In this country, William Shakespeare has been popular for the past 150 years. The translation of his complete works was finished as early as 1928 and his plays have often been performed in Japanese. Now there are a great number of students of Shakespeare. I for one read some of his plays in English at university and have seen quite a few of his plays performed; I have also read English and Japanese books on the dramatist. Today, among the Japanese critics, I am personally most impressed with the view of Shakespeare by Rintaro Fukuhara (1894–1981).

Most people are fascinated by impressive characters like Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth, or Lady Macbeth, whereas Fukuhara shifts our attention towards minor characters who do not usually attract the audience’s attention. He tells us that Shakespeare is a great dramatist in that he has created attractive marginal characters as well as commanding figures. A play cannot be complete without people who are not particularly important for the development of the plot.

One example is a messenger in *Romeo and Juliet*. An old man totters onto the stage in Act I. He is Capulet’s servant. He is going to deliver the invitations to the feast to be given by his master, but he cannot read the address, because he is illiterate. He happens to come across Romeo and, saying to him, ‘I pray, sir, can you read?’ asks him to whom the invitations are addressed.

Romeo, sad at his unrewarded love towards Rosaline, answers that he can read ‘mine own fortune in my misery’ and then reads the address aloud and lets him know to whom the letters should be delivered. He incidentally finds his love’s name among the guests, and decides to
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attend the feast, disguised by a mask. He sees Juliet there and falls in love with her.

The old man is such an inconsequential figure that he is not listed among the *dramatis personae*, but Fukuhara emphasizes that the scene is not only amusing but also pathetic and regrets that it is omitted in an English film based upon the play.

The illiterate man belongs to the class in which no one expects him to go to school and learn how to read and write. Actually he cannot read, but he is ordered by his master to deliver the invitations with the guest’s name on them. He must ask others where to deliver. He is in an embarrassing situation.

No one wants to be illiterate. The messenger also wishes to read and write. He could read words if he had a chance to learn at school or elsewhere. Illiteracy is not history. Even today a number of countries are launching illiteracy eradication campaigns. The messenger scene in *Romeo and Juliet* makes us realize there are a lot of people in the world who neither read nor write.

Another example is an apothecary in Act V of the same play. Romeo goes to his shop to buy a dram of poison to kill himself after he hears that Juliet is dead. At first, the apothecary answers that it is prohibited to sell it on pain of death, but agrees to do so, saying, ‘My poverty, not the will, consents.’ He is too poor to observe Mantua’s law. A hungry man cannot observe any law for that matter. As Romeo justly says to him, ‘the world affords no law to make thee rich’. In the film, regrettably, the apothecary scene also is omitted. Romeo uses a dagger, instead of drinking poison, to kill himself. As a result, the audience cannot hear the poor man’s pathetic words which contain an important message. It is not only the apothecary alone that is so poor and hungry as to violate the law.

A third example is Cinna at the end of Act III in *Julius Caesar* (which was translated into Japanese in 1884 in the midst of the democratic movement). The play impresses us with the fight for liberty, Brutus’s noble character, Antony’s skilful speech, while Fukuhara turns our attention to Cinna, the poet, a minor character not directly related with the main plot. The plebeians who are stirred to fury by Antony