

*'The Resurrected Christ':
A Modern Nō Drama*

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ANY number of difficulties stand in the way of assessing Yeats's assimilation of the Japanese Nō, and the problem of transmission through the hands of both Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound is not the least of them. Before attempting to unknot that tangled skein, however, independent studies need be made of both the condition and development of anti-realistic verse drama in Europe, as well as of the literary background and stage tradition of Nō, in order to provide contexts in which patterns of influence and assimilation can be accurately identified. The least understood aspect of the question is the nature of Nō drama itself. All too many critics of English literature, for example, continue to draw conclusions from published translations for the purpose of comparison with Yeatsian models as though they were dealing with Western drama, when, in fact, the performance of such poetic texts succeeds by virtue of inherent rhythms and forms, not by the logic of the events involved. One cannot emphasize enough that the drama of Nō is a function of the dramatization, rather than of the dramatic quality, of the basic poem. Nō is not a form of literary drama, it lives only in performance, where the experience of the spectator is primarily visual and aural: an emotional experience very like listening to music and altogether inimical to the intervention of intellectual apparatus.

From Pound to the present day, commentators have ignored, or have been ignorant of, the accomplishment of choreography and musical construction as complements to the dramatic poem. Nō drama has often been dismissed in the West as slight and insignificant; above all, as intellectually soft, and the original translation which follows would fare no better without some understanding of its visual and aural presentation. The text, by itself, does not adequately reflect the inherent power and beauty

of the play. However, 'The Resurrected Christ' does provide an accessible model on a Western theme as actually treated by authentic Nō tradition and offers us an excellent opportunity for comparison with Yeats's *Calvary* and *The Resurrection*. For some years this modern Nō drama has figured as an annual Easter production in Tokyo and was written as a reconciliation between traditional aesthetic forms and the alien faith of Christian converts. The text has never been published except in the programmes used at performances, and is as typical an example of the god play, or Kami Nō, as one could wish for. In addition, it has considerable literary merit. The play is classically ornamented with allusions and quotations, and it is perfectly regular in construction, except for the use of *tsure*, assistants to, or extensions of, the primary character, rather than a *waki*, deuteragonist or interlocutor, who is normally unrelated to the historical action or legendary incident on which the ritual is based. Precedent for such substitution was set during a late and experimental period of development in Nō drama, and in this instance *tsure* are required by the historical circumstances. Oddly enough, there is little in the text, as it stands, that could not have evolved directly from the early medieval trope known as the 'Quem quaeritis', a choral dramatization of the Christian Message at Easter mass in which European liturgical drama was born. The trope originally took the form of a dialogue between the three Marys and the Angel at the tomb.

Quem quaeritis in sepulchre, [o] Christicolae?

Iesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicolae.

non est hic, surrexit sicut praedixerat.

Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit de sepulchro.

Resurrexi.

(Quoted in E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 1903, II, 9)

The rough translation from the Japanese was made by Mr Fumio Otsuka, an ardent enthusiast and disciplined performer, and even though the final version was checked against the original by a third party, I must assume full responsibility for any discrepancies which may have resulted in recasting the English to approximate the various lyric forms involved. Instead of the line drawings which are conventionally printed in the margins of Japanese editions and correlate stage movement with the text (as

was the practice in Roman Catholic missals) I have incorporated stage directions taken down some years ago in Tokyo during a magnificent performance of Mr Kuro Hoshō, a co-author of the piece. Changes in style of delivery which are noted in the original are retained within square brackets and give some indication of the play's musical character and composition. The text requires about an hour for performance.

FUKKATSU NO KIRISUTO

'The Resurrected Christ'

by: Hoshō Kuro
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translated by Otsuka Fumio

edited by Richard Taylor

Source: the Gospel according to Luke (24: 1-9)

Cast: SHITE . Jesus Christ
FIRST TSURE . Mary Magdalen
SECOND TSURE . Mary, the mother of James

Action: before the tomb at day-break

[After the musicians and chorus are seated, a vine-topped and curtained bamboo frame which represents the sepulchre is placed in the centre of the stage. The masked and wimpled Tsure in single-coloured robes enter; Mary Magdalen carrying a container of holy oil for anointing the body, and Mary, the mother of James, a single lily.]

TSURE. (*In unison*)
(*Weak*)

As the light broke,
We woke from our dream,
Impelled to seek
The resting place of our Master.

FIRST TSURE
(*Sashi*)

I am a woman of Galilee,
Searching in the shadow
Of this mountain
For the tomb of our Lord.

(Mondai)

It is the first day of the week,
And, carrying sweet spices,
We hurry to the tomb before sun-rise.

SECOND TSURE

I too, go there with you.

FIRST TSURE

Come, this way!
This is indeed strange;
The massive stone that sealed
The entrance of the tomb
Is now thrown down.

SECOND TSURE

Can this be the work
Of the recent earthquakes?

FIRST TSURE

My heart pounds!

[They hurry toward the tomb and station themselves a little before and to the right of the structure.]

CHORUS

(Strong and High)

A sudden beam of light
Radiates from heaven.
Clad in incandescent white,
A heavenly messenger appears.
Frightened and awed,
The women sink to the ground.

ANGEL *[Voice from chorus or covered frame.]**(High)*

Why do you look
For the living among the dead?
He is risen; He is not here:
Behold the place
Where they laid Him.

[The women rise. Mary Magdalen crosses to the bridgeway and stands by the first pine.]

FIRST TSURE

(Weak and Low)

Bleak is our path
Without Him; and yet,
His feet bathed in tears
And dried in long black hair,
The lingering scent of ointment,
The sweet and noble face,
The merciful smile:
All are still fresh
In mind, though gone.

Without measure
Is the grace and favour of God:
He came to remove
The pain of the sick,
And bring salvation
To the suffering;
Eventually bearing
The sins of the world,
And doing penance for them.

TSURE. (*In unison*) [*Mary returns to her former place.*]
(*High*) O yearning unsurpassed!

CHORUS
(*High*) Beyond all this, what is it
That has come to pass?
The tomb of the Lord has been opened.

Praying that he might appear,
They throw themselves to the ground,
Choked with sobs.

They throw themselves to the ground,
Choked with sobs.

TSURE. (*In unison*) How saddened we are
At the telling of it.

SHITE [*From behind the curtain, altogether off-stage.*]

What sounds are these
From in front of the tomb?

[*He enters swiftly down the bridgeway and retreats to the third pine, wearing a white dancing over-robe and stiff divided trousers of white and silver brocade with a sensitive, yet compelling mask, a golden crown, and a black wig of unbound hair flowing loosely over the shoulders. The intensity of the moment is prolonged by a pause and heightened by the use of the stick-drum. The figure proceeds to the second pine, postures slowly, and speaks, facing the audience.*]

(*Sashi —
Strong and High*) The mind of God,
Generous and merciful,
Waiting neither
For scent nor flower,¹
Has overcome death.

¹ Conventional offerings at the altars of the dead.

I am resurrected,
Through the power of God,
And have proven Myself
The Redeemer.

[*Entering on the stage proper, He speaks to the women who have retreated before Him.*]

Women, why do you weep?
For whom are you looking?

FIRST TSURE
(*Weak and High*)

Is this the guardian of the tomb
Seen by the dim light of dawn?
Where is the body of our Lord?

SHITE
(*Strong and High*)

Mary!

TSURE. (*In unison*)
(*High*)

Master! Master!
How terribly we have missed you!

CHORUS
(*Strong and High*)

Saying this, they rush to Him,
Longing to touch Him,
But they are driven back
Before His glory.
Overcome with awe, they sink
To the ground at His feet.

SHITE
(*Strong and High*)

Mary, do not touch Me.

CHORUS
(*High*)

Stand up, make haste; return
To the brethren and tell them
That they too, may know.

SHITE
(*Weak*)

I am My Father
And the Father of mankind.

CHORUS
(*High*)

My God
And the God of mankind.

SHITE
(*Noru — High*)

I am raised
To the feet of God, My Father.

CHORUS
 (*Strong*)
 How strange this is;
 A wonderful light prevails,
 Suffusing both heaven and earth;
 The dignity
 And grandeur of the City of God
 Is revealed. He dances.

SHITE [*Finishing the dance.*]
 (*Strong*)
 Peace be with you.
 Divine grace be given unto you.

CHORUS
 (*Weak and High*)
 He is truly resurrected.
 He is truly resurrected.
 He is proven to be the son of God.

Father and Son
 In the name of the Spirit
 Are given unto the world
 At each baptism.

Let there be glory
 To God in heaven,
 And for us on earth
 Peace!
 Hymns to God are swelling.
 Hymns to God are swelling.
 In the purple mist
 Filled with clean perfume
 God is returned to heaven.

[*The shite exists swiftly along the bridgeway, pausing to gesture transcendently; a voluminous sleeve thrown up and allowed to billow down over the head.*]

By its very nature the god play has less appeal for a Western audience than any other type of Nō drama. It contains, after all, almost no conflict, no human situation to be entered into or resolved. Ezra Pound, for example, included none in his edition of the Fenollosa translations although there was at least one full text among the manuscripts, *Yoro*, which Yeats did use as the basis for the first of his dance plays, *At the Hawk's Well*. The Kami Nō is essentially a miracle play, the projection of momentary harmony between, or intersection of, the natural and supernatural worlds,

an archetype of universal order. Even more than any other type of Nō, it is a ritual of emotional re-creation, rather than the imitation of an action, and depends more completely on choregraphy and musical composition as paradigms of the emotion to be evoked because so much less immediate sympathy is aroused by the action itself than, for example, in the tragic death of a youthful warrior, the thwarted love of a beautiful woman, or the pathetic derangement of a mind unbalanced by human suffering.

On the Nō stage the projection of emotion depends largely on elements of mimetic dance, and every motion of the body is measured in both time and space; none are imitations of normal human motions, but are, rather, abstracted and expressive movements of purity and restraint which approach the condition of dance, introduce elegance and ritual action, and suggest universality. The vocabulary of motion is fixed, as is the case in classical ballet, and the movements themselves are inordinately slow and powerful; certainly, never so fluid as to become ordinary dancing. A basic posture or attitude of the body is common to all movement. The feet are aligned and the knees bent, while the trunk is carried rigidly, chest forward and chin back, elbows in and hands resting along the upper thigh, palm-inward. In this position the body is perfectly balanced and easily controlled, giving the outward appearance of serenity and immobility while visibly containing the dynamic potential for movement. When 'walking', stockinged heels never leave the polished floor, and in order to preserve balance, the foot is arched up from the heel at the end of each glide and replaced on the stage as the body weight is shifted for the next 'step'. The visual impact of this movement is powerful. Since the bent knees take up the bobbing motion of normal walking and the mechanical motion of the legs is hidden in the voluminous, richly coloured robes, the solitary, heroic figure seems to glide and sweep over the stage, uncannily freed from resistance, deliberate and graceful as a gull over the sea. It is as though the physical laws of the temporal world were suspended, and the effect of a sudden gliding run against seemingly endless, static posturing can be stunning.

The set dances are equally anti-realistic and either demonstrate a lyric intensity appropriate to the character and action when accompanied by flute and drums, or serve to emphasize the

narration of an accompanying choral chant. Dances are carried out with great solemnity and economy of movement; the more spiritual the representation, the fewer and simpler the movements. The smallest gesture is enough to call up a force of feeling, already present in the context, with powerful emotion, for the subject of a Nō play is always a famous incident. In a play of two acts, where the main character first appears in disguise, relates the familiar story and later returns to reveal his true identity and relive the emotion of the original action, two or more dances are common. Each is exactly suited to the nature or quality of the character; the first is generally lyrical and subdued, a sympathetic re-creation rather than the act itself, while the second is more immediate and climactic rather than the manifestation of an attitude toward the action. 'The Resurrected Christ', even though a conventional one-act play, has both; the solemn posturing after a swift entrance which sets a hieratic tone and mood, and the more ecstatic dance of Christ's divinity and ascension into heaven. Dancing takes over when poetry alone ceases to be effective and projects feeling beyond logic and conscious communication.

The pattern of movement in both basic mime and dance also forms a part of the elaborate musical structure which informs Nō drama. Music is the very soul of Nō and shapes the feelings of the audience to the point of imaginative acceptance and participation. Besides the musical accompaniment of drums and flute, which provides a background of rhythmic variety and simple melody, the vocal styles for chanting the lyric poems which, in turn, constitute the dramatic text, are the basis of the play's composition and structure. It is not so much that the form of a Nō play is effective because the entrance speech of the secondary character is followed by a passage describing his journey or surroundings, *etc.*, but that a patterned, prosaic style of delivery is followed by a vocal line of relaxed and lyric beauty, and so on. To be sure, each section or speech has a more or less fixed literary form, subject matter, and rhetorical ornamentation, but associated with each is a general vocal style, ranging from pure speech, a figured or heightened recitation, through melodic patterns based on varied rhythms which are usually changed by the main and secondary characters, to those of fixed rhythm which are generally employed by the chorus. The pitch range of the different styles may vary

from 'high' to 'very low', depending on the effect desired and also shift from the 'weak' tonal scale which employs the full octave of four main tones and numerous semi-tones, to the 'strong' tonal scale which depends for effect on accent, dynamic stress, tone colour, and a special technique of accomplishing upward movement by intense straining of the vocal chords rather than melodic inflection. In the 'strong' system pitch intervals are inexact and unstable, and only two main tones are distinguished. Lyrical and emotional passages are normally sung in the 'weak' style, while descriptive and powerful sections are intoned in the 'strong' mode.

The composition of any given play is, of course, unique, and highly complex, but the general tendency is toward a progressive intensification of feeling with varied literary forms and vocal styles leading to a sustained melodic section of complex rhythm, a scene of quiet grace and beauty in which the first dance or posturing is performed. The climax follows as a brief sequence dominated by an impelling, regular rhythm and ecstatic dance; in 'The Resurrected Christ' this begins with the notation 'Noru'. Through the musical modification of the poetic forms, emotion is communicated intelligibly as sense imagery, and the spectator experiences the integration of both dance and poem into a musical flow which is itself the movement of the play's basic emotion or mood.

The Cafe at Syangja

Three pots on the fire:
rice, meat, dhal.

Three sisters in the house:
one to cook,
one to serve,
and one to wash the plates.

Three things shining:
our steel dishes,
the brown mud floor,
red in high Thakali cheeks.

ALAN McLEAN