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# Ninagawa Yukio's Intercultural *Hamlet*: Parsing Japanese Iconography

*Jon M. Brokering*

*The efforts of Ninagawa Yukio to draw upon traditional Japanese theatrical techniques in the staging of Western classics arose from his desire to break from the mimetic, Western style of staging plays and to revitalize aspects of classical Japanese theater that had fallen out of use in modern "new theater" (shingeki) drama. Moreover, he wished to divest Shakespeare of the highbrow status it held in Japan and popularize Shakespeare by incorporating familiar imagery from indigenous culture. Owing to their highly visual approach, Ninagawa's productions have also enjoyed surprising success in the West, where his interpretations provide striking new perspectives on Shakespeare and other classics. Ninagawa has gained worldwide recognition and in Great Britain his work is often hailed as profoundly illuminating. This paper investigates Ninagawa's production of *Hamlet* (1998), which ran for eight performances at the Barbican Centre, London, as part of the Barbican International Theatre Event series. In this revival, the author served as backstage interpreter between the Japanese and the British stage crews.*

*The paper examines four major aspects of Ninagawa's approach. First, it focuses on his transposition of the play in time and space: as a framing device Ninagawa sets the play in the dressing rooms of a theater, underscoring the themes of pretense and dissembling. Second, the paper examines Ninagawa's symbolic use of curtains and stairways. Third, it discusses the allegorical use of the Japanese doll tier (hinadan) as a central motif to highlight the hierarchy of the Danish court and the precariousness of power. Finally, it discusses the stage techniques which Ninagawa borrows from kabuki and nō to enhance the production's theatricality. The warm reception this *Hamlet* enjoyed in both Britain and Japan demonstrates how Ninagawa Yukio's stage iconography transcends cultural, linguistic, and political borders.*

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### Introduction

Owing to an aggressive century-long policy to “catch up with the West,” which included importing the best of Western culture, the Japanese became aficionados of American and European music, literature, and art—often to the detriment of indigenous culture. Japan’s defeat in World War II and subsequent occupation by United States forces accelerated the acclimatization to Western ways of life. The late 1960s and early 1970s, however, saw a countermovement in theatre called the Underground (or Little) Theatre movement. Spearheaded by Suzuki Tadashi, Ninagawa Yukio, Kara Juro, Terayama Shuji, and others, it aimed to break from deferential imitation of Western drama with its concomitant realism and to revive the debilitated traditional forms of theatre at the same time. Anzai Tetsuo observes: “In the case of the Underground Theatre movement, however, return to the Japanese tradition did not necessarily mean a simple retrieval of the established conventions of the traditional theatre. What the leaders of the movement tried to do was to delve more deeply so as to reach the underground stream of dramatic imagination and sensibility handed down half-unconsciously through ages on the level of folklore and folk-memory, and to tap its powerful potentiality” (Anzai 1999: 8–9). Ninagawa himself turned primarily to the theater conventions of *kabuki* and *bunraku* with their flamboyant aesthetics and elaborate theatricality.

Ninagawa’s drawing upon traditional Japanese theatrical techniques in the staging of Western classics arose initially from his desire to break away from the stilted mannerisms of the Western-oriented *shingeki* movement, which had become as entrenched in its ways as the codified but separate streams of *kabuki* and *nō*. He was disturbed both by the impetuous emulation of Western theater by Japanese theatre companies and by the consequent neglect of traditional theatre practices in Japan. Through heterogeneous productions that integrated elements of East and West, Ninagawa advanced Shakespeare not as an import from a superior culture to be blindly venerated but as something to be appropriated and explored. Ninagawa’s effort to make Shakespeare’s plays more immediate to a Japanese audience by fusing them with familiar images and cultural references was part of a reversal in Japan’s inferiority complex toward Western culture, which had prevailed since the opening of Japan to the West in 1868.

Ninagawa's second major endeavor was to divest Shakespeare of the highbrow literary status it held in Japan and to reveal not only the lofty and poetic but also the lusty, vulgar, and playful. Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1965), a perspicacious examination of satirist François Rabelais and the Renaissance era, Ninagawa sought to emphasize the carnivalesque aspects of Shakespeare that had been overshadowed by the notion of his plays as "high art."

Shakespeare is not really that stoic a writer, cannot fit so neatly into the confining categories he is put in when taught at school. On the contrary, Shakespeare is teeming with vulgarities, puns, word play, and sexual language. Of course, there are many undeniably beautiful passages, or passages laden with the wisdom of life. But Shakespeare is also filled with images and recollections corresponding to the wide diversity of the makeup of his audience—ranging from people of the bottommost classes to figures of uppermost authority—images and recollections which, I believe, were far more vulgar than we imagine. As an extreme illustration, if Shakespeare had written in Japan he would have incorporated everything from the practices of traveling theatre minstrels to modern theatre companies—he worked within that broad a range. [. . .] Armed with Bakhtin's theory, and setting Rabelais as my basis for doing Shakespeare, there was no way but for my productions to become more vulgar. (Ninagawa 1998a: 28–29; all translations from Ninagawa and other Japanese sources are my own)

From his first Shakespeare production, *Romeo and Juliet*, in 1974, Ninagawa strove to popularize Shakespeare in Japan by placing stress on story, theatricality, and visual spectacle, as well as by borrowing freely from Japanese culture. His efforts have continued in his stagings of other Shakespearean works. Although he initially targeted his plays for Japanese audiences, Ninagawa soon felt a desire to test his work overseas and discovered that by introducing traditional Japanese theatrical practices into Western classics, he created a theater that paradoxically transcended cultural boundaries.

Ninagawa made his first impact on the international theatre scene in 1983 when he directed a Japanese version of Euripides's *Medea* featuring a *kabuki*-style female impersonator (*onnagata*) in the leading role and a chorus of men strumming the three-stringed lute (*shamisen*) that accompanies *kabuki*. Ninagawa followed with an equally successful production of *Macbeth* that was transposed to sixteenth-century feudal Japan and staged behind large *shoji* (rice-paper doors) representing a Japanese Buddhist altar (*butsudan*).<sup>1</sup> Since then, he has returned to London with revivals of *The Tempest* (1992), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1995, 1996), *Hamlet* (1998, 2004), *King Lear* (1999),

*Pericles* (2003), and *Titus Andronicus* (2006). This paper examines the rendition of *Hamlet*, which—following a hundred mostly sold-out performances in Japan—ran for eight performances (August 28 to September 3) at the Barbican Centre as part of the 1998 season of the Barbican International Theatre Event (BITE 98).<sup>2</sup> I had the fortunate opportunity to serve as interpreter between the Japanese and British stage crews and gain an insider's view. The all-Japanese cast performed in Japanese without the aid of English surtitles.

### Transposition and Framing

In staging a play, Ninagawa most always establishes a conceptual or visual frame. *Macbeth* (1980), for example, began with a pair of stooped Japanese crones opening the doors of a vastly oversized Buddhist altar to reveal the stage. In *The Tempest* (1987), he staged the work as a rehearsal of the play, with waiting actors seated on folding chairs around the playing area and stage crew clearly visible.<sup>3</sup> Ninagawa started Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1990) in a games arcade with high-tech audio and visual effects and journeyed into a world of virtual reality, with the entire play taking place inside a computer.

For *Hamlet*, Ninagawa places the action within the backstage of a theater. As we enter the auditorium, we behold a two-story set composed of cubiclelike dressing rooms, each with its own curtain for privacy. The upper level consists of individual dressing rooms for the leading actors, complete with lighted mirrors and a clutter of photographs, flowers, and good-luck cards. The lower level serves as a common dressing area, with long counters and lighted mirrors, and other full-length mirrors scattered downstage. From thirty minutes before curtain the actors are seen putting on their makeup, checking their costumes, running lines, performing physical warm-ups, or relaxing before the show. Crew members make final adjustments and consult with actors. The stage manager announces (in both Japanese and English) the minutes remaining before Act I.<sup>4</sup> We feel we are peering into the backstage of the theater itself (see Fig. 1). Finally, the music swells and the stage is plunged into darkness for the start of Act I.

In framing *Hamlet* with backstage activity, Ninagawa aimed to eliminate the artificiality of Japanese actors performing non-Japanese roles.

There's one more reason why I transfer foreign plays to Japanese settings, and that is the transparent phoniness of the attempt [by Japanese actors] to mimic the outward form of foreigners. By this I mean visible aspects such as gesture and makeup. Just seeing people wearing tights and blond wigs on stage fills me with a sense of embarrassment,

which alone is enough to alienate me from the theatre altogether. To avoid this kind of theatre, I must come up with artistic plans that resolve these various problems. In the case of *Macbeth*, for example, it is why I set the play within a Buddhist altar (*butsudan*). (Ninagawa 1998c: 106)

Ninagawa avoided the “phoniness” of Japanese actors trying to portray Caucasians by framing the play within a Japanese milieu—the war-prone Azuchi-momoyama Era (1573–ca. 1603) in the case of *Macbeth*—or by establishing the performance as a rehearsal of the play by Japanese actors—a device employed in both *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*.

While the Japanese cultural references, stage metaphors, and theatrical techniques Ninagawa introduces may in one sense be incongruent with the foreign text, they succeed in liberating the performers.

When Japanese actors perform Western characters, their acting usually reeks of artificiality. I don’t like it one bit. To get around it, in my production of *The Tempest*, for instance, I set the entire play as a rehearsal. The actors are consequently seen to be merely performing their roles and not alleging to literally be the personae of Shakespeare’s drama. In other words, because I’m simply showing Japanese



FIGURE 1. Cast and stage crew making final preparations in dressing rooms that double as chambers of Elsinore Castle. Left to right: (above) Matsu Takako, Kaga Mariko, and others; (below) Seike Eichi, Hori Fumiaki, Sakaguchi Yoshisada, and others in *Hamlet* (1998), directed by Ninagawa Yukio, designed by Nakagoshi Tsukasa at the Barbican Centre, London. (Photo: Jon M. Brokering)

people acting out a Western play, the actors can perform without shame or embarrassment. I have done Hamlet in much the same way. (Ninagawa 1998c)

By exposing and emphasizing rather than concealing the artifice of performance, Ninagawa subverts the tradition of performing Shakespeare in Japan, in which efforts to emulate “genuine” Shakespeare have resulted in actors donning strange wigs, dying their hair blond, putting their noses, and making themselves up in ways incongruous with their Oriental physiognomy. Ninagawa dispenses with such pretense by drawing attention to the reality of Japanese actors. He opts for laying the histrionic process bare rather than attempting to present a theatrical *trompe l'oeil*. With this Brechtian approach to performing, Ninagawa succeeds in rendering a Shakespeare play done by Japanese actors entirely plausible.

Second, Ninagawa's backstage setting of *Hamlet* serves as an ideogram for one of the chief motifs of the play. Ninagawa explains: “In fact, *Hamlet* has this same theme: of performing, of playing, of pretending to be something different than one's true self” (Ninagawa 1998b). The dressing-room cubicles, by doubling as rooms of Elsinore, superimpose the image of “acting” on the play, and stand as an icon for all the dissembling, subterfuge, and dramatizing that take place. “Man when he is performing versus the flesh-and-blood man when he is not performing, how you appear in another's eye versus your own self-image, things that are visible versus those that are invisible, and acting versus not acting—on top of that, all of these distinctions being performed by our actors. Since all these things are all involved, I set the play in a dressing room” (Yamanaka 1998: 16). Passages that are thereby thrown into particular relief by such a setting include Hamlet's remarks on sincerity and appearance: “Seems, madam, Nay, it is. I know not ‘seems’” (1.2.76); the duplicity of the King, who “may smile, and smile, and be a villain” (1.5.108); Hamlet's railing to Ophelia about her “painted” face: “God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another” (3.3.144–146); and, of course, Hamlet's assuming an “antic disposition” (1.5.180) to confound the court.

The beige, slightly soiled curtains over each dressing room also lend their own special relevance to the play. Electric fans blow on these curtains, causing an undulation that ranges from gentle rippling to gusty billowing (see Fig. 2). Apart from changing the mood of each scene, the movement of the curtains adds softness to an otherwise hard-looking steel and (simulated) concrete set. The constant fluttering also suggests notions of eavesdropping, supernatural forces, and, according to set designer Nakagoshi Tsukasa, the fluctuations of Ham-

let's mind (Nakagoshi 1998). The effect, as theater critic Charles Spencer aptly perceived, created “a constant sense of unease, mystery, and concealment” (Spencer 1998: 13).

Particularly whenever the King and Queen exit, Ninagawa amplifies the sound of the curtains snapping shut. This jarring sound is used, for example, when Claudius and Polonius duck behind a curtain to overhear Hamlet's conversation with Ophelia (3.1.55) or again when they reappear to reflect on what was said (3.1.163). This recurring sound over time endows the curtains with an impetuous willfulness of their own.

Naturally, the curtains are used by Polonius to eavesdrop on Hamlet when he visits his mother's closet. When Polonius arrives at the Queen's room (one of the dressing-room cubicles), he first speaks to her from the passageway outside, and, yet unseen behind the drawn curtain, we only hear the Queen's sober voice. The Queen then opens the curtain suddenly and beckons Polonius to join her: “Withdraw, I hear him coming” (3.4.6)—after which the curtain snaps shut again with characteristic resoluteness. A moment later, Hamlet similarly speaks to his mother's “voice” through the closed curtain, but this time she is dimly lit from within so that we can vaguely make out her figure. (Later, Ninagawa makes the Ghost similarly appear and disappear behind the curtains of this cubicle, laying stress on the dichotomy of illusion and reality.) Polonius is stabbed by Hamlet through these curtains, a theatrical image that underscores the old man's deceptiveness.



FIGURE 2. Fluttering curtains suggest eavesdropping, duplicity, and supernatural forces. Left to right: Sanada Hiroyuki and Kaga Mariko. (Photo: Jon M. Brokering)

To portray outdoor scenes in the play, Ninagawa employs another set of curtains that simultaneously snap shut to conceal the dressing rooms. The images on these twelve curtains form a composite mountain landscape in the style of Japanese *sumi-e* (water-soluble ink) painting (see Fig. 3). The stylized black-and-white painting, with a large full moon, establishes a foreboding mood for the opening battle scene and a somber atmosphere for Ophelia's burial. Moreover, instead of concealing the changeover between the two curtain sets within a blackout, Ninagawa draws attention to the transformation by sliding them in plain view of the audience. To critic Paul Taylor, "The rows of curtains seem to be caught in the act of a shifty cover-up, as they whiskingly swish from, say, depicting Mt. Fuji, to conveying the interior of the court" (Taylor 1998: 12). Just as the actors do not profess to be actual Danes, these painted curtains signify mountains, instead of offering realistic reproduction of them.<sup>5</sup>

Ninagawa is fond of transposing plays in time and place. For example, he set *Macbeth* (1980) in feudal Japan when warrior honor codes prevailed. He placed *The Tempest* on the Island of Sado,<sup>6</sup> where the *nō* dramatist Zeami was banished during the later years of his life to parallel Prospero's banishment to the Mediterranean desert island. So in contrast to the placement of *Hamlet* in "backstage" cubicles, the *sumi-e* curtains connote a nondescript, Oriental never-never land, with



FIGURE 3. For outdoor scenes, such as the gravediggers' scene, a second set of curtains snap shut to reveal a large black and white landscape painting. Left to right: Shimizu Isamu, Daimon Goro, Sanada Hiroyuki, and Matsushige Yutaka. (Photo: Jon M. Brokering)

the mountains, as already noted, suggesting a Chinese landscape (certainly not Mount Fuji, as was supposed by some).<sup>7</sup> The costume designs constitute an eclectic amalgam of Japanese, Chinese, and Western styles and, according to costumer Lily Komine, were originally inspired by Mongolian folk dress. This transposition to a distant and yet familiar setting (for the Japanese) succeeds in evoking the remoteness of Elsinore in the imagination.

### Japanese Cultural Iconography

At the crux of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* lies the play-within-the-play, which confirms for Hamlet his uncle's guilt. Here Ninagawa employs a familiar item from Japanese culture: the *hinadan* or "doll tier." To understand the significance of this stage metaphor, it is necessary to understand the ancient custom of displaying dolls that still enjoys widespread popularity in Japan.<sup>8</sup>

The word *hina* or *hina*, denoting a small, highly decorated doll, originally refers to a newborn chick—the implication that the *hina* dolls are small and cute like baby chicks. The Japanese *hinadan*, a small stand commonly built in seven tiers and covered with a bright red cloth, is used to display the *hina* dolls during the Festival of Dolls (*hina matsuri*) celebrated on March 3. The *hina* dolls represent ancient Japanese courtiers dressed in the costume of the Heian era (798–1185). Magnificent examples of Japanese handicraft, these dolls have porcelain heads, hand-painted faces, silk costumes, and exquisite detail. A set of dolls can cost from ¥50,000 (\$425) for the minimum set of two dolls to as much as ¥2,500,000 (\$20,000) for a full set of fifteen dolls and their accessories (see Figs. 4 and 5).

The dolls are displayed on the tiers in a strictly prescribed manner. At the very top and on small, decorated platforms of straw mats (*tatami*) sit the imperial lord (*shinnō*)<sup>9</sup> and the princess (*ohime*), known together as *dairibina*. Behind them stands a resplendent folding screen, with two tall paper lanterns flanking the royal couple on either side. The lord holds in his hands a Japanese-style wooden scepter, and the princess, dressed in an aristocratic twelve-layer kimono, holds an exquisite fan. On the second tier from the top, one finds the princess's three ladies-in-waiting (*kanjo*), with pink and white rice cakes displayed on banquet trays between them. On the third row from the top sit five court musicians (*bayashi*) modeled on the musicians of *nō*. From left to right we find the chanter, the bamboo flutist, the shoulder drum player, the hip drum player, and the stick drum player. On the fourth tier down are two members of the imperial guard, referred to as the minister of the left (*sadaijin*) and the minister of the right (*udaijin*). Between these two ministers sit offerings of diamond-shaped rice



FIGURE 4. The doll tier and set of *hina* dolls used by Ophelia. (Photo: Jon M. Brokering)

cakes (*hishimochi*) layered in white, peach, and green, and a sweet, milky sake (*shirozake*). On the fifth tier are three attendants (*jichō*) carrying an umbrella, a footstool, or an umbrella stand for the lord and princess when they venture outside. Beside these valets stand a fruit-bearing orange tree to the left and a blossoming peach tree to the right. Finally, on the bottom two tiers are placed an exquisite assortment of miniature paraphernalia such as a palanquin, an oxen-drawn



FIGURE 5. A commercial set of dolls selling for ¥2,500,000 (\$21,000). (Photo: Ningyo no Kotoku)

cart, a chest of drawers, a mirror, a tea set, and other household belongings.

From long ago dolls were used in Japan for sorcery and occult art. This fact is even reflected in the Chinese characters that make up the word “doll”: *nin* + *gyō*, or “human form.” The Festival of Dolls goes as far back as the Heian era when a festival was celebrated on the first day of the serpent in the month of March to pray for the well-being and sound growth of children. A fortune-teller was called to offer a prayer to the gods of heaven and earth: Food was offered as a sacrifice, and as a purification rite paper or straw dolls, symbolically taking on

all impurities, misfortune, and illness, were set afloat in rivers or in the sea. This practice was called *nagashi bina* or “setting *hina* dolls adrift.” Also in the Heian period, ladies of the court played with paper dolls in what was referred to as *hiina* play (*hiina asobi*), an activity probably quite similar to “playing house.” (References to this form of amusement appear in the *Tale of Genji* and other literature of the time.) The present-day Festival of Dolls (*hina matsuri*) has evolved from a combination of these two Heian customs.

As the dolls became increasingly ornate and costly, the habit of sending them down rivers died. Instead, they were packed away for use the following year. It was not until the Edo era (1603–1867) that the festival became uniformly observed on March 3 as a day when a girl would display her *hina* dolls. In fact, until the Western custom of celebrating one’s “birthday” came into vogue, every girl’s birth was celebrated on the Festival of Dolls day—otherwise known as the Girls’ Festival—and every boy’s on May 5, the Boys’ Festival (*tango no sekku*). Even now, young girls in Japan look forward to the Festival of Dolls much as an Occidental girl would anticipate her birthday. During the Edo era the displaying of dolls disseminated from the nobles to ordinary people and from the capital to the outlying regions. The display of dolls became so lavish that the frugal-minded shogunate even issued repeated admonishments against extravagance. With the Meiji Restoration (1868), the new government abolished the festival as an official court custom, but the holiday still continues to be observed throughout Japan.

Although setting dolls afloat was largely discontinued long ago, the dolls are still thought to possess the power to ensure a girl’s growth and protect her against accident and illness. The mother’s family is normally obliged to provide the *hina* dolls for a newborn daughter. However, manufacturers of the dolls now insist (for commercial reasons?) that the figures not be passed on to succeeding generations, as each set of dolls, like a talisman, is made to protect only one individual. Families are encouraged to purchase a new set of dolls for each successive daughter—although the prohibitive cost and lack of space for display and storage make this impossible for most families.

In modern times, a family will celebrate the Festival of Dolls by eating the tricolor rice cakes (*hishimochi*) and drinking sweet sake (*shirozake*). A multicolored, puffed rice candy (*hina arare*) is also offered and eaten. On March 3 wishes are expressed for the health and future happiness of one’s daughter, including her eventual marriage to a suitable husband—one like the imperial lord doll. By the same token, young girls are expected to become as graceful, elegant, and ladylike as the princess doll. The *hina* dolls are displayed in the best room of

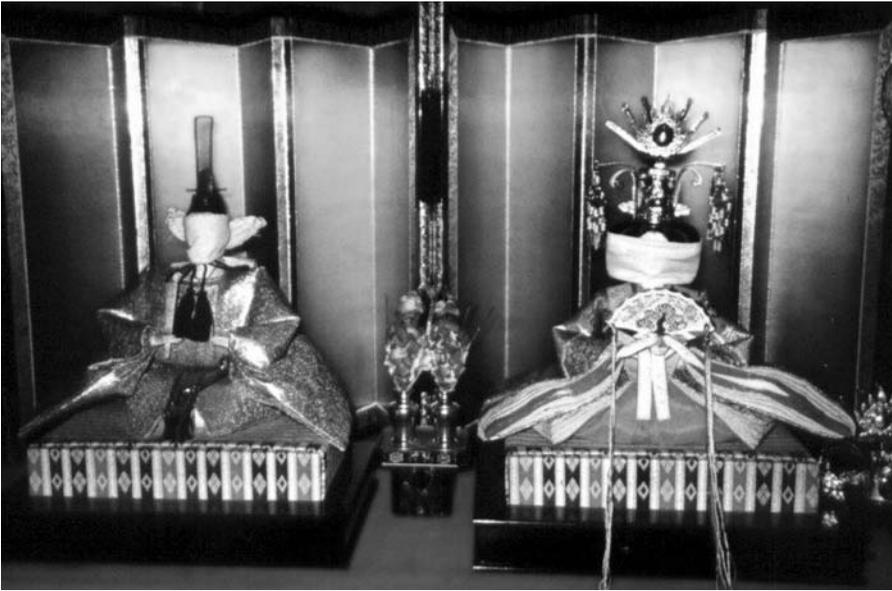


FIGURE 6. Blindfolded imperial lord and princess *hina* dolls used in Ninagawa's *Hamlet*. (Photo: Jon M. Brokering)

the house for at least a week before the festival, but must then be promptly packed away again on the evening of the festival. Superstition has it that any delay in putting the dolls away will lead to diminished chances of getting married. The dolls are carefully wrapped and stored, with great care being taken to guard against moisture, aridity, and insects. The faces of the dolls are wrapped with soft white strips of paper to protect their delicate porcelain finish. Dolls are blindfolded, it is said, to enable them to sleep during their storage, as they are unable to close their eyes (see Fig. 6).

In his staging of *Hamlet*, Ninagawa exploits this Japanese custom of displaying dolls visually and metaphorically, thereby introducing new levels of meaning to the play. The doll tier first appears in act 1, scene 3, when Ophelia is discovered arranging her *hina* dolls on a seven-tiered doll stand (see Fig. 7). Apart from creating a beautiful and elegant picture, this occasion also provides the perfect domestic setting for Laertes to counsel his sister on Hamlet's advances and for Polonius to give exhortation to his son before his departure. To a Japanese audience this setting evokes the Heian era when the pastime was limited to ladies of the court. Furthermore, it illustrates Ophelia's aspiration to obtain a favorable husband—while underscoring her optimism, naiveté, and purity. Her supplications for good health and fortune heighten the irony of Ophelia's eventual tragic demise.

Later on (2.1), we return to the same setting as Ophelia's father is helping her pack the dolls away, carefully wrapping each one's face with a strip of white paper and placing it in a large box. The picture is still one of hope and expectation. However, because care of *hina* dolls is normally passed down from mother to daughter, the image of the father doing the packing subtly calls attention to the absence of a mother figure in Ophelia's family. This contrasts with the strong mother presence in Hamlet's family.

Although the doll tier does not appear again, Ophelia brings *hina* dolls on stage during her mad scene (4.5). When she first appears, singing enigmatic ditties in a trancelike state, the audience sees a bloodstained strip of white paper wrapped around her left wrist, symbolically linking the dolls to her suicidal despondency. The low, plaintive drone of an ancient Chinese wind instrument (*shō*) starts, and a web of crisscrossing light beams obscures the stage, illustrating Ophelia's demented state of mind. She sings, wails, bites her wrist, scratches the floor, dallies precariously on the edge of the upper level, and flutters barefoot around the stage in a torn and soiled dress. Later



FIGURE 7. Ophelia arranging her set of *hina* dolls. Left to right: Matsu Takako, Yokota Eiji, and Sakaguchi Yoshisada. (Photo: Jon M. Brokering)

Ophelia reappears, carrying wildflowers together with several *hina* dolls. She squats centre stage and wraps the eyes of one of the dolls with the bloodstained bandage, singing, “They bore him bare-face’d on the bier, / And in his grave rain’d many a tear” (4.5.164–165). Where Ophelia would normally pass out flowers, Ninagawa has her give away her *hina* dolls. Although as Michael Pennington contends, the picture of Ophelia handing out real flowers with an “understanding of them [that] is sane and exact” has far greater impact than distributing imaginary flowers or substituting other objects (Pennington 1996: 167), Ninagawa must be pardoned in this case, for with this stage business he capitalizes on a previously established association between the dolls and Ophelia’s dead father. Moreover, giving away dolls, which should instead be safely stored, becomes symbolic of Ophelia’s giving up hope for finding a suitable husband and enjoying a happy future. In her final moment on stage, she tosses the last remaining doll from the top of the stairs to her brother below in a poignant gesture of despair, before heading off to her death. In an alarming, almost morbid reversal of imagery, it is Ophelia, not the doll, who gets washed down the river.

Ophelia’s set of *hina* dolls constitutes only the first and most literal use of the doll-tier motif by Ninagawa. It reappears in a different form for the staging of the play-within-the-play (3.2). Here, “The Murder of Gonzago” is presented on an immense doll tier made by covering the large center-stage staircase with a bright red cloth. As if the dolls had suddenly come to life, the players appear as life-size *hina* dolls frozen in their designated positions on the tier—creating a stunning visual image (see Plate 4). Looking more closely, it becomes apparent that the dolls are in disrepair: the flute player is missing an arm, the princess has a broken tiara and a bared chest, and other dolls have lopsided bodies, torn costumes, or pulled-out hair. The dilapidated appearance of the human “dolls” evokes a ghostly and supernatural quality, linking them with the world of the dead and connecting them indirectly with the Ghost of Hamlet’s father. In fact, the Ghost in Ninagawa’s production wears the distinct style of amour and helmet (*kabuto*) commonly displayed on the day of the Boys’ Festival to ensure young Japanese boys grow up strong and courageous. Undoubtedly, by evoking these childhood talismans, Ninagawa means to highlight the tragic failure of both Hamlet and Ophelia to realize their respective ambitions.

The play begins with the Player King and Player Queen, dressed as the lord and princess *hina* dolls, descending slowly from the top level as they recite their lines. To emulate the embellished and antique English of the original, the translation by Matsuoka Kazuko renders

the lines in a pseudo-classical writing style (*gikobun*) that was popular in the Edo and Meiji eras. The rhyming couplets of iambic pentameter are replaced by the 7-5 syllabic meter (*shichigochō*) used in *kabuki* verse (similar to the 5-7-5 meter of Japanese *haiku* poems) and delivered in a euphonious chanting manner. As with the Hecuba speech (2.2.464–514), which is also translated in this way, the Player King begins his delivery in a traditional balladic recitation style (*kōdan*). Even someone ignorant of Japanese can easily detect the sudden change in recitation style. The Player Queen, here a young male actor, speaks in the distinctive singsong of female impersonators (*onnagata*) of the *kabuki* stage. After the Player King and Player Queen descend the steps, they act out the remainder of their part in exaggerated pantomime before a row of candlesticks which have been placed along the apron of the stage by traditional *kuroko* stagehands.<sup>10</sup>

After the Player King has fallen asleep, the “minister of the left” rises from his position on the doll tier to play the part of Lucianus, murderer of Gonzago. It is significant that a figure from the lower echelons of the tier usurps the throne of one who resides at the top. Through the allegorical use of the doll tier Ninagawa clearly depicts the vertical relationships existing both in the play-within-the-play and, by inference, in the Danish court. Next, Lucianus pours a long green ribbon from a cup into the ear of the sleeping Player King to represent the poisoning, a primitive stage device reminiscent of premodern Japanese theater.<sup>11</sup> At this point King Claudius interrupts the performance and ascends the staircase in a fury, stopping only long enough to bellow out, “Give me some light. Away” (3.2.264). Pandemonium ensues, and the bright red carpet is pulled halfway off the staircase, demolishing the beauty of the doll tier in one stroke.

Now that two levels of abstraction have been established for the doll tier—as an emblem of Ophelia’s doom and as an allegorical matrix for “The Murder of Gonzago”—a third level becomes apparent. Just as Hamlet means for the play-within-the-play to mirror the circumstances of his father’s murder, Ninagawa has extended Hamlet’s analogy by illustrating visually the hierarchy of the Danish court. The placement of the Player King and Player Queen at the top of the *hina* doll tier mimics the action of the real King and Queen (Claudius and Gertrude), who have several times already addressed their subjects from the same exact positions on the upper level. Moreover, the broken-down *hina* dolls reflect the “rotten” state of Denmark and give proleptic indication of the outcome of the play.

Having established the parallel between the *hina* dolls and the Danish court, Ninagawa makes his *coup de théâtre* with the doll tier analogy in the final moments of the play. For the duel between Laertes

and Hamlet, the King and Queen symbolically take their seats at the very top of the stairs. After the poison takes effect on the Queen, she rises from her seat, staggers fitfully down the steps, and collapses to one side on the lower level. This movement down the long flight of stairs echoes the earlier descent of the Player Queen and symbolizes in visual and physical terms the Queen's catastrophic fall from power. Moments later, Hamlet ascends the stairs to stab the King with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink the tainted wine, whereupon the ruler teeters and falls dead on the top few stairs. Fortinbras enters on the upper level and declares his right to the throne of Denmark on the top tier with the dead King lying literally at his feet. The other courtiers, who have thrown themselves prostrate on the ground below, begin a groveling crawl up the staircase towards their new leader. As one of them clammers past the dead King, he or she unwittingly swipes at the King's body, which sets it sliding swiftly and joltingly all the way down the steeply pitched stairs.<sup>12</sup> Like a *hina* doll tumbling down the steps of a doll tier, the deposed king falls from the foot of the usurping Fortinbras to the very bottom of the stairs in a stunning visual depiction of the precariousness of regal power (see Plate 5).

The mirror motif is also brought to a violent close in the final moments of the play. When Fortinbras's soldiers enter, they smash the mirrors in each dressing room with the staffs of their standards. This violent act at once signifies Fortinbras's forcible rise to power as well as the end of "performance" in every sense of the word: the end of pretence, fabrication, and dissembling; the end of "reflective" contemplation; the end of illusion, of supernatural visitation; and the end of the "mirror held up to nature." Ninagawa's bleak but visually spectacular ending forces us, with the destruction of the mirrors, to face the ineluctable, grim outcome. The sound of traffic noise surging under Fortinbras's final lines aids in rousing us from the world of theatrical illusion back to quotidian reality.

The idea of employing the Japanese doll tier as an icon for the hierarchy of the Danish court was not new to this 1998 production. In earlier revivals of *Hamlet* (1978 and 1988), Ninagawa also used "ancient-looking *hina* dolls [. . .] as an analogy for the entire drama" (Ninagawa 1989: 135). "Since the early 1970s, I have had the idea in me that *Hamlet* could be done as a fantasy occurring on the night of the *hina* doll festival. The structure of the doll tier so closely resembles that of the court: the emperor occupies the very top, with the ministers, ladies in waiting, and performers of other odd jobs below. Such a structure provides the perfect means for illustrating the court [of Elsinore]" (Ninagawa 1989: 313). However, the stage for Ninagawa's 1978 and 1988 productions of *Hamlet* consisted of a fixed tier of seven steps

(the number on a real doll tier), while the 1998 production had two moveable flights of eighteen steps forming the doll tier for the play-within-the-play. Moreover, in the earlier productions Ninagawa drew even greater attention to the element of hierarchy by using the text of a 1933 translation by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935) for characters of the “establishment” and lines from a 1974 translation by Odashima Yushi (1930–) for the “younger roles” (Yamanaka 1998: 16). For the 1998 production, Ninagawa adopts a single, modern text translated in 1996 by Matsuoka Kazuko (1942–) because, in his words, “This time I feel it’s enough to let the actors act out the hierarchy without having to explain it superficially [with two translations]. Indeed, I hope for the actors to do it on their own” (Yamanaka 1998: 16). Ninagawa wishes not to place too much emphasis on political hierarchy in this interpretation. “Years ago I aimed at creating a formalistic *Hamlet*. This time I am thinking more about the entire balance of the play. [. . .] I think I have shifted from being concerned about sheer formalistic matters to having more of a concern for the inner world of human beings” (Yamanaka 1998: 16). By breaking the standard doll tier into two moveable (even removable) steel staircases, Ninagawa could more easily explore other aspects of the play and bring in new ideas such as the dressing rooms, the mirrors, or fluttering curtains. Furthermore, being equipped with a flexible pair of staircases and several trapdoors, Ninagawa could create the impression of an Elsinore laced with a myriad of stairways, engendering a surrealist quality reminiscent of Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*.

Performing on a wide set of stairs provides greater visibility and a heightened vertical dimension—which proved particularly pertinent to *Hamlet*. Long keen on employing levels to enhance a play’s visual impact, Ninagawa has regularly made use of a wide bank of stairs for his shows, some of them stretching the entire width of the stage.<sup>13</sup> In other instances, Ninagawa has settled for a long, narrow flight of stairs center stage or has created high and low levels by other means.<sup>14</sup> According to Ninagawa’s producer, Nakane Tadao, this proclivity of Ninagawa’s derives more from the cinema than from any stage technique (Nakane 2000). Whereas the movement of other directors is primarily horizontal (i.e., left and right), Ninagawa’s is “in and out” and “up and down,” which explains why he is fond of using deep stages. This recalls Robert Lepage’s notion that theater is vertical because, in his words, it “has a lot to do with putting the audience in contact with the gods. [. . .] Things are better expressed that way for some reason. When I start to do shows that are vertical I always have a very good response” (Delgado 1996: 143). For Ninagawa to bring out these effects of verticality and depth, he must rely on either a raked set or a

bank of stairs. The movement afforded thereby is cinematic in that it corresponds to the long shots, close-ups, and zooms of a moving picture. This practice, however, can be found elsewhere in the Japanese theater world. Takarazuka, the renowned all-female theater company, perform their musical revues on an enormous bank of stairs trimmed with rows of tiny lights. In *kabuki*, the term *hinadan* (doll tier) in fact refers to the red-carpeted platform that is provided for singers and musicians. Although Ninagawa's technique may bear some resemblance to these theaters, he has also justified the use of stairs in *Hamlet* visually as a doll tier, metaphorically as a symbol of aristocratic hierarchy, and physically as a representation of the labyrinthine stairways of the castle of Elsinore.

### Stage Techniques from *Kabuki*

For most theatergoers, the hallmark of Ninagawa's directing style lies in his creative use of traditional Japanese theater techniques—of which this production of *Hamlet* has no shortage. To make the transition to the play-within-the-play, for example, Ninagawa employs a spectacular stage device from *kabuki*. Ophelia, alone on stage at the end of the previous scene (3.1), makes a solemn exit upstage into the darkness. Without warning, a Chinese gong sounds loudly and a large *kabuki*-style curtain (*jōshiki maku*) of wide vertical stripes in black, orange, and green tumbles down from above—a technique known as *furikabuse* or “draping down over” (literally “shake” + “cover”) (see Fig. 8).

Because the curtain is released suddenly instead of being “flown in,” as would be typical in Western theater, an abrupt and dramatic change of mood is effected. The tattered state of the curtain immediately signals connection with the motley traveling minstrels we met in an earlier scene.

After Hamlet gives his “advice to the players” before this curtain, a row of eleven candles is placed along the apron of the stage as footlights. The Prologue enters in his *hinadan* garb and signals the start of the play with a hand-held gong. The prologue and dumb show are both performed with colorful costumes and an exaggerated style of gesticulation before this curtain. The soft drone of archaic court music (*gagaku*) suggests that this show pre-dates even the *nō* theater. A midget<sup>15</sup> in a wig plays the part of the Queen in the dumb show during which a long green ribbon unraveling from a cup indicates the poison poured into the sleeping King's ear. The King awakes in great pain, pulls a long red ribbon agonizingly out of his mouth, and abruptly dies.

Once the prologue is finished, the actors scurry away behind or

underneath the *kabuki* curtain. The gong sounds again, signaling the end of the dumb show and the start of the actual performance (3.2.150). On the gong the *kabuki* curtain falls suddenly to the floor in another technique known as *furiotoshi* or “dropping down” (literally “shake” + “drop”).

The use of stylized pantomime acting, representational staging (the colored ribbons), and traditional stage devices (candles and falling curtain) hearkens back to a time when theater could not rely on electrical lighting or special effects and when acting was not expected to be literal or natural. These techniques lend the play-within-the-play an old-time atmosphere of resplendent pageantry and spellbinding theatricality.

Ninagawa borrows freely from Japanese theater in a variety of other ways. Many techniques, such as the two-man dummy horse that Fortinbras rides (4.4), depart radically from Western traditions of realism, bringing an unabashed theatrical artifice to the play.<sup>16</sup> A subtle but more symbolic instance can be found in the Ghost's use of “sliding footsteps” (*suriashi*)—a style of walking deriving from *nō* drama. The actor maintains a low center of gravity by bending the knees slightly and expanding the chest while sliding the soles of the feet on the stage with special care taken to eliminate extraneous vertical move-



FIGURE 8. A *kabuki*-style curtain tumbles down suddenly (*furikabuse*) to create a backdrop for the prologue and dumb show, and to conceal the life-size doll tier being readied behind. Left to right: Sagawa Tetsuro, Kaga Mariko, Iamura Shunichi, Sanada Hiroyuki, Matsu Takako, Sakaguchi Yoshisada, and others. (Photo: Jon M. Brokering)

ment in the upper body. Turns are initiated from the feet, pivoting slowly on the soles without twisting the waist, torso, or neck. This manner of walking makes the figure seem to glide across the stage as if the feet were not touching the ground. Unfortunately, the impact was curtailed since the Ghost of Hamlet's father wore boots and not the usual bifurcated socks (*tabi*), and walked on a rough wooden floor instead of a polished *nō* stage. Nonetheless, the effect was enough to make the connection of the Ghost with the spirits, demons, and apparitions of *nō* drama.

Ninagawa also employs short musical sound effects in the style of traditional Japanese theatre. For example, the Ghost exits the stage to the accompaniment of bamboo flute and shoulder drum, making the association with *nō* more explicit. When Ophelia enters in her mad state we hear the sound of wooden *kabuki* clappers (*hyōshigi*), traditionally used to mark a dramatic entrance or change of scene. Also, the moment before Gertrude enters the stage to relate the news of Ophelia's death, a single plangent chord of a Japanese *shamisen* sounds, providing the cue for Claudius's line: "But stay, what noise?" (4.7.161). The practice of using musical sounds to punctuate the action derives directly from *nō* and *kabuki*, where musicians provide all of the sound effects. Even with modern sound effects used in *Hamlet*, we are alerted from the start that they will not be used in a literal way. The crowing of the cock that frightens the Ghost away sounds with an echoing reverberation, and the distant blasts of the King's cannons resound with an electronically modified rumble. Scene changes are accompanied by agitated, synthesized piano music by Kasamatsu Yasuhiro. Such nonrealistic use of sounds exemplifies Ninagawa's nonrepresentational approach to stage effects even when he works with modern technology.

Finally, for costumes Ninagawa and costume designer Komine Lily combine Occidental and Oriental aesthetics into beautiful syntheses of form and color. The King, for example, wears a glossy magenta Chinese-style suit underneath a magnificent Oriental robe with resplendent golden embroidery. The robe is especially impressive when it trails behind the King as he walks upstage or ascends the stairs. Gertrude's wardrobe consists of a similarly heterogeneous mixture of garments, but most impressive are her plainly Japanese costumes: the sleeveless purple-and-white gown she wears during the closet scene and the luxurious light-green kimono for the final duel scene (and for her own death). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern wear robes of complementary blue and yellow tones. Hamlet sports a dark turtleneck and a short black cloak. Other courtiers wear bulky, nondescript gowns or shawls that they can wrap around themselves. The massive, hooded,

royal red robes of the nonspeaking parts serve not only to obfuscate the double-casting of actors but also to make the stage seem more populated by virtue of their sheer bulk. The uniform red color enables Ninagawa to mold the courtiers as a mass. The traveling minstrels and graveyard clowns bring a different atmosphere: a colorful gaiety of pattern and design characteristic of low mimetic *kabuki* characters. They also carry an unlikely assortment of brightly colored, oversized belongings suggestive of the traveling performers and minstrels (*dosamawari*) of premodern Japan. The black hoods worn by those who place the candles on the apron of the stage for the play-within-the-play derive from the traditional garb of *kabuki* stagehands (*kuroko*) and add to the patent theatricality of the entire performance. The same hoods make an even more striking picture when worn by Fortinbras's bare-chested soldiers both in the marching scene (4.4) and in the final moments of the play (5.2.367–408). Concealing the soldiers' faces with black hoods places the focus more sharply on Fortinbras, the only one whose face is visible in the group.

Ninagawa, however, does not simply clothe his actors in magnificent costumes; he offers them ample opportunity to use those costumes for spectacle and display. For instance, Hamlet bats at imaginary attackers in the air with his black cloak, as he demands, "Who calls me villain [. . .] who does me this?" (2.2.567–570). Later on, he snuffs out the candles one at a time by swatting the floor with the corner of his gown—almost as if he were snuffing out actual lives as he utters, "Now I could drink hot blood [. . .]" and so on (3.2.379–383). In the closet scene, he uses the same cloak to envelop his mother in an incestuous embrace. The King displays the full resplendence of the backside of his costume after imploring England's quick disposal of Hamlet (4.4.61–71) by turning resolutely and walking upstage in a brazen gesture of haughtiness. Laertes and Hamlet make a striking picture in the fight scene as they battle it out in *haute couture* shirts designed by Miyake Issey—black for Laertes and white for Hamlet. Gertrude cuts a dramatic picture in her flamboyant green kimono when, poisoned, she descends the long flight of stairs—stumbling erratically but gracefully, and manipulating the sleeves of her robe in an obvious quotation of *kabuki* dance movement (*buyō*). Ninagawa's manner of working with garments in this and other plays clearly derives from traditional Japanese theater, where costumes do not simply cover an actor's back but are expected to be part of the stage spectacle.

### Assessment

To the Japanese—who have venerated Shakespeare for well over one hundred years and have continually updated translations of his

works—Shakespeare is perceived as a far less remote or “foreign” entity than we in the West might assume. Moreover, with many aspects of feudal society still so prevalent in Japanese society and language, the Japan of today in many ways bears greater resemblance to Elizabethan England than any Western nation does.

Part of Ninagawa’s talent as a director lies in his ability to fuse opposites: Orient and Occident, antiquity and modernity, formalism and realism, Brecht and Stanislavski. While indulging in the poetry of Shakespeare (although in translation), he embraces a Western psychonarrative approach, but fuses it with a stage that is theatrical, physical, and symbolic. Yet the notable successes of Ninagawa must be considered in light of his shortcomings. Although he draws from a variety of cultures, styles, eras, and genres, the amalgam does not always hang together in a coherent, artistic whole. In his eagerness to provide illuminating stage metaphors, Ninagawa sometimes provides so many metaphors or devices that they begin to conflict with one other. Even in this production of *Hamlet* some may wonder whether Ninagawa has not introduced too many additional elements to an already complicated play. Is there really more to be gained by incorporating the dressing room metaphor, the doll-tier staging, the evocative fluttering curtains, and the mirror imagery, when any one of these would have been sufficiently thought-provoking? At times, Ninagawa seems unable to exercise self-restraint.

Moreover, the “high-voltage” acting Ninagawa demands of his actors often borders on the melodramatic and the constant high-energy pitch often leaves him with no place to build—a feature of his work that some critics, both at home and abroad, find tiresome. In part he is not to blame, for the peculiarly exaggerated style of acting found in his works reflects the melodramatic style of “realistic” acting common among most *shingeki* actors of Japan. Earle Ernst elaborates:

The modern Japanese actor studies Stanislavsky assiduously and avoids non-realistic movement and posture; but except in the case of a very few contemporary actors, he does not escape entirely the subtle effect of centuries of Kabuki acting. In most modern acting there is the noticeable exaggeration, the somewhat uncontrolled intensity, which the Westerner associates with early film acting but which in Japan derives directly from Kabuki. Thus although the surface of modern drama bears a deceptive resemblance to the Western representational theatre, its inner flow and movement in performance is of purely native origin. (Ernst 1974: 273–274)

Unfortunately, whereas certain other directors are able to subdue this sort of acting, Ninagawa actively encourages it. This “uncontrolled

intensity,” combined with the visual and aural sumptuousness of Ninagawa’s productions, certainly must strike some spectators as gaudy, cloying, and overwrought.

Notwithstanding, this production of *Hamlet* can be said to have amply demonstrated Ninagawa’s ability to create a coherent, aesthetically striking, and thematically meaningful stage endowed with multiple layers of meaning. The significance of the “performance” metaphor—symbolized by the dressing rooms, curtains, and mirrors—manifests itself simultaneously on many levels. Beginning with the Japanese actors’ own enactment of *Hamlet*, it proceeds inward to the play-within-the-play and then outward again to Hamlet’s politically turbulent world. But by virtue of Ninagawa’s manner of executing stagecraft with utter transparency, the metaphor also reflects our conscious act of watching *Hamlet*, our awareness of succumbing to the theatrical illusion, and, with the smashing of mirrors and the sound of traffic noise in the final moments of the play, we understand the theatrical nature of our own existence, where everyday life is a performance and we are all Hamlets. Likewise, the *hina* doll tier begins as a simple aristocratic plaything of Ophelia’s, telescopes to becoming a symbol of her dashed hopes, then a matrix for the play-within-the-play, an allegory of the court of Elsinore, and finally, by inference, a representation of our very world. The ability of Ninagawa to impose multiple levels in this manner undoubtedly derives from a working method grounded in traditional Japanese theater, where the world is signified, not copied, and where the processes of performance are left deliberately unconcealed. It is these deep-rooted principles inherent in his work that perhaps constitute his greatest contribution to modern theater practice.

### Conclusion

As the most popular theatre director in Japan, Ninagawa’s influence on Japanese theatre is unparalleled. He has provided a vision of how theatre can be spectacular and serious, traditional and trendy, foreign and familiar at the same time. Overseas, Ninagawa has acquired a devoted following, especially in the United Kingdom, where his productions of Shakespeare enjoy tremendous popularity and are seen as providing a refreshing impetus to a theatre tradition that many believe has grown stale.

And yet Ninagawa’s Japanification of Shakespeare is not without skeptics. Of Ninagawa’s landmark production of *Macbeth*, Charles Osborne of the *Daily Telegraph* remarked, “I cannot help feeling that there is something faintly ridiculous in a Japanese company attempting to grapple with Shakespeare, as there would also be in the National

Theatre staging a *Noh* drama. The genius of the two races is, let us say, disparate. I refrain from quoting the obvious lines from Kipling's 'Ballad of East and West,' but I should infinitely have preferred to bring my Western incomprehension to a piece of Japanese theatre than to this bastardisation of 'Macbeth'" (Osborne 1987: x). Although this censorious review proved to be the exception rather than the rule, not so many years ago it would have been the standard reaction of a British theater critic to any Japanese adaptation of Shakespeare. Vast changes in perception now enable the works of Ninagawa not to be merely palatable in England but to prompt critics such as Michael Billington to declare: "In my whole theatregoing lifetime I have never seen a production as achingly beautiful as Ninagawa Yukio's *Macbeth*" (Billington 1987: 14).

For more than three decades, Ninagawa Yukio has capitalized on his deep-seated familiarity with Japanese performance traditions to create extraordinary renditions of Western classics by fusing them with traditional Japanese theatrical forms. Although not without failure, Ninagawa's work overall cannot be easily dismissed as imaginatively feeble or intellectually ineffectual; his attempts to crossbreed Western drama with Japanese theatrical traditions represent a wholehearted effort to reexamine and revitalize both theatre forms in the union. The resulting dramatic works have genuine appeal and significance not only for Japanese spectators but also for an emerging global contemporary theatre audience that appreciates intercultural amalgams.

#### NOTES

1. *Butsudan* refers to a small Buddhist altar, in the form of a medium-sized wooden cabinet, with ornately decorated doors that close to conceal the inner display when not in use. Found in many homes, the altar houses the ashes of one's ancestors and is used to pay daily homage to them.

2. The Barbican International Theatre Event runs from spring to early winter each year in the Barbican Centre, London.

3. This recalls Peter Brook's historic production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970) where actors on standby peered down on the playing area from atop the walls surrounding the stage.

4. Ninagawa's production of *The Tempest* (1987) began in a similar fashion.

5. Takagoshi's curtains bear an uncanny resemblance to the drapes of painted mountains created by designer Karl von Appen for Bertolt Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1954.

6. A dilapidated outdoor *nō* theater occupied the main area of the stage for *The Tempest*. Ironically, the Island of Sado, where Zeami was banished, now has a great number of indoor and outdoor *nō* theaters.

7. Theater critic Paul Taylor, in the article quoted above, and Ninagawa's own producer, Thelma Holt.

8. References for this section include the following sources: Nippon Steel Corporation (1984), Yamaguchi and Kojima (1985), and Saitō (1986).

9. The term *shinnō* previously referred to any son or male relative of the emperor. Currently, the term refers only to males in direct line of descent from the emperor.

10. Literally, "black child," the term *kuroko* (also *kurugo*) refers to *kabuki* stagehands who dress entirely in black, with faces usually covered by hoods or masks. They appear on stage during the action to help with costume changes and other technical tasks. The black of their costumes signals the audience to disregard their presence on stage.

11. But as with a similar device used in *Medea* (1978) and more recently in *Titus Andronicus* (2006), Ninagawa's inspiration for this idea came in fact from the Jean Cocteau film *Testament of Orpheus* (1960).

12. To prevent injury, the actor had to wear athletic protection on his arms, legs, and back!

13. Plays with such a stage include *Hearty but Flippant* (1969), *Guide Dog* (1973), *Oedipus Rex* (1976), *Medea* (1978), *Macbeth* (1980), *Rainy Summer* (1982), and *Tango at the End of Winter* (1984), among others.

14. Plays with such a stage include *Nigorie* (1984), *The Tempest* (1987), *Peer Gynt* (1990), *Romeo and Juliet* (1998), and *Hamlet* (2001), among others.

15. Ninagawa is fond of using actors of extreme physiques: very tall, very short, very fat, etc. For instance, he frequently includes one fat lady in his shows. According to his producer, this practice derives from Ninagawa's affinity for movie director Federico Fellini (Nakane 2000).

16. The most celebrated *kabuki* play featuring such a horse is *Oguri Hangan*, in which the protagonist tames a wild horse and makes it stand on a tiny *go* table.

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