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Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki: A Kabuki Parallel to *On Baile's Strand*

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As is generally known, Yeats's dramatic art has been heavily influenced by the Japanese Nô play. His *Four Plays for Dancers* were in fact constructed as deliberate evocations of that Japanese dramatic genre, and many of his later plays have been analyzed from the same perspective, as demonstrating a continued fascination with, and use of, key characteristics of the Nô technique and structure. What has, however, remained puzzling is how Yeats's early dramatic ventures developed out of the Western tradition of drama. Even many of his early plays, such as *On Baile's Strand*, or *The Green Helmet*, and indeed *Deirdre*, seem to have more affinity with his later 'Nô'-plays than with contemporary dramatic works. The movement of Yeats's dramatic art towards the enthusiastic espousal of the Nô tradition can be traced directly to Yeats's revulsion at the poetic inanity of the well-made play and its (even more revolting) gaudy and hyper-realistic staging. Yeats realized early on that poetic drama, for an example of which he drew on both the Greeks and Shakespeare, achieved its effects by non-realistic condensation into essential symbols of action and feeling, as well as by the free-play of suggestive indeterminacy. That Yeats departed from a mythic and ritual conception of drama helps to define even such early plays as *The Countess Cathleen*, demonstrating that a realistic portrayal of society, or even of the individual psyche, was far from his intentions.

After having researched into possible antecedents for such an orientation of Yeats's dramatic oeuvre, I eventually came to the conclusion that none of the probable candidates in the late nineteenth century seems at all

likely to have influenced Yeats's realization of poetic drama. F.C. McGrath has pointed to some interesting parallels between Pater's concepts of the aesthetic and Yeats's realization of these in his plays (McGrath 1973, 1984) yet general aesthetic norms such as these do not allow an explanation in terms of specific effects of dramatic technique. What had seemed to be a likely inspiration, the French Symbolist drama, on closer inspection also proved to be equally unconvincing as a predecessor of _The Countess Cathleen_, or _Deirdre_. Although French Symbolist drama, for example Villiers de L'Isle Adam's _Axël_, or Maeterlinck's _Péllëas et Mélîsande_, shows some affinity to Yeats's mythical and poetic conception of drama, the dramatic technique is all too different. Where the Symbolist plays employ a vocabulary of exotic exuberance, Yeats restrains the poetry to the bare bones of language--a decision that yields a superior emotional effect. This concentration on an essential minimum holds true also for the plot structure. Where Symbolist drama multiplies episodes and piles one monologue on another, Yeats is careful to preserve the utmost simplicity, thereby achieving an effect of much greater subtlety. Another feature of Yeats's plays so singularly lacking in Symbolist drama is what Barthes would call the 'reality effect'. When Maeterlinck and Villiers, in spite of the mythic and exotic scenery, pile one realistic detail on another, achieving the effect of ornateness and luxurious hyper-realism so striking in a Moreau painting or in the sensuality of Preraphaelite art, Yeats, by contrast, refrains from individualizing his characters by too much mundane finery, or too much psychological specification. Reduced to figures on a stage, which convey to us their symbolic meaning by a scenario of gesture, tone and poetic language, even Yeats's early plays compare to the Symbolists' as do Rossetti's or Henry Ozawa Tanner's _Annunciation_ to the canvasses of Moreau and Delacroix.[1]

Having searched in vain for Yeats's antecedents in the drama of his time, it became increasingly evident to me that Yeats's early drama was more an anticipation of the Nô play (as he later discovered it) than an imitation of a pre-existing dramatic model. I then attempted to define more clearly technical characteristics of Yeats's plays, characteristics that would need to be compared to those of the Nô drama. During my research into these aspects I happened to see a performance of the _Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki_ ('The Chronicle of the Battle of Ichinotani'), a Kabuki play which was first performed in 1751, the last work of the famous Kabuki playwright Namiki Sôsuke (1695-1752). In this play, which deals with events portrayed in the famous _Tale of the Heike_ (_Heikemonogatari_), an epic composed in the late twelfth century and whose earliest written versions date to the early thirteenth century (the so-called Kamakura period), I discovered a clear thematic parallel to Yeats's _On Baile's Strand_. The comparison afforded me some interesting insights into the similarities, as well as differences, between Japanese aesthetics and those of Yeats's plays. More important than this, however, was my slow realization that Yeats's early plays were much closer to the Kabuki theatre than to classical Nô, and that Yeats's move to incorporate the Nô tradition into his work must have been facilitated by aesthetic and technical preoccupations close to Japanese drama, if not to the Nô tradition. I believe that such a comparision might help to view Yeats's later 'Nô' plays no longer as a failed imitation of a Japanese model alien to his (after all Western) background, but as a logical development from his earlier dramatic experiments. A refinement of quasi-Kabuki dramatic technique into the Nô is after all more credible than the jump from one tradition into another.

Let me add a caveat in this place. I will not argue that Yeats's _On Baile's Strand_ is a conscious rewriting of material from the _Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki_; indeed I have

not found any evidence for Yeats's familiarity with the Nô, much less the Kabuki, before 1912. The comparison will therefore be purely structural and is not meant to imply a possible influence on Yeats. Nevertheless, I hope to support, as a consequence of my structural comparison, that Yeats's move towards the Nô will be made more logical than it has been hitherto, and that the positing of a separate dramatic grid could perhaps also lift some of the taint of Yeats's imperfect achievement of Nô. What Yeats saw in the Nô, and imitated, was a more radical technique for achieving his own ends. Yeats never seriously imitated the Nô, and his use of dance and music in his so-called 'Nô'-plays is indeed very different from the real Nô.

In the following I will provide some background and a plot summary for Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki, and I will then proceed to a comparison with On Baile's Strand. The concluding section will attempt an outline of the characteristics of Yeats's dramatic art, and thus return to the questions with which I have started.

The Heikemonogatari treats of the struggle between the warring clans of the Heike (also called Taira) and the Genji (or Minamoto), tracing the Heikes' tragic fall from power during the period between 1131 and 1191. A significant turning point of the historical events related in the epic are the Gempei Wars (1180-1185), of which the battle of Ichinotani constitutes one episode. The plot of the Kabuki-play takes its material from Book 9, chapter 16 (Tale 1975: 561-3), in which we hear of the death of the famous hero, Atsumori, who fights on the Heike side, at the hands of the unknown warrior Kumagai-no-jirô-Naozane, who, in the Tale, is consistently referred to as Naozane. In an earlier episode, Kumagai had rushed into the enemy (Heike) camp to rescue his foolhardy son, who had recklessly entered the Heike encampment all by himself, desirous of immortal glory. Now Kumagai appears on the beach at Suma Bay (near Kobe), calling out to the retreating Heike forces, who are

attempting to flee by ship. Atsumori is still on his horse, trying to gain the boat, when he is thus called upon by Kumagai, and he comes back and fights with his challenger. Kumagai defeats Atsumori and is about to behead him, when he realizes how young his enemy is. He is reminded of his own son, and, in spite of Atsumori's demand that he show no pity and save his honour by taking his life, nearly spares the young warrior. Atsumori is a particularly poetic subject because he plays the flute in the Genji camp, much to the delight of the Heike, and he is even more pitiable because his fiancée, Princess Tamaori, has just before become the victim of a ruffian's attack and has died at his hand. Remembering Atsumori's flute, which he found on his body, Naozane finally embarks on the life of a Buddhist monk.

It is important to note that in the original version of the story Kumagai plays a subsidiary rôle, and that the pitiable hero is noble Atsumori, who is young, talented, and honourable, and who is struck down by fate, losing first his beloved and then his own life. In the Kabuki version--Namiki wrote the original for the _bunraku_, the puppet theatre, and I am basing my remarks on the _jôruri_ text (_Ichinotani_ 1975: 167-210)--Atsumori and Princess Tamaori move into the subplot, although the classic story as told in the _Heikemonogatari_ provides the indispensable background against which the _Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki_ operates. The story of Atsumori and Kumagai became one of the classics of Japanese literature and gave rise to a Nô play by the title of _Atsumori_. In the Nô version of the story there is no plot (in the Western meaning of this word). The ghost of Atsumori appears to Kumagai, now a Buddhist monk. In an enactment of the battle scene the former opponents, in the shape of the priest Rensei (Kumagai) and the ghost of Atsumori, eventually find reconciliation. 'Atsumori''s anger is defused by the chorus's reminder that Rensei is praying for his salvation. The play is notable for its description of the Heike fall from power as an instance of the mutability of human life, a standard theme of Japanese poetry.

Now what happens in the Kabuki version is quite different from the original story as presented in the Heikemonogatari. Namiki radically changed the plot, turning Kumagai into the hero of the piece, and saving the life of Atsumori at the cost of Kumagai's son Kojiro. For Namiki's Kabuki/Jôruri version I need to provide some background information on the characters in the text, since this will affect their actions. In the course of the play it transpires that Atsumori is the Emperor's offspring. As the Emperor's son, he should be saved, even from the Genji point of view--although he has joined the Heike side. Kumagai has received mysterious instructions on a wooden tablet, that is displayed on stage in front of a cherry tree--the Japanese symbol of ephemerality--throughout the play. This tablet warns that the cutting of one branch of the cherry tree is punishable by the loss of one finger. Kumagai, correctly as it turns out in the final act, interprets these instructions to refer to the branch of the imperial family, Atsumori, who must not be allowed to die, and for whom he duly substitutes his son Kojiro. Kumagai has also a second motif for saving Atsumori. Atsumori's mother, Fuji-no-kata, helped him and his wife Sagami, who was a lady-in-waiting at the Emperor's court, to escape punishment for their secret love affair. Through Fuji-no-kata's help Kumagai was able to marry Sagami and to beget Kojiro on her. The obligation to Fuji-no-kata must now be paid with Kojiro's life. Towards the end of the play Atsumori is saved once more by the stone mason Midaroku, who turns out to be the warrior Munekiyo. Munekiyo kills an informer, who might have endangered Atsumori's escape from the Genji. It turns out that this Munekiyo is the former benefactor of the Genji general Yoshitsune, who arrives in the final act in order to inspect the head of Atsumori and who approves of Kojiro's substitution for Atsumori, thus sanctioning Kumagai's interpretation of the tablet. It was owing to Munekiyo that the Genji were able to come to power, and Yoshitsune pays

his obligation to Munekiyo by giving him a box with Atsumori's armour, which contains the living Atsumori. This box Munekiyo carries off with the approval of Yoshitsune.

The plot of Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki, as that of many Kabuki plays, is arranged in a manner to afford the spectator a series of surprises. Thus until the final act when Yoshitsune inspects Atsumori's head we do not know that it is Kojiro who has been killed. The scenes of the play are as follows:[2] First we have "Before the Heike Camp," in which Kojiro, nagged on by cowardly Hirayama, rushes into the enemy camp and is saved by his father Kumagai. As it turns out later, it is while they are in the Heike camp that the exchange of Atsumori and Kojiro takes place. Thus Kumagai when re-emerging from the camp, is carrying Atsumori disguised as Kojiro, not his own son. The scene then switches to Suma Beach, where Princess Tamaori is importuned by Hirayama, who tells her that Atsumori is dead. She draws a knife to defend herself, and is stabbed by Hirayama. The third scene of Act Two shows the Heike warriors fleeing, the last of whom is the young warrior in Atsumori's armour. Kumagai appears, rides to the front of the beach, challenges the warrior, and defeats him. When he prepares to cut off his head, he asks for the victim's name. Kojiro--as we only learn later--pronounces himself to be Atsumori, and Kumagai, in a long monologue lamenting the youthful age of his enemy, tries to get up his courage to kill what is in fact his own son. Knowing the plot of Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki, the audience at this point is well aware of the double entendres in both Kumagai's and Kojiro/Atsumori's words. Finally, when Kumagai has voiced his decision to spare the life of his 'enemy', much against 'Atsumori''s protests, who does not wish to be dishonoured in this way, Hirayama comes riding up from the dunes and accuses Kumagai of having betrayed the Genji side by allowing an enemy to escape. Kumagai has no choice but to behead 'Atsumori' and to proclaim the deed to the group of Genji warriors that is arriving.

Act Three, 'Kumagai's Camp', centers on the revelation of identities and portrays Kumagai's heroism and his decision to become a Buddhist monk. Both Sagami, Kumagai's wife and Kojiro's mother, and Fuji-no-kata, Atsumori's mother, turn up to enquire after the welfare of their sons, and a potential act of revenge by Fuji-no-kata on Kumagai for having slain her son is defused by the pivotal scene of the unveiling of 'Atsumori''s head. In Yoshitsune's presence, who has come to inspect Atsumori's head, both Sagami and Fuji-no-kata are constrained to pretend that this is Atsumori, although Sagami of course realizes it is her son's head. After this climax Atsumori is transported off in Munekiyo's basket, and Kumagai, called upon by Yoshitsune to go back to battle, reveals beneath his dress the garb of a Buddhist monk. The final point of the play is Kumagai's elegiac monologue on the _hanamichi_ (the Kabuki theatre's entry and exit passage) when he is on the point of renouncing his former life in favour of meditation and the purging of his soul.

In its final version the story of Kumagai therefore concentrates on Kumagai's heroic sacrifice of his son Kojiro, which he undertakes in settling his political and personal obligations. In Namiki's play Kumagai is thus _fully aware_ of who he is killing on Suma Beach, and the performance of the act is meant to be a measure of his heroic stature.

We are now ready to move on to a comparison with Yeats's _On Baile's Strand_. I will take the reader's familiarity with Yeats's play for granted, but will supply some information about earlier versions of the story.

More basically, and this is where the comparison between the two plays becomes possible, _On Baile's Strand_ deals with a father's killing of his own son in the course of a military challenge. Another similarity between the two plays lies in the pivotal question of the father's knowledge about the identity of his opponent. In both plays the

rewritings of the plot center on this very question. In the Kabuki play the classic text by Namiki restructures the story to have Kumagai knowingly sacrifice his son, whereas in Yeats's play Cuchulain hears about the young warrior's identity only after he has killed him, a twist of the plot that rewrites the Táin version, where Cuchulain knows who has come to challenge him.

Both the Kabuki and the Yeats play give a large amount of space to the women who are involved. Emer and Aoife figure prominently in the story as told by Lady Gregory (in the Táin only Aoife is involved), where Aoife's jealousy of Cuchulain's wife Emer is given as the root cause of the tragedy. In On Baile's Strand, Emer is not referred to at all, but the blind man recounts that Aoife has placed her son Conlaoch under obligation to challenge everybody without naming himself in order to make him kill Cuchulain and effect her revenge on the one man who conquered her. In Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki the women also play an important rôle, and they also gain our respect for their heroic stature. Fuji-no-kata is certainly admirable for venturing into the enemy's camp in search of her son, and for presenting herself to Kumagai and Yoshitsune, who might have taken her hostage or even killed her. Princess Tamaori dies a heroic death, fending off the play's villain Hirayama, and Sagami has travelled many miles in search of her son Kojiro, only to be presented with his cut-off head, and has to dissemble her grief, pretending that this is somebody else's head. Yet whereas Kumagai's heroism finds its partial reward in the solace of his voluntary religious career, his wife is granted no such recompense, and is left to her grief. Thus it is noticeable that in both plays women are shown to fulfil major rôles, yet they are excluded from participating in the central plot level. The core plot limits itself to the encounter between father and son, and to the father's relation to authority (which wins out over the more tender interests of love and family).

Both plays centrally involve the issue of political authority, and in both cases it is the final version that puts this issue on the agenda. However, in Yeats's play, Cuchulain _submits_ to Conchobar's authority, and this decision is presented as a failure of his, whereas Kumagai's obedience receives full authorial approval.

Having enumerated a number of similarities between the two plays, which I hope justify the comparison I am here indulging in, I wish to consider more closely the changes of the plot between the Celtic legend and Yeats's own version(s) of it. This should help us to understand the aesthetic rationale behind the changes, and allow a further comparison with the Japanese classic, a comparison that will now concentrate on the differences, both structural and aesthetic, between the Kabuki play and Yeats's piece.

The 'original' Celtic version of Cuchulain's slaying of his son[3] is told in the _Táin Bó Cuailnge_, the Irish eighth-century epic, the written text of which goes back to the twelfth century. In the episode called "The Death of Aife's One Son" (pp. 39-45), Kinsella, in his translation of the epic, recounts the series of fateful events. Cuchulain, having conquered Aoife and begotten a son on her, orders her to raise his son to be a warrior, and to send him over to Ireland when he has grown up enough for his finger to fit the ring he leaves with her ("Training in Arms," p. 33). He is to tell no one his name and to challenge everybody he meets. When Conlaoch ("Connla" in Kinsella) arrives on Baile's Strand, Emer tells Cuchulain not to go out because it is his son, yet he fights and kills him nevertheless. The story has an additional twist, since Cuchulain is only able to win the fight by employing a trick, using his magic spear, the _gae bolga_, in a move Conlaoch has not learned from his teacher in arms. Thus in the _Táin_ version Cuchulain's heroic stature is achieved by his superhuman feats of armour, but he is not presented as a likeable person, since he goes out to kill his own son, and even employs deceit to defeat him.

In Lady Gregory's book on Irish legends entitled Cuchulain of Muirthemne, Aoife is also given a ring for Conlaoch to grow into and come to Ireland with when he can wear it. But there is no word about Conlaoch's obligation not to tell his name, and to challenge everybody, on Cuchulain's side. These bonds (gēasa) are put on Conlaoch by his jealous mother Aoife, who has heard of Cuchulain's marriage to Emer. When Conlaoch shows up to fight, Cuchulain therefore does not recognize him for his son. Lady Gregory's version has an additional twist in that Conlaoch's death is a direct consequence of his recognition of his opponent as his father Cuchulain. Since Conlaoch's skill equals Cuchulain's, Cuchulain is angered at his inability to overthrow his challenger and blazes out in heroic wrath (acquiring a halo, or 'hero-light'). At this Conlaoch recognizes him to be Cuchulain and deflects his spear so it will not kill his father. Cuchulain's spear, however, finds its deadly aim with greater certainty. Dying, Conlaoch curses his mother for her wiles, and Cuchulain's anger is subdued by the spell Cathbad the Druid puts on him to fight the waves, since Cuchulain would have killed everything in sight to abreact his heroic rage. In Lady Gregory's version, therefore, Cuchulain preserves his heroic stature and gains our sympathy for having been tricked into the killing of his son by jealous Aoife.

Yeats tried his hand at the subject twice. He wrote a poem entitled "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea," composed in the 1890s, which was originally entitled "The Death of Cuchulain," and later composed On Baile's Strand in its several versions.[4] In the poem, Yeats adheres to the jealousy motif, only Aoife is called Emer. She sees in her magic web that Cuchulain has a young love, and out of jealousy sends her son to fight Cuchulain. The young man tells his name at the moment of his death, and Cuchulain's gathering wrath is by the Druids' spell deflected into a fight with the "sea-horses".

In the well-known second version of _On Baile's Strand_ the motif of jealousy is transformed into that of Aoife's hatred (revenge for having suffered defeat at the hands of a man?), but Emer is not mentioned at all, and much is made of Cuchulain's lack of offspring. The major conflict of the play concerns Cuchulain's heroic status, which is defined, not by magic and superhuman feats of war, but by his former freedom and the healthy exercise thereof. When Cuchulain bows to Conchobar, he does so because he momentarily loses hold on his own values, because he believes himself to have failed, finding himself without an heir. It is this notion of failure which leads him to give in to Conchobar, whom he would not uphold if he had a son. The tragic irony in Cuchulain's renunciation of his own agency plays itself out in the immediately following challenge by the young strangers and its consequences. Cuchulain feels an immediate natural bond of sympathy towards the young warrior, a bond overriding any considerations of state politics. As we can see, it is a feeling motivated in part by the youth's resemblance to Aoife, whom he still loves. This bond of love comes across as another sign of the nobility of Cuchulain's instincts since he esteems in Aoife the same indomitable spirit of freedom by which he is himself motivated, disdaining to woo a woman whom he could win without endeavour on his (and resistance on her) part. The bidding of Conchobar, to which he had earlier bowed in a bout of depression, now becomes the snare in which he is forced to strangle his natural response, a response which of course turns out to be more 'natural' still. Conchobar's order to fight the youth thus becomes equated with an unnatural order, and it is Cuchulain's dilemma that he cannot extricate himself from the situation without either denying the promptings of his innermost self, or without losing his honour (by breaking his word to Conchobar). True to the mode of modern tragedy, irony diminishes the hero's stature. There is more than a

tragic flaw to Cuchulain's tragedy, since he betrays his own self in bowing to Conchobar. Yet Cuchulain is also redeemed as a tragic hero by his honourable decision to stand by his word against his intuitions and self-interest, and by the grandeur of his grief which propels him into madness. One major achievement of Yeats in this play is the reduction of the mythic heroic Cuchulain of his sources to the human being of heroic proportions. There is no question that Conchobar and his retainers dwindle in significance when compared to Cuchulain, who has kept himself free from the money-grabbing greed for wealth and possession, and from the need for security and law-and-order that is its bedfellow.

We are now ready for another series of comparisons between Yeats's play and the _Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki_. In both plays the correct course of action is at issue; the drama deals with moral, ethical choice. Yet, in the Japanese play, the choice is correct, _although_ it involves tragedy, whereas in Yeats's piece the choice is shown to be _incorrect_ and the _cause_ of the tragedy. These different understandings rely on different evaluations of the concept of duty. Whereas the Kabuki play upholds societal norms, and is meant to inculcate the audience with them, Yeats deliberately sets out to ridicule the concept of duty, and to contrast it with complete individual freedom beyond the rule of society, in which duty is only an obligation to remain true to oneself. These differences can readily be appreciated by reference to the aesthetic and political circumstances at the time when the two plays were composed.

The Kabuki theatre came into existence in the sixteenth century, at the beginnings of the Edo period, when the Tokugawa shogunate took over after a long period of civil war to initiate a period of peace and prosperity. The main class to profit from the peace were the merchants and craftsmen, who rose to considerable wealth, if not social status, while the aristocracy, and particularly the warrior class (the _samurai_), sank into unemployment and poverty. At

this stage, which resembles the social conditions in Europe during the early modern period, the newly-rich middle class tried to imitate the aristocratic values of the economically declining but still socially prestigious upper classes. These efforts show in the classic drama of the serious Kabuki plays, as they do in the classic German drama of Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe. There, too, the exercise of duty and virtue, in imitation of the aristocratic code of honour, are commended to the audience, and the tragic conflict arises from moral dilemmas of a similar nature.[5]

This leads me to some remarks, finally, about the dramatic structure of On Baile's Strand and Ichinotani Futaba Gun'ki. In a sense, these are not comparable at all. The Kabuki play is a long five-act work, of which we have in fact only considered acts 2 and 3. This one should not contrast with a play in its entirety, which is as brief as one single act of the Kabuki. It has been noted that Yeat's plays frequently resemble the fifth act of a Shakespearean tragedy, and taken in this sense--as a radical condensation of dramatic moment into the space of one act--this is quite illuminating. Indeed, the Shakespearean parallel allows us to make some very precise observations in relation to the Kabuki play, since it is there we find almost the same structural elements. It allows us, moreover, to explain how Yeats condensed these elements in the interest of a particular post-Symbolist effect.

The Kabuki play, like many Shakespearean histories and tragedies has a subplot--the Hirayama-Tamaori plot--which overlaps with the main story line when Hirayama sends Kojiro into the enemy camp, thus unwittingly initiating the exchange with Atsumori, and again when he appears on Suma Beach, thereby forcing Kumagai to kill the youth whom he has conquered. Like many Shakespeare plays, too, mistaken or concealed identities play a major rôle, as we have already noted. Another striking feature is the occurrence of important action off-stage rather than on-stage. This is

striking in the excised scene inside the Heike camp, where Kojiro and Atsumori exchange armors.

Now it will have been observed that all these characteristics also apply to On Baile's Strand, with the two most spectacular scenes occurring off-stage--the fight with Conlaoch, and Cuchulain's mad attack on the waves. As in the Kabuki play, the highest dramatic effect is achieved by these omissions. In 'Kumagai's Camp' the deliberate refusal to reveal 'Atsumori''s identity allows the dramatic effect to be heightened when Kumagai finally displays the head of poor Kojiro. Likewise, the revelation to Cuchulain of the young warrior's true identity results in the finest dramatic moment of Yeats's play, when the blind man's remark about the shaking of the bench, in thus relaying to us the information about its effect on Cuchulain by one further mediating frame, marks the impact of the two plots' interlocking with consummate precision. Here Yeats is a better craftsman than Nomiki, who--within his tradition--has to aim at spectacular effect. Much as he despised it, Yeats has learned his lesson from the well-made play and German and Scandinavian naturalist drama. Yet the achievement of this moment is all his own, because it derives entirely from the baring of grand drama to its very functional bones, reducing the constellations of plot and character to a lucid mathematical equation which resolves itself at the key moment.

What Yeats dispenses with, first and foremost, is the elaborate intrique on the plot level, so apparent and distracting in Shakespeare or the Kabuki. This is true of all his 'early' plays, even of The Countess Cathleen, where we find a very logical succession of scenes in which no situation is without its necessary function to the main conflict, the Countess's dilemma and its resolution and the seriousness of the situation for the Irish peasantry, which necessitates her help. Needless to say, the same rigorous bareness is achieved in Deirdre and in The King's Threshold, one of the finest literary parables of our time. Yeats's

effect of condensation derives, secondly, from a very concerted effort to eliminate all realistic background, psychology and motivation. This is not to say that psychology does not enter into the characters' reading at all; what Yeats here contrives to do is to refuse his characters any realistic ground on which they might strike us as faintly akin to ourselves. This is an important point, and one which, I believe has not been seen yet. The realistic stage of the well-made play and its successors in Ibsen or Shaw presupposes an identification on the part of the audience with the actors on the scene. Such identification exists even with Greek drama and Shakespearean tragedy, and it is partly due to their detailed analysis of motivation, feelings and grounds for action. Yeats, on the other hand, indulges in very unrealistic dialogue, mostly of a philosophical and lyric nature. In On Baile's Strand, however, Yeats frames the play with the quasi-realistic dialogue of two beggars (although this, too, is not really realistic, since no real plot is involved in their quarrel). The major scene of the play involves a discussion about obligation, and, secondly, an interaction between two men who recognize their affinity to one another. Neither of these elements has any intrinsic dramatic content, and the drama of the play rests entirely on Cuchulain's off-stage action and his eventual recognition of the meaning of that action--the killing of his own son.

In contrast to the Kabuki and Shakespearean tragedy, Yeats therefore dispenses with superfluous action and consciously eliminates realism in plot, psychology, or staging to avoid the audience's identification with the characters. These are meant to remain in a sphere of poetic parable, which is why myth and the morality play were such useful paradigms for Yeats's dramatic art. Besides reducing and trimming the scenario of Western drama, Yeats however also added two features, and he added them before he knew the Nô theatre. These are dance and song. One can easily

see how the Greek chorus, via the Nietzschean rediscovery of the origins of Greek tragedy in Dionysian dance rituals (one only needs to look at Perseus), must have been an inspiration to him. Whatever their origins, however, dance and song are integrated into Yeats's early plays, and are originally motivated by the plot, or the characters, or the setting. Thus, in The Countess Cathleen, we have the poet Aleel who plays a significant rôle in symbolizing the temptations of art. He sings for Cathleen. In Deirdre the musicians are much more active, and there is but little technical development between this and At the Hawk's Well.

In terms of dramatic technique, we can therefore conclude, Yeats's plays are very different from the Kabuki, which best compares with a Shakespearean history play. Yet, since Kabuki does include the music and the dance element which is not an intrinsic element in the Western dramatic tradition, one can also say that Yeats's early drama was, in a sense, a condensation of Kabuki at its least spectacular. The comparison would have little meaning by itself if we did not also have to contend with the question of how Yeats came to espouse the Nô for his dramatic model. For all their elimination of realism Yeats's early plays are still dramatic in the sense that they are centered on a climactic point, which lies at the heart of their structure, which is a pivot of the plot. The Japanese Nô, much as do many of Yeats's plays written in the wake of his discovery of the Nô tradition, no longer center on a point of plot at all. Thus, The Dreaming of the Bones is as elegiac and plotless as the Nô play Atsumori. Yet this development needs to be considered a gradual one rather than an either/or pattern, with On Baile's Strand centering on an act of recognition, and At the Hawk's Well stripping the plot to a bare situation pregnant with meaningful action.

What I am suggesting is how we can move from the Yeats of The Countess Cathleen, or Deirdre, to the Yeats of the Four Plays for Dancers. When Yeats encountered the Nô,

he found a model for the drama he was already writing, and this allowed him to feel freer in his use of song and dance, and to cut down the realistic plot interest further than he had done before. It additionally confirmed some of Yeats's ideas about staging which he had already come by on his own and by the example of Gordon Craig.[6] This also explains why Yeats never wrote a "real" Nô play. Bearing in mind that Yeats was starting from what is (from a Japanese point of view) basically a Kabuki tradition, one will find his failure to reproduce the Nô less disappointing. Japanese enthusiasm for Yeats's dramatic art tells me that he has indeed achieved the superior quality of artistic refinement that Japanese audiences expect of the Nô drama.

Notes

1. The importance of Preraphaelite painting for Yeats's aesthetics is impressively documented by Loizeau (1986). Rossetti's Annunciation is surpassed in its effect of simplicity and heart-rending emotional impact only by Henry O. Tanner's little-known canvas on the same subject, which is one of the treasures of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in Philadelphia.
2. Of the original five acts only acts two and three are performed today, and the sequence given corresponds to these.
3. For a detailed discussion of Yeats's sources see Bjersby (1950), and Skene (1974).
4. The earliest version dates to 1901-1902 and the major revised version is usually given as 1906. (Skene 1974: 41, but see the Variorum, which dates the revision as 1904--Yeats [1966].) Bushrui, Skene and Taylor have excellent discussions of the play and the changes.
5. The theme of sacrifice was a prevalent one in the Kabuki literature. The sacrifice of one's own offspring indeed occurred so frequently as an element of Kabuki plays that a technical term was coined for the action:

migawari (Lee 1980: 141). One other example of the sacrifice of the son by his father occurs, for instance, in the play Sugawara Denji Tenarai Kagami ('Sugawara's Secrets of Calligraphy') (1746). In Act 4, scene 3 ("The Village School") of this play Michizane's, the calligrapher's, son is saved from impending beheading by the arrival of a new pupil called Kotarô. Kotarô turns out to be the inspector's (Matsuômaru's) son, whom he is willingly sacrificing for the sake of Michizane. (See Gunji 1987: 126-128.)

6. For Yeats's cooperation with Gordan Craig, see especially several of the articles in O'Driscoll/ Reynolds (1975).

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