**Japanese Nô Plays**

 Introduction by Kenneth Rexroth

Donald Keene and his students have almost doubled the number of Nô plays available in English. With the works available in German and French, especially those of Noël Peri in French, Ezra Pound and Arthur Waley in English, this means that the Western world can now study a representative collection, seen from a variety of points of view, of one of the three most remarkable dramatic traditions that man has ever evolved.

There was nothing like Japanese Nô drama in the West until Thomas Sturge Moore and William Butler Yeats imitated the first Pound-Fenollosa translations. *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Salomé* bear a faint resemblance to Nô, but there is a fundamental difference. They are plays of action and of the developing interaction of persons, and they culminate in dramatic climax. The typical Nô play contains no action at all but rather the recollection of action, and although it commonly culminates in a dance, the dance is not a climax but the manifestation of the crystallization of the realization that has grown and pervaded the play. Many Nô plays concern revenants — ghosts who are bound by passion to re-enact the critical moment of bygone lives — critical not in a dramatic sense, but in the sense of decisive karma. At the end the prayers of a pilgrim priest, who has encountered a long-dead hero and heroine in a windy nightfall on a lonely moor, release them from the endless re-enactment of dead fate and consequence. They are unbound, and reciprocally, realization of the meaning of being itself pervades and saturates the minds of the audience, and precipitates a crystal called release. In other words the Nô drama is more like solemn high mass than it is like a Western play — although a process like this goes on, behind the scenes so to speak, in a very few great Western dramas, notably Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. In the Nô drama this mode of esthetic realization is stripped to its essentials and reduced to an art form which is at the same time a Buddhist ritual.

It is quite impossible to convey, least of all by the printed text, the extraordinary novelty of a Nô play to an audience which has never seen one. The words are chanted in a slow, choking moan, in an accent incomprehensible to a modern Japanese who has not been taught it. The dances are considerably slower than any ritual motions anywhere in the West. The acting consists of highly stylized, symbolic gestures, unbelievably slow, whose significance is not apparent to the untutored. The costumes of stiff, elaborate brocade bear little relation to anything worn in the real world and the principal actors are masked. The stage is always the same — a small platform, like a boxing ring, with a resounding floor, approached from the dressing room by a bridge on which are three dwarf trees. The “backdrop” is a screen painted with a highly stylized pine. The chorus and orchestra sit on the stage and the chorus not only “choruses” but often takes over the actor’s lines, especially while he dances. Finally, all roles are played by men.

All of this sounds so exotic that it would seem completely unexportable. Quite the contrary. The Japanese Nô drama represents an art form so highly purified that its impact is irresistible to any person who lays himself open to it. From William Butler Yeats to Bertolt Brecht to Paul Goodman to the Living Theater, Eisenstein, Maiakovsky or Genêt, ever since the first translations, Japanese Nô has profoundly affected the best European theater. In addition there is probably no better closet drama except for a few plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus. The greatest Nô plays, especially those of Zeami, read in the study, are the finest dramatic instruments of meditation, objects of contemplation, in all literature, when read, they certainly take less getting used to than seen performed.

Donald Keene gives a new version of one of the greatest Nô plays — *Nishikigi,* Pound’s best translation — which Keene dismisses as too inaccurate. The difference is illuminating. Accurate the new version may be, but Pound’s is great poetry, in spite of its pseudo-Irish accent, and the new version is not. Furthermore, knowing really almost nothing about Japanese culture, Pound did capture the *yûgen,* the mystery and revelation of Nô, to a degree no one has done since. That is not to quarrel with this new collection. It is really wonderful, and constitutes an addition to the non-Western supplement to the Hutchins-Adler 100 Best Books, a list so lacking in the deepest spiritual insights of non-acquisitive cultural traditions. Perhaps we can learn most about Buddhism by studying the beautiful objects it has produced, the frescoes of Ajanta and Horyuji, statues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, poems of Ono no Komachi and Bashô, novels like *The Tale of Genji,* and perhaps its finest esthetic distillate of all, the greatest Nô plays.

It is not often in our omnivorously eclectic society that we can thank someone for giving us knowledge of hitherto unknown major accomplishments of the human spirit, and that of course is exactly what Donald Keene does. It is a little as though someone had turned up a thousand lines lost from Homer or Isaiah.

~KENNETH REXROTH  1971

**INTRODUCTION to *The No Plays of Japan* by Arthur Waley**

The theatre of the West is the last stronghold of realism. No one treats painting or music as mere transcripts of life. But even pioneers of stage-reform in France and Germany appear to regard the theatre as belonging to life and not to art. The play is an organized piece of human experience which the audience must as far as possible be allowed to share with the actors.

A few people in America and Europe want to go in the opposite direction. They would like to see a theatre that aimed boldly at stylization and simplification, discarding entirely the pretentious lumber of 19th century stageland. That such a theatre exists and has long existed in Japan has been well-known here for some time. But hitherto very few plays have been translated in such a way as to give the Western reader an idea of their literary value. It is only through accurate scholarship that the "soul of Nō" can be known to the West. Given a truthful rendering of the texts the American reader will supply for himself their numerous connotations, a fact which Japanese writers do not always sufficiently realize. The Japanese method of expanding a five-line poem into a long treatise in order to make it intelligible to us is one which obliterates the structure of the original design. Where explanations are necessary they have been given in footnotes. I have not thought it necessary to point out (as a Japanese critic suggested that I ought to have done) that, for example, the "mood" of *Komachi* is different from the "mood" of *Kumasaka*. Such differences will be fully apparent to the American reader, who would not be the better off for knowing the technical name of each *kurai* or class of Nō. Surely the Japanese student of Shakespeare does not need to be told that the *kurai* of "Hamlet" is different from that of "Measure for Measure"?

It would be possible to burden a book of this kind with as great a mass of unnecessary technicality as irritates us in a smart sale-catalogue of Japanese Prints. I have avoided such terms to a considerable extent, treating the plays as literature, not as some kind of Delphic mystery.

In this short introduction I shall not have space to give a complete description of modern Nō, nor a full history of its origins. But the reader of the translations will find that he needs some information on these points. I have tried to supply it as concisely as possible, sometimes in a schematic rather than a literary form.

These are some of the points about which an American reader may wish to know more:

(1) THE NŌ STAGE.

Something of its modern form may be seen from [Plate II](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj04.htm#img_pl02) and from the plans on pp. [10](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj01.htm#page_10)-13. The actual stage (A) is about 18 feet square. On the boards of the back wall is painted a pine-tree; the other sides are open. A gallery (called *hashigakari*) leads to the green-room, from which it is separated by a curtain which is raised to admit the actor when he makes his entry. The audience sit either on two or three sides of the stage. The chorus, generally in two rows, sit (or rather squat) in the recess (O). The musicians sit in the recess (J) at the back of the stage, the stick-drum nearest the "gallery," then the two hand-drums and the flute. A railing runs round the musician's recess, as also along the gallery. To the latter railing are attached three real pine-branches, marked S in the plan. They will be seen in [Plate II](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj04.htm#img_pl02). The stage is covered by a roof of its own, imitating in form the roof of a Shintō temple.

(2) THE PERFORMERS.

(a) *The Actors*.

The first actor who comes on to the stage (approaching from the gallery) is the *waki* or assistant. His primary business is to explain the circumstances under which the principal actor (called *shite* or "doer") came to dance the central dance of the play. Each of these main actors (*waki* and *shite*) has "adjuncts" or "companions."

Some plays need only the two main actors. Others use as many as ten or even twelve. The female rōles are of course taken by men. The waki is always a male rôle.

(b) *The Chorus*.

This consists of from eight to twelve persons in ordinary native dress seated in two rows at the side of the stage. Their sole function is to sing an actor's words for him when his dance-movements prevent him from singing comfortably. They enter by a side-door before the play begins and remain seated till it is over.

(c) *The Musicians*.

Nearest to the gallery sits the "big-drum," whose instrument rests on the ground and is played with a stick. This stick-drum is not used in all plays. Next comes a hand-drummer who plays with thimbled finger; next a second who plays with the bare band.

Finally, the flute. It intervenes only at stated intervals, particularly at the beginning, climax and end of plays.

COSTUME.

Though almost wholly banishing other extrinsic aids, the Nō relies enormously for its effects on gorgeous and elaborate costume. Some references to this will be found in Oswald Sickert's letters at the end of my book.

Masks are worn only by the *shite* (principal actor) and his subordinates. The *shite* always wears a mask if playing the part of a woman or very old man. Young men, particularly warriors, are usually unmasked. In child-parts (played by boy-actors) masks are not worn. The reproduction of a female mask will be found on [Plate I](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj03.htm#img_pl01). The masks are of wood. Many of those still in use are of great antiquity and rank as important specimens of Japanese sculpture.

PROPERTIES.

The properties of the Nō stage are of a highly conventionalized kind. An open frame-work represents a boat; another differing little from it denotes a chariot. Palace, house, cottage, hovel are all represented by four posts covered with a roof. The fan which the actor usually carries often does duty as a knife, brush or the like. Weapons are more realistically represented. The short-sword, belt-sword, pike, spear and Chinese broad-sword are carried; also bows and arrows.

DANCING AND ACTING.

Every Nō play (with, I think, the sole exception of *Hachi no Ki*, translated on [p. 134](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj23.htm#page_134)) includes a *mai* or dance, consisting usually of slow steps and solemn gestures, often bearing little resemblance to what is in America associated with the word "dance." When the *shite* dances, his dance consists of five "movements" or parts; a "subordinate's" dance consists of three. Both in the actors' miming and in the dancing an important element is the stamping of beats with the shoeless foot.

THE PLAYS.

The plays are written partly in prose, partly in verse. The prose portions serve much the same purpose as the iambics in a Greek play. They are in the Court or upper-class colloquial of the 14th century, a language not wholly dead to-day, as it is still the language in which people write formal letters.

The chanting of these portions is far removed from singing; yet they are not "spoken." The voice falls at the end of each sentence in a monotonous cadence.

A prose passage often gradually heightens into verse. The chanting, which has hitherto resembled the intoning of a Roman Catholic priest, takes on more of the character of "recitativo" in opera, occasionally attaining to actual song. The verse of these portions is sometimes irregular, but on the whole tends to an alternation of lines of five and seven syllables.

The verse of the lyric portions is marked by frequent use of pivot-words 1 and puns, particularly puns on place-names. The 14th century Nō-writer, Seami, insists that pivot-words should be used sparingly and with discretion. Many Nō-writers did not follow this advice; but the use of pivot-words is not in itself a decoration more artificial than rhyme, and I cannot agree with those European writers to whom this device appears puerile and degraded. Each language must use such embellishments as suit its genius.

Another characteristic of the texts is the use of earlier literary material. Many of the plays were adapted from dance-ballads already existing and even new plays made use of such poems as were associated in the minds of the audience with the places or persons named in the play. Often a play is written round a poem or series of poems, as will be seen in the course of this book.

This use of existing material exceeds the practice of Western dramatists; but it must be remembered that if we were to read Webster, for example, in editions annotated as minutely as the Nō-plays, we should discover that he was far more addicted to borrowing than we had been aware. It seems to me that in the finest plays this use of existing material is made with magnificent effect and fully justifies itself.

[A portion of Seami’s advice to his pupils, mid 1300’s AD]

IMITATION (Monomane).

In imitation there should be a tinge of the "unlike." For if imitation be pressed too far it impinges on reality and ceases to give an impression of likeness. If one aims only at the beautiful, the "flower" is sure to appear. For example, in acting the part of an old man, the master actor tries to reproduce in his dance only the refinement and venerability of an old gentleman. 2 If the actor is old himself, he need not think about producing an impression of old age. . . . The appearance of old age will often be best given by making all movements a little late, so that they come just after the musical beat. If the actor bears this in mind, he may be as lively and energetic as he pleases. For in old age the limbs are heavy and the ears slow; there is the will to move but not the corresponding capacity.

It is in such methods as this that true imitation lies. . . . Youthful movements made by an old person are, indeed, delightful; they are like flowers blossoming on an old tree.

If, because the actor has noticed that old men walk with bent knees and back and have shrunken frames, he simply imitates these characteristics, he may achieve an appearance of decrepitude, but it will be at the expense of the "flower." And if the "flower" be lacking there will be no beauty in his impersonation.

Women should be impersonated by a young actor. . . . It is very difficult to play the part of a Princess or lady-in-waiting, for little opportunity presents itself of studying their august behaviour and appearance. Great pains must be taken to see that robes and cloaks are worn in the correct way. These things do not depend on the actor's fancy but must be carefully ascertained.

The appearance of ordinary ladies such as one is used to see about one is easy to imitate. . . . In acting the part of a dancing-girl, mad-woman or the like, whether he carry the fan or some fancy thing (a flowering branch, for instance) the actor must carry it loosely; his skirts must trail low so as to hide his feet; his knees and back must not be bent, his body must be poised gracefully. As regards the way he holds himself-if he bends back, it looks bad when he faces the audience; if he stoops, it looks bad from behind. But he will not look like a woman if he holds his head too stiffly. His sleeves should be as long as possible, so that he never shows his fingers.

APPARITIONS

Here the outward form is that of a ghost; but within is the heart of a man.

Such plays are generally in two parts. The beginning, in two or three sections, should be as short as possible. In the second half the *shite* (who has hitherto appeared to be a man) becomes definitely the ghost of a dead person.

Since no one has ever seen a real ghost 1 from the Nether Regions, the actor may use his fancy, aiming only at the beautiful. To represent real life is far more difficult.

If ghosts are terrifying, they cease to be beautiful. For the terrifying and the beautiful are as far apart as black and white.

[Back to Arthur Waley]

YŪGEN: It is obvious that Seami was deeply imbued with the teachings of Zen, in which cult his patron Yoshimitsu may have been his master. The difficult term *yūgen* which occurs constantly in the works is derived from Zen literature. It means "what lies beneath the surface"; the subtle as opposed to the obvious; the hint, as opposed to the statement. It is applied to the natural grace of a boy's movements, to the restraint of a nobleman's speech and bearing. "When notes fall sweetly and flutter delicately to the ear," that is the *yūgen* of music. The symbol of *yūgen* is "a white bird with a flower in its beak." "To watch the sun sink behind a flower-clad hill, to wander on and on in a huge forest with no thought of return, to stand upon the shore and gaze after a boat that goes hid by far-off islands, to ponder on the journey of wild-geese seen and lost among the clouds"--such are the gates to *yūgen*.

It is above all in "architecture," in the relation of parts to the whole, that these poems are supreme. 2 The early writers created a "form" or general pattern which the weakest writing cannot wholly rob of its beauty. The plays are like those carved lamp-bearing angels in the churches at Seville; a type of such beauty was created by a sculptor of the sixteenth century that even the most degraded modern descendant of these masterpieces retains a certain distinction of form.

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First comes the *jidai* or opening-couplet, enigmatic, abrupt. Then in contrast to this vague shadow come the hard outlines of the *waki's* exposition, the formal naming of himself, his origin and destination. Then, shadowy again, the "song of travel," in which picture after picture dissolves almost before it is seen.

But all this has been mere introduction--the imagination has been quickened, the attention grasped in preparation for one thing only--the hero's entry. In the "first chant," in the dialogue which follows, in the successive dances and climax, this absolute mastery of construction is what has most struck me in reading the plays.

Again, Nō does not make a frontal attack on the emotions. It creeps at the subject warily. For the action, in the commonest class of play, does not take place before our eyes, but is lived through again in mimic and recital by the ghost of one of the participants in it. Thus we get no possibility of crude realities; a vision of life indeed, but painted with the colours of memory, longing or regret.

In a paper read before the Japan Society in 1919 I tried to illustrate this point by showing, perhaps in too fragmentary and disjointed a manner, how the theme of Webster's "Duchess of Malfi" would have been treated by a Nō writer. I said then (and the Society kindly allows me to repeat those remarks):

The plot of the play is thus summarized by Rupert Brooke in his "John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama": "The Duchess of Malfi is a young widow forbidden by her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, to marry again. They put a creature of theirs, Bosola, into her service as a spy. The Duchess loves and marries Antonio, her steward, and has three children. Bosola ultimately discovers and reports this. Antonio and the Duchess have to fly. The Duchess is captured, imprisoned and mentally tortured and put to death. Ferdinand goes mad. In the last Act be, the Cardinal, Antonio and Bosola are all killed with various confusions and in various horror."

Just as Webster took his themes from previous 'works (in this case from Painter's "Palace of Pleasure"), so the Nō plays took theirs from the Romances or "Monogatari." Let us reconstruct the "Duchess" as a Nō play, using Webster's text as our "Monogatari."

Great simplification is necessary, for the Nō play corresponds in length to one act of our five-act plays, and has no space for divagations. The comic is altogether excluded, being reserved for the *kyōgen* or farces which are played as interludes between the Nō.

The persons need not be more than two--the Pilgrim, who will act the part of waki, and the Duchess, who will be *shite* or Protagonist. The chorus takes no part in the action, but speaks for the shite while she is miming the more engrossing parts of her rôle.

The Pilgrim comes on to the stage and first pronounces in his *Jidai* or preliminary couplet, some Buddhist aphorism appropriate to the subject of the play. He then names himself to the audience thus (in prose):

"I am a pilgrim from Rome. I have visited all the other shrines of Italy, but have never been to Loretto. I will journey once to the shrine of Loretto."

Then follows (in verse) the "Song of Travel" in which the Pilgrim describes the scenes through which he passes on his way to the shrine. While he is kneeling at the shrine, *Shite* (the Protagonist) comes on to the stage. She is a young woman dressed, "contrary to the Italian fashion," in a loose-bodied gown. She carries in her hand an unripe apricot. She calls to the Pilgrim and engages him in conversation. He asks her if it were not at this shrine that the Duchess of Malfi took refuge. The young woman answers with a kind of eager exaltation, her words gradually rising from prose to poetry. She tells the story of the Duchess's flight, adding certain intimate touches which force the priest to ask abruptly, "Who is it that is speaking to me?"

And the girl shuddering (for it is hateful to a ghost to name itself) answers: "*Hazukashi ya*! I am the soul of the Duke Ferdinand's sister, she that was once called Duchess of Malfi. Love still ties my soul to the earth. *Toburai tabi-tamaye*! Pray for me, oh, pray for my release!"

Here closes the first part of the play. In the second the young ghost, her memory quickened by the Pilgrim's prayers (and this is part of the medicine of salvation), endures again the memory of her final hours. She mimes the action of kissing the hand (*vide* Act IV, Scene 1), finds it very cold:

I fear you are not well after your travel.  / Oh! horrible! What witchcraft does he practise, that he hath left  / A dead man's hand here?

And each successive scene of the torture is so vividly mimed that though it exists only in the Protagonist's brain, it is as real to the audience as if the figure of dead Antonio lay propped upon the stage, or as if the madmen were actually leaping and screaming before them.

Finally she acts the scene of her own execution:

Heaven-gates are not so highly arched /  As princes' palaces; they that enter there /Must go upon their knees. (*She kneels*.)  Come, violent death,  / Serve for mandragora to make me sleep!  / Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,  /They then may feed in quiet.     (*She sinks her head and folds her hands*.)

The chorus, taking up the word "quiet," chant a phrase from the Hokkekyō: *Sangai Mu-an* "In the Three Worlds there is no quietness or rest."

But the Pilgrim's prayers have been answered. Her soul has broken its bonds: is free to depart. The ghost recedes, grows dimmer and dimmer, till at last

*use-ni-keri use-ni-keri*

it vanishes from sight.

The reference which I have just made to dance-ballads brings us to another question. What did the Nō-plays grow out of?

ORIGINS.

Nō as we have it to-day dates from about the middle of the 14th century. It was a combination of many elements.

These were:

(1) Sarugaku, a masquerade which relieved the solemnity of Shintō ceremonies. What we call Nō was at first called Sarugaku no Nō.

(2) Dengaku, at first a rustic exhibition of acrobatics and jugglery; later, a kind of opera in which performers alternately danced and recited.

(3) Various sorts of recitation, ballad-singing, etc.

(4) The Chinese dances practised at the Japanese Court.

Nō owes its present form to the genius of two men. Kwanami Kiyotsugu (1333-1384 A.D.) and his son Seami Motokiyo (1363-1444 A. D.). 1

Kwanami was a priest of the Kasuga Temple near Nara. About 1375 the Shōgun Yoshimitsu saw him performing in a Sarugaku. no Nō at the New Temple (one of the three great temples of Kumano) and immediately took him under his protection.

This Yoshimitsu had become ruler of Japan in 1367 at the age of ten. His family had seized the Shōgunate in 1338 and wielded absolute power at Kyōto, while two rival Mikados, one in the north and one in the south, held impotent and dwindling courts.

The young Shogun distinguished himself by patronage of art and letters; and by his devotion to the religion of the Zen Sect. 2 It is probable that when he first saw Kwanami he also became acquainted with the son Seami, then a boy of twelve.

A diary of the period has the following entry for the 7th day of the 6th month, 1368:

p. 22

[paragraph continues] For some while Yoshimitsu has been making a favourite of a Sarugaku-boy from Yamato, sharing the same meat and eating from the same vessels. These Sarugaku people are mere mendicants, but he treats them as if they were Privy Counsellors.

From this friendship sprang the art of Nō as it exists to-day. Of Seami we know far more than of his father Kwanami. For Seami left behind him a considerable number of treatises and autobiographical fragments. 1 These were not published till 1908 and have not yet been properly edited. They establish, among other things, the fact that Seami wrote both words and music for most of the plays in which he performed. It had before been supposed that the texts were supplied by the Zen 2 priests. For other information brought to light by the discovery of Seami's *Works* see Appendix II.

YŪGEN

It is obvious that Seami was deeply imbued with the teachings of Zen, in which cult his patron Yoshimitsu may have been his master. The difficult term *yūgen* which occurs constantly in the works is derived from Zen literature. It means "what lies beneath the surface"; the subtle as opposed to the obvious; the hint, as opposed to the statement. It is applied to the natural grace of a boy's movements, to the restraint of a nobleman's speech and bearing. "When notes fall sweetly and flutter delicately to the ear," that is the *yūgen* of music. The symbol of *yūgen* is "a white bird with a flower in its beak." "To watch the sun sink behind a flower-clad hill, to wander on and on in a huge forest with no thought of return, to stand upon the shore and gaze after a boat that goes hid by far-off islands, to ponder on the journey of wild-geese seen and lost among the clouds"--such are the gates to *yūgen*.

I will give a few specimens of Seami's advice to his pupils:

PATRONS

The actor should not stare straight into the faces of the audience, but look between them. When he looks in the direction of the Daimyōs he must not let his eyes meet theirs, but must slightly avert his gaze.

At Palace-performances or when acting at a banquet, he must not let his eyes meet those of the Shōgun or stare straight into the Honourable Face. When playing in a large enclosure he must take care to keep as close as possible to the side where the Nobles are sitting; if in a small enclosure, as far off as possible. But particularly in Palace-performances and the like he must take the greatest pains to keep as far away as he possibly can from the August Presence.

Again, when the recitations are given at the Palace it is equally essential to begin at the right moment. It is bad to begin too soon and fatal to delay too long.

It sometimes happens that the "noble gentlemen" do not arrive at the theatre until the play has already reached its Development and Climax. In such cases the play is at its climax, but the noble gentlemen's hearts are ripe only for Introduction. If they, ready only for Introduction, are forced to witness a Climax, they are not likely to get pleasure from it. Finally even the spectators who were there before, awed by the entry of the "exalted ones," become so quiet that you would not know they were there, so that the whole audience ends by returning to the Introductory mood. At such a moment the Nō cannot possibly be a success. In such circumstances it is best to take Development-Nō and give it a slightly "introductory" turn. Then, if it is played gently, it may win the August Attention.

It also happens that one is suddenly sent for to perform at a Shōgunal feast or the like. The audience is already in a "climax-mood"; but "introductory" Nō must be played. This is a great difficulty. In such circumstances the best plan is to tinge the introduction with a nuance of "development." But this must be done without "stickiness," with the lightest possible touch, and the transition to the real Development and Climax must be made as quickly as possible.

In old times there were masters who perfected themselves in Nō without study. But nowadays the nobles and gentlemen have become so critical that they will only look with approbation on what is good and will not give attention to anything bad.

Their honourable eyes have become so keen that they notice the least defect, so that even a masterpiece that is as pearls many times polished or flowers choicely culled will not win the applause of our gentlemen to-day.

At the same time, good actors are becoming few and the Art is gradually sinking towards its decline. For this reason, if very strenuous study is not made, it is bound to disappear altogether.

When summoned to play before the noble gentlemen, we are expected to give the regular "words of good-wish" and to divide our performance into the three parts, Introduction, Development and Climax, so that the pre-arranged order cannot be varied. . . . But on less formal occasions, when, for example, one is playing not at a Shōgunal banquet but on a common, everyday (*yo no tsune*) stage, it is obviously unnecessary to limit oneself to the set forms of "happy wish."

One's style should be easy and full of graceful *yūgen*, and the piece 1 selected should be suitable to the audience. A ballad (*ko-utai*) or dance-song (*kuse-mai*) of the day will be best. One should have in one's repertory a stock of such pieces and be ready to vary them according to the character of one's audience.

In the words and gestures (of a farce, kyōgen) there should be nothing low. The jokes and repartee should be such as suit the august ears of the nobles and gentry. On no account must vulgar words or gestures be introduced, however funny they may be. This advice must be carefully observed.

Introduction, Development and Climax must also be strictly adhered to when *dancing* at the Palace. If the chanting proceeds from an "introductory-mood," the dancing must belong to the same mood. . . . When one is suddenly summoned to perform at a riotous banquet, one must take into consideration the state of the noble gentlemen's spirits.

IMITATION (Monomane).

In imitation there should be a tinge of the "unlike." For if imitation be pressed too far it impinges on reality and ceases to give an impression of likeness. If one aims only at the beautiful, the "flower" is sure to appear. For example, in acting the part of an old man, the master actor tries to reproduce in his dance only the refinement and venerability of an old gentleman. 2 If the actor is old himself, he need not think about producing an impression of old age. . . . The appearance of old age will often be best given by making all movements a little late, so that they come just after the musical beat. If the actor bears this in mind, he may be as lively and energetic as he pleases. For in old age the limbs are heavy and the ears slow; there is the will to move but not the corresponding capacity.

It is in such methods as this that true imitation lies. . . . Youthful movements made by an old person are, indeed, delightful; they are like flowers blossoming on an old tree.

If, because the actor has noticed that old men walk with bent knees and back and have shrunken frames, he simply imitates these characteristics, he may achieve an appearance of decrepitude, but it will be at the expense of the "flower." And if the "flower" be lacking there will be no beauty in his impersonation.

Women should be impersonated by a young actor. . . . It is very difficult to play the part of a Princess or lady-in-waiting, for little opportunity presents itself of studying their august behaviour and appearance. Great pains must be taken to see that robes and cloaks are worn in the correct way. These things do not depend on the actor's fancy but must be carefully ascertained.

The appearance of ordinary ladies such as one is used to see about one is easy to imitate. . . . In acting the part of a dancing-girl, mad-woman or the like, whether he carry the fan or some fancy thing (a flowering branch, for instance) the actor must carry it loosely; his skirts must trail low so as to hide his feet; his knees and back must not be bent, his body must be poised gracefully. As regards the way he holds himself-if he bends back, it looks bad when he faces the audience; if he stoops, it looks bad from behind. But he will not look like a woman if he holds his head too stiffly. His sleeves should be as long as possible, so that he never shows his fingers.

APPARITIONS

Here the outward form is that of a ghost; but within is the heart of a man.

Such plays are generally in two parts. The beginning, in two or three sections, should be as short as possible. In the second half the *shite* (who has hitherto appeared to be a man) becomes definitely the ghost of a dead person.

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Since no one has ever seen a real ghost 1 from the Nether Regions, the actor may use his fancy, aiming only at the beautiful. To represent real life is far more difficult.

If ghosts are terrifying, they cease to be beautiful. For the terrifying and the beautiful are as far apart as black and white.

CHILD PLAYS

In plays where a lost child is found by its parents, the writer should not introduce a scene where they clutch and cling to one another, sobbing and weeping. . . .

Plays in which child-characters occur, even if well done, are always apt to make the audience exclaim in disgust, "Don't harrow our feelings in this way!"

RESTRAINT

In representing anger the actor should yet retain some gentleness in his mood, else he will portray not anger but violence.

In representing the mysterious (*yūgen*) he must not forget the principle of energy.

When the body is in violent action, the hands and feet must move as though by stealth. When the feet are in lively motion, the body must be held in quietness. Such things cannot be explained in writing but must be shown to the actor by actual demonstration.

It is above all in "architecture," in the relation of parts to the whole, that these poems are supreme. 2 The early writers created a "form" or general pattern which the weakest writing cannot wholly rob of its beauty. The plays are like those carved lamp-bearing angels in the churches at Seville; a type of such beauty was created by a sculptor of the sixteenth century that even the most degraded modern descendant of these masterpieces retains a certain distinction of form.

First comes the *jidai* or opening-couplet, enigmatic, abrupt. Then in contrast to this vague shadow come the hard outlines of the *waki's* exposition, the formal naming of himself, his origin and destination. Then, shadowy again, the "song of travel," in which picture after picture dissolves almost before it is seen.

But all this has been mere introduction--the imagination has been quickened, the attention grasped in preparation for one thing only--the hero's entry. In the "first chant," in the dialogue which follows, in the successive dances and climax, this absolute mastery of construction is what has most struck me in reading the plays.

Again, Nō does not make a frontal attack on the emotions. It creeps at the subject warily. For the action, in the commonest class of play, does not take place before our eyes, but is lived through again in mimic and recital by the ghost of one of the participants in it. Thus we get no possibility of crude realities; a vision of life indeed, but painted with the colours of memory, longing or regret.

In a paper read before the Japan Society in 1919 I tried to illustrate this point by showing, perhaps in too fragmentary and disjointed a manner, **how the theme of Webster's "Duchess of Malfi" would have been treated by a Nō writer.** I said then (and the Society kindly allows me to repeat those remarks):

The plot of the play is thus summarized by Rupert Brooke in his "John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama": "The Duchess of Malfi is a young widow forbidden by her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, to marry again. They put a creature of theirs, Bosola, into her service as a spy. The Duchess loves and marries Antonio, her steward, and has three children. Bosola ultimately discovers and reports this. Antonio and the Duchess have to fly. The Duchess is captured, imprisoned and mentally tortured and put to death. Ferdinand goes mad. In the last Act, the Cardinal, Antonio and Bosola are all killed with various confusions and in various horror."

Just as Webster took his themes from previous 'works (in this case from Painter's "Palace of Pleasure"), so the Nō plays took theirs from the Romances or "Monogatari." Let us reconstruct the "Duchess" as a Nō play, using Webster's text as our "Monogatari."

Great simplification is necessary, for the Nō play corresponds in length to one act of our five-act plays, and has no space for divagations. The comic is altogether excluded, being reserved for the *kyōgen* or farces which are played as interludes between the Nō.

The persons need not be more than two--the Pilgrim, who will act the part of waki, and the Duchess, who will be *shite* or Protagonist. The chorus takes no part in the action, but speaks for the shite while she is miming the more engrossing parts of her rôle.

The Pilgrim comes on to the stage and first pronounces in his *Jidai* or preliminary couplet, some Buddhist aphorism appropriate to the subject of the play. He then names himself to the audience thus (in prose):

"I am a pilgrim from Rome. I have visited all the other shrines of Italy, but have never been to Loretto. I will journey once to the shrine of Loretto."

Then follows (in verse) the "Song of Travel" in which the Pilgrim describes the scenes through which he passes on his way to the shrine. While he is kneeling at the shrine, *Shite* (the Protagonist) comes on to the stage. She is a young woman dressed, "contrary to the Italian fashion," in a loose-bodied gown. She carries in her hand an unripe apricot. She calls to the Pilgrim and engages him in conversation. He asks her if it were not at this shrine that the Duchess of Malfi took refuge. The young woman answers with a kind of eager exaltation, her words gradually rising from prose to poetry. She tells the story of the Duchess's flight, adding certain intimate touches which force the priest to ask abruptly, "Who is it that is speaking to me?"

And the girl shuddering (for it is hateful to a ghost to name itself) answers: "*Hazukashi ya*! I am the soul of the Duke Ferdinand's sister, she that was once called Duchess of Malfi. Love still ties my soul to the earth. *Toburai tabi-tamaye*! Pray for me, oh, pray for my release!"

Here closes the first part of the play. In the second the young ghost, her memory quickened by the Pilgrim's prayers (and this is part of the medicine of salvation), endures again the memory of her final hours. She mimes the action of kissing the hand (*vide* Act IV, Scene 1), finds it very cold:

I fear you are not well after your travel. Oh! horrible! What witchcraft does he practise, that he hath left A dead man's hand here?

And each successive scene of the torture is so vividly mimed that though it exists only in the Protagonist's brain, it is as real to the audience as if the figure of dead Antonio lay propped upon the stage, or as if the madmen were actually leaping and screaming before them.

Finally she acts the scene of her own execution:

Heaven-gates are not so highly arched /  As princes' palaces; they that enter there /Must go upon their knees. (*She kneels*.)  Come, violent death,  / Serve for mandragora to make me sleep!  / Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,  /They then may feed in quiet.     (*She sinks her head and folds her hands*.)

The chorus, taking up the word "quiet," chant a phrase from the Hokkekyō: *Sangai Mu-an* "In the Three Worlds there is no quietness or rest."

But the Pilgrim's prayers have been answered. Her soul has broken its bonds: is free to depart. The ghost recedes, grows dimmer and dimmer, till at last

*use-ni-keri use-ni-keri*

it vanishes from sight.

**Footnotes**

[20:1](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_0) For example in *yuku kata shira-yuki ni ... shira* does duty twice, meaning both "unknown" and "white." The meaning is "whither-unknown amid the white Snow."

[21:1](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_1) These dates have only recently been established.

[21:2](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_2) See [p. 32](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj06.htm#page_32).

[22:1](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_3) Not to he confused with the forged book printed in 1600 and used by Fenollosa.

[22:2](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_4) See note on Buddhism, [p. 268](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj56.htm#page_268).

[24 :1](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_5) The piece to be used as an introduction. Modern performances are not confined to full Nō. Sometimes actors in plain dress recite without the aid of instrumental music, sitting in a row. Or one actor may recite the piece, with music (this is called *Hayashi*); or the piece may mimed without music (this is called *Shimai*).

[24 :2](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_6) An old shirōto, i. e. person not engaged in trade.

[26:1](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_7) This shows that, in Seami's hands, the device of making an apparition the hero of the play was simply a dramatic convention.

[26:2](http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj05.htm#fr_8) This, too, is the only aspect of them that I can here discuss; no other kind of criticism being possible without quotation of the actual words used by the poet.