

## Play Review: Spiritual Plenitude in *Noh: King Lear*

### 劇評—『能：リア王』における救済

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**要旨：** 本公演は上田邦義教授の『能：リア王』（1992年）の3回目の再演に当たる。今回の舞台装置は華道の美意識を取り入れたようである。そのセットで華やかな装束を身に纏ったシテとツレの舞いはそれだけで幽玄を思わせる。この作品はグローバリゼーションによってますます盛んになっているインターカルチュラル・シアターの一つの形態である。1980年代から能とシェークスピア戯曲の融合にご尽力された上田教授は五幕構成の悲劇を大胆にカットし、複式能に仕立てている。焦点はリア王（ツレ）と三女コーディーリア（シテ）の関係に絞られ、それを通して、心と言葉と行動との和が具現化され、二人は救済へと導かれる。フィナーレでは死後の精神世界が豊かに湧き溢れる。

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Professor Kuniyoshi Ueda's *Noh: King Lear* (1992) was revived this year at the Kioi Hall in Tokyo on December 23<sup>rd</sup> under his direction. It featured Reiko Adachi (1925-), a woman noh performer, as Cordelia and Yoshihisa Endo as King Lear. The stage designer was Koen Yokoi.

The production, performed in Japanese, was a feast for the eyes—bright, gorgeous, and spectacular. The art design was suggestive of an elysian flower arrangement. On the rectangular stage, the stage-right bridgeway was marked out by a low wooden railing half-concealed by sinuous vegetation. On the far stage left and right as well as upstage centre, stood small groups of slate-coloured pillars of various heights drawing attention to the vertical stretch of the performance space. Vines climbed up those pillars and at the base of the pillars at stage left and right, borders of flowers and greenery were tastefully arranged. The musicians and the chorus were seated behind the stage-left flowerbed. In the wide central space magnificently costumed performers glided, interacted and danced, their

elaborate costumes creating a swirl of rich colours and patterns. Just this was enough to bring Zeami's concept of *yūgen* to mind.

Entranced by the visuals, I forgot I was watching Shakespeare. But soon the speeches and chanting brought the verbal and diegetic aspects of *King Lear* to the forefront of my attention. Then I realized that only two characters, Lear and Cordelia, had managed the “sea change into something rich and strange”.

Intercultural theatre takes many hybrid forms. Theatre critic Marvin Carlson identifies seven types based on the extent of assimilation into the receiving culture. One type he cites brings the foreign into a new combination with familiar elements. Often the discrete forms from the various cultural traditions are apparent on stage, and the dynamic interaction of disparate qualities generates a defamiliarizing effect, which challenges the audience to create their own meaning. Sometimes the blending is on a conceptual level and harder to discern in the production. The present case is an excellent example of the former kind of theatrical interweaving.

Since the 1980s, the playwright-director Kuniyoshi Ueda has been a practitioner of this kind of intercultural theatre. Today he is an expert par excellence in Shakespearean *noh*. In this hybrid, the *noh* performance code is applied in a flexible manner to Shakespeare's plays so that the resultant work both breaks and fulfills the genre expectations of the viewers.

Yet it takes courage to trim a five-act tragedy into a short two-scene *noh* about redemption and to give the *shite* role to Cordelia, who in the original *King Lear* has fewer lines than even Goneril's mild husband, the Duke of Albany.

Scene One of *Noh: King Lear* begins in the middle of Act Four of the original work, when Cordelia, now Queen of France, arrives at Dover; this scene includes a brief choral reminder of her initial silence early in the story when she refused to use fancy words to express her love for her king and father. Then the tormented Lear enters and the process of reunion, forgiveness, and love unfolds.

Scene Two opens at the end of Shakespeare's Act Five, with Cordelia already dead. Lear too dies, hopeful to the last that Cordelia may still be alive and speak. Her ghost enters. Here the speeches are not from Shakespeare but from Professor Ueda's own hand. The spirits of the father and daughter conduct in unison a dance symbolizing redemption.

The week before I saw this play, I had the opportunity to attend director Suzuki Tadashi's four-language intercultural version of *King Lear*. The difference was striking. What was excised from Professor Ueda's play was retained and magnified by director Suzuki. The result was a ferocious Dionysian display of greed, jealousy, deceit, and malice. Cordelia, shrunk to a very minor character, was overwhelmed by the forces of evil.

Professor Ueda's desire seems to be that like effective *noh* drama his play “will lead [the viewer] to a kind of *satori* or enlightenment”. He takes Lear's last hope for Cordelia's life as something that is attained not in this world but on another plane. In the closing moments of the play, the words Lear longed to hear her speak when he was alive seem to be expressed by her spirit and the Chorus on his death. Thus the harmony of words, behavior, and

mind-heart, which the *ai-kyogen* (i.e. the Fool) had earlier noted was unattainable for Lear in his embodied state, is now assured. Unlike tragedies in which the body-politic seems to be bled of positive human abilities and left anemic to carry on as best it can, Professor Ueda's Shakespearean *noh* grants us a flourishing sense of spiritual plenitude.

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