The Merchant of Venice* again as part of their program at the newly built Imperial Theatre; the main cast were unchanged from the celebrated 1906 production, with Tōgi Tetteki as Shylock and Doi Shunsho as Portia. Their performance, however, was entirely eclipsed by another play in the program: *A Doll's House* by Ibsen, in which Matsui Sumako played the role of the heroine, Nora. Tanaka Eizō recalls, approximately 45 years later, that the popularity of Ibsen over Shakespeare at this point was symptomatic of the generational gap between the young actors of Bungei Kyōkai and their teachers including Tsubouchi, Doi, and Tōgi (Tanaka 80).

Although probably unintentionally, staging Shakespeare and Ibsen together showed very clearly how different they were, especially in terms of representations of female characters. While Matsui's performance as Nora convinced theatregoers that a Japanese actress could convincingly portray a modern, Western woman on stage (Levy 197), making the actress an absolute necessity for the performance of modern naturalistic drama, the audiences began to realize that Shakespeare could do without an actress. Nakamura Kichizō, who was one of the “producers” of *Doll's House*, wrote soon after the performance that the only kind of drama that absolutely requires actresses is *shin shakwai geki* (“new social drama”):

the heroines in such kind of drama, who are not types and whose individual characters must therefore be portrayed, require performers to go beyond simply ‘looking like women’ and ‘being feminine’ [...]. Thus, it is difficult for *onnagata* to perform such roles, and actresses will necessarily have a monopoly over

this area. (my trans.; Nakamura 214)

Following this observation, Nakamura compares Bungei Kyōkai’s *The Merchant of Venice* and *Doll’s House* as examples to support his argument:

To use a recent example, a heroine in a modern Western social play such as Nora in Bungei Kyōkai’s *Doll’s House* was only able to live on stage when she was performed by an actress; on the other hand, the heroine in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* could be performed by a male actor [i.e. Doi] without much hindrance. Rather, many more commendable qualities could be found in the actor than in the actresses available to us at this point. (214-15)

Nakamura attributes this difference to the fact that Shakespeare is more of a “classic” and therefore does not require the “realistic” and “individualistic” portrayal of characters (215).

The 1911 performance of *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Doll’s House* within the same program marks a point of diversion between the history of Japanese actresses and the history of Japanese reception of Shakespeare. Up to this point, introduction of Shakespeare in translation and introduction of actresses on stage seemed to go hand in hand, as both were seen as part of the process of modernization of Japanese theatre. From this point on, however, the mainstream of the *shingeki* movement would include actresses but not Shakespeare. The dramatists such as Osanai Kaoru and Shimamura Hōgetsu clearly preferred the works of more contemporary playwrights such as Ibsen,

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while the new actresses on stage would portray “modern” Western women and be identified with the idea of the “New Woman” (Levy 262). Shakespeare’s heroines were no longer the preferred vehicles for exhibiting the talents of the modern Japanese actresses.

The stage history of *The Merchant of Venice* in Meiji Japan, as has been discussed above, tells two different yet intertwined stories. On the one hand, it follows the development of the professional actress on the Japanese stage; on the other, it outlines the transition from adaptation to translation as the dominant mode of introducing Shakespeare to Japan. While both started as part of the effort to make Japanese theatre more “modern” and Western, at the end of the trajectory Shakespeare was no longer deemed modern enough for the advocates of the *shingeki* movement. From Taishō to early Showa era, despite the many theatre productions, Shakespeare was mainly appreciated in the studies and popularized as part of the Taishō emphasis on liberal arts (Takahashi 501). Later, “the outbreak of the Second World War extinguished any possibility of producing plays deriving from what were then hostile countries” (Kishi and Bradshaw 74). Only in post-WWII Japan did Shakespeare take centre stage again, when diverse translations and productions began to emerge and coexist, partly as a result of the break away from the naturalistic view of theatre that dominated the Japanese stage in the first half of the twentieth century. The coexistence of multiple Japanese translations of the plays, one of the characteristics of the Japanese reception Shakespeare in the post-war era, is mirrored by the diversity in the bodies that embody the translated texts; in recent years, Shakespeare’s cross-dressing heroines have been represented on the Japanese stage by different types of performers including *onnagata*,

actresses, and male actors in all-male productions. The characteristic multiplicity of both translation and embodiment of Shakespeare’s plays in Japan may be an indication that the focus has shifted away from achieving “modernity” through the reform of theatre. The textual and embodied performances of gender in Japanese Shakespeare has become more varied and multi-dimensional, transcending the dichotomy of the Japanese versus the Western, the old versus the new, and the performative versus the naturalistic.

Note

- 1 The use of the word “actress” has recently come to be considered sexist, and “actor” has become the preferred word for both male and female performers. The present paper limits the use of the term “actress” to refer to female performers in the context of theatre and film up to the early twentieth century.
- 2 On the other hand, the device of Portia “returning to a woman for a moment” (my trans.; Ikeda 41) in the same production was praised by Ikeda Daigo, a playwright / translator who was also a confidante to Sadanji II.

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