

In June we celebrated the launch of *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits, Volume X*, the latest addition to a 25-year project documenting the lives of those involved in the development of the UK-Japan relationship. *Volume X* brings the count of these 'pen-portraits' up to over six-hundred, and is dedicated to all those who have contributed to the series; as Sean Curtin comments in his review, the writing of a biographical portrait has itself become something of a rite of passage for those at the heart of the relationship today. *Volume X* boasts sixty-nine chapters, and as such it is impossible to cover them all. Instead Curtin presents a selection that gives a sense of both the full breadth of the relationship and the book.

Shakespeare is arguably Britain's most significant cultural export, and as such it is no surprise that he has figured prominently in Anglo-Japanese relations (there are biographical portraits of a number of Japanese directors, actors, translators and academics celebrated for their work on Shakespeare). As part of the country-wide festival marking the 400th anniversary of the Bard's death, the

Japan Society was delighted to collaborate with the Globe Theatre in an event considering the reception history of Shakespeare in Japan, reviewed here by Susan Meehan. Sōseki Natsume famously questioned Shakespeare's relevance to a Japan where existential dilemmas did not dominate thinking in the same way as in the West. In the same vein, Shiraishi Kazufumi has suggested that his *Me Against the World* might be better suited to Western readers. In her review Poppy Cosyns confirms that the celebrated novelist's latest work is nothing if not existential in its critique of what he sees as the uplifting platitudes relied upon in the face of disaster and terror.

Also reviewed here are crime fiction giant Matsumoto Seichō's final work, and former diplomat Ogura Kazuo's survey of Japanese diplomacy in Asia.

As ever, the Japan Society is extremely grateful to all of its reviewers for giving up their time and expertise. Anyone interested in contributing to the *Review* should contact the Japan Society office.

William Upton

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(Image: Anon, *Jurui shinzu (True pictures of animal types)*, collection of earlier hang-painted images compiled c. 1830. British Library.)

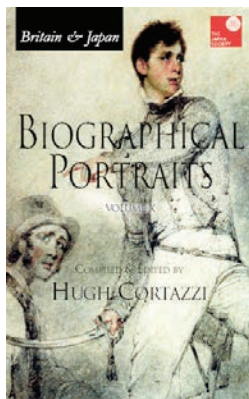
Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits, Volume X

edited by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

Renaissance Books in association
with the Japan Society (2016)

ISBN-13: 978-1-898823-51-3

Review by Sean Curtin



Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits, Volume X marks a new high point in this excellent series profiling people, organizations and themes related to Anglo-Japanese engagement. This new volume is bursting with energy, containing sixty-nine fascinating articles encompassing a breathtaking spectrum of subject matter. It also represents the largest volume in the series to date. The key standard bearers, Sir Hugh Cortazzi, Ian Nish, Jim Hoare, Gordon Daniels and Paul Norbury, who have each devoted over twenty-five years to developing this impressive endeavour since the first volume in 1994, all contribute to this new volume. Its publication also marks a significant milestone in the project's evolution with the *Biographical Portraits* series now available to access online, making it an incredibly useful global resource.

As in previous editions, the majority of profiles are of individuals, covering an ABC to XYZ of professions and vocations, in this volume ranging for example from authors (Peter Martin by Mike Barrett), broadcasters (John Newman by Ian Ruxton), and consuls (John Frederick Lowder by Jim Hoare) to [E]xeter (Archdeacon Hutchinson by Hamish Ion), yachtsmen and zoologists (Alan Owston by Mike Galbraith). There are a number of unusual professions and vocations which particularly caught my eye, such as the snow scientist Nakaya Ukichirō, profiled by Jenny White, the Buddhist idealist Takakusu Junjirō described by Iwagami Kazunori and Paride Stortin, and *netsuke* collectors bought to life by Rosemary Bandini. As with earlier volumes, no single review could possibly do this work justice as its sheer scope and content are too immense. With this caveat, here are some of my observations on the latest instalment in this prestigious series.

The English maritime pilot William Adams provided the promethean spark for Anglo-Japanese relations, arriving in Kyushu in 1600 when his Dutch ship *Liefde* foundered. The first official British ship to reach Japan, *The Clove* under Captain John Saris, arrived in Nagasaki in June 1613. This short-lived chapter ended in 1623 with the closure of the British outpost in Hirado

and the subsequent period of Japanese isolationism. There was scant direct contact between the two countries for 230 years until the arrival of Admiral Stirling in Nagasaki in 1853. However, there were some largely forgotten efforts to penetrate Japan's exclusion. Two such endeavours are highlighted in the book's first two essays, each by Professor Timon Screech. One charts the October 1808 brief incursion by HMS *Phaeton* under the command of Fleetwood Pellew and the other describes the frustrated attempts by Sir Stamford Raffles to open trading relations by sending missions to Nagasaki in 1813 and 1814. (As part of this attempt, Sir Stanford attempted to present a breeding pair of elephants to Tokugawa Ienari. The female died in Nagasaki, while the male was declined because of 'difficulty to transport'. This issue's cover image is an anonymous coloured sketch of the bull.) Both articles enhance our historical understanding of how the bilateral dynamic developed.

One of the unique features of the *Biographical Portraits* series is that it not only covers well-known historic figures, but also illuminates the lives of those at the coal face of Anglo-Japanese relations, without whom the relationship would not be so strong, prosperous and beneficial. One such early figure is William Henry Smith (1838–'84) whose life is researched by Mike Galbraith. Smith first arrived in Japan as a Royal Marines officer in charge of the British legation guard; upon leaving the service he decided to stay in Japan, pursuing a wide variety of occupations. He became known in Yokohama as 'public-spirited Smith' for his contribution to the local community.

I was fascinated by the 1907 motoring adventures of Thomas Bates Blow (1853–1941), the subject of an entertaining essay by Ian Chrystie. He charts Blow's arduous journey from Kyoto to Karuizawa on roads 'with hairpin corners which are so sharp that the car would not go round without reversing'. Such conditions seem unimaginable in today's car-oriented Japan. Blow lived in Kyoto, owning the very first automobile in the city, a 1904 7 HP Swift. There's an amazing photo on page 111 taken in 1904 of Blow and his wife in the car outside the Yasaka (Gion) shrine. A reproduced letter written to *Motoring Illustrated* in November 1907 records the numerous challenges of early motoring in Japan.

At the other end of the scale are more public figures like the MP Ernest Harold Pickering (1881–1957) who Peter O'Connor labels an 'honourable and convinced but unconvincing apologist for Japan' because of his 'uncritical admiration of Japan

and almost wholesale acceptance of her political economy.' Several other more distinguished politicians are covered in this volume by Robert Morton, Andrew Cobbing, Thomas Otte and Anthony Best. The Pickering essay certainly illustrates the need for skilled diplomats on both sides.

British diplomats are well covered in this volume. Jim Hoare looks at the career of Sir Edward Crowe (1877–1960), a forgotten star of the Japan service, who was a diligent and efficient officer specializing in commercial work. He eventually became permanent secretary to the board of overseas trade in London. Hugo Read depicts the life of another faded diplomatic star, Oswald White (1884–1970), while Ian Nish looks at three consuls in Manchuria. Robert Cooper assesses Sir Fred Warner, who was Britain's ambassador to Japan from 1972 to '75 during which time the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh paid a state visit in 1975. Sir Fred was certainly a colourful personality who greatly enjoyed his posting to Japan, a country where he had not previously served. His successor, Sir Michael Wilford, ambassador from 1976 to '80 – a period of some trade friction – is portrayed by Sir David Warren, himself ambassador from 2008 to '12. Sir Michael had served in China but like Sir Fred was no Japan specialist. In contrast to these two earlier predecessors Sir John Whitehead, ambassador from 1987 to '92, spent much of his diplomatic service life in Japan. His achievements are detailed by Sir Hugh Cortazzi, himself ambassador from 1980 to '84, who says of Sir John, 'He brought experience, dedication and zeal into his efforts to find solutions to the trade and investment issues, which were key features of his years as ambassador, but he did not neglect the important cultural aspects of our relations.'

Japanese diplomats are also well represented with Seki Eiji, a former Japanese ambassador to Hungary, exploring the fascinating career of Fujiyama Naraichi (1915–'94) whose final post was as Japan's ambassador to the UK from 1977 to '82. The achievements of Chiba Kazuo (1925–2004), who was ambassador to the UK from 1988 to '91, are highlighted by Sir Hugh Cortazzi, who also offers some personal insights. In an in depth and well researched article, 'Young Japanese Diplomats Sent to Study at British Universities', Numata Sadaaki, who was Japan's ambassador to Canada (2004 to '07), provides a fascinating historical overview ranging from the first Japanese student diplomat, Mutsu Hirokichi who studied at Cambridge in 1888, to the present day. Numata also reminds us of the impressive academic achievements of the brilliant

young diplomat Owada Masako, who studied at Balliol College, Oxford from 1988 to '90 reading international relations before entering the diplomatic service. Her promising diplomatic career ended in 1993, when she married the Crown Prince, who also studied at Oxford, and entered the imperial household.

There are so many interesting lives illuminated in this volume. I enjoyed Joseph Cronin's piece on Basil Hall Chamberlain, a high profile early Japan scholar and writer. Cronin examines his hostility towards state Shinto and the cult of *bushido*. Kayama Haruno provides a fascinating account of the popularity in today's Japan of many British Victorian novelists such as Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens and both Charlotte and Emily Bronte. While Christian missionaries from Britain were only moderately successful in Japan, they were a significant factor in the early British presence from the Meiji period up to the outbreak of World War II and therefore have been profiled in almost every *Biographical Portraits* publication. In this volume Hamish Ion looks at Charles Frederick Warren, Barclay Fowell Buxton and Archibald Campbell Hutchinson. Women are also well represented with interesting articles on the fascinating lives of Yasui Tetsu (1870–1945), early promoter of women's higher education, by Tomida Hiroko, Marianne North (1836–'90) by Karato Tadashi, Lisa, Lady Sainsbury (1912–2014) by Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere, and Dorothy Britton (Lady Bouchier, 1922–2015) by Sir Hugh Cortazzi and Paul Norbury. Other enjoyable profiles are penned by Ayako Hotta-Lister, Gordon Daniels, Richard Bowring, Peter Kornicki, Morita Norimasa and Dharini Parekh.

It's not just people who are the subject of portraits; many entities and themes are also covered. For example Peter Ackroyd looks at 'Wool in Japan' describing how this traditional British product fought off strong local competition to maintain its pole position in the Japanese market. The British Chamber of Commerce (Japan), vividly described by former director Ian de Stains, is an institution which has given invaluable support to British firms in Japan and assists efforts to penetrate the Japanese market. Its Japanese counterpart in the UK, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI), is profiled by Patrick Macartney, and Paul Madden looks at the British Pavilion, Aichi Expo 2005. There is a diverse variety of portraits in the Business, Trade and Investment section by Clive Bradley, Nakajima Yuuichiro, Peter Woodland, Noguchi Yoshio, Martin Edelshain, Ivor Cohen and Peter Bacon. Groups are also covered, such as English lawyers in Japan by Tony Grundy, early British judges

in Japan by Christopher Roberts and the UK-Japan 21st Century Group by Marie Conte-Helm. Other enjoyable portraits of organisations and groups are penned by Kamide Mayu, Koyama Noboru, Colin Ellis, Mary Redfern and Libby Horner. Gill Goddard also deserves praise for producing an excellent bibliography.

Of the organizational portraits, I enjoyed the two articles on the JET (Japan English Teachers) programme by its visionary conceptual progenitor Nicolas Maclean and Japan scholar Graham Healey. JET and its British antecedent the Wolfers' scheme, have greatly contributed to forging strong Japan-UK people-to-people relations, creating better mutual understanding between the two countries and improving English language teaching in Japan. They have allowed tens of thousands of young people to go to Japan and discover it at a local level via its schools, many in rural locations. In the early years many of these JETs were the first foreigners to live in the town or village to which they were dispatched. Some participants have stayed on in Japan, while others have shined in Japan-related or completely different fields.

In their respective articles Healey and Maclean describe the mechanics of the JET scheme, how it evolved, and review its overall impact. According to Healey the JET Programme is 'the world's largest people-exchange programme' with so far more than 60,000 young people from over forty countries having participated. The programme in its present form was established in 1987 as a joint venture between Japan's equivalent of the Home Office and the Foreign Office (ministry of foreign affairs). JET's creation resulted in it absorbing two much smaller pre-existent programmes, the American-oriented Monbusho English Fellows (MEF), which itself was derived from the Fulbright programme and ran from 1977 to '86, and its UK counterpart the British English Teachers Scheme (BETS) or the Wolfers scheme which ran from 1978 to '86. A number of those involved with JET's creation, like Sir Hugh Cortazzi, as well as former participants, are also key contributors to the Biographical Portraits series.

Including *Volume X* and its sister publications, some six-hundred portraits have now been produced. This is an impressive achievement, and makes this unique and growing series a valuable reference resource. While the first volume of the *Biographical Portraits* series came out in 1994, if you combine its sister publications, it forms a fifteen-volume project stretching back 25 years. The entire enterprise has been built thanks to an army of dedicated, unpaid writers and researchers who have tirelessly given their

time and energy to create this impressive body of work, which can now be accessed online thanks to the sterling efforts of the Japan Society.

Sir Hugh Cortazzi, who has been involved with all of the publications as either an editor, compiler, contributor or any combination of the three, has become the driving-force behind the project. He has been greatly assisted by Ian Nish (editor, volumes I and II), Jim Hoare (editor, volume III) and Gordon Daniels who co-edited its sister publications. This steadfast core and their fantastic cohort of energetic contributors has been able to carry the project successfully forward over the past quarter of a century thanks to the generous support and assistance given by Stephen McEnally and Mike Barrett and their colleagues at the Great Britain-Sasakawa Foundation, Paul Norbury and his dedicated publishing staff and Robert Guy and Heidi Potter and the innovative team at the Japan Society. In the last decade, contributing a biographical portrait also appears to have become something of a rite of passage for anyone who wishes to demonstrate their commitment to Anglo-Japanese relations. This new volume, which is dedicated to all contributors, demonstrates that this enterprise is set to thrive and develop over the coming decades. §

A Quiet Place

by Matsumoto Seichō

Bitter Lemon Press (2016)

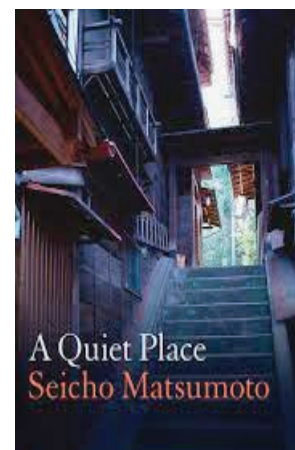
ISBN-10: 1908524634

Review by Harry Martin

Only a handful of Matsumoto Seichō's works have yet made it into English, and yet fledgling entrants to the world of Japanese crime fiction will

soon come to realise that prior to discovering his prolific output they have been paddling only within the smaller tributaries of the genre, oblivious to this great river which flows with powerful currents of national sentiment and a cult following. I have been shamed by Japanese friends and colleagues for allowing this revered author to remain so long outside my consciousness.

A Quiet Place (*Kikanakatta basho*) was the last of Matsumoto's novels to be published and at 228 pages is by no means a lengthy or arduous undertaking. The story begins with a hardworking and dedicated



government official receiving the news of his wife's untimely death while he is away on a business trip in Kobe. This is followed by the proceeding twists and turns of the grieving husband's own investigation and pursuit of the truth. Spurred on largely by the protagonist's paranoid and obsessive nature, the reader is led through a somewhat formulaic process of conspiracy, intrigue and discovery, typical of the crime fiction genre; a cast of mysterious and stimulating characters and cryptic undertones make for an enjoyable journey.

However, what I found interesting about Matsumoto's writing is that he does not focus the attention of the narrative on investigatory or judicial procedures. Rather the narrative centres on the wider context of Japanese society and social psychology, with Matsumoto scrutinising social norms and day-to-day interactions and relationships in routine life.

The story provides an insight into the layers of duty and social obligation (*giri*) found in many aspects of Japanese society, from spousal relationships to interactions with corporate and government organisations. Matsumoto presents a bountiful array of examples, amplifying the complexities and intricacies

of this social phenomenon. For example, at the opening of the story the bereaved husband, moments after hearing of his wife's death, seems to concern himself only with resolving the embarrassment and inconvenience caused to his superiors. This extreme example of *giri* really opened my eyes to the potentially crippling nature of this sense of obligation.

The theme of *giri* plays a recurring and important function in the writing, dominating multiple interactions among the characters and essentially driving the story forward. The often extreme and hyperbolic nature of the main character's moral conflicts are, at times, comical and made me feel a possibly nihilistic scepticism at play in Matsumoto's critique of social norms.

Overall this is a compelling crime thriller with a captivating storyline and interesting characters, providing an enjoyable and effortless read, offering an insight into Japanese social-politics. I feel this book has much to offer to all crime fiction aficionados, but for me it opened a door into a world of an extraordinary author and personality, who should be on the radar of any fan of Japanese literature. §

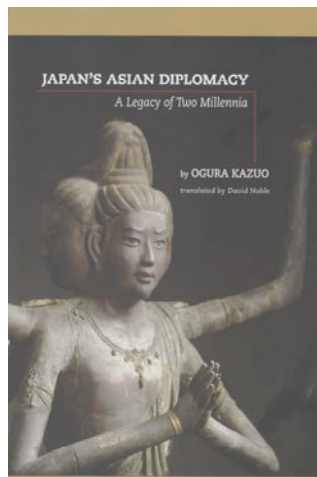
Japan's Asian Diplomacy: A Legacy of Two Millennia

by Ogura Kazuo

LTCB International Library
Trust / International House
of Japan (2015)

ISBN-13: 978-4-924971-39-4

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi



Ogura Kazuo, who is a graduate of both Tokyo and Cambridge universities, served as Japanese ambassador to Vietnam, Korea and France before becoming president of the Japan Foundation. He currently holds professorial appointments at universities in Japan.

In this masterly survey Ambassador Ogura looks at Japan's relations with China and Korea since the earliest recorded times. He notes that previous studies have concentrated on the aggressive ideology of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere and 'Pan-Asianism' as an ideology of resistance to Western colonialism, an idea he problematises in this work.

He suggests that 'our perspective should address the question of how the nation of Japan perceives itself.'

In his opening chapter on 'The Ethos of Japan's Asian Diplomacy' he draws attention to the concept of 'Japan as the "divine land"' and discusses Nichiren's famous *Rissho ankoku ron* (*A Treatise on Pacifying the State by Establishing Orthodoxy*, 1260) as contributing to the creation of the divine land ideology. He argues that insufficient attention has hitherto been given to the importance of Japan's internal politics and domestic power struggles in relation to the development of Japanese foreign policy in Asia.

Part I is entitled the 'Fundamentals of Japan's Asian Diplomacy'. In this Ogura stresses the role and influence of 'shared values' in the formulation of policy, both in the early Japanese relationship with China and in the modern era in response to modernization, colonialism and in the postwar period to democracy and human rights. He describes Japan's response to the 'Yellow Peril' jibes, concluding that in the Anglo-Japanese alliance 'by making itself an ally of a "white" nation Japan strove to leave Asia and the "yellow race" behind.' The rejection of Japan's proposal for racial equality to the League of Nations followed by the condemnation by the League of Japan's invasion of

Manchuria can, he thinks, be seen as contributing to 'Japan's strategy of aggression in Asia'. He considers it 'a mistake to interpret Pan-Asianism simply as a variety of anti-Westernism'.

Ogura is sharply critical of the way Japan often handled relations with China. In presenting the infamous Twenty-One Demands in 1915, Japan's 'overbearing attitude' was 'threatening' and 'involved repeated verbal insults to the Chinese'.

In Chapter Two, entitled 'The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy', he discusses 'the diplomacy of apology as recognition diplomacy'. He concludes that 'If Japan wishes to be fully recognized by the other countries of Asia as an unquestioned economic leader and an established democracy, it must first of all clearly acknowledge the fact that in the past it trampled upon both democracy and liberty in Asia, and does indeed feel remorse for these actions'. He then lists the apologies made in recent years by Japanese leaders.

Ogura draws attention to the influence that 'considerations of honor and "face"' have in Asian diplomacy. His paragraphs on 'initiation of diplomatic contact – who invites whom', 'mutuality and equality', 'maintaining prestige', and 'Diplomatic face in the contemporary world' should be read by all diplomats dealing with Asian affairs, but they should also bear in mind that these considerations apply to other areas as well.

Part II is entitled 'Foreign Relations of Japan, China, and Korea in Historical Perspective'. Chapter Three on 'The History of Seikanron Thought' provides a valu-

able and succinct survey of Japan's relations with Korea from the earliest times to the annexation. In this he discusses the second Anglo-Japanese alliance and its role in relation to Korea. He asserts that 'the establishment of Japanese interests in Korea was founded upon a deal involving Japanese support for British rule in India – a strategic balance of interests'. 'Japan's aggressive foreign policy towards Korea was accepted by the Western powers, and Japan's Asian diplomacy was in fact a diplomacy oriented toward the Western nations – Asia was reduced to little more than its instrument.'

Chapter Four is entitled 'Two Millennia of Sino-Japanese History: Five Wars and their Antecedents'. In this chapter Ogura reminds his readers of the complex history of Japanese contacts with China and the five wars that Japan and China have fought over the last two thousand years. He notes that all these wars began with struggles for influence over the Korean peninsula and were closely connected with domestic politics in both Japan and China. Sino-Japanese relations have 'been deeply affected by both nations' relations with Europe, Russia and the United States'. He suggests that 'imbedding Sino-Japanese relations within a framework of international cooperation can minimize friction between the two countries, but also conversely, alienate them from one another'.

This book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Asian relationships which if mishandled could lead once more to conflicts which could shatter world peace. §

Me Against the World

by Shiraishi Kazufumi

Dalkey Archive Press (2016)

ISBN-13: 978-1943150021

Review by Poppy Cosyns

This novel by Naoki Prize winning author Shiraishi Kazufumi begins intriguingly, with a 'Publisher's Foreword' written by a fictional journalist. It explains that the ensuing work was discovered after the sudden death of his friend Mr K, who had been secretly compiling these 'private musings' while working as a businessman.

What follows is less a work of fiction than a hundred or so pages of nihilistic ranting, in which Mr K attempts – with off-putting ferocity – to unravel the meaning of life (or lack thereof). In one of the more



memorable passages, he goes as far as to liken human beings to cancer cells, noting that 'Humans too lead meaningless lives, having no reason to be born.'

Each and every one of us is something like a cancer cell. While cancer cells can metastasize anywhere and are able to adapt and grow in any environment, there really isn't a single thing that can be considered significant in their existence or in their nature to carry out unlimited proliferation.

Shiraishi revealed in a recent interview with *The Japan Times* that the novel was written as a stream of consciousness and took him just a week to complete. On reading, this comes as little surprise; the text is structured in two parts, but is otherwise without chapters, and the ideas presented flow chaotically into one another, often with little sense of follow-through. False analogies and non-sequiturs dominate the discourse.

For the most part, this is a confounding and faintly distressing novel, which sees Mr K systematically rejecting those scraps of hope or meaning we all cling to when trying to make sense of our existence.

There is light at the end of this very dark tunnel however, with our narrator eventually arriving at a surprisingly optimistic conclusion. He declares that compassion is the one way to elevate the human condition above the 'diabolical programme that has been built into this world.' By this point the tone has softened and Raj Mahtani's translation is at its most

lucid and readable, although how Mr K arrived at his optimistic denouement is difficult to discern. Perhaps it is recognition that when it comes to subjects like love and hope, excessive rationalism is itself irrational.

While this is undoubtedly something of an arduous read, *Me Against The World* demands – in impressively unflinching style – that one consider and interrogate those most elemental of concepts: love; morality; science; religion, and for that reason alone it's worth the slog. [S](#)

Hamlet and Japan: An Evening of Talks and Performances

Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, Shakespeare's Globe

7 July 2016

Review by Susan Meehan

Hamlet and Japan at the Globe Theatre was an ambitious attempt to cover aspects of Shakespeare's extensive history in Japan through talks, music and performances, all in the space of a few hours. The overriding motif of the 'variety show' style evening was that our two nations draw strength from each other and that there is no better exemplar of this than in the performance and reception of Shakespeare.

As two *shamisen* players opened proceedings, a hush descended over the tightly-packed and expectant audience in the candle-lit Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, a Jacobean-style 340-seat theatre.

The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo', quoted Patrick Spottiswoode, Director, Globe Education as he greeted the audience and welcomed onto the stage British theatre producer and former actress Thelma Holt. In this evening's celebration of Shakespeare, it was fitting to begin by celebrating the life of the Japanese theatre director Ninagawa Yukio, renowned for his sumptuous adaptations of Shakespeare, and with whom Holt had collaborated on twenty-one productions since 1986.

Perched on a chair at the front of the stage, a large Hello Kitty bag firmly planted in front of her as a prop, the animated and passionate, yet visibly saddened Holt delivered a heartfelt tribute to her friend, the great man, Ninagawa.

From there, the evening progressed apace with two fine academic presentations, both illustrating the fact that the British don't hold a monopoly on Shakespeare. Sir David Warren, former British

ambassador to Japan, gave an erudite talk focusing on Shakespeare as a contemporary rather than classical influence in Japan. Japan discovered Shakespeare in the late nineteenth century when the country was dramatically transforming, modernising and industrialising in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. Plays such as *Julius Caesar*, the title rendered as *The Rise and Fall of Rome* and *The Sword of Freedom* by Kawashima Keizō (1859–1936) and Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), were politically relevant during Japan's period of liberal awakening during the Taishō period (1912–'26).

Covering much ground, Sir David also touched on modern Japanese adaptations of Shakespeare such as Kurosawa Akira's series of films including *Ran* (based on *King Lear*), *Throne of Blood* (*Macbeth*) and *The Bad Sleep Well* (*Hamlet*). He further whetted the audience's appetite by mentioning acclaimed contemporary and radical Japanese theatre adaptations of Shakespeare by Noda Hideki.

Dr Todd Andrew Borlik, lecturer in the Department of English Literature at Hull University, gave a fascinating account of Sōseki Natsume's negative response to Shakespeare. Sōseki (1867–1916) 'audaciously' criticised Shakespeare from 'a Japanese point of view', pointing out that the issue of suicide as seen in *Hamlet* does not resonate in the same way in a non-Christian country like Japan. Nor was the idea of a man marrying his sister-in-law – as with Gertrude and Claudius – problematic in Japan. Furthermore, the strong appetite for revenge in Japanese theatre can make Hamlet's vacillation difficult to comprehend.

Following the intermission, the evening's focus moved towards performances and readings from *Hamlet*. Isoda Aki, Japan-based actress and Shakespearean, performed her *A Vision of Ophelia* in *kabuki* style. Isoda's three short pieces strip *Hamlet* down to the action and words of Ophelia.



Isoda Aki as Ophelia in an earlier performance of *A Vision of Ophelia*

Isoda's performances were in modern colloquial Japanese and without English surtitles. Her use of props (Hamlet's love letters, flowers, the river), however, ensured that the entire audience knew on which parts of *Hamlet* she was drawing.

Isoda's performance was a testament to her longevity. Now in her 80s, she has been performing these pieces for around 45 years. Her heavily whitened *kabuki*-style face – which made her seem far older than she otherwise appears – was startling. She is a tremendous supporter of Shakespeare and the Globe and her commitment to acting is to be greatly admired.

A comedic highlight of the evening was a reading of the first translation into Japanese of 'To be or not to be', written by Charles Wirgman, creator and editor in the 1860s of *Japan Punch*. Japanese actor Ueda Sadao read the piece to the evident hilarity of the Japanese speakers in the crowd. He did this with tremendous style despite the quality of the doggerel. Patrick Spottiswoode in turn read Wirgman's text – translated back into English – again in fine dramatic style. The result was extremely funny and had the audience

laughing at phrases including 'Would it be better if, my head hurts' and 'Or to take arm against this trouble sea' and finishing 'Goodbye to you, and then clap-clap.'

The evening came to a close with a conversation between Spottiswoode, Rosie Fielding (a PhD student specialising in theatre), Isoda's costume and wig dressers and Isoda herself. They discussed the symbolism of the wigs and kimono used by Isoda: pink kimono and long hair for innocence, red for passion and love, and unkempt hair and a brightly-coloured kimono with lots of yellow to reflect descent into grief and madness.

The evening's accomplished performers, musicians and presenters marvellously achieved the aim of celebrating Shakespeare and Japan in this milestone 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. Though slightly overloaded by all that I had heard and seen (each one of the expert presentations could have formed the basis of an afternoon's discussion in itself) I felt fortunate to have been in the audience.

Referencing Spottiswoode, the words of Mercury did not disappoint or sound harsh at all! §