

Is Jan Kott our contemporary?

The intellectual legacy of the most influential Polish theatre critic

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Jan Kott (1914-2001) was the only Polish theater scholar, critic, and literature scholar who wrote in Polish and whose texts have been published in Japan. His *Szkice o Szekspirze* [*Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*¹], which according to Polish theater and literature critic, Tadeusz Nyczek is “the most famous critical book of a Polish intellectual”² was published there in 1968 and, as Kott himself notes in the introduction to this work, this marked the thirteenth language it was translated to and twenty-second country where it was published.³

In his introduction to the conference *Jan Kott Our Contemporary: Context, Legacies, New Perspectives*,⁴ John Elsom directly stated that “Jan Kott was the most influential theater critic in the second half of the 20th century”.⁵ It is not difficult to find

¹ The first Polish edition was entitled *Szkice o Szekspirze* (Sketches on Shakespeare) and was published by Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in Warsaw in 1961. In 1962, the first translation of the book, by Anna Posner, was published in France and was entitled *Shakespeare notre contemporain* (a collection published by the journal *Les Temps Modernes* (Modern times), T. M. Julliard, Paris 1962) which can be translated as Shakespeare, our contemporary. This edition lent its title to the most well-known collection of essays by Kott, which, depending on the translation, edition, and Kott’s corrections, varied in contents. The second Polish edition was entitled *Szekspir współczesny* (Contemporary Shakespeare) (Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw, 1965). The first edition in English was published in 1964 and was entitled *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* (New York: Doubleday & Co.) and it was translated by Bolesław Taborski.

² Tadeusz Nyczek, “Jan Kott: na wielkiej scenie (Jan Kott: on the great stage),” in Jan Kott, *Pisma wybrane*, (Jan Kott, selected works) vol. I, *Wokół literatury*, ed. Tadeusz Nyczek (Warszawa: Krąg 1991), p. VIII.

³ Yan Kotto, “Nihonhan e no jobun (Introduction to the Japanese edition),” in Yan Kotto, *Shieikusupia wa wareware no dōjidaijin* (Shakespeare, our contemporary), trans. Kishi Tetsuo and Hachiya Akio, (Tōkyō: Hakusuisha 1968), p. 8.

⁴ The conference took place on 19 February 2015 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Kott’s birthday and the 50th anniversary of the first publishing of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* in the United Kingdom. It was organized by the Polish Institute in London and the Kingstone Shakespeare Seminar. Conference proceedings were never published, however, all lectures are available in the form of podcasts on the page *Jan Kott Our Contemporary: Context, Legacies, New Perspective*, [<https://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2015/03/jan-kott-our-contemporary-contexts-legacies-new-perspectives-2/>] (accessed: 16.06.2021).

⁵ John Elsom, “Is Shakespeare still our contemporary?,” in *Jan Kott our Contemporary*.

similar statements. I believe that this sentence contains everything: not only a time framework for the meaning of Jan Kott's work but also the inability to express what was the influence of this work. The phrase "the most influential" is definitely an expression of appreciation, however, it lacks specificity.

The main problem of the reception of Kott's works is its ephemerality. Many an author have claimed that "everyone" read Kott; however, this fact is not reflected in academic texts and remained unnoticed by the majority of theater creators. Initial research on the matter I was able to conduct during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that this reception is either overwhelming and practically all "contemporary" stagings of Shakespeare's works should be to a certain extent treated as inspired by Kott, or these texts were not significant at all. There are opinions that contradict either one of these statements.

This text is intended to be an outline of possible research tropes connected to Jan Kott's intellectual legacy. The fact that someone is considered to be "the most influential theater critic in the second half of the 20th century" means that they are deserving of research. Thus far no monograph on Kott's intellectual legacy or a recollective biography has been published. The only biography about Kott is an autobiography⁶ and it cannot be characterized as a confession. Let us one more time cite Nyczek, who in the Introduction to the first edition (and thus far the only) of collection of Kott's essays published after the fall of Communism in Poland wrote: When in 1990 [...] he published *Footnote to the biography*, it was met with a disappointed groan. The audience expected the truth and expiation. [...] And they received neither. In turn, what they received was yet another literary story about the life of a certain author in a certain period".⁷ Apart from reeditions of the existing collections or new compilations, there has been no academic publication on the works of Kott, works which, despite the fact that their author's academic status is undeniable, are themselves not academic. Kott wrote essays and reviews, some of them compiled into books, others as separate works, which were filled with literary freedom and inaccuracies in best of cases. There were also many cases in which, as Nyczek puts it, there was "no respect for the facts".⁸ Kott was above all a writer and he wrote about theater, about how he read dramas and imagined them on the stage.

⁶ Polish editions: Jan Kott, *Przyczynek do biografii. Zawał serca* (Footnote to the biography. Heart attack), (London: Aneks, 1991) and (Kraków: Wydawnictwo literackie, 1994). American edition: Jan Kott, *Still Alive: An Autobiographical Essay*, trans. Jadwiga Kosicka (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁷ Tadeusz, "Jan Kott: na wielkiej scenie," p. V.

⁸ Ibid, p. VI.

This is why this paper, which is a summary of an introduction to my ongoing wider research on the subject is divided into two parts, as there are two perspectives or windows facing two different directions that can be used in order to look at the nature of the reception of Kott's texts: his life or his works in particular languages.

Since, as mentioned above, it is not possible to only rely on what Kott wrote or said about himself, but also what others said about him was usually fragmentary and selective and, what is worse, often those opinions of others were shared in celebratory speeches during jubilees, in the first part of this article, I shall present the essence of Kott's figure, basing on how he described. The reader might choose to believe this narrative or not but it is a starting point. In the second part of this text, I shall discuss the most important Japanese editions of Kott's texts and I shall also deliberate on his Japanese legacy and the nature of the reception of his texts.

JAN KOTT – “LIFE AND WORK” ACCORDING TO JAN KOTT

Jan Kott was born in 1914, the year in which World War I broke out. Poland was not to regain its independence until the end of this war, so Kott was Polish but Poland was not present on the map. When finally in 1918, Poland became an independent state, Kott stopped being Polish because he was a Jew. Jan's father, who apparently was a man of extraordinary insight, decided that it would be best for little Jan to be baptized, as he believed that Poland would not be a good place for Jews. In order for the boy to be baptized, his mother had to convert to Catholicism. And thus Kott's family was a perfect illustration of Polish multi-national reality, in which only those who were Catholic were considered Poles and those who were not Catholic were not.

Kott studied at the University of Warsaw from 1932, a time when nationalist and antisemitic feelings were running high and slowly engulfing most institutions in Poland. He followed in the footsteps of many Polish Jews (and of course others) and became a Communist. This text is not the place to consider the history of the Communist thought in Poland or in other European countries, however, I believe that when taking into consideration the theme of the text and the time it discusses it is worth mentioning at least one idea, namely that sympathizing (whatever that means) with Communism both before and after the war is a stigma in Poland or, in best of cases, a taboo. For many Poles it is much easier to remember the prewar nationalists than Communists. Especially the later and in less dramatic circumstances they left either the Communist Party or Poland. Kott

committed this unforgettable sin and lived in it, (and what is even worse!) used his literary talent in his Communist activities until 1957.

He soaked in engaged Communism during his scholarship in Paris. At that time he became involved, also personally with French Trotskyists. Here, however, Kott's decisions were also not doctrinal. With a broken heart and also after his mentor's persuasions he joined a Dominican Monastery. Here he supplemented his literary experience with, e.g. writings of Marquis de Sade but also familiarized himself with the works of activists in the Basque independence movement, which was an anti-Franco opposition that supported Spain. I believe that an ideal complement to the concepts with which Kott had the most contact before the war, namely Trotskyism and Thomism, is ... surrealism. At that time he began translating surrealist poetry, he befriended Tristan Tzara (1896-1963) and also discovered Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918). While still in Paris, he married Lidia, and he stayed with her until her death in 2000. In September, soon after the wedding, he was drafted into the army and he defended Warsaw during the Siege of 1939. He managed to reunite with his wife in Red Army occupied Lwów (Lviv). Reportedly his stay there abated his Communist zeal, further dampened by the fact that he failed Marxism on his entry exam for doctoral studies in Romance Philology. However, he still remained a member of the Communist Party and praised Socialist realism in literature. In the darkest years of the Stalin era, as a professor at the University of Wrocław (1949-1952) and the University of Warsaw (1953-1969), he authored texts for which he would never be forgiven in Poland. He praised "the only correct system" for too long and he also criticized the fundamentals of Polish literature and the struggle for national liberation. Just after the Polish October 1956, in 1957 he handed over his party membership card and in 1964 was one of the signatories of the Letter of 34, a two-sentence protest of thirty-four Polish intellectuals against censorship in the Polish People's Republic.

Footnote to the biography begins with two facts from Kott's life in Paris: "I played the last game of bowls with Aleksander Wat. In 1962 or in 1963. [...] But I played the last game of bowls before the war in May or June of 1939 with the man who later killed Leo Trotsky..."⁹ This is how he writes about his political involvement. After he left the party he focused on Shakespeare. He later mentioned that in 1958 he saw *Richard III* in Warsaw with Jacek Woszczerowicz (1904-1970) in the title role. He also saw *Titus Andronicus*

⁹ Jan Kott, *Przyczynek do biografii. Zawal serca*, p. 9.

directed by Peter Brook (b. 1925) in Warsaw in 1957. Three years after that, he published *Szkice o Szekspirze* (Sketches on Shakespeare).

In 1965 he was invited to Yale and then later to Berkley. In the meantime, in Poland, it was 1968 and an anti-Semitic purge began in the Party, at the universities, and in wider circles. Kott was stripped of his title of professor and of Polish citizenship. He was not a direct victim of the March 1968, since at this point he had been staying in the United States for two years; an emigrant who never emigrated. From the time he left for the United States in 1966 Kott was a theater critic who did not write theater reviews, as if the theater only made sense for him in Poland, and the contemporary non-Polish theater was not a part of his biography. "He devoted himself [...] to research on theater, and to writing essays and columns".¹⁰ At American universities he taught in English, despite the fact that he did not know the language. French was his second language after Polish and he never felt comfortable with English. The American reality never related to him. In an interview, he said that he never stopped feeling like an alien because he did not like American theater. "It was different in Japan, I did not know Japanese, but after a week I felt immediately at home".¹¹

There are a few facts from Kott's childhood that prove to be a signal, a key to his whole life, as he describes it, and to all his works. Kott admitted that only at the end of his life he realized that he was "raised in contradictions, wrote in contradictions for a long time, and at the same time, [he] was just – Jan Kott".¹² A while earlier, in the same interview, when he talks about his first scholarship in France, just before the outbreak of World War II, we can find a sentence which I believe is key for his understanding his life and works and also for the reception of his texts: "As always, everything was unified and in opposition in the same time. Everything was knotted up, and kept on rolling over, like a boat that is chased from shore to shore, but which is still the same boat".¹³ A boat is still the same boat, Jan Kott is still the same Jan Kott, however, only when put together they show the logic of paradox, which was noticed in the life and works of Kott by Allen J. Kuharski; his being "between worlds", between his liminal existence and his legacy.

¹⁰ Tadeusz, "Jan Kott: na wielkiej scenie," p. VI.

¹¹ Jan Kott, Allen J. Kuharski, "Raised and Written in Contradictions: the Final Interview," *New Theatre Quarterly*, no. 18, 2/2002, pp. 103-120; p.118-119.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 107.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 106.

Before all these statements about contradiction and paradox were said by Kott in the last interview he gave before his death, Tadeusz Nyczek wrote: “[t]he craving for cognition and curiosity about the world led Kott through various nooks and crannies of culture and made the cohesion of this text seem almost improbable, except, of course, for the person of the author.”¹⁴ Human biography is not coherent, it meanders, it is fragmentary, it is built from coincidences and unpredictable experiences. Nyczek writes further that “Kott said once that it is not the case that he writes about himself (and also about the literature he reads and the theater plays he watched, etc.) but he writes with himself.”¹⁵ “Self writing”, i.e. the act which leads to self-cognition, viewing the world through oneself, recognizing oneself in words. Michel Foucault sees in this process the only way leading to self-recognition. He writes about *hupomnēmata*, i.e. “notes” about everything we want to, or believe we have to write down. According to Foucault, “[h]owever personal they may be, these *hupomnēmata* ought not to be understood as intimate journals or as those accounts of spiritual experience (temptations, struggles, downfalls, and victories) that will be found in later Christian literature. They do not constitute a “narrative of oneself”; they do not have the aim of bringing to the light of day the *arcana conscientiae*, the oral or written confession of which has a purificatory value. The movement they seek to bring about is the reverse of that: the intent is not to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self. [...] [T]o make one's recollection of the fragmentary *logos*, transmitted through teaching, listening, or reading, a means of establishing a relationship of oneself with oneself[.]”¹⁶ Despite the fact that Kott’s texts have the form of essays and are devoted to the theater and literature, they can be considered *hupomnēmata* by which he shapes himself, they have a purificatory value (the best example of that are, without doubt, his essays about Shakespeare from the end of 1950s and the beginning of 1960s), which are embedded in the here and now. A writer constructs themselves, however, not themselves in general but themselves here and now. Just how they live here and now and not cling tightly to anything.

Kott “was often not consistent in what he thought and what he tried to prove; he changed his political views, philosophical schools, methods of literary analysis, and

¹⁴ Tadeusz, “Jan Kott: na wielkiej scenie,” p. VI.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “Self Writing,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault* ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 207-222; p. 210–211.

aesthetic criteria. But he never changed what is the writer's greatest gift from God; his literary style of the highest order. That is why, in the end, Jan Kott, i.e. the style, sometimes remains the only consistent criterion for this extensive, multi-faceted work. And a testimony to the madness of the era, which between 1935 (Kott's literary debut) and 1990 (the most recent text in this collection) disintegrated and merged several times, changing its skin, power, faith, societies, and borders".¹⁷ His life was not coherent and he did not try to negate that fact in his works. On the contrary; he nurtured this fragmentary and incoherent nature.

His texts became the parable of such a biography and the literature it filtered, the theater it filtered, blessed with literary talent; the biography set a model for the bibliography. But in order for the world to know about it, there had to be an idea which would be similar to the discovery of the elixir of immortality – he would filter Shakespeare through himself.

Kott did not start to write about Shakespeare in order to be recognized by the world academia. As Nyczek states, Kott solved "both his problems and Polish problems of spiritual and political nature from the time of the greatest upheaval, the collapse of the Stalinist vision of the works, with Shakespeare".¹⁸ But he became aware and later he made the rest of the world aware that for the first time in history, greater politics to such a large extent forced its way into everybody's lives. This political category, the fact that classics can be read through this contemporary political lens, became an international revelation.

It is time now to look through the second window at Jan Kott's texts from afar and apart from his biography.

Jan Kott's texts in Japan

The first translation of Jan Kott's work was published in Japan by Hakusuisha in 1968 and was entitled *Sheikusupia wa wareware no dōjidaijin*, which can be translated into English as "Shakespeare, our peer".¹⁹ It was translated by English scholars and Shakespeareans Kishi Tetsuo (b. 1935) and Hachiya Akio (1930-1986). In their afterword to the book, they explain what kind of text is being bestowed on the Japanese audience. *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, or rather a collection of essays on Shakespeare's plays,

¹⁷ Tadeusz, "Jan Kott: na wielkiej scenie," p. VI.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. VIII.

¹⁹ Yan Kotto, *Sheikusupia wa wareware no dōjidaijin* (Shakespeare, our contemporary), trans. Kishi Tetsuo and Hachiya Akio, (Tōkyō: Hakusuisha 1968).

has several editions and translations that differ from one another. Kishi explains that his Japanese translation is based on four editions: first French edition from 1962, first American edition from 1964 (which compared to the French edition has a supplementary part devoted to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), British edition from 1966 (which has three additional essays) and the Polish edition from 1965.²⁰

The Japanese translation is a compilation of all editions mentioned above. Some of the essays were extended by Kishi and Hachiya, who combined several versions of essays whenever they believed that this would help the Japanese reader understand the text better.²¹ I consider this fact significant as well, and I emphasize its importance for future research; Jan Kott's texts translated and published during his lifetime were not "faithful" or identical. They were amended by Kott himself, supplemented by the translators, and they function in many versions, in various collections. Therefore, these are not static "works of life", but ideas that are constantly being worked out.

The beginning of the *Translators' Afterword* brings interesting insights from the perspective of research on the reception of Kott's texts in Japan. The authors refer to the words of a poet Alfred Alvarez (1929-2019), who claimed that in Poland *Contemporary Shakespeare* was above all read as a description of communist authorities and Polish interpretations stem not from Shakespeare but from Polish political reality.²² The translators leave this opinion without further commentary. Maybe they intended to persuade Japanese readers to read through the political lens, or maybe show the reality of life behind the Iron Curtain?

Sheikusupia wa wareware no dōjidaijin was published again first in 1969, and later in 1979, 1983, 1992 and 2009. As the Japanese publishing market is in private hands, the fact that a book is reissued is a testament to the demand for the given book. These six editions are the result of an interest that goes beyond the Japanese Shakespearean circles.

Koten sakka no gakkō or *Szkoła klasyków* (School of classics) in Polish²³ was the next published collection of essays in Japan. The contents of the Japanese translation corresponds to the first Polish edition. It was translated by Ishihara Tatsuji (b. 1932) and

²⁰ Kishi Tetsuo, Hachiya Akio, "Yakusha no atogaki (Translators' afterword)," in Yan Kotto, *Sheikusupia wa wareware no dōjidaijin* (Shakespeare, our contemporary), trans. Kishi Tetsuo and Hachiya Akio, (Tōkyō: Hakusuisha, 2009), pp. 365-366.

²¹ Ibid, p. 366.

²² Ibid, p. 367.

²³ Yan Kotto, *Koten sakka no gakkō* (School of classics), trans. Ishihara Tatsuji, (Tōkyō: Serika Shobō, 1970). Polish edition: Jan Kott, *Szkoła klasyków*, (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1949 and 1951 (revised edition)).

reissued twice, in 1970 and 1973 by Serika Shobō. This was Kott's second book published after the war. "For many years it was a bible of realism". In it, Kott tried to showcase the possibilities of the new political system in literature, to show that realism, or rather social realism, is the only possible path. He showed this by writing (wonderfully I might add) about the greatest classics of realism, and about many more, such as Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert, Stendhal, but also Diderot, Swift and Voltaire. This book and the earlier *Mitologia i realism* (Mythology and realism), which has not been published in Japan, left the strongest mark on the Polish reception of texts by Kott; a cynical Marxist, as his relentless enemies called him. This was a vision of great Polish socialist realist literature. "It was purely wishful thinking, and for an ardent Marxist it was completely naïve. None of the disciples of the *School of classics* became the second Flaubert, however, the number of scribblers big and small increased."²⁴ Unfortunately, I was unable to access the Japanese translation, so I am not aware of the translator's motivation or of his reflections upon the text, which are most certainly different from the reflections of Poles. This publication in Japan is adjacent to the mainstream, however, it is noteworthy that this was the second translation of Kott's texts in Japan and its intended audience was most definitely different from that of *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, which branched out beyond those interested in Shakespeare and theater.²⁵

In 1976 Hakuishisha published *Engeki no mirai o kataru* (Discussing the future of the theater), which was a collection of Kott's texts this time translated and selected by Kishi Tetsuo alone. It contains more than thirty of Kott's essays written between 1954 and 1970 and most of them were published in an American compilation *Theatre notebook 1947-1967*.²⁶ Kishi again only omitted texts about "Polish authors not known in Japan",²⁷ and added ones that might be of interest to Japanese readers (most of them from the German translation published in 1972).²⁸ According to Kishi "[t]he German translation, however, contains many abridgements, and the Japanese translation is faithful to the original".²⁹ By choosing essays to be printed in the Japanese edition, he wished, as he himself claims, to

²⁴ Tadeusz, "Jan Kott: na wielkiej scenie," p. VII.

²⁵ Yan Kotto, *Engeki no mirai o kataru* (Discussing the future of the theater), trans. Kishi Tetsuo, (Tōkyō: Hakuishisha 1976).

²⁶ Jan Kott, *Theatre Notebook 1947-1967*, trans. Bolesław Taborski, (New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1968).

²⁷ Kishi Tetsuo, "Yakusha no atogaki (Translator's afterword)", in Yan Kotto, *Engeki no mirai o kataru* (Discussing the future of the theater), p. 351.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

above all showcase not Kott the Shakespearean but make available the text which contains “less politics and more faith and god”.³⁰ At the time of their publication in Japan, many of these texts were relatively new and Kishi notes that during the few years preceding the publication Kott had been mainly preoccupied with the theater technique and stage technique.³¹

At the time Jan Kott’s position was already definite – he was considered a known intellectual, who was very popular in the media. Before the publication, he had visited Japan twice: in June and December of 1973 and in July of 1976, and during each of the visits, he gave numerous interviews and lectures. As Kishi mentions, Kott also spend time during his visits on watching “a lot of *noh* and *bunraku*”,³² a fact that is the most significant from the readers perspective.

“There is most probably no one, who does not acknowledge the fact that *Contemporary Shakespeare* opened a new chapter in research on Shakespeare”,³³ claims Takayama Hiroshi (b. 1947), a specialist in the field of English literature of the 17th and 18th centuries, in the beginning of translator’s afterword. In 1989 Heibonsha³⁴ published his translation of the American edition of collection of essays entitled *The Bottom Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare and The Carnival Tradition*. Takayama entitled the collection *Sheikusupia cānivaru* (Shakespeare’s carnival). He believed this title to be clearer and meaningful, claiming “who nowadays does not know Bakhtin’s theory?”.³⁵ The translation was revised and published again in 2017 and thus far it is the most recent publication of Kott’s texts in Japan.³⁶ This reissue, which coincided with the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, was of unique character, as Kott’s essays were published as a *bunkōbon*, a pocket-size paperback, which in Japan is considered to be an important institution for readers, as *bunkōbon* are widely available, and they are also of small size, so they can be read on the train. It was Kott’s last book in which he touched

³⁰ Ibid, p. 349.

³¹ Ibid, p. 351.

³² Ibid.

³³ Takayama Hiroshi, “Runessansu no ‘meigasū’tachi wa kare no dōjidaijin. Yakusha no atogaki (The magicians of the renaissance are his contemporaries. Translator’s afterword),” in Yan Kotto, *Sheikusupia kānibarū* (Shakespeare’s carnival), trans. Takayama Hiroshi, Chikuma Bunkō 2017, p. 336.

³⁴ Yan Kotto, *Sheikusupia kānibarū* (Shakespeare’s carnival), trans. Takayama Hiroshi, (Tōkyō: Heibonsha 1989).

³⁵ Takayama, “Runessansu no ‘meigasū’tachi wa kare no dōjidaijin. Yakusha no atogaki (The magicians of the renaissance are his contemporaries. Translator’s afterword),” p. 336.

³⁶ Kotto, *Sheikusupia kānibarū* (Shakespeare’s carnival).

upon the political category and analyzed theater and literary phenomena according to a coherent key. After that he only wrote the biography...

In the time between publication of its London edition published by Aneks (a publisher adjacent to the Polish diaspora magazine of the same name), and the Kraków edition published by Znak the book *Footnote to the biography* was published in Japan.³⁷ Jan Kott remained in contact with translators of his works around the world and he also corresponded directly with Sekiguchi Tokimasa (b. 1951), who worked on the Japanese translation of the first collection of Kott's biographical essays. The collection entitled *Watashi no monogatari* (My story) was published in 1994 by Misuzu and it is one of only two books translated directly from Polish. Henryk Lipszyc, Polish Japanologist, had the following comment on the translation: "I believe that Kraków «roots» of his [Sekiguchi's] education are not without significance. It seems, that this explains his sensitivity towards the language of essays, the aphorisms, the distinct Galician charm, which was used to «enchant» audiences by both Jan Kott and his great mathematician father-in-law, Hugo Steinhaus [1887-1972], was also a wonderful memoirist and aphorist, and similarly has been used by Lviv (Lwów) born [writers] Jerzy Lec [1909-1966] and Stanisław Lem [1921-2006], who is perhaps the most often published Polish author in Japan".³⁸

Sekiguchi is one of the most distinguished persons as far as the presence of Polish culture and literature in Japan. He is the author of numerous translations of key works of Polish classics, novels, poetry, dramas and memoirs. This book is very personal and it required a translation that was different from previous Japanese translations of Kott's texts, and which was sensitive to Kott's roots. In this case, the translator did not omit fragments or names that are not clear to the Japanese reader. I believe that the fact that *Watashi no monogatari* was published in Japan, speaks to the fact that Jan Kott has gained an indisputable reputation in this country. It was also a sort of summary of the presence of Kott's texts in Japan. It is also worth mentioning that in most cases Japanese translations are published relatively shortly after American versions in particular. The publication of a biography shows that there was a need to be "up to date" with such an important author. It also enables closeness and evokes empathy. These statements raise questions about the traces of Kott's reception. All evidence points to the fact that he was known and had readers

³⁷ Japanese edition: Yan Kotto, *Watashi no monogatari* (My story), trans. Sekiguchi Tokimasa, (Tōkyō: Misuzu 1994).

³⁸ Agnieszka Żuławska-Umeda, Henryk Lipszyc, "Jan Kott w Japonii (Jan Kott in Japan)," in *Dialog*, no. 79 (4/2002), p. 186.

but for some reason he dissolved and, apart from publications, did not leave any traces of the inspiration he created.

Kadisshu: Tadeushu Kantoru ni sasagu (*Kaddish: Pages on Tadeusz Kantor* in the English-language edition),³⁹ published in Japanese by Michitani in 2000 and translated by Sakakura Chizuru, also a specialist in Polish studies, has a different position among Japanese translations. It is a Polish studies text and its target audience are probably those interested in Tadeusz Kantor rather than in Jan Kott.

Apart from the books mentioned above, in its 11th issue for 1987 the monthly theater periodical “Shingeki” (New Drama) published Kurahara Koreharu’s translation of Kott’s article *Witikiewiczchi no yokisenu riarizumu*, which was entitled in Polish *Witkiewicz, albo realizm nieoczekiwany* (Witkiewicz or unexpected realism).⁴⁰ It is worth remembering that in the 1960s and 1970s the news of Polish directors Jerzy Grotowski’s (1933-1999) and Tadeusz Kantor’s (1915-1990) theater and methods reached Japan and that translations of plays by Polish authors of fundamental importance such as Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969), Sławomir Mrożek (1930-2013) and finally Stanisław Witkiewicz (1885-1939) started to appear in Japan. As it was mentioned above, the popularity of texts authored by Kott, without doubt, paved the way for these.

A number of interviews and discussions with Kott appeared in the Japanese press also outside of professional periodicals. The first issue of “Umi” (Sea) from 1972 featured an interview conducted by Kishi Tetsuo and entitled *Seiji no kisetsu no ato ni* (After the season of politics). *Sekai engeki no naka no nihon engeki* (Japanese theater in international theater), an extensive conversation with Shakespearean Suga Yasuo, and theater scholar, critic and director, Kurashi Ken was published in the August issue of “Teatoro” (Theater) in 1973.

I was unable to access the interview conducted by Yamaguchi Masao for the “Sekai” (World) magazine from August 1976 and mentioned by him in his text published in April 2002 in “Eigo seinen. The Rising Generation”,⁴¹ a Japanese English studies journal, after Jan Kott’s death. This issue of the journal included four commemorative essays about Jan

³⁹ Polish edition: Jan Kott, *Kadysz. Strony o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2006); Japanese edition: Yan Kotto, *Kadisshu: tadeushu kantoru ni sasagu* (Kaddish: for Tadeusz Kantor), trans. Sakakura Chizuru, (Tōkyō: Michitani 2000).

⁴⁰ Yan Kotto, *Witikiewiczchi no yokisenu riarizumu* (*Witkiewicz or unexpected realism*), trans. Kurahara Koreharu, “Shingeki”, no. 295 (11/1978), pp. 102–114.

⁴¹ Yamaguchi Masao, “Yan Kotto no jikan (Time of Jan Kott),” *Eigo seinen. The Rising Generation*, no. 1838, 4/2002, pp. 11–13.

Kott written by his friends and translators. (Kott has also been featured in many TV and radio interviews, and I plan on researching these sources in the future).

This brief preliminary research on Kott's texts shows that they were being systematically published from 1968 until the beginning of the 1990s. He was also a regular guest of debates in Japan, especially these concerning Shakespeare but also theater in the broader sense. Kott's texts are still read by Japanese researchers exploring the theater. However, at this stage of my study, I am unable to provide citations and references in Japanese publications in much detail.

It is obvious that Kott reached Japan because of Shakespeare. Analyzing any Polish writer or artist would have never given him a comparable place in the intellectual world. However, were his works only read because of Shakespeare? The diversity of his publications points to the contrary. Shakespeare helped the world to find Kott, embrace him, find a Shakespearean framework for him and his writings. Just as Shakespeare helped Kott embrace himself. Shakespeare was a key that opened all doors but Kott did not only write about him, which, e.g. is also visible in Japanese translations.

Publication of Kott's text in Japanese is a concrete proof that his ideas existed in Japan. But what about other, more concrete conclusions? How to show the reception, how to go deeper than just stating "he was read by everyone"? Kott was liked by the media, and he was present, maybe even abundantly present. He did not lecture on his Grand Mechanism from a university lectern, he did not mention this idea in an academic tome. I believe that the scattered biography and the scattered bibliography, which as I mentioned above, connected to the biography, are the reason behind the fact that the reception of Kott's texts is also scattered. During my research on the theatrical reception of Kott's texts in Japan and the search of traces of his ideas in stage productions and in the descriptions by creators and critics, one thought proved to be paradoxically inspiring. While reading the texts devoted to such directors as Deguchi Norio (1940-2020) or Ninagawa Yukio (1935-2016), the most prominent directors, who introduced Shakespeare's plays to the contemporary Japanese theater (which coincidentally occurred after 1968, the year when *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* was published in Japan), I discovered that whether Kott is mentioned or not is random and seems to depend on the choices the authors make or on their knowledge or sympathies. On the academic discourse level, researchers can be divided into the following categories: those who reference Kott, because "everyone read his books", those who directly show Kott's influence on a given director, or those who do not mention

Kott at all. My intention is to further prove this in my further writing on the reception of Jan Kott's text in Japan.

There were many Jan Kott enthusiasts, but also many criticized him. I believe that his biography, and also the shape of his works caused, or maybe I should say "enabled", a reception of his texts which is equally inconsistent and escapes analysis. Jan Kott created a narrative out of an anti-narrative in his biography. Reading a narrative out of it leads to rejections of Kott's thoughts, and also Kott himself. Attachment to his judgments or ignoring them is also futile. It does not matter if we mention him or not when writing about today's stagings of Shakespeare's plays, as it is more a question of our subjective sympathies, of our decision of whether we like him or not.

Research on international reception of Kott's texts, as without doubt the reception can be said to be international, has been thus far unsystematic and there has been no academic study on the subject published to date. The reception of Kott's texts cannot be discussed without clarifying the circumstances with which they were met in particular places around the world. The conclusion cannot be generalized, as the interpretations of readers have always stemmed from the reality that surrounded them in a given moment; it differed, in for instance, Poland, England, Japan, Israel, or China. This requires extensive research in numerous circles and places.