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- 1997). All references to Hamlet are to this edition. References to other plays are also to this edition and will be identified in parenthesis in the text.
- 10 For a useful summary of the characteristics and development of *wuxia* as a major genre in Chinese cinema, see Stephen Teo, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The "Wuxia" Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 1–11.
- 11 Chen Pingyuan, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fiction*, trans. Victor Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 231.
- 12 Burnett, *Shakespeare and World Cinema*, 141.
- 13 "Bon," *ReligionFacts.com* (28 October 2016), accessed 4 October 2017, www.religionfacts.com/bon
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 For a discussion of "animism and shamanism" in film, see Mike King, *Luminous: The Spiritual Life on Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 37–49. King makes reference to both *Rashomon* and *Kundun* on 47.
- 16 Alexander Huang, "The Paradox of Female Agency: Ophelia and East Asian Sensibilities," in *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, eds. Kaara L. Peterson and Deanne Williams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 87.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 On the significance of angels in late medieval mourning and burial; in engravings; and in Books of Hours, books with texts and prayers for Christian devotion, see Daniel Swift, *Shakespeare's Common Prayers: The Book of Common Prayer and the Elizabethan Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159–60.
- 20 Noting that death is both dreaded and longed for in *Hamlet*, Michael Neill argues in *Issues of Death: Mortality and Death in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) that "[b]oth of these contradictory attitudes towards death can be accommodated in the hero's enigmatic final sentence, 'the rest is silence' (V. ii. 352); for the meaning of these words, whose terminating period enacts the abruptness of which they speak, shifts with the degree of emphasis one gives to 'rest' or 'silence'. Spoken with one inflexion, they can signal the grateful release of a mind tired with the endless iteration of 'words, words, words'; spoken with another, they can express the frustration of a narrative voice cut short, like Hotspur's, by the 'stop' of death" (218).
- 21 Edwin Gentzler, *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

12 Is Shakespeare "Translatable"? Cinematic Adaptations by Kozintsev, Kurosawa and Feng Xiaogang

King-Kok Cheung

China celebrated its first Shakespeare Festival in April 1986. Twenty-five versions of 15 plays were presented in two weeks, and over 100,000 people saw the 70 performances. One of the best, according to a Chinese critic, was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the China Coal Miner's Troupe:

In it Bottom and his Athenian Workmen-players appear with the sleeveless vests, gait and speech of typical old-style Beijing workmen. When Bottom turns into a donkey he wears the painted face of a Peking Opera clown—plus ears. When fairy royals Oberon and Titania quarrel, it is not over her little servant but over an "eight-function" digital watch. The play, complete with electronic music, flashing green lights and other impressionistic stage effects, a dialog salted with references to [current] events, and a finale of fairies waving Chinese flags and Union Jacks, delighted audiences.¹

In accordance with local theatrical practices and musical preferences, various regions of China offered their "indigenous" renditions of Shakespeare: "*Othello* made a highly acclaimed Peking Opera. *Macbeth* was in the ancient *kunju* opera form, which preceded Peking Opera, and also in Sichuan style."² Chinese opera, the main medium for the adaptations, is said to have many characteristics in common with Elizabethan drama:

both have many sub-plots. Second, the sparse settings of bare stages give free rein to the audience's imagination. Third, both stages extend out into the audience, enabling the action to be seen from three sides and creating a bond of intimacy with viewers.³

The Festival was a great success; the only major criticism was praise in disguise: "there were far too few performances of each play, so that the audience demands, especially those of students and factory workers, have not been met."⁴

Delighting people all over the world, Shakespeare is infinitely portable and transferable – whether or not he is “translatable.” Here I am not referring to the difficulty of translating verse, though that is insurmountable enough. “Poetry,” Robert Frost tells us, “is what gets lost in translation.” Shakespeare, with his predilection for puns and devilish delight in double entendre and malapropism, especially eludes translation. There is another more formidable difficulty. I use the word “translate” metaphorically to mean “replicate the sensibility of Shakespeare,” especially his “negative capability.” Although my topic pertains to production, I use “translate” (instead of “adapt”) advisedly because we generally expect a relatively high degree of faithfulness from a translation. I submit that the very quality that makes Shakespeare popular across cultures also makes him especially hard to render faithfully.

What makes Shakespeare accessible to diverse cultures is his ability to offer a multiple perspective, to excite a wide range of responses in any given play – especially in the mature tragedies. Critics have given various names to that uncanny, all-encompassing insight of Shakespeare. Norman Rabkin calls it “complementarity”; he adduces the presentation of reason in *Hamlet* as an example:

the play presents an ideal, that of reason, in such a way that we must recognize its absolute claim on our moral allegiance, and then entirely subverts that ideal by demonstrating that its polar opposite is the only possible basis for the action its protagonist is morally committed to perform.⁵

Susan Snyder calls it “the comic matrix of Shakespeare’s tragedies”; she shows how *King Lear* is suspended between the divine and the absurd: “Shakespeare ... is not rewriting the *Purgatorio* or anticipating *Endgame*: he is setting one vision against the other, and in their uneasy coexistence lies the play’s peculiar tragic force.”⁶ Stephen Booth calls it “indefinition”: “*Macbeth* makes us able to sit unperturbed in the presence of mutually antipathetic facts of a sort that in ordinary experience put our minds in panic... of truth beyond the limits of categories.”⁷ (Booth argues that “indefinition” pervades all the mature tragedies, but he uses *Macbeth* and *King Lear* as illustrations.) Marvin Rosenberg calls it “polyphony”:

Macbeth knows how wrong it is to murder a guest-king—and *Macbeth* murders him. Knowing it wrong involves clusters of feeling tones.... The countering impulse to murder sounds harsher notes.... Sometimes one cluster of notes seems to override all, but even then countering strains may be faintly heard; sometimes the counterpoint swells, and overwhelms the original chords, controlling them, but not extinguishing them.⁸

The different terms all describe the way Shakespeare opens unlimited interpretative possibilities in his persistent refusal to conform to any one system. Because he can strike multiple chords, some of his notes are bound to resonate in every culture, in every individual. But precisely because he allows each culture to see his plays in the light of its own prevalent beliefs and ethics, each tends to generate performances – however successful and memorable in themselves – that do not fully reflect the playwright’s broad sympathy.

Are not other English playwrights equally “untranslatable”? Some are but certainly not to the same degree. I can easily imagine a Chinese adaptation of Dryden’s *All for Love* in which the director has no trouble translating the play. Nor would a Chinese audience have difficulty understanding its moral – that it is wrong to let passion interfere with familial and national duty. This play would also lend itself well to the new theory of Ethical Literary Criticism developed by Nie Zhenzhao in the last decade, which believes that a critic could objectively unpack the ethics embedded in the literature of any given period. A critic or an audience versed in Ethical Literary Criticism would have no difficulty extracting the “moral” in this play. While the audience may sympathize with Dryden’s Antony and Cleopatra, it also knows that the lovers are guilty of making the wrong ethical choice. Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, as Rabkin has demonstrated, is quite another story.⁹ There Roman and romantic ideals vie equally for our sympathy, and in a faithful production we are left to our own persuasions as to whether the lovers are right or wrong in choosing love over duty. But faithful directors are as hard to come by as faithful readers; most of us, as Janet Adelman justly accuses, “want the play to conform tidily to our system: Rome or Egypt, Reason or Passion, Public or Private,” despite the fact that “the play achieves a fluidity of possibility far more akin to our actual experience than any of our systems can be.”¹⁰ Foreign directors, who usually exercise considerable freedom in adaptation, are likely to emphasize – in accordance with their particular ethical and cultural beliefs – either the depravity or the transcendence of Shakespeare’s lovers, and their audience will be swayed accordingly.

Through a discussion of Grigori Kozintsev and Akira Kurosawa’s film adaptations of *King Lear*, and Feng Xiaogang’s adaptation of *Hamlet*, I demonstrate Shakespeare’s polyphonic indefinition as well as suggest what we can learn from the foreign productions even when they stray from the original. The two auteurs’ adaptations of *Lear* could not be more different. “I started out to make a film about Motonari Mori, the 16th-century warlord whose three sons are admired in Japan as paragons of filial virtue,” Kurosawa explained. He wondered what would have happened to the warlord had his sons been ingrates: “It was only after I was well into writing the script about these imaginary unfilial sons of the Mori clan that the similarities to ‘Lear’ occurred to me.”¹¹

It is admittedly unfair, therefore, to judge *Ran* (1985) according to its fidelity to *Lear*, for Kurosawa claims that the relationship of his film to the tragedy is only "secondary." Yet he draws so extensively from Shakespeare (to the extent of having many parallel scenes and dialogues) that his departures do tell us much about the Elizabethan playwright.

Where Kurosawa stresses historical time, Kozintsev diffuses it. The Russian director wrote,

The more I work on films which are called historical, the less I understand the meaning of the term. I have tried for a long time to neutralize everything which has anything to do with ancient settings, to tone them down and make them less obtrusive.... The boundaries of time are particularly vague in Shakespeare's plays.¹²

He also avoided cinematic effects, such as gaudy costumes and flashy colours, that might call attention to themselves.¹³ Yet he claimed that he was influenced both by the Noh Theatre and by Kurosawa in making the film version of *King Lear*.¹⁴

The mises en scène manifest the two auteurs' divergent motives. The Russian director wants to bring his *Lear* "as close as possible to life"; filmed in black and white, it takes place in the stark landscape of Russian steppes.¹⁵ Kozintsev hardly alters the text despite some elaborations. The Japanese director exploits stylized conventions and techniques. *Ran*, an extravaganza of colour, takes place in sixteenth-century medieval Japan. Kurosawa freely adapts: Hidetora, the Japanese Lear, has three sons instead of three daughters. The pre-Christian religion invoked in the English drama becomes Russian orthodox religion in Kozintsev's and Buddhism in Kurosawa's.

Their distinctive personal touches are most notable in the storm scene. Kozintsev dramatizes massive displacement by packing the hovel where Lear and the fool take refuge with human bodies, cluttered together. Kozintsev calls them "the many faces of Poor Tom" in whose midst Lear, Edgar and the fool are "homeless among the homeless."¹⁶ Commenting on that scene, Jan Kott observes, "In that enormous shack... the mad ruler and his subjects find themselves sharing a common Russian fate: poverty, degradation, and suffering."¹⁷ Where Kozintsev emphasizes common human vulnerability Kurosawa dwells on individual responsibility, on nemesis. Instead of encountering the counterpart of Edgar or a swarm of beggars in the hovel, Hidetora takes shelter during the storm with a blind young man, who turns out to be the son of a lord whom Hidetora had killed. Hidetora allowed the heir to live but only after blinding him. The blind man now entertains his former enemy by playing on his flute; the music is so plaintive and unnerving that Hidetora, quite unhinged, escapes back into the storm outside. (In Shakespeare it is the fool who runs out in panic at the sight of Poor Tom.)

Both the Russian scene focussing on the tattered assemblage and the Japanese scene focussing on the blind victim are haunting and unforgettable. Although Kozintsev and Kurosawa have added elements extraneous to the original *Lear*, their additions are inspired by the bard. Kozintsev had discovered in the poetry "seedlings of what can be developed into dynamic visual reality."¹⁸ He defines the development of the image of Lear as a "thawing."¹⁹ This motif accounts for our impression of a seemingly innocent and gentle Lear despite Kozintsev's contrary belief that the rest of the play is "retribution" for Lear's behaviour in the first scene.²⁰ The huddle of human bodies in the Russian production is a cinematic rendering of the "Poor naked wretches" whom Lear apostrophizes:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.²¹

This same passage prompts Kurosawa to expose his Lear "to feel what wretches feel." Hidetora, who had every luxury before, must now taste penury; he who was ruthless and insensitive before must now take physic by confronting his former victim. When at the sound of the plangent music he rushes deranged into the storm, he seeks the same refuge as does Lear, who finds the natural elements more bearable than his inner turmoil: "This tempest will not give me leave to ponder / On things would hurt me more."²² The inner tempest contends with, and rages above, the external tempest; these one-time despotic rulers look to the storm without to distract them from their disquiet within. Both the Russian and the Japanese renditions hark back to Shakespeare; the innovative touches of the directors are grounded in Lear's prayer which, according to Rosenberg, realizes the "archetypal action of the powerful humbled to insight."²³

But has either director rendered a faithful "translation"? The insights acquired by the Russian and the Japanese Lears in the storm scene vary considerably: Kozintsev's Lear hears "the voice of evil celebrating a victory"²⁴; Kurosawa's hears music that reminds him of his past sin. The Russian ruler is driven mad by what has happened to him (Rosenberg notes that he "accused Fool, and then Kent, of the crimes he enumerated")²⁵; the Japanese warlord is driven mad by confronting his own brutality. In highlighting the pervasiveness of human misery, Kozintsev

calls attention away from the peculiar tragedy of Shakespeare's King, which stems in part from his own tyrannical behaviour towards his daughters. In suggesting comeuppance Kurosawa muffles Lear's plea that he is "more sinn'd against than sinning"²⁶ and instead plays up Regan's unfeeling bromide that "to willful men, / The injuries that they themselves procure / Must be their schoolmasters."²⁷ Shakespeare alone allows us to see the storm as reflecting both individual culpability and the human condition. The two foreign adaptations reduce some of the complexity embedded in the original.

What Kozintsev and Kurosawa have done is what many critics do all the time: focus on what they feel is the dominant theme in Shakespeare and then produce a film or a paper about it – with their own thesis. In a critical circle where most people have read the bard, a narrow thesis is quickly modified by other secondary texts. But in a milieu where most viewers have no recourse to the English text, a film director can usually make of Shakespeare what they will without wrestling with dissenting voices, and their audiences would readily assume an adaptation to be a "translation." Nevertheless, the problem of fully representing Shakespeare is not confined to foreign productions. Peter Brook's *King Lear*, heavily influenced by Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, focusses insistently on the absurd aspects of life. Gone is the paternal susceptibility (Lear is an adamant figure throughout); gone is Edgar's understandable umbrage at his illegitimacy; gone is the moving tenderness that informs the reunion between Lear and Cordelia.

Why does each director choose to play one dominant key in Shakespeare at the expense of other contrapuntal notes? Is it because his reason, meaning and pattern are inexhaustible, too elusive to be contained? In our attempts to pin him down to a coherent structure we privilege "what we ought to say" rather than "what we feel." Chinese critics, for instance, are explicitly urged to speak what they ought to say. According to Qi-xin He, they "have been and still are encouraged to examine Shakespeare's play from a Marxist point of view," a point of view underwritten by Mao: "To Mao, every form of art is designed for a specific class, and those who believed that art could transcend class, in fact, upheld bourgeois art. Since art belonged to specific classes, it followed specific political lines."²⁸ Accordingly, one critic regards the theme of *King Lear* as "the portrayal of the shaken economic foundations of the feudal society and the rapid decline of the order of the old world."²⁹ Such a line of inquiry inevitably falls short of girding Shakespeare.

Directors, no less so than critics, try to satisfy to various degrees the human longing for a political, intellectual or moral pattern by transposing Shakespeare into their own world view, one harmonious with their own ethical or religious beliefs. Shakespeare, to be sure, is the one who allows the director or the critic to take such liberties. For his genius lies in multiplying insights frequently at odds with one another without zeroing

in on a particular perspective, so that directors are free to pick the point of view they especially favour and attune it to their personal concerns or to their cultural milieu. They may do so out of constraint or free will. Even in the absence of political pressure, directors may be influenced by their own need for some sort of logic in adapting Shakespeare. The emphasis on guilt in *Ran* is one example. Kurosawa said in an interview, "What has always troubled me about 'King Lear' is that Shakespeare gives his characters no past. We are plunged directly into the agonies of their present dilemmas without knowing how they came to this point." Trying to ferret out the *reason* for Lear's abuse of power and for the daughters' ferocious response, he gave Lear a history in *Ran*: "I try to make clear that his power must rest upon a lifetime of bloodthirsty savagery. Forced to confront the consequences of his misdeeds, he is driven mad."³⁰ The emphasis on guilt in *Ran* is thus deliberate. In making Hidetora a victim of his own misdeeds, Kurosawa has made *sense* of *Lear*; he has rendered what is mysterious comprehensible; he has given the play poetic justice – which Shakespeare painstakingly sidesteps.

Chinese director Feng Xiaogang's adaptation of *Hamlet – The Banquet*, released on DVD in the United States as *Legend of the Black Scorpion* (2006) – is no exception. *The Banquet* is a spectacular production that tries to reprise all the original subplots (including the play within the play), all the Chinese vis-à-vis of the English cast (Gertrude becomes Queen Wan, Claudius becomes King Li, Hamlet becomes Wu Luan and Ophelia becomes Qing Nü) and even all of the Prince's predilections (for poetry, music, dance, fencing and acting). But the film's overriding theme, culminating in a visual moral clincher at the end, is the bane of lust, whether for power or for a man or a woman. King Li kills his brother for the throne and his queen; Queen Wan condones or commits equally ruthless acts for the Prince and for the throne; Prince Wu Luan wishes to kill the King as much out of jealousy as out of duty to avenge his father. (In *The Banquet*, Queen Wan is not Wu Luan's biological mother but former sweetheart, four years younger than the Prince; she married his biological father and regicidal uncle in succession.) The only character who seems to rise above incest and the political fray is Qing Nü, who is as innocent as Ophelia.

In Feng's adaptation, the psychological focus is on Queen Wan rather than the Prince. Admittedly she is not one-dimensional. She yields to King Li's sexual overtures in the hope of sparing Wu Luan's life. In a scene that parallels Claudius's prayer scene, she stalls at poisoning King Li on account of his consummate erotic devotion to her. King Li also surprises the audience at the end when he voluntarily drinks the lethal wine after finding out that his beloved queen is the one who schemes to poison him. But these scenes could hardly mitigate the atrocious excess of the duo. King Li stages the public bludgeoning of a high official (who has spoken out against the usurpation) to death and executes the rest

of his family; Queen Wan orders the whipping, and subsequently also threatens scarification, of Qing Nü, who volunteers to accompany the Prince in his exile as hostage.

Although Feng tries to avoid making his characters black and white by tempering King Li's and Queen Wan's lust for power with their obsessive love, the audience could hardly feel any psychological tension, for the major characters in Feng's film often remain opaque. Part of that is by design. The recurrent use of masks by the Prince, and by the players in the "play within the play" is, I believe, not just a theatrical prop but a metaphor for "seems" or the "trappings and suits of woe," as opposed to "that within which passeth show."³¹ The masks accentuate the characters' inscrutability and the Shakespearean contrast of appearance versus reality. Yet the tragic heroes in Shakespeare are much more transparent on account of their soliloquies. In lieu of soliloquies that illuminate the tragic hero's interiority, *The Banquet* is punctuated with gory skirmishes carried out at the behest of King Li or Queen Wan. In the absence of verbal revelations, *The Banquet*, for all its titillating scenes, cannot arouse deep emotions from the audience.

To return to the two adaptations of *Lear*, the more a director tries to make the play follow his or her logic – whether moral, religious or philosophical – the less Shakespearean is the production. *King Lear* stubbornly resists formula. As Rosenberg points out, "Any critic of the play willing to find a unifying thematic assertion in it ... can find a counterassertion, if he will look for it."³² Most directors would not look for a counter-assertion, as though they were afraid that their audiences might become lost in the dreadful vortex of possibilities. Yet an audience who shares a similar cultural and intellectual ambiance to its director may not readily perceive an auteur's reductive tendency; to someone steeped in Existentialism Peter Brook's *Lear* may seem faithful enough. In contrast, a foreign director's point of view usually stands out, coming as it were from another world. An English-speaking audience is more likely to detect the discrepancy between Shakespeare's original and its foreign adaptation. The same audience that may be blind to the partiality of a local performance readily raises its brow at the first sign of departure in an overseas production.

Hence we can learn much about Shakespeare from attending international performances, for at least three reasons. First, through their omissions or additions foreign adaptations can pick out the aesthetic contours of Shakespeare; second, they may hammer home a familiar insight with a new force; third, they may call attention to dimensions hitherto unnoticed by an English-speaking audience. Even more so than an English-speaking audience, the non-English speaking audience for whom the production is primarily intended obviously benefits the most, though that audience also would be more liable to take the director's interpretation as Shakespeare's essence.

Because foreign productions usually omit some nuances from the original they can lead us by indirection to those subtle elements. Despite Kozintsev's preoccupation with the misery of poverty and Kurosawa's obsession with comeuppance, we are all the more aware of the perspectives missing from either film: we notice that the Russian director eclipses Lear's responsibility and that the Japanese director downplays gratuitous evil. Similarly, Brook's decisions to tailor the text to accentuate the "Beckettian bleakness" of his production actually "help to define the affirmative element in *Lear*."³³ Thus even a production that fails to express the original plenitude sharpens our awareness of that profusion by default. Equally revealing are a director's additions. Kurosawa vehemently denied having any didactic intention: "I have no lessons to impart. Nothing to teach. Simply look at my films and draw from them whatever meaning you like."³⁴ But the anti-violence message in *Ran* is too insistent to be missed. The obtrusive lesson only amplifies the philosophical silence in the original. The director's didactic impulse renders the more palpable its absence in Shakespeare.

Transporting the playwright into another culture and another theatre, a foreign adaptation can lend a new resonance to the commonplace about Shakespeare's universality. Kurosawa's alteration of details at times magnifies rather than diminishes the Shakespearean vision. If the Japanese hovel scene highlights guilt by overshadowing the horror of random evil, the horseback scene, in which Kurosawa condenses Shakespeare's prison scene and last scene, more than makes up for that overemphasis. After a moving reconciliation between Hidetora and Saburo – the male counterpart of Cordelia – the virtuous son carries his decrepit father on his horse. Hidetora leans his head fondly on Saburo's shoulder, muttering wistfully, "I have so much to say. When we are alone we can talk, father to son—that's all I want." The father seems totally oblivious to the war raging around them; after an unrelenting ordeal he feels gratified. But only for an instant. For at the very moment, when all losses seem restored, Saburo is shot by an arrow in an ambush arranged by his older brother. Lear's respite of being imprisoned together with Cordelia is made the more fleeting by Kurosawa. As Hidetora himself dies with his dead child in his arms, the jester (Kyoami) demands whether Buddha laughs to see mortals weep. (Cf. Gloucester's "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods / They kill us for their sport.")³⁵ But the person who has the last word in the Japanese scene is not the indignant fool but Tango, Kent's counterpart, who rebukes the jester for incriminating Buddha; Tango retorts that Buddha is the one who weeps to see men wreak havoc among themselves by preying upon one another. "And that's true too," Gloucester would probably second.

But the film does not end with any didactic words. To parallel the subplot of Edgar guiding the blind Gloucester to Dover Cliff, Kurosawa has the blind victim of Hidetora guided by his devout sister in their attempt

to escape from assassins. The blind man has forgotten to take his flute with him and his sister offers to fetch it, leaving with him an icon of Buddha. On her way to retrieve the instrument, the loving sister is killed. The film ends with the blind brother, who has groped his way to a precipice, dropping the Buddhist icon by accident. The parchment unrolls, revealing the picture of a placid Buddha at the bottom of the cliff.

We recall that it is soon after Edgar's pious statement – "The gods are just"³⁶ – that Lear enters with an example of virtue unrewarded: Cordelia hanged. In both the original and the Japanese versions, the divine is invoked only to be questioned. Much as we are led throughout *Ran* to see some sort of religious and moral logic, the ending is mute. While both the horseback scene and the cliff scene of Kurosawa deviate from Shakespeare's *Lear*, they are remarkably faithful in spirit to the English play, in which hope is often raised – only to be brought low. Notwithstanding his didactic impulse the Japanese director has transferred, with admirable success, the insistent questioning of the original play. In *Ran*, as in *Lear*, as in life, we are made to think in varying moments that the gods are just, or unjust; that human nature is benign, or savage; that suffering is edifying, or stultifying. By grafting Shakespeare's complex world view to a radically different cultural setting, Kurosawa makes us marvel anew at the playwright's transcendence of time and place.

Foreign performances may also reveal facets of Shakespeare overlooked hitherto. The war in *Lear* is a case in point: the audience is generally too engrossed by the fates of Lear and Cordelia in Shakespeare to pay much attention to the battle itself, which ends almost as soon as we know it has started. Yet both Kozintsev and Kurosawa choose to zero in on the war: Kozintsev on its ravages; Kurosawa on its glory and gore. (Both auteurs had lived through the Second World War and seen its devastating effects on Russia and Japan.) Setting in relief what appears merely as a backdrop in Shakespeare, these two directors alert us to an underlying motif almost imperceptible while reading *Lear*.

Whereas we read about the disparity between the haves and have-nots through the lengthy speeches of the dispossessed Lear, it takes a *visual* presentation to spotlight the contrast between the vulnerable and the armed. In Kozintsev, the stream of naked wretches is struggling for survival; the armed soldiers are fully equipped – only to kill. The irony, I believe, is embedded in Shakespeare. Stanley Cavell, for instance, perceives that it is when Edgar is fully armed that he reveals himself to his dying father: "Armed, and with the old man all but seeped away, he feels safe enough to give his father vision again and bear his recognition. As sons fear, and half wish, it is fatal."³⁷ This peculiar confrontation of father and son epitomizes the unnatural interaction of human beings, including the closest of kin: arming not so much to defend as to hurt. The dispossessed are made the more wretched by those who have the means to succour.

In Kurosawa war brings out yet another form of irony – what Rosenberg calls "the savage primitivism of sophisticated man": "The *Lear* world suffers the pains of civilization, with robed and furred gowns of wool and silk ... and a lavish monarchical economy so sophisticated it casually spawns the bedlam beggars and poor naked wretches of the audience's experience."³⁸ Kurosawa conveys this oxymoronic reflection not by sartorial opulence but by rugged panoplies and colourful streamers – in yellow, red, blue and white. (Yellow banners designate the soldiers of Hidetora's eldest son, Taro; red banners, of the middle son, Jiro; blue, of the youngest son, Saburo; white, of Saburo's father-in-law, Fujimaki.) These colour-coded rivalling troops in the majestic cavalry scenes advance towards one another in stately phalanxes. This brilliant array of orderly troops contrasts with the chaos encapsulated in the film's title: 亂 or chaos. In showing how the resources of civilization are marshalled to kill, the choreography reinforces by analogy Shakespeare's subtext about the abuse of power. Both the Russian and the Japanese directors effectively unveil Shakespeare's "darker purpose."

The Chinese – enjoined to toe a certain political line in approaching Shakespeare – may too have discerned impulses remote to contemporary Western audiences, such as the reason (besides the similarities between Chinese and Elizabethan drama) given for the success of the Chinese Shakespeare Festival: the chaos erupting in the wake of the transition from a feudal to a modern society. To a Western scholar the argument that historical and political developments account for the popularity of Shakespeare may seem obtuse at first. It tells us again how each generation or each regime legitimizes, or tries to be legitimized by, Shakespeare. Yet, from *Political Shakespeare* edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield to Stephen Greenblatt's *Will and the World* to Jonathan Hart's *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, we have been shown how heavily Shakespeare's plays are embroiled in the politics of his age. Little wonder that the Chinese too see the Bard as speaking to their political upheavals. (I also cannot help linking the relentless decimation of political dissidents in *The Banquet* as casting a shadow on various contemporary regimes.) Still, a little viewing, no less than a little reading, is a dangerous thing, especially in the case of Shakespeare. In both the critical and the theatrical circles we need many voices to sound Will out.

One can easily add to the reasons why foreign adaptations can enhance our appreciation of Shakespeare. Leonard Pronko, for instance, suggests that the East may present the Elizabethan playwright "in a style much more similar to that of the original productions than are those of the productions one usually witnesses in the modern theatre."³⁹ Where Pronko has in mind the analogous dramaturgy of Peking opera and Elizabethan drama, I would like to posit a certain parallel sensibility that may have accounted for why *Lear* was "wonderfully understandable and extremely successful" in the first Chinese Shakespeare Festival.⁴⁰ Less affected by

the scientific rationalism and the individualism of the post-Renaissance West, many Asians of my generation still hold the supernatural in awe and the family sacred; old age also commands much greater reverence in the East, where filial piety is still regarded as a cardinal virtue. Operating in such a cultural climate the Chinese director of *Lear* can perhaps suggest more feelingly than his Western counterparts the preternatural complicity in the storm scene; the inhumanity of the wayward daughters; and the shock and outrage of the abused parent, the aged king. In any case the Chinese Shakespeare Festival seems to have infused the Renaissance giant with a new life, making him accessible once more to different segments of society, from learned scholars to coal miners.

I am not suggesting that modern directors in the West cannot duplicate Elizabethan dramaturgy and sensibility, though it does take a world of critics and directors to illuminate the many faces of Shakespeare. He could inspire radical departures as well. Directors who borrow much from him should be allowed to improvise much. After all, the Bard borrowed many of his plots from his predecessors, though he invariably left his own imprimatur. As with the scripting of plays, adapting and directing them are forms of creativity too; and Shakespeare frequently inspires memorable adaptations, different as they may be from the original. Lady Kaede, Hidetora's implacable daughter-in-law, is one of the most striking figures in *Ran*, but her powerful role is entirely of Kurosawa's making – though one may argue, along with Vincent Canby, that she is “a combination of Goneril, Regan, and Lady Macbeth.”⁴¹ The English playwright would most likely wink at these free adaptations – as long as we do not mistake every footage a Will.

Is Shakespeare “translatable”? Perhaps not, though a definite answer cannot emerge from the sketchy evidence presented here, especially since I have not seen many of the highly acclaimed productions. Nothing would please me more to be told that I am wrong. But should I not live so long as to stand refuted, I remain grateful to the many directors – foreign and domestic – who have allowed me to see so much.

Notes

- 1 Hengsheng Yang, “Shakespeare in the Chinese Idiom,” *China Reconstructs* 35, no. 7 (July 1986): 42.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Zuolin Huang, “On China's First Shakespeare Festival,” *China Reconstructs* 35, no. 7 (July 1986): 40.
- 5 Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Understanding* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), 6.
- 6 Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 179.
- 7 Stephen Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 117.

- 8 Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), x.
- 9 Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 64–72.
- 10 Adelman, 171.
- 11 Peter Grilli, “Kurosawa Directs a Cinematic ‘Lear,’” *New York Times*, 15 December 1985, www.nytimes.com/1985/12/15/movies/kurosawa-directs-a-cinematic-lear.html.
- 12 Grigori Kozintsev, *King Lear: The Space of Tragedy: The Diary of a Film Director*, trans. Mary Mackintosh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 1.
- 13 Ibid., 37.
- 14 Ibid., 3–14.
- 15 Ibid., 36.
- 16 Ibid., 39.
- 17 Jan Kott, “The Edo *Lear*,” *New York Review of Books*, 24 April 1986, 13.
- 18 Kozintsev, 54.
- 19 Ibid., 40.
- 20 Ibid., 57.
- 21 William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton, 1974), 3.4. 28–36.
- 22 Ibid., 3.4. 24–25.
- 23 Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of King Lear* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 204.
- 24 Ibid., 50.
- 25 Ibid., 196.
- 26 Shakespeare, 3.2. 58–59.
- 27 Ibid., 2.4. 304–306.
- 28 Qi-xin He, “China's Shakespeare,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1986), 157.
- 29 Quoted in *ibid.*, 158.
- 30 Grilli, 1.
- 31 Shakespeare, 1.2. 89–90.
- 32 Rosenberg, *Lear*, 5.
- 33 Snyder, 170.
- 34 Grilli, 17.
- 35 Shakespeare, 4.1. 36–37.
- 36 Ibid., 5.3.171.
- 37 Stanley Cavell, “The Avoidance of Love,” in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of King Lear: A Collection of Critical essays*, ed. Janet Adelman (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 81.
- 38 Rosenberg, *Lear*, 18.
- 39 Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Theater East and West: Perspective Toward a Total Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 47.
- 40 Yang, 41.
- 41 Vincent Canby, “The Screen: *Ran*, directed by Akira Kurosawa,” *New York Times*, 27 September 1985, C14.