

【特別寄稿】

## On Experiencing Japanese Noh and Thinking About Greek Lyric\*<sup>1</sup>

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Le souffle tragique traverse quelquefois le nō: il ne les anime pas.  
Le plus souvent l'événement tragique, lorsque le sujet en comporte,  
y est raconté plutôt que mis en acte; l'intention est moins de le  
représenter que de le chanter. Le nō est avant tout une œuvre lyrique.

Noël Peri\*<sup>2</sup>

This paper is the result of a professional engagement with Greek lyric

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\*<sup>1</sup> This is a written version of a paper that was presented at the Humanities Seminar at Tokyo University on 8th February 2019 at the conclusion of a ten-month visiting fellowship there. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Kasai Yasunori for inviting me to Tokyo and for looking after me so well during my stay. I am grateful, too, to his colleagues and students for all manner of kindnesses, especially Prof. Matsumoto Emi, Prof. Yoshida Shunichiro, Prof. Tamaruya Masayuki, Ms Sueyoshi Miku, and Mr Hayashi Bin. Back in Europe, Enrico Emanuele Prodi has been kind enough to listen to me 'go on and on' endlessly about Noh—I am grateful to him for his forbearance.

\*<sup>2</sup> Peri and Lachaud (2004) 17.

and an amateur engagement with Japanese Noh. During the academic year 2018-19, I was so lucky as to spend ten months in Tokyo as a visiting scholar. I arrived entirely ignorant of the rich tradition of Japanese performance arts, but I soon set about seeing as much of it as I could. The performances I saw were chiefly of Kabuki, Bunraku, and Noh, as well as more informal performances at temple festivals. Of all these, Noh exerted an irresistible fascination over me; indeed, I might go as far as to say that I developed a minor obsession with the genre. I attended every performance I could find seats for at the National Noh Theatre in Sendagaya, where English-language provisions allowed me to book tickets for myself, and when I had exhausted these I turned to my Japanese friends to help me find performances in the smaller local theatres that operate entirely in Japanese. In total I must have attended roughly a dozen performances, each comprising two or three Noh plays (in addition to a Kyogen interlude). And so it happened that during my time in Japan I found myself pursuing two parallel trains of thought: while in my 'day job' I was preoccupied with Greek lyric poetry, in my spare time I found myself thinking a good deal about Noh. It was not long before these two trains of thought began to converge, and it is this convergence of thoughts about Greek lyric and Japanese Noh that is the subject of this paper.

The juxtaposition of Noh and Greek lyric poetry (as a self-standing genre, as opposed to a component of tragedy) is, to the best of my knowledge, entirely original. The remark by Noël Peri that I have adopted as my epigraph did not come to my attention until after I had returned to Europe, but it expresses exactly my own intuition with particular reference to the lyric of archaic Greece coupled with the reservations I feel towards the traditional comparison of Noh with Athenian tragedy. Peri was writing in the early twentieth century; he was one of the first

and most influential westerners to devote considerable scholarly effort to the study and translation of Noh drama.<sup>\*3</sup> And yet, despite the remark by his later editor Lachaud that Peri's intuition is 'that of a precursor', in the field of Classics at least it seems that no one has taken his lead.<sup>\*4</sup> While I myself cannot presume to do justice to this question—I do not read Japanese, and a proper acquaintance with Japanese poetics would take me another lifetime to achieve—, what I intend to do here is set out how my experience of Noh in performance has informed my thinking about Greek lyric. It remains a desideratum that someone better qualified than me produce a comparative study of Noh and ancient Greek lyric, and I would invite my Japanese colleagues especially to consider this unexplored area of research.

As Peri's wording implies, the comparison between Noh and Greek tragedy was the one that established itself from the outset, i.e. since the West became aware of Noh with the second opening of Japan in 1868.<sup>\*5</sup> The following remark by Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), the American art historian and professor at the Imperial University (as Tokyo University was then known), is telling of some deeper attitudes behind the comparison:<sup>\*6</sup>

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<sup>\*3</sup> Peri, a Jesuit missionary, worked on studying and translating Noh plays mainly between 1907, when he became a *pensionnaire* at the École française d'Extrême-Orient, and his untimely death in a car accident in Hanoi in 1922.

<sup>\*4</sup> Lachaud '... son intuition d'une parenté avec l'art lyrique, parenté plus grande qu'avec la tragédie grecque dont les humanités occidentales d'alors étaient toutes frottées, est celle d'un précurseur': Peri and Lachaud (2004): 9. Cf., too, Nishino (2013) 59. Lachaud seems to be referring to the impact of Noh in French theatre from the 1920s onwards, specifically the work of Jean-Luis Barrault, for which see Gillespie (1982-3).

<sup>\*5</sup> Only a few brief remarks about Noh are preserved from the Jesuits who visited Japan during the country's first brief opening to visitors in the 16th century: see Frois (2014 [1584]).

<sup>\*6</sup> Pound and Fenollosa (1959) 59. Fenollosa was writing at the turn of the century and, in fairness, for oral delivery; his text was later edited by Ezra Pound and published as

A form of drama, as primitive, as intense, and almost as beautiful as the ancient Greek drama at Athens, still exists in the world. Yet few care for it, or see it. In the fifth century before Christ the Greek drama arose out of the religious rites practised in the festivals of the God of Wine. In the fifteenth century after Christ, the Japanese drama arose out religious rites practised in the festivals of the Shinto gods...

Fenollosa's old-fashioned prose conveys the sense not just of the fresh discovery of Noh but also of a rediscovery of one's own past (from a Western perspective) and the enduring draw to find the source of all things beautiful in ancient Greece.<sup>\*7</sup> His wording simplistically conflates Japanese past and present, the art form that 'arose out of the religious rites' of Shinto and the art form that 'still exists today'. This projection of one's own past onto an exotic contemporary art form, of the 'primitive' onto a sophisticated dramatic form that has developed over centuries, is today—thankfully—unacceptable.<sup>\*8</sup> Yet in one form or another the comparison between Noh and Greek tragedy has never ceased to hold a special place in the scholarly imagination.<sup>\*9</sup> The reasons for this lie in

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part of the introductory material to collections of Noh in 1916-17.

<sup>\*7</sup> Note how Fenollosa qualifies Noh as '*almost* as beautiful' as Greek tragedy.

<sup>\*8</sup> A similar but more amusingly blatant form of self-interested myopia is betrayed by Ezra Pound, who insisted on the 'Homeric robustness' of Noh plays (Pound (1970 [1938]) 81, assimilating the hero Kagekiyo to Achilles, and adding 'The Noh is not merely painting on silk...'). Pound employed this argument also in an attempt to persuade the Fascist officials of the Salò Republic to fund an edition of Noh plays: Nicholls (1995), quoting unpublished correspondence. That is not to say, of course, that in other respects Pound did not show himself a sensitive reader of Noh (there is no evidence he was ever a spectator): see below.

<sup>\*9</sup> For a brief account of the dense multi-directional influences between Greek tragedy, Noh, and modern Japanese theatre, in the broader context of Japan's reception of ancient Greece, see now Lucken (2019) 170-5.

part in the many similarities between aspects of production of the two genres; these are many and striking, so that it is not difficult to see how the comparison first suggested itself. Both Japanese Noh and Greek tragedy are archaizing forms of drama belonging to a ritual context, both are performed on a bare and stylized stage, and the performance traditionally takes place outside.\*<sup>10</sup> In both dramatic forms, actors wear elaborate costumes and masks; there is in both a chorus of sorts, there is a mixture of verse and song, and musical accompaniment. In both Noh and tragedy several more or less connected plays follow one another during the arc of a day of performances. And in both cases the drama is offset by comedy: in Japan, Noh plays are paired with Kyogen plays, while in ancient Greece the performance of a tragic trilogy was capped by a satyr play. In both Noh and tragedy there are two or three primary actors, and all parts—male and female—are played by male performers.\*<sup>11</sup>

There are, then, a good many formal similarities between Noh and tragedy, and the comparison can be evocative; but these similarities are primarily externalities. When it comes to the manner of representing, on the other hand, the comparison becomes much more problematic, and this must be the reason why, for all the popularity of passing comparisons between Noh and Greek tragedy, only two sustained, monographic treatments exist (to the best of my knowledge). Both these are by one author,

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\*<sup>10</sup> In contemporary performances of Noh the outside space is brought inside (for obvious practical reasons) by simply encasing the traditional temple structure in a western-style modern theatre.

\*<sup>11</sup> At least traditionally. This tradition remains strong: it was not before 1948 that the first woman was registered into the Society of Noh Performers, and though women now make up about 20% of the membership they remain a stifled minority; see Prideaux (2004) and, for a more optimistic (and recent) perspective, Whatley (2018). The notion that women played no part in the development of Noh has recently been contested: for the history of women in Noh see Rath (2001) and Geilhorn (2015).

Mae Smethurst, who has made it her life's work to produce comparative analyses of Noh and Greek tragedy from a literary critical perspective; her two volumes are separated by a quarter century of thought.\*<sup>12</sup> The fundamental problem that confronts one when trying to compare Noh and Greek tragedy is well illustrated in the introduction to her first book, where Smethurst describes two possible approaches to the material.\*<sup>13</sup> One is to compare the small minority of Greek tragedies that lack a strong plot and dramatic action with the majority of Noh, which likewise place a minimal emphasis on plot and dramatic action. This is the approach she goes on to pursue in that same volume, where she focuses on the atypical tragedy that is Aeschylus' *Persians* and relates it to Zeami's play *Sanemori*. The second possible approach that Smethurst envisages is to compare the less typical sample of Noh comprising the minority of plays that have a plot of some sort with the more representative majority of tragedies that equally revolve around dramatic action. And so in her second monograph Smethurst chooses as her Japanese sample the subset of *genzai* Noh, a term that is commonly (somewhat misleadingly) translated as 'realistic' plays but is better rendered by Hare's paraphrase 'plays in which the characters on stage are alive in the dramatic present'.\*<sup>14</sup> Smethurst studies these plays in relation to Aristotle's definition of tragedy and by reference to some tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides that conform to Aristotelian conceptions.

What emerges clearly from Smethurst's acknowledged constraint to an unrepresentative subsection of each genre in turn is that there is a missing common term between the two genres taken as wholes. This difficulty

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\*<sup>12</sup> Smethurst (1989) and Smethurst (2013).

\*<sup>13</sup> Smethurst (1989) 4-5.

\*<sup>14</sup> Hare (2011) 16.

does not present itself when considering Noh alongside ancient Greek lyric. Like Noh, Greek lyric is a form of poetry that involves musical performance, includes the representation of different personas and the presentation of narratives from mythology, sometimes involves choral performance—but is not centred on dramatic action and plot. Greek lyric therefore presents a much more natural comparison with Noh.

It is no accident that the dissonance produced by attempting to bring together Noh and tragedy clusters around the aspects of tragedy that were heavily theorized by Aristotle, whose views were foundational not just for our understanding of Athenian tragedy but for our conception of drama in general in the West. This is probably also one reason why Noh is often felt to be so ‘alien’ on first exposure,<sup>\*15</sup> and why there is such a strong temptation to filter this ‘alienness’ through the familiar analogue of Greek tragedy. The Aristotelian conception of tragedy emphasizes dramatic action and dramatic reversal, and it insists on a carefully constructed and self-propelling plot. These notions are not helpful in making sense of Noh, and yet our Aristotelian conditioning can make it difficult to reach beyond them. Conversely, an effort to concentrate precisely on the aspects that Aristotle dismissed—lyric song and music, spectacle in general, mood, imaginative digression, a manner of representing that is evocative—seems a more helpful and satisfying strategy for attempting to make sense of Noh, and it is these aspects of poetic performance and style that are also key to making sense of Greek lyric poetry. Ever since antiquity the Aristotelian conception of drama has dominated our understanding of

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<sup>\*15</sup> Marie Stopes, who co-authored the first monograph on Noh drama in English warned of ‘the extreme remoteness’ of the Noh ‘from everything to which we are accustomed’: Stopes and Sakurai (1913) 2. Basil Hall Chamberlain (the first professor of Japanese philology at Tokyo University) remarked emphatically on the ‘peculiar’ ‘manner of representing’ in Noh: Chamberlain (1880) 23-9.

tragedy and marginalized its lyric components; in recent years, scholars have made a conscious effort to wrest ourselves free of it, to recognize it as a superimposed critical framework, albeit a hugely influential one, and not as an expression of the essence of tragedy.\*<sup>16</sup> I would contend that this Aristotelian ‘baggage’ is best shed also when looking at Noh, and—more to the point in the present context—that looking at Noh without this Aristotelian ‘baggage’ frees up a productive comparison with Greek lyric poetry also beyond the dramatic stage.

The Japanese tradition has its own ‘Aristotle’, the theoretician Zeami Motokiyo, who was active at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, and who is often compared to Aristotle for the magnitude of his influence on the Japanese tradition. But unlike Aristotle, Zeami displays little or no interest in plot or dramatic action. Moreover, Zeami was not just a theoretician but also a playwright, an actor, and an ‘impresario’. Most of his plays are of the ‘plotless’ kind, and it is evident from his writings that Zeami paid the greatest attention to the performative aspect of his dramas, to music and movement, to song and spectacle, to evocation and mood and imagery.

So lyric rather than tragedy is (among ancient Greek poetry) the better term of comparison with Noh, and it is helpful when attempting to make sense of both Noh and Greek lyric to shake off the influence of Aristotelian theory. The following remarks by the comparatist Earl Miner cast an interesting light on this matter:\*<sup>17</sup>

The first thing to be said of lyric poetic systems is that they are not mimetic. Imitation and representation are simply not the grounds considered [...]. Since western mimesis emerges from

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\*<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Gagné and Hopman (2013) 19.

\*<sup>17</sup> Miner (2014) 579.

the exceptional use by Aristotle of drama as the foundation genre, Japanese conceptions of drama are particularly revealing. They are not mimetic.

Noh is a theatrical, dramatic kind that draws on lyric and narrative to unusual degrees. [...] Some people may doubt that drama can be understood apart from imitation or without representation.

Leaving aside the complications introduced by Miner's choice of the term 'mimesis'—which has accreted a phenomenal amount of complexity over the past two and a half thousand years of aesthetic thought<sup>\*18</sup>—what is important here is the idea that Noh, unlike Greek tragedy but like Greek lyric, does not aim for dramatic representation: the way it operates is not by putting on stage a coherent represented world that the audience is supposed to accept as a discrete slice of reality subject to a linear chronology (as, on the other hand, Kabuki does). Rather, its effect is carried by a peculiar mixture of chronologically spliced narrative and intense imagery, spoken by a fluid and multiple voice, and expressed through song, dance, music, costume, and setting (a setting which is largely evoked in the audience's imagination in counterpoint to a ritual space). The experience of Noh makes it possible to make sense of the practical workings-out of a poetic performance that does not conform to common (European) notions of dramatic representation, and it is this that has the potential to enable more imaginative and sensitive readings of Greek lyric poetry, which too was meant for performance. It allows the actual experience of a non-mimetic, or rather non-dramatic, form of performance, a different kind of 'event'.<sup>\*19</sup> To us in the west, this manner of representation is lost to the theatrical

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<sup>\*18</sup> Halliwell (2002) is a positively heroic account of this complex history.

<sup>\*19</sup> On lyric poetry as 'event' see Budelmann and Phillips (2018).

tradition (since the latter is essentially built on the Aristotelian model) and perhaps also to the performance tradition more generally, since lyric became an essentially textual genre. In Japan, on the other hand, it is very much alive in the performance of Noh. Some difficulties that we have in making sense of Greek lyric's manner of representing may simply be a failure of the imagination, an inability to conceptualize something of which we have no experience. It is in this sense that experiencing Noh has been so helpful to me in thinking about Greek lyric.\*<sup>20</sup>

The differences and affinities that I have in mind between Noh on the one hand and tragedy and lyric on the other show up nicely by setting side by side a Japanese and a Greek play that in some ways bear an extraordinary resemblance to each other and yet also display fundamental differences. The many similarities between the two pieces cast into relief the ways in which Noh is like lyric poetry and unlike tragedy and they help me in characterizing what I mean when I talk of the 'manner of representing' that Noh and Greek lyric have in common. Before I turn to a specific Japanese text, however, I should pause to clarify that when I discuss Noh plays I do so primarily on the basis of my experience of them in performance, rather than on a philological basis. I do not read Japanese, so I refer in the first instance to my memory of the play in performance and secondarily to a translated script.\*<sup>21</sup> This is deliberate and consonant with the aims of this paper, where the emphasis is on performance as a phenomenon to be experi-

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\*<sup>20</sup> Besides Noh, another stimulus that has been informing my thoughts around lyric's manner of representing in performance are some forms of contemporary experimental or conceptual theatre. A good example of this is the work of Tim Crouch, which pointedly confounds expectations about dramatic representation, and which features non-naturalistic acting, even at times distributing characters across different actors; I hope to write about this in a future article.

\*<sup>21</sup> I use the script published by the excellent online resource [The-Noh.com](http://The-Noh.com).

enced. The Noh play I discuss is *Kagetsu*, named after its protagonist. I saw this play in an especially small theatre outside of Tokyo, in Kamakura; the venue was such an intimate one that the audience removed their shoes before entering the auditorium as we would to enter a Japanese home, and for the most part we sat on cushions placed directly on the ground. But for all the intimacy of the venue, the performance was of a high professional standard, and the venue included (albeit in a slightly smaller scale than normal) all the traditional elements, including the *hashigakari*, the long passageway to the left of the stage along which the actors enter and exit the scene. In such a setting, I was able to appreciate especially well all aspects of the performance, the actors' dancing, gesturing, declaiming, and singing, the chorus' and musicians' accompaniment, and the elaborate costumes.

The first thing to strike a classicist watching *Kagetsu* is the similarity it bears to Euripides' *Ion*. Both plays are named after a protagonist who is a boy long lost to his parents and who grows up as a foundling in a temple. Both plays are about the boy's reunion with his parent, which is aided by the temple attendant. At the beginning of both plays, the main character enters the scene of a temple precinct claiming a close relationship to the divine, and in both cases the symbolism of their name is enlisted to reinforce this close connection: in the Noh play this is done by *Kagetsu* himself, whereas in the Euripidean play it is done by *Hermes* in the prologue (and the name's significance is then emphasized and punned upon at various junctures in the play). *Ion* is the secret son of *Apollo*, and this blood relationship is essential to the overall impact of the play, since it claims for Athens—and therefore for its audience—a divinely sanctioned ascendancy over the Ionian race named after him. *Kagetsu*, on the other hand, repeatedly underlines his close relationship with the temple deity by offering an elaborate etymo-

logical explanation of his name (ostensibly ‘moon-flower’, but he lists all the possible readings of the characters and sounds that make up ‘Kagetsu’, including the *ka* in ‘karma’, a central tenet of the Buddhist faith). He further recites the story of how the deity became manifest to the people at the site of the temple, weaving into it strands of imagery which tie it closely to his name (moon, flowers, seasons). Both plays thus insist on the sacred dimension of the story and bind together the collective entity of sacred setting, performers, and audience.

In matters of detail, too, there are striking similarities, almost to the point of stretching belief in coincidence (though not of breaking it). In both plays the young protagonist is characterized at the outset as an archer: both Ion and Kagetsu enter the stage carrying a bow, and the visual impact must have been similar. In *Kagetsu*, the titular character takes exception at the way the bush warblers are shaking off the petals of the cherry blossoms; likewise, Ion takes exception at the way the birds are soiling the sacred precinct. In both plays the boy has taken out his bow and almost shoots at the birds before he desists at the thought that it is inappropriate to shed blood in the sacred space; both characters are concerned with safeguarding the ritual purity of the sanctuary setting.

Against such striking similarities, the differences stand out all the more starkly. Euripides’ *Ion* has a tightly knit plot including danger averted, tokens of recognition, carefully constructed moments of climax and resolution, and a marked interest in the psychology of its characters. *Kagetsu* is opposite to *Ion* in all these respects. It displays no interest at all in the psychology of its characters, rather illustrating Fenollosa’s remark that in Noh ‘the emotion is always fixed upon idea, not upon personality’.<sup>\*22</sup> Thus

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<sup>\*22</sup> Fenollosa, Pound, Yates (1916) 69.

*Kagetsu* does not dwell on the father's and son's experience of loss and reunion: this is presented to us on stage but in a fleeting, almost incidental way. Instead, the lamentations and rejoicing in turn of father and son are subsumed into the larger scheme of the Buddhist view of life and afterlife, in which the right path is found after much wandering. *Kagetsu*'s reunion with his father may be perfunctory by western standards—it is certainly a far cry from that of Ion with all three of his 'parents' (!)—but it works just fine in the context of Noh, where the aim is not primarily to involve the audience into the representation of an absorbing story but rather to present this story as something to be beheld in counterpoint to the higher reality that underlies the community's coming together in a ritual occasion. As for the plot of *Kagetsu*, this is practically inexistent; in as much as there is a plot, this serves primarily as a framing device for a series of performances of song, dance, and music. This simple iterative structure moved the distinguished Princeton Japanologist Thomas Hare to dismiss *Kagetsu* as merely an 'excuse for a collection of "vaudeville" performances'.\*<sup>23</sup> Hare may have a point when comparing *Kagetsu* (a 'minor' play) to the rest of Zeami's production, but I find him too harsh. The unity of the play is instead provided by the imagery that runs through it like a red thread to produce a thematic whole. Once Aristotelian dramatic expectations are relinquished and reframed in function of a lyric poetics, then this whole is entirely satisfying. The weaving together of a piece's unity by means of recurring imagery is a well-recognized technique of Noh poetry. The way in which the interplay of image and emotion builds up to a characteristic aesthetic experience is something that already Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats, with their poets' sensibility, were very keen on. Here is Pound:\*<sup>24</sup>

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\*<sup>23</sup> Hare (1986) 236.

\*<sup>24</sup> Fenollosa and Pound (1917) 45-6.

. . . the Noh has its unity in emotion. It has also what we may call Unity of Image. At least, the better plays are all built into the intensification of a single Image: the red maple leaves and the snow flurry in Nishikigi, the pines in Takasago, the blue-grey waves and wave pattern in Suma Genji, the mantle of feathers in the play of that name, Hagoromo.

This notion of the ‘intensification’ of an image is reminiscent, for instance, of Sappho’s fr. 96, where the elaborate moon imagery unites the girl who has left and the girls left behind, or Alcman’s *First Partheneion*, where an insistence on terms of light and colour alternates with recurrent horse imagery, or some odes of Pindar, such as *Pythian* 1, in which fiery volcanic imagery recurs at the same time as it alludes (presumably) to the location of first performance in Aitna. In the same vein, W.B. Yeats speaks of Noh’s ‘playing upon a single metaphor, as deliberate as the echoing rhythm of line in Chinese and Japanese painting’.<sup>\*25</sup> This appeal to a visual metaphor is apt but not precise enough, for in Noh the elaborate silk textiles worn by the *shite* (the main actor) often refer to these recurring images. Monica Bethe, perhaps the western scholar to have done the most to elucidate Noh in performance in recent decades, explains it well:<sup>\*26</sup>

Internalized, understated, and very refined, the Nō performance is a well-wrought poem in which imagistic integrity overshadows plot. The costumes function within the tightly intertwined poetic fiber. Not only is the patterning on the costumes a visual poetry

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<sup>\*25</sup> Fenollosa, Pound, and Yeats (1916) xvi.

<sup>\*26</sup> Bethe (1992). In addition to authoring numerous scholarly publications (most of them published under the imprint of Cornell University’s *East Asia Papers*), Monica Bethe (co-)coordinated the tremendously helpful series of ‘Noh Performance Guides’ to individual plays published in association with National Noh Theatre in Tokyo.

in itself, but references to costuming elaborate the poetry, and the visual impact of the costumes supports and underscores the words of the text.

Woodblock prints depicting *Kagetsu* show that the flower imagery in the text is always picked up by the costumes; most often it is in counterpoint to blue geometrical patterns that, to my mind at least, are reminiscent of the moon imagery with which the flower imagery is intertwined. In *Kagetsu* the unity of the flower- (and moon-) imagery spanning the verbal and the visual spheres builds up to a coherent mental experience for the audience. Moreover, the unity of imagery underlies the unity of the theme of the rewards of devotion to the Buddhist way. Thus the opening speech of the father is reprised by *Kagetsu*'s songs in the body of the play; the play includes accounts of roaming in loss and searching on the part of both father and son, but it ends with a spiritual journey that achieves resolution as father and son, having found each other, walk off the scene to continue their journey together, and their journey becomes one of salvation. The suggestion is that, having been drawn into the conceptually (as opposed to dramatically) unified experience of the performance, the audience is also drawn into the characters' spiritual journey, so that the performance has real-world effect when the characters' spiritual realization at the culmination of the play involves the audience too. In essence, then, *Kagetsu* is a framed sequence of lyric performances on a theme that builds up to a collective experience that is both sacred and aesthetic, and that is held together by music, imagery, mood, and a subtle conceptual unity rather than by an Aristotelian unity of action.

This conceptual rather than dramatic unity that is a feature of both Noh and lyric and sets them apart from tragedy becomes apparent also if one

tries to visualize the general ‘shape’, as it were, of a piece of Noh or lyric as opposed to tragedy. Whereas tragedy has a clear arc and there is a definite sense of the trajectory of an action in time, both Noh and lyric are more like a fluid situation that is conjured up momentarily before the mind’s eye. Paul Claudel remarked in connection with the difference between western theatre and Noh, that ‘Le drame, c’est quelque chose qui arrive. Le Nô, c’est quelqu’un qui arrive.’—‘Theatre is something turning out. Noh is someone turning up’ (literally ‘Theatre is something happening. Noh is someone arriving’).<sup>\*27</sup> Thus in *Kagetsu*, all that ‘turns out’ in the play is that both audience and characters at once register the boy’s presence and his true identity. In the majority of Noh *mugen* plays, all that ‘happens’ is that both the *waki* on stage and the audience off stage at once realize the true (and complicated) identity of the seemingly quotidian character they had encountered at the beginning of the piece. Within Greek lyric, among many poems offering no action beyond someone’s ‘arrival’, one might think of Aphrodite’s evoked epiphany in Sappho’s fr. 1, of Apollo’s return from the land of the Hyperboreans in Alcaeus’ fr. 357 (in so far as we can reconstruct it on the basis of Himerius’ detailed paraphrase), or even the deferred arrival of Theseus in Bacchylides’ Dithyramb 18, or, again, Sappho’s fr. 96, with its longing evocation of the imagined presence of a girl who has arrived indeed, but somewhere else. In fact, in both Noh and lyric the emphasis is very much on what happens in the mind rather than in the audiences’ presence. Whereas tragedy shows us the action playing out before our eyes and embodied by the performer,<sup>\*28</sup> in Noh and lyric the

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<sup>\*27</sup> Claudel (1965) 1167.

<sup>\*28</sup> It is true that in tragedy much action happens offstage and is narrated, e.g. in messenger speeches, but this is factual, ‘realistic’ narrative, and even this the audience construes as actually happening in the fictional world displayed on stage.

performance is almost a pretext—a very elaborate pretext—for conjuring up something in the mind’s eye. The ‘action’ that is constructed in the audience’s imagination (through evocation and narrative, through imagery and song) is as important as, or perhaps at times even more important than, the real-life action that is being dramatized by the performers.

All of this that I have attempted to describe—the loose permeability between the fictional world of the story and the ritual charge of the occasion, the unity of imagery and idea as opposed to unity of action, the evocation of a rich situation rather than a dramatic trajectory—nicely illustrates a lyric rather than a tragic sensibility, and these considerations on the similarities of Noh and lyric open the way for further productive comparisons.

One such productive area of comparison lies in the issue of the performer’s ‘voice’. This issue of ‘voice’ is one of the most intensely debated in specialist scholarship on Greek lyric. It is perhaps most pronounced in the case of Pindar, whose poetry is striking for the way in which the speaker in a given poem seems to slide between being the poet who is composing, the performer who is singing (who can be male or female, singular or plural), or at times a more generic voice of wisdom.<sup>\*29</sup> Within the framework of the usual naturalistic and mimetic expectations of western dramatic or performed poetry, such an unstable persona being voiced by the performer is felt as problematic. The example of Japanese Noh, on the other hand, offers a pertinent comparison through its alternatives to a dramatic personality embodied by an individual performative voice.

As I understand it, the actor of Noh does not make any attempt willfully

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<sup>\*29</sup> A sample of the scholarly diatribe on the ‘Pindaric voice’ in e.g. D’Alessio (1994) and Currie (2013).

to conjure up a dramatic character.\*<sup>30</sup> What he does instead is perform a series of formal actions that have been handed down by tradition to fulfill his role. These actions, in combination with all the corresponding formal actions by other members of the ensemble, contribute to build a character. For instance, the main character of a play, the one that is ascribed to the *shite*, will in fact be a composite of the words and the voice of the *shite*, and of his carefully codified actions, dancing, and stomping on the wooden boards of the stage, but also of the words sung by the chorus, as well as the cries and distinctive ‘whooping’ of the drummers, the sounds of percussion and flute, and the effects of masks and wigs and costumes. So dramatic character in Noh is not conceived straightforwardly as an individual personality, and it is encoded in a number of other aspects of performance besides text. A character can therefore be allowed to coalesce around an idea and a set of performative codes rather than a psychological or physical entity; the character’s voice is refracted in multiple different aspects of the performance and embodied by different members of the ensemble. All of this is profoundly illuminating when set side by side with problematic passages of Greek lyric poetry. It helps us imagine how the conceptual difficulty of a fluid persona might work out in performance, how it might not only be intelligible to an actual audience, but even feel natural.

Another such fruitful area of comparison between Noh and lyric lies in the peculiar use of time in the two genres. One of the most disorientating aspects of Noh to a western viewer is the daring superimposition of different time layers, which is part of the genre’s broader indifference to

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\*<sup>30</sup> Understanding gained largely orally, especially through a lesson and conversation with a Noh actor of the Kanze school, but cf. a description of the Noh teaching method and its implications in Matsunobu (2016).

naturalistic representation (as conceived in the west). Often in Noh plays what action there is seems to take place simultaneously in the past and in the present. Such interaction of different temporal planes is particularly evident in the majority set of *mugen* plays, the plays in which the *shite* (the main actor) features as a spirit who appears in different guises to the *waki* (the secondary actor, usually playing the part of an itinerant monk). In these plays, the main action takes place in the present of the play's story and simultaneously in the past of the *shite*'s stylized recollection, which in turn may or may not be simply a dream on the part of the *waki*, who in this sense models the audience's imaginative experience. Moreover, there sometimes is a play of ambiguity whereby the spirit's 'reliving' of the story by retelling it achieves a resolution of sorts, which appears to negate the reason why it is being told in the first place, i.e. the spirit's unresolved attachment to this world. It is done subtly, but this slight bending of the laws that govern space and time produces a sort of 'double-vision', a heightened attempt on the part of the audience to process the outcome of the story in the past and present simultaneously. I would like to think that such 'supercharging' of the cognitive richness of the here and now is one of the aspects that render the lyric medium the most apt for a ritual setting, whether in Japan or in ancient Greece. But this sort of play with different timeframes is absent from European theatre before the self-conscious experimentations of the twentieth century (themselves partly inspired by Noh). As Ezra Pound remarked, the 'sense of past time in the present' that we find in Noh is unlike anything in European dramatic convention.<sup>\*31</sup> However, such play with time is characteristic of Greek lyric poetry, where the present situation can function as a kind of screen on which a past situation is projected. An

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<sup>\*31</sup> Nadel (1993), 110: 'the hardest [...] for an occidental to fathom'. Pound himself was greatly influenced by Noh's use of time: see Nicholls (1995).

especially intricate and condensed, as well as familiar, instance of this in Greek lyric is Sappho's fr. 1, where the speaker invokes the presence of Aphrodite by evoking a past occurrence of her presence; that past occasion is then described in detail and Aphrodite's interaction with Sappho is acted out, so that the speaker's impersonation of Aphrodite produces the effect of an epiphany or apparition. The performer's voicing of both Sappho and the goddess, and of each in turn in both past and present, intensifies the effect produced by the superimposition of different timeframes. But the comparison stands in more general terms, too, in the structural relationship that binds the mythological past and the ritual present in both Greek lyric and Japanese Noh.

For example, in *Kagetsu*, in the scene already mentioned in which the protagonist aims his arrows at the birds disturbing the cherry blossoms, the action is emphatically set against the heroic precedent of Yōyū nocking his hundred arrows.

[Kagetsu]

A legend says when Yōyū who lived in a foreign country nocked one hundred arrows to shoot willow leaves from one hundred steps away, he was successful in hitting all one hundred leaves. My attempt to shoot the bush warbler on the cherry branch would not be inferior to that of Yōyū. How amusing.

[Reciters]\*<sup>32</sup>

That was a willow. This is a cherry. That was a goose. This is a bush warbler. That was Yōyū. This is Kagetsu. Although our names are different, a bow is a bow. Now I will teach you a lesson, O Bush

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\*<sup>32</sup> This passage incidentally illustrates my earlier point about voice, since the character's voice can be seen here to migrate from the *shite* to the chorus; this is standard in Noh.

Warbler.

One is reminded of Pindar's use of Heracles as a heroic model for his victors in some of the Sicilian odes, for instance. This scene is immediately followed by Kagetsu's performance of a *kusemai* (a sung and danced storytelling) in which he describes the origin of Kiyomizu Buddhist Temple. The story tells of the miracle by which the place's waters became sacred and how these attracted the people's devotion. It reprises all the strands of imagery which have already been established from the beginning—flowers, the moon, the seasons—and adds further ones which allude to elements of the bow scene, namely the willow leaves and cherry blossoms, which in this story become the signs of the god's miraculous manifestation at the Temple. Such an appeal to a mythological past is, of course, more than familiar to the scholar of Greek lyric, especially choral lyric, where the reference to a mythical precedent is a standard structuring device and often presents as an analogue for the present ritual. But beyond just telling a story about the past that is relevant to the present, what *Kagetsu* seems to be doing here is evoking a complicated set of imaginings that entwine past and present, symbol and symbolized, all mentally conjured up simultaneously. This double articulation of memory and fantasy is prompted by a performance that is not primarily mimetic or dramatic but is instead a prompt for the audience to construct in their minds something that is much richer than anything that could possibly be represented or enacted on the stage, and which is at the same time very much a collective and social experience. To experience this sort of poetic effect in actual performance, to watch myself making sense of it as an embodied mind, has moved me indescribably as a scholar of lyric. I have found myself thinking about lyric in ways that I do not think would have

been possible had I not been lucky enough to have to opportunity to puzzle out Noh for myself simply by watching performance after performance.

These sophisticated poetic effects that I have merely begun to describe while comparing Noh and Greek lyric are not ones that we are used to seeing played out in performance in the European tradition, so that it can be difficult to imagine how they might work out in practice. How can superimposed timeframes, for instance, be pulled off on stage, rather than merely imagined in one's mind, where the immateriality of thought makes it easier to comprehend two things as one, past and present merged? Or conversely how does an audience follow the shifts of voice from performer to performer, as if they could perceive some immaterial thing shifting its presence from one body to another and then back again? I have been struck by the naturalness with which such conceptually sophisticated effects are pulled off on the Noh stage. What follows—a descriptive coda to this paper—is a selection from the notes first jotted down on my lap while at the theatre on how actual experience of the performance of lyric poetry in the form of Noh has aided my imagination when trying to think of the performance of Greek lyric.\*<sup>33</sup> Scholars of Greek lyric are used to having to make do with scraps of papyri and other fragmentary, context-less, drily textual material. What a source of glee, then, to stumble into the Japanese

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\*<sup>33</sup> It was with amusement that, on rereading this section while writing up the oral presentation, I noted the parallels between my 'discovery' of Noh from a position of ignorance and the discovery of it by the pioneers of the 16th century and the Meiji era: with my observation of the audience compare the remarks by father Luis (Frois (2014 [1585]) 231, 241) or Marie Stopes' notes 'Concerning the Effect of the *Nō* on the Audience and on me' (Stopes (1913) 19-22); for resorting to a Nohgaku master for lessons in dancing and declamation compare Fenollosa's diaries. For a book-length account—half scholarly half personal—of this recurring encounter with Noh see Carrie Preston's *Learning to Kneel: Noh, Modernism, and Journeys in Teaching* (New York and Chichester 2016).

tradition of performed lyric poetry, with its riches of music and costume and superbly accomplished productions that one can simply buy tickets for on the internet and watch on a Saturday afternoon!

For one thing, experiencing Noh in performance has lent support to the intuition that dense, intricate, sophisticated, sometimes lengthy poems, poems that are full of allusions and delicate strands of imagery, can actually work in oral delivery. It has also made it possible for me to imagine what a non-dramatic stage performance might look like, and how it might be received by a real audience, which will inevitably be mixed, i.e. comprising members with a shared heritage but with different levels of cultural knowledge. Some of what I have learned indeed has come from observing not just the performance on stage but also the audience: some will sleep, some will follow most attentively with their noses alternately buried in the script, and others will follow with half-uncomprehending but spellbound faces. Zeami had great care for the practicalities of holding an audience's attention. He discusses strategies for performing to a mixed audience of aristocrats and commoners. He also discusses strategies of modulating the pace and momentum to keep the audience engaged during a long religious festival.\*<sup>34</sup> All of these are aspects of performance that are eminently relevant to archaic Greek lyric, much of which would have been performed at public festivals.

Observing the interaction between the audience (including myself) and what goes on on stage also confirmed in practice what I already knew in theory, namely just how much the non-textual elements of performed lyric poetry add to the experience as a whole: the sense of the audience and actors and musicians participating in a communal event, the hypnotic

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\*<sup>34</sup> Sieffert (1966) 97 and *passim*.

effect that music can have, especially the combination of percussive and wind instruments (which also accompanied lyric poetry, in addition to string instruments). Also the effects of pauses and silences and the shuffling or the emphatic stomping of feet on a wooden platform; the quasi-liturgical gestures of preparation and transition from one scene to another, the pregnant lulls during spatial positioning and seating and standing, robing and un-robing; the impression created by a ‘massed crowd’ of even silent participants in the performance, with their special dress and the air of concentration that exudes from them; the potential for subtle symbolism of the performers’ costumes that captures the gaze as they move and makes the mind whirr.\*<sup>35</sup> Monica Bethe speaks of how ‘the variation of color in each visual motif creates an ever-changing overall image despite the mechanically fixed repeated pattern. The eyes wander from sleeve to hem to body of the robe, focusing for a moment on an exquisite detail, then refocusing to enjoy the interplay of shapes,

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\*<sup>35</sup> For a potted history and taxonomy of Noh costumes, and some detailed descriptions accompanied by high-quality photographic plates, see Hays and Hays (1992). It is hard to overestimate how much costumes can add to the poetry. Bethe (1992) 7: ‘in general the costumes make little attempt to be realistic [...]. In addition to designating a role, the costumes are meant to evoke the atmosphere of the play, functioning much like a stage set in western theater. Since the plain wooden stage of the No theater remains unadorned, costumes are the primary focus of visual interest. The patterns of the costumes suggest season and setting, often echoing verbal imagery central to the play, while their colors evoke mood and suggest sensibility’. Hays and Hays (1992) 21: ‘motifs in the patterning and the colors used create not only a beautiful design or picture but often silently in their symbolism they convey hidden meanings. They may refer to a well-known legend, literary work, or folk tales. The symbols used may create a mood, evoke a season, or express an ideal. Humor is sometimes present in sly allusions to recognizable objects or events. Since the Japanese language is rich in homophonic sounds, the pronunciation of a word or character while sounding the same can have more than one meaning. Therefore, motifs may be puns.’

until the motifs and colors expand to create a complete vision'.<sup>\*36</sup> The painstaking depiction of natural motifs on the precious silks is 'activated' by the animism which is still such a hallmark of Japanese culture and which immediately strikes even the most casual foreign observer. All of this adds up to the synaesthetic effect that cannot ever be conveyed by a mere text. While we have precious few and vague testimonies for Greek performances, what little we do have, coupled with the entextualised references to a poem's own performance, testifies to the significance of the visual spectacle and of the sumptuous costumes in the Greek context too.<sup>\*37</sup>

Other things that are difficult to imagine on the basis of a bare text: the surprising impact that a silent character on stage can have. A silent character leaves no trace in the text, but the effect his/her presence has on the experience of the performance is remarkable. In a production I saw of the Noh play *Kuzu*, 'The Sweet Fish', the character of the exiled emperor appeared on stage at the outset in an elaborate and solemn procession. The exiled emperor is at the centre of the play's story and is the subject of an elaborate complex of imagery that runs throughout the play. During the performance he does nothing but sit in a dignified pose on the side of the stage—and yet his presence is affecting and adds much to the experience of the play. In the production I watched, the actor playing the emperor was a child, and the unusual presence of a child on stage being guided by the cast of professional performers added a whole other dimension to the sense

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<sup>\*36</sup> Bethe (1992) 19.

<sup>\*37</sup> E.g. Alcman's *Partheneia* for intratextual references to the visual spectacle of the performers; the beginning of Pindar's *Paeon* 6 for the visual impact of the speaker (he comes 'together with the Graces and Aphrodite' i.e. with an accompaniment of beauty); Demosthenes' *Against Meidias* includes an account of the elaborate costume meant for a dithyrambic performance.

of occasion. Moreover, during the particular performance that I witnessed, the child kept falling asleep, his little head repeatedly drooping sidewise far enough to startle him awake, over and over again, so that for a time the entire audience were holding their breath for him. Of course this was just an accident of this performance, but it is a healthy reminder that performance involves real bodies in real situations with all the unexpected outcomes this can have.

The physical skill of the performers can also take over from the words in story-telling: in the same play about the 'The Sweet Fish', when by a miracle the titular fish half-eaten by the emperor comes back to life, the old fisherman releases it back into the water—and with a painstakingly accomplished flourish of the actor's hand we see the fish swimming away in the glittering stream. When speaking of the impact of bodies in performance, it is hard not to mention the meditative manner in which Noh plays are performed, which goes hand in hand with the sacred setting in which the genre originates (and which is also the background to much of Greek lyric as well as tragedy). In the Noh dance lesson in which I participated, the teacher tried to convey the way in which every movement has to be deeply 'grounded' and effected like a meditation—hence the distinctive glide by which the actors move silently across the stage. The teacher explained that this meditative quality of the movement harks back to the days when performance was an aspect of education for the samurai class, who had to train to keep their mind steady, especially in preparation for battle. In ancient Greece too, lyric performance was practised as a form of education for the citizens. I have no doubt that the inwardly directed concentration required for this technique in Noh is one of the elements that contribute to the special atmosphere so characteristic of Noh performances.

All of this is intended to hint at some of what can only be known in

performance and cannot be puzzled out purely by thinking abstractly on the basis of texts. With Noh I have found a whole new world of lyric poetry that is alive in performance. I have had, for the first time in my life, the particular embodied mental experience that is the hallmark of lyric (as opposed to dramatic) performance, the experience of watching the performance on stage and simultaneously—pointedly—being made to conjure up a different performance of the imagination. I am like the *waki*, sitting on the side of the stage, watching and listening to the apparition of the *shite*, and wondering—is it all a dream?

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