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WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND THE NOH, THE CONCEPT OF
SPIRITUAL REALITY IN AT THE HAWK'S WELL AND
ATSUMORI

By

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

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1974

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...there is for every man some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture that is the image of his secret life, for wisdom first speaks in images, and that this one image, if he would but brood over it his life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world, into that far household where the undying gods await all whose souls have become simple as flame, whose bodies have become quiet as an agate lamp.

William Butler Yeats
"The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry"

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INTRODUCTION

I need a theatre; I believe myself to be a dramatist; I desire to show events and not merely to tell of them; . . . and I seem to myself most alive at the moment when a room full of people share the one lofty emotion. My blunder has been that I did not discover in my youth that my theatre must be the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against the wall.

William Butler Yeats¹

William Butler Yeats believed that "drama is a picture of the soul of man not his exterior life."² In Samhain of 1904 Yeats spoke of a dramatic art which reveals the "energy" of the soul and stated that "we, who are believers, cannot see reality anywhere but in the soul itself."³ For Yeats the most serious subject for drama was this reality, which he saw as the struggle of the spiritual with the natural order taking place in the depths of the soul. It is in the soul that those difficult spiritual tests occur

¹William Butler Yeats, "Note on At the Hawk's Well," Four Plays for Dancers (London: Macmillan, 1921), p. 86.

²Yeats, "Freedom of the Theatre," United Irishman (November 1, 1902):5. Quoted in Robin Skelton and Ann Saddlemyer, ed., The World of W.B. Yeats (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965).

³Yeats, Explorations. Selected by Mrs. W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 170.

that shape a man's destiny in the external world. He felt that the long decline in the arts was "but the shadow of a declining faith in an unseen reality,"¹ and he sought a dramatic art which could deal with the spiritual core of man's existence on the living stage. Yeats was convinced that spiritual reality exists, that man is capable of perceiving it. Much of his creative energy went into the search for a dramatic art which would allow him to dramatize the nature of spiritual reality in terms of an internal struggle in the soul between the natural and supernatural.² In 1915 he clearly defined the dramatic situation which was to be the central concern of his later plays,

Now the art I long for is also a battle, but it takes place in the depths of the soul and one of the antagonists does not wear a shape known to the world or speak a mortal tongue. It is the struggle of the dream with the world--it is only possible when we transcend circumstances and ourselves, and the greater the contest, the greater the art.....³

Yeats's primary problem was to find a way for the dramatic form itself to reflect the inner conflicts of the soul

¹Ibid.

²This interpretation of Yeats's dramatic problem is supported by Leonard E. Nathan, The Tragic Drama of William Butler Yeats (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965) and by John Rees Moore, Masks of Love and Death (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971). Further references will be made to these works.

³Yeats, The Poet and the Actress, unfinished dialogue of 1915 quoted in Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 105.

which were invisible to the outer world. His quest for an ideal dramatic form which was lyrical, symbolic, not unlike a religious ritual,¹ resulted in his creation of a poetic drama inspired by the example of the Japanese Noh.² Yeats was introduced to the Noh in 1913 by Ezra Pound who was editing the translations of Ernest Fenollosa for the book "Noh" or Accomplishment (1916). Most of the plays that were translated for this book were written or revised by the undisputed master of Noh, Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1444). Fenollosa's comments on the Noh and his translations introduced Yeats to the attitudes and poetic ideals which had been established by this dramatist of Medieval Japan, who like himself had sought not a realistic representational art form but a symbolic drama capable of revealing the spiritual reality at the heart of the human condition. Yeats was impressed with the dramatic solutions the Noh offered to the problems of effectively dramatizing spiritual reality on the stage. Leonard Nathan writes: "In its strict refusal

¹ In a letter to Sturge Moore in 1926 Yeats admitted, "I write not drama but the ritual of a lost faith." Quoted in Ursula Bridge, ed. W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore; their Correspondence, 1901-1937 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 154.

²There are two acceptable spellings for this type of Japanese drama; Noh and Nō. The former will be used in the text but the latter occurs in quotes from other sources. According to Donald Keene Noh means "talent" or "display of talent in performance." Donald Keene, Nō the Classical Theatre of Japan (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1973), p. 9.

to compromise with realism, its intense concentration of effect, and its frank inclusion of the supernatural, the Noh seemed to Yeats the answer to his long. . . search for an ideal theatre."¹ Yeats gave up writing for the Abbey theatre in 1910 because of the increasing demand for more realistic drama and turned to a less "popular" theatre. With this decision and the influence of the Noh, Yeats's drama moved further away from the imitation of reality than ever and became more inward in its concerns.² The philosophical assumptions which were to provide the foundation for his drama seemed to be implied in the Noh. For Yeats the Noh form became a viable means for expressing the inexpressible mystery of man's spiritual condition. The Noh encouraged him in his desire to produce a serious dramatic embodiment of his world view.

The purpose of this paper is to consider the dramatic methods revealed in the texts of the plays used by Yeats and Zeami for the presentation of spiritual reality. The primary emphasis will be on Yeats's first experiment in the Noh form, At the Hawk's Well (1916) and Zeami's Atsumori.

The remainder of the introduction concerns a definition of Zeami's Noh from an historical and aesthetic perspective followed by a review of Yeats's thoughts on poetic

¹Nathan, p. 167.

²Moore, p. 198.

drama and his subsequent reaction to Noh. In the first chapter the philosophical similarities and differences in the spiritual messages of these plays will be discussed. The next three chapters on characterization and chorus, lyrical atmosphere and symbolism, explore the incorporation of the spiritual into the dramatic format as an essential dramatic element. This study will attempt to illustrate the ideas of poetic drama conceived by two artists of different traditions and to illuminate some of the essential features of their works which transcend differences of language and literary convention.

The Noh owes its present form chiefly to the genius of Zeami and his father, Kanami Kiyotsugu (1333-1384). The dramatic art which these two men refined was derived from several earlier art forms which like the Noh, included dance, mime, and recitation. One of these was gigaku, a dancing performance imported from China about 612 A.D., consisting of masked processions and dances accompanied by flutes and drums. Bugaku, stately court dances with masks and costumes were also from China and gained popularity around 750 A.D. The division of each bugaku performance into three musical sections of increasingly rapid tempo, jo (introduction), ha (exposition) and kyū (conclusion), was a vital contribution to the structural and rhythmical organization of the Noh as it was finally defined. The folk

elements of Noh come primarily from dengaku, "field music", an indigenous art form. A folk dance ritual associated with rice planting and harvesting and made up of songs and dances of the country people, it eventually developed into poetic performances alternating dance and recitation. Another early model for Noh is found in sarugaku meaning "monkey music" which was originally a variety show entertainment that later developed into a realistic form of drama. By early Kamakura times (1185-1333) sarugaku and dengaku began to fuse. About this same time another early dramatic form called ennen, ceremonies of prayer for the prolongation of an exalted person's life, influenced these existing forms. Ennen provided a model for Noh of how old songs, quotations from religious and secular literature, and a vocabulary including words of Chinese as well as of Japanese origins might impart a dignity and beauty not found in older forms of drama.¹ The sarugaku actors began to present plays of a religious nature as entertainment to the populace and by the middle of the fourteenth century these plays had become serious dramatic performances called sarugaku Noh and dengaku Noh, Noh meaning accomplishment and implying that these performers were professional. As these various art forms merged into the form now called Noh, the plot

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Keene, p. 30.

became centered around an historic episode, with the chief character performing songs and dances. The 'dream' Noh which introduced supernatural characters was "superbly suited for the transformation of Noh into a medium of poetic elegance and the stage into a vehicle of poetic imagination"¹ and was developed after the historic dramatic form of Noh.

The Noh developed during Japan's feudal age, the Kamakura (1192-1336) and the Muromachi eras (1338-1568), a time of painful change and destruction as the peace and tranquility of the Heian world gave way to feudal warfare. In the Noh there is an intense awareness of the tragedy of life reflecting fear of the "end of Law", a term referring to the total obscuring of the Buddha's teachings. Japanese life and art was coloured by a profound sense of the transitoriness of life. The sad impermanence of human life and the fact of death were constant themes of Noh. Dominated by this despair, medieval Japan had

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Japanese Noh Drama, trans. Japanese Classics Translation Committee of the Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, 1955, 1959, 1960), 3: xv. The historical and cultural information on the Noh has been derived from this work and the following: Earle Ernst, Three Japanese Plays (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); Donald Keene, Nō The Classical Theatre of Japan (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1973); Ryusaku Tsunoda, William Theodore de Bary, Donald Keene, Sources of Japanese Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Makoto Ueda, The Old Pine Tree and Other Noh Plays (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962); Makoto Ueda, Zeami, Basho, Yeats, Pound (London: Mouton, 1965); Arthur Waley, The Nō Plays of Japan (New York: Grove Press, Evergreen Books, 1950). Further references will be made to these works.

a great need for eternal and incorruptible values such as those expressed in the new popular Buddhist faiths which all sought to bring salvation within reach of ordinary man.¹ Although the ultimate goal of attaining enlightenment was the same, the method of achieving it varied from the Amidist emphasis on repeating the formula "Namu Amida Butsu" and a reliance on the saving power of Buddha, to the rigorous mediative practices of Zen with its emphasis on self-reliance and contemplative introspection. Noh drama reflected the deeply felt religious concerns of the age.

During this Medieval period the court ceased to be the creative center of new works of art and concentrated on the preservation of existing forms. The new warrior class sought a cultural climate in which to increase their artistic sensibility and out of this demand grew the popularization of the classical court culture of the Heian period (794-1185) among warriors and commoners alike. Noh drama developed in response to this need and found support among the aristocracy as well as the warrior class and commoners. Zeami reflected this situation when he said, "the purpose of all art is to bring sweetness to the hearts of all people and to harmonize high and low."²

¹Tsunoda et al., p. 286.

²Zeami, quoted in Japanese Noh Drama, 3: xxi.

It has been said that Zeami wrote for the uncultivated public but never allowed his work to descend to the level of the minds of his audience. He perfected a noble form of drama, a synthesis of the highest elements of past culture, music, poetry, dance and mimicry.¹

Zeami wrote many essays on the aesthetics of Noh to insure the further development of the art to which he devoted his life. His primary focus was on the spiritual strength and artistic ability of the actor to reach the high level of performance necessary to convey the spiritual message of the play. The principle of imitation and the ideal of elegance were the most important to the art of acting. It is unfortunate that in most studies on the Noh an appreciation of the texts has been overshadowed by an exclusive attention to non-literary elements. Yet the profound and sensitive nature of the concepts Zeami developed makes them valuable in a consideration of the plays themselves as literature. Of the sixteen treatises which make up Zeami's Works, the one most often mentioned in critical studies is the Kadensho (The Book of the Transmission of the Flower.)²

¹Ibid.

²Arthur Waley in The Nō Plays of Japan (p. 21) points out that it was a later sixteenth century version of this book that Ernest Fenollosa quoted in "Noh" or Accomplishment. The original Kadensho was recovered in 1908.

Zeami was also responsible for the classification of Noh plays into five categories. One play from each category alternated with comedies called kyogen arranged according to the principle of rhythm (jo, ha, kyū) which also structures the individual plays, made up a Noh program, a "complete service of life."¹ Donald Keene outlines these categories as follows: "(1) plays about the gods, (waki No); (2) plays about martial heroes (shuramono); (3) plays about women (kazuramono); (4) plays of a miscellaneous or contemporary character (genzaimono); and (5) plays about demons (kiri No)."² Noh plays can be further classified into two larger groups, i.e. those that are set in the 'real' world and deal with the sorrow of separation of people from each other, and those 'dream' Noh that involve the spiritual quest of an apparition or supernatural being.³ Atsumori, the drama by Zeami discussed in this paper, is a 'dream' Noh dealing with a supernatural being and is of the second category, shuramono. It is considered to be one of the most

¹Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, "Noh" or Accomplishment (London: Macmillan, 1916), p. 16.

²Keene, p. 21.

³Ezra Pound in "Noh" or Accomplishment (p. 18), points out that "the lover of stage and the lover of drama and of poetry will find his chief interest in.....the plays of Spirits...."

dramatic of the dream Noh plays. The plot is derived from the Tale of the Heike, a loosely woven novel of the events of the wars between the Taira and Minamoto clans which were climaxed in the final defeat of the Taira in the battle of Ichi-no-tani in 1184.

Basically the Noh is a poetic drama concerned with a remote or supernatural event, performed by a dancer, often masked, who shares with a chorus and secondary figures the recitation of his story of inner suffering. Earl Miner gives this general definition of Noh:

Nō is a relatively short dramatic form with certain qualities taken from the Japanese religions. Its use of ritualistic, symbolic dance seems to owe much to various Shinto rituals; its thought, subjects, and form are derived from Zen and other sects of Buddhism. Nō was perfected in the fourteenth century, and its repertory of plays with religious, historical, and literary subjects has remained all but unchanged from feudal times. It employs masks and rich costumes, a chorus which takes no part in the action, and a small rhythmic orchestra; it is a highly poetic and stylized dramatic form presented on a bare, elevated stage open to the audience on three sides.¹

All the dramatic and literary elements of Noh including subject matter, language, character, masks, gesture, dance, music, stage setting, and properties, with the exception of the elaborate costumes which stem from the early influence of Esoteric Buddhism, follow the artistic restriction and reduction characteristic of Zen art. This dramatic

¹
Earl Miner, The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) p. 283.

approach represents a distillation of human experience to its essence, as this essence is reflected in Buddhist philosophy.¹

The stage is without scenic embellishments, except for the stylized pine tree at the back, and there is no attempt to use space as a dimension of the real world. The sparingly used properties are extensions of the main character and are reduced to their essential form indicated only by outlines.

The main actor of a Noh play is called the shite, "doer" or actor. He is both man and spirit existing in a shadowy world balanced between life and death. The shite is accompanied by the waki, "assistant", who will act as an interpreter for the audience and liaison between the natural and spiritual. There may also be auxiliary characters, tsure. These few characters share the highly symbolic setting with a chorus of eight or twelve singers who interpret the action and often assume the verbal role of an actor while he dances. Masks worn by the main character reveal shades of emotion between joy and grief on an otherwise expressionless surface through the actors subtle movements catching light and shadow. The shite performs many stylized dance-like movements as well as the climatic dance which expresses in the whole body the joy or torment at the heart of the play.²

¹Ernst, p. 5.

²Ernst, pp. 4-10.

The Noh texts reveal the same remoteness from realistic detail characteristic of non-literary elements. They are a combination of verse (utai) and prose (kotoba) and should, according to Zeami, be as brief as possible. The Noh dramatist drew from a diverse selection of literary sources: Japanese and Chinese poetry, ancient legends, and great epic tales of Japanese literature. The liberal use of quotations and allusions which are woven into the text creating an organic poetic whole, give Noh plays a setting far beyond the immediate plot.¹

Noh reaches out toward eternity through beauty and the elimination of the temporal and accidental. Zeami wanted to lead his audience to Buddhist truth through the experience of yūgen, an absolute beauty which as his highest poetic ideal permeates all aspects of Noh; atmosphere, acting and poetic language. Yūgen is a mysterious indefinable presence which lies below the surface of things.² The lyricism and symbolism of the Noh texts provided a means for the expression of the depth of meaning revealed in yūgen.

The Noh before Zeami's day was essentially a representational theatre, with the attempt being made in a manner not very different from that in the West to portray on the stage the actions of dramatic personages. Zeami, however, chose to make of the Noh a symbolic theatre in which the

¹Japanese Noh Drama, 3:xii, xvi.

²Keene, p. 23.

most important actions were not represented but suggested,¹ Yeats's desire for a "mysterious art....doing its work by suggestion,"² echoes Zeami's thought. Since the spiritual level of reality is to be grasped intuitively and cannot be known through ordinary senses, it is presented through symbols. The Noh as Zeami developed it portrays symbolically in words, music and dance the tragic climaxes of profound emotions. Zeami wanted the Noh to reveal that other level of reality far beneath the conscious level of the mind of which tangible reality is but a shadow. The purpose of Noh, states Keene, is "not to divert on the surface but to move profoundly and ultimately to transcend the particular and touch the very springs of human emotions."³ The type of Noh which best suited this ideal was the 'dream' Noh as Zeami developed it.

The Japanese Committee for the Translation of Classical Texts comments on the 'dream' Noh as follows:

¹ Tsunoda et al., p. 286.

² Yeats, Plays and Controversies (New York: Macmillan, 1923), p. 213.

³ Keene, p. 15.

Many critics are inclined to regard the dramatic Noh in two acts as the most advanced form of Noh, but the 'dream' Noh has a number of characteristics which make it a more justifiable contendant for that claim, for this type of Noh play is richer in poetic and symbolic beauty, and by abolishing the limits of time and space and transcending the distinction between the real and the unreal, it is capable of presenting characters without the limitations of realism.¹

In the two-act 'dream' Noh, the main character, the shite, is the ghost of a hero or some extraordinary person. In the first act the ghost presents himself disguised as a commoner. A visitor to the area, the waki, usually a priest, meets the commoner who relates the story of his inner suffering which is the theme of the play. When the waki's curiosity is aroused and he begins to ask questions, the main character hints at his real identity and then disappears. He returns in his true form in the second part to act out his grief or torment. In this technique of 'double' apparition the protagonist in both parts is the same spirit, although appearing in a different disguise in the two acts.² The central character of many of Zeami's plays is a spiritual being, someone from a world beyond our own which can only be symbolized. The climax of the play is the final dance which symbolizes the character's anguish and his quest for salvation. Most of Zeami's 'dream' Noh follow this pattern. The world of Zeami's Noh is remote

¹ Japanese Noh Drama 3:xiv.

² Ibid., p. xv.

and shadowy, simple and profound, bare yet evocative. It is a ritual which brings this other world experienced usually only in the subconscious depths of man's mind to the audience.

Zeami's drama reflects the spiritual eclecticism characteristic of the Japanese approach to religion. In his Noh plays he combines the other worldly concerns of Buddhism with elements from animistic Shinto beliefs which focus on a love of this world. The use of ghosts returning from the world of the dead to speak to the living derive from the early ill-defined Shamanistic religions.¹ The concept of spiritual reality proposed by Noh is primarily from Mahayana Buddhism with its emphasis on the experience of liberation rather than on an intellectual philosophical system.²

¹ Keene, p. 28.

² "The Mahayana distinguishes itself from the Buddhism of the Pali Canon by terming the latter the little (hina) Vehicle (yana) of liberation and itself the Great (mana) Vehicle-great because it comprises such a wealth of upaya, or methods for realization of nirvana." Alan Watts, The Way of Zen (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), p. 59. Information concerning Buddhism was derived from this book and from John Blofeld, The Tantric Mysticism of Tibet (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970), pp. 45-58. The aesthetic principles of Noh, discussed later, derive from Zen Buddhism which arose from central Mahayana doctrines.

Noh deals with the common belief that reality is two fold and with the tragic impact of this belief on man in his dividedness. Noh texts, following Buddhist tenets, reveal that this apparent duality is a delusion and focus on the tragic inability of the shite to recognize the oneness of all things which thwarts his achievement of Nirvana. Nirvana has been described as "a state of being beyond duality in which all beings are one with one another and with Nirvana itself."¹ The shite's attachment to the material world, his obsessions and desires, create a conflict between the natural and the spiritual world in the depths of the mind. The Noh shite expresses the tension in his innermost being between the two realities in language and gesture. Unable to attain Nirvana, liberation, he is caught in a purgatorial suspension between the natural and supernatural.

Zeami celebrated emotion over intellect for he realized as did Yeats that in dealing with man's aspiration to what lies beyond the natural it was necessary to focus on the inner emotions. In their intensity and purity, emotions link man to spiritual reality. In Buddhism it is man's attachment to these desires and passions which prevent the realization of the oneness of all things. Yet it is precisely through his deeply felt emotions and subsequent

¹
Blofeld, p. 50.

suffering that the divided man begins to perceive the essence of things. Zeami makes no attempt at naturalistic character portrayal but rather is concerned with the universality of the experience of liberation. The Noh shite is most often a spiritual being who is possessed of few individual qualities and is usually the incarnation of some powerful emotion, such as possessive jealousy, overwhelming remorse, or unforgiving enmity.¹ In spite of its dream-like, other worldly atmosphere the Noh is realistic in its evocations of what men and women experience in the depths of the soul. This realism, which according to Keene is the glory of Noh and separates it from other fantasy-oriented forms of Japanese theatre, "is found at its intensest in the slow moving drama of Zeami."² Nathan similarly notes that Yeats realized that "the truly realistic dramatist was one who could represent on the stage emotion elevated to passionate intensity."³ Yeats, however, places his emphasis on the dramatic character possessing a passion which is necessary to the achievement of Unity of Being while in Noh the character's obsession prevents him from Self-realization and the attainment of Nirvana. In Yeat's vision of man's spiritual struggle the tragic hero continues to be the center of cosmic tension even after

¹Keene, p. 28.

²Keene, p. 16.

³Nathan, P. 15.

a momentary glimpse of Unity of Being. Yeats sought a state of being in which opposites are reconciled, and the hero is in harmony with duality. The ultimate message of Noh is that man's tragic condition is dissolved by initiation into religious enlightenment, a state of being beyond duality.¹ All passion, all suffering, and all attachment to the world ceases to exist when the Noh shite realizes the oneness of all things.

Such, in outline, is the essence of Noh, a spiritually profound drama, which had an obvious appeal for a dramatist who felt that drama, like all arts, is a "moment of intense life...and action reduced to its simplest form...."² This Yeatsian ideal is a concise description of Noh plays with their emotional profundity and aesthetic simplicity. The Noh provided a form allowing for the natural development of certain tendencies in Yeats's early plays. From the beginning of his career as a playwright Yeats rejected both the traditional theatre and the new realistic theatre as models for the drama he envisioned because neither dealt seriously with spiritual reality. The Victorian melodramatic revival of Elizabethan theatre reduced the poetic to rhetoric, and used the spiritual as a melodramatic device.³ Yeats felt that the realist theatre reduced man's

¹ Ueda, Zeami, p. 131.

² Yeats, Explorations, p. 153.

³ Nathan, p.7-9.

stature in both art and life by the exclusion of spiritual reality, by a "concentration on the surface of things, the outsides of men and things never treating them as clues which lead to a different sort of world within."¹ The example of the Noh suggested to Yeats a possibility for a dramatic combination of lyricism, symbolism, and austerity which allowed a vision of human perfection that included man's spiritual nature. In 1913 this relatively unknown dramatic art encouraged Yeats to move unhesitatingly in the direction of his ideal poetic drama.

The second decade of the 20th century was an intense and inspiring period for Yeats's imaginative life. His invention of a new dramatic possibility encouraged by the Noh was preceded by his own reevaluation of the type of drama he wished to create in the essay "The Tragic Theatre" (1910). Yeats wanted to write drama in which the audience would be carried from passion to perception, "beyond time and persons to where passion living through its thousand purgatorial years, as in the wink of an eye becomes wisdom,"² a drama in which the soul recognizes that in the struggle

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Ibid., p. 154.

²Yeats, "The Tragic Theatre", Essays and Introductions (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 239.

with its opposite it transcends its incompleteness. In this mainly "tragic art" Yeats would "exclude or lessen character" and "diminish the power of that daily mood", for "if the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance."¹ In this essay Yeats is moving away from "modern vitality" to a view of life "trembling into stillness and silence."²

Tragic art, passionate art, the drowner of dykes, the confounder of understanding, moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance. The persons upon the stage, let us say, greaten till they are humanity itself. We feel our minds expand convulsively or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened image crowded sea.³

Yeats's new dramatic form was built out of what he had learned from the nineties' experiments with aestheticism culminating in the highly symbolic The Shadowy Waters, and from the tragic comedy of the middle plays,⁴ where

¹Ibid., p. 243.

²Ibid., p. 244.

³Ibid., p. 245.

⁴Nathan, p. 155.

spiritual intimacy, absorbed by the claims of the natural, had been replaced by the psychologically real. In "Discoveries" (1906) Yeats had defined the two ways before literature: "Upward into ever-growing subtlety, with Verhaeren, with Mallarme, with Maeterlinck, until at last, it may be, a new agreement among refined and studious men gives birth to a new passion, and what seems literature becomes religion; or downward, taking the soul with us until all is simplified and solidified again."¹ What Yeats sought in these Four Plays seems to have been a simultaneous experience of both ways, the melding of "Shelley's Chapel of the Morning Star" and "Burns's beerhouse"² a wedding of passion and perfection. Both Yeats and the Noh master Zeami held the view that, although there is a higher reality, a hidden truth, the essence of the heroic spirit rises out of a world inhabited by common people who are in close proximity to spiritual reality. Yeats was no doubt impressed with the "aristocratic" flavour of Noh, but this was partly because he defined ~~that~~ quality as a reflection of the deeply felt experience and knowledge of the common people which is shaped and presented by the imaginative power of the artist. Yeats

¹ Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays, p. 267.

² Ibid.

said, "I love all the arts which remind me of their origin among the common people."¹

Yeats felt that in his earlier plays he had failed to produce a drama in which the depth of the mind could be revealed on the actual stage. After redefining his dramatic approach in the first years of the twentieth century, he was ready for the catalyst which the Noh provided. During the years 1913-1916 Yeats spent part of each winter at Stone Cottage with Ezra Pound who was editing Ernest Fenollosa's notes on and translations of several Noh plays for publication in "Noh" or Accomplishment (1916). Fenollosa and Pound interpreted the Noh in a manner that suggested possibilities for poetic drama not offered by the traditional or realist drama. Fenollosa was chiefly concerned with the spiritual profundity of Noh, asserting that in this Japanese form the deepest emotions could be "elevated to the plane of universality by the intensity and purity of treatment...the most striking thing about these

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Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Essays, p. 223. In the essay "Ireland and the Arts" (p. 203) Yeats defines his position: "We who care deeply about the arts find ourselves the priesthood of an almost forgotten faith, and we must, I think, if we would win the people again, take upon ourselves the method and fervour of a priesthood. We must be half humble and half proud. We see the perfect more than others, it may be, but we must find the passions among the people."

plays is their marvelously complete grasp of spiritual being."¹ In these translations Yeats surely recognized many of his own themes: the conflict between body and spirit, emotion and intellect; the concept of evil as resulting from the shattering of unity and manifested in the tension of opposites rather than as an intrinsic separate force; and the freedom to delve completely and without apology into the realm of the spiritual.² The Noh further appealed to Yeats because of the symbolic use of nature, the extreme lyricism, the purposeful lack of characterization, the emphasis on "experiencing"³ rather than observing, and the pursuit of an ideal beauty, identical with hidden truth which is revealed through suggestion. The Noh also confirmed Yeats's ideal that "we must from time to time substitute for the movements that the heart sees, the

¹Fenollosa, p. 121. Noh is a significant aspect of Yeats's interest in the East evident in his early poetry and lasting throughout his life. Among the books which deal with the influence of the East on Yeats are Earl Miner, The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature; Shotaro Oshima, W.B. Yeats and Japan (Tokyo, 1965); Hiro Ishibashi, Yeats and the Noh (Dolman Press, 1966).

²Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 185.

³Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 157. "The greatest art symbolizes not those things that we have observed so much as those things we have experienced, and when the imaginary saint or lover or hero moves us most deeply, it is the moment when he awakens within us, for an instant our own heroism, our own sanctity, our own desire."

rhythmical movements that seem to flame up into the imagination from some deeper life than that of the individual soul."¹

Although, as Donald Keene has pointed out, the Fenollosa-Pound translations are often inadequate and in some cases confused as to plot and characterization, there is, nevertheless, a great sensitivity to the lyrical beauty, aesthetic ideals, and spiritual profundity of the Noh derived from the personal experience of Ernest Fenollosa who spent years learning the intricacies of the art. Yeats never had the opportunity of seeing an actual performance of Noh and his knowledge of it was based primarily on his reading of these notes and translations. This was supplemented by Maria Stopes' book, Plays of Old Japan (1913).

In the 1914 essay "Swedenborg, Mediums, and Desolate Places" Yeats first began to assimilate the Noh to his own thoughts.

Last winter Mr. Ezra Pound was editing the late Professor Fenollosa's translations of the Noh drama of Japan, and read me a great deal of what he was doing. Nearly all that my fat old woman in Soho learns from her familiars is there in an unsurpassed lyric poetry and in strange and poignant fables once danced or sang in the houses of nobles.²

¹ Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 48.

² Yeats, "Swedenborg, Mediums, and Desolate Places," Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland, ed. Lady Gregory (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), p. 333.

In this essay Yeats asserts that faith in the emotional life and its relationship to man's spiritual goals also revealed in Zeami's Noh. Finding empathy with Swedenborg's philosophy of the soul, Yeats remarks that "all pleasure and pain of sensible life awaken again and again, all our passionate events rush up about us and not as seeming imagination, for imagination is now the world."¹ He speaks further of a change in which "we...possess only those memories we have related to our emotion or our thought; all that was accidental or habitual dies away and we begin an active present life."²

In another passage reminiscent of Noh origins in folk beliefs and arts, and the consequent use of concrete images, Yeats states that:

....An impulse towards what is definite and sensuous, and an indifference towards the abstract and the general, are the lineaments, as I understand the world, of all that comes not from the learned, but out of common antiquity, out of the 'folk' as we say,....³

At the same time that Yeats was formulating a new dramatic approach inspired by the encouraging example of

¹
Ibid., p. 301.

²
Ibid., p. 302.

³
Ibid., p. 309.

the Noh that a drama revealing states of being was indeed possible, he was also redefining his philosophical views which were eventually published in Per Amica Silentia Lunae in 1918.

I have always sought to bring my mind close to the mind of Indian and Japanese poets, old women in Connaught, mediums in Soho, to immerse it in the general mind where that mind is scarce separable¹ from what we have begun to call the subconscious.

In Per Amica Yeats defined the relationship between the natural and the supernatural orders of experience. Briefly, the tragic hero must endure the discipline of terrestrial divisiveness through suffering which should make possible the transcendence to the "condition of fire", the Anima Mundi, where being achieves the ideal state: completion, unity and ecstatic harmony with the universe. In his passionate longing for spiritual perfection, the tragic hero must strive against the natural world and his emotional attachments to that world. Yet the very character of the world, its perpetual divisiveness makes Unity of Being impossible. Thus the conflict is an eternal one during which the hero may attain a momentary glimpse of Unity of Being. In the plays modelled on the Noh, desire and dream act out the conflict in the depths of the mind which results in suffering and sometimes in tragic ecstasy.²

¹Yeats, Per Amica Silentia Lunae (London: Macmillan, 1918), p.51. It would be interesting to note the similarities between Yeats's Anima Mundi, Jung's Collective Unconscious and Zeami's Way of Emptiness.

²Nathan, pp. 162-164.

Per Amica is also an introduction to the Four Plays for Dancers, the later poems in the Wild Swans at Coole, and to the Vision. The dramaturgy which supported his theoretical conclusions was outlined in his introduction to Certain Noble Plays, Japan (1916), while the Four Plays for Dancers (1921) became the dramatic conclusion for the actual stage.¹

Yeats translated the Noh into his own terms and outlined the program his plays would follow in his introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan. He refused to submit to the "picture-making of the modern stage"² and was impressed with the unadorned Noh stage and the symbolic properties. Yeats, who had used a chorus in some earlier plays such as Deirdre in a manner similar to the Greek plays, was influenced by the integrative and interpretative use of the Noh chorus. The subtle, intense, and often harsh accompanying music which created with flute and drums the sense of a strange other reality, and the climactic and symbolic dance were two other elements Yeats used with variations in his own plays. He was intrigued with the dramatic function of the mask in Noh which he interpreted symbolically as an

¹Yeats published four of the plays from "Noh" or Accomplishment: Nishikigi, Hagormomo, Kumasaka, and Kagekiyo, to which he added his own introduction. This chronology is mentioned in Nathan, pp. 160-161.

²Yeats, "Samhain: 1904," Explorations, p. 173.

image of those "profound emotions that exist only in solitude and in silence."¹

In Certain Noble Plays of Japan Yeats summed up these dramatic principles:

There will be no scenery, for three musicians, whose seeming sunburned faces will, I hope, suggest that they have wandered from village to village in some country of our dreams, can describe place and weather, and at moments action, and accompany it all by drum and gong or flute and dulcimer. Instead of the players working themselves into a violence of passion indecorous to our sitting room, the music, the beauty of form and voice all come to a climax in pantomimic dance.²

Yeats learned much from the formal principles of dramatic presentation of the Noh, but he was especially attracted by the central lyric quality which could touch the inner silence of the mind and create a single impression, and by the metaphorical pattern of thinking which allowed the effective delineation of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural: "I wonder am I fanciful in discovering in the plays themselves a playing upon a single metaphor, as deliberate as the echoing rhythm of line in Chinese and Japanese painting."³

¹Yeats, "Note on At the Hawk's Well," Four Plays for Dancers, p. 87.

²Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Essays, p. 221.

³Ibid., pp. 233-234.

In his ideal drama which he viewed as tragic, heroic and spiritual, Yeats sought, as Zeami had, a dramatic convention which allowed the full expression of man's potentiality for spiritual achievement. He felt that drama ought to suggest the common life all men share in the depths of the Anima Mundi. In the Four Plays for Dancers Yeats turned his attention away from the "emotion of the multitude" to a less popular kind of theatre which emphasized the strangeness and intimacy of the emotion of solitude.¹ In these plays, adaptations not copies, he attempted to present tragic passion within the narrow ritualistic and austere dramatic frame of Noh.²

I desire a mysterious art always reminding and half-reminding those who understand it of dearly loved things, doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space-pervading like the intellect but a memory and a prophecy.³

¹ Moore, p. 194.

² Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 183. The influence of Noh on the dramatic form Yeats finally synthesized is discussed in varying degrees by the critics of Yeats's plays including: Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); David Clark, W.B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality, (Dublin: Dolman Press, 1965); Hiro Ishibashi, Yeats and the Noh (Dublin: Dolman Press, 1966); Moore, Masks of Love and Death; Peter Ure, Yeats the Playwright (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963).

³ Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 213.

Yeats created a theatre in which the primary focus is on a spiritual struggle in the depths of the mind. The Four Plays for Dancers are part of Yeats's religious quest to hold against a pushing, skeptical world the world of spiritual reality.¹

¹ Nathan, p. 166.

CHAPTER I

SPIRITUAL REALITY

The dramatic concept which infuses both Zeami's Noh plays and Yeats's Four Plays for Dancers is based on a perception of the human condition which defines man's essence as spiritual as well as natural. This view of human nature suggests an apparent duality between two orders of reality: natural and supernatural; visible and invisible. Inner conflict and suffering stem from the inability of man to reconcile these two realities within the depths of the mind. However, suffering may be the way in which man perceives truth. The characters in these plays who suffer because of their divided natures, are images of desire, i.e. desire for union with divine reality: Unity of Being in Yeatsian terms; Nirvana in Buddhist terms. Both Zeami and Yeats insisted on the primacy of spiritual conversion in their plays. The busy mundane existence of man fades away in the pursuit of the eternal gestures of spiritual identity.

Yeats was impressed by Ernest Fenollosa's comments on the spiritual basis of Noh, to which he was introduced in

1913 at a time when he was putting his own theories about spiritual reality into focus. Fenollosa observed that:

...The most striking thing about these plays is their marvelously complete grasp of spiritual being. They deal more with heroes or even ghosts, than with men clothed in the flesh.In no other drama does the supernatural play so great, so intimate a part...we see great characters operating under the conditions of spirit life, we observe what forces have changed them.¹

In this chapter the "conditions" of spiritual reality which inform the action of Zeami's Noh and Yeats's Dance Plays, and the "forces" that inspire a revelation in the main character will be explored in terms of the philosophical assumptions which underlie these plays. The spiritual existence of conflict and suffering which the Noh shite experiences has been described as tragic. Marie Stopes in 1913 asserted that "the ground note of Noh is human tragedy. Their tragedy is of the fundamental kind that depends on the very nature of our being...."² Donald Keene, a contemporary scholar of Noh sees Zeami's drama as tragic in their dealing with profound human emotions which bring the hero or heroine to great inner suffering.³ Ueda points out, however, that the Noh is not dealing with the tragic vision which places an individual with a tragic flaw in a contest with fate.

¹Fenollosa, p. 121.

²Maria Stopes, Plays of Old Japan (London: William Heinemann, 1913), p. 34.

³Keene, p. 22.

The focus is rather on the inability of the shite to realize ultimate truth.¹ Noh is perhaps best described as tragedy once removed, and is presented through the phenomenon of 'dreaming back'. It begins where Western tragic drama ends. Noh spirit drama is almost always concerned with the hero after death who lingers in the world, unable to renounce worldly desires. His longing for both the natural world of the past and spiritual world of peace creates his divided nature and internal conflict which among other things, characterizes the tragic hero. If the tragic events of the past, which the Noh text alludes to, were represented on the stage a Noh play would be better described by the term melodramatic. But the actual events are presented through a veil, seen from a great distance, revealed in the shite's confessional tale. Only the essence of the tragic experience remains to follow the hero into his purgatorial life yet the intensity of his suffering is not diminished. As Ernst points out this view of tragedy comes close to what Maeterlinck describes as "the truly tragic life which begins only at the moment when what are called adventures, sorrows or dangers have passed."²

¹ Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. xiv.

² Ernst, p. 13.

This focus on the shite's spiritual after life as the fulcrum of the drama is partially explained by the Buddhist belief in the karmic¹ recycling of events and actions in the Round of Birth and Death called Samsara, and partially by the aesthetic principle which recognizes that this realm of the spiritual is more conducive than the naturalistic world to the lyrical expression of beauty which Zeami sought to share with his audience along with his spiritual vision.

The vision of tragedy which permeates Noh is defined by Buddhist philosophy. The essential point in Buddhism is a belief in the existence of a supramundane alternative to the wretchedness of life. The whole purpose of Buddhism is to point the way to the permanent destruction of suffering. Buddhism, unlike Christianity with its doctrine of eternal Hell, postulates that ultimately every sentient being will attain the bliss that is called Nirvana. Nirvana, divine reality, is a state to be attained, a state of being beyond duality in which one recognizes the oneness of all things. The Buddha selected duhkha or suffering as the starting point of his teaching. Suffering is caused by desire or aversion. It is described by Blofeld as

¹
Karma is defined by Alan Watts as the active principle of the round of birth and death; "conditioned action." The Way of Zen, p. 49. John Blofeld explains that "Karma (causatory energy) leads to chains of action and reaction extending from life to life and governing the circumstances of each." The Tantric Mysticism of Tibet, p. 60.

"the sense of lacking" and as such inspires the frantic grasping characteristic of much human life.¹ In the Noh the shite's suffering is the result of an emotional obsession which prevents him from self-realization. This is expressed in Zeami's Noh play, Battle at Yashima: "Yet a man's soul may haunt the world after he dies; for human passion if too fierce to leave this life, out of itself creates a hell where the soul goes through torments, wraths and struggles"² Karmic accretions such as desires, must be shattered. The Noh characters are obsessed with their earthly passions which continue to bind them to the world of actuality and prevent their attainment of Nirvana. These spirits, apparitions from another world, are unsubstantial evocations of a single emotion such as jealousy, hate, revenge, which haunts the tortured spirits.³ Conflict has its origins in the hero's soul and arises out of failure to recognize universal truth. In the Noh plays, following Buddhist tenets, there is no possibility of putting an end to suffering as long as the ego is in power. Until the ego is negated the hero will be reborn again and again in the Round of Samsara. The Noh shite is already dead and unlike

¹Blofeld, p. 55.

²Zeami, Battle at Yashima, quoted from Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. 23.

³Ernst, p. 12.

the Western tragic hero who has the choice of dying as if all were a dream, for him, death is not an alternative. Therefore, the shite by overcoming his ignorance ceases to exercise his will, accepts suffering by letting go of his obsession and perceives reality without attachment. The forces which change the shite encourage an awareness which is no longer anchored upon selfhood. He is aided in this task by a Buddhist priest, the waki, who as an agent of the Buddha represents the universal ability of man to achieve Nirvana.

Zeami believed that the spirit world, mysterious and profound, could be understood through the direct apprehension of feelings and emotions.¹ For Zeami, as for Yeats, man's emotional nature is linked to his attempt to achieve a spiritual identity. Human nature partakes of emotion of divine being, that seeking to rejoin the universal and infinite which brings man to grief or death.² It is not completely correct to say that in Noh emotions are purged in the sense of a violent eradication. What the audience is given is a vision of the falling away of obsessions and suffering from the shite. The Noh hero does not try to change the situation or to escape from a particular experience. When he so struggles he becomes more tightly

¹Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. xxii.

²Nathan, p. 4.

immersed in conflict and suffering. In letting go of desire he accepts it as one with all else and thus achieves liberation.¹

Although the Yeatsian tragic hero struggles against his fate, Cuchulain in At the Hawk's Well in a manner reminiscent of the Noh shite, exhibits heroic acceptance of both the Old Man's world and the spiritual world, sees the necessity for conflict and faces the challenge of life with courage. What the audience observes in the Noh climax, when the grasping ceases, is a non-action. Ueda describes this as the state of mind which "calmly accepts nature, and art, life and death, time and eternity as one."² Since there is nothing valuable in life, the eyes are focused on death. The will then is negated, but this is followed not by a nihilistic despair but by "the natural and uncontrived bliss (ananda) of liberation."³ The conflict between natural and spiritual stops and the depths of the mind are reduced to total silence.⁴ As Watts puts it, in Nirvana, liberation, the despair at not being able to control life turns into joy and creative power

¹Watts, p. 64.

²Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. xv-xvi.

³Watts, p. 62.

⁴Blofeld, p. 49.

because of the freedom in being released from self-frustration.¹

The Noh shite's attachment to obsession is not evil but ignorance which arises out of the human insistence on a twofold vision of reality and the failure to conceive of the oneness of all things. Sin as an aspect of evil arises not from an original sin concept as in Christian belief. In Buddhist inspired Noh sin is inherent because of the separation of man from the universal. It is this separation which causes the pull between the outer and inner worlds; the natural, social outer world and the spiritual inner world. Fundamental sin stems from man's failure to recognize the great law that governs the universe.² For Yeats also "...evil is the strain one upon another of opposites."³

Noh hero's spiritual condition is further characterized by phenonemon of 'dreaming back' a psychoanalytic possibility for the revelation of the shite's inner conflict. In Noh the truth of life is to be realized intuitively, there is no attempt at a realistic, rational analysis of man's problems.⁴ Noh deals not with actors and actions but with

¹Watts, p. 50.

²Ueda, p. 17.

³Yeats, Per Amica, p. 76.

⁴Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. xxiv.

states of being, and moves beyond the psychologically real toward the spiritually intimate. The internal tension of the hero is presented in a mystical vision and is interpreted by the waki who intuitively perceives the condition of the hero's spirit life manifested in the 'dreaming back.' This is a folk belief that the soul after death returns because of some extraordinary attachment to life. In the case of Atsumori, the hero's desire for vengeance distorts his perception of spiritual reality and prevents his absorption into the Divine. Every aspect of the Noh play works toward the revelation of an intense tragic event in a person's past. Often the Noh shite, in a painful evaluation of his duality, moves from the destructive, negative explosion of energy toward peaceful serenity of mind in his movement toward Enlightenment. Since the resolution is not to be found in the relation between man and man but between man and the universal,¹ the tragic struggle is not presented in a confrontation between characters.

Although Yeats did not use the 'dreaming back' phenomenon in At the Hawk's Well, he incorporated it into Dreaming of the Bones and Calvary and other late plays, most effectively perhaps in Purgatory. He explained the process in the Note on the Dreaming of the Bones:

¹
Ibid.

The conception of the play is derived from the world wide belief that the dead 'dream back' for a certain time, through the more personal thoughts and deeds of life...The wicked, according to Cornelius Agrippa, dream themselves to be consumed by flames and persecuted by demons; and there is precisely the same thought in a Japanese Noh play, where a spirit lives back through events in the order of their occurrence, this living back being an exploration of their moral and intellectual origin.¹

Also in Per Amica he pursues this idea which became a familiar motif in his plays styled on the Noh: "Spiritism whether of folklore or of the seance room, the visions of Swedenborg, and the speculation of the Platonists and Japanese plays, will have it that we may see at certain roads and in certain houses....all passionate moments recur again and again..."²

Yeats, like Zeami, based the concept of spiritual reality in his plays on a personal faith for "all symbolic art should arise out of a real belief...."³ In 1938, in A General Introduction for My Work Yeats summed up his "faith" which had provided a foundation for the spiritual vision of his plays.

¹ Yeats, "Note on Dreaming of the Bones," Four Plays for Dancers, p. 129.

² Yeats, Per Amica, p. 71.

³ Yeats, "Discoveries", Essays, p. 294.

I am convinced that in two or three generations it will become generally known that the mechanical theory has no reality, that the natural and supernatural are knit together, that to escape a dangerous fanaticism we must study a new science; at that moment Europeans may find something attractive in a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of Druidism, not shut off in dead history, but flowing, concrete, phenomenal.

I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it; my Christ, a legitimate deduction from the Creed of St. Patrick as I think, is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake's 'Imagination,' what the Upanishads have named 'Self': nor is this unity distant and therefore intellectually understandable, but imminent, differing from man to man and age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness, 'eye of newt, and toe of frog.'¹

Yeats interpreting Blake defines a cosmic view which involves a conflict between the individual and the universal, a conflict which results from the shattering of the original oneness of the universal. Evil or sin is inherent in the separation itself, not in the opposing forces. Since the individual contains an element of the universal (Yeats's mood or emotion) which is the root of man's being, there is some hope of reconciliation of natural and spiritual. Blake, according to Yeats, regarded passions and emotions because they derived from infinite and universal experience as holy. Man's emotional life is actually a longing for

¹
Yeats, "A General Introduction for my Work,"
Essays, p. 518.

union with the divine.¹ In Buddhist inspired Noh man's emotional attachment prevents his assimilation into divine, thus the shite seeks a release from emotion. For the Yeatsian hero, the struggle of the self for union with that higher Self leads him to a war of the spiritual with the natural order.

Yeats's spiritual vision was expressed in The Poet and the Actress (1915):

Now the art I long for is also a battle but it takes place in the depths of the soul and one of the antagonists does not wear a shape known to the world or speak a mortal tongue. It is the struggle of the dream with the world....²

The outcome of this "battle" is to be a reconciliation of two orders of reality and implies a co-existence in which each reality retains its own identity. "The human soul would not be conscious were it not suspended between contraries."³ In Zeami's Noh there is the need for the realization of a universal oneness which insists on the non-existence of duality.

Yeats seems to deny the necessity of an exclusive choice between natural and spiritual by demonstrating how the soul can attain to the high estate of union with God without casting away the desires of material things. Man's spiritual

¹Nathan, p. 3.

²Yeats, The Poet and the Actress, quoted in Ellmann, Identity, p. 105.

³Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 105.

quest becomes synonymous with the desire for natural things. In At the Hawk's Well Cuchulain does not actually make a choice between natural and spiritual realities; his choice has the loftier implication of accepting the challenge of questing for Unity of Being. The audience is presented with the incarnation of a hero.¹ As Clark suggests, in Yeats's tragic drama, the soul recognizes that in the struggle with its opposite it transcends its incompleteness. The climax of tragic rhythm is at the moment of passionate perception.²

In Yeats's spiritual vision the ego is developed to the full. Personal emotions like joy, grief, love and jealousy are not to be suppressed but to be intensified to such a great degree that they become pure and aimless. The tension coming out of a struggle between opposites is the very essence of human vitality. The impact arising from such tensions is tragedy. In Zeami's Noh, there is no possibility for tragedy in this sense for Noh allows no possibility of man's fight against the mysterious power of a higher reality.³ In Yeats's concept of poetic drama tragic tension occupies a central place. Noh emphasizes a

¹Bloom, p. 297.

²David Clark, W. B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality (Dublin, Dolman Press, 1965), p. 16.

³Ueda, Zeami, p. 131.

release from the ego, and the expansion of inner self until it becomes one with undifferentiated state of reality.¹

In Yeats's drama man's suffering and defeat are illuminated by the possibility that he can know and experience a passionate harmony with the essential spirit behind all limitations and appearances. The Yeatsian hero continues to be the center of cosmic tension because his emotional nature, his passionate desire links him to spiritual reality.² The dramatic conflict most moving to Yeats was that between man-made law, suited to upholding the rights and guaranteeing the security of ordinary man and the divine law, capable of upsetting man's most cherished rational preconceptions which govern the actions of heroes and the feelings of all other men at their best and deepest moments.³ The hero of Yeats's plays surrenders his lesser self which identifies him with other people and instead asserts his higher self. The hero remains a tragic figure precisely because he must live with the conflict. This suffering assures his validity as an extraordinary person capable of a superior perception of reality. It is paradoxically this suffering, this loneliness, the separation and conflict, caused by the struggle, which

¹ Ishibashi, p. 137.

² Nathan, p. 14.

³ Moore, p. 18.

finally restores the hero to humanity.¹ As Keene points out the Noh audiences love the shite because of his capacity for suffering.² As Moore confirms for Yeats's poetic tragedy, the supreme moments come when character gives way to "tragic reverie" and "all is lyricism, unmixed passion; the integrity of fire."³ For Zeami the moment of joy for the Noh shite comes when the character resolves inner conflict and accepts enlightenment. The ecstatic exclamation at the end of a Noh play is one of realization, of finally "seeing" into the absolute law of the universe. All conflict melts away. For Yeats tragic joy is in the acceptance of inescapable eternal conflict. Yeats speaks of tragedy "which has not joy as comedy does but ecstasy, which is from the contemplation of things vaster than the individual and imperfectly seen, perhaps by all those that still live."⁴ The exclamation at the end of At the Hawk's Well is an ecstatic assertion of human will.

¹ Nathan, p. 163.

² Keene, p. 15.

³ Moore, p. 3.

⁴ Yeats, "Estrangement," The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats (New York: Macmillan, Collier Books, 1965), p. 319.

A momentary glimpse of Unity of Being is the impetus which keeps the Yeatsian hero stalwart and pure in his aspiration to attain the unattainable. Yeats asserted in "Discoveries" that "the end of art is ecstasy awakened by the presence before an ever changing mind of what is permanent in the world:"¹

In Per Amica Yeats characterizes spiritual reality as Anima Mundi or the "Condition of Fire " which consists of homogeneous, eternal and completed beings, of timeless and spaceless spirit attainable by those who have endured the discipline of terrestrial divisiveness and have transcended the human sphere.²

The spiritual being is characterized by ecstatic accord with itself and the universe: for "in the condition of fire is all music and rest."³ In At the Hawk's Well we note this movement toward the ideal state or condition of fire which is completion, unity and harmony with the universe. In order to reach the "Condition of Fire" the Yeatsian hero must endure suffering and defeat in his effort to rise above the "terrestrial condition."

¹Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays, p. 287.

²Yeats, Per Amica, p. 76.

³Ibid.

The process of transcendence leading through agony to ecstasy demands a heroic capacity and insures the tragic base of the plays.¹ This is the ideal that the figure of Cuchulain was designed to achieve, beginning with the definition of his heroic destiny in At the Hawk's Well and ending with his soul "about to sing" in The Death of Cuchulain. Unlike the Saint who comes to perfection by rejecting the world² and its defeating conflicts, the hero achieves perfection by embracing the life to which he is committed as a man and by rising above worldly rewards and punishments. Out of the world's opposition to his great will, out of the opposition stirred by human limits in collision with a superhuman appetite for experience, arises the tragic war that defeats the hero yet reveals to him the higher reality while he stands on the ruins of the lower.³ "In the heroic achievement of Unity of Being, if only for an instant, the Yeatsian hero assumes his mask,

¹Nathan, p. 162.

²Yeats came to feel that the easy way out was the way of the Saint who comes to perfection by rejecting the world and its defeating conflicts. He asserted again and again a passionate affirmation of life. In 1906 he wrote to Florence Farr, he had begun Eastern meditations "but with the object of trying to lay hands upon some dynamic and substantializing force as distinguished from the Eastern quiescent and super sensualizing state of the soul--a movement downwards upon life, not upwards out of life." Letter to Florence Farr quoted from Ellmann, Yeats the Man and the Masks, pp. 187-188.

³Nathan, p. 163.

symbol of unified being, of personality that is stripped of all that is individualistic as he now lives by choice his complete selfhood."¹ This is the process Nietzsche described which greatly influenced Yeats's ideals as set forth in "The Tragic Theatre". "...tragic myth, through the figure of the hero delivers us from our avid thirst for earthly satisfaction and reminds us of another existence and a higher delight. For this delight the hero readies himself, not through his victories but through his undoing."² Yeats, realizing the necessity of pain in the human condition, found that the way to rise above such pain was to find joy in the struggle itself. Zeami, on the other hand, revealing a Buddhist influence, found joy in the final yet painful resignation to oneness. For both dramatists it is the "intensity of the struggle--an intensity beyond that of real life which makes these characters tragic."³

¹ Nathan, p. 163.

² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), tr. Francis Golffing. p. 126.

³ Yeats, If I Were Four and Twenty, (1919), (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1940), p. 5.

This spiritual view of the world and man's relation to it places the artist in a unique position as perceiver and transmitter of the spiritual order of reality. Zeami and Yeats saw their obligation as poets to their audience not in terms of inspiring realistic social reform but in terms of the problem of how to transport audiences away from mundane outer world preoccupations so that they are open to the mystery of eternity otherwise viewed only in myths and dreams. In these plays there is a momentary identification with all humanity through the spirit. Through an imaginative use of symbols the poet-dramatist creates a meeting ground for the spiritual and the natural. This higher level of reality, the spiritual can only be known through heightened senses. In Noh the things of this world are symbols for that other world and through them the external and internal are unified in a spiritual experience.¹

The spiritual symbolic content of Noh is based on the Medieval Japanese Buddhist belief, shared by all sects, and especially dominant in Zen, that eternal truth, while it transcends the natural, could be understood only through the objects of the natural world. Thus the world of sensation provided the symbols which enable the mind to

¹
Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. xxii.

perceive, perhaps but momentarily, ultimate reality. The Noh does not try to analyze man's problems but presents them in a mystical vision momentary but far reaching and the resolution of these problems is sought in relation between man and cosmos.¹

Yeats stressed a similar attitude in his introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan when he asserted that "the arts which interest me while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation."² In their religious approach to art, the Noh artists were like priests who could through images and symbols evoke the spiritual in the present life. This ideal is explained by Zeami.

If I illustrate my purpose by the principle of two ways in Buddhism, being and non-being, then the appearance will correspond to being and the vessel to non-being. To take an example, a crystal, although it is a pure transparent object without color or pattern, produces fire and water. Why is it that two entirely heterogeneous things like fire and water emerge out of one transparent object? A poem says:

¹
Ibid.

²
Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays," Essays, p. 225.

Smash a cherry tree,
 And you will find no blossom
 In the splinters.
 It is in the sky of spring
 That cherry blossoms bloom.

The seed for the flower of art is the artist's soul which has a power to feel. As a crystal body produces fire and water or a colorless cherry tree bears blossoms and fruit, so does a superb artist create a variety of works out of his imaginative scenery. Such a man may be called a vessel. Works of art, treating the wind and the moon or flowers and birds, accompanying a festival or a picnic are many and various. The universe creates thousands of things as the seasons roll on--blossoms and leaves, the snow and the moon, mountains and seas, trees and grass, the animate and the inanimate. The artist should try to attain the mysterious flower by letting these numerous things be the materials of his act, by making his soul the vessel of the universe, and by setting the vessel in the vast, windless way of emptiness.¹

Drama must be the creation of the poet who goes below the surface of life, to the comparative simplicity and stillness to be found at the center of experience.²

Both Yeats and Zeami saw their role as that of poet-seer who through imaginative power communicates to the reader or audience a spiritual insight. Yeats realized that "if we poets are to move people, we must reintegrate the human spirit in our imagination."³ He felt that a poet lives a life which is always vigorously in pursuit of truth

¹ Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. xxiii.

² Moore, p. 19.

³ Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays, p. 264.

not abstract truth, but a "kind of vision of reality which satisfies the whole being."¹ For Yeats, the artist's relation to ultimate reality is to see beyond the illusory to express the immortal voice of the Anima Mundi. When a poet enters a state of "trance" or meditation, image and symbol which reveal the spiritual are generated.² Referring to Anima Mundi Yeats points out that "when a man writes any work of genius or invents some creative action is it not because some knowledge or power has come into his mind from beyond his mind."³ For Zeami the vacuous vessel, is the source of all creative expression.

The vessel (emptiness) is the universe which gives birth to all things, depending upon the season of year, starting with flowers and leaves...By adorning this art of entertainment with descriptions of these phenomena, by making the inner spirit the vessel of the universe, and by making it securely rest in 'the way of Emptiness,' which is both broad and transcendent, you will be able to achieve the level of exquisiteness in this art of entertainment.⁴

¹Yeats, Letter to Father September 1914 quoted from Ellmann, Yeats, The Man and the Masks (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 242.

²Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," Essays, p. 159.

³In the 1901 essay "Magic" Yeats stated that "I believe...in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind...." and listed the three doctrines of his belief. "(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy. (2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself. (3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols." Yeats, Essays, p. 28.

⁴Yasuko Stucki, "Yeats's Drama and the Noh," Modern Drama, ix (May, 1966), p. 102.

Zeami felt that the essence of things is so deeply hidden that man's faculties barely reach it; its beauty is too radiant for ordinary humans to feel or perceive. In his mystical experience the Noh writer touches upon the essence of life and creates a beautiful vision out of it. As Yeats expressed it, "beauty is indeed but bodily life in some ideal condition."¹ Zeami's hope to inspire the audience to see his vision and to realize truth² echoes Yeats's desire expressed in Discoveries to "make them [vigorous simple men] understand my vision."³ Zeami's role is not unlike that of a Bodhisattva who chooses not to attain Buddhahood but prefers to help others attain it. Paradoxically the poet can never achieve total unity of being without giving up his art, for art is necessarily an attachment to the world, and nonattachment is necessary for enlightenment. Yeats points up the situation in "Discoveries":

The imaginative writer differs from the saint in that he identifies himself--to the neglect of his own soul, alas!--with the soul of the world....Those things that are permanent in the soul of the world, the great passions that trouble all and have but a brief recurring life of flower and seed in any man, are indeed renounced by the saint, who seeks not an eternal art, but his own eternity.⁴

¹Yeats, Per Amica, p.62

²Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. xiv.

³Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays, p. 265.

⁴Ibid., p. 286.

As noted in the introduction, Yeats's principle problem in his drama was how to introduce the spiritual seriously and effectively on the actual stage. The Noh, with its simplicity, ritual acts, emotional intensity, and spiritual profundity, offered an effective medium for the theme of inherently tragic striving and suffering of unfulfilled being. So he made, as the Noh had done, the supernatural one dramatic element in a total dramatic convention. Yeats wanted more than a shared experience on the written page, he wanted to feel unity when play, players and audience share a physical and spiritual immediacy, the "one lofty emotion."¹ Since the spiritual struggle was presented in the depths of the mind, the supernatural could participate in the metaphorical representation of this struggle on the stage with no strain. The meeting of man and ghost was to be judged by coherence and vividness.²

¹
Moore, p. 22.

²
Nathan, p. 141.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERIZATION AND CHORUS

In his essay "The Tragic Theatre" (1910) Yeats speaks of the objections to poetical drama raised by his contemporaries: "In poetical drama there is, it is held, an antithesis between character and lyrical poetry, for lyric poetry can, as these critics think but encumber the action."¹ These same critics felt that "if a play does not contain definite character its constitution is not strong enough for the stage," and that "the dramatic moment is always the contest of character with character."² Yeats found in Noh, the combination of lyrical feeling and the lack of individualized characterization which substantiated his own dramatic theory, that the focal point of the play was to be on the internal conflict of the main character, "a battle" which "takes place in the depths of the soul."³ Nathan points out that for Yeats the "depths of the mind

¹Yeats, "The Tragic Theatre," Essays and Introductions, p. 240.

²Ibid., p. 239.

³Yeats, The Poet and the Actress, unfinished dialogue of 1915, quoted from Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 105.

could not be represented by the complex tragicomic characterizations of Shakespeare or by the psychologically accurate characterizations of Ibsen, because the struggle within the mind is the result of a conflict between spiritual qualities, intense states of being that underlie all complexity of character."¹ Yeats saw that the extreme stylization of character in the Noh was one of the elements which would enable the audience "to pass for a few moments into the deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation."²

Characterization in Zeami's Noh was influenced by the same rules of austerity and reduction which he applied to other aspects of Noh. The main character had particular significance for Yeats's ideal of characterization for it both suggested the superhuman, and reduced with the aid of masks, the human character to some quality that most intensely expressed its essence.³

The characters in Noh, as in Yeats's Dance Plays

¹
Nathan, p. 169. "Yeats also found support for this view of characterization in Maeterlinck who had indicated that a certain suppression of physical and psychological characteristics was necessary to reach the essence of similarity in man." (p. 56).

²
Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays," Essays, p. 225.

³
Nathan, p. 169.

are not distinct individuals with unique personality traits because the purpose of the Noh is to intensify passion, something commonly shared by everyone. The world of the Noh presumes the identity of all men beneath their conscious minds.¹ Also, the portrayal of psychological relations among individuals is not sought. The Noh character becomes an image of some profound emotion such as jealousy, vengeance, loyalty or loneliness. Ernest Fenollosa noted that:

Each drama embodies some primary human relation or emotion; and the poetic sweetness or poignancy of this is carried to its highest degree by carefully excluding all such obtrusive elements as a mimetic realism or vulgar sensation might demand. Emotion is always fixed upon idea, not upon personality,... some one of these intense emotions is chosen for a piece and in it elevated to the plane of universality by the intensity and purity of treatment.²

The Noh shite's obsession with some profound emotion creates his attachment to the natural world. This attachment is cemented by an assertion of the will. But unlike the Yeatsian dramatic situation, in the Noh this assertion of will is not celebrated. The Noh shite must eventually negate the will and attain liberation from the controlling power of the ego in order to experience enlightenment. For example in Zeami's play, Aoi No Uye, Lady Rokujo becomes the embodiment of jealousy and hatred. In appari-

¹ Ueda, Zeami, p. 25.

² Fenollosa, p. 120.

tional form she threatens the psychic and physical well being of Prince Genji's young wife, Aoi. In the final dance Rokujo's spirit is enlightened and "Her soul casts off its bonds."¹ Although a spiritual being, the Noh shite must work out his conflict in terms of an outer world obsession while in that vague twilight between life and death.

Yeats also sought a similar elimination of extraneous aspects of personality, and in his plays characterization is centered on some universal sensibility such as courage, love, remorse or forgiveness. Yeats's approach to characterization serves the tragic focus of his play and lies somewhere between the common Western dramatic technique of showing human activity in the complex ambiguous movement of the character, and the Noh technique of reducing the life of man to a single quality in which the world of being and nonbeing touch, where the problem of the suffering spirit has a single solution.² Yeats sought a character for his drama in which a single intense passion is purified of all the many facted desires of man. He defined passion in Plays and Controversies as the straining of man's being against some obstacle: "...a passion can only be contemplated when separated by itself, purified of all but itself, and aroused into a perfect intensity by opposition with some passion...."³

¹Waley, Aoi No Uye, p. 189.

²Ernst, p. 13.

³Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 105.

For Yeats the struggle between opposites which necessarily creates tension, is the essence of human vitality. It is this tension which defines the tragic. Thus Yeats could not, like Zeami, create a one-character drama. The following discussion of Atsumori and At the Hawk's Well will explore further similarities and differences in characterization.

In the 'dream' Noh such as Zeami's Atsumori, the focus is on one main character, the shite or hero, who is usually some spiritual being from the other world, the departed soul of a man, within whom the contest between the natural and the supernatural is manifested. In this play Zeami chose to delete everything particular about Atsumori and the warrior Kumagai from the original story in the Tale of Heike in the interests of achieving a stylized universal tragedy.¹ The core of the play consists of a narration by the shite of an episode in his life which has universal application. The audience's vision of the shite is mediated by the secondary character, the waki, often a Buddhist monk who as an agent of Buddha helps the hero to perceive the true way of life. The waki has the perception and power to renew the contact between the natural and supernatural. Through his wisdom

¹ Keene, p. 50. The Tale of Heike (C. 1230) is a loosely woven epic tale of the rise and fall of the Taira Clan. It furnished material for many Noh plays.

he provides the opportunity for the hero in his 'dreaming back' to resolve his inner turmoil and to approach self-recognition.

In creating the main characters of Noh, Zeami used two principle devices which allowed him to incorporate the spiritual into the play as part of the dramatic format. One of these, the 'possession' of the shite by a vengeful spirit, is seen in both Aoi No Uye and Sotoba Komachi, two of the plays translated by Fenollosa. Spirit possession in a Noh play occurs at the peak of the shite's anguish and is usually followed by a moment of epiphany. The possession is related to the character's emotional despair and intensity of feeling. Although the shite suffers because of the possession, it also provides the motivation for his Self-realization. Yeats used this device with variations in both At the Hawk's Well and The Only Jealousy of Emer, but in neither case is the spiritual possession experienced by the main character, nor is it purely a vengeful aspect but also a challenging one. In At the Hawk's Well, the possession of the Guardian of the Well defines the spiritual power against which Cuchulain must struggle. It comes at the climatic moment in the play when Cuchulain is faced with the ultimate choice of his life.

The second technique, used in Atsumori, is that of 'double' apparition and provides the dual role needed to reveal the shite's obsession with things of his world and his divisiveness. The usual situation in using this technique is for the shite to appear in the first act of the play as some humble person, in this case a reaper; in the second part, the shite appears to the monk, as in a dream, as a ghost of his inner self. As the shite portrays his identity and his obsession through the revelatory process of 'dreaming back' which combines poetry and dance, the audience together with the waki glimpses momentarily his universal conflict and spiritual experience.¹

Zeami's Atsumori is exemplary of the approach to characterization common to Noh. The plot of the play is simple and concerns the meeting of a priest, formerly the warrior Kumagai of the Minamoto clan who was responsible for Atsumori's death, with the ghost of Atsumori, who first appears as a young reaper, and second as a ghost of the warrior Atsumori. As the play opens, the priest Rensei is traveling to Ichi-no-Tani near Suma Beach, the scene of the famous battle in 1184 between the Tairas and the Minamotos, to pray for the salvation of Atsumori's soul. The allusive nature of the poetry combined with the twilight tends to superimpose past upon the present.

¹ Japanese Noh Drama, 3: xv..

Rensei's reflections are interrupted by the sound of a flute and the appearance of the reapers on their way home in the dusk. The flute is used in the play to symbolize Atsumori's grief and attachment to the past. A young reaper lingers after the others have left and requests prayers to be said for him. After hearing that the boy is of Atsumori's clan, but still unaware that he is face to face with Atsumori's ghost, Rensei proceeds to pray. The young reaper dissolves into the night. The second act finds the priest still performing the rites of prayer when an apparition of Atsumori himself in his former grandeur appears. The priest fears he is dreaming, but Atsumori hastens to assure him that he has in fact appeared and is resolved to reconcile his attachment to world caused by his feeling of vengeance and grief. Atsumori tells his story to the priest who unknown to him is the warrior Kumagai, the object of his revenge. The action of the past is relived through Atsumori's confession, and is expressed in his dance. Atsumori reflects on the shortlived power of the Taira, their exile from home to live on the sea, their life at Suma beach among the fishermen, and the final battle during which Atsumori was slain. During the climatic dance the chorus describes the final moments before Atsumori's death.

Twice, three times he strikes; then, still saddled,
 In close fight they twine; roll headlong together
 Among the surf of the shore.
 So Atsumori fell and was slain, but now the Wheel of Fate
 Has turned and brought him back.¹

As the play ends Atsumori resolves the inner conflict of his soul and reaches for unity of being in salvation. Though Atsumori would reconcile the world of his spiritual existence with his past external reality, he is haunted by his spectral form which will not allow him to attain non-attachment. Implicit in the play is the fact that the ghost, fed by revenge and sorrow, relives over and over his death battle in his 'dreaming back'.² Though Atsumori discovers that his interlocutor is none other than his former antagonist, the contest taking place in the depths of the mind is not between the hero and Kumagai, but between feudal world values of external reality and Buddhist truth. When Atsumori comes before the priest, Rensei, he says, "It is to clear the Karma of my waking life that I am come here in visible form before you."³ At the end of the climactic dance there is an exquisite dramatic re-

¹Zeami Motokiyo, Atsumori, translated in Arthur Waley, The Nō Plays of Japan, p. 73. Further references will be by page number to this edition.

²See Chapter One for a discussion on the phenomenon of 'dreaming back.'

³Atsumori, p. 69.

versal when in a moment of realization, Atsumori reconciles the battle of his previous life with the profundity of spiritual existence.

'There is my enemy,' he cries, and would strike,
 But the other is grown gentle
 And calling on Buddha's name
 Has obtained salvation for his foe;
 So that they shall be re-born together
 On one lotus-seat.
 'No, Rensei is not my enemy
 Pray for me again, oh pray for me again.'¹

The conflict in the depths of the soul is resolved when Atsumori no longer asserts his will. At this moment of epiphany when the hero achieves self-recognition and accepts the suffering of his condition there is a unity of image and emotion. Atsumori is typical of the Noh hero who is somehow trapped in the natural world while in spiritual form. His emotional attachment to the world, centered in his extreme desire for revenge and his longing for the past, which is symbolized by the flute, are set at loggerheads with his desire for spiritual identity, for his "soul's deliverance."²

The confrontation of characters typical of most drama is missing in Noh.³ For Zeami the real antagonist was

¹Ibid., p. 73.

²Ibid., p. 68.

³Similarly in At the Hawk's Well the juxtaposition of characters cannot be called the usual dramatic conflict of character. It is rather a contest between the dream, the desire for the superhuman symbolized by the hawk, and the limitations and external concerns of life reflected by the old man. In both plays the audience is given a spiritual conflict rather than an external one.

within the shite, although in later Noh plays after Zeami's death the shite is presented with a more distinctive personality. Sometimes the shite and waki are developed as protagonist and antagonist. The pattern in Atsumori is not to set one character off against another. At the point at which conflict would arise in Western drama a dance is substituted in Noh to show that real conflict is an internal one and cannot be dealt with in the outer world. Through his dance Atsumori relives the past, expresses the inexpressible and succeeds in letting go of outer world delusions. The protagonist here has no visible antagonist for in Yeats's words, such an antagonist "does not wear a shape known to the world or speak a mortal tongue."¹ The contest is between two ideals; one natural, one spiritual. A true dramatic situation evolves when these ideas are realized in the hero's spiritual experience and attain universal significance. The priest's meeting with the disembodied soul affords insight into the interior life of humanity.

In the Four Plays for Dancers Yeats has reduced the number of characters used in the earlier plays to a minimum and following the Noh example he has reduced the personality to one essential quality which is the focal

¹
Yeats, The Poet and the Actress, Ellmann, Identity, p. 105.

point of the play. But he does not, like Zeami, subordinate all the elements of the play to the prominence of the main player, nor does he use the particular character roles of shite, waki and tsure. In At the Hawk's Well the three characters, the Old Man, the Young Man (Cuchulain) and the Guardian of the Well are all essential and share among them the dominant characteristics of the Noh shite and waki. True to the Noh simplicity, the action of the play takes place in "any bare space before a wall against which stands a patterned screen."¹ It is here that characters and chorus recreate an event from Cuchulain's life which shapes his later destiny as a hero. The plot of At the Hawk's Well is also extremely simple. An Old Man makes his way to a barren place high above the sea where three leafless hazel trees and a dry well filled with fallen leaves stand as symbols of some other reality. He shares the nightmarish desolation with the Guardian of the Well, a mysterious, mute girl, as he waits, as he has been for fifty

¹ Yeats, At the Hawk's Well, in The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, 2nd ed., enl. (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 136. All references to At the Hawk's Well and other plays by Yeats will be by page number from this edition.

years, for the water of immortality to flow into the well. Each time the well has filled he has been lulled to sleep by the Guardian. After this introductory segment establishing the scene where the conflict will take place, the hero, a Young Man, enters in search of the "miraculous waters."¹ The Old Man, fearful that the newcomer will rob him of the precious water, urges the Young Man to leave the "accursed place", warning of the supernatural power of the Sidhe, "deceivers of men."² Cuchulain, the Young Man, determined to fulfill his quest and depending on his good luck to see him through, elects to stay. Then the Guardian gives the cry of the hawk signaling the climactic movement of the play. The Old Man after warning Cuchulain of the curse placed on those who gaze into the Guardian's eyes,³ is put to sleep by the Guardian, now seen as a hawk-woman, possessed by the supernatural. She starts to dance, ensnares

¹At the Hawk's Well, p. 139.

²Ibid., p. 140.

³Yeats's early poem "The Hosting of the Sidhe" (1899) relates this destructive aspect of supernatural powers:

.....
 And if any gaze on our rushing band,
 We come between him and the deed of his hand.
 We come between him and the hope of his heart.

Yeats, "The Hosting of the Sidhe," in Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats, ed. M. L. Rosenthal, (New York: Collier Books, 1966), p. 20.

Cuchulain with her power, and leads him off as in a dream just as the water splashes in the well. The Old Man wakes, as Cuchulain returns from useless pursuit of the Guardian, to find the well again dry. Cuchulain is warned once more by the Old Man of the curse upon him for daring to challenge the supernatural forces. Queen Aoife of the fierce women of the hills, to whom the hawk goddess is sacred, has been excited to battle against the intruder. Cuchulain rouses himself to the call of battle and goes out no longer as if in a dream.

The hawk woman, Guardian of the Well, like the Noh shite is the spiritual being of the play who dances at the climatic moment. She represents spiritual power and embodies the Unity of Being which Cuchulain seeks. In this sense she is unlike the divided Noh hero in function and character. Yeats uses her not as a character in opposition to the hero but as a force to be dealt with in his quest. Her power is revealed by the control she has over the other two characters, leading one to a tragic destiny, the other to a bitter, obscure life.

Yeats uses a combination of the Noh techniques of 'double' apparition and possession usually reserved for the shite's role in presenting the spiritual being of this play. At first the Guardian of the Well appears as a mysterious figure sitting by the well "entirely covered by a black cloak."¹ She has qualities which distinguish her

¹At the Hawk's Well, p. 137.

from what is normally expected of a natural being. She is in a trance-like state traditionally associated with supernatural possession. "Her heavy eyes/ Know nothing, or look upon stone."¹ Later the old man recalls that this "glassy look" occurred the "Last time it happened",² that is, the last time the well filled. Also, she is mute throughout the play except for the cry of a hawk which signals her possession by the Woman of the Sidhe. During the play her non-verbal power is contrasted with the Old Man's ineffectual preaching.

In the second part of the play she is infused with the supernatural and becomes an enticing yet threatening spirit, half-woman and half-hawk. As hawk her recognition of Cuchulain as the heroic quester and her destructive power are revealed when Cuchulain describes the hawk's attack; "It flew/As though it would have torn me with its beak." The old man describes her as "the unappeasable shadow," the Woman of the Sidhe, who will "allure or destroy"³ and bring curses on men. Although it takes place at the climactic moment when the well begins to fill, the possession of the Guardian is not related as in Noh to the

¹Ibid., p. 139.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 141.

emotional despair and intensity of suffering within the character. The Noh shite suffers because of possession, which provides the motivation for him to seek transformation. Here the Guardian is a vehicle for that spiritual power which defines the agonizing spiritual quest for those of heroic disposition who would seek its essence.

The Guardian is moved to dance because of supernatural possession. Her dance is not like that of the Noh shite, a personal and emotional expression of conflict. It is not symbolic of inner conflict in the depths of her mind but rather defines definitely the spiritual order with which Cuchulain must deal. Zeami is, on the other hand, dealing with a spiritual being, the shite, who is seeking completion. His dance expresses the profound suffering felt by the character and draws the audience into a universal reality.¹ The hawk woman in Yeats's play dances the climactic dance, yet the moment of realization is Cuchulain's who has been brought to the choice of an heroic destiny. It is at the point of her dance that the hawk becomes an active agent in the play. Prior to this she is delineated solely by the Old Man. Her dance symbolizes in hawklike gestures the presence of the supernatural, its remote beauty

¹
Keene, p. 73.

and destructive power. The hawk is not according to Yeats a divisive creature, and her beautiful and powerful unity of being draws Cuchulain to her in a trance of "madness." The Guardian's supernatural possession which is symbolized by her dance is part of the world of the play.¹ The hawk woman like the Noh spirits, is not a shadowy image but heightened reality.

The Old Man cannot properly be called either shite or waki. While his fruitless, lonely and bitter existence elicits audience sympathy as is the case with the Noh shite, he lacks the purity of purpose, strength of conviction and emotional intensity necessary to be a hero. Suffering cannot lead to transcendence in his case. The Old Man is seen as a wastrel who should have sought comfort and security rather than an obscure, bitter death. In contrast to Zeami's Buddhist belief that all men are capable of enlightenment, Yeats felt that Unity of Being was only for the extraordinary person of heroic sensibility. The Old Man is Cuchulain's foil; his passive endurance is contrasted with Cuchulain's active acceptance of conflict. Yeats created in the Old Man an extremely simplified, stylized character who, like the Noh shite embodies one profound emotional quality, that of human wretchedness. He becomes

¹
Nathan, p. 159.

in the course of the play an image of this wretchedness and despair, and all that defines the non-heroic; greed, jealousy, and fear. As such the Old Man, who merely waits to have immortality thrust upon him, is in dramatic contrast to Cuchulain.

The Old Man is an improbable waki, too. Although he attempts to interpret the situation for Cuchulain, to whom he seems "...as dried up as the leaves and sticks," his vision is stunted by pettiness and hate. He supplies much of the essential detail of the plot such as explaining the secret moment when the water fills the well, identifying the hawk woman as the Sidhe, and defining the curse that falls on "all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes."¹ But he lacks the waki's ability and wisdom to understand the spiritual core of existence. He does mediate aspects of the spiritual reality of the play to the audience as the Noh waki does, yet he cannot grasp the full implications of his own words. At the end he realizes only that "the accursed shadows have... ,/ stolen my life."² He is terrified of the Hawk woman and "cannot bear her eyes, they are not of this world,"³ and he is lulled to sleep at the moment

¹At the Hawk's Well, p. 141.

²Ibid., p. 143.

³Ibid., p. 142.

of perception. Yet his cry of despair at the end "O, do not go! The mountain is accursed;"¹ is one of the most poignant utterances in the play and demands sympathy from the audience as does the Noh shite's exclamation of suffering.²

The Young Man, Cuchulain, is like the shite, the character in whom the spiritual conflict takes place, but unlike the shite in that he is not supernatural and hence does not dance the climactic dance. It is Cuchulain's courage to which attention is called, both as the quality which distinguishes him from the Old Man, and which determines the course and results of the plays action. As in the Noh shite the characteristics of Cuchulain are neither complex nor particularized, yet the encounter of the natural and the supernatural which is the center of the play pivots on the single passionate quality of his courage. Like the Noh hero he must deal with the universal conflict between the natural and the supernatural. Cuchulain's experience in the play is not filled with the suffering of a tragic hero but his choice foreshadows the dimensions of that suffering for his life.

¹
Ibid., p. 144.

²
See the discussion in the conclusion of Taka No Izumi, a Noh version of At the Hawk's Well in which the Old Man is the shite. Moore suggests that the tragedy of At the Hawk's Well is not Cuchulain but the Old Man's, (p. 205).

In At the Hawk's Well the hero is seen as one of the Yeatsian possibilities for achieving spiritual reality. Yeats gives the audience in Cuchulain an image of the contradictory nature of heroic courage which defines his essence and transforms him into a victim. Peter Ure points out that, "What makes At the Hawk's Well a play and not a symbolist poem is the way in which the contradictory nature of the heroic courage is prepared for and acted out through the deed and character of the hero."¹ In one who would face the battle of life, and the peace of eternity, the two realities meet and are united. In his search for "the miraculous water" Cuchulain has the luck of a true questor,

And with a lucky wind under the sail
Crossed waves that have seemed charmed, and found this
shore.²

He is neither deterred by the physical threats of pain and suffering, "If I grow drowsy I can pierce my foot"³, nor by the verbal threats of the old man reiterating the curse which will shadow his life in the world. He is not tempted by the promise of "a pleasant life among indolent meadows."⁴ Neither is he afraid to gaze into the "un-

¹Ure, p. 72.

²At the Hawk's Well, p. 139.

³Ibid., p. 140.

⁴Ibid., p. 144.

moistened eyes" of the "unappeasable shadow" who in the shape of a hawk flew at him as though it would have "blinded" him, "smiting with that great wing." ¹ With heroic absolute-ness he announces to the Guardian "I am not afraid of you, bird, woman, or witch," ² and responds to "the clash of arms again!" ³ with his totality of being. Cuchulain in At the Hawk's Well foreshadows the description of heroic man in the late poem "Under Ben Bulben" (1939) as he "completes his partial mind" at this climactic moment.

Know that when all words are said
 And a man is fighting mad,
 Something drops from eyes long blind,
 And he completes his partial mind,
 For an instant stands at ease,
 Laughs aloud, his heart at peace. ⁴

In Yeats's plays the state of the hero, capable of perceiving the levels of reality and of relating to the spirit world, is characterized more by suffering and pain than by what one would call happiness. Although the stature of a hero like Cuchulain is made more impressive by the mystery of supernatural power, he is caught between the threatening and often terrifying spiritual world, and the reprimanding, mundane world of men which lacks any vision

¹Ibid., p. 141.

²Ibid., p. 142.

³Ibid., p. 144.

⁴Yeats, "Under Ben Bulben," in Selected Poems, p. 190.

of heroic wisdom, for "who but an idiot would praise/Dry stones in a well".¹ Atsumori, too, is a solitary figure, necessarily alone in his heroic plight, devoured by the contradictions of the soul, for the movement toward salvation must come from within the shite himself. In Noh it is the hero's attachment to the world which insures his fearful relationship to the spirit world. In both Yeats's plays and Zeami's Noh, the powerful urge of the protagonist for perfection drives him upward toward an eternal spiritual identity while his restless and aggressive instincts draw him downward into self-absorption and fruitless passion.² Yet the outcome of heroic involvement with the supernatural is different. The Noh shite usually achieves enlightenment with the help of the intercession of the waki, the agent who restores the broken contact between the natural and supernatural. The Noh shite's suffering is dissolved in the joyful peace of ananda. In Yeats's plays there is little sense of relief or resolution but rather of tragic ecstasy, joy rising out of defeat for "...the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east that must raise the heroic cry."³ For Yeats

¹At Hawk's Well, p. 144.

²Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 184.

³Yeats, Letter to Dorothy Wellesley quoted in Ellmann, Identity, p. 185.

the proper subject matter of drama had to be heroic involvement, since nothing less than heroic involvement would be consonant with the intense passion that is necessary to evoke spiritual reality. The suffering of the hero is the result of his irremediable defeat; the joy is the result of his capacity to rise above defeat to a reverie in which individual suffering is contemplated under the aspect of spiritual reality, the Anima Mundi.¹ Although the Noh shite wishes to be released from his obsession and thus experience the joy of eternal peace, he exercises no will to relieve himself of his passion. Rather he "lets go" of his passionate desire through non-attachment. For Yeats the hero must exert his will to obtain self-realization for passion is a desire for fulfillment. The conflict between the natural and supernatural thwarts his achievement of his goal and sets his passion to intensity.

The action of At the Hawk's Well concerns the spiritual birth, the incarnation of a hero.² This meeting between mortal and immortal shapes Cuchulain's later destiny as a tragic hero.

¹ Nathan, p. 62, p. 156.

² Harold Bloom, Yeats, p. 299.

Cuchulain is faced with a choice necessitated by the brevity of life; either to quest passionately and heroically for some sort of meaningful if dangerous destiny, or to seek peace of mediocracy.¹ Cuchulain seems capable of attaining unity of being, of reconciling the two realities. He contains all relevant energy within himself, and the supernatural hawk dance simply serves as a catalyst to bring out what is already implicit in the heroic figure. Cuchulain's desire for the superhuman is played off against his defeat by human limitation. In his quest for the water of immortality we see the heroic human desire for superhuman experience.² As Moore suggests, Yeats's crucial problem was to convince the audience that "the most dramatic thing in the world was not a battle of wills between people intent on their various worldly misunderstandings but the effort of an extraordinary person to win the Nietzschean heights from which he could look down on human existence with the cold passion created by his new perspective."³ Cuchulain's final moment, as he goes off, "no longer as if in a dream" to a battle which is controlled by the supernatural, is spoken in the third person. "He

¹ Nathan, p. 173.

² Nathan, p. 178.

³ Moore, p. 28.

comes! Cuchulain, son of Sualtim, comes!"¹ This has the same impact and power as the Noh device of presenting the shite, at times of high tension such as in the dance, stepping out of himself to become an entirely impersonal observer viewing himself in complete disassociation. This expresses the profound capacity of the aroused psyche to look down from a height coolly and objectively realizing the totality of his existence.² Zeami leads the audience to a transcendent world as Atsumori fades into the bliss of ananda, leaving the tragic conflict behind. Yeats leads the audience to a perception of the actual tragic world through Cuchulain's passionate necessity to struggle for Unity of Being. In both plays the "hero surrenders the lesser self--those traits that link him by comradeship and affection to ordinary mortals--in order to assert his higher self--that lovely, impersonal and inflexible loyalty to an ageless ideal."³

It was Yeats's hope, then, to create "heroic or grotesque types that, keeping always an appropriate distance from life, would seem images of those profound emotions that exist only in solitude and silence!"⁴ In the Four Plays,

¹At the Hawk's Well, p. 144.

²Wells, p. 216.

³Moore, p. 11.

⁴Yeats, "Note on At the Hawk's Well," Plays and Controversies, p. 419.

Yeats dealt only with basic emotion, images of passion, and avoided analysis of character.

If the subject of drama or any other art were man himself, an eddy of momentary breath, we might desire the contemplation of perfect characters; but the subject of all art is passion and a passion can only be contemplated when separated by itself, purified of all but itself and aroused into a perfect intensity by opposition with some other passion.¹

Yeats's ideal of spiritual essence in character is perhaps best described in "Tragic Theatre" when he recalls in Synge's Deirdre "a reverie of passion that mounts and mounts till grief itself has carried her [Deidre] beyond grief into pure contemplation...the player ascended into the tragic ecstasy which is the best that art, perhaps that life, can give...and we too were carried beyond time and persons to where passion living through its thousand purgatorial years, as in the wink of an eye, becomes wisdom; and it was as though we too had touched and felt and seen a disembodied thing."² For both Yeats and Zeami this sublimation of character by intensity of feeling results in characters who are stripped down to their basic humanity where they cannot escape from inner conflict. In defense of this interpretation of tragic hero Yeats asks, "why should we honor those that die upon the field of battle,

¹Yeats, "Samhain: 1904," Explorations, p. 155.

²Yeats, "The Tragic Theatre," Essays, p. 239.

a man may show as reckless a courage in entering into the abyss of himself."¹

Thus, the characters in the plays by Zeami and Yeats are astringently delineated retaining only those attributes which further the action. The function of the chorus allows the purposeful one dimensional character types in these plays by rounding out the characters through descriptive definition of their emotional spiritual dilemma. Thus, the effective use of the chorus helps convince the audience of the reality of their spiritual struggle in the depths of the mind. The chorus is the thread which connects characters, actions, and setting, assuring the audience of a total, comprehensible experience as it "naturalizes the incredible."² The chorus expresses the theme at the beginning and the end and augments the secondary characters, the waki, and the Old Man in their mediating role. The chorus also has the important task of interpreting the climactic moment. In Atsumori the chorus speaks for the shite during the final dance since the intensity of the actor's recreation of the past, followed by his moment of realization is too extreme and intense to be expressed in his own words.³ In At the Hawk's Well, the chorus describes

¹Yeats, quoted in Ellmann, Yeats The Man and the Masks, p. 6.

²Nathan, p. 176.

³Ernst, p. 5.

the intensity of Cuchulain's experience with the hawk woman and interprets the moment in terms of his heroic destiny.

The characters are assisted in other ways by the chorus, not as specific personae involved in the action but as a descriptive vocal unit. In its descriptive function the chorus suggests association between natural setting, and emotional tone and spiritual quest, thus fusing the personal and universal experience. The chorus is one means for sharing with the audience the essential forms which underlay the multiplicity of external experiences.¹ In both plays the chorus functions to broaden the dimension of the play, to lift it from the momentary to the timeless.

The significant differences in Yeats's and Zeami's use of a chorus are related to the spiritual concepts at work in the plays as well as to the complexity of choric function. Just as all other elements of Noh drama are focused on the main character, so the chorus is a vocal and physical extension of the principal character.² This derives from the singleness of purpose of the Noh which does not recognize the alternatives suggested in Yeats's drama. In the Well,

¹
Ibid., pp. 3-4.

²
Ibid., p. 5.

the chorus, concerned with the dichotomy of experiences, focuses on both the Old Man and the hero, Cuchulain. In Noh the choric perceptions and responses, usually chanted or sung in unison, are woven into the total fabric of the drama without interrupting the rhythm. Although the chorus of eight or twelve singers, accompanied by three or four musicians, remains seated during the performance, it enters freely into the dialogue and describes actions on and off stage. With the exception of the opening descriptive catalog related primarily by the waki, the choric function of providing an imaginative background for the main character is used throughout the play recording changes of setting and in particular the events and scenes of the 'dreaming back' sequence. Yeats, on the other hand, uses a chorus of three musician-singers for the opening and closing songs which frame the action of the play with descriptive and philosophical commentary. Thus, the Yeatsian chorus is not as totally integrated into the movement of the play as the Noh chorus. After the ritual of the unfolding and folding of the cloth the musicians remain seated throughout the performance as in Noh. Yeats uses the choric voices singly, in pairs, or in unison as in lyrical opening of At the Hawk's Well, depending on the impact desired. This flexibility gives a greater sense of human response to the events of the play than offered by the more narrowly focused Noh chorus.

The Noh chorus describes the thoughts of the shite, speaks with him, and though it comments impersonally on the events the choric re-appraisal at the end is more sympathetic to the main character than the choir perceptions of a "bitter life" at the end of the Well which focus on the divisiveness of human nature and destiny of both the Old Man and Cuchulain. In At the Hawk's Well the chorus does not actually share Cuchulain's thoughts, but has the descriptive function of defining the divided nature of human desire and the choices available to the hero. The chorus in the plays of Yeats and Zeami serves a primary need, descriptive as well as intuitive and will be discussed in the following pages with examples from several of Zeami's Noh plays, and Yeats's At the Hawk's Well.

One example of the chorus in its descriptive function is that the Noh chorus uses natural images to create an atmosphere which reflects the peculiar sensibility of the main character. An example is found in Nishikigi. (Yeats knew the play well, found parallels in it with Irish myth, and modeled Dreaming of the Bones after it.) The story centers on an ancient love tryst between two ghosts. In the play a priest meets the two lovers, and supposing the apparitions to be villagers, he requests the

story of the place. He does not realize until later that the story of unrequited love they tell is their own. The climax of the play is their spiritual union aided by the priest's prayers. The loneliness and despair of the two finds an analogue in the tactile and visual description of autumn, begun by the shite and elaborated by the chorus.

Shite:

There's a cold feel in the autumn.
Night comes...

Chorus:

And storms; trees giving up their leaf,
Spotted with sudden showers.
Autumn! our feet are clogged
In the dew-drenched, entangled leaves.
The perpetual shadow is lonely,
The mountain shadow is lying alone.
The owl cries out from the ivies
That drag their weight on the pine.¹

The descriptive setting can also be established through reiteration of a symbol which comes to be synonymous with the mood of the play. In the following example the common Noh technique of interlacing,² where the chorus is one of the voices, is used. In Atsumori, the priest (Rensei), shite (Atsumori), and chorus (Reapers) in alternate lines weave the lonely atmosphere of Atsumori's spiritual

¹

Zeami, Nishikigi quoted in Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, "Noh" of Accomplishment, pp. 138-139.

²

This technique is noted by Henry Wells The Classical Drama of the Orient, p. 213.

struggle symbolized by the flute, emblem of his attachment to the past, which was worn by Atsumori when he died. The flute is mentioned in the chorus's introductory comment:

To the music of the reaper's flute
 No song is sung
 But the sighing of wind in the fields.

and is further elaborated on as follows:

Priest.
 Songs of woodmen and flute-playing of herdsmen...

Reaper.
 Flute-playing of reapers...

Priest.
 Song of wood-fellers...

Reapers.
 Guide us on our passage through this sad world.

Priest.
 Song...

Reaper.
 And dance...

Priest.
 And the flute

Reaper.
 And music of many instruments...

Chorus.
 These are the pastimes that each chooses to his taste.

.....
 And as for the reaper's flute,
 Its name is Green-leaf;¹

¹
Atsumori, p. 67.

In the close to this interlude the chorus, in mentioning the flute named Green-leaf, absolutely identifies the reaper with Atsumori.

The most obvious function of the Noh chorus is its assumption of character roles through identification. It becomes at different times the eyes, ears, and mouthpiece of various characters. In Atsumori the chorus verbalizes the hero's deeply felt emotional reaction to the priest's offer to pray for him which is too profound to be related directly to the spirit himself.

'Oh reject me not!
 One cry suffices for salvation,
 Yet day and night
 Your prayers will rise for me.
 Happy am I, for though you know not my name,
 Yet for my soul's deliverance
 At dawn and dusk henceforward I know that you will pray.
 So he spoke. Then vanished and was seen no more.¹

In its role of character portrayal the chorus has the responsibility of defining and presenting, without value judgment, many of the deeper thoughts and feelings of the supernatural beings. An example of this use of the chorus is found in Aoi no Uye, a Noh play which surely influenced Yeats's Only Jealousy of Emer for the theme of jealousy combined with spiritual possession and 'double' apparition is common to both plays. In the Noh play, the

¹
Ibid., p. 68.

heroine, the princess Rokujo, is consumed by jealousy for Prince Genji's wife, Aoi. The jealousy is transformed into a revengeful spirit, which leaves Lady Rokujo's body and attacks her rival physically and mentally. The chorus describes the intensity of the emotion felt by the Shite.

This loathsome heart!
 This loathsome heart!
 My unfathomable hate
 Causes Lady Aoi to wail in bitter agony.¹

The next moment the chorus still speaking for Rokujo, reveals the sorrowful countenance of her spiritual turmoil.

Rokujo.
 I shall be to him [Prince Genji]
 Chorus.
 A stranger, which I was once,
 And I shall pass away
 Like a dewdrop on a mugwort leaf,
 When I think of this
 How bitter I feel.
 Even were I living
 Our love is already an old tale,
 Never to be revived even in a dream!²

An example of the chorus as interpreter of the shite's spiritual situation is found in Tsunemassa. This play, like Yeats's Resurrection, is built around the suspense of waiting for a supernatural manifestation. The choric explanation of the appearance of ghost's form, Tsunemasa, allows the movement of the apparition to become perceptive to the depth of the mind.

¹ Zeami, Aoi No Uye quoted in Japanese Noh Plays, 2:97.

² Ibid.

Only as a tricking magic,
 A bodiless vision,
 Can he hover in the world of his lifetime,
 Swift-changing Tsunemasa.
 By this name we call him, yet of the body
 That men named so, what is left but longing?
 What but the longing to look again, through the wall
 of death,

.....
 Like a dream he has come,
 Like a morning dream.¹

Here the chorus envisions in the descriptive passage the painful conflict within the heroic heart, the spiritual being's attachment to worldly life which prevents self-recognition and eventual unity of being.

The most impressive use of the chorus's ability to assume a character's role with sensitivity and coherence is in the final and climactic dance scene. In the description of the hero's mind in its 'dreaming back' the chorus unveils the conflict of the heart and the conflict of the soul in a flow of lyrical and narrative poetry while the shite dances, rendering imaginatively the climax in his own career. Often the choral recitation is punctuated at pauses in the dance by comments from the shite. In Atsumori the chorus accompanies the shite's dance describing the details of his death. Atsumori has been left behind on the shore of Suma.

¹
 Zeami, Tsunemasa, quoted in Waley, The Nō Plays of Japan, 83.

He looks behind him and sees
 That Kumagai pursues him;
 He cannot escape.
 Then Atsumori turns his horse
 Knee-deep in the lashing waves,
 And draws his sword.

Twice, three times he strikes; then, still saddled,
 In close fight they twine; roll headlong together
 Among the surf of the shore.
 So Atsumori fell and was slain, but now the Wheel
 of Fate
 Has turned and brought him back.¹

The effect of the chorus's lines is to definitely define
 with equal credibility an action and a place and a
 spiritual condition.

In Yeats's At the Hawk's Well the physical scene
 described by the lyric chorus is not merely background
 for the action, but mirrors in the imaginative creation
 of nature, the scene of spiritual conflict symbolized
 by well, tree, and guardian. In the opening stanza the
 essentials of the play are introduced.

I call to the eye of the mind
 A well long choked up and dry
 And boughs long stripped by the wind,
 I call to the mind's eye
 Pallor of an ivory face,
 Its lofty dissolute air,
 A man climbing up to a place
 The salt sea wind has swept bare.²

¹
Atsumori, p. 73.

²
At the Hawk's Well, p. 136.

The chorus asserts in descriptive poetry the unquestionable foreboding and strangeness of the place which "the salt sea wind has swept bare."¹ As "night falls" and the "mountain-side grows dark" the chorus with a few strokes, as in a Japanese ink painting so admired by Yeats, creates in stark images the mysterious, craggy-edged existence of the play. The scene of "withered leaves", the "dry bed of the well," and the guardian sitting "upon the old grey stone at its side," foreshadow the despair of the Old Man and the loneliness of the spiritual struggle perceived by the chorus. One musician reflecting the normal human sense of terror says, "I am afraid of this place."² Into this bleak, surreal atmosphere the Old Man is introduced by the chorus,

That old man climbs up hither
Who has been watching by his well
These fifty years.³

His actions are described in sharp, painfilled terms as he builds a fire.

He has made a little heap of leaves;
He lays the dry sticks on the leaves
And, shivering with cold, he has taken up
The fire-stick and socket from its hole.
He whirls it round to get a flame;⁴

¹Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 138.

²Ibid., p. 137.

⁴Ibid.

In the firelight, hazels and the empty well dominate the eerie scene. This use of fire is partly ironic when considered in terms of Yeats's description of the 'Condition of Fire' in Per Amica. Here the fire foreshadows the entrance of Cuchulain for whom the 'Condition of Fire' is a spiritual possibility.

As in the Noh, the Yeatsian chorus, reflecting on the conflicts of transitory existence, operates as a human imagination given special insight into the depths of the mind.¹ Yeats's musicians open up the peripheral vision of the audience, a cone-shaped expansion starting from the "eye of the mind", by combining and juxtaposing descriptions of the scene with descriptions of emotional attributes of characters. By the end of the introduction the stage is virtually full of images of nature and the vibrations of conflict.

In the second stanza the chorus asks a rhetorical question on the heroic choice to be made by "the man":

What were his life soon done;²
Would he lose by that or win?

As the drama unfolds this question becomes its center. It is asked by the musicians who have special intuitive knowledge of the dilemma of the play. The answer is implied in choric comments on the condition of the Old Man who is

¹Nathan, p. 176.

²At the Hawk's Well, p. 137.

of non-heroic disposition. The chorus reflects the normal human response to a wasted life and the irreversible despair of old age.

A mother that saw her son
 Doubled over a speckled shin,
 Cross-grained with ninety years,
 Would cry, 'How little worth
 Were all my hopes and fears
 And the hard pain of his birth:'¹

The concern of the mother here is played off against the indifference shown to the Old Man by the supernatural Guardian of the well whose female responsiveness and spiritual awareness is reserved for the true hero.

One of the choric functions mentioned above is to clarify for the audience the divided nature of human desire. The musicians speak about the two alternatives of the heart signified by Cuchulain and the Old Man, but they are not identified with the characters as the chorus would be in Noh. The conditions under which the spiritual conflict will take place are established in natural symbols and in the choices insisted upon by the transitoriness of life.

The boughs of the hazel shake,
 The sun goes down in the west

The heart would be always awake,²
 The heart would turn to its rest.²

The movement of the hazel tree representing the power and wisdom of the supernatural is paralleled in the awakened

¹
Ibid.

²
Ibid.

heart, and is contrasted with the setting sun and with the heart which would rest. This emotional dichotomy is continued between the heart which "would wander always like the wind" and the heart which would "grow old and sleep."¹ The whole middle section of the play is not interwoven with choric voices as is usual in the Noh. Yeats chose to use the chorus to provide a lyrical bridge between the audience and the world of the play. But, to present the central conflict of the play, he chose to use a Western dramatic technique, a dialogue between two main characters.

Thus, it is not until the climactic dance scene, the third segment of the play, which is dominated by the spiritually infused Guardian, that the musicians with their special perceptions are again needed to comment on characters and action. Here Yeats uses the chorus at the point in Cuchulain's spiritual experience when the hawk has begun to dance and its supernatural power begins to take hold of him. The chorus describes with horror the possession of the Guardian by the Woman of the Sidhe;

O, God protect me
From a horrible deathless body
Sliding through the veins of a sudden.²

The chorus then shifts its viewpoint and describes Cuchulain's trance-like response:

¹Ibid., p. 138.

²Ibid., p. 143.

The madness has laid hold upon him now,
For he grows pale and staggers to his feet.¹

As the dance of the hawk woman goes on the musicians witness the well filling. The lyric song which follows defines Cuchulain's heroic path to the immortality lost by not drinking the water.

He had lost what may not be found
Till men heap his burial-mound
And all history ends.²

As in Atsumori, the chorus in At the Hawk's Well assures the credibility of the supernatural and sounds the final wisdom of the play. In the Noh the chorus's comments, the dance, and the action join in a lyric crescendo expressive of the spiritual experience attained by the shite. The audience, then, is led to a transcendental world where all conflict is non-existent.

Although the Yeatsian chorus is noncommittal in the early part of the play as it defines the "contradictions of the heart", in the final scene, the terrified, normal human response to the concluding events sharpens the contrast between the tragic destiny of the extraordinary man and the mundane pursuits of ordinary men. The Yeatsian chorus sings the concluding song in ironic praise of a non-heroic sensibility after the moment of climax. Thus, the chorus brings the audience back to the real world of tragedy and conflict, "a bitter life."

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

The characters together with the chorus in these poetic dramas by Yeats and Zeami are in Yeats's words, "a group of figures" which "enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation."¹ Through their actions and words the audience comes to understand more fully the spiritual vision of the play. The world of wonder which these figures inhabit is permeated by a lyrical atmosphere which further defines the spiritual experience at the center of these plays and is the main concern of the next chapter.

¹ Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays," Essays, p. 225.

CHAPTER III

LYRICAL ATMOSPHERE

The dramatic efforts of both Yeats and Zeami were directed toward the creation of a lyrical atmosphere of heightened reality which allowed a totality of vision and a unity of impression. In their plays the experiences of the real world are intimately connected with those of the spiritual world. The atmosphere of the Four Plays for Dancers and Zeami's Noh is characterized by a dream sensibility¹ and an aura of mystery. There is in these plays a sense of wandering through layers of reality to some mysterious core as secrets are revealed in the unfolding of the spiritual experience. The audience travels into an other-worldliness which is organically fused with the real world through the interlocking of action and location, and the use of natural images to symbolize the spiritual. The atmospheric focus is on the gradual opening up of perception to the supernatural. The lyrical

¹For Yeats this dreamlike atmosphere had been partially successful in The Shadowy Waters but without the vital dimension of the real world. As Nathan points out the pure aestheticism of that play removed it from the universality of human experience (p. 79), while in the Four Plays the supernatural, as in the Noh, is felt through direct experience.

atmosphere is characterized by an extreme austerity, is permeated with an ideal beauty and is based on a rhythmic structure which governs the movement of the drama.

The atmosphere of Noh is characterized by an elimination of elements which are excessive. Noh simplicity as an aesthetic ideal derives from the Zen Buddhist principle of wabi, poverty or simplification, which refers to the pure "suchness" of things.¹ The Buddhist ideal of seeking to strip away all the multiplicities of temporal reality that prevent man's perception of spiritual truth was translated by Zeami into an aesthetic principle which permeates all aspects of Noh, except for the elaborate costumes. Instead of the anxiety of multiplicity the Noh atmosphere offers the tranquility of simplicity.

Yeats admired the Noh form for this stark simplicity and sought for his plays a similar astringency which allowed the showing forth of the essence of things. In "Certain Noble Plays" Yeats points out that such "simplification is not mere economy" for "the measure of all arts' greatness can be but in their intimacy."² For Yeats this intimacy was made possible by the exclusion of obtrusive elements

¹ Watts, p. 181. Also mentioned in Ishibashi, p. 136.

² Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays" Essays, p. 222-224.

which prevented that perception of the depths of the mind which was the focus of his drama.

Both Zeami and Yeats sought in an austere, lyrical atmosphere the reflection of an ideal beauty which helped to express the spiritual vision upon which the plays were based. Zeami advocated a beauty called yūgen as the final goal of Noh and as the ultimate aesthetic ideal. Yeats shared Zeami's conviction when he stated that "Beauty is the end Law of poetry."¹ Further, Yeats discovered in Noh aesthetic principles his own criteria for a "true theatre of beauty"² which he outlined in his introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan.

The term yūgen originally used in Taoism and Zen Buddhism, means "what lies beneath the surface,"³ something mysterious and profound which is beyond the reach of ordinary human senses. Makoto Ueda points out that, etymologically analyzed, the yū of yūgen means deep, dim or difficult to see, and gen describes the dark, profound,

¹Yeats, letter to George Russell (1900) quoted in Ellmann, Identity, p. 42.

²Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays," p. 228.

³Waley, p. 21. The discussion on yūgen from Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, Japanese Court Poetry (Stanford University Press, 1961); Ishibashi, Yeats and the Noh; Keene, No the Classical Theatre of Japan: Japanese Noh drama, vol. 3; Ueda, Zeami, Basho, Yeats, Pound; and Ueda, The Old Pine Tree.

tranquil color of the universe and refers to the Buddhist concept of truth.¹ As an aesthetic principle employed in Japanese literature, yūgen came to imply a remote, elegant beauty with subtle rather than obvious overtones. As such yūgen is conceived as one of the unifying devices of Noh along with character, image, and musical principle. It harmonizes visual, aural, and literary expressions. It refers to the subtle complex tone achieved by emphasizing the unspoken connotations of words and the implications of the poetic situation.²

In the Noh, Zeami retained the original meaning and mystical overtones of yūgen and created a beauty which was not merely of appearance but also of the spirit. It has been suggested by critics of Japanese poetry that yūgen is closely related to symbolism as it was outlined by Edgar Allen Poe, "a suggestive indefiniteness, vague and therefore of spiritual effect."³ Yeats, too, desired to work by suggestion to evoke profound meanings and create the "mysterious art" he sought: "I desire a mysterious

¹ Ueda, Literary and Art Theories in Japan (Cleveland, 1967), p. 60.

² Brower and Miner, p. 265.

³ Tsunoda et. al., p. 284.

art...doing its work by suggestion not by direct statement."¹
 Here Yeats expresses the essence of the Noh beauty of yūgen.
 In the symbolic description of At the Hawk's Well Yeats
 achieved a beauty akin to yūgen. The barren setting,
 the withered tree, the figure of the Old Man produce a bitter,
 mournful tone that pervades the play. Such an evocative
 setting filled with emotional overtones is reminiscent
 of atmospheric beauty of place created by Zeami in his
 plays. Alan Watt's definition of yūgen as a device of
 suggesting meditative depths with a few brief words describes²
 the method for creating beauty used by both playwrights.

Yūgen, then, is used to describe the profound, the
 remote, and the mysterious, those impressions of things
 which cannot be grasped easily. It is the beauty of
 the innermost nature of things manifesting itself outwards.
 This type of beauty results not from imitating the object
 in detail, but from the poet's ability to assimilate
 himself to the object and thereby experience it as a totality.
 The imitation of human actions and things which embody
yūgen should be done in such a way as to reveal the hidden

¹Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 213.

²Watts, p. 182.

essence of men and things.¹ In Noh, the artist is concerned with man's deepest self. In his perception he sees life through death, being through non-being and permanence through change.² Therefore, Zeami depicts in the Noh the beauty of strong human emotion; heroic suffering, loneliness, or extreme sorrow. Yūgen is inseparable from the ecstasy experienced by the Noh shite at his moment of self-realization. Yeats expressed a similar correlation of beauty with ecstasy when he asked in "Estrangements" in 1909, "...is not ecstasy some fulfillment of the soul in itself, some slow or sudden expansion of it like an overflowing well? Is not this what is meant by beauty?"³

The lyrical atmosphere which dominates the plays of Yeats and Zeami is permeated by an ideal beauty which as an experience and not merely an intellectual concept,

1

A story exemplifying this principle is quoted by Pound from Fenollosa's notes: A Noh actor followed an old woman in the street and noted her every step because he wanted to learn the difficult role of Komachi. "She said that it was bad for Noh, though it might be good for the common theatre, to imitate facts. For the Noh he must feel the thing as a whole from the inside." "Noh" or Accomplishment, p. 51.

²Ueda, Zeami, p. 33.

³Yeats, "Estrangements," Autobiography, p. 319. He is speaking here of tragedy "which has not joy as comedy does but ecstasy...."

reflects the enlightenment of the main character and is based on a threefold rhythmic structure.

The Noh has disregarded more completely than any other drama the normal considerations of time and space. Since the spirit is superior to all tangible aspects of the material world, the Noh is not tied to such outer world dictates: a day, a month, a year, or a century can elapse with a single line, while the action of the moment can be prolonged indefinitely.¹ As Arthur Waley points out,

...Nō does not make a frontal attack on the emotions. It creeps at the subject warily....The action, ... does not take place before our eyes, but is lived through again in mimic and recital by the ghost of one of the participants in it. Thus we get no possibility of crude realities; a vision of life indeed, but painted with the colours of memory, longing, or regret.²

The Noh then has little dramatic structure in the traditional Western sense.³ It does not progress according

¹ Pater, whose aesthetic ideals greatly influenced Yeats, expressed a similar ideal remarking that "...in that vivid single impression left on the mind when all is over, not in any mechanical limitation of time and place, is the secret of the 'unities'--the true imaginative unity of the drama." Walter H. Pater, Appreciations with an Essay on Style (London: Macmillan 1895, 1944), pp. 211-212.

²Waley, p. 53.

³Donald Keene points out that contrary to the Aristotelian theory that a play must have a beginning, middle and end, Noh plays tend to be all end, though divided into sections of different musical tempi. (Nō The Classical Drama of Japan, p. 9.)

to the law of causation, but instead it has a musical continuity. The Noh relies on the instantaneous emotive power of music and rhythm since it aims not to analyze social problems but to represent ultimate reality lying beyond the realm of the intellect.¹ This movement of a Noh play is based on Zen thought. Zen art is not a matter of observation or imitation of an object; its style expresses through strength based on simplicity a spiritual rhythm. The Noh play is usually divided into two acts, while the rhythmic movement is defined by a threefold musical structure; Jo, introduction, Ha, development, and Kyū, climax. The structure is derived from traditional Japanese music, and though it the rhythm of Noh is suggestive of the great hidden law of the universe, the universal rhythm of life.² According to Zeami "all things in the universe, good or evil, large or small, animate or inanimate, have each the rhythm of Jo, Ha, and Kyū."³

The musical quality of Noh, the oscillation between movement and arrest, stillness and turbulence, is described by Zeami through the metaphor of the flowing stream. "Water flows slowly and peacefully on a gracious plane; it rushes on whirling and bubbling as it comes to

¹ Ueda, Zeami, p. 30.

² Ueda, Literary and Art Theories in Japan, (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1967), p. 70.

³ Ibid.

the rapids."¹ Through this rhythmic flow, this mingling of contraries, philosophical implications and sensory effects are united.

The Jo, the introduction to a Noh play, is a mixture of prose (kotoba) for narration, and verse (utai) for emotional utterance, and has a slow regular beat. In Atsumori the atmospheric rhythm begins with the illusive, enigmatic opening couplet (jidai) spoken by the priest, Rensei.

Life is a lying dream, he only wakes
Who casts the world aside.²

This is the central theme of the play and establishes Atsumori's conflict as universal as well as personal. This is followed by the hard prose outlines of the Rensei's description of himself, and his destination in a regular rhythm of alternating five and seven syllable units. A shift in atmosphere is created by the lyrical movement of the Michiyuki, the "Song of Travel"³ which serves as a passageway into the shadowiness of the unknown. Scene after scene, full of allusions and nuances, dissolves before the reader.

The major symbol and unifying device of the play is the flute which belonged to Atsumori, and is introduced

¹Ibid.

²Atsumori, p. 64.

³The "Song of Travel", is common to most Noh plays and provides a vehicle for the extraordinary descriptive poetry typical of Noh.

at the end of the Michiyuki:

To the music of the reaper's flute
 No song is sung
 But the sighing of the wind.¹

The emotional tone and subtle beauty in these lines is an example of yūgen. The reaper's flute is hinted to be Atsumori's flute Greenleaf but now "no song is sung" as it was in the victorious days of Taira. The sighing of the wind connotes the sadness and loneliness of Atsumori's spirit life at Suma. The lyrical juxtaposition of an image from nature, the sighing of the wind, with the flute symbol, suggests the emotional atmosphere of the play; Atsumori's grief and his attachment to the world. Night, the appropriate time for a spiritual encounter, approaches as the chorus describes his "deep misery", and alludes to the reaper's identity, further internalizing the movement of the play.

Short is the way that leads
 From the sea of Suma back to my home.
 This little journey, up to the hill
 And down to the shore again, and up to the hill--
 This is my life, and the sum of hateful tasks.
 If one should ask me
 I too would answer
 That on the shore of Suma
 I live in sadness.
 Yet if any guessed my name,
 Then might I too have friends.

¹
Atsumori, p. 64.

But now from my deep misery
 Even those that were dearest
 Are grown estranged. Here must I dwell abandoned
 To one thought's anguish:
 That I must dwell here.¹

The whole passage reflects the rhythm of the recurring phenomenon of 'dreaming back'; "the sum of hateful tasks", when (as Yeats noted) the spiritual being returns again and again to the scene of his tragedy. The mention here of the Sea of Suma is an example of the use of place in Noh to connote a particular atmosphere, in this case one of melancholy and sadness. This use of allusion² is another technique for creating yūgen. The Shore of Suma is well known to the Japanese audience from the famous poems by Lord Yukihira and from Genji's banishment to Suma in the Tale of Genji. Throughout the play the shore of Suma is used symbolically to suggest Atsumori's grief. Recurring images of the sea, the rocky shore, sea birds, salt waves create an atmosphere consistent with Zeami's ideal of beauty.

The regular rhythm of the introduction is broken in the Ha, or development, which is performed at a variety of

¹Ibid., p. 65.

²Yeats noted in his introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan that the emotion of the men who created Noh was "self-conscious and reminiscent always associating itself with pictures and poems." (p. 233.)

tempos and pitches. The line length becomes more and more irregular and rhythms more diversified. The flow of energy is punctuated by emotion filled silences. The sense of expectation gradually increases throughout this section as secrets are revealed during the dialogue between the shite, Atsumori, who appears in his first disguise as a reaper, and the priest Rensai. The reaper humbly requests prayers of the priest and reveals himself as one of Atsumori's family. The atmosphere of prayer is charged with the emotional utterance of the shite, "Oh, reject me not," as he vanishes into the night. With the reappearance of the shite as the warrior Atsumori, and the passionate "tale of [his] confession", which describes the defeat and misfortune of the Taira clan in images from nature, the tempo quickens. As the circumstances are outlined, it is clear that Atsumori's grief and desire for revenge reflect a universal situation.

Yet their prosperity lasted but for a day;
 It was like the flower of the convolvulus
 There was none to tell them
 That glory flashes like sparks from flintstone,
 And after, -darkness.
 Oh wretched, the life of men!¹

The atmosphere here follows Zeami's principle of yūgen, for it is not the surface of things that counts, but the inner essence and feeling. The whole passage uses descriptive

¹Atsumori, p. 70.

nature imagery to reveal the loneliness and melancholy situation of the fall of the Taira clan. "The leaves of the autumn of Juyei/ were tossed by the four winds;/ Scattered, scattered (like leaves too) floated their ships."

Here they dwelt they on the shore of Suma
 At the first valley.
 From the mountain behind us the winds blew down
 Till the fields grew wintry again.
 Our ships lay by the shore, where night and day
 The seagulls cried and salt waves washed on our sleeves.
 We slept with fishers in their huts
 On pillows of sand...
 ...Sorrowful we lived
 On the wild shore of Suma.¹

The end of the Ha becomes intense in anticipation of the climactic final movement which is prepared for by the re-emergence of the flute symbol. Reminded by the waki of the "Music of the flute" which was "echoing from your tents that night;" Atsumori acknowledges: "The Bamboo-flute! I wore it when I died."²

The kyū, the climax of the play, is performed with great speed and brevity. The tone is no longer one of expectation and the atmosphere is filled with the immediacy and wonder of spiritual manifestation and psychic revelation. The sentences become fragmentary; the rhythm is quick, irregular, and full of tension. A sense of release accompanies the ecstatic dance of Atsumori as the death scene is related by the chorus and shite. Here is embodied that perception of Buddhist truth in a lyrical ecstasy

¹Ibid., p. 71.

²Ibid., p. 72.

which is the aim of yūgen. The atmospheric movement of the play, its rhythmic power carries the audience to that revelation of hidden truth presented in Atsumori's moment of self-recognition.

In the Four Plays for Dancers, unlike Yeats's earlier plays, a three-fold dramatic structure is also apparent, though not as clearly defined in musical terms as in Noh. Yeats also felt that a musical rhythm was essential to poetic drama if it would reveal the universal rhythm of life; "We must from time to time substitute for the movements that the eye sees the nobler movements that the heart sees, the rhythmical movements that seem to flame up into the imagination from some deeper life than that of the individual mind."¹ All four plays begin with an introductory lyrical section followed by a dialogue-centered middle section, and end with a climactic dance and lyrical closing. Yeats sought in his plays unity of effect through a beauty created by lyrical atmosphere and through musical continuity, for "when sound and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet in one emotion."²

The atmosphere created in At the Hawk's Well is characterized by movement and arrest and like the Noh,

¹ Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 48.

² Yeats, "Symbolism of Poetry," Essays, p. 156.

is related to a three fold rhythmic division. The primary movement of the play is not unlike that of a box within a box, and interior journey of the mind to the place of initiation. It is centered on the suspense of waiting for heroic revelation which is culminated in the final scene. The atmospheric movement is from the windswept barrenness of nature to images of strange shadowiness. Throughout the play the lyrical atmosphere is defined by the juxtaposition of turbulence and stillness, clarity and shadow.

The sculptured outlines of the introduction give an austere beauty to the opening and provide a lyric bridge into the unknown regions of the play.

I call to the eye of the mind
 A well long choked up and dry
 And boughs long stripped by the wind,
 And I call to the mind's eye
 Pallor of an ivory face,
 Its lofty dissolute air,
 A man climbing up to a place
 The salt sea wind has swept bare.¹

Here the primary symbol of the play, the well, "... choked up and dry" presenting at best a gloomy prospect, is introduced; and the region of the play is defined as an internal one of the mind. In these simple lyric chants images of nature and echoes of basic human emotion help to create the sense of impending change. First comes the awakening of the mind's eye, then the gradual diminish-

¹At the Hawk's Well, p. 136.

ing of external reality as "night falls;" so that perception by the inner self is possible as silence is punctuated by human response: "I am afraid of this place."

The atmosphere of the introduction focuses on the desolate scene created by "boughs long stripped by the wind" and "withered leaves" which choke the well bed. These are all images which foreshadow the Old Man's fruitless search and the "bitter wisdom" stated at the end of the play. It is an atmosphere charged with the emotional dichotomy of human existence.

With the appearance of the Old Man, the second section, the development, gets underway. It is centered on the dialogue between the Old Man and Cuchulain. The blank verse contrasts with the lyric verse of the introduction, and the atmospheric tone is brisk and colloquial. Shadow is dispelled as "the fire leaps up and shines upon the hazels and the empty well."¹ There is a movement toward the human realm of confrontation. Sounds of the human voice challenge the chill of the supernatural as the Old Man reprimands the Guardian "...yesterday you spoke three times.../Today you are as stupid as a fish;"² and the scope of vision is awakened to include the pettiness which is inseparable from human life, and the demands of

¹
Ibid., p. 138.

²
Ibid.

a world untouched by spiritual necessity.. Unlike Noh, which attempts to remove the ugliness of human life, Yeats insists on the craggy edges of existence. The movement of the play expands again with the entrance of Cuchulain. His appearance brings further worldly rhythms to the play as well as a sensitivity for the spiritual quest. Cuchulain is not one who rejects the world nor does he fear the supernatural. The dialogue between age, "one whom the dancers cheat," and youth, whose "luck is strong,"¹ between the merely dissipated and the heroic, sets up the interplay of the natural and the spiritual as well as defining the criterion for heroic involvement. The flow of the dialogue which is centered on the well, is broken by the cry of the hawk.

The atmosphere is infused with an awareness of spiritual power as Cuchulain relates his direct confrontation with the hawk spirit--another aspect of the silent Guardian and quiescent well; its challenge, "It flew/ as though it would have torn me with its beak," and his subsequent pursuit of it, "Could I but find a means to bring it down/ I'd hood it." As the movement of the play comes closer to the climax, the conversation centers on the power of "the unappeasable shadow" who will "allure or destroy."²

¹Ibid., p. 140.

²Ibid., p.141.

The tempo of the dialogue increases as the emotionally erratic tension toward the end of this section prepares for the filling of the well, and the possession of the Guardian by a "terrible life."¹

In the third and climactic section of At the Hawk's Well, the sense of urgency and terror greatly increases with the hawk's dance. The combination of lyrical poetry with blank verse, as well as the intermingling of voices, the Old Man, Cuchulain's and the musicians, creates a rhythmic tension of movement and arrest. The climax approaches; the attention is focused on the guardian and the arena of spiritual confrontation, not on the outer world confrontation of differences of opinion. The accelerated rhythm of the dance contrasts with the slower movement of the introduction. The poetry moves into a high lyrical phase as the pace of the play changes with the direct influence of the supernatural on the hero. Unlike the Noh play, where the energy and lyrical flow are abruptly and simultaneously terminated in a crescendo of passion which soothes into blissful peace as all elements are brought to a point of unity, here the atmosphere is charged not

¹
Ibid., p. 142.

with peaceful resignation but with the passionate yet commanding assurance of Cuchulain who has been touched by the spiritual, as he accepts heroically the challenge of life. The lyrical epilogue extends the mental impact beyond the physical action and brings the play full circle in an ironic answer to the opening question of the play.

'The man that I praise,
Cries out the leafless tree,
'Has married and stays
By an old hearth, and he
On naught has set store
But Children and dogs on the floor.
Who but an idiot would praise
A withered tree?'¹

Here again is that essential difference between the Buddhist inspired transcendent vision of Noh, and Yeats's tragic vision of continual conflict as the heroic destiny. The Noh shite fades into an eternity of silence while the Yeatsian hero is projected into the real world to live his tragic destiny. Similarly the cold, stark beauty which permeates the atmosphere of At the Hawk's Well correctly reflects the reality of conflict for the tragic hero. The beauty created by Zeami in Atsumori has a delicate dream-like quality appropriate to the theme of transcendence.

The atmosphere of both Atsumori and At the Hawk's Well is based on a rhythmic blending of the urgency of action

¹
Ibid., p. 145.

and "stillness of contemplation," and carries the audience from passion to perception. Yeats noted that "...the nobleness of the arts is in the mingling of contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy, perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender, overflowing turbulent energy, and marmorean stillness."¹ The link between the audience and the poet in Yeats's dramas as well as in Zeami's is silence, for "the poet would set before us all those things which we feel and imagine in silence--no observation of life."² In his study of Noh, Yeats saw that the containment of physical energy in these plays approached the ideal he came to feel was inherent in his own aims as a dramatist. Drama should speak only to make silence deeper. Alan Watts describes a similar ideal of silence in the artistic vision of the Zen painting of Mu-chi, where the use of empty space is brought to life with a few strokes of the brush. He goes on to point out that in poetry the empty space is the surrounding silence which a lyric poem requires, "a silence of the mind in which one does not think about the poem but actually feels the sensation which it evokes all the more strongly for having said so little."³

¹Yeats, "Poetry and Tradition," Essays, p. 255.

²Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays," Essays, p. 231.

³Watts, p. 183.

To Yeats the secret of Noh lay in its concentrated-ness, its stylization, its self-contained tension between tumultuous passion and lyrical quietude, and its unity of image.¹ Engleberg points out that it was as a single image "that the Noh was the answer to Yeats's quest for a form which would embrace within carefully bounded limits a single unfolding story capable of achieving a single effect."² The technique of the unifying image which Yeats saw in the Noh lies at the heart of Yeatsian symbolism that sustains the spiritual vision of the Four Plays and will be the main concern of the next chapter.

¹
Ishibashi, p. 130.

²
Engleberg, p. 142.

CHAPTER IV
SYMBOLIC METHOD

...The man who understands a symbol not only 'opens himself' to the objective world, but at the same time succeeds in emerging from his personal situation and reaching a comprehension of the universal...Thanks to the symbol, the individual experience is 'awoken' and transmuted into a spiritual act.

Mircea Eliade
One and the Two¹

The work of art itself is symbol, 'aesthetic monad' utterly original and not in the old sense 'imitated'; 'concrete', yet fluid and suggestive, a means to truth.

Frank Kermode
Romantic Image²

Ezra Pound in "Noh" or Accomplishment pointed out that "the Noh plays are at their best, I think, an image; that is to say their unity lies in the image. They are built up about it as the Greek plays are built up about a single moral

¹
Mircea Eliade, One and the Two (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torch Books, 1969). p.22.

²
Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 44.

conviction."¹ It was as the single image that Noh appealed to Yeats, as a form which could embrace within carefully bounded limits, a single unfolding story capable of achieving a single effect, the "one emotion."² It must have seemed to Yeats that the aim of Noh was similar to his ideal of creating in the drama a unity of form close to the Paterian condition of music in which all elements are woven together to illuminate one another achieving a wholeness of impression. In the essay "Symbolism of Poetry"

¹
Pound, "Noh" or Accomplishment, p. 63. In the magazine, Poetry, for March, 1913, Pound presented his well-known definition of image which further clarifies his definition of Noh as an "image." He defined image as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time...It is the presentation of such an image which gives that sudden sense of liberation; that sense of freedom from time and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art." Pound's definition of poetry published in the same essay while he was working on the Noh plays, stressed concision, separation of imagery from abstract statements, and emphasis upon natural images. It is interesting to note that these are also the outstanding characteristics of Japanese poetry and certainly of Noh poetry, as outlined by Brower and Miner in Japanese Court Poetry. Yeats, in his introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan, also emphasized these principles as essential to poetic drama.

²
Engelberg, The Vast Design (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 142.

(1900) Yeats expressed his belief that "when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion."¹ Here in the Noh Yeats found that lyrical unity suggested by Pater as a substitute for the unities of time and place. Indeed, the Noh as Zeami conceived it is a symbol of (or, as Pound prefers, an image for) a single profound emotion which is the center of the play. In Atsumori, for example, all elements; literary and dramatic, work together to produce a single impression, that of profoundly felt vengeance. Yeats, in the Four Plays also sought through symbolism to focus on a single emotion such as heroic courage in At the Hawk's Well, the selflessness of love in The Only Jealousy of Emer, the forgiveness in Dreaming of the Bones and Christ's loneliness in Calvary, until each play became an image of that emotion, as experienced in the depths of the mind.

The symbolic method used by Yeats and Zeami to further establish the central position of spiritual reality in their plays is the subject of this chapter. After considering the

¹ Yeats, "Symbolism of Poetry," Essays, p. 157.

definition of terms such as image, symbol, and metaphor, the discussion will deal with literary symbols, nature imagery, and the concept of the recurring metaphor followed by a look at non-literary symbols such as the dancer-dance motif and the use of the mask which reveal the closeness of these plays to other art forms.

Robert Brower and Earl Miner point out in Japanese Court Poetry that the "lines between image, metaphor, allegory, and symbol are not always easy to draw in Western poetry, and the distinctions are even more difficult to make in Japanese." As an example they quote a poem by Shunzei where "the images of quails crying in the autumn dusk may be not only an image but also an affective metaphor for a sad loneliness, as well as a symbol of the experience of the poet."

As evening falls,
 From along the moors the autumn wind
 Blows chill into the heart,
 And the quails raise their plaintive cry
 In the deep grass of secluded Fukakusa.

The dusk, the autumn wind, the quails are used as images to describe a scene. As vehicles of a "melancholy tenor" these images are metaphors. But the images also function as "symbols of states of mind and represent a truth, because centuries of Buddhist monism and poetic practice had invented these natural images with overtones which made clear

their relationship to man."¹ The poetry of Noh rises out of the court poetry tradition, and often whole poems or segments of poems are used in the text; thus the difficulties suggested above are applicable.

It has been suggested that the imaginative power of Noh springs more from the use of symbol than of metaphor.² It would be more correct to say that in Noh image as metaphor goes beyond its usual function and becomes a symbol in which is embodied an essence, an emotion which is not otherwise expressible. Furthermore, the symbolism in the Noh is inextricably bound up with what Yeats called the "rhythm of metaphor." Yeats accurately perceived the method at the heart of the Noh symbolism when he asked in his introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan, "I wonder am I fanciful in discovering in the plays themselves a playing upon a single metaphor as deliberate as the echoing rhythm of line in Chinese and Japanese painting?" He gives examples of the recurring imagery of woven grass in Nishkigi which becomes symbolic of the "tangled" unconsumated love of the ghost lovers, and of the feather

¹Brown and Miner, p. 17.

²Wells, p. 246.

mantle of Hagoromo which "creates also its rhythm of metaphor." Yeats related these examples to "Shelley's continually repeated fountain and cave, his broad stream and solitary star."¹ Further understanding of Yeats's use of the term metaphor may be aided by Cleanth Brooks's definition of metaphor which goes beyond its "referential" and "emotive" characteristics to become a direct means of representing truth incommunicable by any other means. As such metaphor is performing as a symbol.² In the "Symbolism of Poetry," (1900) Yeats speaks of the "perfectly symbolical" lines of Burns which "evoke an emotion which cannot be evoked by any other arrangement of colours and sounds and forms" and points out the vital connection between metaphor and symbol. "We may call this metaphorical writing, but it is better to call it symbolical writing, because metaphors are not profound enough to be moving, when they are not symbols, and when they are symbols they are the most perfect of all because the most subtle, outside of pure

¹Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays," Essays, pp. 234-235. It was Yeats who called attention to the pattern of images in Noh which inspired Japanese scholars for the first time to examine the recurring imagery so characteristic of Zeami's style.

²Cleanth Brooks and R. P. Warren, Understanding Poetry, 3rd ed., (New York: Holt, 1960), p. 270.

sound, and through them one can best find out what symbols are."¹ Metaphor here is expected both to evoke an object in order to illustrate an idea or quality and to embody that idea or quality as a symbol. Yeats further elaborated on the function of metaphor in the 1906 essay "Discoveries", where he saw in it a new possibility for expressing the spiritual reality in the depths of the mind while retaining his earlier idea of symbol as symbolic substitution for spiritual reality.² Here he suggested that the "outer world" gives metaphors and examples to the teller of stories who has "felt something in the depth of his mind and wants to make it as visible and powerful to our senses as possible."³ Nathan points out that Yeats came to prefer, just prior to his introduction to Noh, the term metaphor, which he saw as a vivid use of nature to express something inexpressible. Metaphor used in this way became a means of formalizing the natural world until it became a medium through which the audience might pass into a deeper world. This approach offered a break with the obscure symbolism

¹Yeats, "Symbolism of Poetry," Essays, p. 276. Henry Wells draws some interesting parallels between the lyric poetry of Robert Burns and that of Noh. Wells, pp. 288-297.

²Nathan, p. 155.

³Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays, p. 276.

used in the earlier plays.¹ The metaphorical representation of the spiritual struggle in the depths of the mind is to be understood in terms of the symbols which allowed participation of the supernatural. By way of definition of terms, then, the complexity of imagery noted in Japanese poetry is also evident in Yeats's and Zeami's plays, where the image is many-faceted, and metaphors become symbols.

Unity in the Noh, as Yeats perceived, is attained through a pervading cluster of images or a single recurring metaphor acting as a symbol to which other elements are linked as in a mandala.² Here is the technique of the unifying

¹
Nathan, P. 155.

²
Jose and Miriam Arguelles, Mandala, (Berkeley: Shambala Press, 1972), p. 20. The mandala symbol which is used in many myths and religions, was a significant aspect of Esoteric Buddhism which influenced the Noh. It is a centering technique, a process of consciously following a path to one's center. "Mandala is a wholeing technique; it is the alchemy of opposites reuniting, a blueprint that can be placed upon anything, or any man or being. It is a vision, it is a song, it is a story and a dance..." / As Jung explained it: "Symbols by their very nature can so unite opposites that these no longer diverge or clash, but mutually supplement one another and give meaningful shape to life." Carl Jung, Memories, Dreams and Reflections (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 338.

image, also mentioned by Pound, which assures atmospheric, emotional, and philosophical coherence. Yeats, then, was aware of the distinct qualities of the symbolic method of Noh which he assimilated to his own ideals of poetic drama.

Yeats felt that with the Four Plays he had invented a "form of drama distinguished, indirect, symbolic..." and thus "to have attained the distance from life which can make credible strange events."¹ The symbolic method he adopted in these plays enabled him to utilize the advantages of both external reality and the inner dream. A symbolism of natural objects allowed the calling forth of that spiritual world which is hidden in material things. For Yeats the imaginative use of symbols was the method by which the symbolic artist bridged the gap between the mortal and the immortal. Yeats wrote to George Russell in 1900 that "the imaginative deals with spiritual things symbolized by natural things--with gods not with matter."²

Zeami's ideal was a descriptive symbolism which on the one hand reveals the basic human emotions and passions which are the heart of Noh and on the other hand insures the union of subjective and objective, observer and observed.

¹

Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays", Essays, p. 221.

²

Yeats, Letter to George Russell 1900 quoted in Nathan, p. 62.

The symbolic artist can make this possible by his recognition of the spiritual in all things; he presents this essence through things in the visible world. Again the Noh emphasis on the elimination of emotional conflict contrasts with the exaltation of emotional life in Yeats's drama. Yet the symbolic method is similar. As Yeats expressed it in "Discoveries": "It is not possible to separate an emotion or a spiritual state from the image that calls it up and gives it expression." He goes on to define "those things that are permanent in the world, the great passions that trouble all and have but a brief recurring life of flower and seed in any man...desire and hope, terror and weariness, spring and autumn."¹ The Noh artist uses symbols to lead his audience to an instantaneous perception of what cannot be analyzed or described in any other way.² Yeats shares this idea of the power of the symbol when he states that "a symbol is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame."³

¹Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays, p. 286.

²Ueda, Zeami, p. 27.

³Yeats, "William Blake and His Illustrations to the Divine Comedy," Essays, p. 116.

In Noh, nature is always a source of vision, and man's perception comes out of the awareness of the oneness of man and nature. The consistent use in Noh of an image to function as the symbolic embodiment of a profound spiritual conflict or emotion is paralleled in Yeats's comment that, "an image that has transcended particular time and place becomes a symbol, passes beyond death as it were, and becomes a living soul."¹ This process is descriptive of the Buddhist world view which underlies the Noh. For example, in many Noh plays the image of the moon and its light is a symbol which signifies a manner of perceiving life in its entirety; as an ideal realization of truth the moon signifies not a particular doctrine, but is equivalent to enlightenment itself.² The image of the flute, "of floating bamboo wood", in Atsumori as the dominant symbol of Atsumori's inner turmoil is a bridge between past and present, natural and supernatural, material and immaterial. The sound of the flute, lonely without song, symbolizes Atsumori's loneliness: as it was his "guide" on the "passage through this sad world,"³ so it becomes through the priest's identification of the

¹Yeats, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," Essays, p. 80.

²Wells, pp. 267-268.

³Atsumori, pp. 66-67.

flute with Atsumori--representative of Atsumori's attachment to the past which must be relinquished.

One of the dominant features of the symbolic method of Noh is this use of images from nature to insure the symbolic overtones. The poetry of Noh shares this quality with Japanese court poetry, which, as Brower and Miner point out, is partially due to the sensory nature of Japanese nouns. The nouns employed in Japanese poetry name objects apprehensible to the senses. Psychologically every noun is an image. The animistic impulse from Shintoism which gives nature an emotional value in the everyday life of the Japanese is another influence. The Buddhist and Taoist philosophical concept of oneness of all natural life thus giving external nature a closeness and relevance to human nature is one more factor.¹ According to the Lotus Sutra which is often quoted in Noh, nature is an infinitely spacious assembly of souls. Since forms in nature are themselves instinct with spirit, as man is himself, natural forms become the leading elements in Noh poetry.²

The play Atsumori offers an example of this use of images from nature. Here images associated with the sea

¹
Brower and Miner, p. 15.

²
Ueda, The Old Pine Tree, p. xiv.

shore at Suma provide a unity of atmosphere, as pointed out in the last chapter, but also express the emotional-spiritual center of the play, Atsumori's grief and inner turmoil. These images provide the "rhythm of metaphor" Yeats recognized in other Noh plays. Thus, a prayer is sought by Atsumori in the "voice of the evening waves;"¹ the ghost of Atsumori wakens "the cry of sea-birds roaming/ Upon Awaji shore;"² and the hero is depicted as "sunk in sin as deep.../ As the sea by a rocky shore."³ Atsumori laments the flight of the Taira clan "on the heaving sea" which took them to the shore where "the sea-gulls cried and salt waves washed on our sleeves" and where they slept on "pillows of sand."⁴ The hero's death battle takes place in "lashing waves" among the "surf of the shore."⁵ The images and sounds of the sea are absorbed in the prayer of Atsumori's final moment of self-recognition. These images together form a symbolic core which reflects the identity of man with nature, as well as Atsumori's grief.

Another example of the unifying image in Noh which has profound symbolic dimensions is found in the recurring images related to fire and shadow in the play Tsunemasa.

¹ Atsumori, p. 67.

² Ibid., p. 68.

³ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

As the play starts out it is night and "within the flame of a candle" the priest sees a "shadow dimly appearing..."¹ It is Tsunemasa's shadow described as a "flickering form which vanished like haze over the fields."² At the end of the play the priest turns away from the candle at the ghost's request and in the midnight moon sees a vision of hell as "fire leaps from swords," and "red waves flow" which "like flames" cover Tsunemasa. The "woes that consume" him,³ his attachment to the world are not merely like the flames; they are the flames. The candle is blown out, the shadow of the ghost vanishes as Tsunemasa represents himself as a foolish man who is like the moth that flies into the flame.

Another example from the same play shows the use of natural images bound together in a metaphor which becomes a symbol of the shite's inner experience.

The wind blowing through withered trees; rain from a
cloudless sky.
The moon shining on level sands; frost on a summer's
night.
Frost lying...but I, because I could not lie at rest.
Am come back to the world for a while,
Like a shadow that steals over the grass.
I am like dews that in the morning
Still cling to the grasses. Oh pitiful the longing
That has beset me!

¹Waley, Tsunemasa, p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 83.

³Ibid., p. 87.

⁴Ibid., p. 82.

The longing of Tsunemasa for this world and the dew clinging to the grass are in a poetic sense one. In the couplet from a poem by Po Chu-i the wind sounds like rain, just as the sands appear to be covered with frost, so does Tsunemasa appear to be a shadow like dew on the grass.¹ Although nature seems to be reconciled to reality "restless" Tsunemasa is not. The image of dew is repeated again in the course of the play as a symbol of Tsunemasa's attachment to the world. The sad transitoriness of the world, man's oneness with nature, is expressed in the lyrical question,

But in a world that is as dew,
As dew on the grasses, as foam on the water
What flower lasteth?²

In Noh plays such as these, the resolution of the play is revealed in images as well as in the actions of the characters. Unlike Yeats's imagery which carries the central contrasts beyond the world of the play, here the imagery becomes synonymous with the climactic moment of enlightenment.

Yeats applied to his own plays this symbolic method of recurring images from nature to represent the spiritual world while simultaneously revealing its interweaving with

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 83.

human affairs. Stimulated by the Noh and Far Eastern painting, Yeats used nature in the Four Plays to a greater degree than in the earlier plays,¹ but did not rely as completely as Zeami in the power of imagery to convey its message. The treatment of ideas was a central concern. For example, in At the Hawk's Well the outer scene of barrenness and desolation suggests the inner reality of the contradictions of the heart,² the Old Man's fruitless quest. Here Yeats moves away from the symbolism of a play like the Shadowy Waters, which was made up of abstractions and personal symbols related to a body of knowledge outside the world of the play. The symbols in At the Hawk's Well are related to the action and are made clear in the context of the play. Images were chosen not for their obscurity but came out of the human experience.³ Yeats thus sought the union of sensuous images and deep spiritual apprehension of life. The Noh plays, as Yeats realized, were full of human passions, not intellectual essences, abstractions which had cut Yeats's earlier plays off from human compassion.⁴ Yeats had noted

¹Ishibashi, Yeats and the Noh, p. 143.

²Moore, p. 201.

³Nathan, p. 182.

⁴Engelberg, p. 138.

in "Discoveries" (1906) before his introduction to Noh, that "art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories and sensations of the body."¹ In the Noh Yeats saw that concrete and definite images were used to convey the profound experiences of man, that the images of nature revealed a universal condition.

In At the Hawk's Well Yeats uses a complex of images--well, tree, and hawk--to make up what Nathan calls "the binding metaphor of the play."² These natural images allow the human perception to pass through the objective world into the subjective, there to witness the spiritual struggle.³ Yeats stated his ideal when he said "... the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation."⁴

¹Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays, p. 292.

²Nathan, p. 182.

³Ibid., p. 167.

⁴Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays," Essays, p. 225.

Throughout the play these images recur like the "echoing rhythm of line in Chinese and Japanese painting,"¹ to establish a unity of atmosphere and spiritual message. The well, "long choked up and dry"² is introduced as the central image of the binding metaphor in the opening lyric, but its full significance is revealed gradually. As the focal point of the play's events, the well symbol gives a sense of place typical of Noh which evokes profound emotions from the main characters. The Old Man's deluded, stolen life, Cuchulain's heroic destiny, and the Guardian's spiritual power are all manifested in the well. Thus the well is first seen filled by "withered leaves of the hazel," and then with a Guardian sitting "upon the old grey stone at its side."³ It is with Cuchulain's entrance that the mysterious powers of the well are mentioned.

Lead me to what I seek, a well wherein
 Three hazels drop their nuts and withered leaves
 And where a solitary girl keeps watch
 Among grey boulders. He who drinks, they say
 Of that miraculous water lives forever.⁴

¹
Ibid., p. 234.

²At the Hawk's Well, p. 136.

³
Ibid.

⁴
Ibid., p. 139.

Here the three images of the binding metaphor are brought together with the full implication of their meaning for Cuchulain's spiritual quest. The well presumably contains the waters of immortality Cuchulain seeks, yet the Sidhe deceive. The bleak, deathlike atmosphere that surrounds the well, uniting the passages of the play, as in *Noh*, through mood rather than logic seems to suggest that wisdom and immortality will not be found here. By the end of the play the well has become a symbol for "...what may not be found/ Till men heap his burial-mound."¹ The hazel tree is a natural image which reflects the mutability inherent in all things. Pictured here with "boughs long stripped by the wind"² it symbolizes the non-heroic destiny of the Old Man to whom the well is death-giving rather than life-giving. He says to Cuchulain "...leave the well to me, for it belongs/To all that is old and withered."³ The "leafless" tree in conjunction with the "empty" well, symbolizes the "bitter" wisdom revealed at the end of the play. The water of the well can only be approached through an encounter with a supernatural being, the hawk woman who guards the power of the well. When Cuchulain first meets this spiritual being she is appropriately in the form of a hawk,

¹Ibid., p. 143.

²Ibid., p. 136.

³Ibid., p. 141.

a natural creature untouched by the dualisms of human life. As such she symbolizes the Unity of Being Cuchulain seeks. Further, as a fierce antagonist she arouses him to the passions of life. The cry of the hawk which cuts through the dialogue of the two men signals the dominance of the supernatural over everything else in the play.

The recurring image of the "salt sea wind"¹ binds the three main images together and establishes the descriptive tone of the setting. In creating evocative settings through symbolism Yeats achieved a beauty of emotional overtones similar to Zeami's ideal of yūgen. The "place" of the spiritual encounter has been "swept bare" by "The wind that blows out of the sea"², the wind that shakes the boughs of the hazel. Further the wind imagery describes in the heart that "...would wander always like the wind,"³ and the heart that would sleep, the two major contrasts of the play: the Old Man's passive endurance and Cuchulain's heroic struggle. "The salt wind, the sea wind" is the "lucky wind" which brought Cuchulain to this shore. The Old Man, by contrast, has been waiting for fifty years only to find the well empty "Or but to find the stupid wind of the sea/Drive round these perishable leaves,"⁴ an image

¹
Ibid., p. 136.

²
Ibid., p. 137.

³
Ibid., p. 138.

⁴
Ibid., p. 140.

which accurately describes the Old Man himself. The contradictions of the heart first revealed through nature imagery, are further explored in the dialogue between the two men. Cuchulain accepts the challenge symbolized by tree, well and hawk which reveals his heroic courage. The Old Man exhibiting fears and doubts merely endures his living death also symbolized by this binding metaphor. The imagery carries the contrasts and tensions between the natural and supernatural to the end of the play.

In the Only Jealousy of Emer the images of the sea constitute the "playing upon a single metaphor" and function to unify and define symbolically the tragic action taking place in the depths of the mind. These images of the sea enhanced by related images of bird and wind, provide a vivid setting for the encounter between the natural and the supernatural. As the action begins "...the bitter sea/ The shining bitter sea, is crying out"¹ foreshadowing the intensity of Emer's inner conflict. The power of the force she must struggle with is partially defined in her comment that Cuchulain fought the "deathless sea" whose "waves washed his senseless image up."² She is aware that this "image" may be "A sea borne log bewitched into his

¹ Yeats, The Only Jealousy of Emer, Collected Plays, p. 185.

² Ibid., p. 186.

likeness." Emer and Eithne are but "...two women struggling with the sea,"¹ which harbors the Sidhe and Manannan's court. Both "people of the wind," Bricriu and Fand are creatures of the sea from "Country-under Wave"² and represent the power against which Emer struggles. She is brought to a choice, just as Cuchulain was at the well. She dares to accept the challenge of the supernatural, and wins Cuchulain "from the sea." In the play the sea is the great repository casting up images of hope, desire, remorse, and love; of death and life. Like Yeats's *Great Memory*, here is nature friend and foe of man. The sea imagery reflects Emer's conflict in the depths of the mind, and joins with other elements in the play to create a unity of impression.

The dream imagery in *Dreaming of the Bones* binds the play metaphorically. Though not specifically natural imagery, it is amplified emotionally by the images of birds which "cry in their loneliness,"³ as well as references to the dark night, for "The bitter sweetness of night; Has made it [the heart] but a lonely thing."⁴ The symbolic

¹Ibid., p. 188.

²Ibid., p. 190.

³Yeats, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, *Collected Plays*, p. 277.

⁴Ibid., p. 279.

correlation between the dream and the passionate agony of the ghost lovers is presented in the opening lyric.

Have not old writers said
That dizzy dreams can spring
From the dry bones of the dead?
And many a night it seems
That all the valley fills
With those fantastic dreams
They overflow the hills,
So passionate is a shade.¹

The world of dreams in the dark of night is an appropriate meeting ground for the natural and the supernatural. The conversation between the young man and the ghost lovers centers on dreams of the dead in which "...some live through their old lives again."² The song of travel, reminiscent of the Michiyuki in Noh, focuses on the "dreaming bones"³ of the dead. As the three, the ghost lovers and the young revolutionary, journey on the pathway to the "ruined Abbey of Corcomroe" symbolizing a movement into the inner regions of the heart, the shades tell the story of their tragedy in the 'dreaming back' and then dance the dream itself; the agony of their eternal separation, as the young man makes his coice: "O' never, never/ Shall Diarmuid and Dervorgilla be forgiven."⁴ The muscians end the play with

1 Ibid., p. 276.

2 Ibid., p. 278.

3
Ibid., p. 280.

4
Ibid., p. 283.

the reminder that "dry bones that dream are bitter/ They dream and darken our sun."¹ The dream imagery in this play is clearly symbolic of the emotional intensity and conflict at the center of the drama. The symbolic vision created by these images assures the strange otherworldly atmosphere of the play.

For Yeats and Zeami image as symbol is a manifestation of some superhuman power, something through which another level of reality is glimpsed. Symbolism becomes a mental bridge between the natural and the supernatural. For Yeats, however, there is not the complete identification of man and nature which is so dominant in the Noh. This difference supports the philosophical differences noted earlier of man's oneness with all things in Noh, and man's struggle with the natural world in his desire for unity with ultimate reality in Yeats's plays. Yet in both Atsumori and At the Hawk's Well a unity of impression is achieved. This is further established by non-literary symbols.

Yeats saw in the Noh a symbolic ritual in which all elements of the play function symbolically. He sought in his own drama the statuesque figures, stylized gestures and sculptured expression achieved in the Noh through mask and dance. Yeats in the preface to The Four Plays for Dancers

¹
Ibid.

specified that "the face of the speaker should be as much a work of art as the lines he speaks, or the costumes he wears."¹ In the Noh and the Four Plays mask and dance have the symbolic potency of metaphor and serve the spiritual intensity at the core of the play.

The masked face in Yeats's play is another way of removing character from the bonds of realistic portrayal. Yeats used masks to suggest the impersonality of fixed passions. The face should be without intellectual disturbance for "the masks of tragedy contain neither character nor personal energy..."² Yeats's ideal was a "mask from whose eyes the disembodied looks."³ Masks as "images of those profound emotions that exist only in solitude and silence"⁴ are like metaphors, the substitution of an artifice for the otherwise inexpressible.⁵ Yeats felt

¹Yeats, "Preface to the Four Plays for Dancers," Plays and Controversies, p. 334. The Noh masks are valued as great works of Japanese art.

²Yeats, "Estrangement," Autobiography of William Butler Yeats, (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 319.

³Yeats, "The Tragic Theatre," Essays, p. 243.

⁴Yeats, "Note on At the Hawk's Well," Four Plays for Dancers, p. 87.

⁵Nathan, p. 157.

that "all imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance once chosen must be firmly held against a pushing world."¹ The mask is one of the elements in the artistic whole which contributes to this distancing. This is perhaps why Yeats uses masks or faces made up to resemble masks for all the characters in the Four Plays with the exception of the young man in Dreaming of the Bones. In the Noh, masks are worn only by the shite and his attendants, ghosts and spiritual beings, not by naturalistically conceived characters. This use of the mask is consistent with the dramatic technique in Noh of subordinating all elements of the play to the main actor. The masked shite, a spiritual being, contrasts with the unmasked waki, the natural man of the world. By comparison Yeats's extensive use deprives the mask of its full symbolic power in terms of the heroic character. In Noh the impersonal expression of the mask is to suggest the subtle balance between actuality and artifice, and it concentrates that which is intensely human. Makoto Ueda suggests that the mask embodies the impersonal expression of a personal emotion.² The Noh mask attempts to represent the essence of human emotion, and thus becomes symbolic of the shite's inner struggle.

¹ Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays," Essays, p. 224.

²Ueda, Zeami, p. 29.

The dancer-dance motif is another example of the evocation of spiritual reality through symbol used by both dramatists. In these plays the human form acts as another kind of "rhythm of metaphor." In the Noh, the dance is always performed by the main character and becomes the symbolic manifestation of what the shite wants to express which reaches beyond the conscious.¹ All the elements in the play, as well as the movement, and imagery, culminate in this final expression, as emotion is removed in a dance of self-recognition. All dances and gestures in Noh spring from the words and are in essence one with them.² The dance is not so much a display of brilliance of movement as a continuation in a different idiom of the mood created by the motionlessness which precedes it in the play.³ Zeami stressed this importance of the dance to Noh:

¹
Ibid.

²
Keene, p. 19.

³
Ibid., p. 18.

One should know the way in which singing and dancing in the Nō are derived from a single spirit. When the spirit remains in the mind, it is called emotion; uttered in words, it is called poetry. When one cannot stop with poetry alone, he goes on to sing it out,¹ waving his hands and stamping his feet in ecstasy.

When the emotion becomes more intense than can be suggested by poetry it is accompanied by a dance, restrained and stylized, in which every action has some symbolic meaning because it is an expression of some inner feeling. What emanates from the dramatic dance in Noh is a spiritual power beyond the expressed meaning. The dance in the play Atsumori is the emotional-symbolic-spiritual climax and rises directly out of the momentum of the play. In the dance, Atsumori relives passionately and violently his death battle which culminates in a final moment of realization and ecstasy.

Yeats also used the dance² as the climax of his Four Plays. In At the Hawk's Well and The Only Jealousy of Emer, the dancer is not as in the Noh, the main character, nor is the dance a symbol of the hero's inner conflict and eventual self-realization. The dancers, such as the hawk

¹ Ueda, Zeami, p. 29. Although each movement of shite in Noh is a kind of dance, full of suggestive gestures, it is the climactic dance which is the concern here.

² Frank Kermode in Romantic Image discusses the complexity of the dancer-dance motif in Yeats's work. Yeats's approach to the dancer image in his later plays varies and deserves special attention.

woman and Fand, are not divisive creatures but are symbols of Unity of Being. The hawk symbolizes the ideal which is sought by Cuchulain while Fand symbolizes the force against which Emer struggles. In each instance the dancer brings the main character to the point of heroic choice. The dance in which body and spirit coalesce symbolizes the presence of the supernatural, its beauty, and its power to "allure or destroy." The verse which accompanies the hawk's dance describes the effect of the supernatural power on the "seekers", Cuchulain's bitter but heroic destiny and the Old Man's deluded existence. The play does not end with the dance as in the Noh, still it is the lyrical and symbolic culmination of the play's meaning.

The dance in Dreaming of the Bones is, like the Noh model, performed by the supernatural beings who are also the main characters. The dance is the final focus on the dreaming shades and is the climax of their 'dreaming back,' around which the play is built. The dance vividly symbolizes the anguish and despair of the ghost lovers. It is described by the young man, who like the Noh waki has the power to reconcile natural and supernatural, but in Yeats's play there is no resolution and the ghosts vanish unforgiven.

In Yeats's plays the dancer is a manifestation of the "dream" which struggles with the world, and therefore must

be a spiritual being who has already achieved Unity of Being. During the dance, the hero is challenged by the supernatural power to achieve unity with it. In Noh the shite is the spiritual being whose salvation is usually assured, and his climactic dance describes his movement toward liberation. Donald Keene's comment on the Noh dance, suggests the function for the dance for both dramatists. "The movements of the dance are unassertive but they express and epitomize the texts, not by crude miming but by evoking the ultimate meaning of the work. Each gesture of the dance must be transmuted into a symbolic utterance."¹ Yeats was successful in The Four Plays in his creation of a symbolic dancer, who as an image would "recede into some more powerful life to inhabit as it were the deeps of the mind."²

In both Yeats's and Zeami's poetic drama the invisible is made visible through the use of symbols which derive meaning from the context of the play. Imagery serves both an aesthetic and philosophical unity. Although the symbolic method is similar, the message conveyed is different. In Zeami's Noh, the imagery and symbolism reveal the oneness of all things. The focusing of all symbolic meaning on the shite and his struggle represents a greater concentration of effect than in Yeats's At the Hawk's Well where the

¹ Keene, p. 71.

²Yeats, "Certain Noble Play," Essays, p. 234.

symbols of well, tree and hawk, emphasize the contrast between the Old Man and Cuchulain. In this play, symbolism joins characterization and atmosphere in establishing the cycle of conflict between the natural and the supernatural which is essential to Yeats's tragic vision. At the Hawk's Well is a story of fundamental passions shocked into an awareness of the bitter paradoxes of human existence.¹

In Zeami's Atsumori, imagery unites with character portrayal and lyrical atmosphere to bring the audience and the shite to a realization of spiritual truth which requires a negation of the will.² The "bitter paradoxes of existence" are perceived as being delusionary. Thus, the final note is not tragic, but rather is the joy of eternal peace not the tragic necessity of eternal conflict.

1

Moore, p. 199.

2

The images of Noh are like pebbles thrown into the pool of the listener's mind evoking associations out of the richness of the imagination and memory. Thus the Noh invites audience participation rather than appreciation of poetic virtuosity on the part of the poet. (Analogy based on Watts, p.183.)

CONCLUSION

When we act from the personal we tend to bind our consciousness down as to a fiery centre. When, on the other hand, we allow our imagination to expand away from this egoistic mood, we become vehicles for universal thought and merge in the universal mood.¹

William Butler Yeats

Yeats believed that a definition of the human condition necessarily included spiritual reality, and saw himself as a poet who seeks "...truth, not abstract truth but a kind of vision which satisfies the whole being."² His interest in the spiritual led him to investigate among other things Irish folklore and country spiritism, theosophy and the occult, the philosophies of Blake and Shelley, Christian mysticism, Eastern philosophy and poetry, as well as Japanese Noh. Ellmann points out that "in Asian conventions he found a sense of life as ceremonial and ritual, and of drama as august, formal, traditional. But his own plays were adaptations, not copies, and attempted to infuse Western passion into the narrow frame."³

¹E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats, ed. The Works of William Blake, Poetical, Symbolic, and Critical, Vol. I, II, III. (London, 1893). I. p. 238 quoted in Bloom, p. 73.

²Yeats, Letter to Father, Sept., 1914. quoted in Ellmann, Yeats The Man and the Masks, p. 242.

³Ellmann, Identity, p. 183.

One of the unique achievements of Noh, a stylized and ritualistic drama, is that it accomplishes the serious embodiment of spiritual reality. All supernatural occurrences and characters are treated as being natural, a given part of the world of the play. Nathan sees as a primary achievement of Yeats's later plays that the supernatural or spiritual cannot be passed off as a symbol for psychological or sociological realities.¹ Through the devices of the confessional tale, the simplicity of atmosphere, the symbolic method which attempts to capture "...the essential forms which underlay the multiplicity of external appearances, the Noh artist seeks a statement of quietude, of philosophical non-attachment, possible when the agitations on the surface are stripped away and the essential form of objects emerges in an aura of timelessness."² Both Yeats and Zeami wished to confront man with the ultimate reality of his condition. All aspects of their plays, particularly characterization, lyrical atmosphere, and the symbolic method insure the unquestioned reality of another perception, another world, that of the spiritual. In the essay "The Tragic Theatre" Yeats described his aesthetic plan for achieving this:

¹
Nathan, p. 252.

²
Ernst, p. 3.

If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance.¹

The world of these plays is one in which man's dream of oneness with the absolute, of Unity of Being, is accepted as essential to the human existence. All the elements of the play communicate this central concern, and through them the audience is drawn into a participation in the universal experience being revealed.

Although Yeats and Zeami both uphold a similar spiritual world view in their plays, there are differences in the perception of this reality. In the Noh, the shite is seen after the tragic incident of his life which haunts him in his after life. He finds his conflict in an attachment to the outer world manifested usually as some profoundly felt emotion. In the Noh the effect of the natural world, for that is the delusionary realm of Buddhist philosophy, on the spiritual world is manifested. The spiritual order presents a negative aspect of power, often visualized in images of suffering, which derives from the shite's inability to let go of his past existence. The Noh shite

¹ Yeats, "The Tragic Theatre," Essays, p. 243.

must reconcile the terrestrial with the spiritual; only then will he realize the oneness of all things. In the Noh tradition the inability to perceive this oneness is tragic. There is no conflict with an antagonist per se as in much Western drama. The Noh shite acting from the personal "binds his consciousness down."¹ According to Ernst, "all such characters are chained to their earthly passions, which continue to bind them to the world of actuality and prevent their attainment of Nirvana...."² The movement in the plays is an internal one taking place in the depths of the hero's mind as he is released from the "egoistic mood" to "merge in the universal mood."³ The final moment of Atsumori, then, is in Buddhist terms, a recognition of the "Way" to enlightenment as inner conflict ceases and Self-knowledge is attained.⁴

Yeats's plays emphasize the complex effect of the supernatural on the natural. The living hero must contend

¹ Bloom, p. 73. See quote above p. 151.

² Ernst, p. 12.

³ Bloom, p. 73. See quote above p. 151.

⁴ Tsunemusa and Motomezuka are plays which end with the main character still bound to the "fiery center." The circumstance is similar in The Dreaming of the Bones, though here the situation is more complex because of the triangle of destiny formed by the ghost lovers and the young revolutionary.

with the spiritual order of existence. Yeats's protagonists are in a cosmic battle and not in revolt against society, as was typical of the heroes of the naturalistic theatre of the time.¹ The Yeatsian hero's attempt to achieve identity with the infinite is hindered by the indifference and hostility of the supernatural forces against which he struggles. The process of transcendence leading through agony to ecstasy Yeats regarded as the most important experience human life can attain. It is so difficult that only heroic figures seek it for their destiny.² As Whitaker points out, for Yeats "an image of wholeness transcending the fragmented temporal world and self could be nothing other than a full rendering of the opposites within that world and the self. Yeats's path led to the agony and exhilaration of self-knowledge."³

Therefore, in At the Hawk's Well, Cuchulain's recognition of his heroic destiny does not exorcise the conflict between the spiritual and the natural in the depths of the mind. Like other Yeatsian heroes, Cuchulain in his human

¹Nathan, p. 9.

²Nathan, p. 62.

³Thomas Whitaker, Swan and Shadow (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 5.

dividedness is forced to make a choice that gives him his heroic destiny and will cause suffering to himself and others.¹ That men and women in Yeats's plays attempt but never seem to achieve Unity of Being is consistent with Yeats's philosophy of a passionate affirmation of life. He was on the side of experiencing the absolute, not merely attaining it. The world is perpetually divided, yet out of this conflict between the natural and the supernatural within the hero comes a moment of vision revealing the true nature of the world. Emer in her capacity for love and self-sacrifice comes closest, perhaps, to this unity in her swerve away from the "egoistic mood"² and her resulting self-knowledge. Moore summarizes Yeats's ultimate ideal: "The Yeatsian hero is always identified with a kind of divine principle that far transcends personal ambition:...The moment Yeats wanted to capture in his plays is that still point where the most fundamental human passions merge into a timeless gesture of dispassionate acceptance."³ Stated in this way Yeats's spiritual view is very close to that expressed in Zeami's Noh where the "emphasis [is] on

¹Nathan, p. 254.

²Bloom, p. 73. See quote above p. 151.

³Moore, p. x.

experiencing the 'nothingness' of the world [which] leads to a release from the ego, to the expansion of the inner self until it becomes one with the undifferentiated state of reality."¹

The unique approach to characterization used by Yeats and Zeami eliminated individual eccentricities and made the supernatural a motive force of character. Human character is thus reduced to some essential quality. However, Yeats's emphasis on a dramatic character possessing a passion which is necessary for the character to achieve Unity of Being differs from Zeami's conception of character whose obsession prevents him from self-realization.

The atmosphere of these plays is intensely lyrical, providing a rhythmic bridge into the spiritual core of the play. Although both Yeats and Zeami set their plays in a recognizable natural world, the supernatural ultimately dominates the scene and action. Often a play will take place in a known location as in Atsumori, which is set on the Shore of Suma, or in Dreaming of the Bones, where the scene is on the road to the Abbey of Corcomroe. In At the Hawk's Well the scene of the action is not as specific, being a high rocky place above the sea. The images which

¹
Ishibashi, p. 137.

make up this atmosphere derive primarily from nature and serve as symbols for emotions which are inexpressible by any other means. Nature imagery is used not to express passing moods of characters, but to express their organic relation to eternal forces in the universe.¹ The Noh reaches out toward eternity through beauty, yūgen, and the elimination of the temporal and the accidental. Yeats in refusing to exclude the uglier, harsher images of terrestrial reality, sought to combine a cold, stark beauty with delicate, lyrical beauty. The associative and allusive use of symbols in Noh from traditional Japanese poetry provides another shade of meaning which enriches the experience witnessed by the audience but is not necessary to an understanding of the play. Yeats also valued the associative possibilities of symbols and "...sought some symbolic language reaching far into the past and associated with familiar names and conspicuous hills that I might not be alone amid the obscure impressions of the senses."² Through symbolism which pervaded all elements of the drama, Yeats and Zeami achieved a dramatic unity, and succeeded in presenting the single image, the one emotion, upon which the play is centered.

¹ Wells, p. 247.

²Yeats, "Art and Ideas," (1913) Essays, p. 34.

As a conclusion to these remarks, a brief look at a recent Noh adaptation of At the Hawk's Well, Taka No Izumi by Yokomichi¹ will highlight some of the differences in the philosophical approach in Yeats's plays and in the Noh. Although the moralistic tone of this play is quite different from that of Zeami's plays, it reflects the dominant Noh conventions established by him.

In Taka No Izumi, the waki, in this case Cuchulain, begins the play with his self-introduction and account of his journey in the Song of Travel. This lyrical opening is performed by the musicians in the original. As in the conventional two-part structure of Noh, the shite, the Old Man, appears first in the disguise of a country man. The Old Man leads Cuchulain to the well upon request. This is described by the chorus. Here the objective world is set forth in vivid detail yet conveys states of mind and feeling in a way similar to the original. Images imply rather than represent. The dialogue between Cuchulain and the Old Man in At the Hawk's Well emphasizes the contrast between youth and age, the heroic and the dissipated, and defines the conflict between the natural and supernatural.

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These comments are derived from an article by Reiko Tsumimura, "A comparison of Yeats's At the Hawk's Well and its Noh version, Taka No Izumi." Literature East and West (December, 1967), Vol. XI, pp. 385-397.

In Taka No Izumi, the Old Man tells with bitter wisdom, the story of a youth who came to the well and died in vain waiting for the water to rise in the well. The Old Man's single intense emotion that of despair and remorse is emphasized. As he confesses his identity, the chorus sings of the Old Man's regret over the failure to gain the water and his enduring desire to drink it which constitutes his attachment to the natural world. This Noh version adds to the theme of conflict between the natural and the supernatural, the lyrical concentration of a certain intense emotional experience reacted by the shite. The Old Man's suffering and his inability to resolve the conflict within himself constitutes the tragedy.

In the second part the shite reappears in the form of an apparition of his former self. His bitter regret is described by the chorus and expressed by his dance. The shite disappears. The play ends with the chorus's description of Cuchulain leaving the well filled with a sense of resignation and futility. This contrasts with Cuchulain's firm resolution to drink the water at the beginning. The tone is moralistic, one of a lesson learned. In Yeats's play Cuchulain pursues his quest aggressively and believes that nothing can deter him from drinking the water. He has the full-blown confidence of an epic hero. He is not remorseful although deterred and then allured away from

the well by the supernatural hawk woman. He leaves the well with the attitude of heroic exaltation. The Noh adaptation shows a movement from willfull agressiveness to a submission of the will in preparation for spiritual identity. This ending differs from Cuchulain's heroic self-recognition at the end of At the Hawk's Well. Here there is a sense of sad melancholy combined with the futility of trying (i.e. grasping at) to achieve the unattainable. This essential difference was summed up by Yeats in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley: "...the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we not the east, that must raise the heroic cry."¹ The result of being cursed by the supernatural in At the Hawk's Well reveals the contradictory nature of heroic courage for Cuchulain both wins and loses. He is defeated in his quest for the "miraculous water" yet dares to challenge the supernatural and finds, ironically, that which will assure his heroic destiny. The conflict is between the comfortable outer world and the world of spiritual endeavor. The focus is not, as in the Noh version, on the recreation of the protagonists past experience of emotional intensity. The Noh sensibility finds in Yeats's Old Man a more impressive shite because of his desperate and futile experience at the

¹ Yeats, Letter to Dorothy Wellesley quoted from Ellmann, Identity, p. 185.

well than Cuchulain in his adventurous and energetic present.

Many of the effects Yeats sought to attain in his poetic drama such as the frank inclusion of the supernatural, unity of image, lyrical atmosphere, figurative use of nature, intense ritual-like concentration and simplification of elements, and the use of folklore and myth, were also among the ideals of Zeami Motokiyo, a dramatist of another time and another culture whose art of the Noh provided the catalyst for Yeats's final dramatic form.

In the plays following At the Hawk's Well, Yeats's aesthetic approach developed in artistry, adding a depth and richness beyond that achieved in this play. But At the Hawk's Well in its simplicity and profundity was a successful attempt at a new dramatic form which allowed the frank inclusion of the spiritual. Bloom characterizes the tone of the play as "Curious astringent joy....The joy is Cuchulain's, Yeats's, the attentive reader's, in each case a joy rising out of the acceptance of a temporal frustration, but joy all the same. In this play, Yeats is again a master, and all imaginative readers his debtors."¹ Yeats had found what he wanted; "I am certain...I have found the only way the subtler forms of literature can find dramatic expression."²

¹Bloom, p. 293.

²Yeats, "Note on At the Hawk's Well", Plays and Controversies, p. 420.

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