

Two Noh Plays, a Rich Experience
—Men who would not fight and Hagoromo—
豊かな能楽体験2曲 —『たたかわざる者』『羽衣』—

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When I was first exposed to a Noh performance a few years ago I was somewhat perplexed because, I must confess, I could not understand much of what was going on. I thought of it and came to the conclusion, which might be inaccurate, that the western mind is basically influenced by rationalism whereas the Japanese spirit is mainly lead by spiritualism.

However nowadays my opinion is more nuanced since the opposite might be also true, as always things are never black or white but something in between, thus several European writers like Samuel Beckett, Bertold Brecht, Paul Claudel and others have been much inspired by the Noh theatre, therefore in their plays one can find also some forms of spiritualism and dreamlike world.

On the 24th of March when I saw « Men who would not fight » I was in a different state of mind, I knew what was all about, thanks to Munakata sensei I had read beforehand the synopsis of the play in English. We, in the audience, had also the verbatim of the dialogues in both Japanese and English which helped us a lot follow the performance.

I was amazed to realize how this theatre with its own rules and symbolism coming from as far back as the XIVth century is still capable of addressing contemporary events and situations.

This play written by Munakata Kuniyoshi is a tribute to R H Blyth a British humanist, who lived and died in Japan. In the play Blyth's spirit, his ghost, is the main protagonist, the “shite”, of the play.

I liked the choir, the band with several type of drums and a transverse flute. There are also narrators, I understand they are very useful to illustrate the transitions. I noticed that when the actors arrive from the backstage onto the stage they are passing over a kind of bridge.

At the end of the performance they quit one after the other and the audience applause is awarded individually. I noticed also that the actors do not bow to the audience as they do in a western theatre.

The second play, Hagoromo, is a famous piece of the repertoire whose access is easier.

The legend is about a woman angel coming to the earth at Miho no Matsubara beach and meeting a young fisherman for whom she danced before returning to heaven.

This play has ramifications in France. In 1920 a French composer Georges Migot wrote Hagaromo a lyrical symphony.

Before WWII a French ballet dancer, Helene Gugliaris, really delighted by the legend of Hagaromo, decided to make a ballet of it. Her life's dream was to dance this ballet on Miho no Matsubara beach. Unfortunately, she passed away before she could realize her dream.

Since then the second Saturday and Sunday of October, the city of Shizuoka holds a Hagaromo Festival during which a performance of the Noh drama takes place near the pine tree of the legend. A monument in memory of Helene Gugliaris was raised on the beach.

In 2013 the pine groves were added to the World Heritage List as part of the Fujisan Cultural Site.

In conclusion I will add that it was for me and our granddaughter who was with us an educative afternoon most interesting in this beautiful Kanze Noh Theater fully booked up by an audience of connoisseurs.

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(その後のメールで、孫のリザさんが公演は堪能したが、『マダム・フィガロ』に掲載する天皇代替わり関係の記事制作に忙殺され、こちらの公演感想を書けなかった旨のお断りをいただきました。——編集)