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**On the Paths of *nō* – from Ernest Fenollosa
to the First Reformers of the Western Theatre**

Abstract

The article is devoted to the world's first popularizers of the *nō* theatre outside Japan, with particular emphasis on the pioneering achievements of two Americans, Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853–1908) and Ezra Pound (1885–1972), as well as the next generation representing various European countries. The latter included, among others, William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), Paul Claudel (1868–1955), Jacques Copeau (1879–1949), Charles Dullin (1885–1949), Jean-Louis Barrault (1910–1994), Gabriel Cousin (1918–2010), Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966), Benjamin Britten (1913–1976), Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) and Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), who, influenced by the fascination with the *nō* theatre, were the first to reform, in a more or less visible way, the traditional, realistic European theatre.

Keywords: Japanese *nō* theatre, western theatre, Ernest Fenollosa

Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853–1908), Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913), Ezra Pound (1885–1972), William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), Paul Claudel (1868–1955), Jacques Copeau (1879–1949), Charles Dullin (1885–1949), Jean-Louis Barrault (1910–1994), Gabriel Cousin (1918–2010), Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966), Benjamin Britten (1913–1976), Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) – come from different countries, yet they have a lot in common. Their common denominator was the era and, above all, the fascination with the Japanese theatre, mainly the *nō* theatre, which they were the first to popularize in the West with great knowledge and understanding, often creating under its influence and thus setting new directions for development.

Some of them also supported with their activities the efforts of *nō* actors, especially of Umewaka Minoru I (1828–1909), who undertook a heroic struggle for the survival of

the *nō* theatre during the period of democratization and westernization of the country – directly after the loss of permanent patronage of the shōgun court and of the permanent audience composed of warriors (*bakufu*) who were abolished in the middle of the 19th century.

1. Ernest Francisco Fenollosa

1.1. A biographical outline

Ernest Francisco Fenollosa¹ (1853–1908) was an American, the son of a Spanish pianist Manuel Francisco Ciriaco Fenollosa and Mary Silsbee. Fenollosa became famous as an art historian, professor of philosophy and political economy, and as an Orientalist. He studied philosophy and sociology at Harvard University, and then attended the art school at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for a year.

Fenollosa's life abounded in ups and downs. A difficult moment for him was the suicide of his father (1878), which caused the fear of not being able to support the family from his own painting. That is why in the same year he dropped his studies after two years, and despite the lack of a university diploma he left for Tokyo, where he began to work at the Imperial University (Teikoku Daigaku)² as a lecturer in philosophy. Thanks to this, and also thanks to the support of the Ministry of Education, he was able to create paintings and make numerous social and professional contacts in the artistic environment.

One of the first students of Fenollosa was Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913), with whom in 1884 he founded the well-known Painting Appreciation Society (Kangakai). His members were leading representatives of *nihonga* – Japanese style painting referring to the painting in the periods of Nara (710–784 lub 794) and Heian (794–1185), such as Kanō Hōgai (1828–1888) and Hashimoto Gahō (1835–1908).

In Japan Fenollosa converted to Buddhism, which was accompanied by the bestowal of the name Teishin. He was also admitted to the family of *nō* actors, Kanō, and he received the stage name Kanō Eitan Masanobu.

Unfortunately, despite the extensive knowledge of Oriental art, Fenollosa had a problem with distinguishing originals from counterfeits. During his lifetime it was loudly commented that in 1886 he sold his huge collection of Japanese art to Charles Weld, an English physician, stipulating that they would go to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It soon turned out, however, that there were a lot of counterfeits in the collection.

¹ The information concerning Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Kakuzō has been provided on the basis of Rimer 2012, pp. 31–35; 221–256; Rosenfield 1976, pp. 204–213; Cabeza Lainez, Almodóvar Melendo 2004, pp. 75–99; Furukawa 1962, pp. 17–28.

² The history of the Imperial University goes back to the mid-nineteenth century. The university changed its name many times, the last time in 1947, when it was renamed the University of Tokyo (Tōkyō Daigaku, Tōdai for short). It is now among the world's best universities.

For this reason, in the same year he lost the post of curator, which coincided with the moral scandal caused by his divorce and remarriage.

Fenollosa returned to Japan (1890), where for two years he worked as Professor of English Literature at Imperial University in Tokyo. Then he met the writer Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904),³ with whom he became friends. In addition, Fenollosa lectured on philosophy and political economy.

Fenollosa died unexpectedly in England. He was cremated in London. The Japanese government sent a warship there to bring his ashes for burial in the cemetery at the Buddhist temple Miidera⁴ in the town of Ōtsu on Lake Biwa. There is a tomb there, founded by the Tokyo Fine Arts School⁵ (Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō) (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, pp. 3). Fenollosa was honored with two Japanese high state awards for the discovery of medieval Chinese scrolls brought there by Buddhist monks.

1.2. Achievements: art, the *nō* theatre

Fenollosa is one of the first authors in the West who presented Japan and China with great skill and thanks to this, through art, he contributed to overcoming the barrier between the cultures of the West and the East – to mutual knowledge and understanding. In the West, in cooperation with, for example, numerous American Museums, he spread knowledge about art and theatre in Japan and China, while bringing the Japanese closer to Western civilization, making them aware of the unique values of their own cultural heritage, and effectively inhibiting the unreflective mass deportation of precious works of art, mainly woodcuts (*ukiyo-e*), to Europe. Inspired by Japanese art, he saw possibility of bringing freshness to Western painting. The correctness of this conviction is clearly proved by, among others, Impressionist works or paintings by Polish modernist artists of so called Young Poland (Młoda Polska) period.

Thanks to continuators such as Okakura Kakuzō or Ezra Pound, Fenollosa's achievements have proved far-reaching and timeless. Up to date remains valid also his theoretical works, such as *An Explanation of the Truth of Art* (*Bijutsu shinsetsu*, 1882), *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912) and *The Masters of Ukiyo-e: a Complete Historical Description of Japanese Paintings and Colour Prints of the Gebre School*, as well as his studies in the field of Japanese (and Chinese) literature, and the first translations of several plays of the *nō* theatre – directly from Japanese to English.

Fenollosa, just like Ezra Pound, was introduced into the secrets of *nō* by an outstanding actor Umewaka Minoru I (1828–1909). Under his guidance, for twenty years, Fenollosa studied the technique of *nō* acting. He mastered it to such a degree that he was able to play in a few plays (Fenollosa, Pound: 2004, p. 106). Umewaka undertook a heroic struggle to save the *nō* from oblivion. Even though he was starving himself, he bought,

³ P.L. Hearn has a triple nationality: Irish, Greek, Japanese. He is also known under the Japanese name Koizumi Yakumo.

⁴ An other name of Miidera is Onjō-ji.

⁵ Present name is Tokyo University of Arts (Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku, abbr. Geidai).

among other things, the masks and costumes sold by the bankrupt actors of *nō* (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, p. 6).

Fenollosa supported these efforts, and his action had a double effect. In the West, it was noticed that Japanese art inspiration can bring a lot of freshness to Western painting, and *nō*, having many features in common with Ancient Greek theatre, can become an important reference point for Western theatre reformers. We find this idea among others in the works of Impressionists, whose view of the world was shaped by Japanese woodcut (*ujiyoe*), as well as in numerous concepts of the creators of the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century, such as Antoine Marie Joseph Artaud (1886–1948), Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) or Adolphe Appia (1862–1928), who protested against realism and emphasised the need to return to the original forms of the theatre.

In Japan, however, in the period of uncritical fascination with the culture of the West (19th–20th century) and of the attempts to adapt a realistic, western style theatre, a foreigner's perception of the unique qualities of the theatre and art has been electricizing. Actions have been taken to preserve native tradition from oblivion, including stopping the tendency of unreflective removal of priceless works of art, and at the same time gradually regaining respect for one's own cultural heritage.

1.3. The *nō* theatre as seen by Fenollosa

Fenollosa perceived *nō* as a theatre as primitive, intense and beautiful as the Greek theatre which arose five centuries before the birth of Christ from the ritual in honour of Dionysius (Bacchus) – the god of wine (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, p. 101). He saw many similarities to *nō*, the theatre that emerged nearly fifteen centuries after the birth of Christ (twenty centuries later) from the rituals dedicated to Shinto deities (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, p. 102).

Fenollosa draws attention to the fact that these two geographically distant theatrical traditions originate from the same background: from dance and music (vocal and instrumental), which for the Japanese meant a form of natural, spontaneous expression of a human being and were an integral part of everyday life. Therefore they played a much greater role than in the lives of Europeans (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, pp. 106). With the passing of time, the dance began to be performed mainly by professional dancers, and from the sphere of everyday life moved to the sphere of ceremonies – secular court and sacred – Shintoist and Buddhist (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, pp. 107).

Fenollosa also stresses the fact that the first mention of the first Japanese dance is mythological. It was recorded in *Kojiki* [‘Records of Ancient Matters’, 712]. The dancer is Ama-no Uzume – a goddess with a frivolous disposition. By contrast, according to a legend the first dance of *nō* was performed by *okina* – half-god, half-man, or an old man in the white mask of the same name.⁶ According to Fenollosa this is what makes *nō*

⁶ On the *okina* dance, performed in the eponymous mask, as the legendary beginning of the *nō* theatre, see Żeromska 2010, p. 231.

theatre, in which the deity has always been giving solo dance performances, different from Ancient Greek tragedy, where a multi-member choir danced on stage, and the presence of the deity was merely symbolised by the altar (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, p. 108).

Fenollosa is also preoccupied with the dance, which in Japan eventually became an integral, inalienable element of traditional theatre – at first spontaneous and – like in Europe – improvised spectacle, not based on a text with a specific content and structure, presenting, among others, events from the life of gods and other supernatural beings interfering in temporal affairs (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, pp. 107–108). It is a sublime dance in aesthetic terms, full of grace and allusive meanings, but – unlike in Ancient Greek dance – devoid of abstract movements. The *nō* actor reminds one of a living sculpture. He dances as if he were a god.

Fenollosa is also preoccupied with the dance, which on the *nō* stage presents various types of supernatural characters, including divine beings, which are played only by the protagonist (*shite*) with his face covered with mask. The performer of such roles play with the accompaniment of percussion instruments (various drums) and the flute of the orchestra (*hayashi*), as well as with the choir (*ji-utai*). He always takes the same place on the stage and stays in the traditional Japanese sitting position (*senza*) throughout the performance. The choir in *nō* – in contrast to the choir in Ancient Greek theatre – never stands and does not dance, but only engages in dialogs with the protagonist and sometimes (when he dances) takes over his lines (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, pp. 107–109; 114).

Although the role of the word (drama) in *nō* art and ancient Greek art is different, they are both characterized by high literary values – beautiful, rhythmic poetic speech (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, p. 102).

The Ancient Greek theatre is long gone. At present, one can only try to reconstruct it or search for its traces in a later (also disappeared) Shakespearean theatre, or even – as Fenollosa suggests – in the theatre of India and China, where the Greek tradition was to have permeated owing to Greek conquests (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, p. 103). Fenollosa therefore makes a bold conclusion that also *nō* could be marked by Greek influence, but at the same time he rightly states that it would be absurd to maintain that this theatre (like the Elizabethan theatre) derives from the Greek theatre (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, pp. 103–104). He also emphasizes that *nō* lasted for centuries in an almost unchanged form, passed down from generation to generation, with care for the continuity and inseparability of blood ties (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, pp. 103–104).

The same can be said of the bourgeois *kabuki* theatre of about two hundred years later (the 17th century), about which unfortunately Fenollosa speaks with great disapproval and evident misunderstanding:

This vulgar drama is quite like ours, with elaborate stage and scenery, with little music and chorus, and no masks; with nothing, in short, but realism and mimetics of action. This modern drama, a ghost of the fifth period, arose in Edo some 300 years ago. It was an amusement designed by the common people for themselves, and was written and acted by them. It therefore corresponds to

the works of *Ukiyo-e* in painting, and more especially to the colour prints; and a large number of these prints reproduce characters and scenes from the people's theatre (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, pp. 104–105).

Fenollosa's description of the *nō* theatre, covering all its most important features (connections with the religious ritual, the influence of native and continental traditions, the acting and the actor's appearance, the use of masks, the inseparability of words, music and dance, or an integral relationship with the *kyōgen* farce), gives the impression of being rather subjective, devoid of scientific precision and acumen, and the comparison of nearly all aspects of the performance to the Ancient Greek theatre is apparently meant primarily to bring the specifics of the Japanese show to those who have never seen it. Despite the superficiality and the lack of terminological precision or the chronology of events, which could have been an inadvertent effect of Ezra Pound's work on Fenollosa's notes, one can not underestimate the pioneering role that Fenollosa and his followers played not only in disseminating knowledge of *nō* outside Japan, but also in sharing his evident fascination with this theatre with the Western theatre artists.

2. Direct heirs to the legacy of Ernest Fenollosa

2.1. Ezra Pound

Fenollosa's achievements were saved from oblivion by his wife, who in 1917 published a collection of *nō* plays, translated and edited by him (Fenollosa, Pound 2004). In this she was assisted by Ezra Pound (Łabędzka 1998, p. XX) who in his turn aroused the fascination with the spiritual power of the Japanese (and Chinese) theatre in William Butler Yeats, with whom he was friends. The traces of this fascination are visible in the work of both artists.

Ezra Pound (1885–1972) was not only a world-renowned poet, feature writer and one of the most outstanding representatives of American modernist poetry but also a translator who translated among others works of Confucius (551–479 p.n.e.), Japanese poems (*haiku*) and *nō* plays. He gained fame and appreciation as creator of the theory of imagination and vorticism, the leading trends in the art of United States of the inter-war period, which were inspired, among others, by Japanese and Chinese poetry. Pound, like Fenollosa, noticed the similarities of *nō* theatre to the Ancient Greek theatre; for him this was the reason why Kan'ami's (1333–1384) and Zeami (1363–1443?)'s artistic creation was so powerful.

He drew attention to the great allusiveness of the *nō* arts, which results from the invariably strong relationship with the ritual roots of this theatre, as well as the ability to read subtle suggestions by elite viewers, to whom they have been addressed for centuries (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, p. 5; Furukawa 1962, pp. 29–35). He also thought that Western artist, such as William B. Yeats or Edward G. (Fenollosa, Pound 2004, p. 6).

2.2. William Butler Yeats

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) was an Irish poet, playwright, writer, philosopher, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (1923). His views and creative imagination were shaped by the considerable influence of Celtic fairy tales and folk tales, Romanticism, French symbolism, as well as of the philosophy and religion of India, especially of Buddhism. Yeats owed his fascination with *nō* theatre to Ezra Pound, and after 1916 he started to write plays in a different style than before. In his dramas, he gave up referring to national motifs and themes, and started focusing instead on philosophical reflection, especially on the passage of time – the relationship between life and death.

The signs of inspiration with the *nō* theatre can be found, in particular, in the four plays that make up the well-known series *Four Plays for Dancers: At the Hawk's Well* (1916) – an adaptation of Zeami Yōrō's play, *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1916) – an adaptation of the play *Aoi-no ue* ['Lady Aoi'] (Zeami 1994), *Dreaming of the Bones* (1917) – an adaptation of the play *Nishikigi* ['Summer cypress'], and also *Calvary* (1917) – an adaptation of the play *Kakitsubata* ['Water Iris'] by Konparu Zenchiku (1405–1471). Traces of inspiration with the *nō* theatre can also be found in dramas *The Resurrection* (1927), *The Herne's Egg* (1938), *Purgatory* (1938).⁷

The influence of *nō* in Yeats' plays can be found, among others, in the content full of allusive and symbolic elements, in the introduction of the mask and of a three-person orchestra which – as in the Japanese theatre – performs the function of accompaniment, illustrating and rhythmizing the actor's movements throughout the performance.

One might be tempted to say that Ernest Fenollosa, Ezra Pound and William Butler Yeats prepared the West for the reception of the classical Japanese theatre, especially *nō*, which the Western audience had the opportunity to see for the first time in Europe and America only in the 1950s. It can also be said that these three artists inspired many European artists to embark on a journey in search of new forms of expression, modelled on *nō*, contributing to breaking the fourth wall and establishing a more direct contact with the public.

3. European Theatre

The work of Fenollosa, Pound and Yeats was taken over by many European continuators from various countries. Artists who have succumbed to the charm of the Japanese *nō* theatre are numerous. We often seem to forget about their Far Eastern inspirations that can be found, for example, in the work of visionary pioneers, such as: Paul Claudel (1868–1955), Jacques Copeau (1879–1949), Charles Dullin (1885–1949), Jean-Louis Barrault (1910–1994), Gabriel Cousin (1918–2010) – in France; Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966), Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) – in England; Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) – in

⁷ Wąchocka 2013, p. 203; Direen W.J. 1982, pp. 9–34.

Germany; Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) – in Ireland. In the activity of the creators of this generation, one can notice distinct signs of fascination with the *nō* theatre, manifesting with varying strength.

3.1. *Nō* on the way to France

3.1.1. Paul Claudel

The French playwright and poet at the same time, Paul Claudel (1868–1955), was one of the first Europeans who had the opportunity to watch *nō* theatre in Japan, since in the years 1921–1926 he was the French ambassador in Tokyo. *Nō* touches the artist's imagination and causes him to give some of his plays, such as *Le livre de Christophe Colomb* [‘The Book of Christopher Columbus’, 1927], a typical for *nō* two-part interlude structure, or moving past events to the present which means that after his death in the fifth act, Columbus appears and becomes a viewer of the performance devoted to his real life (Furukawa 1962, pp. 118–128).

Claudel wrote this art in response to the needs of Max Reinhardt (1873–1943), who was looking for a work containing extensive musical parts. In the end, however, the Austrian artist decided not to stage this innovative (in terms of staging) play, which was successful only after more than twenty years, thanks to Jean-Louis Barrault, who directed it at *Le théâtre du Vieux-Colombier*. The premiere took place in 1953 in Paris in Théâtre Marigny, and then the performance was shown in many countries around the world, including Japan (1960). In *The Book of Christopher Columbus*, Claudel, predicting – as in the *nō* dramas – the balance of words, music, dance, mimicry, achieved in this art an effect similar to that of Brecht's epic theatre (Lécroart 2018).

Claudel, through his work, shared his fascination with the *nō*, *kabuki* and *bunraku* theatre with many European artists at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. He was for them a reliable source of “indirect” knowledge about Japan (and China) and inspired them to undertake experimental activities aimed at freeing the Russian theatre from the bonds of imitative realism. The group of artists who succumbed to the charm of the theatricality of *nō* included, above all, Vsevolod Emilyevich Meyerhold (1874–1940) – the creator of the biomechanical method of actor training.⁸

3.1.2. Jacques Copeau

Jacques Copeau (1879–1949) was a playwright, theatre director, producer and critic. From 1941, he was permanently associated with Comédie Française. Above all, however, he was known as the founder (1913?) of the Parisian Theatre du Vieux-Colombier (Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier), in which he began to experiment with the stage and with the techniques of *nō* acting (Bablet 1980, pp. 56–58).

⁸ For information about the influence of the classical Japanese theatre on the Russian theatre at the time of the Great Reform see: Osińska 2013, pp. 199–214.

In cooperation with Louis Jouvet (1887–1951), he created a “poor theatre” in which the text ceases to dominate, and in return finds “its expression above all in the acting” (Bablet 1980, p. 57). When the actors come out on the extended proscenium, they approach the viewer, going beyond the frame of the fourth wall, disturbing the sense of realism. The stage can be divided by moving, illuminated curtains. It begins to be filled up only with the necessary, minimalist decorations. Multi-layer structures appear, allowing simultaneous acting at various levels – as it often happens in *kabuki* (Bablet 1980, pp. 56–58; cf. Olkusz 2014).

3.1.3. Charles Dullin

Another artist indebted to the *nō* theatre was Charles Dullin (1885–1949). The greatest impression was made on him by the rhythm and spontaneity of the performance, as well as by the feelings of alienation and objectivity caused by the use of the mask. Contrary to the spirit of realism is the understanding of the theatre by Dullin. He claims that theatre, being – like a mystery play – a world beyond the world, and the scene a place, “in which colour, sound and fine arts play important role” (Bablet 1980: 153). Dullin, like Zeami, sought simplicity. Using the ascetic, precisely selected means of expression, he focused on extracting the maximum force of words, gestures and feelings – on reaching the essence of things (Bablet 1980, pp. 153–154).

3.1.4. Jean-Louis Barrault

Dullin’s follower was Jean-Louis Barrault (1910–1994) – an actor, screenwriter, director and mime – but he was fascinated by the unity of dance, music, facial expressions, speech and singing, as well as by spirituality and symbolism. He founded together with his wife a famous troupe of Théâtre de l’Atelier and eagerly directed the plays by Racine, Claudel and Shakespeare, in which he also performed as an actor. In the years 1931–1935 he was associated with the Paris troupe of Théâtre de l’Atelier, and in 1946–1956 with the group La Compagnie Renaud-Barrault, which he founded together with his wife, actress Lucie Madeleine Renaud (1900–1994).

In 1973 Jean-Louis Barrault began cooperation with Jerzy Grotowski. He was one of the most important figures in the French and European theatre of the 20th century. A year earlier, he met Suzuki Tadashi (born 1939), who recorded his impressions from the spectacle of the Frenchman:

Performances were presented at Le Théâtre Récamier, led by Barrault. I had many wonderful experiences there. The building in which the theatre was located was previously a residential building - a few small quadrangular rooms formed a box theatre, and in the middle there was a specially prepared scene resembling a ring; on four sides, plywood stairs led to it, so the stage had four fronts. It is hard to say whether there was more simplicity or eccentricity in it. It was in this place that the participants of the festival, representing various countries, presented their performances (Suzuki 2012, p. 30).

3.1.5. Gabriel Cousin

Gabriel Cousin (1918–2010) was a French playwright and poet. In his play *Le voyage de derrière la montagne* [‘Journey to the Mountain Beyond’, 1962] he refers to the legend widely known in Japan, which Zeami (1363–1443), the creator and theoretician of *nō* theatre, used in the famous drama *Obasute yama* [‘Mountain to Abandon Old Women’] (Cousin 1964, pp. 6–115).

Cousin relied directly on the novel by Fukazawa Shichirō (1914–1987) entitled *Narayama bushikō* [‘The Ballad of Narayama’, 1956], in which the same issues were used. While the basic motif in Zeami’s play is the ungratefulness of the family. In that *nō* play the old woman is brought to the mountains by her son because his wife could not bear her.

In *The Ballad of Narayama* Fukazawa Shichirō (1956) explains this cruel habit with extreme poverty, which forces the villagers to send old people to death. Cousin, however, makes this version the main theme motif of his play, through which he wanted to draw attention to the problem of hunger in the world.

The influence of the aesthetics of *nō* theatre onto *Journey to the Mountain Beyond*, considered one of the best dramatic works of Gabriel Cousin, is manifested inter alia in the poetic qualities of the text, in the important role of music in the performance, the limited number of characters, or the slowdown of the actors’ movements. The same we can say about an other moving play *Le drame du Fukuryu-Maru* [‘The drama of the Fukuryu-Maru’, 1967] devoted to the problem of the nuclear weapon.

3.2. *Nō* on the way to England

3.2.1. Edward Gordon Graig

Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) was an English theatre director-designer, actor, producer, and theorist who proclaims the concept of the theatre that is fully spectacular (not merely depicting). His view can be applied to the *nō* theatre and to the remaining genres of the Japanese classical theatre – as a harmonious coexistence of the all indispensable elements:

The art of theatre is not about acting, or about the works presented, nor is it about the scenery and dance, but consists of all the elements that these concepts contain: from action, which is the soul of acting; from words that are the body of literature; with lines and colors that are the core of the decoration; from the rhythm, which is the essence of dance (Bablet 1980, p. 48).

Similarly to *nō* or *kabuki*, Craig’s theatre is thus compatible with the Buddhist truth about unity in multiplicity or about time, being, as Dōgen (1200–1253) describes it, a constant movement (Dōgen 1997, 2005, 2014). It is a theatre known as the art of movement, of a changing form, which is helped, among others, by an “architectural group of walls [screens] that move according to the will of the producer and create continuously

the next places of the drama” (Bablet 1980, p. 48). Harmoniously combining variability with continuity, Craig counters Western imitative realism, and in his own way manifests an immanent feature of traditional Japanese theatre, which is a combination (in the light of Buddhism complementing, not excluding) of movement with stillness, or of sound with silence, exposing what emerges “from among” (Craig 1985).

With time, Craig’s vision of synthetic theatre will penetrate the imagination of many European artists, including among others also Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990).

3.2.2. Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) was an outstanding English composer and conductor, also considered to be the most outstanding British pianist of the 20th century. He wrote the music to the opera *Curlew River* (1964), the libretto of which was created by William Plomer (1903–1973) on the basis on Kanze Motomasa’s (1395?–1432) *nō* play entitled *Sumida-gawa* [‘The Sumida River’], which Britten had the opportunity to see in Japan in 1956.

In the original one-part play there is the ferryman (*waki*) on the river Sumida who is waiting for passengers (*waki-zure*). A traveller appears, followed by a woman (*shite*) who is a grief-stricken mother, gone mad after the loss of her son, and convinced that one day her child would return. The crossing of the river begins. The ferryman announces that a crowd of people on the opposite bank of the river has gathered in order to pay homage to the son of a Mr. Yoshida from the capital, abducted from his house and having passed away a year before. The woman is convinced that it was her son. The ferryman takes her to the grave on which people pray. Against the background of the words of prayer, one can hear the voice of a boy, whose spirit (*ko-kata*) appears to his mother, but after a short while disappears forever.

The *Curlew River* is the first part of the triptych entitled *Church Parables*. In his opera Benjamin Britten combined Japanese motifs with the European Christian tradition, moving the plot to the England of the early Middle Ages. He also uses many formal features of *nō* theatre such as a small number of actors performing ascetic gestures; a choir, modest in number, which resides on the stage; musicians playing percussion instruments, the alto trombone, the French horn, the harp, the flute, the positive organ, the viola, the double bass and so on; a lack of a choir conductor; ceremonial costumes; minimalism of stage design and of gestures.

Britten wanted that in his work “nothing specific Japanese remained, to keep [...] the intensity and concentration of Japanese art” (Bristiger 1980, p. 4).⁹ The composer himself admitted that he would be happy, “if we on the stage and you in the audience were able to reach half of the intensity and concentration of the original drama.” (Bristiger 1980, p. 4).

⁹ „Rzeka krzyczących ptaków” *Benjamin Brittena* is a souvenir programme for the opera *Curlew River* staged in the Grand Theatre in Poznań (Teatr Wielki im. Stanisława Moniuszki w Poznaniu), directed by Małgorzata Dziewulska, with scenography by Ewa Starowiejska; première 22 on November 1980. Electronic version: http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/programy/2013_12/56292/rzeka_krzyczacych_ptakow_teatr_wielki_poznan_1980.pdf [access date: 24.04.2018].

The use of the means of expression, as modest as in *nō* theatre, though very expressive, probably helped Britten – according to Michał Bristiger, a reviewer of the Warsaw version of the *Curlew River* – “to show us [the Europeans] the strength of our own, lost tradition” (Bristiger 1980, p. 4). Bristiger further states that “intensity and concentration [becomes] our common cause, because we all in this opera are covered by one and the same theatrical space – we the singing ones, the playing ones, the listening ones, the hearing ones” (Bristiger 1980, p. 4).

3.3. *Nō* on the way to Germany: Bertolt Brecht

In Germany, an exceptional admirer of *nō* theatre (and, more broadly, of the theatre of the East) became Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) – a writer, playwright, theoretician of the theatre, staging director and poet.

Brecht was an expert on the theatre of the Far East and was willing to refer to it, especially to the Japanese and Chinese traditions. He strived to create epic drama corresponding to the character of *nō* plays. He became famous as the creator of the estrangement effect, which he achieved in his works, similarly to *nō* plays, the effect of alienation consisting, among other things, in describing the situation rather than creating a dramatic plot, and thus alienating the viewers from the stage events, allowing them to penetrate into the depths of the essence of events. This effect was achieved, among others, by reducing the tension at the beginning of the performance, which consists in introducing a person who briefly acquaints the audience with the content of the whole play. In *nō* such a role of initiating action is played by the deuteragonist *waki*, and sometimes also by the choir. Such a solution contradicts the Aristotle’s principle of the three unities, which leads to the progressive achievement of the climax.

Some similarity of Brecht’s plays to *nō* theatre can also be found in the apparent lack of connection between the figure appearing on the stage and the figure portrayed, which creates the effect of alienation. Just as in *nō* theatre, it is difficult to guess, at the beginning, the nature of the connection of the protagonist’s relationship in the first (*mae-ba*) and the second part (*nochi-ba*) of the play, because the proper identity of these characters always begins to be revealed only in the second part.

3.4. Further Irish fascination with the *nō* theatre in Ireland: Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), co-creator of the theatre of the absurd, is, after Yeats, another Irish playwright who created under the clear influence of *nō*. The deluding resemblance, both in formal and philosophical terms, to *nō* plays is visible in *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957), whose main hero is time.

Endgame, is also noteworthy for its division divided into three parts, resembling the structure of *nō* dramas, and also referring to the “three-step” rhythmic principle of *jo* (slow beginning), *ha* (faster development), *kyū* (the fastest ending).

The link between some Beckett's works, especially *Waiting for Godot*, and *nō* plays consists, among others, in the time ambivalence, in philosophical reflection, in ascetic form, in the simplicity of the means of expression, and in the economy of words.

A comparison of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* with the *nō* plays leads to the paradoxical conclusion that what is obvious and natural in *nō* (the integrity of the past, present and future, leading to the sense of disappearance of time) in the dramas of Beckett has been described as absurd.

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When Ernest Fenollosa was fascinated by *nō*, he did not think that his notes about this theatre, as well as a few plays which he was the first to translate into a foreign language (English), would be published only after his death. He probably did not suspect that thanks to this he would be able to influence, over time, the imagination of many Western theatre artists and make them perceive the universal and timeless power of *nō* that transcends cultural boundaries.

Conclusion

The group of artists for whom the *nō* theatre has become an important reference point, inspiring them to make experimental attempts to break the fourth wall and to reduce the distance between the actor and the viewer, is very long and continually extended over the next generations by subsequent followers of the works of Ernest Fenollosa, Ezra Pound and William Butler Yeats. This list includes Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990), Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999), Eugenio Barba (born 1936) and many other visionaries who, in their turn, influence the imagination of many Japanese artists, such as Suzuki Tadashi (born 1939).

It can therefore be said that *nō*, so different from the Western theatre, has extraordinary power. Passed from father to son for over six hundred years, it invariably remains a bastion of Japanese tradition, but the universal strength of its simplicity and credibility of the truth about human being penetrates more and more beyond the boundaries of time and space, revolutionizing Western theatre, through which it also stimulates the development of the native theatre. Thus a closed circle of artistic interactions has been created, which makes the modern Western theatre more and more connected with *nō*.

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