

THE NOH THEATRE OF JAPAN AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WEST

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I

Japan boasts of three highly developed traditional theatres—the *Noh*, the *Kabuki*, and the *Bunraku*. The *Bunraku* or the puppet theatre has a finely executed technique in addition to the strong folk-art appeal and can hold the playgoer captivated as much as any entertainment.

The *Kabuki* (sixteenth century), less than four hundred years old, is romantic and popular, characterized by display of adventure and passion in plot and characterization, a colourful setting, stunning costumes and flamboyant music and acting. The famous *Jiraya Goketsu Monogatari*, the *Kabuki* I saw in 1975 at the new *Kabuki-za*, had acquired rather modern gadgets to produce miraculous and gigantic effects. *Jiraya*, the magnificent “Robber of Justice” was able to transform himself into an enormous fire-belching toad and exhibit other magical feats, more suited, I must admit, to children’s than to adult taste. Children’s roars of laughter from the audience filled the otherwise dignified Hall.⁴ I have seen other *Kabuki* plays that were equally exotic, but more human. Altogether, the *Kabuki* theatre is gorgeous, spectacular and energetic, full of sound and fury, love, intrigue, risk, suspense—not infrequently, also violence.

In marked contrast, the *Noh*, a full-fledged theatre by the fourteenth century, is classical, chaste, sophisticated and exclusive.

Under the patronage of the 3rd Shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the founder of the theatre, Kan’ami (1333-84), evolved the *Noh* from a combination of *Sarugaku* (a lively harvest or religious dance) and the Hien (794-1186) courtly arts of *Gigaku* and *Bugaku*. This was perhaps one expression during

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the Muromachi renaissance of the nostalgia felt for the elegance, chivalry and the never-to-return glories and glamour of the past.

The most historic event in connection with the *Noh* theatre was the stage appearance in the year 1374, of father and son (Kan'ami and the ten or eleven years old Zeami) in a ceremonial performance at the Kanze-za, Kyoto, before their first royal patron (Yoshimitsu). This won the favour of the Shogun and his court and left a lasting impression upon the boy Zeami as much as on the subsequent course of the *Noh*.

Zeami (1363-1443) is the real father of the *Noh* drama. He is said to have written a hundred or more plays and acted with distinction in many. Withal, he wrote twenty-three treatises on the secrets of *Noh* and every conceivable subject transmitted to him orally from boyhood to the age of twenty-two by his father, who was a dedicated writer, actor and producer with intimate experience of the *Noh* theatre. After his death Zeami expanded Kan'ami's instructions and added subtleties and secrets from his own personal experience of writing, acting and producing the *Noh* over the decades, until he had built up a complete system of dramatic art. Critics have compared Zeami's *Kadensho* (Book of the Transmission of the Flower) and parts of another treatise to Aristotle's *Poetics*. *Kadensho* is considered to be the most authoritative document on the *Noh* and reveals Zeami's search for dramatic form and aesthetic principles. His painstaking teachings and theories on the composition of *Noh* plays, on dance, music, acting, staging and production are well-established and religiously followed to this day.

Zeami is also responsible for giving to the *Noh* theatre a deeply spiritual tone for which he drew heavily on the old national roots of Shinto worship and Buddhist concepts of non-attachment. The shrine and the temple, the original homes of the greatly refined later *Noh*, are never lost sight of and serve as symbols of ceremony and ritual connected with the ghost world of the Ancestors and the austerity and introspection of Buddhism. Buddhism, in particular the Zen school, had a deep fascination and widespread impact upon the Japanese way of life as well as on their aesthetics. The Tea Ceremony, the *Noh*, the *Ikebana* (flower arrangement), Listening to Incense or Savouring Incense, *Smi-e* the black and white scroll painting, *Bonsai* (the science of dwarfing trees), Dry Gardens are all influenced by Zen.

Further, the *Noh* must be seen against the medieval cultural and social milieu. The samurai or the soldierly class (we might call them the Japanese *kshatriyas*) and the feudal nobility were among the educated, fine flower of the Japanese literati. They had also deliberately cultivated Spartan character and Spartan tastes and felt a profound sense of responsibility expected of the defenders of the Land of the Rising Sun. Their keen sense of propriety arising out of their privileged position made them realize that aristocracy of birth demanded aristocracy of outlook, manners and behaviour. Snobbish in regard

to the fine arts, they were forbidden places of popular entertainment. Again, their war-time activities, at all times, reminded them of the transitoriness of earthly success and splendour, defeat and failure. The strains and suppressions of the civil wars during the feudal period drove them to turn the mind from the changes and chances of the battlefield to the Buddha and to take into account the inexorable law of *karma*. In such a context it is not difficult to see why they encouraged this meditative, symbolical dramatic art through which they sought moments of tranquillity in the theatre and learnt to enjoy spells of non-attachment and peace.

Their aesthetics are also inspired by principles of sobriety, unobtrusiveness and quiet grace. They extolled the ideal of solitariness, frugality and reticence as against multiplicity, dazzle and gaiety. The contrast between the Indian Sun Temple of Konarak with its abundance and variety of detail and the stark austerity of the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo is marked. A Japanese Professor flying between Bombay and Calcutta was most struck by the vast vacant expanse of the Indian continent. Perhaps the Indian landscape with its vast expanse and vacancy attracted the Indian artist to extravagant and crowded canvases, be it sculpture or painting or poetry. The most outstanding principle of Japanese art is asymmetry. The "fearful symmetry" Blake found in the Tiger and the visitor to Japan finds in the august spectacle of Mount Fuji are accomplishments of the hands of God. Man can only dream of, and evoke images of perfection. The Japanese artist recognizes the myth of completeness in earthly life and articulates that wisdom by presenting a partial view of reality. A Japanese garden is a master-piece of unpredictability and opens out to the viewer unsuspected vistas and depths not seen at a glance as in a Mughal Garden where the plan is forthright and symmetrical. Related to this concept is the concern for the distorted and ugly aspects of nature and human life as against the straight, the tall, the well-formed. For those accustomed to the way of *bushido* — the way of the Warrior — the concept of *furyu* — tenderness for the weak, the unwanted, the fallen — made great appeal. For instance, *Bonsai* or the dwarfing of trees is meant to give one not only a feeling of *sabi* — hoariness, ancientness and permanence — but also to create a feeling of sympathy for the twisted, the warped and the unfortunate.

In Zen spirituality, there seems to be a strong element of the concrete. The Japanese, by and large, are a practical people — rulers, soldiers, makers of things, peasants — all. They rarely go in for abstract philosophising. Nor do they, I think, wish to remain in a state of dream and abstraction. Periods of religious and artistic devotion and ecstasy are used as temporary retreats into the visionary world from which participants must return to the daily concourse with a new kind of awareness and wisdom. As a student at Columbia University I had the good fortune to meet Dr. Daisetsu Suzuki, the greatest modern exponent of Zen Buddhism of the Kamakura School. Very unceremoniously he accosted me by saying : "You Indians have always been weaving

systems of philosophy. Why don't you get down for a change and do something about your poverty?" This coming from a Zen contemplative took me aback and it also made a deep impression on me. I think the Japanese national sensibility is more artistic than metaphysical. The true artist is drawn to the particular and the concrete rather than to the general and the abstract. The Japanese traditional artistic temperament expresses the particular in terms of ritual, ceremony and symbol, with severe selection and economy and makes of it a studied, fastidious art. A careful study shows that whether consciously or unconsciously the typical Japanese aesthetics are embodied in subtle and delicate ways in the *Noh* theatre as also in the Tea Cult, Dry Gardens, *Ikebana*, *Bonsai*, etc.

Composition of a Noh Play

Zeami observes "Even if the playwright has not a deep knowledge of the classics, he can write a good play with his technical skill" (p. 68, *Kadensho*). Authenticity of historical material especially in the *Waki-Noh* — God *Noh* — and explanation of the classical background are of prime importance to him in order to engage the audience at once. Simple or complex, the plot must have an exciting climax, not necessarily by way of vigorous action, but certainly in its emotional and psychological movement. Secondly, says Zeami, the *Noh*-maker must use "elegant and easily understood phrases from songs and poetry" (p. 69, *Kadensho*). One of the chief delights of the *Noh* enthusiast is his recognition of quotations from Chinese and Japanese classics in which the play abounds and which give the play a universality and connection with the past. "He must write in a different style according to whether the action takes place in China or ancient Japan" (p. 69, *Kadensho*).

Sophisticated Sanskrit or Chinese words inserted indiscriminately will make the action absurd and unnatural. The dramatist is enjoined to use "refined language", "soft words" and "strong words" which produce elegance and strength respectively. "Clumsy and strange-sounding words are effective only when they correspond to the actions of the characters" (p. 69, *Kadensho*). But vulgarity and coarseness are permitted under no circumstances, for these would offend the delicate sensibility of the courtly audience. Zeami was also insistent on the use of recurrent poetic imagery to give unity to the dominant mood of the play. Introduction of new images is not possible in a short piece such as the *Noh*. In *Takasago*, there are many references to pines and to the sea — both contributing to the mood and to the plot of the play. The mood of the play might relate to loneliness, nostalgia, regret, jealousy, revenge, pain of parting and loss of a loved one. Whether the play has serene or less serene, even tempestuous action, the words, the singing, the music, the dancing and gestures must be co-ordinated and have the power to move the heart. Whereas the music appeals to the ear, "the posturing appeals to the eye" (p. 72, *Kadensho*).

The structure of the play, musical or otherwise, falls into three parts, viz. *jo-ha-kyu*. In *jo* i.e., Introduction, the secondary character, *Waki*, usually a travelling monk, sets out on a journey as in the *God-Noh*, *Takasago*. He arrives at Takasago Bay and learns from a local person, in this case from an old couple sweeping fallen pine leaves, the story of the twin pines, one at Takasago Bay and the other at Sumiyoshi separated by thousands of miles of mountains and rivers. The *ha* i.e., Development begins with the ceremonial appearances of the *Shite*, the principal character, i.e. the protagonist, in this case the old man who reveals his and his companion's identities, recalls memories of their conjugal happiness and steps into a boat bound for Sumiyoshi. In *kyu* i.e., Climax and Ending, the old man is deified at Sumiyoshi and performs a God-dance.

The highest peaks of music and poetry, haunting poetic figures of speech and quotations from the ancient classics are found in the *ha*. The play ends in the evocation of the past, in the brilliance and ecstasy of music and in the final dance by the *Shite* (here the old man). The plot of a *Noh* play is a mere fragment usually with a single, uncomplicated motif and can be appreciated in the context of the total *bangumi* (dramatic programme) which might duplicate the *jo-ha-kyu* pattern. In the old days the *bangumi* was protracted over three to five days on ceremonial occasions, such as the initiation and marriages of the Shogun or receptions at a Shogun's court of envoys from the Emperor in Kyoto, wielding a slender control over the rival feudal lords. As many as four to five days were assigned to the very central ceremony of the New Year and rites for the dead Shogun. Sometimes, upto ten short pieces were presented from nine in the morning to three or four in the afternoon. But the usual *bangumi* offered a cycle of life in five or six plays — often corresponding to the cycle of the seasons in Japan.

The first play, *shugen-kami-Noh* or *Waki-Noh* was in the form of a ritualistic dance in praise of the grandeur and bounty of the Gods of Nihon. The next, *shura-mono*, a Battle-piece, celebrated the deeds of the splendid warriors of the twelfth century rival Genji and Heike clans who had fought and expelled enemies and demons to restore peace in the land or suffered in hell for shedding blood. The *onna-mono*, woman piece also called *katsuro-mono* i.e. the Wig Play, so called because women actors being forbidden on the *Noh* stage, (for that matter on the *Kabuki* stage also) male actors wore wigs to act female parts, introduced gentleness and love themes, lyrics and dances of exquisite beauty after the tumult of war scenes or suffering in hell. A good example of *onna-mono* is *Sotowa Komachi* which is about the life of the most beautiful woman of the time who now is a beggar and sits on a grave stone to recall her glamorous past. Another favourite *onna-mono* is *Isutsu*, variously translated into English as either the well-curb or the well-image. This relates the story of the faithful Ki-no-Aritsune's daughter and the not-so-faithful Narihira.

The repertoire of the fourth group includes a variety of themes. Here one might come across a *Noh* of spirits such as the exquisite *Aoi-no-ue* or *Nishikigi* or *Motomezuka*. The fourth play may also be a *Kyogen*, i.e. an earthy farce in prose depicting the foibles and weaknesses of mankind. Or the *Kyogen* character may narrate the action that is going to be dramatized in part 2 of the play. I think, the only piece non-Japanese and uninitiated Japanese enjoy is the *Kyogen*. Often a *Kyogen* is used as an interlude between two serious plays. *Kyogen* actually began as a popular comic play, but when associated with the *Noh* it acquired the discipline and sober tone of the *Noh*. The *Kyogen* actor is also called *Kyogen*.

The last piece is called *kiri-Noh*. It has supernatural protagonists and ends on a congratulatory note and felicitates the Shogun lords in the audience. Here, too, the enraptured dance forms the finale.

Characterization

The *Noh* is based on ancestor worship; hence many ghosts and supernatural characters who visit their earthly abodes, relive their tragedy or happiness or find completion of their former fragmentary lives in visionary dance and poetic experience. Ghosts are charming or interesting in poetry, but they defy characterization! Characterization is dependent on moral or other kinds of conflict. If there is any conflict at all in a *Noh* play, it comes out as a pale shadow, as a memory of the original — a much weakened and romanticized experience of a remote past. So we might say that both the *Noh* plot and character are props for the evocation of human sentiment, passion or state of mind.

The *Noh* is essentially a one-man drama. The *Shite* holds the stage throughout. He appears in different roles in Part I and Part 2 of the play. He might have a *Shite-tsure* to assist him. The *Waki* and *Waki-tsure* are secondary characters and play the role of witnesses to the *Shite's* story and action. Two or three other characters, called *Koken* who sit in the left hand corner of the back stage assist the actors on the stage with the changing of costume or the handing of properties and serve as promptors. The chief of these is also an under-study for the *Shite* and as such is an equal-ranking actor with the *Shite*. Often the under-study is a most experienced and accomplished actor and may be superior in ability and training to the *Shite*.

Theatre and Stage

Originally *Noh* performances were given at the Shogun's court or at the house of a nobleman, half out-of-doors. The smallness and intimacy of the *Noh* theatre with its conventional structure and size hold to this day, thanks to the zeal of Minoru Umewaka and his family who reclaimed the *Noh* during the Meiji Restoration. The stage, on level with the spectators, is a square platform open on three sides. The most striking feature, the twisted, luxuriant pine

tree painted in vivid green in the centre background of glossy tan-coloured wood, is a symbol of prosperity and performance against a fleeting scene. The same fresh tan wood lines the walls, the ceiling and floor of the stage. The Mirror Room, on the spectators' extreme left is connected with the main stage by a twenty-one feet long Bridge-stage called *hashigakari*. The asymmetry, with nothing to correspond to the Bridge-way or Bridge-stage on the right, is pronounced. Three pine saplings in pots, symbols of Heaven, Earth and Man mark the intervals of position for the actors' entrances and exits. The four pillars of the stage are conveniently used for the various positions of the actors. For instance, there is the *Shite's* pillar where the protagonist first stations himself, another is called the *Shite's* eye-fixing pillar, a third serves as the *Waki's* pillar and the fourth is reserved for the flute-player.

There is no curtain on the stage. But there is a gorgeous, almost gaudy, striped curtain at the entrance to the Mirror Room, thus making a sharp contrast to the rest of the subdued stage decor. The ceremonious lifting of this curtain and the slow and dignified entrance of the *Shite* create an atmosphere of hushed expectation in the theatre. The *Shite*, in his *Noh* regalia and mask which make him look larger, broader than life, glides (does not walk) in measured steps with the majesty of a whole royal procession.

The stage setting is spare and simple and leaves much to the imagination. Nor are there elaborate descriptions of the scene in fine poetry as in a Shakespeare's play. An open framework will serve for a boat. A hut or place is erected quickly by putting a roof on four bamboo poles. The properties are handed out, when called for, by the *Koken* in the presence of the audience without the least distraction. The Japanese fan alone is capable of representing a diversity of things such as a sword, a dagger, a shield as well as a diversity of action and emotions.

In contrast to the simplicity of the stage, the *Noh* costumes called *shozoku* are regal and resplendent, and in traditional colour and cut. They are well padded to enhance the stature and nobility of the characters. The length and cut of the Kimono sleeve play an important part in acting. One is dazzled by robes of rare beauty made of silk and brocade and lined with fine silk. These garments have been lovingly preserved by each *Noh* School for centuries, and *Noh* families pride themselves on their costly heirlooms bought after the Meiji Restoration from bankrupt companies. Originally they were the property of some feudal lord or Shogun. There is an atmosphere of eternity about these treasures of silk and gold and embroidery.

One of the most distinguishing features of the *Noh* theatre is its use of masks. Masks contribute to the symbolic and stylized representation of action. They are worn by *Shite*, the *Tsure* (his assistant), old men, female and supernatural figures. There is a conventional set of masks for each role.

The protagonist, the villain, the demon, the mad woman can be recognized at once by their masks as well as by their costumes. Masks also dispense with the necessity for make-up and solve the problems of representing age, sex and the supernatural. A good actor using a mask with neutral expression can give, through a minimum of stylized poses of the head and neck, an unbelievable range of emotional meaning. A downward glance at once creates a feeling of dejection and woe. An upward glance lights up the masked face with joy or surprise. I never ceased to marvel at this miracle taking place from moment to moment. The narrow slits for eyes (narrow half-shut eyes are ideals of Japanese beauty and cause romantic tremors in the beholder, I am told) hold the actor's inner concentration by literally impeding his view of the external world. Cut off from much of the material reality surrounding him, the actor can achieve a more intense vision of the imaginative role he is called upon to play. A *Noh* mask weighs two pounds. Both the weight poised on the head and the difficulty of seeing through narrow slits necessitate slow movement and further enhance the quiet and dignified quality of the *Noh* acting. Masks are made by skillful and dedicated sculptors. I saw masks of the most exquisite workmanship in the temples of Nara. In the 1960s *Noh* lovers spoke glowingly of Nori Kitazawa of Kyoto who adhered to the traditional *Noh* concepts and took seriously the task of choosing wood of the right texture and thickness before carving and painting his high prized creations.

The *Noh* music: *Hayashi* is the name for the music and *utai* is the term for the chanting. What created in me the most trance-like effect was the music of *Noh*. The Japanese playgoer seemed as much under its spell, but certainly not because of novelty which might account for my own state. The habitual *Noh*-fan sat often with his eyes closed enjoying, I felt, more the words and sound than the spectacle. It has been averred that the *Noh* is essentially a musical rather than a visual theatre. Recordings of *Noh* music provide for some an experience quite as meaningful as a stage performance. All subtleties of masked acting, the stylized dances, the gorgeous costumes would be nothing without the irresistible, almost primitive, appeal of the sound of *Noh*. Nor is the *Noh* music by any manner or means primitive. It is a highly cultivated art and partakes of the inveterate Japanese habit of long training and artifice. The artifice lies, I think, in preserving the spontaneous primitive appeal. I was fortunate enough to hear Mrs. Chifumi Shimazaki, a highly trained *Noh* singer, sing and play some of the *Noh* lyrics to demonstrate the diversity of musical modes suited to the action of the play. A single man's voice can impersonate many parts and often gives the impression of dialogue. Often it seems the dialogue is carried on between the words and their repetitive echo. One finds a similar device in Karnatak music whereby the human voice is echoed with slight variations by an instrument or one instrument is echoed by another. A poetic style with choral repetitions is congenial to lines such as the following :

*And passing distant Naruo
To Sumiyoshi we have come
To Sumiyoshi we have come.*

Or

*The plants of varied hues and scents
Are part of Buddha's shining land
Are part of Buddha's shining land.*

Or

*Give it with tears to the wandering monk
With tears to the wandering monk.*

the repetition sliding off into an echo.

The *Noh* orchestra consists of a shoulder drum, a knee drum, possibly a flat drum, all of which mark the rhythm, and a flute capable of shrill lonely piping, "provides the melodic theme of the songs and dances" (p. xiv, *Japanese Noh Drama*, Tokyo, 1955). The eight-to ten-man chorus rhythmically chants and intones words to accompany the *Shite's* dances. The chorus does not participate in the action, though it carries on a dialogue with the *Shite* and *Waki*, mostly commenting on the action as it is taking place on the stage. The drums, the flute and choral chanting create a blended musical background. A double set of boards at the back of the stage, and five earthenware jars placed at mathematically determined distances under the stage enrich the tone of the music and produce unexpected fullness and reverberations. Arranged in the conventional asymmetrical manner in front of the painted pine, back stage, slightly to the right, sit the musicians in readiness for the *Waki* and the *Shite* to make their respective entrances. The chorus sits on the right hand side opposite the Bridge-stage. The musical exposition or the *Waki's* entrance music called *shidai* begins in a slow deliberate, shrill, bewitching flute monologue to the insistent beat of the drums. The rest of the play proceeds through many musical variations until the dance finale.

Mrs. Shimazaki described and sang or played nearly a dozen samples of *Noh* music each with a special name in the play *Takasago*, a *Waki-Noh* which is always first on the *Noh bangumi* (programme) and in *Izutsu* an *onna-mono* which is always third on the *Noh bangumi* as observed earlier. For each kind of play there is a different repertoire of music and the repertoire is complicated and extensive. Of the twenty odd items of music in *Takasago* as described by Mrs. Shimazaki, I noted the following :

Shidai, introductory travel song in regular rhythm by the *Waki* and *Wakizure* (*Tomonari* and attendant), later repeated by the chorus as *jidori*;

Shin-no-shidai, dignified music at the entrance of the *Shite* and *Tsure* (old man and old woman in *Takasago*);

Issei, solemn or elated brief melodious song in free rhythm by the *Shite* and *Tsure* (old man and old woman) who describe the scenery at Takasago Bay;

Ashirai, quiet music as the above actors enter the main stage;

Sashi, a recitative in free rhythm in solo and in duet when the *Shite* and *Tsure* (old man and old woman) contemplate their lonely life in Takasago;

Saga-uta, low pitched song in regular rhythm by the *Shite* and *Tsure* (old man and old woman) beginning :

*"Countless years have passed
The needles are falling upon our sleeves
Let us sweep them away
Let us sweep them away—" etc.*

Rongi, a kind of debate song between the *Shite* and the chorus;

Klri, a finale sung by the chorus at the end of the play :

*"'A thousand Autumns'
Rejoice the people's hearts;
And 'Ten thousand years'
Endow them with new life.
With gladness fill each heart
With gladness fill each heart."*

Noh Acting and Dancing (Mai)

The *Noh* is designated by terms such as accomplishment, skill, talent. *Noh* acting is an accomplishment and skill as much as it is a God-given vocation passed on from generation to generation with hereditary pride. It is claimed that the famous actor, Minoru Umewaka, was the forty-fifth descendant of this ancient line. A *Noh* actor is expected to achieve a mastery not only of his art and to excel actors of his own troupe and other troupes, but to excel his own performance of the season or seasons before, always remembering to act in harmony with the time of his life — say at twenty-five or thirty-five or forty-five. Since no female actors are permitted on the *Noh* stage, the most celebrated actors are those who can play female parts. A life-time's training, as vigorous as that of Plato's philosopher-king, *Noh* acting demands from the age of seven to forty-five a constant discipline in gesture, pose, dance, song and speech. "All the exercises," says Zeami, "must be severely and strictly

done." (p. 16, *Kadensho*). The Mirror Room is not only a place for dressing, but a place and time for gaining repose. The mirror reveals the actor's face and form as well as helps him to realise and to concentrate on his role as a god, a mad woman, or a demon with imaginative sympathy. Here we notice the Zen ideal of contemplation at work even in the Mirror Room. The dedication of Zeami to the *Noh* art is seen in his "three important prohibitions ...against lasciviousness, gambling, drunkenness. "There must be no self-assertion," either (p. 16, *Kadensho*).

Zeami devotes a whole chapter to *mono-mane*. *Mono-mane* means imitation of action realistically. Zeami admits that to imitate the manners and carriage of emperors, ministers, generals, courtiers realistically is impossible and to imitate the humble manners of wood-cutters and charcoal burners might be possible but is not necessary nor interesting for an aristocratic audience. In any case it is a matter of degrees of realism. Besides, for symbolical drama stylized gestures and postures and ritualistic presentation are most suitable. In the end *Mono-mane* means not necessarily to imitate action, but to imitate the essence of action in a restrained, stylized manner.

Zeami gives interesting and meaningful instructions regarding the impersonation of nine different types of character, i.e. women, old men, maskless characters, mad people, monks, *shura* or warriors who have killed in battle and have suffered in *shurado* (one of the six regions of Hell) *kami* or supernatural beings, *oni* or demons, and *karagoto* or foreigners, especially Chinese.

Regarding female actors, costuming and posturing are most important. Garments should cover the male hands and neck. The girdle must be tied loosely, and bending at the waist and knees must be kept to the minimum. The masked face must assume such poses as will not reveal male features (pp. 26-27, *Kadensho*).

In the impersonation of mad people there is a male and a female style. Madness may be caused by demoniacal possession or because of anxiety of separation from parents, children, husbands and masters. It may be a temporary derangement brought on at the sight of some natural scene. This last kind of madness borders on ecstasy (pp. 30-31, *Kadensho*). Costuming for mad people must be gay with flowers on the head (like Shakespeare's sweet, mad Ophelia).

I have seen on the *Noh* stage at the Kanze Kaikan (Tokyo), the most magnificent display of madness in *Aoi-no-ue*, where the lady Rokuju, inflamed by jealousy because of Prince Genji's drifting to the lady Aoi, suffers torments of loss and regret. The neutral mask recorded marvellously the demoniac and forlorn condition of an agonized spirit. One sleeve falling off her shoulder and hanging disconsolately down her side in the prescribed stylized manner

the lady searched her fan holding it away from her as if (the fan) were her last refuge and contained the whole text of her suffering and fate. Locked in a private, closed world of anguish and loneliness, the mad woman danced in hypnotised frenzy creating most movingly the forsaken state of the sick mind. It was a spell not to be broken, but broken it was when the dancer stamped his feet twice according to the traditional direction and left the stage. The make-believe and absorption on the part of the beholder vanished in a trice.

In the impersonation of warriors, there must be "splendour and gorgeousness", and the knack for handling the bow, quiver, and sword must be carefully cultivated (p. 32 *Kadensho*). "To be horrifying, is indeed, the real purpose of a *Noh* of *Oni*," says Zeami, on the impersonation of Demon, "but intensity and horror are very far from being interesting" (pp. 33-34, *Kaden sho*). The actor who can steer the right course in the representation of Demon is, according to Zeami, a real genius. The *Karagoto* (foreigner) role is suited to an experienced *Shite*, "It is almost impossible to imitate Chinese realistically" (p. 35, *Kadensho*). "There is really nothing to do but costume the role in Chinese style and to assume a foreign courage" (p. 34, *Kadensho*). Here it is interesting to note Zeami's national prejudice and wise insularity when the chief foreigner used to be the Chinese.

The most inward of the aesthetic concepts of *Noh* acting are found in the terms *Yugen*, *Kurai*, *Kasa*, *Take*, and above all *Hana* and *Shin-no-hana*. In medieval times *Yugen* in art meant, among other things, beauty, elegance and refinement, especially in the recapture of these excellences of the Heian Court. In the *Yugen* style, it is stressed that weakness and sentimentality and "introspective expression of emotion" are to be eschewed and tenderness and vigour are to be harmonised as much as repose and magnificence. (p. 9, *Kadensho*). *Kurai* literally means rank or grade but when used in relation to an actor or acting, it is translated as distinction. *Kasa* literally means mass or volume. Here it refers to the commanding presence of a *Noh* actor. *Take* literally means height. Here it means nobility, dignity, clarity. *Hana* and *Shin-no-hana* are terms not so easy to describe. They have a variety of interpretations. *Hana* is the "aesthetic beauty in the actor's style of acting and comes to him as a result of long training added to his innate artistic character". There are many styles suited to the time of the actor's age — boyhood, youth, maturity and so on. This means that *Hana* is the essence of novelty and unpredictability and is different in "the various aspects of its flowering" (p. 5, *Kadensho*). It must give fresh and vivid impressions. It has nothing to do with wit or cleverness or showiness (pp. 5-6 *Kadensho*). The actor should not only imitate and feel the essence of the situation, but identify himself wholly with the nature of the character. The form can be handed down from actor to actor. But *Hana* is acquired by each artist through his own effort (p. 8 *Kadensho*) The wise *Shite* will play roles unsuited to his genius in order to gain mastery over his weakness (p. 79, *Kadensho*). *Hana* means to create freedom and fluidity within the limits of the actor's ability and the age-long convention

of the *Noh* theatre. The symbol of *Hana*, says Zeami, is the flower or bloom. The temporary bloom of an actor comes and goes as does that of the flower in its seasons. But *Shin-no-hana*, the true flower, will befriend an actor throughout life, irrespective of time, place, circumstances and audience, as it did Kan'ami. Zeami tells us with pride that his father died on the 19th May at the age of fifty-two. On the fourth day that month his performance at the Sengen Shrine in Suruga was given with subdued brilliance, suited to his age, to his own favourite style of acting and to the occasion. "His flower looked better than ever" (pp. 23-24, *Kadensho*).

Terms like fame, reputation, prestige, popularity, success, failure, prominence in a troupe, are not infrequent in Zeami's pages and show his concern for a real rapport, as in any good theatre, between the actor and the audience. A good actor understands the psychology, the drawbacks and aspirations of the play-goer. Without losing the artist's integrity, the actor's aim is to give pleasure to the audience and meaning to their lives.

The philosophical basis of *Hana* is rooted in the law of *Yo* and *Yin* representing the inevitable polarities between the male and the female principles, between light and darkness, between strength and weakness, in short between the positive and negative positions. The actor's life is dominated, as everyone else's, by *Yo* and *Yin* alternately. The Heraclitean fine point of balance between opposites is too idealistic and is never reached. A *Noh* actor must wisely watch the sea-saw movement and seize the propitious moment of *Yo* for confident and brilliant acting. For *Shobu-Shin* the merry god of sports is a changeable god.

In its totality the term *Hana*, then, means whatever is suitable to the occasion (p. 96, *Kadensho*) which in turn means whatever is suitable to the actor's age, his own favourite style and ability, the cycle of the seasons, current tastes of the audience and the lucky favourings of *Yo*.

Zeami concludes "I cannot give more detailed instructions in writing. But the talented *Shite* who has acquired all this (i.e. *Hana*, *Shin-no-hana*, *Yugen*, *Kurai*, *Kasa* and *Take*) will understand naturally the more minute things without being told" (p. 35, *Kadensho*). Then he adds: "These instructions must not be shown to anyone except serious artists" (p. 81, *Kadensho*).

The dramatic and aesthetic excellences of *Noh* are not matters of routine instructions only. They arise out of the artist's dedication, hard work, humanity and intellectual and spiritual stature and are nurtured in secrecy and reticence and modesty.

II

Let me now turn to the impact of the *Noh* theatre on the West. Here

I am concerned with the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) and the influence of *Noh* on his work, especially his experiment in poetic drama inspired by the *Noh* theatre. Yeats wrote twenty-six plays; only a few of these are written in the style of plays for dancers.

In order to see fully the meaning and significance of this experiment it is necessary to place it in the literary and ideological setting of the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century — how this drama, in fact, the total work of Yeats, was a protest against bourgeois values, against the scientific temper of the age and, in particular, the new realistic tradition in literature. One is led to ask why Yeats, with a long and rich European tradition in drama from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Ibsen and Shaw, had to turn to a Far Eastern theatre, how he came upon it and what he did with it. In this connection one might point out, howsoever briefly, a few of the historical and intellectual factors that would provide a background and perhaps supply the reason.

Breaking through the late Victorian literary heritage, Yeats found himself to be a rebel reaching out for newer and more energetic forms in poetry and drama. He was hunting for a literary idiom that would range him opposite realism. His first direction came from the Symbolist movement on the European continent, especially France. An epoch-making event for poets was the publication, in 1899, of Arthur Symonds' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, which introduced to the English-speaking world the life and works of the new poets of France who were in the Romantic tradition, but who in their methods, techniques and language had something entirely arresting and meaningful to offer. Symbolist poets and playwrights like Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Stephane Mallarme, the Belgian-French poet Maurice Maeterlinck and others moved Yeats deeply at this time. At home, the most symbolist of poets, William Blake, who had had a revival, occupied Yeats' study and contemplation. Too conscious of "the pushing world" and gripped by thoughts of "the enchanted valley" Yeats found in symbolism, half-revealing and half-concealing, a literary device to capture the essence of human experiences that lie in the border country between dream and daylight, between madness and sanity, between imagination and fact. He was as enamoured, if not more, of other sources of symbolism which he found in the works of Swedenborg, in the occult traditions of the Jewish Kabbala and in Indian Theosophy. One is relieved that later he rose from Madam Blavatsky's version of Theosophy and translated in matchless English ten of the principal *Upanishads* as his tribute, I might say, to one of the finest Indian contributions to world literature. However, esoteric philosophies and practices, spiritual mediums and seances never lost their fascination for him.

Further, the new psychology of Freud, Jung and Adler, with startling disclosures about the Unconscious, the hidden complexes, disturbances and unpredictabilities of human behaviour, especially abnormal and irrational

states of mind held tremendous appeal for highly imaginative poets whose best poetry came perhaps from moments of their own lucid madness.

About this time another new intellectual preoccupation for poets was Anthropology, which seeks to describe and interpret tribal ways of life. Magic, myth, ritual, symbol through which primitive man made explanations for, and conquest of the inexplicable world of Nature, became for writers poetical devices to explore modern man's dilemmas and confusions. The influence of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* cannot be over-estimated in modern literature, notably poetry. For instance, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Finnigan's Wake* draw heavily on the symbolic content of primordial myths and practices.

Thus Continental, Jewish and Indian symbolism, the psychology of the Unconscious (Yeats's *Anima Mundi*) and Anthropological ritual extended for Yeats and his contemporaries the province of the imagination. These discoveries supplied accountrements proper to the magus, enchanter and poet and served to strengthen his protest against the cold, hard, limited scientific method, even outlook represented, say, in Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), and the mechanical processes of building new societies as represented by Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867). In the theatre world, Yeats left it to Ibsen (one dramatic phase) and to Shaw of the early period of *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* and Galsworthy to rectify social injustices and inequalities. Not that Yeats was not interested in social reform, but that he was less interested in organizing societies and governments and more in the individual and his inmost experiences, depths of distress and his ecstasies and flights of soul, his relationship to other individuals, to nature and to the gods that be. He made a temporary excursion into and quick retreat from the Irish political movement for freedom. The violence and disorder which characterized this period of Irish history repelled him and despite the fact that Maud Gonne, the thorn in his love life was an ardent nationalist and revolutionary, he turned to the more humane and refined movement of the Irish intellectual and cultural renaissance. One thing, however, Yeats did gain from his short-lived association with Irish nationalism and admitted it too — that "the Irish people (were) at that precise stage of their history when imagination shaped by many stirring events desires dramatic expression" (p. 74, *Explorations*, Yeats) the mainstay of drama being conflict of one sort or another and imaginative sympathy. "A good play" as George Moore said, "was possible in Dublin." The Abbey Theatre was waiting. So were Yeats and others of his school of thought.

The brilliant, witty social satire of Oscar Wilde, the fantasies of James Barrie, the musical light opera of Gilbert and Sullivan and other popular forms such as melodrama and extravaganza had little attraction for a poet of Yeats' quality. Especially did Yeats hold out against the new realism of the drama of Ibsen and Shaw with bold characterization, vigorous conflict and

action, realistic dialogue, stage setting and costumes and, most important of all, discussion on some pressing social issue—in other words the problem play. He protested that the Theatre was not a platform for propaganda or a place for mere amusement. The Theatre, he believed was a rendezvous for intellectual excitement and contemplative moments of insight. His approach to reality was through non-realistic modes through symbol, ritual, music, incantation, dance, poetic speech—all of which were suitable media for the portrayal of heroic character, noble action intensified emotion and passionate states of the soul—in short, portrayal of reality transcending appearance and mere realism.

Again, with his ardour for the aristocracy of birth, breeding and intellect, Yeats believed in the celebration of all that was high-born, strong, reckless, and exceptional. Heroes like Cuchulain, Finn, and Usna's children of Irish legend, or types of Aristotle's "magnanimous man" with vitality and vigour, or Shakespeare's Lears and Cordelias and Hamlets with intellectual and moral dimensions alone quickened his poetic sensibility. As a dramatist he would have felt at home in the age of Pericles, or the Age of Kalidas in Ancient India or the Age of Elizabeth I or the Muromachi period in medieval Japan. He was frankly partial to the classical, to old world virtues such as courage, chivalry, honour and generosity. In one place he says he would like to have spent a month in Byzantium before Justinian closed the Academy of Plato. Unfortunately, Yeats was born in a materialistic age dominated by middle class values in life and in society, and the logic and rigidity of the scientific method in knowledge as against knowledge gained by intuition and fitful intimations. Most of all he rejected the realistic tradition and the prose sense in literature and in the theatre.

He speaks repeatedly about establishing a kind of distance and intimacy in the theatre. The distance comes no doubt through non-realistic stylized representations of action and character, through ancient tales and myths of the past, and through the employment of the poetic style. The intimacy or immediacy comes through the actual physical smallness of the theatre, the homogeneity of a select audience and above all through portrayal of personal, intangible excitements and psychological inconsistencies, dejections and yearnings which make glad or sorrowful the heart of man.

With this kind of outlook and mood Yeats' talents and poetical furniture, Yeats set out in search of a new dramatic form and technique to make the Abbey Theatre, in contrast to the London stage, a theatre for poetical symbolical drama. From 1900 on, for the next twelve years he wrote, spoke, and debated on his new theories in which the poet, peasant and aristocrat were to play a leading part. With the help of sympathetic friends like Douglas Hyde (who could wield the Gaelic idiom and knew the Celtic drama), J.M. Synge, a new Irish dramatist, actors like the Fay brothers, Florence Farr with an incomparable voice for speaking verse, Sara Bernhardt

and De Max with talent for quiet stylized acting and, above all, Lady Gregory whose *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* supplied a fund of Celtic legends and stories and who presided over the whole scene of the Irish literary and cultural renaissance with her old world charm and grace, Yeats's Irish Dramatic Movement (1901-1919) was firmly launched.

Introduction to Noh

Then as magically as all good things happen, in 1912 Yeats came upon the manuscripts of Fenollosa edited by Ezra Pound, was introduced to the *Noh* theatre of Japan, and discovered that he had been moving towards the style of this medieval aristocratic drama long before he knew there was such a thing as the *Noh*. The years 1912-16 were eventful and exhilarating for Yeats.

In 1916 Macmillan published '*Noh*' or *Accomplishment : A Study of the Classical stage of Japan* by Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa with an essay on the *Noh* by Yeats. This book contained translations of fifteen *Noh* plays and synopses of five. Another publication was *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* (1916) by the Cuala Press, Dublin. This carried four *Noh* translations, *Hagoromo*, *Nishikigi*, *Kumasaka* and *Kagekiyo*, selected and edited by Ezra Pound with an Introduction by Yeats. These works were among the first to introduce the *Noh* to the English-speaking Western world. About this time Yeats also came to know certain personalities who proved a great inspiration in his *Noh* experiment days. For instance, he met Arthur Waley, a great scholar of Chinese and Japanese with his monumental translation into English of the Japanese classic *The Tale of the Genji* and his many *Noh* translations. In 1915 he was introduced to a young talented Japanese dancer, Michio Ito, then living in London. Later it was Ito who was to dance magnificently the part of the guardian of the well in the first performance of *At the Hawk's Well* in 1916. The impact on Yeats of the *Noh* and of these gifted personalities, together with people like Gordon Craig, son of Ellen Terry, schooled under Henry Irving in the effects of stagelighting, Edmund Dulac the maker of masks and screens and Walter Rummel who wrote music for some of the plays for dancers, was immediate. The first play in the new manner, *At the Hawk's Well* was written in 1916. By 1921 he had a volume of four called *Four Plays for Dancers* with a Preface and notes on each play published by Macmillan. It included *At the Hawk's Well*, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, and *Calvary*. The first three are based on Irish legend and history; the first two deal with his favourite hero, Cuchulain.

Yeats wrote "My blunder has been that I did not discover in my youth that my theatre must be the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or making out a place with a stick or setting a screen against a wall... I have found my first model... in the *Noh* stage of aristocratic Japan." (p. 86, *Four Plays for Dancers*). But what held irresistible appeal for Yeats was

the combination of symbolism, masks, music, ritual dances and quiet stylized acting.

In dramatic technique, Yeats favoured the one-act play with a simple plot. Whereas the *Noh* play has two parts divided by the *Kyogen* interlude (whether a serious narration or mildly comic display), Yeats usually had three scenes not called scenes one and two etc., but the one fluidly merging into the other, thus eliminating the necessity for a curtain in front of the stage. The action of his plays begins in the everyday world, transcends into a visionary experience and returns to the everyday world. Plots and characters are taken from the mythical or Heroic Ages of Ireland. Yeats had at his disposal an abundance of stories and legends about heroes, superhuman figures, demons, ghosts, spirits benevolent and malicious—all of which corresponded to the gods and the ghost world of the Japanese ancestral tradition. The language of the dialogue bears resemblance to the spoken language of the day and is suited to the character into whose mouth it is put. The language of the chorus, lyrics, and songs and the speech of the noble protagonists is naturally in verse, surcharged with figures of evocation and suggestive rhythms. As in the *Noh* there is repetition of certain lines, but more subtly rendered than in the *Noh*. For instance :

*The heart would be always awake
The heart would turn to its rest*

(At the Hawk's Well)

Or

*A woman's beauty is like a white
Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone
At daybreak*

(The only Jealousy of Emer)

Or

*What crime can stay so in the memory
What crime can keep apart the lips of lovers
Wandering and alone*

(The Dreaming of the Bones)

The rhythm and pauses of the songs lend themselves easily to singing, and chanting with silences in between. For silence is important in the Japanese art of communication. As in the *Noh*, the imagery is consistent and sustained by just one or two dominant images. For instance, in *Calvary* there are many avian references—sea birds, eagles, herons, swans, gulls. I am tempted to

quote the last part of the final lyric from *Calvary* with its refrain of "God has not appeared to the birds"

*The ger-eagle has chosen his part
In blue deep of the upper air
Where one-eyed day can meet his stare;
He is content with his savage heart*

God has not appeared to the birds.

*But where have last year's cygnets gone?
The lake is empty; why do they fling
White wing out beside white wing?
What can a swan need but a swan?*

God has not appeared to the birds.

With Cuchulain the young, impetuous man setting out in search of the waters of immortality the images in *At the Hawk's Well* are water, stream, spring, well, and salt wind.

As in the *Noh*, characterization is not developed through conflicting choices. Besides, the character of legendary beings is already fixed. It remains for the dramatist to exhibit it in symbolic action and to subordinate both plot and character to sentiment or some profound emotion.

The half-supernatural personages of the Celtic past take readily to the use of masks. "What could be more suitable," writes Yeats, "than that Cuchulain, let us say, a half-supernatural legendary person, should show to us a face not made before a looking-glass,... but modelled by some distinguished artist?" (pp. 86-7, *Four Plays for Dancers*). Such distinguished artists were Edmund Dulac and the Dutch sculptor Hildo van Knop. But for Dulac, Yeats admits, these plays could not have existed.

In the *Noh* only the protagonist, old men, females and supernatural beings wear masks. Yeats was so excited by the idea of masked players that he fell into extravagance and enjoined upon all actors either to use masks or to paint their faces to resemble masks. The only character in *Four Plays for Dancers* who is maskless is the youthful rebel in *The Dreaming of the Bones*. In *The Only Jealousy of Emer* Yeats introduced a change of masks on the stage when Cuchulain's masked face turns out to be that of Bricriu, the god of Discord, in disguise.

"If I write plays and organise performances", says Yeats, "on any scale and with any system, I shall hope for a small number of typical masks, each capable of use in several plays. The face of the speaker should be as much a

work of art as the lines that he speaks... that all may be as artificial as possible" (vi, Preface, *Four Plays for Dancers*.) Yeats was thrilled at the prospect of substituting a mask "for the face of a commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his own vulgar fancy." In any case, he believed that the expression of a masked actor is in the movement of the whole body and not in that of the face only.

Costuming was planned with equal fastidiousness. Edmund Dulac, with his creative aptitude, designed costumes as he did masks. His version of the mask and costume of the guardian of the well in *At the Hawk's Well* with powerful wings brooding over the whole scene (as shown in an illustration in *Four Plays for Dancers*, Macmillan, 1st edn.) is a masterpiece of ingenuity and symbolic stylized art. Minute and careful instructions are given by Yeats on stage setting also. All four plays were meant for drawing-room or studio with an elite surrounding a small stage "to share the one lofty emotion." The stage is stripped bare to its minimum. Against some suitable painted background or screen there is a square blue cloth for the well in *At the Hawk's Well*, a bed for Cuchulain in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, and a cross in *Calvary*. Yeats wanted "half a dozen players who can bring all their properties in a cab" (p. 86, *Four Plays for Dancers*.) In the absence of a stage curtain Yeats introduced what he described as the folding and unfolding of the cloth at the beginning and ending of the play. This is not a *Noh* feature.

Music which was an integral part of the *Noh* is also integral to *Four Plays for Dancers*. There are three musicians in each play. They constitute the chorus, sing in unison or in solo parts, describe the scene and comment on the action without participating in it. Yeats made use of instruments on oriental lines, drum, zither, flute and gong with a mellow sound.

Dancing and acting as in the *Noh* was highly stylized. Yeats favoured the formality of actors moving "a little stiffly and gravely like marionettes... I do not want any existing form of stage dancing but something with a smaller gamut of expression, something more reserved, and more self-controlled as befits performers within arm's reach of their audience" (v, Preface, *Four Plays for Dancers*.) Michio Ito's dance style in the performance of '*At the Hawk's Well*' with slow, sliding graceful movements, formal gesture and intervals of stillness was after his own heart. Yeats also admired the acting of Sara Bernhardt and De Max as seen by him in a performance of Phaedra.

A dramatic technique closely parallel to that of the *Noh* could keep a poetic play from the intrusion of the "pushing world" and transport the play-goer for a while into the territory of the imagination where human action and passions become more meaningful and where suffering and ecstasy are endowed with poetic beauty, splendour, repose, perhaps even utter simplicity. Yeats writes: "I wanted the strongest passions that had nothing to do

with observation and a metrical form that seemed old enough to have been sung by men half asleep or riding upon a journey”.

The volume *Four Plays for Dancers* was hailed between 1921-22 by critics with diverse responses. Some used terms of high praises such as “the wizardry of Mr. Yeats.” Others all but dismissed the plays as charades, remote from contemporary interests.

One could measure success and excellence in drama in three terms. In the writing of plays Yeats was fully rewarded and will continue to be. Even though these plays are not produced on the English and American stage they are read as the most sensitive type of dramatic literature. As Donald Richie says, if for nothing else, these plays will live by virtue of their magnificent language. But there is here more than language. The plays are a subtle blending of diction, imagery, lyrical impulse, music, rhythm and a symbolical presentation of experience at its most imaginative level.

Secondly, from the angle of theatrical production, which means staging, music, costume, masks, training in speech and in stylized acting and dancing, gesture and pose, Yeats was quite successful if we take his *Four Plays for Dancers* as something fresh and engaging in the Western theatre and not as a replica of the *Noh*. Both in the traditional Japanese sense and in the modern sense it was team-work of the most creative kind. Yeats was fortunate enough to stir the imagination of actors, dancers, sculptors, musicians and stage directors who were indispensable to his ambitious production. What is more, he seemed to have communicated to this diverse group (artists in their own rights and gifted, withal) the spirit and the quality of philosophical repose and aesthetic enjoyment which had been communicated to him by the *Noh* theatre. All the time it must be remembered that Yeats's knowledge and understanding of the *Noh* had come to him only from his limited reading on the subject. In fact he himself was the spirit and soul of this dance-drama. Would not, therefore, one have misgivings as to what would happen to subsequent production when Yeats was no longer on the scene and his original ideals for poetic drama had been lost sight of? For example in regard to one detail in production one has just to compare pictures and drawings of Edmund Dulac's masks and stage decor and William Pitkin's later productions. The latter's conceptions seem too spectacular and modern for the relatively quiet mood of those poetic plays.

Since Yeats's time dramatists and producers have written and produced plays on the *Noh* model. Notable among those are Padraic Colum and his younger countryman Ulick O'Conner (*The Rock*, 1972, *Deirdre and Emperor's Envoy*, 1975.) Dr. Henry W. Wells tells us in his *Classical Drama of the Orient* of a project he arranged for the production of nine *Noh* plays for a Negro college in the United States. I just missed in Tokyo *The Curlien River* based on the *Noh Sumidagawa* for which no less a composer than Benjamin Britten had

written the music with a libretto in English by William Plover. It was highly rated and enjoyed by critics and play-goers. What I did see was a production of Arthur Little's *Noh*, St. Francis at the Franciscan Chapel, Roppongi, Tokyo. This play is connected with the Earlham College *Noh* experiment.

At best *Noh* enterprises by non-Japanese and Japanese who do not have the feel of the traditional *Noh* are adaptations, without the poetic qualities and passion which a great genius like Yeats put into a work of this nature.

It is not unnatural to see success in the theatre in terms of audience response. A novelist or poet may become impatient of his reader and write as he pleases. The reader on the other hand is free to throw the work into a waste basket. But in the theatre the relationship to the play and its impact is immediate. The play-goer is caught, as it were, in a trap. A good dramatist knows that he cannot ignore the expectations and tastes of the audience to which he is actually also giving a direction. Not always can the audience be an especially invited one with the right expectations and ideals such as Yeats got for the first few performances of his plays. Either the dramatist sees more or less eye to eye with his audience without too much effort or damage to himself or he must have or create a suitable audience which does not demand too great a sacrifice of his artistic integrity. One has to bear in mind, in this context, the difference between the courtly Shoguns and patricians of medieval Japan who sponsored the *Noh* drama, their delicately cultivated tastes and their philosophy of theatre entertainment and Yeats's twentieth-century playgoers with their middle class values of life and views of the theatre. Contemplative plays like the *Noh* and like Yeats's *Four Plays for Dancers* are not everybody's fare. How could Yeats create a suitable intellectual and cultural milieu as he could his new plays? The cultural milieu is a matter of generous spans of time. As an indirect admission of the unsuitability of his dramatic experiment, Yeats re-wrote *The Only Jealousy of Emer* as a prose play. The new version was called *Fighting the Waves*. It is relevant to quote the following from a letter he wrote to Lady Gregory in 1919 ("A People's Theatre: A Letter to Lady Gregory"):

We set out to make a 'People's Theatre' and in that we have succeeded. But I did not know until very lately that there are certain things, dear to both our hearts, which no 'People's Theatre' can accomplish. I want to create for myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many. Perhaps I shall never create it... However, there are my *Four Plays for Dancers* as a beginning, some masks by Mr. Dulac, music by Mr. Dulac and Mr. Rummell... I desire a mysterious art, always reminding and half reminding those who understand it of dearly loved things, doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space-pervading, like the intellect, but a memory and a prophecy... I... must draw an outline about the things I seek:

and say that I seek, not a theatre but the theatre's anti-self, an art that can appease all within us, that becomes uneasy as the curtain falls and the house breaks into applause.

Nevertheless, *Four Plays for Dancers*, however eccentric, will remain a brilliant spot in the history not only of Western drama, but of world drama and the plays will never lose their appeal for "a secret select society."