

Yeats and the Noh: The Supernatural in Drama

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I

Between 1910 and 1916, Yeats wrote no new plays. It was the Noh drama that broke through the long silence of Yeats the dramatist. During the years 1913-16, as literary executor to the manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa who had died in London in 1908, Ezra Pound was editing Fenollosa's translations of certain Noh plays, and he introduced Yeats to the Noh drama. Consequently, in the winter and the spring of 1915-16, Yeats wrote and produced *At the Hawk's Well*, in which he eventually invented his most characteristic and original dramatic form on the model of the Noh plays, that is to say, "Play for Dancers"; and he set out to found what he called a true theatre of beauty, "not a theatre but the theatre's anti-self."⁽¹⁾ However, when it comes to the influence on Yeats of the Noh, we should note that the relation between Yeats and the Noh was not direct and total. Yeats had never seen any actual Noh performance all his life. Neither through such a direct and total contact with Noh plays in Japanese Noh theatre as Paul Claudel had in Japan, nor through the medium of the Japanese language as was in the case of

Arthur Waley, Yeats encountered the Noh drama. To begin with, there were transmitters in between, who were Fenollosa and Pound, although Pound also had never seen any Noh performance and had little knowledge of the Japanese language. Hence arises the difficult problem of transmission and assimilation of the Noh in assessing the development of Yeats the dramatist: that is, to “ascertain exactly what ideas were borrowed from the Noh tradition, how accurately those ideas had been transmitted, and what effect they had on the already established course of Yeats’s theatrical innovations,” as Richard Taylor indicates in his *Drama of W. B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese Nō*.⁽²⁾ Indeed, this problem is important and worth while to cope with. But would it not be possible to assess the achievement of Yeats’s drama under the influence of the Noh by emphasizing the result of transmission rather than the process, however inaccurate and limited the transmission was? It can be said to be more certain and fruitful to ascertain from Yeats’s own theatrical views and practices what ideas he himself aimed to find out in the Noh drama, whatever it was: that is to say, what dramatic form Yeats invented. And this can best be confirmed in the preface to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* (1916), which Yeats wrote with excitement over the invention of a new dramatic form, while he was rehearsing his first dance play, *At the Hawk’s Well*, to have it produced in a friend’s drawing-room in London on April 2, 1916. It is most remarkable that in this essay Yeats’s view on the Noh was primarily centred on the Noh as a stage art with its

own acting and staging techniques.

In *'Noh' or Accomplishment: A Study of the Classical Stage of Japan* (1916), Pound admonished: "The reader must remember that the words are only one part of this art. The words are fused with the music and with the ceremonial dancing. One must read or examine these texts as if one were listening to music."⁽³⁾ But he gave no help at all. Richard Taylor discovered in Fenollosa's manuscripts unedited translations of the Noh plays with extensive production notes and marginalia taken down at actual performance, which show the staging and acting techniques. There is no evidence that Yeats read these unedited translations, but it is possible to believe that this fact shows in a new light the process and extent that Yeats, who had never seen any actual Noh performance, acquired the knowledge of the Noh as a whole theatre art with its specific staging and acting system, that is to say, the way the apparently thin and slight texts are fleshed out in performance through music, dance and mime. As Richard Taylor points out, it is one of the great failings of Pound as editor that he omitted all those production notes and marginalia which could have helped the reader to form an image of actual Noh stage, and reduced the plays to a literary text by suppressing their character as stage art.⁽⁴⁾ But it is one of the great successes that, concerned with the poetry and subtleties of construction of the Noh play as a literary work, Pound discovered the unifying principle in the Noh plays which he called Unity of Image. Pound approached the Noh primarily from the literary point of

view, whereas Yeats came to grips with the Noh, first of all, as drama or specific stage art in which the text is not the whole play. This approach to the Noh bears witness that Yeats had attained his own idea of a theatre through long experience of theatrical activities in the Abbey Theatre. He came to discover in the Noh a solid and living confirmation of his previously attained dramatic theory and practice.

In 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan' Yeats remarks about the characteristics of the style of acting in the Noh drama :

The players wear masks and found their movements upon those of puppets: the most famous of all Japanese dramatists composed entirely for puppets. A swift or a slow movement and a long or a short stillness, and then another movement. They sing as much as they speak, and there is a chorus which describes the scene and interprets their thought and never becomes as in the Greek theatre a part of the action. At the climax instead of the disordered passion of nature there is a dance, a series of positions and movements which may represent a battle, or a marriage, or the pain of a ghost in the Buddhist Purgatory.⁽⁵⁾

"No naturalistic effect is sought." Yeats points out that an important aspect of the movements of the Noh players is stillness in movement, movement in stillness. And he notes that the principal elements of the Noh consist of the mask and the movements of a puppet or marionette. It is a historical misunderstanding that the acting of the Noh players is derived from *Bunraku* or the Puppet Theatre, since *Bunraku* dates approximately from the sixteenth century, while the Noh dates from the mid-fourteenth

century.

The two principles of the mask and the movements of a marionette are valid for the presentation of a series of Yeats's own plays for dancers. In the preface to *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921), Yeats says, "the players must move a little stiffly and gravely like marionettes and, I think, to the accompaniment of drum taps."⁽⁶⁾ A stage direction in *At the Hawk's Well* runs: "His [the Old Man] movements, like those of the other persons of the play, suggests a marionette." All this can be seen to be reminiscent of Gordon Craig's concept of the *Über-marionette*. Craig, the revolutionary of theatre, embodied all his theatrical aspirations into the *Über-marionette*, a symbol of an ideal actor. The *Über-marionette* was also a strategic weapon for his attack against modern realistic or naturalistic drama. In opposition to the modern literary, psychological drama consisting largely of dialogue, and its acting method, or rather, in despair of this theatre and its flesh and blood actors, Craig went so far as to propose the creation of the Actorless Theatre, from which both play and actor were to be banished. In this theatre, the living actor is replaced by the *Über-marionette* which is an inanimate figure or puppet. "I believe," Craig says, "in the time when we shall be able to create works of art in the theatre without the use of the written play, without the use of actors." "We have to banish from our mind all thought of the use of a human form as the instrument which we are to use to translate what we call *Movement*."⁽⁷⁾

At first glance these words seem to be a mere negation of living actors, but it is inadequate to draw such a conclusion from them without making the effort to examine his true intentions beyond surface paradoxes and negative ideas. Like many others, Allardyce Nicoll failed to perceive the positive implications of Craig's thought. His reaction was: "to Craig's desire to banish the drama from his ideal performances we can have no valid objection, since... the theatre's range embraces far more than the presentation of plays. But when he proposes the banishing of living performers we are bound to pause."⁽⁸⁾

It is true that Craig's words often invite us to draw the conclusion that Craig intended simply to negate the existence of living actors in theatre. What Craig desired was to discover or recover a style of acting based on entirely different principles from those of the modern Western theatre, which had ceased to be expressive and come to an artistic cul-de-sac. His basic assumption was that art is the anthesis of nature.

Acting is not an art. It is, therefore, incorrect to speak of the actor as an artist. For accident is an enemy of the artist. Art is the exact antithesis of pandemonium, and pandemonium is created by the tumbling together of many accidents. Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make any work of art it is clear we may only work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of these materials.⁽⁹⁾

In contrast with the living actor, the *Über-marionette* is, first of all, an inanimate artifact that is not the slave of destructive

human emotion. As material or instrument to be used to translate *movement*, the *Über-marionette* is absolutely in servitude to the mind, the manipulator, the director who is responsible for the unity of the production. We could envisage “an artifice of eternity” like a Greek statue in action, with the exquisite form and movements entirely free from the servitude of all the human weaknesses. The *Über-marionette* might be seen to be the “golden bird” in the realm of the art of theatre.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
 More miracle than bird or handiwork,
 Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
 In glory of changeless metal
 Common bird or petal
 And all complexities of mire or blood. (‘Byzantium’)

Yeats’s idioms fit into the dialectical scheme of Craig’s thought, because of the common underlying principles and the acute aesthetic awareness of the relationship between Art and Nature.

Craig’s *Über-marionette* is a theatrical equivalent of Yeats’s “mask” or “the other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self”⁽¹⁰⁾ which the living actor ought to assume or aspire to. In the dialectical scheme between Art and Nature, the *Über-marionette* is the exact antithesis of the living actor who is in servitude of his own human weakness, namely emotion, and possessed with “the idea of impersonation, the idea of reproducing nature.”⁽¹¹⁾ Therefore

the actor must create for himself "a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolical gesture."⁽¹²⁾ Also by covering his face with a mask which is a safeguard against the idea of reproducing nature, the actor can transform himself into a symbol or work of art.

.... human facial expression is for the most part valueless.... Masks carry conviction when he who creates them is artist, for the artist limits the statements which he places upon these masks. The face of the actor carries no such conviction: it is over-full of fleeting expression—frail, restless, disturbed and disturbing.⁽¹³⁾

The echo of Craig's view of the theatrical mask can be found in Yeats's statement :

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his own vulgar fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art; nor shall we lose by stilling the movement of the features, for deep feeling is expressed by a movement of the whole body.⁽¹⁴⁾

Craig asserts that by virtue of the new form of acting based on the two principles of the mask and the symbolic gesture, the actor can exercise control over the movements of his body and the expression of his face. Thus, like that of a marionette, his performance becomes free from the accidental confessions of personality, and eventually he will be able to transform himself into the ideal of the *Über-marionette*.

The *Über-marionette* will not compete with life—rather will it go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance—it will aim to clothe itself with a deathlike beauty while exhaling a living spirit.⁽¹⁵⁾

Released completely from all the human weaknesses, the flesh and blood of the actor is frozen into “the body in trance”, clothed in “a deathlike beauty.” Yeats might have called it “the superhuman” or “death-in-life and life-in-death.” At the last analysis the *Über-marionette* as well as the mask and the symbolical gesture is the very instrument or device to take us beyond reality or give us the “sense of being beyond reality which permeates all great art.”⁽¹⁶⁾ In Yeats’s words, all these devices, keeping an appropriate distance from a surface reality, “enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation.”⁽¹⁷⁾

There is no reason why we should not find in this image of the *Über-marionette* the female or male mask of the Noh theatre, the original form of which was presumably designed to imitate that state of Shaman’s face in trance which does not appear to be significant of anything definite. The apparently expressionless expression of the mask of the Noh is sometimes described to be “neutral” to the effect that the mask is almost infinite in suggestiveness. Once the *shite*, the principal role of the Noh play, wears the mask on his face and begins to act and dance on the stage, the mask reveals its potentiality for giving a variety of subtle expressions.

It is a coincidence that in Japan of the fourteenth century, Zeami, the Noh player, director and composer, had attained the similar concept of an ideal actor and the style of acting in a more positive, direct and rational way than Craig's negative, paradoxical and mystifying way. All the theories of Zeami seem to have been focussed on the idea of an actor in the Noh theatre. Throughout all his writings which were intended for the heirs to his artistic inheritance, Zeami told again and again how to achieve a perfect presentation of the Noh plays: that is to say, how to get *hana*, flower or blossom, and ultimately how to achieve *yugen*, "the ultimate beauty and mystery" in acting. These words, *hana* and *yugen*, are used to express the beauty and mystery which creates interest and touches the heart of the audience of the Noh.

It is not surprising that *yugen* in the Noh acting reminds us of the ideal state of the *Über-marionette* that is "the body in trance" wrapped in "a death-like beauty," since both of them could be regarded as the ultimate state that can only be attained by the actor who is absolutely in servitude of the mind, never the slave of emotion, and has the full mastery of a movement of his whole body. In *Kakyo (The Flower Mirror)* Zeami made an interesting comment on the relationship between the body and the mind, that is, between physical and mental movement:

When I say to set the mind in action at full capacity while moving the body at only seven tenths of capacity, I mean that the body should be moved by using the arms and legs just as the master teaches. Then,

after you have polished and perfected what you have learned, you should perform by using all the powers of your mind while moving your body with the greatest possible economy.

This is true not only in dance but also in all movements executed during the time one is on the stage. The body should at all times be working much less than the mind. The body performs the piece itself while the true substance of the play is expressed from the inner depths of the mind. In this way you will be able to hold the interest of your audience.⁽¹⁸⁾

The most interesting thing is that Zeami developed a theory of acting in terms of the relationship between the actor and the audience, while on the other hand Craig put it forward in terms of the relationship between the actor and the director. In Craig's hierarchy of theatre, the actor is both his own instrument and the instrument of the director, who is responsible for the unity of the whole production. It seems as if theatre could do without audience. In Zeami's theatrical hierarchy, the audience was considered to be the essential criterion. Zeami made a penetrating remark about the mechanism of acting in terms of the attainment of plural visions: the "view from within" and the "view from without."

One's figure seen from the viewpoint of the audience is the 'view from without', while one's own figure seen with one's own eyes is the 'view from within'. In order to observe oneself with the 'view from without' one must become one with the audience. At that time one will be able to actually see himself clearly.⁽¹⁹⁾

The actor who is able to see himself from the viewpoint of the

audience, or rather, the director in Craig's terms, will be able to get outside himself and see his performance objectively. Unless he can get outside himself and attain the "view from without", he will never have more than a subjective view of himself. Here could be found a clear and logical conclusion of that concept of the *Über-marionette* which Craig could only pursue in his negative, paradoxical and mystifying way.

It is evident that Craig's theory of the *Über-marionette* and acting played a not less important part on the formation of Yeats's idea of the Noh than Pound-Fenollosa's translations of Noh plays. As early as 1900, Yeats began to pay much attention to Craig's theory and practice, and from 1909 to 1912, Craig collaborated with him in a production of his play, *The Hour Glass*. It seems that around 1908, Craig began to be concerned with the Oriental theatre, and in 1910 *The Mask* featured the Noh theatre. And Yeats's important essay on drama, 'The Tragic Theatre' was first published in *The Mask* of October 1910.

Michio Ito, a Japanese dancer, is credited with having made possible the drawing-room production of *At the Hawk's Well*, Yeats's first dance play written after the example of the Noh play. It may be an exaggeration to say that Yeats found an embodiment of the *Über-marionette* in Ito's performance. But at least it can be said that Yeats recognised in the gestures and movements of the Japanese dancer a manifestation of the new principles of acting that were quite different from those of acting in modern Western theatre. To put it another way, the Japanese

dancer confirmed for Yeats that the physical gesture-language was capable of expressing more than the verbal language.

My play is made possible by a Japanese dancer whom I have seen dance in a studio and in a drawing-room and on a very small stage lit by an excellent stage-light. In the studio and in the drawing-room alone where the lighting was the light we are most accustomed to, did I see him as the tragic image that has stirred my imagination. There, where no studied lighting, no stage-picture made an artificial world, he was able, as he rose from the floor, where he had been sitting cross-legged, or as he threw out an arm, to recede from us into some more powerful life. Because that separation was achieved by human means alone, he receded, but to inhabit as it were the deeps of the mind.⁽²⁰⁾

In an ordinary drawing-room, an everyday life space, the Japanese dancer showed himself transformed into the "tragic image" by "human means" of such apparently simple and insignificant movements or gestures as simply standing up where he was, or throwing out an arm. The fact is, I suppose, that he may demonstrated something of the basic movement patterns of the Noh. The spectators in turn were led into the "deeps of the mind" which was full of "powerful life", or the *Anima Mundi*, a reservoir of collective archetypal images, which lies in the deepest layers of the human psyche. It was by means of the conventional stylised forms of acting, that is, the symbolic gestures that he succeeded in creating a peculiar dramatic world of duality, the extraordinary laid on the ordinary, the supernatural on the natural. This is the reality of acting "founded on the movements of a marionette," which, keeping a distance from life, enable us

to enter a deeper reality of life, that is, to have the sense of being beyond reality.

Another witness to the expressiveness or suggestiveness of this style of acting is Paul Claudel, who had dramatic aspirations similar to Yeats's but had the opportunity to have a direct and total contact with the Noh in Japan. In his journal of February 1923, Claudel describes his deeply felt first experience of seeing the Noh performance. In this play, *Sumidagawa*, a woman who has been seeking for her lost son incidentally finds his mound grave on the bank of the Sumida river. *Shite* begins to do the gesture of the *moro shiori*, which depicts weeping, the actor simply bowing his head and raising both hands.

La lenteur du geste qui permet toutes les interprétations. Par exemple elle porte les mains à ses yeux pour pleurer. Mais cela peut signifier aussi l'image de sa douleur qu'elle approche pour mieux voir, l'eau des larmes qu'elle puise, le poids de la peine, puis l'éloignement du calice qu'on a bu, l'abdication de la vie, etc. —Magnifique mouvement quand elle s'accroupit et que lentement les vastes vêtements pli sur pli s'arrangent dans un ordre nouveau. Quand elle prie petits coups de temps en temps sur un timbre de métal, comme les brusques élancements de la douleur. Les sanglots des musiciens qui donnent une impression de désespoir, d'une nuit d'été absolument ténébreuse et bouchée. Le chœur énonciation calme et stoïque de la destinée.⁽²¹⁾

Through the imagination of the audience an apparently familiar and insignificant simple gesture "raising hands to weep" becomes charged with layers of meaning and amplifies the tragic feeling of the play because of the slowness and stillness of the movement

characteristic of the Noh acting.

The concept of *Über-marionette*, Craig's negative idea of actor and acting, could be seen to have been a link between Yeats and that European movement of theatre reform which Craig, Adolph Appia, Meyerhold and others had propelled forward in opposition to the so-called literary drama around the turn of the century. Ernest Schumacher's conclusion about this dramatic movement suggests much of the difficulties and limitations Yeats also had to face with.

When the theatre reformers sought to restore the art of theatre that essentially consisted of the movements of the actor's whole body, they brought to mind such an Occidental form of drama as farce or Comedia dell'Arte which depended largely on the use of the gestures of the actor, while at the same time they resorted to the typical form of presentation of Oriental drama, and its physical gesture-language that was rich in expression. But then it turned out that even if it were possible to give a definition of the 'grammar' of the acting system in Oriental theatre, it was impossible to put it to 'syntactical use.'⁽²²⁾

It is possible to get a theoretical knowledge of that stylised and conventionalised acting system of the Noh which seems to have come almost unalterably to the height of refinement. Yet it is in practice most difficult, if not impossible, to transplant it in, or graft it on, the tradition of Western modern drama. The underlying world view or the basal structure of culture which gave birth to such an acting system is incompatible with that of modern Western Europe. And, curiously enough, the incompatibility of

the world view was a breakthrough for Yeats, while it was nothing but a cul-de-sac for the fighting revolutionaries of the anti-realist camp of theatre.

For instance, *suri ashi*, one of the stylised movement forms of the Noh, by which *hakobi* (progression in space) is achieved. This is a unique style of walking in which the heel is always in contact with the floor, only the toes rise off the floor as the feet slide whispering along the smooth boards of the stage. Suppose a Western actor, for instance, in the role of Cuchulain imitates this style of walking. Mere imitation of the *suri ashi* movement does not necessarily result in the realisation of the essence of the Noh, however characteristic element of the Noh it may be. It is the question of discerning the essence from the conventions of the Noh. As early as 1893, in his lecture 'Nationality and Literature', Yeats remarked about the attitude towards Greek and Indian literature: "We [the Irish] like the Greeks and the Indians, are an idealistic people.... But we must not imitate the writers of any other country, we must study them constantly and learn from them the secret of their greatness."⁽²³⁾ This remark indicates that, as regards the Noh Yeats's attitude was not to imitate it but to discover the secret of its greatness. As is evident in the fact that Yeats had an insight into the basis of the Japanese dancer's movements, Yeats's eyes always turn from the periphery to the core or basis of things. What he was really interested in was not mere transplantation or grafting of the Noh tradition such as the *suri ashi* movement, but that which had

given birth to the tradition and still underlay it. This was the point of departure of Yeats's dramatic experiments.

II

The crux of Yeats's dramatic theories and works written on the model of the Noh play is the restoration of the theatrical rights of the supernatural which the modern Western drama has long banished from the stage. This is what distinguishes Yeats's anti-realism from that of the other theatre reformers, such as Craig, Meyerhold, Artaud and others.

From the Greek drama down to the Elizabethan, the supernatural had been an essential element of tragedy, as is evident in the appearance of the ghost. In the Greek drama, the ghost had appeared as a real and distinctive being of a different order, though related with the life and action of the other characters. In the Elizabethan drama, the appearance of the ghost became more subtle and suggestive, though it had still a substantive existence. For instance, the ghost of *Hamlet* appeared on the stage in such a subtle and suggestive way that it might be taken for not only a substantive being but also a product of the mind which had much to do with Hamlet's mental state.

In the Elizabethan drama, the supernatural receded into the background, because the faith in the supernatural began to recede into the background of culture. At the last analysis, the naked appearance of the supernatural in Greek tragedy was made possible by the traditional culture based on a dualistic

world view: the world consists of *interacting* and *intermingling* opposites such as the natural and the supernatural world, the human and the spiritual world, life and life-after-death, the profane and the sacred, the earth and the heaven, the visible and the invisible, and so forth. By the Elizabethan age, this traditional and basal culture began to lose its grip and submerge from the surface into the underground, in proportion as modern rationalism emerged and gained in power. The subtle and suggestive treatment of the ghost in Shakespeare, for instance, was a product of the age of transition between these two cultures.

The restoration of the theatrical rights of the supernatural in Yeats's dramatic works can be seen to be an attempt to discover a form of drama capable of giving expression to that world image of the traditional and basal culture which was dethroned from modern European scenes, as is manifest in Yeats's statement that "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 marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against the wall."⁽²⁴⁾ Irish mythology and folklore could have provided Yeats with the source and subject of this form of drama. Through long years of experience and knowledge of the tradition of Western mysticism, he could have acquired the theory and practice in its traditional symbolism. But however could all this be realised on the stage? This was the crucial problem that Yeats had faced from the start of his theatrical activities.

Preoccupied with such a problem, Yeats encountered the Noh as “a form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic”,⁽²⁵⁾ in which the supernatural dominates the stage as *shite*, the principal role of the Noh play. *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919), the third of the dance plays, is Yeats’s first important attempt to treat the ghost in the manner of the Noh. The construction of this play is attributed to Pound-Fenollosa version of the Noh play *Nishikigi*, as can be seen from Yeats’s full account of the story of the play in ‘Swedenborg, Mediums, Desolate Places’ (1914). But the content of *The Dreaming of the Bones* was Irish, because Yeats chose Diarmuid and Dervorgilla as counterparts of the roles of *shite* and *tsure*. Diarmuid and Dervorgilla were well-known Irish historical figures whose love affair induced the foreign domination of Ireland. This choice followed the choice of a young patriot of the Easter Rising of 1916 as antagonist to the traitors rather than as the counterpart of the role of *waki*. This indicates clearly that Yeats’s idea of drama consists primarily in the conflict of the characters. Yeats’s choice of the characters resulted in dividing the theme of the play in two: the theme of the ghost and that of politics. It seems that the vast design of the conflict between the natural and the supernatural world was divided into the two themes, but with a slant towards the theme of politics.

In the Noh, particularly a type of the Noh called the *mugen Noh* (the phantasmal Noh), the function of the role of *waki* (literally the person at the side, or the deuteragonist) consists primarily of serving the accomplishment of the action of *shite* as

the focus of the stage of the Noh, even at the expense of drama in the sense that it consists in conflict or opposition. From the angle of the audience, the main function of *waki* is to introduce the audience into the world of *shite* as a ghost, and help the supernatural presence to acquire reality on the stage. That is the reason why *waki* recedes into the *waki-za* (the position of *waki* near the pillar downstage right), once he has finished his function. The fact that *waki* is usually a travelling priest is that he is qualified as representative and guide of the audience to the other world in that he could be a visionary with disinterested and detached attitude. *Waki* is a seer, and not an actor.

From the choice of the young patriot on the run as the figure who is to meet the ghost-lovers, it follows that there will be set up not such a relationship between *waki* and *shite* but a schematic relationship between the accuser and the accused, patriot and traitor. This means that at the core of the drama this scheme of patriot versus traitor is to exert influence on the whole action. In theory, this should lead to a vast dramatic situation with the natural and the supernatural world involved. But in effect this might lead to a flattened and one-dimensional drama of conflict on a realistic and political level.

As a result of setting up the scheme of patriot versus traitor, the matter of penance and absolution on the part of the ghost-lovers is bound to be treated in its realistic, political aspect. In atonement of the great transgression that they caused the induction and subsequent domination of foreign powers over Ireland

for seven centuries, Diarmuid and Dervorgilla have been doomed to return to this world, in retrospect living their unfulfilled love again and again, until "somebody of their race would at last say, 'I have forgiven them'." The young man refuses three times to forgive them. Every time he refuses, he resorts more emphatically to his great political cause to justify his refusal. A traitor must remain a traitor, a patriot must remain a patriot. So long as the relationship of patriot versus traitor holds on, the young man never loses his sense of identity. In *The Dreaming of the Bones* there is not a shuddering moment of revelation, when the invisible become visible and shatters our sense of reality, as can be found in *Purgatory* (1939). Despite the remarkable ritualistic use of the chorus and the synchronised movements of the ghost-lovers and the young man in the middle part of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, Yeats had not yet mastered adequate dramatic devices to grapple with the vast design of the conflict of the natural and the supernatural orders.

In his letter dated October 20, 1938, Yeats wrote: "To me all things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, being or persons which die each other's life, live each other's death. That is true of life and death themselves." And he added a geometrical figure illustrating "two cones (or whirls), the apex of each in the other's base."⁽²⁶⁾ This statement throws light on the characteristics of Yeats's world view. He saw the duality of the world in terms of the conflict of a pair of opposites.

In the case of the Noh, the opposites tend to intersect, inter-

permeate, intermingle and transmigrate, that is, pass into each other. This world is seen as a space-time continuum. So far as the dramatic structure is concerned, what prevails in the Noh is the logic of space or *transmigration* that time is apt to be synchronised, spatialised and swallowed into space, whereas what is dominant in Yeats's play is the logic of time rather than the logic of space.

The Noh play *Nishikigi* fascinated Yeats to compose *The Dreaming of the Bones* based on it. In *Nishikigi*, in the village of Kefu in Mutsu a travelling priest meets a woman carrying a narrow cloth on her arm (*tsure*) and a man with a brightly coloured stick in his hand (*shite*). The priest hears from them that the narrow cloth is woven from birds' feathers and the coloured stick is called *nishikigi* (a brocade tree). It is a sign by which a man declares his love for a woman by leaving it outside her house. She can respond by taking it in or refuse him by leaving it standing there. The couple take the priest to the old grave mound of a man who, after vainly leaving such trees outside a woman's house every night for three years, died of a broken heart. Then, they both disappear into the mound. In terms of stage production this disappearance is called the *nakairi*, which refers to the withdrawal of *shite* from the stage. But the action continues on the stage. During the withdrawal of *shite*, there is an interlude, in which the *ai-kyogen* converses with *waki*, explaining in a more colloquial though eloquent language the story so cryptically related previously. Then the priest prays and in his

dream the ghosts of the couple appear in their true guises seeking release from their worldly obsession by telling their own story. Rejoicing in the happiness they have found at the priest's intercession, they perform a dance. Waking in the morning light the priest finds only a grave mound among the fields, the murmur of a wind drifting through the pines.

The action proceeds not in time sequence but to the logic of transmigration. Time, place and person are all out of ordinary time and space. In the village of Kefu a travelling priest meets a couple of man and woman carrying respectively a brocade tree and a narrow cloth, and then spends a night beside an old mound. This is the sequence of time *waki* experiences. This sequence of time is intersected by another sequence of time in which the couple of man and woman, inhabitants of the village, appear and tell a story associated with the brocade tree and narrow cloth. But they suggest their identities by disappearing into the old mound. This means that they change their identities from the local man and woman to the figures of a story of the past. Time flows backward into the story of the past. Simultaneously space passes into a different order of space. The natural world of *waki*, a living being, and the supernatural world of *shite*, a ghost, intersect, intermingle, and transmigrate. At the climax the supernatural world of *shite* covers the whole stage. But at the end it changes back into the natural world of *waki*. This time and space structure of *Nishikigi* is typical of the *mugen Noh*.

A simple structure set upstage centre functions as the hinge on which a reality turns into a supra-reality. The turning-point begins at the end of the first section of the play.

Here is the Brocade Mound,
 Dyed bright with crimson maple leaves.
 Here is the tomb, he says,
 Then man and wife depart,
 Descend into the grave,
 Descend into the grave.⁽²⁷⁾

The Brocade Mound which the couple have disappeared into is represented by a simple structure covered with leaves, its sides with a cloth. At the beginning of the performance, stage assistants have set it in front of the position of the *otsuzumi* and *kotsuzumi* (large hand-drum and small hand-drum) players. Now this structure attracts the full attention of the audience, it becomes the focus of interest and centre of dramatic construction. The moment the cloth covering the sides of the structure is removed, the old mound turns into the woman's house. *Waki* chants :

Strange, what seemed so very old a cave
 Is all glittering-bright within,
 Like the flicker of fire.
 It is like the inside of a house.
 They are setting up a loom,
 And heaping up charm sticks. No,
 The hangings are out of old time.
 Is it illusion, illusion?⁽²⁸⁾

This is the place where the ghost-lovers re-live their unfulfilled love in order to be released from their purgatorial anguish. The above extract from Pound-Fenollosa version of *Nishikigi* includes the image that inspired Yeats's poetic imagination in *Purgatory* and 'Crazy Jane on God'.

Before their eyes a house
That from childhood stood
Uninhabited, ruinous,
Suddenly lit up
From door to top:
All things remain in God.

"A ruined house and a bare tree in the background" in *Purgatory* is a counterpart of the device of the Noh stage as the hinge on which a reality turns into a supra-reality, or the focus of recognition of the reality of the supernatural. The presentation of the ghosts in silhouette, and a light in the window of a "ruined house" are signs of the presence of the supernatural. The supernatural world is designed to be presented in the background (*upstage*) as against the foreground (*downstage*). This staging is reinforced by the simplified light-shade effect of lighting, which is evidence of Craig's influence on Yeats's stagecraft.

Generally, Western drama achieves reality by way of attempting to conceal the fictiousness of the stage. The Noh achieves reality by exposing the fictiousness of the stage. Through the function of the simple structure representing the old mound, that above quoted passage which *waki* chants becomes not only a

verbal image but also a dramatic image. The audience in their turn are convinced of the reality of the supernatural. This is one of the Noh's theatrical strategies for grappling with the supernatural world, that is, materialising the supernatural on the stage.

The time and space structure of the Noh is characterised by the transmigration of the two worlds or the stratification of them. In *Purgatory* the different dimensions are juxtaposed, the one of the living in the foreground (*downstage*), the other of the dead in the background (*upstage*). In the background the time of the past runs simultaneously and in conflict with the time of the present in the foreground. Someone arrives in the background, then something happens in the foreground. But if something happens in the foreground, nothing happens in the background. There is an abyss in between.

The action begins when a wandering old pedlar (Old Man) and his illegitimate son (Boy) stand in the moonlight before "a ruined house and a bare tree in the background." The Old Man reveals the history of this ruined house to his son. He tells that this was his mother's great house, where he was born; that this great house came to ruin because the daughter of the house, his mother, had fallen in love with a vain drunken groom and married him; that after her death in child-birth, the groom had squandered all her estate, disgraced the great family's name, and eventually burned down the house in a drunken frenzy. The Old Man confesses that in the burning house he had stabbed to

death the groom, his father, who had *killed* "a house/Where great men grew up, married, died," and fled to avoid trial, until he became a pedlar on the road.

To the Old Man "a ruined house" means the origin of his world to which everything is to return. "A bare tree" implies *Axis Mundi* around which everything revolves and by which everything is given significance. This ruined house had been great for its glorious family tree, which had been as full of "Green leaves, ripe leaves, leaves thick as butter, /Fat, greasy life" as the thunder-riven bare tree was fifty years ago. This implies that the house and tree should have guaranteed him rich and fertile life in the future. But in reality, this place was the very point at which the history of the great house ended, and from which its decline and fall began. Now the house is in ruins, and the tree is thunder-riven and bare. The history of the Old man's life is full of sins and stains because the central axis has been broken and disordered. As a pedlar on the road, he goes on wandering round the broken centre, as if he himself were the "soul in Purgatory."

As is the case with the Old Man, this place is the origin of the world of his dead mother. The reason is because the glory and fame of this house ended and its decline and fall began as consequences of her transgressions: in the darkness of passion she had married a vain drunken groom and conceived the Old Man himself. In expiation of these consequences, her soul after death is condemned to return to the place of origin and "dream back"

the deed of origin. From a different angle, her Dreaming Back in Purgatory is in atonement of the history of the Old Man's damned life full of sins and stains. The theme of atonement and purification of the Mother's soul and that of recovery of the Old Man's lost central axis turn out to be both sides of the coin.

Hoof-beats! This is the anniversary of the Mother's wedding. The soul in Purgatory has come back to dream back the original occasion. The Old Man sees the window of the ruined house "lit showing a young girl." But the Boy cannot see it. Someone arrives in the background, then something will happen in the foreground. At this moment the ordinary patri-filial relationship between the Old Man and the Boy changes into that of the man who can see and the man who cannot (or the man who can hear and the man who cannot). The Old Man, being a seer, is captivated by the ghosts re-living the night of their wedding. On the stage the time of the past begins to run simultaneously and in conflict with the time of the present. Thinking of th Old Man being mad, the Boy takes the chance to make off with the bag of money. The stage direction goes: "The light in the window has faded out.... They struggle for the bag. In the struggle it drops, scattering the money. The Old Man staggers but does not fall. They stand looking at each other. The window is lit up. A man is seen pouring whisky into a glass." Someone arrives in the background, then something will happen in the foreground.

Now the Boy sees the apparition of the groom, though he could not see the ghost of the Mother. It seems as if a mysteri-

ous identification of the Boy with the groom had been established on account of the Boy's possibility that "had he grown up /He would have struck a woman's fancy, /Begot, and passed pollution on." The moment the Boy becomes a seer, he is forced to become a sacrifice to the fatal and ruthless power of the world of the dead. In terror he covers his eyes, when he is stabbed to death with the same knife that was used to murder the groom. On the mind's mirror of the Old Man this filicide is the very reflection of his patricide. In this respect, it is possible to read *Purgatory* in terms of the Oedipus Complex. However, we need to remember that it is *an* interpretation of this play.

The stage direction that "The stage has grown dark except where the tree stands in white light" is significant. The Old Man sees the "bare tree" standing glittering in white light. "It stands there like a purified soul, /All cold, sweet, glistening light." He is sure that it is the evidence of the purification of his mother's soul. It seems to him that the sacred centre has been restored to him.

As a symbol of the sacred centre the tree standing in white light in the background reminds us of the huge pine tree painted on the back wall of the Noh stage, *kagami-ita* (literally mirror-board). This pine tree is regarded as the sacred tree on which the gods alight. *Matsu*, the pine tree, is homonymic of *matsu*, waiting, so that the pine tree is supposed to be waiting for the gods to descend.

But in a moment the hoof-beats are heard again. The Old

Man has murdered his son as well as his father in a futile attempt to release his mother's soul. If something happens in the foreground, nothing will happen in the background. There in the background someone arrives and re-enacts its deed of origin.

O God,

Release my mother's soul from its dream

Mankind can do no more. Appease

The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.

The Old Man's cry of despair resounds in the unfathomable darkness of the dividing crevasse between the world of the dead and that of the living. It shakes our sense of reality. The recognition that "mankind can do no more" makes a man face the absolute being.

The Noh would start at the very point where *Purgatory* ends. According to the dramaturgy of the *mugen Noh*, the hero is already dead. The Old Man, who has made a cry of despair after failing to recover his lost identity through the purification of his mother's soul, would be carried away into the world of the dead. Then he would appear as a ghost, that is, *shite* before a travelling priest (*waki*), and re-enact his attempt and failure to release the Mother's soul from its dream. On the stage layers of time and space intersect, intermingle and transmigrate. In this way, the *mugen Noh* solves the insoluble question of releasing the "soul from its dream" and appeasing "the misery of the living and the remorse of the dead." The Buddhistic logic of salvation is that life can only be affirmed when it is absolutely

denied or nullified through the medium of death.

Yeats remarks : "The East has solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the East, that must raise the heroic cry."⁽²⁹⁾ The Noh is not tragedy in the Western sense of the word. Paradoxically life seems the more glittering, however faint and feeble, when it is set against the dark background of death.

NOTES

While staying in Dublin, I had the necessity to make my view of Yeats and the Noh known to Irish friends. The result is this revised and enlarged English version of the article originally included in *Yeats no Sekai* (1978).

- (1) W. B. Yeats, *Explorations*, p. 257.
- (2) Richard Taylor, *The Drama of W. B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese Nō*, New Haven, 1976, p. x.
- (3) Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan*, New York, 1959, p. 37.
- (4) Richard Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- (5) W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, p. 226.
- (6) W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, London, 1921, p. v.
- (7) Gordon Craig, 'The Artists of the Theatre of the Future' in *On the Art of the Theatre*, London, 1911, p. 50.
- (8) Allardyce Nicoll, *The Theatre and Dramatic Theory*, London, 1962, p. 14.
- (9) Gordon Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-marionette' in *op. cit.*, pp. 55-6.
- (10) W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies*, p. 331.
- (11) Gordon Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
- (12) *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- (13) 'A Note on Masks', *The Mask*, vol. I, no. 1, March 1908, p. 10.
- (14) W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, p. 226.
- (15) Gordon Craig, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

- (16) Gordon Craig, 'A Note on Masks' included in *Gordon Craig on Movement and Dance*, London, 1978, p. 6.
- (17) W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, p. 225.
- (18) See Zeami, *Kakyo*, quoted in Yasuo Nakamura, *Noh*, Tokyo, 1971, p. 224.
- (19) *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- (20) W. B. Yeats, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
- (21) Paul Claudel, *Journal I*, Paris, 1968, pp. 578-9.
- (22) Ernest Schumacher, 'Das Gestische in der darstellenden Kunst des Ostens und des Westens' translated by K. Senda, *Teatro Nov.* 1977 & Jan. 1978.
- (23) *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, vol. I, p. 274.
- (24) W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, p. 86.
- (25) W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, p. 221.
- (26) *Letters of W. B. Yeats*, p. 918.
- (27) Donald Keene, ed., *Twenty Plays of the Nō Theatre*, New York, 1970, p. 90.
- (28) Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan*, p. 83.
- (29) *Letters of W. B. Yeats*, p. 837.