

# Early encounters

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## Abstract

This essay discusses two early encounters of theater that took place in different parts of the world at approximately the same time: in the German-speaking countries in Europe and on the islands of Japan in Asia during the second half of the sixteenth century and the first decades of the seventeenth century. In both cases a particular kind of “national” theater emerged from these developments, which was able to embrace elements of highly diverse origins: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Weimar theater plays and devices from different European performance cultures, and Izumo no Okuni’s *kabuki* elements stemming from a range of genres, including the Christian mystery plays. These new forms, recognized as a national theater, came into existence by way of intercultural performances. Ultimately, what came into being out of an “intercultural” encounter was later deemed genuinely “intracultural.”

## KEYWORDS

German theater, interculturalism, Izumo no Okuni, Japanese theater, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, performance genre

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Theater as a cross-cultural encounter has a long history. It does not—as is frequently assumed—begin with the twentieth century, when realistic-psychological theater was introduced to Japan and China, and directors in several European countries experimented with devices taken from various Asian theater forms. Nor was it a result of colonialism. Rather, there are a number of earlier encounters that are often ignored or even negated. Yet theater

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historiography has to take into account these earlier processes of interweaving in order to contribute to as well as to scrutinize the current debate on ostensibly novel forms of interculturalism in theater.

In this essay, I shall discuss two such early encounters that took place in different parts of the world at approximately the same time: in the German-speaking countries in Europe and on the Japanese islands in Asia during the second half of the sixteenth century and the first decades of the seventeenth century. The German-speaking countries had since the 1560s witnessed the arrival of numerous traveling acting companies from the Italian lands, England, and France. They were the first professional acting companies in this part of Europe. In Japan, Jesuits introduced Christian mystery plays shortly after the arrival of the Portuguese (in 1543 or even 1539) and the first documented performances go back as early as to Christmas 1552.

In both cases, these activities ended rather abruptly. In 1618 the Thirty Years War broke out in Europe and in its aftermath the wandering acting companies had to find safe spaces in distant towns such as Königsberg or Warsaw. In Japan, the expulsion of the Jesuits was decreed in 1587. Even though many remained, they had to reduce their missionary activities. In 1596, 26 Christians were crucified, followed by a general persecution of Christians. In 1614 a complete ban on Christian teachings was issued. The climax of their persecution was reached in 1637–1638, resulting in a strict policy of isolating Japan from all foreigners, which ended only in 1853 when the U.S. Admiral Perry forced the opening of Yokohama harbor.

It therefore makes sense to restrict my analysis to the period mentioned above. In the case of the German-speaking countries, we have to consider performance genres from other European countries, while in Japan's case we shall deal with performance genres from neighboring countries such as the three kingdoms of Korea and China, but also, if not foremost, with the mystery plays introduced by the Jesuits.

## 2 | THE ARRIVAL OF ITALIAN AND ENGLISH COMPANIES IN THE GERMAN LANDS

Some of the first documented *commedia dell'arte* performances in the German lands were staged as part of the wedding of Crown Prince Wilhelm of Bavaria and Princess Renée of Lorraine, celebrated in Munich in 1568. Conceived by Orlando di Lasso, the performance consisted of comic interactions between Pantalone—played by Orlando di Lasso—and his servant Zanni (see Leuchtman, 1980). That same year, *commedia dell'arte* actors—presumably members of the already famous troupe of the Comici Gelosi—performed before the Emperor in Linz. At the latest by 1574, their troupe were staging regular performances at the imperial court in Vienna. The southern German states in particular witnessed a number of performances by Italian troupes in the first decades of the seventeenth century. In Prague, for instance, the Comici Fideli, headed by the famous Lelio player Giovanni Batista Andreini, was part of the court festivities held in honor of Ferdinand II and his wife, Eleonora of Mantua, in 1624. The *commedia* troupes were the first to have female parts played by women.

In the German countries, the *commedia dell'arte* troupes performed mostly, if not exclusively, at the courts. They were able to accommodate the specificities of each court that hosted them, and to adapt their material to the preferences of its spectators, on whose favor they depended. Since the performances mainly consisted of ready-made components, these could be adjusted depending on the situation at hand (see Hulfeld, 2018). It was therefore easy to follow the performance, even if some of the spectators might not have understood the Italian language.

Such performances were “intercultural” in the sense that their process largely relied on the responses of spectators hailing—in the majority—from a different culture than the Italian actors. The performance resulted from the encounter of the Italian performers and the German courtly spectators, whom they had to please. It came into being through the process of their encounter and not via a presentation of a fixed “product”—to which, as a matter of fact, the spectators could also respond, without, however, being able to exert any fundamental influence or even change it.

Since a performance always takes place as an encounter between two groups of people, the performers and the spectators, the latter inevitably leave their imprint on the performance—even if not on the *mise en scène* (in modern times). The question then arises whether a performance rooted in a particular performance culture could even be called “intercultural” when it takes place before an audience that is used to quite another performance culture—particularly in cases where the performers reorganize their performances with a view to the tastes, preferences, and level of knowledge of their spectators.

A rather different situation was created by the English companies. The first troupe that entered the continent was Lord Leicester’s Men. In 1585 they performed first in Denmark and then at the court in Dresden for 10 months. Among the troupe’s members was William Kempe, for whom Shakespeare had written a number of clown’s roles. In 1592, Lord Leicester’s Men were followed by the troupes of Robert Brown, John Bradstreet, Thomas Sackville, and Richard Jones. As documented in their passports, they intended to travel via the Netherlands to the German countries. One troupe followed the next until the outbreak of the Thirty Years War.

In the beginning, the English performers used their mother tongue on stage. However, there is evidence that already in 1605 they had switched to the German language. Following the order of their princely patrons such as Count Moritz of Hessen-Kassel (ruled 1592–1627) and Duke Heinrich Julius of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (ruled 1589–1613), they trained young courtiers as well as incorporating other German members into their troupes, mostly students and journeymen, while the head of the troupe remained an Englishman. The repertoire of the English troupes consisted of the most popular Elizabethan plays. Crowd-pulling plays included Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*, Christopher Marlowe’s *Faust* and *Jew of Malta* as well as William Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Julius Caesar*. They were adapted to create a focus on the scenes that the audiences enjoyed the most. These were English plays translated into German, tweaked and performed in a way that appealed to German audiences.

We could indeed call such performances “intercultural.” They presented English plays not only in German translation but also in a modified form that accommodated the preferences, interests, tastes, and emotions of the audiences. There are no documents informing us whether the success of the performances was due to their novelty and distinct “foreignness” which triggered a sense of wonder, surprise, and intimacy with a world heretofore unknown. All we have is an account by an English traveler, Fynes Moryson, who was present at a play still performed in English, which nonetheless enthused the German spectators: “[...] the Germans, not understanding a worde they sayde, both men and women flocked wonderfully to see their gestures and Actions” (Limon, 1985, 5). This appears to confirm the impression that the performances of the English players were received as a kind of “exotic” spectacle. It seems that this was due not just to the storylines but especially to the nuanced use of the voice, the unusual repertoire of gestures, and the employment of props. One actor “murmurs,” “shouts,” “speaks rather softly,” “cries,” “rebels and sings,” “sighs,” and “laughs”; another “shakes and trembles,” looks “angry” or “furious,” “nods at the ground,” “wretchedly gazes up at the sky,” “sits sorrowfully, head in his hands,” “walks, lost in thought,” “scratches his head,” “rubs his hands,” “tears open his vest,” and so on. Even bloody effects were popular: “[he] bumps his head into a wall, so that blood spills forth from under his hat, which can probably be arranged with the help of a pouch”; “Titus slits his throat, the blood is caught, then put to rest on the ground, dead” (Creizenach, 1967, XXXVIII ff.; Flemming, 1965, 35–41).<sup>1</sup> These impressions suggest the idea that the performances were received as something completely novel, unexpected, spectacular, and indeed exotic. The ways in which the actors of these English companies made use of their bodies caused the German spectators to gape and wonder—not unlike the performances of tightrope walkers, jugglers, and other acrobats.

An important figure mediating between the stage and the auditorium was the clown or jester—in particular during the first years when the English troupes still performed in English. A chronicle of the town of Münster features an interesting entry dated November 26, 1599: “They brought with them a fool, who would joke and jest in German when one act ended and while the others changed their costumes, in order to make the people laugh” (quoted in Schrickx, 1986, 331. Creizenach gives the year 1599, while Schrickx mentions 1601).

During the intervals, the clown was supposed to entertain the audience in German. Soon, however, he began to take over important parts in the play and his entry between the acts grew into veritable interludes. At times this even turned him into the main attraction. As a result, the wandering players usually mentioned the clown in their announcements. His German name was "Pickelhering." In 1627, Robert Reynold's troupe travelled under the name "bicklingshering compagnie."

Thomas Sackville himself took on the part of the clown when his troupe entered the German countries in 1592. In just a few years, he attained legendary fame under the name of "Jan Bouset" or just "Posset." Duke Heinrich Julius of Braunschweig, who had hired his troupe, began to write plays in which the comic figure of Jan played a prominent role. His name and his costume turned into something of a brand. In Marx Mangold's poem "Markschiffs Nachen" from the year 1597 he writes on Sackville's Jan:

The fool's name was Jan

His expertise was jesting

Even I acknowledge

That he was the master of this art.

He changes his guise in such a way

That he resembles no human being,

He is adept at foolish jokes,

His shoes don't pinch him at all,

A second person could fit inside his pants,

He wears a monstrous bib:

His outfit makes a fool of him,

He pays no heed to his jester's bauble

When he begins to eat his soup,

Yet deems himself a gentleman.<sup>2</sup> (quoted in Mentzel, 1982, 30)

The clown could don different names and costumes. Besides Jan Bouset, he appeared as Hans Knapkäse, Hans Supp, Hans Wurst, and others. From 1615 onwards, the name "Pickelhering" became more or less synonymous with the comic figure. In the eighteenth century, the figure of "Pickelhering" was commonly regarded as an "ur-German" phenomenon. His origins rooted in processes of interweaving were by then long forgotten.

However strange the stories that were performed might have been, however outrageous the acting, however marvelous the plot twists, in the end it was the figure of Pickelhering, whom the spectators related to directly and who allowed them to become familiar with the strange world on stage. He functioned as an intercultural mediator between the world of the play and the world of the spectators, while still allowing them to feel superior to him.

That is to say, the performances came about out of a process of negotiation, whereby the actors found out what impressed or pleased their audiences the most, and the spectators in turn contributed with their responses that were perceived by the actors and the other spectators. Since the actors were able to adjust their actions to these responses, the performance came into being out of the encounter between the English—or Italian—actors and the German spectators. In this sense, it originated as an intercultural performance.

### 3 | THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW FORMS FROM CHINA AND KOREA AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE JESUITS IN JAPAN

In Japan we find similar processes unfolding as early as during the Nara period (640–794 AD), when Korean and Chinese performing art forms were introduced to Japan. Performers from these regions were invited to the Nara court to teach young Japanese their art, while Japanese performers traveled to the courts of Silla and Tang to learn from the Korean and Chinese masters. The masked pantomime *gigaku* and the cosmic court dance and music *bugaku* evolved from these encounters:

According to The Chronicles of Japan Nihon shoki a.k.a Nihongi *gigaku* was introduced in 612 AD by Mimashi from the ancient Korean Kingdom Paekche, who taught in Nara. *Gigaku* was staged for the “eye-opening ceremony” of the Great Buddha in the Tōdaiji Temple in 752 AD and other, religious events. (Terauchi, 2016, 5)

Some *gigaku* pieces were comic or erotic, conceived with the intention of attracting people to the temples. In contrast, *bugaku* is a highly dignified dance accompanied by music. In the seventh century, dance and music were common in the three Korean kingdoms. In Japan, they were paired with Chinese and Vietnamese music. *Bugaku* is particularly interesting in this respect, since its pieces adhered to a three-section structure called *jo-ha-kyū*, which later became one of the leading concepts in *nō*: “*Jo* (prelude) is usually in free rhythm with a slow tempo, *ha* (breach) a metrical rhythm with moderate tempo, and *kyū* (quick) a metrical rhythm with rapid tempo” (p. 7).

As the concept *jo-ha-kyū* indicates, the structure and dramaturgy of the *bugaku* ceremony followed a system that highlights dichotomies, such as bright/dark, strong/weak, male/female, all grounded in the *yin/yang* principle:

A Chinese-music dancer appears from the left (east) side, dances in the center of the yard and exits, followed by a Korean-music dancer who mirrors the actions from the right side (west). This series of alternating dances continues for hours, interpreted as symbolizing the rotation of sun and moon, or day and night. While the two opposites never merge into one, their circulation brings balance to the universe. (Terauchi, 2016, 9)

According to Terauchi, *bugaku* was instituted as the *gagakuryō* in 701 AD and has received government support since then. Even today, some temples and shrines in Osaka and Nara present a number of *bugaku* dances performed by amateurs. As these examples show, Japanese culture at the time was quite open to “imports” from the neighboring Buddhist cultures. Over the decades, these new forms of “intercultural performances” were assimilated into and came to be regarded as Japanese cultural heritage.

In 1549 members of the Jesuit Order arrived in Kagoshima (Kyūshū Island) to convert the Japanese to Christianity. Unlike the situation in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Latin America, the missionaries in Japan could not rely on military invasion, conquest, and domination. They had to find new ways and means in order to achieve their goal of evangelization. That is to say, they had to adapt it to the Japanese culture—to the Japanese language and the people’s tastes and preferences. We know about their approach from the *litterae*

*annuae*, the annual letters, which the missionaries sent to the Order in Rome in order to keep it informed about the progress of the evangelization campaign. A collection of these letters was published in Evora, Portugal, in 1598.<sup>3</sup>

In his book *Die Entstehung des Kabuki* (The Genesis of *Kabuki*), which in our context is of the greatest importance, Thomas Leims quotes extensively from these letters with regard to the performances organized by the Jesuits from 1552 onwards. He also references other sources concerning the period from 1581 to 1611 and relates the performances to performance genres that were common in Japan at that time.<sup>4</sup> In my following remarks, I rely heavily on Leims's book.

The performances of sacred plays took place on the occasion of important Christian holidays, such as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. Similar to the mystery or sacred plays performed all over Europe in medieval times and partly still in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Japanese performances derived their stories from the Bible, featuring not only the events from the holy days—such as Jesus's birth and his life until his death and resurrection—but also stories of the Old Testament such as Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise, Sodom and Gomorrah, the captivity of the Children of Israel, and others.

However, the plays were not performed in Latin or a modern European language but in Japanese and using scenic devices that were invented by the Japanese Christians. One of the *Letters* (Funai, October 8, 1561) states:

Some twenty days before Christmas, the Priest spoke to two or three Christians and asked that they stage some sort of play on Christmas Eve, so that all might rejoice in the Lord; and speaking thus, he left them no direction as to what he wanted them to do, placing the matter instead in their hands. And so it was that when Christmas Eve came, they came up with a great many inventions based upon the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, with which they hoped to please the Lord. They first presented the fall of Adam and the hope of redemption, for which purpose they placed an apple tree with golden apples in the middle of the church, and showed Lucifer deceiving Eve beneath it. And this with motets sung in Japanese, and though it was indeed a festive day, there was neither great nor small who did not weep at the sight.

And after the fall of man an angel cast both of them from Paradise, which was also cause for much weeping and wailing. [...] And then there appeared an angel to comfort them and give them hope that in the end, both would be redeemed, whereupon both Adam and Eve departed singing, no longer with tears of grief but with happiness, and left the audience with much joy. (quoted in Rubiera, 2019, 217)

Not only is it remarkable that the priest allowed the Japanese Christians to choose what kind of a play to stage on the occasion of Christmas Eve and how to do it, but it is rather striking that even the motets were sung in Japanese so that the Japanese congregation could fully grasp what the motets were about, evoking a strong emotional effect in all present. The use of the Japanese language was the most important factor in letting the spectators receive the performance in the vein of *tua res agitur* (it concerns you), which was in fact the aim of sacred plays wherever they were performed.

The drive to accommodate Japanese culture went even further. As another letter suggests, it was generally up to the Japanese Christians to invent scenic devices. One letter describes the celebration of Easter in Funai in 1562:

On Easter Day, during the procession of the Resurrection, some of the events in the Holy Scriptures were presented, namely, the flight of the children of Israel out of Egypt. For this purpose, there was no lack of ingenious devices created to form a Red Sea in front of our church, which parted to allow the Israelites to pass and closed back in on itself when Pharaoh and his army tried to cross. (quoted in Rubiera, 2019, 218)

By allowing the Japanese devotees to stake their own claims in these performances, they had the possibility to perform in ways that not only suited them best in terms of affirming their belief that the Christian religion was compatible with their own culture, but these plays also proved to be highly attractive for non-believers.

It is often emphasized that in those years the Japanese were generally open to the new. On festive occasions, those who could afford it would pride themselves in dressing up in the European fashion and adopt from the foreigners whatever suited their own purposes. Since the Japanese converts were the ones responsible for the performances of the sacred plays, they staged them in ways that met the expectations of their compatriots regarding such an extraordinary event.

As Leims explains, the *fūryū* became a mass movement in the second half of the sixteenth century. It was a performance genre that combined dance, the exposition of magnificent objects or even mechanical curiosities with performances of sketches in the context of festivals, pageants, and processions. It was a genre that incorporated different elements, new and old (see Leims, 1997, 170).

What was common practice in the *fūryū* seems to also have been successfully applied to the performance of sacred plays. On the one hand, this meant the introduction of exciting new technical devices, such as the opening and closing of the Red Sea. On the other, the performances imbibed existing elements developed in other performance genres. In a letter by Father Melchior de Figueiredo sent from Bungo on September 27, 1567, we learn the following about the celebration of Christmas in 1566:

To this festival came many of the Christians from the surrounding villages with their wives and children. During the festival, always on the night of Christ's birth, we always stage a representation of several passages from the Scriptures in the middle of the church, using people to act out what took place. These passages are such as the fall of Adam, the sacrifice of Abraham, the story of Lot, and the great flood and Noah's ark, to which were added this year the story of Joseph and his brothers and his father Jacob, up to the point of their entry into Egypt. In these representations the Japanese are accustomed to using actors for the main scenes, and what appears to be most convenient for them is to have the actors speak in their own tongue. As for the lines belonging to the chronicler or evangelist, several people instructed for such a purpose sing these outside in a chorus, thus introducing some bit of doctrine to help the Christians understand the story and its message. And as these are admirable mysteries of our Holy Faith, and are so new to this amicable people, and are presented in *such a fashion that has been adapted to their own ways* [my emphasis], there are many who come to this festival, not only Christians, but their many kindly relatives as well, who attend to ask for intercession in secret. And were it not held inside, to this celebration would come every last person, as it gives them all much pleasure, which would be good, in part, if it were so, such that all around, everyone would receive notice of something so important taking place for the salvation of the soul.(quoted in Rubiera, 2019, 222)

Just as in the *fūryū* new and old elements are fused, here, too—new stories are told by taking recourse to “old devices.” Moreover, a device taken from the *nō* is introduced—the chorus who sings the lines of the evangelist. This way, aided by the use of the local language, the whole manner in which the story was performed became increasingly Japanese. In fact, it was an intercultural performance born from the desire of those involved to present and transmit the “new stories” on which their novel belief was based as their own. To become a Christian and live as one here meant absorbing this new belief—and anything related to it—into Japanese culture.

In both cases explored in this essay, the German as well as the Japanese, interculturalism in performance resulted from processes of negotiation: in the German case, a negotiation between what the foreign actors had to offer and what the German spectators favored and expected, and in the case of the Japanese, performance as a negotiation between the “lay” actors of the sacred plays and their preferences for which devices suited them best. As we saw in the latter case, the outcome attracted and satisfied the demands of even those spectators who had

not adopted the Christian faith. In both cases, the performances gained great popularity among audiences. For they found ways to tell these new stories in a surprising as well as pleasing manner that felt sufficiently familiar to audiences to allow them to enjoy the novelties and unexpected facets of what was being staged.

#### 4 | THE COMING INTO BEING OF NEW THEATER FORMS

A number of theater troupes were founded in the German lands by Germans after the end of the Thirty Years War. At first, they traveled under the well-known brand of “English Comedians,” but soon after they adopted the label “Hochdeutsche Komödianten” (High German Comedians). Their repertoire continued to feature the plays introduced by the English troupes and only later, mostly in the early eighteenth century, was this expanded to include French plays. During his tenure as director of the Weimar Court Theater (1791–1817)—that is to say, much later—Goethe even developed a repertoire for his small, rather provincial theater that was supposed to realize his idea of “world literature.” It comprised plays from European theater history alongside contemporary plays—such as his own, Friedrich Schiller’s, and *The Broken Jug* by Heinrich von Kleist. Thus, Sophocles’ *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, plays by Terence and Plautus, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, *Henry IV*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Othello* (in new translations that differed from those used by the English wandering companies 150 years earlier) were performed alongside Felipe Calderón’s *The Constant Prince* and *Life is a Dream*, Pierre Corneille’s *Le Cid*, Jean Racine’s *Phaedra*, Molière’s *The Miser*, comedies by Carlo Gozzi and Carlo Goldoni, and tragedies by François Voltaire and Gotthold Lessing. In this way, Goethe’s theater became a means of mediating between his own and other European cultures.

Goethe did not consider it important to have plays from other cultures performed in literal translations. He preferred adaptations. He explained his approach in a letter to Charlotte von Wolzogen: “The maxim I followed was to concentrate on the interesting parts and to harmonize them, for Shakespeare was forced by his genius, his age and his audience to add much disharmonious confusion in order to reconcile the ruling theater genius” (quoted in Hinck, 1982, 19). With the help of this approach, Goethe succeeded in bringing plays from other cultures to his audiences and making them a vibrant component of the theater of his time. We might even go so far as to call his approach an interweaving of theater cultures. In a letter to Georg Friedrich Sartorius, he wrote the following about his production of *The Constant Prince*: “This time we have a play that was written nearly 200 years ago in quite a different climate, for people of a quite different culture, and it is performed in such a fresh way that it might have come hot from the oven” (p. 14).

The repertoire of the Weimar theater was made up exclusively of European plays, even though Goethe had expressly wanted to include “world literature”: “National literature means little nowadays, the era of world literature is at hand, and each of us now must help to hasten its arrival” (in conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann on 31 January 1827; Eckermann, 1994, 238). This contradiction did not result from a Eurocentric perspective, nor did it stem from a lack of knowledge about theater traditions outside Europe. Goethe had read *Sakontala* by the Indian poet Kalidasa in Georg Forster’s German translation of 1791 and asserted that the play had “a very great influence on [...] [his] whole life” (Goethe, 1961–1966, 11.205). He expressed his enthusiasm in this distich:

If you wish for the blossoms of spring, as well as the fruits of autumn,

If you wish for charms and delights, wish for what satisfies and nourishes,

If you wish to grasp both heaven and earth in one name,

I name, Sakontala, thee, and then is everything said.<sup>5</sup> (vol. 4, p. 122)



Goethe's enthusiasm for *Sakontala* also found expression in his own work: the idea of the "Prelude in the theater" in *Faust* is derived from the Indian play. Still, he shied away from adapting *Sakontala* and including it in the Weimar repertoire. With regret he explains in his *Tag- und Jahreshefte* "that our sensibilities, customs, and ways of thinking have developed so differently from those in this Eastern nation that even an important work such as this [...] can have little success here" (4.937).

Goethe not only incorporated plays from other European cultures into his repertoire, he also experimented with theatrical devices originating in other traditions, such as the use of masks in his production of Terence's *The Brothers*. Considering the rather small population of Weimar and neighboring Jena, the fact that the house sold out each time the play was performed speaks to the enormous interest that the audience took in Goethe's experiments. He also repeated this experiment with equal success in Schiller's *Turandot*. Such "intercultural" performances were supposed to contribute to the spectators' *Bildung*, that is to say, to their capacity "to develop the whole of our sensual and intellectual powers in the fullest possible harmony," as Schiller explained in his "Letter upon the aesthetic education of man" ([1795]; Schiller, 2012, 99 [20th letter]). Schiller worked as a dramaturge at the Weimar theater. Goethe and Schiller both strove to turn theater from a form of entertainment or empathetic emotionality into an institution of *Bildung*. Intercultural performances served as an important means in this mission. We can conclude that the trend towards interculturalism in theater that began in the German-speaking countries with the advent of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* troupes and the English theater companies of the sixteenth century continued at least until the early nineteenth century.

In this respect, the situation in Japan was very different because of its deliberate isolation from foreign influences—with the exception of trade conducted with the Dutch on a secluded island from 1641 onwards. Yet in the years preceding that, a remarkable development took place with regard to performance, which resulted in the coming into being of a new performance genre—*kabuki*.

Although the expulsion of the Jesuits was decreed in 1587 and Christians were even crucified in 1596, there is sufficient evidence that performances of sacred plays continued into the first years of the new century. In Nagasaki, for instance, Christmas 1599 was celebrated on a square before the Collegio with performances of several plays by the local Christian community. On the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in 1602, the most noble citizens performed several plays in Japanese, written by Japanese, in the church as well as on the square before it. There were also some firework displays. We also have reports of an opulent procession along the festively decorated streets, led by the bishop carrying the monstrance, on the occasion of Corpus Christi Day in 1605. Altars were erected in many places. The procession featured two richly embellished festive wagons and many musicians with instruments. There was even a stage on which two Japanese boys performed dances—one dressed as a European and dancing in a European style, while the other wore Japanese attire and performed a Japanese dance (see Leims, 1997, 287). Another example is the procession held in Arima for Corpus Christi Day in 1611, which was accompanied by music and several dances performed by young noblemen and the sons of ruling princes (see López-Gay, 1970, 174). Performances of sacred plays thus continued even during the period when *kabuki* came into being.

The name *kabuki* in itself is quite telling. Most researchers agree on its etymology. As Kamachi summarizes it, "the word 'kabuki' comes from the verb 'kabuku', which means 'to slant', to be 'oblique', 'to deviate from the normal path.'" Accordingly, a *kabukimono* is to be seen as "a deviant, a non-conformist in a society that, after more than a century of civil war, was suddenly being organized into a stable and fixed form of class system" (Kamachi, 2003, 24). A new era did indeed begin in 1603 once Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) seized power and was given the title *shōgun* (supreme commander). He transferred the administrative center from Kyoto to Edo (Tokyo), with Kyoto serving only as the seat of the Emperor. A significant social shift went hand in hand with this new political development, leading to the rise of a middle class, with a prominent position allotted to merchants.

It was within this context that the new performance genre of *kabuki* emerged. It was founded by a woman named Izumo no Okuni, a former shrine maiden in Kyoto (1578–1613), who began performing on the dry riverbed of the Shijōgawara of the Kamo River at Kitano shrine in 1603. The few paintings of Okuni show her wearing a

rosary, which could be either Christian or Buddhist (*juzu*), with a cross attached to it. The question arises then as to whether Okuni was a Christian and whether she had even witnessed performances of mystery plays during her time in Kyoto. On Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Christmas of the year 1596, the Franciscan Church held processions performing Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem, the erection of a tomb with the Most Holy Place, and a Nativity play.

There is a debate among Japanese scholars about whether Okuni wore the cross because this was the latest fashion or because she herself had converted. In order to substantiate the latter thesis, much emphasis is placed on Okuni's relationship with Nagoya Sanzō, who had served a Christian lord and, therefore, presumably also adopted the Christian faith. He is described as an attractive example of a *kabukimono*. Kamachi suggests that "Okuni's impersonation of a dandy could well have been based on his image" (Kamachi, 2003, 26).

He goes on to argue that the mystery plays had been so successful with the Japanese audiences because they were exotic and spectacular to them, which is what the people yearned for. As discussed above, these plays not only included elements of *nō*, but also of popular dance forms such as *kagura*, *bon'odori*, and *kōwakamai*; they also used the Japanese *biwa* (lute) alongside the European organ, mixing traditional Japanese tunes such as *imayō* with those of Gregorian chants. This blend satisfied the yearning and enthusiasm for the "novel," which was characteristic of the Japanese upper and middle classes of the time. Kamachi comes to the following conclusion regarding the new performance genre of *kabuki*:

What Kabuki shared with the Jesuit theatre was this tendency to become a melting pot for all kinds of performing arts, in order to attract and please a large, mixed audience. They also shared a talent for the invention of theatre machinery. It has been pointed out that the same mechanism was employed to create the illusion of a huge running river onstage both in Kabuki and the Jesuit plays in later years. The famous revolving stage of Kabuki also had its counterpart in the Jesuit theatre. (Kamachi, 2003, 29)

In this regard, both *kabuki* in its early stages and the sacred plays that were designed and performed by Japanese Christians could be designated intercultural performances. This process unfolded without being forced on the performers; it was a development that suited the Japanese at that time and was therefore carried out according to their own tastes and preferences.

As in the case of *gigaku* and *bugaku* in the years that followed, especially after Japan closed its borders to Europe for over 200 years, the fact that *kabuki* developed out of an encounter with the foreign was forgotten or even intentionally denied, since it grew to become the most popular Japanese theater form. Over the centuries, it exploited its potential "to swallow all that came within its reach, absorbing and giving out the exuberant energy of the common people." In this regard, it must indeed be acknowledged as a "uniquely Japanese theatre" (Kamachi, 2003, 30), even if this very potential allowed it to embrace all that was at hand at its inception (as did the *fūryū*), including the developments around the mystery plays.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

These early encounters in the German lands and on the Japanese islands brought forth new kinds of performances that can indeed be labeled "intercultural." They came into being through a combination of elements developed in different cultures which, in both cases, met on an equal footing. The "novelties" that they incorporated had been offered to but not forced on them. The recipients were free to choose how to respond to them—to adopt what they liked and could make sense of and discard what did not appeal to them. This way, the performances evolved out of the interaction of the two groups involved in the encounter: in the German case, the English or Italian actors and the German spectators, and in the Japanese case, the Portuguese missionaries and the Japanese Christians. In

both cases, the performances resulted from an—in each case very different—interaction between the two groups without one of them being able to restrict or even abolish the other's agency.

It is therefore understandable that in both cases a particular kind of “national” theater emerged from these developments, which was able to embrace elements of highly diverse origins: Goethe's Weimar theater plays and devices from different European performance cultures, and Okuni's *kabuki* elements stemming from a range of genres, including the Christian mystery plays. These new forms, recognized as a national theater (in the case of *kabuki* this happened much later), came into existence by way of intercultural performances. Ultimately, what came into being out of an “intercultural” encounter was later deemed genuinely “intracultural.”

What happened in these cases, both predating colonialism, takes place at a much faster pace today in the age of globalization. The intercultural and the intracultural in performance seem to become increasingly interchangeable; sometimes they even merge. It remains to be seen whether this development, using Ernst Bloch's term, can be regarded as a kind of aesthetic *Vorschein* (premonition) of a world of mutual understanding, exchange and cooperation, or whether it must be seen only as a temporary “fashion,” without any serious commitment to a better future yet to come.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> “Wie der Narr drinne, Jan genennt,  
Mit Bossen war so excellent.  
Welches ich auch bekenn fürwar,  
Dass er damit ist Meister gar.  
Verstellt also sein Angesicht,  
Dass er keim Menschen gleich mehr sicht,  
Auf tölpisch Bossen ist sehr geschickt,  
Hat Schuch, der keiner jhn nicht drückt,  
In sein Hosen noch einer hett Platz,  
Hat dran ein vngehewren Latz:  
Sein Juppen jhn zum Narren macht,  
Mit der Schlappen, die er nicht acht,  
Wann er da fangt zu löffeln an,  
Vnd dünkt sich seyn ein fein Person.”

<sup>3</sup> *Cartas que os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Iesus escreverão dos Reynos de Iapão & China aos da mesma Companhia da Índia & Europa desde anno de 1549, até o de 1580* (Évora: Manuel de Lyra, 1598).

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Leims's book has so far not been translated into English or Japanese, even though it contains such rich archival material.

<sup>5</sup> “Willst du die Blüthen des frühen, die Früchte des späteren Jahres,  
Willst du, was reizt und entzückt, willst du, was sättigt und nährt,  
Willst du den Himmel, die Erde mit Einem Namen begreifen—  
Nenn' ich Sakontala dich, und so ist Alles gesagt.”

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