

■ Humorous *Othello*: Tarokaja Masuda's *New Othello* (1907) and the Value of Comedy

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Abstract

Ever since Shakespeare was introduced to Japan in the late nineteenth century, the Bard has been regarded as an icon of the modernized West, a teacher of wisdom, an authoritative source of knowledge, and a master to whom utmost respect was due. Tragedies, a genre invoking solemnity and

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*Corresponding author. Throughout this paper, all Japanese quotations are translated by the authors unless otherwise acknowledged. We would like to express gratitude to Waseda University for access to its database and copyright materials and to the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable suggestions. This work was financially supported by the Young Scholar Fellowship Program, Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), Taiwan, R.O.C., under Grant MOST 108-2636-H-002-001, for which we are immensely grateful.

(Received 30 September 2019; Accepted 22 November 2019)

thought to befit a serious playwright, dominated the scenes of early Shakespeare reception. Shakespearean transadaptations in Japan often omitted bawdy language in conformance with the Bard's solemn stature, so that the ennobled Shakespearean language could remain "proper." During such a period, a unique comedy writer, Tarokaja Masuda (1875-1953), went against the grain by making *Othello* humorous, accessible, satirical, and full of slapstick. This paper brings attention to Masuda's forgotten *New Othello* (1907), a comic spin-off derived from one of the most renowned box-office hits of Shakespeare in early twentieth-century Japan—a localized *Othello* (1903) adapted by Suiin Emi (1869-1934) and produced by Otojiro Kawakami (1864-1911). This paper argues for *New Othello's* contribution to the development of comedy as a worthy genre as well as its revision of creative approaches to Shakespeare in Japan. *New Othello* not only embodies the malleability of generic perception, but also familiarizes and popularizes Shakespeare for a wider, entertainment-seeking audience. Last but not least, *New Othello* manifests the social capacity of comedies by demonstrating the transformative power of trust and love. *New Othello* further grants a happy ending to a cross-cultural and cross-class marriage in stark contrast to Shakespeare's *Othello*, wherein inter-racial and cross-class relationships could not last. The successful productions of this neglected play in Taiwan (1909) and in Tokyo (2018) bore witness to *New Othello's* theatrical cogency and sustained legacy, currently unexplored by the academic community.

Keywords: Shakespeare in Japan, *Othello*, Tarokaja Masuda (1875-1953), Suiin Emi, Otojiro Kawakami, comedy

Levity, frivolity, and gaiety—these characteristics can hardly be associated with Shakespeare's masterly tragedy, *Othello*. Yet it was precisely with the spirit of conviviality that Eiji Nishizawa—a rising director and chairman of Jam Session theatre company—produced his unique addition to Shakespearean performances on the Japanese stage in 2018: *New Othello*, a comedy penned in 1906 and produced in 1907 by Tarokaja Masuda (1875-1953),¹ an early twentieth-century literatus, playwright, critic, entrepreneur, colonial tycoon, and ardent advocate of comedy as a worthy genre that deserves a respectful place in Japan's theatrical development and literati circles. A comical spin-off of an earlier and much more renowned transadaptation of *Othello* commissioned by Otojiro Kawakami and written by Suiin Emi in 1903, *New Othello* is nevertheless worlds apart in terms of genre and plot from its source text. Emi's *Othello*—a text set in colonial Taiwan, wherein the low-born samurai Washiro (*Othello*) serves as the Governor-General—has been described by scholars such as Yasuko Ikeuchi as a pivotal text that reveals Japan's "Imperial Gaze" upon objectified Taiwan, since the *Othello* of 1903 tells the tragedy of a "half-civilized" and "excluded other" within society (137). Robert Tierney reads Kawakami and Emi's *Othello* alongside the "ethnographic showcase of indigenous people in world expositions" and reveals *Othello* as a text about "race and imperialism" (516). Yukari Yoshihara illustrates how *Othello* creates a multi-layered world order in which the Japanese people occupy the top tier (23). The 1903 *Othello* no doubt is a play of great import in the context of Japan's stepping towards a full-fledged empire.

Masuda's *New Othello*, on the other hand, tells a story of the reformative power of mutual love and trust on a misguided, jealousy-ridden soul. The play takes place at the residence of Muro Washiro, the counterpart of *Othello* in Emi's Japanese transadaptation. From the very beginning of the play, the protagonist is jealous without a justifiable cause: he patrols around the bedroom of his residence with a pistol and a dagger out of suspicion towards his wife's chastity. Just as Shakespeare's *Othello* and Emi's Washiro do, Masuda's Washiro rants about how the fatal handkerchief came into his hands. His obsession with the handkerchief is laced with patriarchal moral codes of chastity: according to Washiro, his grandmother made the handkerchief from a shrine maiden's underwear. Accused of parting with such an important gift as the handkerchief, Tomone (*Desdemona*) adamantly denies the charge. Provoked by his own imagination, Washiro becomes further upset because the name "Tomone" in Japanese sounds identical to "sleeping with a friend" and insists upon calling her by a

¹ Born Taro Masuda. Tarokaja was his pseudonym.

less offensive name. To complicate matters further, the character Katsu Yoshio (Cassio), whom Washiro thinks his wife is having a clandestine relationship with, lives right in front of the couple's mansion. Because Washiro perceives Katsu as a threat, Tomone writes to Katsu, who then decides to visit her in order to clarify the situation. Inevitably, this visit enrages Washiro. Towards the end, when the protagonists' marital relationship is pushed to the brink of destruction, Washiro, while hiding under a piece of tiger skin, overhears an innocent conversation between Tomone and Katsu Yoshio in a *deus-ex-machina* fashion. Washiro recognizes the situation for the innocent misunderstanding it is, and apologizes for ever suspecting Tomone of adultery. The play ends with the reformed Washiro's declaration of future hope and happiness: "Until now, I have been living a nightmare. From now on, let us cheerfully dream together" (Masuda 124).

This paper attempts to contextualize and explore the significance of *New Othello*—a play that has escaped scholarly attention for more than a century despite its highly experimental and generically revolutionary nature. What contextual circumstances compelled such a radically adapted spin-off of *Othello*? What was the source of this transadaptation? How should we evaluate the merits of *New Othello* in its own right? Via answering these questions, this paper argues for *New Othello*'s contribution to generic development as well as its revision of creative approaches to Shakespeare in Japan. Masuda boldly disrupts the supremacy of tragedy and helps advance comedy as a worthy genre in the history of Japanese Shakespeare reception. *New Othello* not only embodies the malleability of generic perception, but also familiarizes and popularizes Shakespeare for a wider, entertainment-seeking audience. Last but not least, *New Othello* encompasses topical references and plays host to Masuda's commentaries on the practice of love in Meiji society, demonstrating the social capacity of comedy as an invaluable genre. The successful revivals of this neglected play in Taiwan (1909) and in Tokyo (2018) bore witness to *New Othello*'s theatrical cogency and sustained legacy, currently unexplored by the academic community.

New Othello: Context and Genre

Masuda's audacious decision to transform *Othello* into a comedy was made at a time when Shakespeare was ennobled and solemnified by the Meiji society as a master of tragedies. At the turn of the twentieth century, half a lifetime after the Black Ships had steamed into Yokohama harbour, Shakespeare's works had been quoted, adapted, and translated in magazines and on stage in Japan. From

the onset of Shakespeare's reception history in Japan, the Bard had been put on a pedestal as a cultural giant, a "hero" (Kawachi 38), an icon of the modernized West, a teacher of wisdom, and an authoritative source of knowledge to whom utmost respect was due. In metaphorical terms, despite the richness of Japan's own ancient cultural and theatrical heritage, the Prospero of Anglo-American cultural supremacy began to impose a vision of Europe's higher civilization on the Japanese Caliban, for which Caliban was expected to be grateful. Such was the extent of this cultural obeisance that even the lower-class characters of Shakespeare's plays—the Peters, the Dogberries, the gravediggers, and the clowns who were hooted at for their gaucheness and gullibility on the English stage—had to be given appropriate manners and mannerisms so that they could be accorded proper respect according to Japanese cultural norms. Shakespearean characters and plays, Europe's pride and joy, thus underwent a process of drastic adaptations and metamorphoses that would not only revise the social status of characters, but also affect generic perceptions and engender linguistic censorship. Given license in Japan by the hypocritical mores of Shakespeare's native England in the Victorian period, "inappropriate" expressions were eliminated following the manner of the Victorian culture police, the self-appointed guardians of popular morality such as the infamous Mr. Bowdler.

Against such a backdrop, *New Othello's* vernacular language as well as its demotic setting contrasted markedly with the usual Shakespearean norms Meiji society fashioned. To begin with, Othello's masterly grasp of language is entirely nullified from the onset of the play. In both Shakespeare's original and Emi's adaptation, Othello's eloquence is particularly foregrounded, his story-telling techniques and poetic capacity considered the most compelling characteristics that draw Desdemona's attention. Masuda's Washiro, on the other hand, consistently speaks very short lines when he makes his first appearances on the stage. For instance, his first words, "Suspicious rascal!" which consist of only four syllables in Japanese, are shouted as he mistakes Omiya (Emilia) for someone who trespasses on Washiro's private quarters (Masuda 6). He is not a man of grand discourse, nor can he cohere language and action. When questioned by Tomone as to the reasons of his jealousy, Washiro attempts at the poetic capability Shakespeare's Othello commands to no avail, as his action betrays his clumsiness and fails to correspond to his words. He personifies the sun with the line, "if the sun has ears, he would pinch them and turn his face away [from the unfaithful behaviors of a wife]" (41). While saying this line, Washiro tries to mimic the sun's hypothesized action, only to find himself clinching his nose instead of his ears.

Witty wordplay is one of the most important comical elements in *New*

Othello, though many of *New Othello*'s lines would have been considered too frivolous, flirty, and light-hearted for Shakespearean audiences in the Meiji Era. When Tomone compares a husband's heart to the cool autumnal sky, Omiya playfully retorts that it is scorching hot out there and that the temperature seems to rise above 100 degrees Celsius because of Washiro's ardent passion for Tomone (Masuda 14-15). Washiro once attempts to speak metaphorically to express his errant suspicion: "I am wrapped with clouds of doubts, so much so that I cannot elevate my head upon my pillow at all" (8). Omiya, though fully aware of the metaphorical nature of Washiro's comment, chooses to tease him by taking his line literally: "If your pillow is still too low, shall I pile up one more Western pillow on it?" (8). Throughout the play, this kind of comical wordplay abounds.

Furthermore, *Othello*'s personality undergoes a complete over-haul. While Shakespeare's *Othello* demonstrates bravery on the battlefield, Masuda's Washiro is vexed and worn out by "fighting the monstrous charms of the night" (9-10) and expresses his anxiety for sleeping (10) due to the nightmares that haunt his "hateful nights" (9). Masuda is bold in his decision to characterize Washiro as a cowardly, sensitive, and anxious man fettered by quotidian concerns in the very first scene, a scene that usually forms the readers' impression of the protagonist of a given play. Towards the end of the play, Masuda further disrupts *Othello*'s tragic aura and the original play's climactic, fateful ending by making Washiro an eavesdropper disguised under a tiger skin. Masuda's Washiro is in every aspect a comical character whose jealousy elicits ridicule and laughter.

Last but not least, Masuda makes room for comical elements in *New Othello* by deleting the greatest source of evil in Shakespeare's original: Iago. This deletion is also a marked departure from Masuda's source text: Emi's 1903 *Othello*, in which the character Iya Gozo (Iago) appears in nine out of ten scenes. Masuda only makes a glancing reference to the name "Iya Gozo" in *New Othello* as the fictional translator of a book Tomone and Washiro read: *Fujin Ron (On Women)* by Arthur Schopenhauer, a text in which contemporary concepts of love in the Meiji period are documented. Iago is transformed from one of the greatest Shakespearean villains to a thinly veiled translator of social commentary.

Characterization and language aside, turning Shakespeare's masterly tragedy into a comedy is a revolutionary task in its own right and carries generic significance. The dignified status Shakespeare commanded in Meiji society narrowed the scope of generic variety in the Bard's receptions. Tragedy, a genre invoking solemnity and thought to befit a serious playwright, dominated the scenes of early Shakespeare reception. *Hamlet*, to begin with, was the first Shakespearean play to be partially translated in Japanese: Polonius's "neither a borrower nor a

lender be” speech was included in the Japanese version of Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help*, a best-seller in Meiji Japan (Sato 23; Takahashi 99). *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* were the very first plays to be performed on the Japanese stage: in 1866 and 1869 respectively, selected scenes were performed in Yokohama by foreign traveling troops. In 1893, *Othello* became the second earliest play—after *The Merchant of Venice*—to be transadapted on stage by Japanese performing troupes (Sasaki 8). *King Lear* was a play with which two giants of Japan’s top circles of modernized drama—Mohe Fukui and Masao Murata—inaugurated Japan’s second Drama Reform Movement (Wu 46). Among early Shakespeare performances, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear* were statistically the most frequently produced (Sasaki 8).

Meanwhile, comedies such as *The Merchant of Venice* became famous for their pedagogical and extrinsic values and were not perceived as comical. The courtroom scene of *The Merchant of Venice* was among the best known parts of Shakespeare’s works and had been perceived by the Japanese people as clear demonstration of the advantage of the rule of law of the enlightened West. The fact that a commoner’s rights could be protected by written legal codes and the judicial process proved to Meiji citizens that Western civilizations had long ago evolved above and beyond that of Japan. *The Merchant of Venice*, then, was perceived not as a comedy that must entertain, but as a textbook-like story of the need to establish a modernized judiciary. Other Shakespearean subgenres suffered a similar fate. *Julius Caesar*, for instance, was appreciated as a grand, tragic story of democratic struggles. Japan had just emerged from the two-century-old system of the Tokugawa Shogunate, under which common people suffered from extreme political exclusion. Direct or indirect participation in political affairs or high politics were impossible due to numerous social, legal, and economic restrictions. Against this backdrop, Keizo Kawashima, an experienced translator of world classics such as *Aesop’s Fables* in the Meiji Era, noticed the political potency of Julius Caesar and translated it as a novel for *Japan Constitutional Party Newspaper* (Kawachi 39). As Yoshiko Kawachi notes, Kawashima chose to publish *Julius Caesar* for a political journal because of his interest in “Brutus as a democrat and Caesar as a politician” at the time of the Liberal and Popular Rights Movement of Japan (39). A year after Kawashima’s translation, Shoyo Tsubouchi, the most renowned translator of Shakespeare’s complete works in Japan, translated *Julius Caesar*’s title as *The Amazing Story of Caesar: The Lingering Sharpness of the Sword of Freedom* (Quinn 168), clearly advancing civil rights, democracy, and freedom as fundamental values for Japan as a modern state.

With the tragic mode monopolizing Meiji Shakespeares, Masuda goes against the grain by creating and preserving the existence of comedies among

Shakespearean transadaptations. Such a subversive move was not without its costs. Masuda's identity as a comical playwright at times even attracted *ad hominem* criticism, partly because of Masuda's extraordinary upbringing, demotic aesthetics, and gregarious manner. Masuda was not a conventional man of letters: at the time Masuda entered into Japan's literary spheres, he was a thirty-one-year-old, allegedly handsome, and immensely wealthy scion of one of the business tycoons, Baron Takashi Masuda, who was credited with developing Mitsui into an international *zaibatsu* ("wealthy clique"). Taro Masuda himself was also a prominent businessman, especially in the sugar industry in colonial Taiwan. In the social scene, this young scion was not a strict adherer to decorum: it was reported that he tricked an employee of Mitsui ("Masuda Taro Inuzuka Shintaro o Moteasobu" 74-75) and that he was entertained by geishas as an aristocrat when mistaken as one by the mistress of the geisha house ("Masuda Taro Kazoku ni Narisumasu" 76).

One notable commentator on Masuda was Jiro Abe (1883-1959), a writer and philosopher with a special focus on aesthetics. In *Santaro no Nikki*, or *Santaro's Diary*, a collection of essays in the style of a fictional novel portrayed from the idealistic viewpoint of its protagonist, Santaro Aota, in his adolescence, a section is devoted to criticizing Masuda indirectly, with negative comments on the Imperial Theatre, where Masuda was actively running its business as well as writing many of its scripts. *Santaro's Diary* labels Masuda as a wealthy person without any poetic talent, and points out Masuda's ugly extravagance of using beautiful scenic art and props to ornament nonsensical scripts meaninglessly (Abe 450).

Yet not all disregarded Masuda's talent and importance. The potential of comedies to reach a wider audience was noted by Masuda's contemporaries. The editor of *Gendai Juyaku Ron* (*The Theory of Modern Executives*) describes Masuda as the best playwright for comedies, one who could reach a larger, general audience, while admitting that some people may find his works clichéd (Ishiyama 287-88). As *Gendai Gyokai Jinbutsu Shu* (*A Collection of People in Modern Industries*) mentions, in the Imperial Theatre, Masuda's plays were often produced and his works were always talked about, since his comedies catered to a particular and idiosyncratic taste and Masuda as a playwright was well-known even outside of the theatre industry (77-78).

Despite polarized opinions offered by Masuda's contemporaries, his passion for comedy as a worthy genre appears to be genuine. Masuda turned *Othello* into a comedy not as a theatrical stunt; rather, it was an attempt to familiarize Shakespeare among the general readership. His pseudonym provides clues. "Tarokaja" is a common name of male stock characters in Kyogen, a form of

comic drama in Japanese traditional theatre. The most famous Kyogen pieces such as *Bo Shibari* (*Tied to a Stick*) and *Kagyu* (*The Snail*) all feature Tarokaja as their main protagonist. Tarokaja usually appears as the first servant to the master in a given Kyogen piece. Although Tarokaja's nature slightly varies depending on the piece, he would usually be ignorant and innocent and almost always represents the common people. His function in Kyogen is to attract people with his charm and lovely character. He propels a story with his positive spirit. His mischief after drinking entertains the audience. In a nutshell, Tarokaja is a jester-like stock character who provides the comical elements of a traditional Kyogen. This lowly yet convivial stock character was Taro Masuda's aspiration. A man who already enjoyed eliciting laughter from people around him, Taro Masuda assumed the name of Tarokaja, declaring himself a grown man in theatre in 1904, and embarked upon a life-long journey of entertaining people with his comedies.² His first foray into Shakespearean drama is the revision of the most famous play in the early twentieth century: the 1903 *Othello* penned by Emi and produced by Kawakami.

New Othello and Its Source Text: Emi and Kawakami's Shimpa Othello

Around the time when Masuda came back to Japan after completing multiple degrees in Europe up to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (Miki 457), the environment of the theatre industry was changing dramatically. The Drama Reform was well under way. Instead of appearing as Kabuki pieces, Western plays started to be directed in “Western-like” styles, observing the rules of realistic *mise-en-scène*. The realistic stage property was one of the governing conventions of early twentieth-century European theatre, but theatrical realism was no more akin to actual Elizabethan performance practice than Kabuki itself. After the influx of fashionable notions of Western theatre, the glorious heritage of Kabuki at Masuda's own time was questioned as an outdated form of theatre. There was considerable discussion on the ways by which Kabuki might be “improved,” and a new style of theatre termed *shimpa*—a genre that usually deals with melodrama—came into being around this time. Subsequently, another new theatrical form, *shingeki*, was derived as a subgenre of *shimpa* mainly for producing Western naturalistic drama.

² “Kaja” means “grown man.”

The waves of *shimpa* certainly affected the early Shakespearean transadaptations of the 1900s. Three years prior to the publication of *New Othello*, Suiin Emi, a journalist and novelist of modest status, adapted what came down through history as one of the most famous, controversial, and researched *shimpa* versions of *Othello* in Japan per commission from Kawakami, the leader of Kawakami Troupe. Emi and Kawakami's *Othello* inaugurated the *seigeki* movement, a purely dialogue-based *shimpa* genre advocated by Kawakami. In the early 1900s, it was difficult for a *shimpa* troupe to succeed commercially by producing a single Western play without any other items on the program. Performing one of Shakespeare's works from beginning to end had never happened before, except for an adaptation of *King Lear* produced in western Japan. This was why Emi and Kawakami decided to Japanize the play (Muroshi 46). A notable difficulty in adapting the play in the Japanese style is to characterize Othello in a Japanese context. There was no fixed figure of the "outsider" in Japanese theatrical conventions. Othello, a figure who occupies a pivotal position in the mainstream society but simultaneously remains ethnically estranged, is thought to pose a constant threat to the cultural hegemony and societal stability of the mainstream. How should Emi cast such a character in the Japanese context? Emi decided to create the protagonist (Washiro, whose name Masuda inherited) as the Governor-General of colonized Formosa (Taiwan)—a useful analog to Othello's duties in Venetian-occupied Cyprus in the sixteenth century. In this production, Othello is made a lowly born samurai from Satsuma, Kyushu, a peripheral area far removed from central Tokyo of mainland Japan. Othello makes his way up to the Governor-General of colonial Taiwan after the Meiji Restoration, as Japan acquired an even "lowlier" territory, Taiwan. To fully prepare for his *Othello* production, Kawakami embarked upon a nine-day journey to Penghu (Akashi 199-201), an island off the west coast of Taiwan, in order to conduct a geographical survey of Japan's "new territory"—a mirror for Shakespeare's Cyprus. *Taiwan Nichinichi Shinpo* (*Taiwan Daily News*), a quasi-official newspaper supported by the Taiwan Government-General, provided extensive coverage of Kawakami's field trip that stretched across ten issues. Kawakami's trip to Taiwan was buttressed by Japan's administrative apparatus, as the Chief of Penghu Bureau provided Kawakami with detailed demographic and cartographical data of the island (Chen 89). This geographical transposition was an astute move: from Japan's perspective, the quasi-feudal culture of the island neatly paralleled the Cyprus in Shakespeare's original. Historically, though Cyprus/Formosa was seen as a cultural and economic backwater, it was one of vital strategic importance. Emi's re-setting of the place to Taiwan was based on plausible historical similarities.

Contemporary audiences soon noted the controversial nature of Emi's *Othello*. In a critical review of Emi's adaptation in *Kabuki* Vol. 34, Shoyo Tsubouchi contends that this version shifts the grand dramaturgical landscape of *jidaimono* (a genre of historical play revolving around aristocrats and samurai remote from the vernacular experience) into the more familiar *sewamono* (a contemporary genre that is close to the audience's quotidian experience). In so doing, it loses the quality of grandiloquence Shakespeare's original version possesses (Tsubouchi 1). While generally viewing Emi's *Othello* in critical terms, Tsubouchi highlights its generic implication. The "descension" from grandiloquence to the vernacular might have been a sacrilege to Bardolatry in Tsubouchi's eyes; yet such remarks registered the hither-to suppressed cultural drive to popularize Shakespeare for the general public—a drive that would later nurture and inspire Masuda's *New Othello*.

In more approving terms, Ogai Mori (1862-1922), renowned poet, translator, and novelist, holds that regardless of the myriad differences from Shakespeare's play, Emi and Kawakami's *Othello* production is a success on its own merits. According to Mori, several factors contribute to its theatrical success: the attractive plot of the original version, the facts that Emi rewrote the plays in a manner accessible to the contemporary Japanese audience, and that the actors played their parts in an amenable fashion (Mori 10). Mori acknowledges the importance of translating/transadapting Shakespeare and the continuous improvement of available translations, crediting Emi and Kawakami's *Othello* as one salient specimen. He also explicates the meaning of the original setting to the English audience in Elizabethan England, embracing Emi and Kawakami's experimental approach to transposing Cyprus to Taiwan.

The fact that Emi's *Othello* elicited critical responses from the most respected literati in Japan's literary spheres is indicative of the production's high-profile impact. In the early twentieth century, Emi's version was staged nine times across Japan, from Tokyo to Nagasaki, Kyoto to Kobe. It enjoyed theatrical monopoly as the most accessible, popular, and authoritative version of *Othello* since Shakespeare's introduction to Japan. It dictated how *Othello* was understood and interpreted among the Japanese people before the advent of faithful Japanese translations. It is no wonder that, when Masuda embarked upon his Shakespearean journeys, he turned to the best-known tragedy canonized by Emi and Kawakami in his own time: *Othello*.

As seen from the perspective of *Santaro's Diary*, *New Othello* may well have been viewed as a senseless and shallow adaptation of *Othello* both out of context and out of genre. Yet Masuda's bold move to turn *Othello* into a comedy was not merely the author's arbitrary decision; nor was it a careless attempt to

vulgarize a serious play to court public favor. Instead, Masuda's *New Othello* registered the aesthetic deficiency in comedy and unsurfaced the cultural demand for an alternative to the tragedy-dominated theatrical market of Meiji Japan.

Such a latent demand was already highlighted by the producer and leading actor of *New Othello*'s source text: Kawakami. In *Kabuki Vol. 34*, after seven reviews that demonstrate how controversial, puzzling, and ground-breaking Emi and Kawakami's adaptation was, intriguing comments by four actors involved in the production are published. One of them is penned by Kawakami, who conducts a casual analysis between the theatrical ecology of the West and that of Japan, observing that in Western theatre industries, "eight plays out of ten are comedies; two are tragedies. . . . Tragedy has been increasingly declining, and comedy has started to gain its popularity" (Kawakami, "Osero o Totta Riyu" 19). Japan, by contrast, enjoyed emotive and sentimental tragedies. The only indigenous comedy was known as *Osaka-niwaka*, a genre considered to be a source for modern stand-up comedy in Japan but distinctively distant from dialogue-based comedy. Kawakami believes that according to Western performance pedagogy, a Western actor is trained to fall down the minute the tip of a sword touches his body. The moment of the actor's death and his agony would not have been appropriate to be shown to the audience. In contrast, a dying scene in Japan is, Kawakami observes, the main focus of a given play and the audience pays particular attention to it ("Osero o Totta Riyu" 20-21). Such was Japan's tenacious predilection for tragedy.

Masuda, likewise, feels that the development of comedy as a genre in Japan has been inhibited due to aesthetical and moral preconceptions. In an interview by Seitan Kawajiri in *Kabuki Vol. 71* published in March 1906, Masuda makes a similar remark: in *kyugeki* (Old Drama, which refers specifically to Kabuki) a plot is written according to moral codes, via which virtue is rewarded and vice punished. If love stories in a play are not morally uplifting and do not revolve around an unadventurous protagonist, people shy away from seeing it. In such a cultural climate, it is difficult to incubate genuine, fun-centered comedies.

***New Othello* and the Social Capacity of Comedy**

Against such a cultural backdrop, Masuda had to be particularly cunning in advancing his strategy for comedy as a genre worthy of respect. He expresses his wish to write a play that could entertain a varied audience, could be successfully

rendered on stage, and could conceal serious comments which satirize society under the guise of comic forms (Kawajiri 94-97). Masuda believes in the transformative and instructive power of comedy as well as the genre's capacity to engage with wider society through laughter. Through the mouthpiece of *New Othello's* protagonist, Masuda makes a self-referential comment on the social obligation of the comedy when Washiro (Othello) discusses the importance of the education of young people in Japan:

Young boys and girls engaged themselves in literary works, performing arts, and music with great interest. That is why novels and drama have a grave social responsibility. Reading the so-called domestic, romantic, or erotic novels may make young people unintelligent, weak-minded, undisciplined, and cowardly. It is not an overstatement to say that such youngsters would do great detriment to the country! (98-99)

In an era when available comical texts were excessively eroticized and romanticized, drama, like novels, needed to direct the future pillars of the society onto the correct paths.

In conformance with Masuda's belief in comedy's social agency, the plot of *New Othello* (Fig. 1) revolves around the comical misunderstandings of the main character led astray by excessive jealousy but eventually guided back to the path of familial harmony via mutual love. Masuda punctuates his comedy with topical references: the details in characters' lines embrace subjects related to contemporary affairs and to the writer's political opinions. Simplifying the intractable and complicated issues in Shakespeare's version, *New Othello* begins at the point of Washiro and Tomone's honeymoon to Ikaho, in a hot-spring resort where the plot takes place. Washiro, originally a calm, gentle, and innocent gentleman, has changed his disposition due to excessive jealousy sprung from excessive love. He becomes picky and takes issue even with the books Tomone reads as a pastime:

During that time when I went to Ikaho on our honeymoon, I tried to inspect your novel since I was so bored. It was a so-called romance novel with a falling-in-love type of story. . . . Meiji women fall in love too easily! I was surprised that the reason for women falling in love was so weak. (28-29)

The frailty of Meiji women described in romance novels plants seeds of doubt in Washiro's mind—an echo of the “weak-minded” youngster Masuda discusses through Washiro's mouthpiece.

Masuda further infuses the plot of *New Othello* with topical allusions to romance-related issues of Meiji society. Washiro is an avid reader of the above-mentioned *Fujin Ron* by Schopenhauer, and the book is used as a literary device to introduce several Meiji social phenomena relating to love in the Meiji period. Washiro consistently comments on young people's treatment of love affairs. He

refers to a government directive, entitled *Monbusho Kunrei Daiichigo*, issued by the newly assigned Minister of Education to regulate young people's morality on 9th June, 1906 (273). The need to publish this directive was due to drastic behaviors such as suicide for love, a common practice in Meiji society. *New Othello* contains references to topical events such as "jumping from Kegon waterfall" and a bewildering allusion to "falling in love with *ebi-cha*" ("shrimp-brown color," a metonym for "young women"). "Jumping from Kegon waterfall" is a reference to a suicide by Misao Fujimura (1886-1903). In a farewell poem inscribed on the monument erected at the right hand side to the grave of the Fujimura family shrine in Aoyama cemetery, Fujimura laments, "What authority has Horatio's philosophy? / The true nature of the whole creation / Is in one word—'incomprehensible.' / With this regret, I am determined to die." This incident wielded great influence on Soseki Natsume (1867-1916), a novelist and scholar in English Literature who taught Fujimura English. Fujimura's suicide is referred in Natsume's first novel, *I am a Cat*, and *Kusamakura (Grass Pillow)*, as well as various newspaper articles by journalists. This dramatized suicide is considered to be as the result of a love affair in the 20 July 1903 issue of *Kokkei-shimbun (The Comical Newspaper)* published by Gaikotsu Miyatake.

While the reference to "jumping from Kegon waterfall" is Masuda's caution against the destructive love that led to many suicide cases in Meiji society, the cryptic term of "*ebi-cha*" on the other hand bespeaks Masuda's aversion to the erosive power of excessively sentimental melodrama that was in vogue. "*Ebi-cha*," a fashionable "shrimp-brown" hue, was the common color of *hakama*, a type of traditional menswear which came to be worn by female students who gained access to modern education in the Meiji Era. At the opening of the *Kazoku-jogakko*, an aristocratic female school in 1885, a skirt-shaped version of *hakama* with an undivided leg covering, *Andon-bakama*, was introduced to facilitate the mobility of female students. At the beginning of the 1900s, female *hakama* in *ebi-cha* became a symbol of the schoolgirl boom that occurred shortly before the Russo-Japanese War (Kuroiwa 39-40). Masuda's reference to "*ebi-cha*" is an oblique attack on youngsters' excessively sentimental love. In an interview by Seitan Kawajiri in *Kabuki Vol. 71*, Masuda criticizes young male students in Tokyo. According to his account, handkerchiefs were usually given to young male students before they went to a war by their "*ebi-cha sikibu*" (female students in female *hakamas*). These romantic partings ruined men's intention of fighting, Masuda argues. He even goes so far as to predict that contemporary melodramatic love stories and dating practices could ruin the country (Kawajiri 96).

In this social context, *New Othello* becomes not only a comedy that amuses

and delights, but a cautionary tale against inadvisable practices of love that were topical to the Meiji audience. From a modern reader's point of view, the fact that *New Othello* warns against melodramatic love and the vices such love could engender—for instance, Washiro's jealousy—would render the play a conservative, conformist, and patriotic adaptation. The true and ideal model of love, as *New Othello* argues, could rescue people from all-consuming madness and could guide them back to a moral, virtuous path, just as Washiro is persuaded by Tomone's true love and sensible arguments. However, the way *New Othello* proves that comedy could wield transformative powers for the society was revolutionary and bold in the context of Meiji Japan. *New Othello* proves that comedies could accommodate serious social issues despite a simplified storyline and a mixture of laughter. In this vein, Masuda preserves in *New Othello* what he perceives to be the essence of Shakespeare's original: the destructive power of unfounded, irrational jealousy that propels a man to kill his wife.



Fig. 1. *New Othello* at Meiji Za. Courtesy of Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum Library.

***New Othello's* Afterlives: Taipei and Tokyo**

In the next one hundred years, *New Othello* would be revived twice, in colonial Taiwan and contemporary Tokyo. The production in Taiwan was enabled through Masuda's appointment in 1908 as the director to Taiwan Sugar Company, established by Masuda's father. In February 1909, *New Othello* was staged at Taihoku Engeijo (Taipei Playhouse) by Toyojiro Takamatsu, a prominent

theatre manager and producer in colonial Taiwan. Since the local and topical references to Meiji Japan would be difficult to understand when taken out of context, the *New Othello* revivals placed more emphasis on the play's comic capacity to delight and amuse than to educate and instruct.

The staging of Japanese plays and adaptations dated as early as to the beginning of Japan's occupation of Taiwan. In 1895, Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing Dynasty per the Treaty of Shimonoseki. With the first generation of Japanese settlers came the modernized Japanese *shimpa* theatre to Taiwan, wherein various Chinese theatrical traditions, including South Min theatres and Peking Style theatre, had long since fostered a theatre-loving public. Touring *shimpa* programs began to thrive due to the demand for entertainment. In the early phase of colonization, Japanese education had not been widely administered among the Taiwanese people. As theatrical activities could pose significant linguistic barriers, the Japanese and the Taiwanese attended different theatrical events. On the side of the colonized, Chinese theatrical traditions in Taiwan had not begun the process of acculturation or assimilation of Japanese theatrical forms. On the other hand, *shimpa* plays were primarily organized, performed, and viewed by Japanese audience, oftentimes with the financial and institutional assistance from the Government-General (Chen 102). Popular repertoire included plays dealing with social issues, familial melodrama, and wartime nationalism, as well as detective stories (Chen 88). Productions which enjoyed success in Japan were oftentimes reproduced in colonial Taiwan by the original cast or by local troupes. Leaders of Japan's *shimpa* movement, including Otojiro Kawakami, Sadanori Sudo, and Toyojiro Takamatsu all exerted their influence both directly and indirectly on the facilitation of dramatic developments in colonial Taiwan.

The first performance of Shakespeare's plays in Taiwan was staged against such a backdrop in early Japanese colonization. Shakespeare's plays signified the achievements of the enlightened empire that was Britain, an imperial model Japan saw as a reference among other Western superpowers. The ability to translate the complete repertoire of Shakespeare's plays was viewed as an enabling signal of higher civilization. Adaptations of Shakespearean plays in the form of dialogue-based modern drama made their ways to the most popular theatres in Japan and Taiwan.

Like the theatrical culture of Meiji Japan, Taiwan's *shimpa* ecology was dominated by tragedies, a fact that partly facilitated Masuda's advocacy for a comical Shakespearean play in colonial Taiwan. Among those tragedies, the 1903 *Othello* by Emi and Kawakami was a landmark production that achieved unprecedented popularity in Tokyo Meiji Za (Tokyo Meiji Theatre). After the success of the 1903 Tokyo production, Masao Murata and Mohei Fukui, two

key figures of Japan's second Drama Reform Movement (Wu 46-47), staged Kawakami and Emi's version in one of Taipei's mainstream Japanese theatres, Sakae Za (Sakae Theatre) in 1905. The success of Murata and Fukui's production prompted further performances in 1909, 1910, 1911, and 1912 (Chen et al. 1). A survey on the theatre reviews surrounding these productions published in *Taiwan Nichinichi Shinpo* reveals that the Japanese-based critics focus on aspects of the actors' acting skills and the choice of stage props, as well as the rhythm of dialogues. Missing from surviving documents in *Taiwan Nichinichi Shinpo* are content-oriented commentaries on some highly sensitive aspects of the play, including the military oppression of Taiwan's indigenous people on the part of Governor-General Washiro Muro as well as the notion of a racial hierarchy which blatantly situates Taiwan in the lowly periphery of the Japanese Empire.

This silence, however, was to be expected. Othello's military oppression all too identically corresponded to the military oppression of Taiwan by Japan in the early phase of colonization. A semi-official newspaper, *Taiwan Nichinichi Shinpo* shied from topical references that might elicit government censure in both its Japanese columns and Chinese ones. Furthermore, since the theatre practitioners, actors, and sponsors were primarily Japanese, it was not to be wondered at that the theatrical responses to the 1905 production reaffirmed the official voice of the empire by tacitly taking for granted the racially hierarchical worldview fashioned by *Othello*.

Just as Emi and Kawakami's version lacked political potency in colonial Taiwan, the topical and political relevance of Masuda's *New Othello* was outshone by its delightful plot. *New Othello* was staged alongside magic shows done by Tenkatsu Shokyokusai—one of the top magicians in Japan and was greeted with critical acclaim and box-office success. For the Taiwan-based audience, *New Othello* was a welcome addition to the tragedy-dominated *shimpa* market and a refreshing alternative to the over-performed 1903 *Othello* by Emi and Kawakami (“Taihoku Engeijo no Koninki”).

In ideological terms, the mutual assurance of love for Washiro and Tomone sends a very different message of race and social classes from Shakespeare's original and from Kawakami and Emi's *Othello* in 1903. If Shakespeare's *Othello* helps consolidate the idea that cross-cultural, inter-racial, and cross-class marriage simply could not be sustained, Masuda's *New Othello*, on the other hand, celebrates the love between two people of unequal social footings and significantly downplays—if not deliberately disregards—the racial prejudice in Shakespeare's original. While Emi's Washiro retains the racial component by making Washiro identify himself with Taiwanese aboriginals in the end of the play as a result of his moral “degeneration,” Masuda's Washiro is not race-conscious. Nor does he

suffer from the social discrimination that shapes the personality of Shakespeare's Othello. For Masuda, who is a cross-cultural mediator of Shakespeare as well as of colonial geopolitics, the happy ending of *New Othello* perhaps envisages a worldview wherein heterogeneous families could thrive equally and successfully despite differences in the couples' race and class. The cross-class harmony and color blindness with which Masuda depicts Washiro's marriage to Tomone in *New Othello* thus becomes idealistic. Yet to an intra-empire cultural mediator such as Masuda, this idealistic worldview perhaps sent an all too optimistic—if also imperialistic—message to both Japanese and Taiwanese viewers in his Taipei performance: heterogeneous coexistence was feasible and could even lead to a happy ending.

After *New Othello*'s Taipei revival, the play was consigned to the dusty corners of history for over a century, until one experimental director excavated the text from oblivion in 2018. He was Eiji Nishizawa, a director experienced in adapting Greek drama, Shakespeare, and Kabuki. Nishizawa started his career in the theatre industry as an actor of a group of Tokyo university graduates. Since 2000, he has directed plays through “Jam Session,” which produces performances without a stationary theatre company. On December 12, 2018, director Nishizawa's production premiered at Atelier Fanfare, a hybrid, versatile, and flexible performance venue situated in the leafy neighborhood of Tokyo's lively hub of artistic and youth culture, Koenji.

In the spirit of simplicity and experimentalism Masuda's *New Othello* embodies, Nishizawa's production was small and economic in terms of its cast and production scale: the production employed only eight actors and actresses, who were divided into Team A and Team B, each performing four named characters alternatively. Nishizawa placed theatrical serendipity over interpretative consistency, as the acting styles, atmosphere, opening music, costumes, and overall impressions of the performances of Team A and Team B were intentionally made worlds apart according to the production's official Twitter site (@sZg1YPng9PFgnUn). Team A was given the task of bringing comical energies to the stage, with an emphasis on the jealousy and misunderstanding of Washiro. On the other hand, Team B leaned towards a comic direction revolving around the character of Yoshio Katsu (Cassio).

Since a hundred years have passed, the modern society is not attuned to the *Weltanschauung* of the Meiji Era, nor to the nuanced topical references of *New Othello*. Challenges lie in the path of a production team that wish to deliver similar levels of entertainment and fun to the modern audience. Nishizawa's strategy was to downplay political and topical references, while foregrounding the demotic spirit of Masuda's *New Othello*. His choice of the cast was a strong

indicator of such a demotic spirit. Nishizawa did not choose well-established actors; instead, he cast actors with unconventional experiences and pedigrees for the lead roles of the play. Team A's Washiro was portrayed by Kazuya Mori, a comedian often cast in stand-up comedies, comedians' shows, and wrestling-related events. Team B's lead actor, K Ichi [sic], who portrayed Cassio, was a performer who had worked in a "show pub" (a Japanese cabaret bar) and was also active as a dancer, a comedian, and an impressionist.

Because of the unconventional presence of stand-up comedians and burlesque popular entertainers on the cast alongside other "serious" actors who were more classically trained, theatrical rigor and solemnity could give way to light-heartedness, hybridization, and creative experimentalism in the 2018 *New Othello*.

Although *New Othello's* Taipei production and the Tokyo revival were not interrelated, they both indicated one important aspect of the play: the sustainability of the play's comical elements. In both revivals in Taipei and Tokyo, political and topical references were lost due to temporal and geopolitical transposition, but the genuine appeal to laughter and the spirit of experimentalism remained. Comedy wields an undeniable level of universality that drew Masuda's attention in the first place. Furthermore, both Masuda's production in Taiwan and Nishizawa's *New Othello* manifested the relevance of the ample repertoire of Meiji Shakespeares, proving the value and feasibility of Meiji adaptations as stage scripts in a contemporary context.

Conclusion

Tarokaja Masuda was a man ahead of his times. He contributed to the development of Japanese theatrical history by endowing comedies with social capacities as well as genuine humor by envisaging a happy ending for a couple whose marriage survived cultural and class divides. Masuda's brave slapstick adaptation of *Othello* transformed the general Japanese audience's response to Shakespeare at a time when the Bard was considered a solemn and awe-inspiring master of Western wisdom, revealing Shakespeare as an accessible, vernacular writer. As a derivative spin-off of Kawakami and Suiin Emi's Japanese *Othello* of 1903, the play thus succeeded in becoming one of the first Japanese Shakespeare parodies in a long line of parody adaptations that would eventually accumulate in the popular anime of modern Japan. *New Othello* and its revivals popularized Shakespeare in the form of a light-hearted farce for entertainment-seeking audiences in vernacular theatres across spatial and temporal divides. In this vein, *New*

Othello was a harbinger of generic metamorphosis, demotic Shakespeare performances, and derivative writing—all of which we hope this paper has gone some way towards revealing.

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幽默《奧賽羅》：益田太郎冠者 《新奧賽羅》（1907）與喜劇之價值

摘要

自莎士比亞於十九世紀末葉東傳日本以降，莎翁一向被視為近代化西方的指標性人物、智慧之師、知識之源頭、以及一位值得崇敬的寫作大家。悲劇作為一引人肅穆且契合莊嚴作家的文類，主導了日本莎士比亞接受史早期的劇場。日本莎士比亞翻案劇經常性地刪減莎劇中的猥褻語言，以便保持備受尊崇的莎翁作品的得宜性。在這樣的歷史脈絡下，一位獨特的喜劇作家，益田太郎冠者（1875-1953），干犯常理將《奧賽羅》改編為一齣幽默、平易近人、具諷刺性且充滿粗俗滑稽元素的劇本。本文關注益田被遺忘的作品《新奧賽羅》——一部改編自江見水蔭翻案、川上音二郎上演的《奧賽羅》（1903）的衍創之作。本文主張，《新奧賽羅》對日本翻案劇的文類發展史作出貢獻，並且翻新了明治時期日本人觀看莎劇的方式。《新奧賽羅》體現了文類歸屬的可塑性，更將莎士比亞推廣給以觀劇娛樂性為需求的一般大眾。此外，《新奧賽羅》實踐了喜劇的社會性功能，揭示信賴與愛能夠成為導正社會與人性的力量，倡導喜劇為深具價值的文類。最後，相較於莎劇原著中無法長遠的跨種族、跨階級婚姻，《新奧賽羅》替跨文化、跨階級的婚姻預設了圓滿結局的可能與可行性。《新奧賽羅》日後在台北與東京的重新搬演，顯示此劇對後世觀眾而言仍具相關性，惜尚未受到學界之關注。

關鍵字：日本莎士比亞、《奧賽羅》、益田太郎冠者、江見水蔭、川上音二郎、喜劇