

Hamlet's "Globe" and the Self as Performer in England and Japan

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**Yu Shibuya,**

**"Hamlet's 'Globe' and the Self as Performer in England and Japan"**

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**Abstract:** In his paper, "Hamlet's 'Globe' and the Self as Performer in England and Japan," Yu Shibuya argues that Hamlet sees his life as a performance. Shibuya presents examples from Tsuneari Fukuda's Japanese translation to suggest that Fukuda makes choices that emphasize the theatrical side of Hamlet's character. If Hamlet perceives himself as an actor, then his definition of theater or an actor is ultimately a definition of himself. Shibuya uses the theme of self-definition to examine Kenneth Branagh's film version, especially the Mousetrap and the "O what a rogue and peasant slave" scenes. By analyzing Branagh's staging and directorial decisions and his recognition that Hamlet is a performer, Shibuya shows how Branagh's directorial decisions complement his abilities as an actor that make this aspect of his *Hamlet* one of the finest moments in Shakespeare on film.

## Yu SHIBUYA

### Hamlet's "Globe" and the Self as Performer in England and Japan

Many of us are aware of others' eyes. Some thrive on attention. Some like to control the amount of this attention. We all have a sense of a public self, and we keep refashioning ourselves according to the information we process. In one form or another, we are performers; we're just not paid for honing the craft of it. Shakespeare's Hamlet is a performer who is keenly aware of his audience. In this essay, I will discuss how Hamlet understands his life as a performance through close-reading, an explication on the Japanese translated text, and an examination of Branagh's film version. Hamlet is a performer. He believes that performance has power to reveal. This theatrical view of life is first announced after hearing of his father's death from the Ghost, "Ay, thou poor ghost, whilst memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe" (1.5.96-97). The word "globe" means head, but on a more self-referential level, the "globe" is the Globe Theater, since *Hamlet* was first performed there in 1600 or early 1601. By extension via association, Hamlet's head is like the Globe Theater in which there are performers and spectators. Therefore, his life is a thing to be performed.

Performance's power to reveal happens in two directions. An example of the first is an obvious one in 3.2 where Hamlet uses *The Murder of Gonzago* to elicit a response from Claudius. In this scheme there exists a fundamental assumption that a reenactment of a murder will stir Claudius's conscience enough for him to reveal his guilt. The second direction is the exact opposite of the first. Here some form of performance moves Hamlet to reveal something about himself, usually through speech. He has a tendency to internalize what he sees, to moralize human action and draw questions or lessons from it. First Player's Priam and Hecuba speech has this affect on Hamlet; he takes the performance inward and says, "What would he do / Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have?" (2.2.516-17). This internalization is the basic structure of the play: Hamlet witnesses an event, the seeing solidifies a certain decision, and he announces it in a soliloquy. Hamlet not only internalizes, he has a performer's ego for his audience. For example, Hamlet is overly concerned about Denmark's reputation, which, according to him, is ruined by the nightly partying done by Claudius and Gertrude. While we never find out about Denmark's true reputation, Hamlet's concern suggests that he interprets public opinion personally. This concern helps him establish a presence in the state, as we can see later in the play, when Laertes demands to know why his father was not given proper burial, to which Claudius has "two special reasons" (4.7.9). The first, he says, is Gertrude's love for Hamlet, and the second, with a hint of jealousy and fear, is Hamlet's popularity: "The other motive, / Why to a public count I might not go, / Is the great love the general gender bear him, / Who, dipping all his faults in their affection, / Work like the spring that turneth wood to stone, / Converts his gyves to graces" (4.7.16-21). How Hamlet succeeded in winning the "great love" of the public there is no clue, but his performative nature suggests that he won it as an actor would win his fame and reputation.

Immediately before Hamlet dies, he addresses the living, "You that look pale and tremble at this chance, / That are but mutes or audience to this act" (5.2.313-314), and defines his death as a performance piece. The translated Japanese text gives a stronger sense of this. Any translation will bring the translator's view to the text, and, in most cases, this phenomenon manifests itself in figurative language. Tsuneari Fukuda, a literary critic and translator of Shakespeare, describes his process as "being aware of Hamlet as a moving, speaking thing; the chance to act well motivates his every being" (Fukuda in *Shakespeare* 1967, 209). Fukuda translates the word "act" in line 314 into two words *o-shibai* ("play" or "drama") but the Japanese character meaning "big" or "great," makes the "play" into a grand piece of theater, or into a historically significant play. This interpretation reflects Fukuda's understanding of Hamlet, namely that his sense of self is grand and somehow larger than himself, deserving an audience. The other, *maku-kire*, is understood more easily character by character. The left half means "curtain" or "act," and is specifically reserved for a theatrical context. The right half, by itself a verb, means "to cut." Together the word means "an act's end." In this translation Fukuda chooses to amplify Hamlet's role as a performer: Hamlet's

life is a play. When it is "cut," the "curtain" falls. Thus, Fukuda expands the theatrical space of his translated text by inventing new meaning. In Act 3 scene 4, the closet scene, Hamlet, before leaving Gertrude, says, "This bad begins and worse remains behind" (183). In his translation, Fukuda turns "begins," a verb, into a noun. We have already looked at the right character and its theatrical nuance. The left character, *kai*, by itself is a verb that means "to open." Combined, *kai-maku*, means "act-beginning." I suspect that Fukuda made this choice because there is no artistic, elevated translation for "bad" in Japanese and it appears he drew from what he perceives as Hamlet's personality to re-invent the line, thereby adding another level of theatricality to the scene.

Shakespeare's style of writing relies often on words with more than one meaning: a nightmare for the translator. Stripped of the opportunity to preserve the layers, the translator must choose which meaning to honor. An example occurs earlier in the closet scene where Hamlet describes the dead Polonius (who is, after all, Hamlet's most faithful "audience"). Upon seeing the body, he says, "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!" (3.4.32). The problematic word in this line is "fool." It functions on a literal level, but a "fool" is also the clownish figure in traditional theater. Seeing as how Polonius was also an actor in his earlier days (as we find in 3.2), it is fitting and appropriate to apply a theater term. But the literal "fool" and the theatrical "fool" are two different pictograms in Japanese. The former choice will neglect Hamlet's acknowledgement of Polonius's early career; the latter will fail to convey Hamlet's anger towards Polonius's constant spying on him. Thus, Fukuda must rely on other means to make this decision; he must look at the general theatrical aspect and atmosphere of the play and Hamlet's way of thinking. Therefore, he chooses the latter pictogram in Japanese when Hamlet describes Polonius. The translated scene reads as though Hamlet is a director, yelling at an actor to leave.

Deep in Hamlet's mind is the idea that performance is somehow infallible, a significant indicator of one's state of mind. After the Ghost leaves Gertrude's chamber, the queen thinks Hamlet has gone mad, "This is the very coinage of your brain / This bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning in" (3.4.141-143). Hamlet's task in this scene is to convince Gertrude to stop sleeping with his uncle, but in order to do so, he must prove that he is not mad. In response to Gertrude's accusation, he therefore replies: "My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time, / And makes as healthful music. It is not madness / That I have uttered. Bring me to the test, / And I the matter will reword, which madness / Would gambol from" (144-49). Hamlet proposes to "re-word" in order to ascertain his sanity. In a modern context "reword" means to rephrase, in different words, but here, Hamlet means to repeat what he has said. In other words, his ability to perform (since performers often repeat their shows) is, for him, the most convincing evidence he has to offer. Fukuda's translated text, yet again, takes quite the artistic license to fully realize the scene. He expands the verb "re-word" into a full sentence where the literal translation back to English is "I will repeat and show you from one to ten" (123). The significant addition here is the character derived from a drawing of an eye, which means "to look" or "to show" depending on the context. Here, Fukuda uses it to mean the latter, thereby making Hamlet a person who believes in the power of words and of oration.

An appropriate speech to examine is the "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I" speech, since Hamlet compares himself to the player, after watching the player's performance. Hamlet asks, "What would he do / Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have?" (2.2.516-17). Normally, one imagines being another to inherit his or her situation. Hamlet imagines the opposite -- "what if he were I?" -- and assigns his situation to the player. Fukuda translates this line into the characters meaning "how would he play my role and speak my lines?" (80). The three key words to focus on are "role" or "part" meaning "actor" and "to play" or "to act" meaning "theater." Joined together with the preceding word, one can see Fukuda's interpretation coming through clearly. The third character, "lines" or "speech," is used strictly in reference to performance. It seems Fukuda translates "cue and passion" into the above three words, because Hamlet's "cue and passion," as Fukuda understands them, are to play roles and deliver speeches.

Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* displays a similar reading, and it appears in both subtle and exaggerated scenic and acting choices. Branagh stages some scenes in what appears to be Hamlet's room. There are many paintings of various sizes that decorate the walls in this room, which adds

an artistic side to Hamlet's character not found in the text. Also there sits a miniature theater in the middle of this room, which mildly echoes Hamlet's reference to his mind as the "globe." Branagh locates the "What a piece of work is a man" speech to outdoors where we see part of the eighteenth-century castle architecture surrounded by snow. Hamlet, played by Branagh himself, faces the camera, but his listeners, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, show their backs to us. This staging resembles the theater in that the positions define the relationship between the performer and the audience. The text indicates an interruption, and Hamlet exhibits a slight frustration: "Hamlet: Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so. / Rosencrantz: My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts. / Hamlet: Why did ye laugh, then, when I said 'Man delights not me'?" (2.2.292-96). Hamlet ends his speech abruptly because his "audience" does not act according to his expectations. Two things are clear from this passage. First, he is quick to recollect when the interruption happened. Second, he quotes himself, which is somewhat narcissistic, as if his words were written down somewhere and rehearsed beforehand. Branagh gazes upward while he delivers the speech; his eyes are seeing the "majestical roof fretted with golden-fire" (286), and his voice moves into a higher register, creating a dreamy, self-focused atmosphere. This mood continues until Rosencrantz gives a small half-laugh and Branagh shifts his gaze away from the sky. Even the music, which has been accompanying the speech fades, out, almost too quickly. Branagh leaves the dreamy vocal zone, talks much faster, and enunciates more sharply to bring out Hamlet's frustration and his accusative tone of voice. Branagh's choices reflect his reading of Hamlet as a proud actor who finds the smallest interruption as a thing to address.

Another example in Branagh's film version highlights Hamlet's interlocked understanding of life as theater. His reading of Act 3 scene 2 (the play-within-the-play sequence) differs from previous film versions of Olivier and Zeffirelli, where Hamlet is an audience member who whispers his lines to Ophelia and Claudius. Branagh's Hamlet is a performer. A servant directs a spotlight on the entrance area, and Hamlet is the first to set foot on stage. Hamlet is on stage and Claudius is in the audience when this exchange takes place: "*King*: How fares our cousin Hamlet? / *Hamlet*: Excellent, i' faith, of the chameleon's dish. I eat the air, promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so. / *King*: I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet. These words are not mine. / *Hamlet*: No, nor mine now" (3.2.83-88). Branagh projects his voice from the diaphragm and wins the audience's attention. When he says, "No, nor mine now," the audience laughs in response to his choice to deliver the line as a joke intended for everyone in the room to hear. A similar thing happens when he tears Polonius: "*Hamlet*: My lord, you played once i' the university, you say? / *Polonius*: That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor. / *Hamlet*: What did you enact? / *Polonius*: I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i' th' Capitol; Brutus killed me. / *Hamlet*: It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there" (88-95). Polonius sits in the audience until Hamlet says, "My lord," with an exclamation, and invites him to the stage with a gesture. The presence of the two on stage transforms the interaction to an interview-like exchange, but they do not look at each other; they look at the audience. When Hamlet delivers his pun on "brute" and "capital," the audience laughs. Branagh reinterprets these lines in such a way as to give Hamlet more opportunity to express his performative nature. What's astounding about Branagh's interpretation of this scene is how he carries this atmosphere throughout, even while Hamlet is sitting in the audience.

Hamlet's interaction with Ophelia is also turned into a piece of theater. Starting from "No good mother, here's metal more attractive" (98), to "the hobby-horse is forgot" (121), Hamlet practically yells his lines. There are cuts of other audience members turning to them both interested and distracted. His take is somewhat obnoxious and immature, making his audience uncomfortable as well as the viewer, but it builds a wonderful tension between Hamlet and Claudius, strengthened by the accelerating orchestral music, the fast cuts jumping from face to face, reaction to reaction. Towards the end of the Player King's speech, Hamlet climbs down, claps while walking, and climbs up on stage immediately after the speech is over. In a sharp-tongued, fast and accusing way, he asks, "Madam, how like you this play?" Again, Branagh chooses to yell his lines, as if not being able to control his anger. The choice here is somewhat questionable since it appears that the play is eliciting more reaction from Hamlet than from the intended Claudius. Yet it raises the stakes in

an unexpected fashion by relocating the exchange to a public place (the stage); this isolates the conflict, and the viewer joins Hamlet in observing the King's conscience. Claudius, played by Derek Jacobi, delivers his question, "What do you call the play?" Jacobi complements Branagh's reading by delivering that line as though to calm himself down; the subtext is "I will not play his game." To this, Branagh says, "The Mouse-trap," as though professing his hatred for Claudius. Typically, this set of lines (211-22) is staged "off-stage." The lines are delivered as commentaries of the play, and the commentators (Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Claudius) are audience members. Mel Gibson's Hamlet, directed by Franco Zeffirelli, whispers these lines, which is in direct opposition to Branagh's fresh re-imagining of the scene. The text by itself reads as though Hamlet is making a joke to himself; or that he is not mature enough to keep his plan to himself. Branagh's Hamlet wants his accusation heard, he wants his attack on the King to be a public one; Branagh's Hamlet is most alive when in the presence of an audience. The sequence increases in its busy-ness. Hamlet climbs up to his seat beside Ophelia, speaks to her; but as soon as he commands, "Begin, murderer," to the villain with the poison, he climbs back down to the stage. While the player delivers his lines (234-38), Hamlet holds the poison, faces Claudius, looks straight into his eyes, and says: "A poisons him i' the garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago. The story is extant, and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife." The text merely suggests that he is explaining the content; the accusation, if there is one, is indirect. But Branagh delivers the line with an amazing speed, giving more emphasis on the pitch's rise than the content. The key here is that he stays on stage while he observes Claudius' reaction. This is precisely Hamlet's view of life represented. For him, Claudius and his reaction is the play, but while he observes, he is also on stage as a performer.

Hamlet offers many definitions of theater, of how to act, and of actors. I have spent the first part establishing Hamlet as an actor, and will now discuss the range and the specifics of these definitions. If Hamlet perceives himself as an actor, then his definition of theater or an actor is ultimately a definition of himself. Perhaps the most direct of all is found in Act 2 scene 2; Hamlet assigns Polonius to take good care of the players who have just arrived, that they be "well-bestowed" (483). He offers his reason so as to make sure Polonius obeys; "Do you hear, let them be well used, for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time" (483-85). An "abstract" is a summary account; we assume it to be authentic and accurate. The word "chronicles" has two levels of meaning. The literal level is one of a historical recording of events in order. The second level is that of an allusive one: the two books of Chronicles in the Old Testament. This allusion invites a sacred and holy perspective on actors, that they are appointed by God to record and that their performance has lasting significance. Therefore, Hamlet's view of an actor is an elevated one; holy and perhaps infallible if it weren't for the preceding qualifier, "brief."

We can see that Hamlet considers himself as a "chronicle" by looking at his death scene in Act 5 scene 2. Laertes has just died, and Hamlet is about to when Horatio, picking up the poisoned cup, says, "Here's yet some liquor left" (320). Hamlet stops him, "Give me the cup. Let go. By heaven, I'll ha't" (323). He continues: "If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, / Absent thee from felicity awhile, / And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, / To tell my story" (325-28). The focus of these lines, in terms of who benefits, is Hamlet himself, not Horatio. The logic is this: if Horatio loves Hamlet, then Horatio must tell Hamlet's "story." Thus we can conclude that Hamlet demands that Horatio "let go" of the poisoned cup because he wants his story to be told. This is as if to say, Horatio has no reason to live otherwise in "this harsh world" where he would draw his "breath in pain." Hamlet locates the worth in "my story," not Horatio's life. This is only consistent to his character because Hamlet's life, a great piece of theater in his mind, is an "abstract" and a "chronicle of the time." Its significance is not personal, but historical and maybe even instructional.

The notion of performance as instruction appears most clearly, of course, in Hamlet's speech to the players in Act 3 scene 2. Here he takes on the role of a director, putting himself above the players. He is extra cautious because prior to the scene, Hamlet seems to have given the "dozen or sixteen lines" to the player to deliver during *The Murder of Gonzago*. As usual, his own words carry him away, and he defines performance and the purpose of playing, whose end both at the first, and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own fea-

ture, scorn her image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure (3.2.17-19). The key metaphor in this passage is the mirror: an object that reflects and corrects. Again, we see the same assumption: that a theatrical performance possesses an unchanging accuracy; that despite being a fiction, it contains a larger truth. The two verbs given to the mirror are "show" and "scorn." It is both revelatory and instructional. "Scorn" makes us think of "contempt" and "disdain," which are sharp-edged and bring a violent texture to the definition. This is an exquisite theatrical moment of simultaneity, in that while he defines theater as instruction, he himself is instructing a group of players. Perhaps he permits himself this rather audacious act because he, too, is like a mirror that can "show" and "scorn."

There are other references to Hamlet as a mirror in the text; the one that applies to this discussion is found in Ophelia's response to Hamlet's urging her, "To a nunnery, go" (3.1.145). She laments the loss in a comparative method by describing what (she thinks) Hamlet used to be: "O, what a noble minds is here o'erthrown! / The courtier's, soldier's scholar's eye, / tongue, sword, / Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state, / The glass of fashion and the mould of form, / Th' observed of all observers, quite quite down!" (146-50). The rest of the speech is about herself, so it can be argued that the first half, which dedicates itself to painting a verbal portrait of Hamlet, culminates with a mirror metaphor: "the glass of fashion." We have to take into account that this description comes from a broken-hearted woman, shaken from the preceding interaction. She may be exaggerating. Michael Ferber, in his *Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, says, "Certain people are models or ideals and serve as mirrors for everyone. 'Mirror of X' became a common place phrase by Chaucer's time" (Ferber 124). He continues: "By extension a book can be a mirror. Jean Meun says his *Romance of the Rose* might be called a *Mirror of Lovers*, 'since they will see great benefits in it for them' (10620-22). Hundreds of books, in fact, were titled *Mirror of X* or *Mirror for Y*, beginning with Augustine's *Speculum*; there have been mirrors of the world, of faith, of astronomy, of alchemy, of sin, of drunkenness, and for magistrates, all calculated to instruct and admonish" (124). "The glass of fashion" makes Hamlet a mirror in the sense of an example, someone who instructs others how to fashion themselves or carry themselves in public. Ophelia stays in this metaphor for another line but emphasizes Hamlet's physical presence by saying he was "Th' observed of all observers." Hamlet imitates, then, and is imitated.

This notion of reflection is closely linked to Aristotle's *mimesis*: "The instinct for imitation is inherent in human beings from our earliest days; we differ from other animals in that we are the most imitative of creatures, and learn our earliest lessons by imitation" (45). Since we differ from "animals in that we are the most imitative," then it follows that the more we imitate, the more we are applying the very thing that sets us apart. Can we also argue, then, that the higher the quality of imitation, the higher the quality of one's existence? Hamlet seems to think so. To find this, we must return to Act 3 scene 2, where he instructs the players. Although his instruction began as a specific set of guidelines pertaining to the lines he wrote, his love of hearing himself talk carries him to deliver a grand meditation on the nature of theater. He returns to his original point about how to avoid poor acting and gives an example: "O, there be players that I have seen play -- and heard others praise, and that highly -- not to speak it profanely, that neither having th' accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably" (24-29). The intriguing substitution for "acted out" is "imitated" (29), which suggests an Aristotelian definition of acting. The equation at work is: poor acting equals poor imitation. Hamlet's assertion is that these actors were "not made well" as human beings, as if lower, which provides us with an opportunity to reason the opposite, that good actors are beings of higher quality. Or even stricter, that good acting is a basic requirement of any human being. Hamlet's identity is interlocked with his performance.

The most resonant of all definitions Hamlet offers in the play is found in the interaction with Ophelia in Act 3 scene 2, immediately after the dumb show: "*Ophelia*: What means this, my lord? / *Hamlet*: Marry, this is miching mallecho; it means mischief. / *Ophelia*: Belike this show imports the argument of the play. / *Enter* Prologue. *Hamlet*: We shall know by this fellow. The players cannot keep counsel; they'll tell all." Hamlet sees himself as a player, then this definition, that a player

"cannot keep counsel" certainly applies to Hamlet himself: he "cannot keep counsel." Hamlet will "tell all." In an indirect manner, this definition is a confession that reveals his understanding of himself. So the question is not "will Hamlet tell?" nor "will he tell all?" but rather, "*when* will he tell all?" and "*how*?" This question of "when and how will Hamlet tell all?" A quick comparison of two scenes, the second half of Act 2 scene 2 (the Player's speech and Hamlet's soliloquy) and Act 4 scene 4, gives us an answer. He will tell all when a good piece of theater, an integral part of who he is, affects him. The Piram and Hecuba speech of Act 2 scene 2 is, as Hamlet puts it, "a fiction, a dream of passion," as is Fortinbras's expedition, since there is little gain in it. The Captain informs Hamlet that there is "no profit but the name" (4.4.17-19). Hamlet describes Fortinbras's effort as a "fantasy and trick of fame," which is similar in content to how he describes the player's speech. Hamlet perceives the two events in the same way: as performances. The fact that these "performances" are followed by a soliloquy suggests that Hamlet, who identifies himself as a performer, is moved to speak -- to tell all -- when someone acts with passion and effort for "a fiction" or "fantasy." Hamlet's head, the "distracted globe" is the Globe Theater, in which his life and every moment of it are scenes. Performance moves him. It reveals a kind of truth from him. I have discussed these notions by looking at Fukuda's translation, Branagh's film and how he realizes the text's theatrical atmosphere, and Hamlet's many definitions of theater, which reveal who he is.

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