

## 3

## ***A Shakespearean Distance: Europe, Modernity and Traditional Values***

### ***I. Eurocentrism Within***

Let me begin with a quotation (with slight modifications) from an essay that deals with the problems of Eurocentrism in reference to the future of sociology in East Asia.

Shakespeare criticism has been Eurocentric throughout its institutional history, which means since there have been departments teaching Shakespeare criticism within university systems. This is not in the least surprising. Shakespeare criticism is a product of the modern world-system, and Eurocentrism is constitutive of the geoculture of the modern world. Furthermore, as an institutional structure, Shakespeare criticism originated largely in Europe. We shall be using “Europe” here more as a cultural than a cartographical expression; in this sense, in the discussion about the last two centuries, we are referring primarily and jointly to western Europe and North America. The Shakespeare criticism disciplines were in fact overwhelmingly located, at least up to 1945, in just five countries—Great Britain, the United States, Germany, France and Italy. Even today, despite the global spread of Shakespeare criticism as an activity, the large majority of Shakespeare critics worldwide remain Europeans. Shakespeare criticism emerged in response to European problems, at a point in history when Europe dominated the whole world-system. It was virtually inevitable that its choice of subject matter, its theorizing, its methodology, and its epistemology all reflected the constraints of the crucible within which it was formulated.

The essay from which the above quote is taken is “Eurocentrism and Its Avatars” and its author Immanuel Wallerstein. Originally titled “Future of Sociology in East Asia,” it was given as a keynote address at the International Sociological Association’s East Asian regional colloquium in Seoul, Korea, in 1996. <sup>1</sup> The modifications I have made consist of (1) replacing “social science” and “social scientists” with “Shakespeare criticism” and “Shakespeare critics” respectively, and (2) the change in the order of the five designated countries from “France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and the United States” to “Great Britain, the United States, Germany, France and Italy.” Despite the apparent wide discrepancy that notionally exists between fields as disparate as social science and Shakespeare criticism, the resultant logical consistency and theoretical coherence of the modified paragraph seems to me surprisingly suggestive.

There is little gainsaying the fact that Shakespeare criticism originated in Europe, and since its inception as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century it has largely been characterized as Eurocentric. The Shakespeare industry in the United States is no exception, as it is essentially located within the confines of a Eurocentric culture. It is thus easy to accept that the disciplines of Shakespeare criticism have been the privileged activities of Europe and North America.

If this much easily meets no objection, there may well be yet a few (and perhaps important) points for which my act of modification requires justification. The main problem probably arises from the proposition that “Eurocentrism is constitutive of the geoculture of the modern world.” Whether one is critical of Eurocentrism or not, or regardless of which way one interprets the concept of “the modern world,” the proposition, however, holds good so long as one accepts the basics of the historical perspective that there is a more or less distinct period meaningfully characterized by certain principles of political, economic, and cultural systems, in which Europe (which is culturally concomitant with North America) holds its conspicuous dominance throughout the world. With the few exceptions of radical views, <sup>2</sup> there largely seems to be a consensus that the period in question has its terminus a quo in about

1. Now it is included as chapter 11 of *The End of the World As We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century* (U. Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 168–84.

2. Cf. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard UP., 1993). Le Goff, “For an Extended Middle Age,” in *The Medieval Imagination* (U. of Chicago P., 1985).

sixteenth-century Europe and its terminus ad quem sometime in the twentieth century worldwide. And we generally call it “the modern world”. Had we been deprived, by any chance, of the concept, we would certainly find it hard to get by in any of the cultural disciplines, including Shakespeare criticism.

Now if it is the case with both social science and Shakespeare criticism that “Eurocentrism is constitutive of the geoculture of the modern world,” it follows that Shakespeare criticism, which at once forms and is formed by Eurocentrism, is closely bound up with the so-called “modern world.” This is empirically verifiable: Shakespeare’s works are usually envisaged as products of the Renaissance, the point of departure for the modern world; the Bardolatry coincides with and contributes to the creation of national and cultural identity, <sup>3</sup> which is characteristic of the modern world; and Shakespeare has become a worldwide cultural currency with the unprecedented accomplishment of the global empire by Great Britain, whose decline was superseded by the rise of another superpower of the Anglo-Saxon dispensation in the late modern world.

What Wallerstein has to say thus far about the emergence and nature of social science on the one hand and Eurocentrism with its concomitant modern world system on the other seems to hold equally true of Shakespeare criticism and Eurocentrism. So far so good. But we may feel confronted with some difficulty, a certain hermeneutic resistance, and perhaps even an instance of nonsense when we are to encounter such accounts as the following:

- (1) Shakespeare criticism is a product of the modern world-system.
- (2) Shakespeare criticism emerged in response to European problems at a point in history when Europe dominated the whole world-system.
- (3) It was virtually inevitable that its choice of subject matter, its theorizing, its methodology, and its epistemology all reflected the constraints of the crucible within which it was formulated.

The common problem with the above three dicta, particularly for Shakespeareans, is probably the concept of “the world-system.” In the

3. The case is not confined to Great Britain alone but applies no less to romantic Germany, where Shakespeare plays the role of antidote against the dominant French neo-classicism.

first dictum, for instance, there is a sense in which Shakespeareans can say that Shakespeare criticism is a product of the modern world, replacing “the modern world-system” with simply “the modern world.” The concept of “the world-system” is an invention of Wallerstein with some specific scholarly aims and effects in mind, whose minutiae fortunately do not concern us here. What can be of some consequence for us, however, is its possible significance for a systematic study of Shakespeare’s reception in the modern world. If “the modern world” is taken as a complex entity, namely a more or less closed system, consisting largely of political, economic, and cultural sub-complexes, then there can and must be certain ways in which Shakespeare’s reception can be orderly and analytically constructed. I must hasten to add, however, that the measure of correspondence between the structure of “the modern world” complex and that of Shakespeare’s reception is anything but tight and rigorous, because the advancement of literary and cultural theories has increasingly put us far aloof from the naïve theory of reflection between culture and society or between mode of ideas and mode of production. The idea that Shakespeare criticism is a product of the modern world-system can work in ways both negative and positive; either it will reduce Shakespeare criticism to a servitor to the overall transactions of the modern world-system or it will help Shakespeare criticism be more self-reflexive about its activities in relation to the wider historical movements.

The second dictum—“Shakespeare criticism emerged in response to European problems, at a point in history when Europe dominated the whole world-system”—may sound rather far-fetched in that the limited specificity of Shakespeare criticism does not go together well with the generality of European problems. But when we reflect on the worldwide dominance that the Anglo-Saxon culture achieved and in which we still find ourselves, the dictum may deserve serious consideration—particularly so if we have rightfully discarded the facile and powerful view of “Shakespeare the genius,” which holds that he was exceptionally so talented as to write works that are universally meaningful to all ages and all peoples. To be sure, Shakespeare criticism could have emerged, and as a matter of fact did emerge, irrespective of European problems; but Shakespeare criticism as it should be conducted in a global perspective could not be better and more meaningfully conceived of than as emerging in response to European problems, at a point in history when Europe dom-

inated the whole world-system. The issue is, of course, to observe the kind and sort of these European problems, which helped specifically to provoke the emergence of Shakespearean criticism.

And this brings us to the third dictum—“it was virtually inevitable that its choice of subject matter, its theorizing, its methodology, and its epistemology all reflected the constraints of the crucible within which it was formulated.” Now let us suppose for the moment, putting the matter as it were upside-down, that Shakespeare criticism in the first place was formulated in the crucible called “the modern Eurocentric world-system,” and let us further see what choice of subject matter, what kind of theorizing, what methodology, and what epistemology Shakespeare criticism would have produced in ways that reflect the constraints of the crucible that the modern Eurocentric world-system is.

In talking about the modern Eurocentric world-system, especially about Europe’s self-reflection on its centralism, we cannot but mark the year 1968 as a symbolic divide on and around which the self-reflexive and self-critical move came strongly to the fore. The perspective that this theory of a great divide allows us to hold offers support for the reflectionist view that the third dictum offers. In the period preceding 1968, there was a gradual process of change, largely within the confines of European traditional values, in Shakespeare criticism—biographical positivism, character criticism, imagery analysis, and new criticism, with Hegelian and Fryean turns at tragedy and comedy criticism, respectively. Since what I call the great divide, however, there has been a quick succession of varieties of theorizing, methodology, and epistemology—structuralism and semiotics, post-structuralism and deconstruction, hermeneutics and reception theory, cultural materialism and new historicism, feminism and gender criticism, and multiculturalism and post-colonialism. While it is difficult and yet as important to get a rough picture of the pre-’68 Shakespeare criticism as it was situated in relation to the overall framework of the modern Eurocentric world-system, it does seem relatively and surprisingly easy to place the post-’68 Shakespeare criticism in the dominant thought-movements, which were in turn closely bound up with the global changes in the politico-economic spheres. To the extent to which the principle of “difference” and the concept of “power/knowledge,” for instance, are products or effects of the modern world-system, the kinds of Shakespeare criticism which are conceivable,

directly or indirectly, in the aftermath of the Derridian and Foucaultian breakthroughs, in the final analysis, belong to the same world picture. Thus it is that at least as far as its post-'68 period is concerned, Shakespeare criticism has largely reflected in its subject matters, theorizing, methodology, and perhaps even epistemology, the constraints of the modern world-system within which it has been conducted and formulated.

One can hear, of course, an objection voiced. It says that the point of the matter with the '68 revolution lies precisely in its essential trait of self-criticism, i.e., "anti-Eurocentrism," which can hardly be considered to reflect "the constraints of the modern world-system within which it was formulated." Take, for example, the case of the critical position of "Orientalism" which veritably forms part of the '68 revolution. If "Orientalism" is "said to legitimate the dominant power position of Europe, indeed to play a primary role in the ideological carapace of Europe's imperial role within the framework of the modern world-system,"<sup>4</sup> it is in theory only from *outside* that its "ideological carapace" (Wallerstein) can be broken: the proponents of the critical position of "Orientalism," Anoual Abdel-Malek and Edward Said, are genuine or partial outsiders. The question, after all is said and done, boils down to whether or not European modernity, though awash with Eurocentrism, has been on the other hand potentially and innately self-critical enough to give birth to the initiative of "anti-Eurocentrism" as well.

The question is hard to decide. For there are internal critiques of "Eurocentrism" (e.g., by Lévi-Strauss) as well as external critiques. What seems more important in this connection perhaps is to take a closer look at both "Eurocentrism" and "anti-Eurocentrism," because each of them has some variant forms of its own. The first form of Eurocentrism is the one based on Europe's historical achievements in the modern era. The second, closely related to the first, is the one which draws on the assumption that it is a uniquely privileged civilization. The third is the type that boasts its universal validity. Turning back to our real business, Shakespeare, we find it not at all difficult to trace these traits of Eurocentrism in some of the underlying assumptions of Shakespeare criticism. The "genius theory" aside, Shakespeare criticism used to fall back unconsciously on the tacit understanding that the poet-dramatist is a

4. Wallerstein, *op.cit.*, p. 176.

representative of the unique and universal civilization that was to achieve the modern world. We must seriously ask if there is still any remnant of this kind of heritage in our dealings with Shakespeare today.

As for "anti-Eurocentrism" or the critique of Eurocentrism, there are equally its variant forms. The above-mentioned critical position of "Orientalism" is one of them. What we often encounter these days is the one based on the principle of "cultural relativism." Both are no doubt politically powerful weapons, but a good deal of qualification is in order when they are employed in Shakespeare criticism. But if it is in a very important sense true, and as I have argued it is, that both Shakespeare and Shakespeare criticism are a product of the modern (Eurocentric) world-system, then it must be clearly understood that the former will inevitably share a proper amount and burden of prejudices of both Eurocentrism and Orientalism, and for that matter, anti-feminist strains as well.

The point of the matter is that in dealing with the Shakespeare complex (both Shakespeare's work and its criticism) we must always keep in mind "the constraints of the crucible within which it was formulated." The crucible is of course the modern world system, and its problem is not only that it keeps changing but also that it is difficult to see its significance from outside. The taste of the pudding is in its eating.

We do better to take seriously the idea that Shakespeare criticism is a product of the modern world-system that Europe is. But who are "we"? We are, be they self-made or not, Shakespeareans, but we are all of us different not only in our cultural background but also in our relation to the modern world-system. To those Shakespeareans who situate themselves cartographically as well as culturally outside Europe and North America it is especially significant to gauge the distance both psychological and theoretical they should take toward the modern world-system that Europe is.

## *II. Modernity outside Europe*

### *Liaisons Dangereuses*

The Japanese love affair with Shakespeare has a long history. It is as old as our modernity or, for that matter, the wider kind of modernity,

inclusive of “post-modernity,” provided that that is the name you prefer to give to the decadent modernity we have been witnessing in this country for some time. Our love affair with Shakespeare has been not only long and continuous but also steady and passionate. Just as a lover is never tired of gazing at his or her beloved and wants to know everything about her or him from birth to adulthood, from inner thought to network of friendships, so do the Japanese Shakespeareans assiduously and passionately engage in the businesses of translation, interpretation, theatrical production and filmic adaptation. Our passionate love is so intense that some of us have come to make a fetish, as it were, of what their beloved wrote to and left with us, devoting themselves to a scholarship of textual criticism. What has come out of these long and steady love affairs with Shakespeare is so enormous, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, that it easily defies any brief account.

In a sense it can be said that our love affair with Shakespeare has been fruitful, enriching the corpus of our version of theatrical tradition as well as our critical and scholarly heritage. It has been nurtured by the continuous waves of intellectual fashion that arrive from the West: existentialism in the 60s, structuralism and post-structuralism/deconstruction in the 70s, post-colonialism and feminism in the 80s, and multiculturalism in the 90s, to name only the most conspicuous and no others. And invariably Shakespeare has not come to us but in these fashionable clothes. Perhaps the acme of these amatory scholarly dealings, if not their consummation and climax, was the occasion of the World Shakespeare Congress that the Shakespeare Society of Japan had the honour of hosting in Tokyo in 1991. The Tokyo congress was the first of its kind ever held outside Europe and North America. Our traditional virtue of modesty demands that we should not speak too loudly of our achievements, but we think we are justified in saying that it was a success.

It looks as if our love affair has proceeded in a propitious boat propelled by a favourable wind. But, as is the case with every love affair, ours is not without friction and worries. It harbours some dimension whose troubles require advice, counseling, and perhaps a dose of healthy disillusionment. Perhaps one of the greatest problems in the case of our love affair with Shakespeare is the fact that ours is nearly always a one-sided love. Under a self-protective veil of cultural pride we usually do not like to admit this hard and disheartening fact, but, once we have come to our

senses and been deprived of comfortable illusion, we have to face the fact that it is a love unrequited and unacknowledged. Here I am already speaking not only of the limited instance of Shakespeare studies but also of the more general case of “English literature” as it has been practiced in this country. The Japanese Shakespeareans, or the Japanese scholars of English literature, feel deep in their hearts that somehow their love is unrequited and they are unacknowledged.

But why? Why do we at all feel unacknowledged and somehow frustrated, and frustrated by what and unacknowledged by whom? What is the source of this apparently groundless discontent? Looking over the past history of cultural transactions worldwide, we can immediately see that we are not alone in suffering such love-sickness of one-sided love. Nineteenth-century Germany, for instance, fell desperately in love with ancient Greece. But they do not seem to have suffered from the kind of discontent we have experienced in our love affairs with Shakespeare and English literature. Although they may have felt an inferiority complex toward the French culture which had been dominant up until the eighteenth century, they were nevertheless successful in diverting that inferiority complex through the cultural appropriation of the glories of Greek Antiquity. In their instance, the intensity of their love for ancient Greece was so strong that they came to create an almost insuperable system of knowledge on ancient Greece, called *klassische Philologie*.<sup>5</sup> But there was more to it than that. As an extreme consequence of their passionate love, they went so far as to fabricate a direct ethnic and genealogical relationship with the ancient Greeks. An almost diabolic self-persuasion led them to conceive themselves as their descendants.

What is then the difference between their one-sided love affair and ours? It is not that we feel somehow frustrated because of being unable to establish a genealogical and ethnic link with Shakespeare’s people. Fortunately, the English and the Japanese are different enough not to be ethnically affiliated. Nor is it that we feel discontent because we have failed to build our own version of a viable system of knowledge on Shakespeare. Of course, we have to admit that we cannot boast as thorough a

5. For this see the succinct and readable account by Hugh Lloyd-Jones in his *Blood for the Ghosts: Classical Influences in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Duckworth, 1982). Its representative manifesto is found in Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *History of Classical Scholarship*, trans. A. Harris (Duckworth, 1982).

system of knowledge as the nineteenth-century German scholarship on ancient Greece, but we can say that we have acquired, at least in certain limited fields of Shakespeare Studies, an international competitiveness sufficient to make us feel intellectually confident. As a matter of fact, among the gifted younger generation of Japanese Shakespeareans there are some so confident, I am afraid even to the point of being complacent, that they act as if their scholarly achievements needed no international examination or evaluation. A daring hypothetical proposition or interpretation is sometimes brought forward (in Japanese) with no audience in mind other than that existing on these small islands. These isolationist and self-satisfied Shakespeareans are in all probability felicitously exempt from the traditionally endemic feeling of discontent. And yet, for the sensitive and self-conscious majority there still remains a certain kind of frustration, a deep-grained feeling of being unacknowledged.

### Cultural Inferiority Complex

My diagnosis, if I am allowed to propose it, is that we are suffering from a sort of cultural inferiority complex consequent on modernization. Or rather it is a case of a hangover, or sequela, resulting from such an inferiority complex. In other words, we have not yet satisfactorily overcome the inferiority complex, cultural or otherwise, which was inevitably produced in the process of modernization. If nineteenth-century Germany was exempted from this kind of inferiority complex in its love affair with ancient Greece, it was probably because their material modernization was not conducted after the model of ancient Greece. In our material modernization, on the other hand, the Japanese had to look up to the western model. Both cases are equally of cultural colonization, but while the former was a self-motivated and cultural movement, the latter was mainly political and was carried through under inevitable circumstances.

Now coming a bit closer to our topic of discussion, we immediately realize that this kind of inferiority complex, cultural and otherwise, is common and endemic to those cultures which have come for various reasons to find modernization inescapable and necessary. Countries in my neighbourhood, China, Korea and Vietnam, are a case in point. These share more or less the same problematic since it was and still is

practically unavoidable for us, as inhabitants of East Asia, to be concerned with and trammled in one way or another by the issues of modernization. For it has so happened by the quirks of history that Britain and North America have successively and successfully obtained world political as well as cultural hegemony over the last two or three centuries, with the result that a cultural, if not always political, inferiority complex is an almost universal issue for all of us, who are more or less late developers.

Now if my diagnosis is right that we are suffering, to varying degrees, from the cultural inferiority complex consequent on modernization, then we will have to find a way out, a treatment to cope with it. And as if to prove the correctness of my diagnosis, some methods of treatment and cure have in fact been invented in the course of the modern history of Japan. Instances of such attempts to ward off or overcome the cultural inferiority complex consequent on modernization, I think, can be roughly classified into the following three types.

The first type is the one that adopts the way of imitation and emulation. Thus, for instance, the true role of a Japanese Shakespearean, on this account, is to be an exact replica, as far as possible, of a good native Shakespearean. In her linguistic and intellectual performance she is accordingly expected to approach as closely as possible to the native. Immediate reflection will reveal, however, the crucial defect of this method, i.e., you do not have to be a Japanese after all. It is true, that were there a science of Shakespeare as objectively conducted as any discipline of the natural sciences, then this method would be valid. But insofar as the study of Shakespeare is a cultural discipline, which as it stands it is, and insofar as a cultural discipline is distinguished by a hermeneutically sealed culture, it will never function meaningfully.

(An exception to the case perhaps is the scholarship of textual criticism, which I do not regard, however, as a species of cultural love affair, and hence is outside our concern here.)

The second type is a reactionary one and in a sense the reverse of the first. It unabashedly dares to read into Shakespeare whatever it thinks is valuable as cultural/national property of its own. It is motivated by a self-conscious disregard, if not defiance, of the cultural difference in terms of which Shakespeare should be made meaningful to begin with. The question one cannot help but ask with this method is the following: Is total neglect better than cumbersome exploitation? Proponents of this second

approach seem to be saying that it is better to ignore than to meddle with difference. If this is the case, however, one might as well appreciate a native author of one's own culture without making such a troublesome detour. For us non-European east Asians, Shakespeare matters as difference matters.

One may well ask what sort of thing this difference that matters is. Before addressing this issue directly, let me deal with the related problem of narcissism. There is no denying that Shakespeare has been one of the most important windows through which we have learned about European civilization and culture. For us Shakespeare has stood for things European or western as distinct from eastern. For us the value of Shakespeare has been weighed on the scales of difference. This view, to a great extent, is true, but it is not sufficiently valid to dissuade me from thinking that the Japanese love affairs with Shakespeare, be they theatrical or academic, have been essentially characterized by narcissism.

The proof of the matter, in my view, can be sought in the egregious fact that the Japanese Shakespeareans have rarely met the Shakespeareans of their neighborhood in Asia. What I would like to drive at is this: had we been less narcissistic and more self-reflective and self-critical about our scholarly activities, we would have been more self-conscious about our own cultural whereabouts — about the cultural foundation on which we stand — which can be located nowhere else but in Japan and East Asia. But Shakespeareans in East Asia have rarely met. Were we less narcissistic in the business of *our* Shakespearean negotiations, we should occasionally look up from the mirror of “Shakespeare studies” as they are called in the “Anglo-Saxon world” and, wisely disillusioned, look around to confirm the ground on which we actually stand. I hasten to add, however, that I am advocating neither a blindfolded nationalistic or ideological approach nor that typical of post-colonial zealots. It is easy to see that they are as much or perhaps more narcissistic in their own ways.

What I call narcissism in Japanese Shakespeareans is by no means a simple phenomenon, but rather is a complicated state of affairs. Japanese Shakespeareans can hardly doubt that they see something culturally different in Shakespeare. From the fact that Shakespeare is a product of Western culture it follows, so they believe, that the study of Shakespeare, their vocation, must be an activity that allows for cultural difference and detachment. But this is a bit too naïve an attitude. One should rather

bear in mind the possibility that what they see in Shakespeare might turn out to be what they have already seen, *déjà vu*; the chances are not slight that, like Narcissus, they may be looking in the mirror of the pond at none other than themselves, with the result that no cultural enlightenment of any sort can be gained by an encounter with the Other, which is theoretically non-existent. Of course, each one of us has no doubt that she or he is not a Narcissus, but that was also true of Narcissus himself.

As a matter of fact, a version of narcissism can be found in the modality of popular Japanese theatrical productions of Shakespeare. It is well known that theatre is a dangerous genre, but in no other sense is it more dangerous than in the way that it employs the bodies of actors. Because the bodies of actors are essentially culture-bound, being made up by and through the culture in which the actors are brought up, it is all too easy to produce a sense of cultural difference when the body is to be employed for the production of a theatrical piece with a different cultural provenance. Added to this indigenous corporal identity (in this instance, of the Japanese), when the setting has “a very strong Oriental flavour” and the traditional costumes and movements of Kabuki and Noh are deployed for theatrical effect, there emerges the kind of “unique” production the very popular director Yukio Ninagawa is good at. The problem is, as Tetsuo Kishi pertinently and eloquently put it, that “Ninagawa’s visual images such as the Buddhist altar and cherry blossom are so evocative to the Japanese audience that they are likely to convey associations which are not really relevant to the play Shakespeare wrote. They may even function as a kind of barrier between the play and the audience.”<sup>6</sup>

The third type of attempted cure for the inferiority complexes consequent on modernization—or, to be precise, a sub-genre of the second—is an ingenious blend of the two types I have mentioned so far. It shows the attitude of an assiduous imitator and diligent emulator in the business of learning Shakespeare, while in the use of what it has learnt, in the employment of the knowledge it has gained, it maintains a policy of cultural protectionism. As a matter of fact, this type was cleverly invented in the course of the first stage of Japanese modernity: “*wakon-yosai*,” literally, Japanese spirit and Western learning. In its spirit of optimism,

6. Tetsuo Kishi & Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare in Japan* (Continuum, 2005), p. 80.

it prided itself on being an inimitable and unique instance of supreme wisdom coupled with highest knowledge, an incomparable mixture of the best of the East (the spiritual) and the best of the West (the scientific). This ingenious contrivance, as might be easily expected, was destined to go into bankruptcy in both theory and practice. For, theoretically, the spiritual supremacy of Japanese wisdom can be an object of belief, but it can never be guaranteed. And history shows in practice that the unique blend did not prevent Japan from entering into the disaster of World War II but rather encouraged it.

Such is the typology I have come up with in my attempt to classify the ways of treatment for the cultural inferiority complex we unfortunately cannot escape in the ineluctable process of modernization. The three types I have briefly described above are, each of them, obviously extreme instances. There are, and I hope there will be, other avenues of possibility through which we will manage to deal with our triangular problematic of Shakespeare, modernity and East Asia.

#### Disturbing Modernity

After all is said and done, what is the point of all this emphasis on the cultural inferiority complex? It may help to orient our (East Asians') approach to Shakespeare but on what grounds is it justified as an interpretive support to the proper understanding of Shakespeare? The answer, which must remain a far cry from anything satisfactory, can be stated this way: Shakespeare's works are disturbing as well as entertaining. In my understanding, the former (disturbing) quality essentially stems from the fact that his works were destined to grapple with the problems of secularization, the problems par excellence of the age (early modern) in which his works were being shaped.

Secularization is a characteristic process of the modern age, in which things divine and their derivatives that were taken for granted as representing transcendent power and absolute authority are called in question. The whole process is discernible in every dimension of human activities, from epistemology and ethics to world-view. Thus the entire spectrum of questions relating to the problem of knowledge and perception—epistemology—presented themselves. Since faith and belief did not count as the last instance of certainty anymore, it became one's business to be

doubtful and skeptical. Hamlet, Othello and Leontes are in skeptical imagination all compacted. As for the social mores and world picture, the entire series of the Roman plays must be seen as a grand experimental arena in which to examine the consequences of non-Christian people's behaviours in non-Christian societies. Coriolanus' virtue, which would definitely be regarded as the vice of pride, is conceivable as a virtue only in the Roman system of values. The world of *Julius Caesar* is inhabited by Stoics (Brutus), Epicureans (Cassius) and Academic skeptics (Cicero). The absence of God (of Christianity) is an underlying principle that characterizes the world of not only the Roman plays but also *King Lear*. Conspicuous in the latter is the conflict between the old authoritative norms and the new rational measures, and all this within the relativistic horizon of a world where the good news of Christianity has not yet arrived. When it comes to the disturbance of the world picture, no play shows its topsy-turvydom better than *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, at whose centre is the triumphant union of Bottom and Titania. The true and serious consequences of this chaotic energy and destructive urge are later to be examined on a more socially-oriented and less imaginary plane in the so-called problem plays such as *Measure for Measure*. I can go on like this almost ad infinitum, adducing the instances of the disturbing effect it is in the grain of Shakespeare's works to produce.

Shakespeare's works are disturbing as well as entertaining, and the *fons et origo* of this disturbing energy, I think, can be sought in what Emmanuel Wallerstein calls "the crucible" of the modern world-system, a kind of "force-field or *Kraftfeld*" (Walter Benjamin),<sup>7</sup> which is being created by and at the same time creating the movement and process called "secularization."<sup>8</sup> Its inception overlaps the beginning of modern age, and you can call it Shakespeare's age. What is at stake here and what distinguishes the age and movement is the critical spirit that never ceases to question fundamentals. It cannot help but bring about various kinds of undermining disturbance.

7. Cf. Martin Jay, *Force-fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (Routledge, 1993).

8. I am fully aware that the word "secularization" is not a straightforward concept. Principally I follow the old view presented by Karl Löwith (*Meaning in History* [U. Chicago P., 1949]). That his "secularization theory" was criticized in important ways by Hans Blumenberg (*The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*) and Leo Strauss ("Letters concerning Modernity") does not particularly affect our argument here.



I hope that by now it has become clear what I mean when I have said that “for us non-European East Asians, Shakespeare matters as difference matters.” The difference for us is nothing if not this critical spirit that manifests itself throughout Shakespeare’s works in the form of the characteristic disturbing effects that comprise the life of each work. These indispensable effects must not be lost on us as a result of the appreciation of any reductive means of interpretation, be it of nationalism, nativism, traditionalism, or Narcissism. It is precisely in this sense that for the non-Europeans Shakespeare matters as difference matters. Shakespeare will then become a medium and agent of the veritable Shake-scene.

### III. *Traditional Values*

The present critical attempt to reconsider the Shakespearean scholarly business has started with taking seriously the idea that Shakespeare criticism is a product of the modern world-system that Europe is. The reconsideration has made us aware of both the theoretical difficulty and the practical danger we would be likely to incur if we assumed that we are entitled to a critical position entirely free from the modern world-system. Shakespeare and Shakespeare criticism and the problematic of modernity are not only “in imagination compact” but also inextricably entangled. Where Shakespeare matters the problems of modernity make themselves felt. The previous section is an instance of the reconfirmation of its thesis conducted specifically from a viewpoint which is clearly distinguished as non-European but is equally characterized as being part of the modern world-system that Europe is.

There is something mysterious about the idea of “modernity” and its related issues. Like a *femme fatale*, it comes as a kind of destiny, and once one is taken by its charms it is difficult to get rid of. The indispensable prefix “post-,” as in postmodernism, for instance, amply speaks of “modernity”’s fatal force. Under these circumstances it seems little use for a better understanding of the concept of “modernity” to grapple with it in a straightforward way. The strategy that I have come up with is what is called “a rear attack,” seeking to put it into relief by considering the opposing concepts, i.e., traditional values.

### Two Approaches

The proposed theme “Traditional Values and Shakespeare” allows, for some pragmatic reasons, for two distinct readings. For those who are inclined to take a broadly historicist position it will suggest a study of “traditional values” as they present themselves in Shakespeare’s works and their function and working in them. The underlying assumption on which this kind of historicism is conducted is that a work of literature in some way or other reflects the dynamics of the society in which it is produced and in which “emergent” forces in most cases are trying to supercede “residual” ones.<sup>9</sup> In Shakespeare’s case, for instance, either a play or his entire work is taken to represent a dynamic picture of historical forces where medieval values are to be superceded by those of the modern world. But there is a further complication in his case, or of anyone living in his age, which is generally characterized by a dynamics of renewal and is on that account called the Renaissance. The structure of historico-cultural dynamics in which Shakespeare’s work is assumed to be produced is a tripartite complex where “emergent” forces are superceding those of the immediately past at the instigation of, and with aspirations toward, the remote past. The “traditional values” in this instance prove, therefore, to be those of the “immediate past” to be superceded and at the same time those of the “remote past” to be restored. The “traditional values” which are called upon to rejuvenate the current culture are therefore not of single valence but multivalent and even contradictory.

In contrast to this kind of historicist reading of our theme, there is the other, seeing it from the standpoint of reception aesthetic. The “traditional values” in this case signify those working in the interpretative or ideological framework, be it intentional or otherwise, of creative receivers. To the best of my knowledge, so far there have been no strictures as to the extent to which interpretative enterprises are to be regulated. “Anything goes” is the dictum so long as an interpretation throws an interesting light on a new aspect of Shakespeare. Thus it is that a number of different Shakespeares have actually been presented, ranging from

9. These now classical ideas are taken from Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford UP., 1977).

“Catholic Shakespeare” and “Post-Colonial Shakespeare” to a bit surprising “Buddhist Shakespeare.”<sup>10</sup> I think it is a matter of time before we have such enterprises as “A Confucian Shakespeare” or “A Shintoist Shakespeare.”

Should one be rigorous and precise about this matter of approach, the case must be put in the following way: since there exist no historical facts or movements as such independently of the later “present” perspective in which they are formed in their appropriate representations, any attempt at historicist study (including ours) is theoretically not exempt from receptionist valorization. To see Shakespeare as a product of “emergent forces” in their struggle against the two kinds of “residual” forces would be in itself an instance of intellectual activity that can be largely categorized under the head of receptionist interpretation. On the extremist principle of “the present makes history” the distinction between historicist and receptionist interpretations can be but a matter of degree; but even while admitting it is indeed the case in theory, one must not dismiss an important difference the focus of attention will make in interpretative endeavours. The Shakespeare as brought forward by an historicist study is markedly different from the Shakespeare as proposed by a receptionist interpretation. The difference, as I take it, is a function of the focus of attention each approach in its different way carries with it: while the former (historicist approach) is past/fact-oriented, the latter is present/fabrication-oriented. Or if you’d prefer the classic distinction made by German hermeneutics, it is the distinction between “meaning (*Bedeutung*)” and “significance (*Sinn*).”<sup>11</sup> Theoretically both are of equal value and interrelated; practically they tend to be distinguished from each other. It must be further noted that if the historicist approach tends to lapse into overconfident positivism, the receptionist on the other hand may be in danger of unreflective complacency.

Along these methodological lines the present paper will explore the way “traditional values” function in some of Shakespeare’s plays, with special reference to *Timon of Athens*, *King Lear* and *Coriolanus*.

10. *A Buddhist Shakespeare: Affirming Self-Deconstructions*, by James Howe (Fairleigh Dickinson UP., 1994).

11. Cf. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (Yale UP., 1967).

### Immediate Past (1): Formal World

Let me begin with thinking about what seem to be the “traditional values” most likely to be negated by “emergent forces” in the Shakespearean world picture. Nothing in this respect, it seems to me, represents more cogently and fully those traditional values of the immediate past than enraged Timon’s vehement invective directed against the city of Athens as he is about to leave it after having been betrayed by his false Athenian friends.

Piety and fear,  
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,  
Domestic awe, night rest, and neighbourhood,  
Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,  
Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,  
Decline to your confounding contraries,  
And yet confusion live!

(*Timon of Athens*, Sc. 12. 15–21)<sup>12</sup>

Timon, as you remember, was an incarnation of bountifulness, offering sumptuous banquets and precious gifts to those whom he promiscuously regarded as friends. His generosity, however, exceeded a human measure as well as any economic principle. In the belated world of superceded values in which Timon lived his unsuspected life he went to extremes in his virtuous act of generosity. It was not the world of business transactions based on contracts and credits but that of mutual help on the basis of obligation, truth and respect—in a word, friendship. Astounded at the collapse of these values in and with which he had fashioned himself and did his political and courtly business, he decided in despair to leave Athens, the city infected and corrupted with new values. His invective against Athens (quoted above), therefore, contains a valediction to the much-endearred old values.

The old values, as you can see, are structured in the familiar framework of an hierarchical and static order: “Degrees, observances, customs,

12. Quotations from *Timon of Athens* here and hereafter are from the Oxford World’s Classics, ed. John Jowett (Oxford UP., 2004).

and laws.” This orderly principle is sanctioned by divine authority (“gods” & c.) and goes on to permeate every sphere ranging from family (“domestic awe”) through community (“neighbourhood”) to professional organizations (“mysteries, and trades”). The orderly world of the old values Timon deplors to have been lost reminds us of the famous “Ulysses’ speech” in *Troilus and Cressida*, an exemplary instance of what E. M. W. Tillyard once named “the Elizabethan world picture.”<sup>13</sup> It is the world harmoniously composed of the macrocosm and the microcosm (i.e., man). As the macrocosm consists of divinity and nature, the spiritual upper spheres and the lower sublunary sphere, so the macrocosm consists of (as Hamlet is surprised to find) angel and beast. As the sublunary sphere (a part of the macrocosm) comprises the four Elements, so the macrocosm comprises the four humours. As the macrocosm is structured in an hierarchical order, so the macrocosm (man) in the same hierarchical order. By the same token, human society as a middle species between macro- and microcosm, namely as the “body politic,” is expected to be ordered in a hierarchical fashion. What counts much is the correspondence between macro- and microcosm. “The Elizabethan world picture” presented by Tillyard in 1943 as a helpful historical background for the interpretation of Elizabethan literature has since been duly criticized for being too static and general. But, I believe, it still retains its usefulness in that it happily provides us with what we call the world of old values that is to be superceded by the new emergent forces.

Timon’s anger at the collapse of the much-trusted old values finds its parallel in Lear’s. Lear’s anger that eventually drives him mad is perhaps more intense, but both are of the same kind. Like Timon, Lear is compelled to find himself in a world where the old values familiar to him have suddenly become irrelevant and powerless. The great tempest scene that begins with his maddening speech “Blow wind” is precisely “an objective correlative” of Lear’s psychic state, a symbolic embodiment of the fall of the older world as such. Such correlation is possible because of the specifically intimate affinity between macrocosm and microcosm in the case of kings like Lear, who are supposed to be at the top of the hierarchy of human society in the sublunary regions.

13. *The Elizabethan world picture* (Chatto & Windus, 1943). For its powerful criticism, see *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1982).

In such a world picture of older values, where all are closely knit together in some form of correspondence and interrelationships, a dysfunction of any order has far-reaching effects and consequences. A moral defect in economic transactions, for instance, is inevitably, if indirectly, bound up with a breach of chastity. Thus it is that in the very same invective in which Timon (enraged by his friends’ betrayal in generosity) deplors the collapse of the old world of mutual obligation, mention is at the same time made of the concomitant corruption of woman’s sexuality:

Matrons, turn incontinent!  
Obedience fail in children! ... To the general filths  
Convert o’th’ instant, green virginity!  
... Maid, to thy master’ bed!  
Thy mistress is o’th’brothel.

(*Timon of Athens*, Sc. 12. 3–13)

In Timon’s imagination, any instances of corruption in human society are of the same order, be they economic or sexual, and are equally regarded as a breach of natural order, a non-fulfillment of the ordainments prescribed by Nature. The point is worth stressing that the collapse of an entire moral order is understood as the corruption of nature—by nature in this instance is meant the whole orderly goings-on of life in the sublunary sphere, which is in turn duly placed in the divine cosmology.

As any reader of Shakespeare knows, what happens to Timon happens on a grand scale to Lear. With King Lear the older world of propitious and fertile nature working in the grand harmonious cosmology has come to an end. John F. Danby<sup>14</sup> many years ago designated this declining world of nature as that of “benign nature” in contradistinction to “malign nature,” which is to be in ascendancy both in the work of *King Lear* (represented by such figure as Edmund) and in the history of thought (represented by Hobbes’ political philosophy). Danby ingeniously sees in the conflict as it appears in the work a representation of the larger historical conflict between forces emergent and residual, between two natures benign and malign. Danby’s thesis is as arresting and convincing as any schematic presentation of binary opposition. Perhaps the

14. *Shakespeare’s Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear* (Faber & Faber, 1949).

trouble with it is that it is too cogent. Although I have reservations about characterization and valorization of the ascendant nature as “malign,” I entirely agree with his general view that the old conception of nature along with its concomitant values is fast losing its hold and being superceded by another.

There is certainly no knowing how Shakespeare actually felt about the decline and fall of these older values, and it is also futile to try to ascertain his attitudes and position. All we can and have to do in this regard is to note once again the fact that the older world picture of “benign nature”<sup>15</sup> and of harmonious cosmology is depicted and deployed as something that has come to lose its relevance and validity. For the representative inhabitants of Shakespeare’s dramatic universe (e.g., Hamlet), the world surrounding them is “out of joint”: it is obscure enough to incur easy suspicion at any moment and it is so far from being perspicuous and harmonious that one is hard put to see any correspondence between macro- and microcosm except for its negative instance like King Lear’s.

#### Immediate Past (2): Informal World

The older world of respect, order and propriety is destined to be ineffectual, irrelevant and residual. In proportion to the downfall of such an orderly edifice, however, there is an upsurge of forces from the underworld, as it were, of the very same tradition. What I am hinting at is the social and cultural forces that derive from the so-called popular tradition, low culture, on which Mikhail Bakhtin brilliantly shed light in his revolutionary study on Francois Rabelais.<sup>16</sup> Striking its roots as it does in the older world of traditional values, this strain of popular culture survives the collapse of its main edifice and continues to keep its strong undercurrent. Bakhtin unforgettably designates the site and origins of these forces as the “lower bodily stratum,” the sources of primordial forces closely bound up with scatology, sexuality and obscenity. Any serious discussion on the “traditional values” in Shakespeare can hardly forgo this disarming area of “lower bodily stratum.”

If the collapse of the world of benign nature and orderly cosmology

15. Here I am referring to Danby’s work.

16. *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (M.I.T. Press, 1968).

takes place with high personages in elevated quarters, especially court (e.g., Lear’s and Timon’s), the diehard undercurrent of the “lower bodily stratum” finds its appropriate habitation in bawdy quarters, i.e., brothels. The bawdy (both as expression and as theme) in Shakespeare is in a class by itself, as a number of books devoted to this subject eloquently show.<sup>17</sup> The bawdy is as embarrassing as it is illuminating; embarrassing because the bawdy, often in the form of sexual double entendre, makes us face squarely and quasi-publicly what the social decorum keeps suppressed as strictly private. What the bawdy deals in is perfectly in the nature of things with us human beings; it is essentially natural but socially, as every history shows, has never been treated positively. In other words, the bawdy carries with it the potential capacity to make us aware and critical of the fundamental relativity of distinction between nature and culture, and it is precisely here that it is illuminating and revealing. This double function the bawdy fulfills in language can be analogously sought in that of the brothel in society. The bawdy is to language what the brothel is to society. In a society as a whole it is obvious that the brothel is something disconcerting and upsetting, but from a certain perspective there can hardly anything more natural. I have not got a chance to enumerate how many brothels and bawds make their appearance in Shakespeare’s dramatic works, but one of the unforgettable references in this connection is the brothel in Vienna and its bawd/clown Pompey in *Measure for Measure*. At the outset of the play, as you remember, Pompey tells his mistress (Mrs. Overdone) that the proclamation has been issued that “All houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be pluck’d down.” Mrs. Overdone asks, quite justly, “what shall become of those in the city?” What Pompey says in reply is fascinating, both embarrassing and illuminating:

They shall stand for seed. (I. 2. 98)<sup>18</sup>

As annotation teaches us, it is an exemplary instance of double entendre.

17. Notable among others are Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare’s Bawdy* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947), Gordon Williams, *A Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language* (Athlone, 1997), and Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Puns and their Significance* (Palgrave, 1984; 2nd ed. 1989).

18. *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford UP., 1991).

(1) Firstly, they “remain standing to assure the continuance of prostitution (like grain left uncut to provide seed for another season). That is, they owe their survival to human intervention as Pompey’s words that immediately follow make clear: “They had gone down, too, but that a wise burgher put it for them” (they would have gone down unless a wise citizen intervened in their behalf [or made an offer for their purchase]). They are made to remain because they are somehow socially in need. (2) Secondly, understood as a bawdy equivoque, the line can mean that, whether in brothels or elsewhere, phalli “stand for seed,” for procreation. The implication is that irrespective of any proclamation, which is a piece of human artifice after all, nature demands that “they stand for seed,” and legitimately at that. The double entendre is hilarious as well as subverting.

One may well wonder what made such a double entendre possible because in the modern and modernized world it has now become a rarity (broadly both in East and West). It is patently obscene and yet has something positive and even healthy about it. It goes against social decorum and yet is not entirely anti-social but rather ultimately conducive to the fundamental health of the society. And if one seeks its origin, it was, as Bakhtin shows us, the popular tradition that struck deep root in low culture, extending more or less unchanged from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

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So far I have discussed what Shakespeare and his age must and might have received and taken advantage of, consciously or unconsciously, as traditional values. The systems of these values are largely divided into two kinds: one is structured by and oriented to the cosmic harmonious order, what Tillyard once named “the Elizabethan World Picture,” which works as a public discourse. The other is, in contrast, an undercurrent discourse with no structural principle to inform it, but carries with it a bottomless power and explosive energy, what Bakhtin once called “the popular tradition,” which is bound up with “the Lower Bodily Stratum.” Seen from the standpoint contemporaneous with Shakespeare, the former system of values was fast in decline, while the latter continued to exert its invigorating, if subversive, forces.

Had I world enough and time, I could set out more in detail another set of values which will comprise, together with those discussed above, the basic constituent systems of values that go to form the historical horizon of the Renaissance. But in brief, distinct from the system of values handed on from the immediate past, this peculiar system of values was a product of discovery prompted by the Renaissance aspirations toward antiquity, the remote past. The case in point is what the story of Coriolanus articulates.

At the risk of oversimplification, the story of Coriolanus boils down to this: that his over self-confidence, underpinned as it is by his valour and military accomplishments, brings him to an extraordinary degree of arrogance, eventually to the point that he completely ignores social recognition and mediation. His self-confidence and self-sufficiency do not allow him to condescend to accept the process of popular recognition by vote, which he must undergo for social promotion to consulship. Rome the body politic, whose socio-political as well as natural mediation is essential for his existence and subsistence, loses its significance for the self-accomplished Coriolanus, who believes in absolute ideal (honour) and its self-sufficient, immediate fulfillment. He even comes to think that it is disgraceful to have him and his honour recognized by the vulgar populace’s vote/voice. I would call his kind of attitude “sublime egotism.” True, he yields at the last moment to his mother’s mediation for the protection of Rome, his motherland; but it is a far cry from acceptance of the necessities of mediation, ranging from socio-political to physico-somatic. What is left as problematic is the issue of “sublime egotism,” a kind of individualistic absolutism, where immediate spiritual self-sufficiency can do without a mediating bodily entity.

With the benefit of historical hindsight, it is easy to see that this problematic emblematically presented through Coriolanus is what is at the heart of the problem of modernity. This strand of values must have formed the “emergent forces” that go to constitute, together with the above-discussed other system of values, the cross section of the society in which Shakespeare’s dramatic universe is produced.

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