Rewritings between East and West: Shiga Naoya’s *Kurodiasu no nikki*

In his autobiographical work *Sōsaku yodan* («Digressions on my work», 1928), Shiga Naoya writes about composing *Kurodiasu no nikki* («The Diary of Claudius», 1912).¹

One of my motives for writing it was that when I saw *Hamlet* performed by Bungei Kyōkai, I had such an impression of superficiality by Doi Shunshō as Hamlet that I was turned rather to sympathize with Claudius, played by Togi Tetteki. Moreover, I found that except for the words of the Ghost not a single proof of Claudius’s murder of his brother exists in the play, which gave me another motive for writing my story. I had a lot of trouble making the work conform with the content of *Hamlet*, since my Claudius is derived from the play and I did not want to contradict it (Shiga 1973: VIII, 7).

The text is thus from its very beginning both an attempt to re-read *Hamlet* in a new perspective and an effort to avoid being at odds with the original. In this sense, it is a good example of the function of parody in general and particularly of the complex role played by rewritings of Western literature in Japanese culture, and their part in the formation of the modern Japanese novel (*shōsetsu*). This issue is of particular interest since Shiga Naoya is considered one of the Founding Fathers of modern Japanese literature (he is often referred to as *bungaku no kamisama*, «the god of literature») and contributed with his work to shape the modern Japanese novel as we know it today.

I propose therefore to analyse this text in relation to the original (or, rather, to the Japanese translation by Tsubouchi Shōyō, which Shiga saw performed and subsequently read, and which constitutes the real basis of his short story) and to Shiga’s other works. Before doing this, I will provide a brief account of the reception of Western literature in Japan in the Meiji period (1868-1911) and in particular the reception of Shakespeare’s works at that time.

¹ *Kurodiasu no nikki* is translated by R. Starrs (Shiga 1998), M. Mecréant (Shiga 1970), E. Rau (Shiga 1986).
1. Modernization, the New Shōsetsu and the Shi-shōsetsu

The modern Japanese novel (shōsetsu) was born in the Meiji period in relation and in reaction to the impact of Western culture. In the 1850s Japan was forced by Western countries to open her ports to foreign ships and put an end to the sakoku (‘closed country’) system. The country was opened to Western influence, whose impact was particularly strong. The changes it brought were primarily political: the end of the Tokugawa regime, the Imperial Restoration and the adoption of a new political, legal and administrative system. All of those changes were explicitly brought on under the sway of the West. Some scholars became fascinated by social Darwinism, manifested in a recognition that the West had climbed higher on the evolutionary ladder than Japan and implying that the purpose of study was to acquire ‘civilization’. To do this involved learning about Western philosophy and law and patterns of behaviour, as well as science and industry (Storry 1960; Reischauer 1946; Beasley 1990).

Literature became deeply involved in this process: not only was it influenced by its contact with Western literature, it soon became an instrument of westernization in turn. Many intellectuals, such as Fukuzawa Yukichi and Nakamura Keiu, took upon themselves the task of instructing the Japanese people on Western philosophy and culture at large, on contention that in order to learn Western superior technology it was necessary to understand Western modes of thought and ways of life.

Literature was urged on the one hand to modernize, and on the other to become a leading force in the modernization of the country. A leading role in this process was played by translations and adaptations of Western literature, which maintained their importance up to the 1920s and 1930s. Not only modern novels borrowed themes and styles from Western literature, but the notion of modern novel in itself was in fact an imported, Western concept. And this concept, along with ideas such as democracy and individuality, also borrowed from the West, was a powerful instrument in the Meiji government’s cultural policies, as we will see. In Masao Miyoshi’s opinion, the formation of the modern shōsetsu is related to Japan’s choice to modernize, that is to westernize, emphasizing the break with the past. It is consequently a ‘progressive’

---

2 The names of Japanese scholars living and working mostly in the United States, such as Miyoshi and Naoki Sakai, will be given in the Western order, with the first name preceding the last name, rather than in the Japanese order.

3 «As in other Third World histories, the development of narrative in Japan was disrupted at the point where the West forcibly imposed itself on the unwilling country. As in many societies overwhelmed by the Western powers, the early Japanese response was to learn how to modernize, that is, Westernize. In the process the Japanese were urged to stress the discontinuity of the present from the past» (Miyoshi 1991: 45). On the origins of the modern shōsetsu see also Id. (1974) and Karatani (1993).
genre, anti-traditional and pro-Western, adopting Western literature’s characteristics such as a straightforward prose style and a preoccupation with the individual as its main subject. At the same time, Miyoshi (1991: 45-46) says, the modern shōsetsu is a specifically ‘Japanese’ genre, which retains from the pre-modern shōsetsu many formal characteristics very different from those of its Western counterpart.

One of these peculiarities of the Japanese novel is generally considered to reside in the tradition of the watakushi-shōsetsu, or «I-novel», considered the ‘Japanese’ novel par excellence. Watakushi-shōsetsu, or shi-shōsetsu, generally designates an autobiographical narrative in which the author is thought to recount faithfully the details of his or her personal life in a thin guise of fiction, and it is regarded as a specifically Japanese genre, with no equivalents in the West. A very interesting approach to the matter is that of Suzuki Tomi, in Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity, on which I will rely as a theoretical background for my analysis of Kurodiasu no nikki. In this work Suzuki questions precisely the view of the I-novel as the particular Japanese genre as an historical and ideological construct. While literary critics both in Japan and in the West usually agree to consider the watakushi-shōsetsu the most salient and unique form of modern Japanese literature, the notion of the I-novel remains very elusive. Yet this concept generated in Japan a critical discourse that informed not only the nature of literature but also views of Japanese selfhood, society, and tradition. Suzuki calls this the «I-novel discourse» or the «I-novel meta-narrative», and argues that it is a ‘discourse’ in Foucault’s sense: in it, a corpus of I-novels is retroactively constructed and afterwards narrativized as a descriptive representation of pre-existing texts. The ability of watakushi-shōsetsu to generate such a powerful literary and cultural meta-narrative derives from the special mystique of the notion of watakushi, the ‘I’ or ‘self’, and from the privileged status of the novel, both of which emerged under the cultural hegemony of Western modernity (Suzuki 1996: 2).

The notion of shōsetsu in its modern sense was first formulated by Tsubouchi Shōyō in his influential Shōsetsu shinzui («The essence of the novel», 1885). In this work, Tsubouchi laments the decadence of contemporary Japanese literature and advocates the adoption of Western literary techniques to modernize and revitalize it. In so doing, he creates the notion of shōsetsu and applies it retrospectively to all Japanese prose fiction. In the Tokugawa period, different genres of prose fiction were referred to using a variety of terms based on content, such as ukiyō-zōshi («books on the floating world») or sharebon (books on the refined manners of the licensed quarters), or on physical appearance, such as akahon («red books», illustrated books for children) or kurohon («black books», historical fiction) or on the mode of presentation, such as yomihon («reading books») or kusa-zōshi («grass books», or illustrated books). Yet Shōyō places all Japanese prose fiction within the category of the shōsetsu, and contrasts them with the Western novel, which he con-
siders the most evolved, 'true' shōsetsu (ibid.: 20). Tsubouchi's role is particularly relevant to the purpose of the present essay since he is the first and most influential translator of Shakespeare into Japanese, and his translations are related to his theory of the novel, as we will see in the second part of this essay.

As for the idea of individual self, the 'I', this also comes from the West and soon finds a privileged medium in literature. The notion of individual self is imported in Japan under the auspices of the Meiji State, which advocates the Enlightenment ideal of free and equal citizens as part of its effort to construct a centralized, modern nation-state. Another instrument in the diffusion of the notion of individuality is Christianity, which began to expand in the 1880s, thanks also to the efforts of the Japanese Romantic movement and the journal Bungakkai. However, the idea of the self takes shape mainly through the assimilation and naturalization of literary representation in Western literature. According to this view, Japanese literature needed to improve by looking to the West for a model. One of the main faults of Japanese literature in the opinion of its critics was its language, unable to adequately 'express the self', which was now seen as the main purpose of literature.

Japanese writers thus tried to create a literary language that would have the transparency and immediacy they attributed to Western languages, to give a faithful representation of reality and of the individual. Yet this was from the beginning a profoundly ambivalent and complex operation. While Japanese naturalists advocated a direct transcription of objective reality, in fact many of their texts dramatize precisely the process by which some paradigms of 'reality' came into existence through interaction with Western literature, and then came to be taken for granted (ibid.: 47).

As I will attempt to demonstrate, one of the main features of Shiga Naoya's Kurodiasu no nikki is precisely the foregrounding of the process whereby modern Japanese literature and the modern Japanese self were formed through the assimilation of and reaction to Western culture.

The most interesting feature of the I-novel discourse is therefore its deep involvement in the dynamics of Japanese reaction to the West. The notion of the I-novel has always been formulated on a polar axis that contrasted the Western novel with its Japanese counterpart. This reminds us of Naoki Sakai's reflections on the complicity between the formation of Japanese and Western identities. According to Sakai (1997: 70-71), the effort to create a national culture in Japan mirrors what has been defined the narcissism of the West:

4 The rise of the novel is also associated to the movement for the genbun-itchi, or «unification of spoken and written Japanese», and the movement for the reform of written Japanese, which is in turn related to the formation of the modern nation-state. According to Nanette Twine (1991), the writers of the 'New Novel' were among the first to adopt the new written language, based on the Tōkyō dialect, and their works, adopted in some cases as primary-school textbooks by the Ministry of Culture, were one of the main instruments of its diffusion (see also Yamamoto 1971).
What has been avoided at all costs in this transferential exchange of desires between the West and the non-West is any interruption, any questioning of the very distinction between the two domains of the world... The schema of the co-existence among nation-states serves to conceal the complicity of the West and Japan in the transferential formation of respective identities; because of this complicity, the obsession with the West warrants self-referentiality to the Japanese. An uncritical endorsement of such a schema prevents us from detecting the hidden alliance of the narcissisms of the West and of Japan. It conceals the working of the regimes in which a paranoiac impulse to identify with the West, and another with Japan, are simultaneously reproduced and mutually reinforced by one another.

For Sakai this process is particularly evident in the case of translation, which, presupposing a symmetrical exchange between two languages and two cultures, reinforces the image of each culture as being clearly and unambiguously distinguishable from the other and a systematic whole in itself, without internal contradictions. Sakai calls this the «regime of translation» and considers it a powerful instrument in what he names the «schema of configuration».

Nevertheless translation itself can be a way out of this impasse, when it stresses precisely the differences between and within languages and their intrinsic hybridity:

Yet, as is obvious from the position of the translator, which makes it impossible to adhere to either the exclusively personal relation of the addresser and the addressee or the utterly indifferent stance of the observer, the recognition of the truly authentic language has to be facilitated by the incessant oscillation between the inside and the outside of the scene of translation, the metaleptic stepping in of the personal relation with the addresser and the addressee in the process of translation. It is by the essential linguistic hybridity inherent in the position of the translator that one comes to know the authenticity of one’s own language. In spite of all these, the schema of configuration serves to negate the essential heterogeneity of language (ibid.: 66-67).

Translation between different cultures can also be a creative re-reading, wilfully subversive both of the source culture and of the target culture. ‘Free’ translations and adaptations, even more so self-conscious parodies, in this sense can be seen as another form of the ‘creative misreadings’ that Harold Bloom sees as the very basis of all imaginative literature.

According to Bloom (1997: XIX), «like criticism, which is either part of literature or nothing at all, great writing is always at work strongly (or weakly) misreading other writing». Therefore, «poetic history... is... indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves» (ibid.: 5). The idea of creative misreading is thus related in Bloom’s view to what he calls the «anxiety of influence», also lying at the core of literary creation. While Bloom elaborates his concept of the «anxiety of influence» in reference to the English Romantic movement and subsequently extends it to the reciprocal influences within European literature, it could be very interesting to attempt to discover
whether and how this concept applies to the influence of Western literature on Japan. In this sense, once again, *Kurodasu no nikki* could provide a useful subject of study. Before analysing it we must consider Shiga’s and Shakespeare’s particular position within the I-novel discourse and the modernization of Japan.

2. *Shiga Naoya and the Watakushi-shōsetsu*

Although Shiga is very little studied in the West, in Japan there is an impressive number of critical works about him. The present essay will obviously not exhaust the critical panorama on this author but only provide a general outline of what I take to be its more interesting features, as well as those more relevant to the purpose of this essay.

In my view, the most remarkable critical perspective is here again that of Suzuki Tomi, who reads his work in the light of her theorization of the I-novel discourse. Although modern literary histories regard Tayama Katai as the founder of the I-novel, Shiga Naoya has been considered the writer who brought this tradition to its apex. Indeed, Shiga’s writings themselves seem to invite an I-novelized reading, all the more so since in personal essays addressed to the reader, like the above quoted *Sōsaku yodan*, Shiga asserted that the background and characteristics of these protagonists were actually his own. It is hardly surprising then that one of the most influential (and one of the very few) Western critical works on Shiga, William Sibley’s *The Shiga Hero*, centres on the notion of a «single central character who, in one guise or another, appears in nearly all of Shiga’s stories and novels» (Sibley 1979: 7), although, as we will see, he contends that this character does not coincide with the biographical person of the author. As a consequence, critical response to Shiga’s literature has often taken the form of comments on the author’s personality and moral life. Fusing the content of his literature and the ‘facts’ of his life, critics and scholars have formulated what they believed to be a coherent picture of his life and have used this biographical narrative to analyse Shiga’s personality and to interpret his literary work. This critical attitude is further encouraged by the ideals of the Shirakaba school, to which Shiga belonged. Pursuing the self through art was a declared goal of the Shirakaba group: they regarded art as the ultimate means of developing and realizing their ‘true selves’. They import this preoccupation with the self from the West, along with the ideology of transcendental humanism, that is, the notion of a «universal human being» (*ningen*), neither Japanese nor Western:

For Mushakōji and the Shirakaba group, there were no Japanese: there existed only Humanity (*ningen*) or Mankind (*jinrui*), together with such universals as Love, Art,

---

5 For instance, see Agawa (1955; 1994); Arai (1985); Hirano (1977); Honda (1960; 1990); Ikeuchi (1992); Nakamura (1954; 1958); Shinozawa (1994); Sudō (1963; 1976; 1979); Takahashi (1981).
Nature, Justice, Beauty, and Life... This absolute acceptance of Western discourse, the uncritical universalism and internationalism, and the notion of cultivating the individual self reflected the general atmosphere of the 1910s - a time when the sense of a national crisis had dissipated in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese war but when political activity was tightly controlled by the government (Suzuki 1996: 53).

Shiga is one of the most fervent advocates of this ideal.

For these reasons, Shiga's works have been read by most scholars in an autobiographical key, and sometimes even criticized for being *romans à clé*, their main interest lying in discovering hidden references to the author's actual life. For example, Nakamura Mitsuo (1950), with Itō Sei (1948) and Hirano Ken (1951) one of the most influential post-war critics of the I-novel, criticizes Shiga's novels for discussing nothing more than the author's personality. In Nakamura's view (1966: 18-20), since no critical distance exists between the author and the main character, Shiga's novels are comprehensible and meaningful only to those who had a biographical knowledge of Shiga himself. Criticizing him for being too personal, Nakamura in fact reinforces the view of Shiga as the prototypical I-novelist.

One of the most interesting studies of Shiga, reinforcing the I-novel myth and its retrospective application to Japanese tradition, is Sudō Matsuo's *Shiga Naoya to shizen* («Shiga Naoya and nature», 1979). The main thesis of this work is that Shiga's relationship with nature (shizen), in the course of his literary career, from the first short stories to his only long novel, *An'ya kōrō* («A dark night's passing»), changes from an antagonistic one to a harmonious union. Sudō argues that this transformation embodies an archetypal characteristic of all Japanese literature, the emphasis on harmony and unity with nature through emotional ties of aware (sympathy). Sudō seems to use Shiga's work as a basis for creating a narrative of continuity and cultural identity. His strategy recalls of Suzuki's idea (1996: 3) that the image of traditional Japanese literature as centred on nature and harmony was created in the 20th century within the I-novel discourse.

Another influential post-war scholar, Kobayashi Hideo, considers Shiga's works the most successful realization of the *shi-shōsetsu*, thus emphasizing both the image of Shiga as the ideal I-novelist and the meta-narrative of the I-novel itself. According to Kobayashi (1975: III, 94-96), «since Tayama Katai learned from Maupassant the literary value of daily life itself, no writer has succeeded as well as Shiga in boldly extracting from his own life a work of art, no one has adhered so scrupulously as he has to the approach of the *shi-shōsetsu*, in which the logic of everyday life becomes the logic of creation». Ueda Makoto (1976: 86) does not deviate from this widespread opinion in asserting that for Shiga «a literary work... should be autobiographical in the strict sense of the word, that is, it should be a conscious effort at self-revelation».

Being preoccupied mainly with tracing the influence of Shiga's life on his work, most Japanese critics tend to neglect the influence of other literary works
and, more broadly speaking, of the absorption of a literary meta-discourse. Particularly relevant in this sense is Yasuoka Shōtarō’s remark on Shiga’s relation to influence. According to Yasuoka (1968: 207), "Shiga’s most conspicuous trait is that he has been influenced by no one and has created his works exclusively within himself". This interpretation seems to be endorsed by Shiga himself. Yet his claim not to have been influenced by anyone could be read as an expression of his ambivalent relation to Western influence.

An exemplary case is what Shiga writes in his diary after reading Rousseau’s Confessions, in 1912 (the same year when he composed Kurodiasu no niki): "I do not know whether Rousseau is ‘great’ or not, but I feel that he is not. Reading his work, I felt that I have within me—myself as I am now—at least as much as he did… mankind need only—or in any case I need only devote my life to mining what is in me". And the next day: "I have come truly to love myself. I now find my face truly beautiful. And I believe there are few men who have possessed the greatness that I have within me" (Shiga 1973: X, 556). While an author like Shimazaki Tōson maintained that he had discovered his individuality reading Rousseau’s Confessions, Shiga, by contrast, finds his selfhood against it. Which, it could be argued, is not so different after all. This recalls the oppositional quality of modern Japanese identity in Sakai’s vision: here, literally, «the narcissism of Japan mirrors the narcissism of the West».

As a final example, I would like to offer the critical analysis of William Sibley. Sibley questions Japanese scholars’ mainly biographical approach to Shiga’s literature, not because of its ideological effects but because it does little more than repeat itself:

The emphasis on this critical perspective became a compelling self-justification on the part of well-entrenched literary scholars for their inexhaustible, sometimes prurient curiosity about authors’ lives, down to the most minute and tedious details. In a vicious circle or, for many of them, it would seem, in a happy little round dance, these scholars turn quickly from the works to the lives, again to the works for more documentary ‘data’, and finally back to the biographies of bona fide real lives, laid out on the most cumbersome scale, that are their ultimate objects (Sibley 1979: 3).

Yet Sibley equally criticizes the totally anti-biographical approach of American scholars, which he traces to the influence of New Criticism. He then proposes a reading of Shiga’s work based on the ‘Shiga hero’, a character he argues can be found, under different names, in almost all of his stories. This

---

6 Suzuki quotes Shimazaki’s diary as one clear example of how the new paradigms of reality take shape through the assimilation of literary representation in Western literature: «In those days I was suffering from various difficulties, and I was depressed when I encountered Rousseau. As I became involved in the book, I felt as if it brought out a self (jibun) that I had not been hitherto aware of…. I felt that through this book I was beginning to understand, though vaguely, modern man’s way of thinking and how to view nature directly» (Shimazaki Tōson, 1909, quoted in Suzuki 1996: 41).
character, however, in Sibley’s opinion, does not coincide with the real-life Shiga but is a self-conscious narrative shaping of his experience. Interestingly, like most Japanese scholars, Sibley too seems to have some difficulty in inserting Kurodiasu no nikki in his schema, as we will see.

In the context of the idea of Shiga as an exclusively ‘personal’ writer, a parody such as Kurodiasu no nikki constitutes a particularly interesting object of analysis, since it raises the issue of influence as well as escapes a biographical interpretation. In works like Sōsaku yodan, as we have seen, it is Shiga himself who seems to encourage a personal reading of his novels. Yet Shiga’s texts, revolving as they often do around the act of writing, remembering, and making sense of one’s own existence, also make the reader aware that any experience can be known only through narration. In this way, while inducing an autobiographical and thematic reading that seeks to reconstruct a coherent story of Shiga’s life, the texts also dramatize and problematize such causal narrativization.

Although on the one hand Shiga’s works have contributed to the formation of I-novel discourse, on the other they have also placed that discourse in a relative and critical perspective. This is particularly true, as we will see, in the case of Kurodiasu no nikki. But before analysing the text, it is necessary to provide a brief account of the reception of Shakespeare in Meiji Japan.

3. Shakespeare in Japan

In the preface to the second edition of The Anxiety of Influence, Harold Bloom explains that he has not mentioned Shakespeare in his study precisely because he is «the most influential of all authors during the last four centuries» (Bloom 1997: xiii), and thus he did not feel ready to meditate upon Shakespeare and originality. In this preface, which is mainly about Shakespeare’s influence, he agrees with Emerson in stating that Shakespeare «wrote the text of modern life», and also invented the «inner self».

Shakespeare’s influence on modern European literature, and on modern European thought as well, has been very strong indeed. His work has been widely translated, inside and outside Europe. While being a powerful example of Bloom’s idea of influence-anxiety, Shakespeare’s case has also been used by scholars of translation studies to explain the relation between translation and tradition, the idea that texts continue to exist because they are translated. In one of her many essays on translation, Susan Bassnett quotes Tolstoj as

7 «To say that Shakespeare and poetic influence are nearly identical is not very different from saying that Shakespeare is the Western literary canon. Some would argue that ‘aesthetic value’ is an invention of Kant’s, but pragmatically it is the aesthetic supremacy of Shakespeare that overdetermines our judgement of literary value» (Bloom 1997: xxviii). «The growing inner self, our incessant predicament, is more a Shakespearean than a Lutheran or Calvinist invention» (ibid.: xxxv; see also Bloom 1980; 1994).
saying that Shakespeare was, after all, primarily German, since his fame originated in Germany and subsequently came to England.  

Translation of a text in different languages often serves to secure the canonical status of those texts, selected for translation as representative of their home culture and also more broadly of ‘universal human values’. It can be argued that translation into foreign languages is one of the ways Shakespeare becomes ‘Shakespeare’, part of the world canon (or, as Bloom maintains, the world canon). Translation can therefore be a conservative instrument; yet translated texts can also have an innovative and even revolutionary impact on the target culture, when they are acted out as a strong reading of the source text. Translated literature can be a source of stylistic or linguistic innovation, and even an incentive for political change. The case of Shakespeare’s translation in Europe, with the interpretations it underwent and the different reactions it provoked, is a good example of the impact upon a literary system that translation can have and the power of translated texts to change and innovate.

In Japan, the reception of Shakespeare takes on a particular role within the process of modernization-westernization. According to Daniel Gallimore, a fundamental characteristic of Shakespeare’s reception in the Meiji period is its relation with the project of ‘internationalization’ of Japan. Gallimore defines internationalization as follows: «Rather than implying assimilation of Western norms, internationalization is here defined as the validation of identity through encounter with foreign phenomena such as Shakespeare. ... [It] asserts both alterity and similitude» (Gallimore 1999: 2). The reception of a canonical and powerful writer such as Shakespeare is a particularly interesting instance of the absorption of Western literature in Japan.

The reception of Shakespeare in Japan is usually divided into five phases (Niki 1984; Moriya 1986; Anzai et al. 1999). The first period, when Shakespeare is first introduced in the early Meiji period, consists mainly of free translations and adaptations, primarily intended for reading rather than for stage production.

The second phase coincides with the beginning of the massive enterprise by Tsubouchi Shōyō of translating Shakespeare’s *opera omnia*, and goes from

---

8 «Until the end of the 18th century Shakespeare not only failed to gain any special fame in England, but was valued less than his contemporary dramatists: Ben Jonson, Fletcher, Beaumont, and others. His fame originated in Germany, and thence was transferred to England» (Tolstoj 1906, quoted in Bassnett – Lefevere 1998: 59).

9 «Real multiculturalists, all over the globe, accept Shakespeare as the one indispensable author, different from all others in degree, and by so much that he becomes different in kind. Shakespeare, as I have argued at length elsewhere, quite simply not only is the western canon; he is also the world canon» (Bloom 1997: xv).

10 «The Shakespeare who found its way into German, Russian, Polish, Italian, French or Czech was essentially seen as a political writer, whose texts raised crucial issues concerning power structures, the rights of the common people, definitions of good and bad government and the relationship of the individual to the State» (Bassnett – Lefevere 1998: 59).
about 1900 until 1911, the year of the first full representation of a translated Shakespearean play, *Hamlet*. In the third phase, which starts in the Taisho period (1912-1926) and continues through 1955, the theatrical interest in Japan shifts to modern dramatists such as Ibsen and Čekov. Shakespeare continues to be translated although almost only for reading.

The fourth phase begins with the new translations by Fukuda Tsuneari, associated with the Underground Theatre movement. Shakespeare is once again used as an instrument for modernizing the Japanese theatrical tradition. The fifth phase, starting in the 1970s, coincides with the work of Odajima Yushi, the only Japanese after Tsubouchi to have translated Shakespeare’s complete works. I will analyse here only the first and second phase.

The first quotation of a Shakespearean line, interestingly, is in Nakamura Keiu’s translation of Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help, Saikoku risshi hen*, published in 1871. This is one of the first translations of a Western work of literature and is written with a specifically didactic intent, to provide Japanese people with examples of Western thought in a narrative form.11 The quotation comes from *Hamlet*, and it is Polonius’s advice to Laertes before he leaves for France, «Neither a borrower nor a lender be...».12 The first translation of an entire play is *Julius Caesar*, translated by Tsubouchi Shōyō in 1884. According to Anzai Tetsuo (1999: 3) this is «a rather free version in the style of bunraku... with the flamboyant title *The Strange Story of Caesar: the Renowned Sharpness of the Blade of Liberty*» (Shizaru kidan: jigū no tachi nagori no kireaji).

Another interesting instance is Kawakami Otojirō’s adaptation of *Othello*, in 1886, where Cyprus is ‘translated’ into Formosa and Othello becomes a shin-heimin, a «new commoner», that is a man of the inferior classes of the old Tokugawa regime who has become rich under the Meiji state. Generally speaking, this period is characterized by very free adaptations. The first attempts at accurate translations were those of Tsubouchi Shōyō.

Niki Hisae (1984: 13-14) traces Tsubouchi Shōyō’s decision to translate Shakespeare’s works to a famous episode of his university days. As a student of English literature under the guide of professor Houghton at the Imperial University of Tōkyō, Tsubouchi was asked to write an analysis of the character of Gertrude in *Hamlet*. He came up with an essay centred on the Confucian notions of sin and punishment, and he got a bad mark. He then realized that one could not interpret Western literature through Japanese canons, and de-

---

11 According to Keene (1984: 17), «This translation, known in Japanese as Saikoku risshi hen (Success stories of the West), enjoyed enormous popularity among Japanese who were eager to help themselves to the benefits of the new civilization and were convinced that unless they were familiar with the contents of the book they would never become leaders of the new regime... In the preface Nakamura insisted that the Western nations were strong chiefly because they possessed the spirit of liberty».

12 «Neither a borrower nor a lender be / For loan oft loses both itself and friend / And borrowing dulleth edge of husbandry» (*Hamlet*, act I, scene 3, 75-77).
cided to dedicate himself to 'truly' understanding Shakespeare’s works.\textsuperscript{13} While his first translations of Shakespeare (like the above quoted \textit{Shizaru kidan}) were still very free, starting with \textit{Macbeth (Makubesu)} in 1891, his translations became closer to the original, keeping the titles and names of characters and trying to convey the specifically Western aspects of the plays. Tsubouchi’s main goal in translating Shakespeare was to revitalize the Japanese theatre. In this sense, his work of translation has a point in common with his theory of the novel as expressed in \textit{Shôsetsu shinzui}.

In \textit{The essence of the novel} Tsubouchi argued that Japan, while actively reforming its political and economic systems, neglected education and culture: consequently, he strongly advocated that Japan reform its literature as well, taking from Western literature the realism, unity and seriousness of purpose it lacked. In an essay on the art of theatre, \textit{Shingakugekiron} («A theory of the new musical theatre»; Tsubouchi 1904), he similarly argued that the purpose of drama was to deal seriously with the moral laws governing human life, and that in order to do so it had to adopt a realistic characterization. This too was to be obtained by learning from the achievements of Western drama. He seemed to find a particularly suitable model in Shakespeare, since in his opinion Shakespeare and the Japanese theatre, especially \textit{kabuki} and \textit{ bunraku}, had many characteristics in common. Therefore the style of his translations was intentionally modelled on the language of \textit{kabuki} and \textit{ bunraku} plays. In Anzai Tetsuo’s opinion (1999: 5), Shôyô’s endeavours typically illustrate the spirit of the Meiji era: \textit{wakon yôsai}, that is, combining Western technique and Japanese spirit.

Interestingly, the representation that so displeased Shiga as to almost compel him to write his version of \textit{Hamlet} was the very first full representation of a Shakespeare play, in Tsubouchi’s translation, and seems to have had a very strong influence on subsequent representations of Shakespeare in Japan. \textit{Hamlet} was first performed at Tôkyô Imperial Theatre on May 20th 1911, by the association Bungei Kyôkai (the Literary and Art Association, founded by Tsubouchi himself in 1906 and devoted to the translation and representation of Shakespeare). According to Anzai (\textit{ibidem}), this was «the very first performance of a Shakespeare play given in faithful translation in contrast to adaptation; and it was also the production which formed the watershed between the period of adaptation and the second period of translation».

The production was a great success and particularly Doi Shunshô in the role of Hamlet was said to have been «superb» (Toyoda 1940: 157). It is therefore remarkable that Shiga should have found his interpretation so distasteful. One reason could be precisely that it was too faithful, too westernized, that he had, so to speak, too much Western technique and not enough Japanese spirit. According to Niki (1984: 20), Doi Shunshô, who had studied in the United

\textsuperscript{13} The episode is also quoted by Keene (1984: 142-43).
States and adopted a Western style of acting, «was more or less free from widespread Kabuki influence... he could speak Hamlet’s lines with a remarkable degree of elocutionary ability, which was beyond the reach of ordinary Japanese actors of the day... Doi seems to have understood the inner meaning of his role».

After seeing the play, Shiga reports in his diary that he proceeded to read Tsubouchi’s translation, and Sasaki Atsuko (1989: 145) argues that Kurodiasu no nikki can be said to parody Tsubouchi’s text rather than Shakespeare’s original, which Shiga had probably not even read. It would be particularly interesting to analyse Kurodiasu no nikki in relation to Tsubouchi’s work. David Rycroft (1999: 192-93) asserts that «there were formidable difficulties facing the early Japanese translators», since «numerous words encountered... had no equivalent at all in Japanese. Other simple words such as ‘desk’ or ‘door’ referred to quite different objects in the West... abstract concepts posed even greater problems».

This is particularly true in the case of Shakespeare, with his subtle and ironic use of language. Tsubouchi’s solution is fascinating: he chooses to exploit a peculiar characteristic of Japanese language, namely the use of a mixed writing system involving kanji (Chinese characters) and hiragana (a Japanese phonetic syllabary) and adopts a particular use of the furigana (hiragana glosses to kanji), common especially in that period, when for instance many newly-coined translations of foreign words were glossed by the correspondent foreign word. According to Rycroft (ibid.: 198),

The glosses frequently indicate that the kanji characters are not to be read in the expected way, and occasionally give a reading with which the character or combination of characters he selected cannot be read at all. This traditional practice gives a richness and subtlety to the eye as multiple shades of meaning can be communicated and co-exist in the mind of the reader.

Tsubouchi’s translation and the Bungei Kyōkai’s production of Hamlet are therefore inherently pervaded by the dialectic between Japanese tradition and Western ‘modernity’ typical of the Meiji period. Shiga’s parody duplicates this dialectic, recuperating and transforming it, while foregrounding the process itself.

4. Kurodiasu no nikki

As we have seen, Shiga is considered one of the main authors of the watakushi-shōsetsu. His work is therefore analysed in a biographical way by al-

---

14 According to Niki (1984: 22), «The production of Hamlet revealed the limits of his (Tsubouchi’s) aesthetic duality: aiming to Western realism while unconsciously being committed to Japanese dramatic tradition». While I would not be so sure that Tsubouchi’s dedication to Japanese tradition was ‘unconscious’, the ambivalence of his operation is indisputable.
most all critics, and his books are seen as a reflection of his real experiences. The central theme of his works is often found in the father-son relationship, read as an expression of Shiga’s conflict with his real-life father. In this perspective, Kurodiasu no nikki is atypical in Shiga’s production in two respects: it is his only explicit parody of a Western work, and it is almost the only story in which the main character is not in the role of the ‘son’ within a father-son relationship. This is probably the reason why most critics find it difficult to place it along Shiga’s other works. Honda Shugo (1990: 71) goes so far as to assert that it is «a shōsetsu whose motive I never understood. At least, I have never been able to understand what Shiga wanted to write through this novel». He tries to relate it to Shiga’s personal crisis at the moment of writing it, and therefore to interpret it as another expression of Shiga’s inner conflicts. Sudō Matsuo (1963: 97) interprets the character of Claudius in Kurodiasu no nikki as a manifestation of Shiga’s personality; in his opinion, although Shiga declares that at the basis of Kurodiasu lies the realization that there were no proofs of Claudius’s murder, his real motive for writing it was more likely to be his new vision of human nature, on which he was reflecting in those years. William Sibley (1979: 77), too, seems unable to place this text within his ‘Shiga hero’ narrative, and argues that Kurodiasu no nikki, along with Aru otoko, sono ane no shi («A man and the death of his sister») – another work in which the narrator is not the son, but his elder brother –, «would appear to represent a half-hearted effort to examine the other side of the story for once». The critics’ perplexities about this text arise from its peculiar position within Shiga’s oeuvre. Thus, it can be a particularly good instrument in undermining the myth of Shiga as an exclusively personal writer. I will therefore analyse it both in its relation to Shakespeare’s Hamlet in Shōyō’s translation and in relation to Shiga’s other works.

Shiga seems to have been particularly fond of his interpretation of Hamlet. In his diary on March 9th 1912 he writes: «Let my Claudius be widely read, and the tragedy of Hamlet will turn out to be absolutely pointless. The audience would no longer take it seriously»,15 (Shiga 1973: X, 557). In some ways, Kurodiasu no nikki is a very strong reading of Shakespeare’s story, questioning as it does the fundamental assumption of Claudius’ culpability.16 Yet in many ways it is very much influenced by the original text, and it also contributes to preserve and perpetuate Hamlet’s role as ‘classic’.

One interesting point is that, throughout the text, Hamlet’s name is never mentioned. The short story being titled The diary of Claudius, the reader is

15 It is worth noting here that this diary entry follows directly the above quotes about finding his true self and coming to truly love himself ‘against’ his reading of Rousseau (March 7th and 8th 1912).

16 As Mathy (1974: 121) and Sasaki (1989: 149) note, Shiga does not take into any account the confession of Shakespeare’s Claudius (act III, scene 3).
somehow supposed to know by himself that the ‘him’ (kare) or ‘you’ (kisama) to whom Claudius refers correspond to the character of Hamlet, but this is never explicitly stated by the text. The only unequivocal reference is in a brief postscript in which the author warns the reader that «the diary ends here, but the fate of the characters does not necessarily correspond to that of Shakespeare’s Hamlet». The reader is thus required to infer that the text is referring to Shakespeare’s play, and in this way the idea of Hamlet as a classic, as something that everybody must have read and must be able to recognize, is reinforced. Shiga’s text both subverts and reinstates the original’s authority.17

Furthermore, as Sasaki Atsuko (1989) notes, the text heavily relies on Shōyō’s translation for its language and style. Sasaki quotes many instances of sentences passing directly from one text to the other. One particularly interesting instance is the 8th day of Claudius’s diary, corresponding to Hamlet’s act III, scene 4, that is, the play-within-the-play scene. In his diary, Claudius accuses Hamlet’s suspicions of being «nothing more than fantasies black as Vulcan’s furnace» (kisama no kangae wa masashiku Vulcan no kanashiki hodo ni mo musakurushii sōzōni suginai no da!; Shiga 1973: I, 13).

According to Sasaki (1989: 146), the fact that Claudius uses the word masashiku («clearly, obviously, exactly»), makes his words sound like a reported sentence. Curiously enough, he is in fact reporting Hamlet’s words to Horatio in Tsubouchi’s translation of the play: wareware no sōzō wa Vulcan no kanashiki hodo ni mo musakurushii wai («our imaginations are foul as Vulcan’s furnace»; Hamlet, act III, scene 2, 93-4). It looks like Shiga’s Claudius has heard Hamlet’s words and is reporting them: his masashiku thus acquires the meaning of «as you (Hamlet) said». But this is diegetically impossible, since Claudius was not present during this conversation and could not possibly have heard it, if Shiga’s text is «not to be at odds with Shakespeare’s play». Sasaki (ibidem) contends that perhaps Shiga, supposing the reader already knew Shōyō’s translation, was trying to convey the idea that Claudius can read Hamlet’s mind, and therefore is able to repeat Hamlet’s exact words. Yet this effect relies upon the reader not only having read but also remembering very well Shōyō’s text: it could then be argued to have the same function as not mentioning Hamlet’s name, of reinforcing the original texts’ authority. In this regard it is worth mentioning Ueda Makoto’s opinion (1976: 103) that Shiga «believed that an artist whose creative energy was at all powerful did not stoop to make his audience’s understanding easy; on the contrary, it was his audience that should make a positive effort to understand his works». I would venture to say that, at least in this case, Shiga’s decision has deeper ideological implications than simply requesting the reader to ‘come to the text’ and

17 This effect is further strengthened by some critics, like Sasaki (1989: 143), who begins her article about Kurodiasu no nikki by stating that «this is, no need to say it, a parody of Shakespeare’s Hamlet» (my italics).
make an interpretive effort: in its implicit assumption that the reader must have read *Hamlet* to understand his Claudius, Shiga helps reinforce an authoritative image of Shakespeare’s play as something that everybody is supposed to have read.

On the other hand, however, Shiga’s text is undeniably a strong reading, modifying Shakespeare’s text in some significant aspects. First of all, it narrates the story from the point of view of Claudius, the play’s villain. This is especially interesting in a play such as *Hamlet*, in which, by way of his numerous monologues, Hamlet becomes the indisputable protagonist of the play. Shiga’s operation of giving voice to Claudius’s position, then, becomes particularly significant.

The other major departure from the original text is the shift of genre, from theatre to prose, and more specifically to a diary: a genre by definition very personal and involving a definite and limited point of view.\(^{18}\) A diary is also much less direct a text than a play. The indirectness is increased in this case by the fact that the narrator is a minor character in the play, absent from many major scenes that in the *Diary* have to be related to him by other characters such as Gertrude or Polonius. In this way the text underlines the mechanisms of intertextuality. The theme of the theatre is also preserved in *Kurodiasu no nikki* as text-within-the-text, emphasizing its intertextuality and touching upon the relation between original and copy.

Shiga’s text in various ways problematizes the relation between his text and Shakespeare’s play, and, more broadly, foregrounds the process of transformation of Japanese literature through importing Western literature. He achieves this mainly by introducing texts within the text, which probe into the relationship between fiction and reality, between identity and narration, and between influence and imagination. The two main metatexts present in this work are a play and a dream. Both are presented in a very problematic way.

The play is, of course, *The Murder of Gonzago*, by means of which Hamlet tries to induce Claudius to betray his guilt. It is interesting to note that after the play Claudius in his diary shifts from speaking of «myself» (jibun) and «he» (kare) to «I» (ore) and «you» (kisama). On seeing the play, he seems to be overcome by Hamlet’s ‘theatricality’ and starts to speak himself in a theatrical style, shaping his diary as a play. This is one of many instances in the text in which Claudius is ‘influenced’ by Hamlet’s vision and way of thought. In fact, the whole diary could be read as the story of the gradual growing of

---

\(^{18}\) On this point it is interesting to note what Izubuchi Hiroshi (1995: 202) has to say on the Japanese adaptations of Hamlet: «it is striking that they mostly take the form of novels and short stories. Even when the work takes the form of a drama, the author claims that it is to be read as a novel. This may mean that the novel is the dominant literary genre for Japanese readers. But at the same time, it shows that Japanese readers have become accustomed to the meditative and romantic Hamlet of the nineteenth century, and that such a Hamlet fits well into the novel form — or at least into the form of the Japanese I-novels.»
Hamlet’s influence over Claudius’s mind, until he reaches the point where he no longer is sure whether he killed his brother or not; such power has Hamlet’s story on him.

Through Hamlet’s influence over Claudius the text highlights the mechanisms of influence themselves, and it almost always does it in relation to literature. Apart from the theatre scene, there are numerous references to literature and theatre in the text. Claudius first refers to theatre in relation to Hamlet’s possible madness, when reporting Polonius’s description of a scene between Hamlet and Ophelia (related to Polonius himself by Ophelia: undoubtedly a high degree of indirectness). In his diary Claudius writes that «the old man described all this with theatrical gestures, as if he had been present himself, and offered it as exclusive proof that the prince has been driven mad by love» (Shiga 1973: I, 3). Yet at this stage Claudius is still defending Hamlet, and sees Hamlet’s theatricality as a justification of his behaviour. He comments to himself that Polonius’s fears are exaggerated, and that «the prince has more of a tendency to melodrama [shibaike no tsuyoi otoko, lit. «a man with a strong theatrical spirit»] than the old man, and whatever did happen was perhaps only a display of his» (ibid.: I, 8).

But after seeing The Murder of Gonzago, he becomes sharper and accuses Hamlet of being a second-rate dramatist (anchokuna doramatisuto) and of being over-influenced by «the devil of cheap literature» (anchokuna bungaku no akuma):

Kisama hodo ni anchokuna doramatisuto wa sekajji ni nai... Sono sōzō wa kisama no anchokuna bungaku to iu akuma kara moratta ni suginai. Sore o kisama wa utagattemita koto ga nai no ka? Kisama hodo ni shibaike no tsuyoi yatsu wa nai.

In the entire world there is no cheap dramatist as you... This imagination comes from nothing more than the devil of second-rate literature. Have you ever even tried to doubt it? There is no more melodramatic person than you (ibid.: I, 13-14).

What Claudius fears most in Hamlet’s theatricality is his ability to involve others in his play. He feels drawn into Hamlet’s narrative although he tries to resist it: «That wouldn’t be so bad if you acted it out all by yourself. But you are trying to force me to play the role of the villain – a role that has nothing to do with me» (ibid.: I, 14).

Claudius contends that Hamlet is swayed by literature, yet he admits himself the power of literary imagination. When watching the play, Claudius realizes that it is a staging of the possibility that he killed his brother, and even though he knows he has not done it, he feels overcome by the power of representation and begins to doubt his own innocence. On this occasion, too, he refers to literature as a driving force: «all the cheap literature [anchokuna bungaku] that lies hidden somewhere in my heart committed treachery against the former king, my brother» (ibid.: I, 15).

In Claudius’s opinion, it is his bookishness, more than the vision of the
ghost, the reality of which is questioned by Shiga’s text, that draws Hamlet into believing Claudius has murdered his father. Claudius, in turn, is influenced by Hamlet’s imagination as well as by his own readings and begins to have doubts about his own deeds. Claudius’ weakness is his very openness and receptivity. As he says, «unfortunately, my mind cannot help but continue to be aware of these emotional traps of yours – and I keep falling into them» (ibidem).

Another instance of this confusion between imagination and reality is the scene of the dream. In his diary Claudius remembers a scene of some months before, when his brother was still alive; it is the only point in which the text departs significantly from Shakespeare’s inventing a totally new episode. One night, Claudius hears his brother moaning in his sleep and imagines that the King is dreaming of being strangled by him, Claudius. He is terribly frightened by this thought:


I soon realized that he was having a nightmare. He was moaning in a ghastly way, as if he were being strangled. I myself began to feel uneasy. Thinking to rouse him, I had risen half out of my bed when suddenly, inexplicably, a strange idea floated into my head, surprising even me: it was me who was strangling my brother in his dream... How savage I looked! What an atrocious thing I had done! (ibid.: 1, 21).

Claudius is somehow drawn into his brother’s dream and begins to think he really has murdered him. On this occasion, too, the relation between reality and imagination is problematized. The dream could be interpreted as another instance of the power of other people’s imagination on Claudius’s own mind. In Kurodiasu no nikki imaginary stories, like Hamlet’s play and the King’s dream, seem to have the power to create reality, or at least to heavily influence it.

All these references could be interpreted as a metaphor of the ‘anxiety of influence’ – Shiga’s towards Shakespeare, and Japan’s towards Western literature. Indeed, influence and its relation to individuality are two of the main themes of Kurodiasu no nikki, as well as of other among Shiga’s works.

5. Identity, Individuality, Responsibility: Kurodiasu no nikki and Han no hanzai, Ōtsu Junkichi, Wakai, An’ya kōrō

Throughout the diary, Claudius repeatedly describes himself as an easily influenced person. At the same time, he asserts on many occasions that he is absolutely certain of the rightness of his actions. He is almost neurotically divided between this self-assuredness and the need for other people’s – particu-
larly Hamlet’s – sympathy (dōjō). He is also forever asserting his ability to sympathize with other people’s feelings, to understand other people’s standpoint. The themes of sympathy, influence and shame are almost always connected.

For instance, on the first day of his diary the narrator writes: «I realize that there are people who disapprove of my feelings. Not only do I realize this, but I can also sympathize with them. Besides, he himself is the first among those people... Not only, but he seems to disapprove of me in some way. I can sympathize with that also» (ibid.: I, 3). On the second day, he begins by declaring: «I do not feel at all ashamed of what I’ve done», and then, a few lines later, he explains that nonetheless he is upset by other people’s bad opinion of him, because «there are few people whose mood is more governed by external circumstances than mine» (ibid.: I, 4).

As the diary goes on, Claudius is led by Hamlet’s suspicions to feel guilty about his scarce mourning of his brother, and feels the need to justify it:

Jibun ga ani no shi o kokoro kara kanashimenakatta to iu no wa sore wa mushiro shizen na koto de wa nai ka. Shizen da to iu no ga rippa na jasutifikēshon de aru. Jibun dake nara rippa na jasutifikēshon ni natte iro no da.

Isn’t it natural that I couldn’t mourn my brother’s death from the bottom of my heart? To say that it is natural is a perfect justification. At least for me, it is a perfect justifica-
tion (ibid.: I, 19).\footnote{One interesting point is that here Shiga uses the English word ‘justification’, transliterated in \textit{katakana}, instead of the Japanese \textit{seitōka}. The word was probably created in the Meiji period, along with many others, to express this Western concept for which there was no equivalent in Japanese.}

The issue of guilt is related to that of ‘natural instinct’, an issue very fre-
quently addressed by Shiga’s stories. ‘Natural instincts’ that cannot be re-
pressed are a typical characteristic of Shiga’s protagonists. According to Si-
bley (1979: 78), «it remains a cardinal principle of the Shiga hero’s private
morality that his strongest instincts cannot and should not be denied»; «the
Shiga hero finally places full trust only in the dictates of his innermost urges,
disregarding all other sources of moral direction» (ibid.: 53).

Yet this particular ‘Shiga hero’ seems so concerned with justifying his
deeds that the reader is led to doubt whether all his \textit{excusationes non petita}
can be read as admissions of guilt. In fact, they seem more of a sign of an at-
tempt to question the very idea of individual responsibility, relying as it does
on the concept of individual subject. When one does not take for granted the
notion of individual subject, one is naturally led to question the notion of re-
sponsibility too.

According to Sudō Matsuo (1963: 94), Claudius tries to justify his love
for the Queen on the sole ground of the inevitability of his emotions. Sudō ar-
gules that Claudius’s doubts are the sign that his faith in nature as the very root
and support of the self are beginning to vacillate, and that this is the mirror of Shiga’s own doubts at the period of the composition (ibid.: 96). Yet one could also argue that his is not a passage from certainty to doubt, but rather an attempt to highlight a structural contradiction of the notion of the individual self.

When reflecting upon his feelings of guilt, induced by Hamlet’s suspicions, Claudius realizes the limits of the idea of individual freedom:

_jibun wa jibun no kokoro no jiyū o hitori tanoshimu koto ga yoku aru. Mata dōjini sore ga tame ni kurushimaeru koto mo aru no da. Sono imi de wa jibun ni totte jibun no kokoro hodo ni fujiiyina mono wa nai no de aru. Jissai ima no jibun ni wa, jibun o korosō to kangaete i ru kare yorimo, dōnimono naranai jishin no jiyū na kokoro no hō ga osoroshii... Jibun wa katsute ichido demo an i korosō to omotta koto wa nai... Shikashi shizen ni futo ukabu kangaewa, sore wa dō suru koto mo nai no dewa nai ka._

I often enjoy the lonely freedom of my heart. Yet at the same time I suffer from it. In that sense, for me there is nothing less free than my heart. At this very moment, more than Hamlet’s desire to kill me, I fear my own unstable free heart... Nevertheless I have never once thought of killing my brother... But isn’t it true that one cannot do anything about an idea that arises naturally and spontaneously within him? (Shiga 1973: I, 20).

The issue of influence is strictly connected to that of individual will, freedom and moral responsibility, a theme that appears in many of Shiga’s stories. This relation between identity, individuality, and responsibility is best understood when Kurodasu no nikki is compared with another short story, written at about the same period: Han no hanzai («Hamlet’s crime»; ibid.: I, 73-91).

_Han no hanzai_ is the story of a Chinese juggler who kills his wife while throwing knives at her during a circus number. The story is structured as a police enquiry, with a judge interrogating first some witnesses and then Han himself. The witnesses, the owner-manager of the circus and a stagehand, cannot say whether Han killed his wife on purpose or by accident. They declare that they knew things weren’t going well between the two, but they cannot be sure this could be a sufficient reason for thinking of the episode as murder. The interesting thing is, when Han is finally questioned, he himself

---

20 Shakespeare’s Claudius, too, reflects on the issue of freedom: «Try what repentance can. What can it not? / Yet what can it when one cannot repent? / O, wretched state! O, bosom black as death! / O limed soul, that struggling to be free / Art more engaged!» (Hamlet III, 3, 65-8); yet his monologue is more of a straight admission of guilt than anything else, whereas Shiga’s Claudius seems more deeply concerned with the contradictions of the human heart.

21 It is interesting to note that the error of a knife juggler is used as a case study in some Italian criminal law texts as a comment to art. 43 of the Italian Criminal Code, which refers to the psychological element in a crime (see for example Mantovani 1992: par. 98). In synthesis, in the modern Western criminal law a judgement of guilt presupposes an evaluation of the psychological relation between the action and its author, to effect which the main criterion of subjective imputation is the scienter (dolo). This is composed by prevision of the fact and will to act it out. The Italian criminal law has elaborated the concept of indirect scienter (dolo
is not able to say whether he killed his wife on purpose or not. He explains to the judge that he had had a fight with his wife and in fact the night before, unable to sleep and tormented by all sorts of gloomy thoughts, he had conceived of killing her. In the morning he realized how insane this thought was and put it aside, but while throwing knives at her became more and more nervous, until at last he missed the target and hit her throat. Since he had thought about killing her, he at first feels he has done it intentionally, but in the end he himself has to admit he doesn’t know where the truth lies, and feels liberated by this very realization.

A doubt rose up in me as to whether I myself believed it a murder. The night before, I had thought about killing her, but was that alone a reason for deciding, myself, that it was murder? Gradually, despite myself, I became unsure... I could no longer assert that it was an accident, nor, on the other hand, could I say that it was a deliberate act. I was so happy because come what may it was no longer a question of confession of guilt (Shiga 1973: I, 90; 1992: 55-56).

In a case like this it is not easy to determine the responsibility of the individual, and Han himself, who is supposed to know his own thoughts better than anyone else, is not able to say whether he is guilty or not. Han no hanzai questions the belief in a fixed identity of the subject as the origin of its actions. Shiga in this way underlines the complexity of the self, which is not the unified and linear entity that Western tradition would have.22

Kudriasu no nikki could be read as a similar operation: by moving the question of Claudius’s murder of his brother into Claudius’s interiority, Shiga renders it more complex rather than clarifying it. Rather than demonstrating Claudius’ innocence, the text questions the idea of guilt and stresses the complexity of the relation between identity and individual responsibility. Shiga confronts these concepts, imported from the West, not by passively assimilat-

eventuale), which indicates the psychological attitude of him who presupposes the concrete possibility of the realization of a crime and accepts the risk of it. According to the law, his accepting the risk amounts to wilfully committing the crime. In his story Shiga touches upon a very delicate point in this conceptual instrument. Usually a knife juggler contemplates the abstract possibility of an error but, counting on his ability, he is sure not to make a mistake, and thus he does not accept the risk of a killing. Lacking any will/intention, there is no scienter; still the knifer would be held liable for manslaughter. Otherwise, the killing might be ascribed to him as his own intentional action, only if enough evidence of an actual acceptance of the risk is gathered. While it is likely that Shiga was ignorant of the debate in the Western world about the issue, it is interesting to see how he touches upon a point that highlights the ambiguities of the modern Western concept of crime and its relation to the modern Western concept of the individual, a point that is subject to discussion even in the West.

22 We find another example of this problem in the short story Nigotta atama («A blurred mind»; Shiga 1973: I, 201-50), where the protagonist awakes one morning to find his clothes soaked in blood and his memory of the previous night almost blank, and gradually concludes he must have killed his lover.
ing them but by reacting to them in a critical way and highlighting their problematic points.

*Kurodiasu no nikki* is also unique in its relationship to the conflict between father and son, one of the major themes of Shiga’s works. This conflict has usually been read as a faithful transposition of Shiga’s hostility towards his real father, which he tried to solve through his writings and which provided the main source of his creative activity. Yet one could also try to reverse this perspective. The father-son conflict’s relation with narrative appears very often in Shiga’s texts and it is never a very straightforward one.

One of the first texts to address the issue is Ōtsu Junkichi (Id. 1973: I, 237-319), whose composition is almost contemporary with that of *Kurodiasu no nikki*. The protagonist, Ōtsu Junkichi, is very much influenced by his readings in Western literature, particularly by Turgenev and Tolstoj. According to Suzuki (1996: 106), «the most powerful of these literary narratives, which the young Junkichi both unconsciously and willingly yields himself to, is the Western romantic opposition between the genuine impulse of love or nature and ‘social and ideological constraints’». Junkichi internalizes these narratives and tries to enact them in his relation with Chiyo, a housemaid, which is opposed by his father. By relating the source of the conflict to Junkichi’s interiorization of a Romantic ideal of love through his reading of Russian novelists, the story foregrounds the relation between literature and identity.

The text where this aspect most conspicuously emerges is probably *Wakai* («Reconciliation»; Shiga 1973: I, 323-419). This short story makes an explicit theme of the narrativization of experience and its influence on the individual. The protagonist, a writer, tries to write a novel in which he represents his conflict with his father in order to resolve it. In a pivotal scene, he tries to imagine a finale for his book and is unable to decide if the father is to kill the son or vice versa:

By explicitly writing those events down, I hoped to prevent them from actually taking place. I believed that we could avoid acting out what had happened in my fiction... I planned to create either a scene in which the father kills the young man or a scene in which the young man kills his father. All of a sudden, however, I imagined the father and the son, at the height of the confrontation, embracing each other and bursting into tears. I had never dreamed of such a scene. My eyes dimmed with tears... I continued to imagine that the scene that I imagined so spontaneously and so naturally was not far from what could happen one day between my father and me (*ibid.*: I, 366-68).

From that moment, the narrator stops writing and tries to get reconciled with his father instead; in the end he gives up writing his novel-within-the-novel. Undeniably, this is far from the supposed ‘immediacy’ of the I-novel.

---

23 According to Sibley (1979: 24), «the theme of fathers and sons – properly speaking, several distinct fathers and one more or less constant son – does indeed bulk large in Shiga’s fiction, contributing a good deal to the tenuous unity linking many of his works together». 
Furthermore, the narrator's spontaneity and naturalness are achieved through writing a work of fiction. Rather than being close to extratextual reality, the text emphasizes the textuality of that reality, and the complex relation between diegetic and extradiegetic worlds, between narrative and subjectivity.

The last text of the father-son saga is *An'ya kōrō*, Shiga's only long novel (*ibid.*: V, 1-580). This text, too, has a particular connection with *Kurodisasu no Nikki*. Many years after writing the diary of Claudius, having seen the movie *Hamlet* by Forbes Robertson, Shiga tried to write a «diary of Hamlet» (Ando 1993: 357-59). This was never completed, but some parts of it were later utilized in writing *An'ya kōrō*. One episode in particular is relevant here, since it revolves around the father-son relationship. It is a scene of wrestling, emblematic of the unhappy relationship between the young Hamlet and his uncle, which has been transplanted to *An'ya kōrō* as an episode in Tokitō Kensaku's childhood, the antagonist becoming his father. The two scenes are strikingly similar. In the first, Hamlet is still a child and tries to wrestle with his uncle. While other adults usually let him win, Claudius does not yield to him and in the end ties him up and leaves him like that on the floor. The child stays there; he becomes more and more enraged and feels hatred for his uncle welling up in him, until at last he bursts into tears. Hearing Hamlet crying, Claudius is surprised; he unites him, laughing and commenting lightly that all he had to do was ask to be untied (*ibid.*: IX, 475-82). The same happens between Kensaku and his father, and the scene marks the beginning of the protagonist's hate for his father (*ibid.*:V, 12-15).

**Conclusions**

The theme of Hamlet seems to have been especially relevant to Shiga's work. In view of Shiga's foregrounding of literature's influence on the individual, the father-son relationship acquires a new importance. According to Harold Bloom, the father-son relationship is one example of the anxiety of influence; interestingly, he relates this concept precisely to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, maintaining that the Oedipus complex is a manifestation of the anxiety of influence and not *vice versa*:

I never meant by 'the anxiety of influence' a Freudian Oedipal rivalry... A Shakespearean reading of Freud, which I favour over a Freudian reading of Shakespeare or of anyone else, reveals that Freud suffered from a Hamlet complex... or an anxiety of influence complex in regard to Shakespeare (Bloom 1997: xxii).

In Shiga's case, we could interpret his special interest in the father-son relationship not as yet another transposition of Shiga's conflict with his real-life father, but as a metaphor of his — and of Japan's — relation with Western influences.
When read in the framework of a father-son relation-based reading of Shiga’s work, Kurodiasu no nikki is atypical in many ways. Being a parody of a Western work, it is at least not totally autobiographical. Besides, it involves not a father-son relationship but an uncle-nephew one, and the protagonist-narrator is the uncle, not even the nephew. However, it has in common with the other works a preoccupation with the relation of identity, influence and narrative.

The insistence on the theme of fathers and sons is usually seen as a confirmation that Shiga is a paradigmatic I-novelist, only concerned with transposing his real experience into fiction with the utmost immediacy. Comparing Kurodiasu no nikki to Shiga’s other works suggests a different reading: it can be considered a means to expose narrativization as a basis of the construction of identity, and to highlight the role of the reception of Western narratives in the construction of modern Japanese literary identity, and even of modern Japanese identity as such.

Rebecca Suter
Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”
rebeccasuter@virgilio.it

REFERENCES

Agawa Hiroyuki (1955) Shiga Naoya no seikatsu to sakuhin. Tōkyō.

Itō Sei (1948) Shōsetsu no hōhō. Tōkyō.
Rewritings between East and West: Shiga Naoya’s Kurodiasu no nikki


— (1979) Shiga Naoya to shizen. Tōkyō.


Tsuchibuchi Shōyō (1904) Shingakugekiron. Tōkyō.


