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## Introduction

Noda Hideki<sup>1)</sup> (born 1955) is a well-known Japanese theater practitioner who has been famous since the late seventies with his troupe *Yume no Yûminsha* [The Dream Wanderers]. He has produced many fictional plays in a modern fairytale style. In the 1980s, he became one of the leading representatives of Japanese contemporary theater. In the 1990s, he began incorporating more social commentary in his themes. Nowadays he remains as successful as ever. This paper will focus on three of Noda's plays, all of which were performed abroad in English: *Red Demon*, *The Bee* and *The Diver*. After a review of his early career and his rise to success, his efforts and struggles in bringing these plays to foreign audiences will be examined in detail, covering topics such as historical influences, comparisons with Japanese versions and critical reactions. The primary question under investigation is this: To what degree has Noda been successful at bringing his vision of Japanese contemporary theater to non-Japanese audiences? For readers not familiar with Noda's body of work, brief plot summaries of each play as well as explanation of background source material will be provided.

## Early career

Noda Hideki's theatrical career began in 1976 when the Dream Wanderers attracted attention during a competition for young, unknown performers in Tokyo

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1) Noda is the family name, Hideki the given name. In Japan usually the family name is written first.

(Senda 1997, p.137). The play he presented was called *Hashire Merusu* [Run Merusu], basically a comedy that contained slapstick elements, but also with quite unexpected and impressively moving moments behind the comic facade. Noda had not only written the script, but acted in the play as well. He played a double role wearing women's costumes and spoke his lines in falsetto. Some critics called the play "brilliant" (Senda 1995, p. 195), but others did not know how to express their reactions (Kazama 1992, p. 109).

According to Senda (1995), Noda's breakthrough came in 1979 with the performance of *Shōnengari* [Boy Hunt] at the Little Komaba Theater in Tokyo. Amid all the comedy, the play essentially dealt with serious themes: the development into adulthood, predictions about the future, and a kind of nostalgia for youth. Noda used music from a popular comedy series to set the tone, which was meant to awaken a feeling of community. Older people had a harder time relating to the drama because it was infused with youthful sentiments. Furthermore, Noda's demanding script had a complicated, almost contradictory structure, much like puzzles that the spectators had to solve.

Noda and his Dream Wanderers troupe were unique in lacking any political polemic in their plays. In the early seventies, strong political engagement was common with other Japanese theater practitioners. Nevertheless, younger spectators felt that Noda put their own world onto the stage with his protagonists acting as though they thought and felt like the spectators in the auditorium (Senda 1995, p. 196). Therefore, Noda's success could be explained by his ability to provide younger audiences with a relevant but satisfying escape from reality.

After 1983, when Noda received the *Kishida Kunio Award*<sup>2)</sup> for *Nokemono Kitarite* [Descent of the Brutes], public interest became so great that he crossed over into commercial theater (Senda 1995, p. 199). This play exemplified Noda's specialized dramatic style at that time, featuring a complicated, multi-layered structure divided into various scene sequences that were only associatively interconnected. The main story contained grotesque episodes, creating a kind of circus atmosphere complete with dance, acrobatics, and temporal leaps into Japan's past.

### **Disneyland, German romanticism, and Shakespeare**

As Noda's public success increased, so did his need for ever larger venues. In 1986, he celebrated the tenth anniversary of *Dream Wanderers* with an epic production called *Stonehenge Sanbusaku* [Stonehenge Trilogy], which was supposedly based on motifs from Richard Wagner's *Der Ring der Nibelungen*, although in terms of content it differed widely from the Nibelungen legend. The event took place in a hall with space for 26,400 spectators (Uchino 1999, p. 51) and lasted for ten hours; it was sponsored by several big companies (Senda 1995, p. 202).

Noda also created theater suited to the Disneyland generation (Kazama 1992, p. 101), with an atmosphere of naïve humor, where even the evil characters were attractive in some way. This practice of bringing depth to the portrayal of antagonists was very typical of Noda's most successful stage events. His plays were also influenced by Grimm's fairy tales and by Michael Ende's neo-

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2) This award is named after author Kishida Kunio (1890-1954), the originator of the *Bungaku-za*. It is considered a breakthrough to artistic acknowledgment in Japan.

romanticism. But shunning reality and escaping into a world of dreams was only one aspect in Noda's productions - another was that the youthful heroes of his plays often resembled *Kaspar Hauser*<sup>3)</sup> who only got to know the world as an adult. Everything these protagonists experienced was new to them (Enomoto 1992, p. 25), and, significantly, they preserved their childlike innocence by typically appearing to be asexual (Hasebe 2001, p. 94).

However, not only Disney and German romanticism provided inspiration to Noda: He also adapted plays by Shakespeare. As Senda relates (1995, p. 204), in 1986 Noda produced a play entitled *Noda Hideki no Jūniya* [Noda Hideki's Twelfth Night] that emphasized the topic of bisexuality. Daichi Mao, a *Takarazuka*<sup>4)</sup> star specializing in male roles, performed the twins Viola and Sebastian in a double role. In addition, the part of the page, Cesario Viola, was performed in an androgynous manner that captured the attractive nature of both sexes (Senda 1998, p. 34). Even the opening scene began with a dance of a bisexual Venus. She fought with the waves until a second Venus appeared with seahorses, carrying the twins away from their shipwreck. This scene symbolized a mythical separation of male and female (Shewring 1998, p. 101). Finally, after the twins found each other again, the beautiful character Cesario appeared once more in order to return, half-male, half-female, back into the sea from whence it originated before being separated into man and woman (Senda 1995, p. 204).

Near the end of his work with the Dream Wanderers, Noda staged more original

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3) Kaspar Hauser was a German youth who appeared on 26 May 1828 in Nuremberg. He was about 16 years old and claimed to have grown up alone in a dark cellar and to have never seen the world before.

4) The *Takarazuka Revue* was founded 100 years ago as a pendant to traditionally male-dominated Kabuki. In *Takarazuka* shows, all parts are played by actresses, and spectators are mostly women. Nowadays, usually Western style musicals are presented in the popular *Takarazuka* productions.

renditions of Shakespeare. His production *Sandaime Richard* [The Third Richard] production very much resembled an entirely new and autonomous play. As Senda (1998, p. 34) notes, only minor references to the original play appeared, such as references to the houses of York and Lancaster, whereas Noda's Richard was the third headmaster of the *Ikebana* school *Shirobana* [White Flower]. In episodes shown of his childhood, Shakespeare's crippled younger brother Richard appeared, who supposedly became the model for Richard III. The message seemed to be that all Shakespeare's characters are products of and exist only in Shakespeare's fantasies. By extension, a question was posed to the audience: "Whose fantasy do you exist in?" (Rolf 1992, p. 104).

In August 1992, Noda produced his own version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, completely reworked in his characteristic style. Instead of Athens, the setting was an amusement park near Mount Fuji, with events taking place in a restaurant (Shewring 1998, p. 107). In the kitchen, Demetrius and Lysander were cooks who threatened each other with kitchen knives. Helena was a cook's daughter and Hermia, the daughter of a restaurant owner. The stage had a merry-go-round with giant teacups, culinary utensils sprouting from bushes, characters entered on bicycles or roller skates, and Titania fell in love with a monster that was half-starfish, half-octopus. Puck was female and acted on that occasion like a malicious Mephisto (Shewring 1998, p. 108).

In the nineties, Noda's opulent theatrical style seemed to reach an end. His productions became too big and too mainstream. Japan's sociopolitical climate of the eighties - before the bursting of the bubble economy in the early nineties - could be compared to that of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (Uchino 1999, p. 39). Noda's stage performances had mutated into a kind of dream factory in this

brave-new-world Japan. As a reaction, rival playwrights came to prominence by focusing on topics that returned social criticism to the Japanese stage. Prosperity had gone, and while younger audiences still looked for distraction, they were no longer as naïve as audiences had been in the eighties.

### **Noda abroad**

Even during the eighties, Noda's brand of theater had gained international interest. The Dream Wanderers were invited to theater festivals in Edinburgh and New York. However, reviews of their performances were mostly ill-judged because critics could not appreciate the original Japanese texts. They saw visually impressive performances, but could not really comprehend them. Noda's intelligent wit was not able to surpass the language barrier. Some critics reviewed his plays positively while others regarded them negatively, but the overall tenor was the same. For example, a guest performance of *Nokemono Kitarite* at the Edinburgh Festival in 1987 was compared with "Lewis Carroll wearing a kimono" (Noda, M. 2012, p. 30). In 1988, when one part of *The Stonehenge Trilogy* was presented at the first New York International Festival of the Arts, critic Michael Feingold called the performance a "kagemishmash." He wrote: "The Japanese are ahead of us industrially, economically, electronically, but don't worry: Theatrically, if *Comet Messenger – Siegfried* is any indication, they're still back in the late 1960s." Feingold compared the play to performances at La Mama or Off-Off Broadway productions and could not understand how Noda could fill large venues with performances like this. Understanding neither the language nor the structure of the play, he concluded: "*Yume no Yuminsha* is just another old-style celebration of teenage antiestablishment attitude, bright and energetic in the old way ... it was perturbing to have it as a highly-touted prizewinning exhibit in an international arts festival" (Feingold 1988, p. 95). Reviews like this must have

been disappointing for Noda. In Japan, he was already regarded as a theatrical genius, and his artistic and commercial success was unsurpassed. He had become not only the darling of Japanese audiences but also of critics. Yet abroad he was still seen as a naïve theater producer at the early stages of his career.

### **The move towards socially relevant topics**

Noda himself seemed unsatisfied with his easy success in Japan, so he sought new challenges (Takahashi 2008, p. 25). In 1992 he dissolved the Dream Wanderers and went to London to study theater for a year. During this time, he saw that European theater played other roles in society beyond providing entertainment (Murai 2008A, p. 57). This encouraged him to turn towards more socially relevant topics. In 1993, after his return from London, he established the *NodaMap* ([www.nodamap.com](http://www.nodamap.com)) not as a new theater group but as a production platform and created plays that featured guest stars, who were engaged specifically for each new theater production.

### **Red Demon**

Representative of Noda's new style was *Akaoni* [Red Demon], which premiered in 1996. On the one hand, this play was as fairytale-like as before, but on the other hand it was also a parable that dealt with the issue of immigration and the difficulties and ultimate impossibility of integrating immigrants into a foreign culture. Stylistically, with *Red Demon* Noda abandoned his preference for big stages and pompous scenes. Although many protagonists appeared, only three actors and one actress performed all the roles. Aside from the actor who played the Red Demon, the others switched from role to role. The production design was spartan, with background scenery only symbolically indicated. For example, simple set piece might serve as a boat or a prison (Ôtori 2001, p. 198). Setting and



location were supplemented by the actors' body language.

### ***Plot summary***

The setting of *Akaoni* was a coastline where one day a “demon” appeared asking for water and food.<sup>5)</sup> The locals, who understood neither his language nor his gestures, knew of demons only as cannibals. However, a woman named Fuku tried to communicate with him. After she figured out what he wanted, she gave him some water. Nevertheless, other locals did not trust him and were puzzled as to where he came from and why. Their prejudices were promptly confirmed when he took up a crying baby. They overcame him, believing he wanted to eat it, although in reality he only wanted to soothe it. Even when it was established that he ate only flowers like raw vegetables, their negative prejudices were slow to subside little by little and in the eyes of the locals, the demon was still considered as a non-human. Only Fuku treated him with respect and tried to communicate with him. Although misunderstandings continued to occur, she made advances in his language and likewise he in hers. Eventually they grew to understand each other more and more and one day the demon suddenly quoted Martin Luther King Jr. in English: “I have a dream that one day let freedom ring from every hill, ... from every state and every city” (Noda 2006, p. 279). Meanwhile, the people of the coast had made another uncanny discovery. Recently, a lot of bottles had washed up on shore containing messages addressed to the demon in a foreign language, indicating that he was probably connected with other demons. His ringing the bell of freedom could therefore be construed as signal for a coming invasion. He and the woman were led before a judge, accused of treason, and sentenced to death. Fuku's younger brother and his friend helped them escape to a big ship filled with

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5) It was up to the audience to see in the protagonist a human being, a demon or something else.

other demons who were sailing across the sea to find a new homeland. In the end, however, the effort was in vain as they were unable to reach the ship. When their food ran out, the demon starved to death, eventually he was eaten by his former companions in an ironic reversal of earlier prejudices against him by the people of the coast. Finally, the remaining survivors were washed back to the beach in their small boat by a storm (Ôtori 2001, p. 198).

### ***Historical influences***

In *Akaoni*, Noda combined legendary motifs with historic events, such as early encounters with foreigners in Japan. Stories of human-eating demons<sup>6)</sup> had supposedly influenced Japanese attitudes towards Europeans and Americans up until the middle of the nineteenth century. This reflected the redheaded and red-bearded seamen who had frightened the Japanese because they appeared as demons to them (Piper 1937, p. 26). Western foreigners were also despised at that time. They were called *ketô* [shaggy barbarian], or *nanban* [barbarians of the south] (Zoubek 1996, p. 145). Since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Japan had pursued an isolationist policy called *sakoku* [locking the country] due to fear of European invaders. Only a single small Dutch factory at *Dejima*, an artificial island in the bay of Nagasaki, was permitted. During this epoch, average Japanese people did not have the chance to catch sight of Western foreigners. As a result, most were shocked when foreigners appeared in Japan at the end of the Tokugawa shogunate.

One possible interpretation of the ship in *Akaoni* from which the demons came is

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6) Redhead demons also appear in *Kyôgen*, the classic form of Japanese comedy accompanying Noh. However, their ghastly appearance always proves harmless in the end when they are fooled by clever people.

that it alludes to the “black ships” from America that appeared in Japanese harbors in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Noda’s Red Demon can be likened to the way the first American consul in Japan, Townsend Harris, was treated in the small coastal city of Shimoda. The fate of Fuku could also be based on that of Tōjin Okichi, who was despised because she was regarded as not only Harris’ maid but also his mistress.

Noda treated this topic as a simple yet effective fable. At the play’s premiere, the Red Demon was played by Irish actor Angus Barnett, who spoke in an Irish accent that no one understood. His appearance was almost a cross between Shakespeare’s Caliban in *Tempest* and Fossybear in the *Muppet Show*.<sup>7)</sup> The other parts were played by Tomita Yasuko, Danta Yasunori, and Noda Hideki himself (Noda 2006, p. 22). Conceived as a play for the Japanese stage, its allusions were packed up into a fairy-tale-like appearance. Such themes would not succeed at all on the Japanese stage if presented differently without opportunities to laugh or cry within this fantasy setting.

### ***Cross-cultural versions of Red Demon***

However, since *Akaoni* was not solely about foreigners in Japan, the play could be sent abroad as a kind of cultural embassy. Translated versions were therefore presented in 1998 in Thailand and also in South Korea in 2005 (Takahashi 2008, p. 25). Each version was re-worked in an attempt to appeal to each specific culture. At a performance in 1997 at the Setagaya Public Theater in Tokyo and then in 1998 in Bangkok, Barnett again played the title role as he had at the premiere,

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7) Later at performances in London, where Noda himself played the part of the Red Demon, he was called a Japanese E.T. (Noda M. 2012, p. 30).

but his fellow actors were Thais. This production, jointly directed by Noda Hideki and Nimit Pipitkul, used conventions drawn from traditional Thai theater (Hasebe 2002, p. 231). Barnett's appearance as the Red Demon gave the play a thrust of being about "Asia vs. Europe." However, in a 1999 Tokyo performance, Noda himself played the lead role amid an ensemble of 13 Thai actors. At this performance, the coastal characters all spoke Thai, with the Red Demon speaking an entirely incomprehensible language instead of Japanese. The reaction of the Japanese audience changed with this performance. In the Japanese version, the spectators sympathized with the coastal people, but in the Thai setting when the Red Demon was played by a Japanese actor, it was no longer so simple to distinguish between "foreign" and "home" (Nishidô 1998, p. 57). The problem of cultural differences and misunderstandings thus revealed themselves in different variations as themes to be grasped and understood. In the 2005 performance in Seoul, the play brought to life memories of Japan as an invading colonial power suppressing the native culture (Noda 2006, p. 105).

In 2003, Noda used his connections with British theater practitioners to have an English version of the *Red Demon* staged in London at the Young Vic Theatre. This time the cast included Marcello Magni, Tamzin Griffin, and Simon MacGregor. Noda himself played the title role, while British actors took over the other parts (Hasebe 2002, p. 231). The script was translated by Roger Pulvers, who re-wrote some untranslatable puns and wordplays. However, his script was criticized as sounding too American, so Noda had Matt Wilkinson create a British adaption (Noda 2006, p. 35). Ultimately, critics felt the English version of *Akaoni* had lost most of the poetry and linguistic nuances that Noda's original had originally boasted (Takahashi 2008, p. 25).

Use of highly associative words has been a trade mark of Noda's plays since his career began. All sorts of puns, homonyms, alliterations, and language riddles can be found in his scripts. Words appear suddenly in their original meaning instead of how they are commonly used in everyday language (Watanabe 2000, p. 43). Noda continued to use old Japanese literary traditions that were new to contemporary Japanese theater, and he made ambiguous dialogue into his artistic trade mark (Uchida 2009, p. 21). However, in the English version of *Akaoni*, all these Noda-like connotations had vanished and only crude jokes remained in their place.

The Japanese, Thai and South Korean audiences understood Noda's hints to their collective fears, but British audiences apparently did not because the English version lacked allusions to parallel historical memories of suffering. Noda was aware that contemporary British society was more pluralistic and that many citizens have migrant backgrounds, so this made it difficult to create a simple xenophobic community feeling as in a closed society such as Japan's with a tendency to social exclusion (Noda 2006, p. 120). As a result, the setting appeared only as a fairy tale on a fantasy island which could be localized everywhere or nowhere. The theme was reduced to a simple one of discrimination vs. tolerance, and the aspect of defense vs. occupation was lost in translation.

During colonial times, of course many countries had similar experiences and many indigenes who welcomed Europeans were eventually betrayed by them, with those who tried to resist defeated and oppressed by the invaders. In the English version of *Akaoni*, the coastal peoples' fear of suppression was presented mostly as a fancy, but fears like this are still very much alive in the collective subconscious of many people around the world, and not only in Asia. This aspect of the story could and should have been made more evident in the performance. It should

not be omitted so as to present only a well-made play with a politically correct and simplistic message such as “love immigrants and the world will be better”. As a result, the Red Demon character in the English version and indeed the play itself became an example of mutual cultural misunderstanding. The similarity of the fate of the demons to the fate of the expelled Jews for example appeared too conspicuous. The weaker the possibility that the demons themselves might finally turn out to be invaders, the more the play lost its essential dramatic tension.

### ***Critical reaction***

The reception of the *Red Demon* in London was split. On one hand, some critics called it the “best play of the week.” The *Sunday Times* praised it as a fable valid for all times and places. On the other hand, the performance received only one out of five possible stars in *The Times*. The symbolism of the scenery was considered a strong point, such as the stage lights reflecting the bottles like the distant glow from the Red Demon's lost home. However, one critic from *The Times* called the play “naïve” because no deeper meanings could be found than what was stated in the text (Hasebe 2003, p. 50). In addition, the *Guardian* reviewer missed the play's specific cultural context (Noda M. 2012, p. 30). Ironically, Pulvers' and Wilkinson's rewriting of Noda's play could be regarded as Shakespeare's vengeance and, in view of Noda's maltreatments of Shakespeare's works in Japan, on the British stage it was indeed taken as such.

### **The Bee**

In 2006, Noda challenged the British stage again with a new play in English called *The Bee*. To avoid translation problems, he brought over only the overall concept of the play and worked out an original English script during workshops with British actors (Uchida 2008A, p. 46). Noda worked in cooperation with

Irish translator and author Colin Teevan. The plot itself had a Japanese theme, and it was based on the short story *Mushiriai* [Plucking at Each Other] by Tsutsui Yasutaka.

### ***Plot summary***

One day after work, a businessman named *Ido* wanted to return home, but police had closed the street, preventing him from doing so. *Dodoyama*, a detective, explained to him that an escaped convict called *Ogoro* had forced his way into Ido's house and taken his wife and son hostages. After Ido was told what had happened, he was suddenly besieged with intrusive questions from reporters.<sup>8)</sup> - Asked to express his feelings and show rage or tears for the cameras, he declined to show emotions, and his comments for the mass media were quite unexpected: "I feel sympathy for Mr. Ogoro, and as a husband and father, I can understand his feelings" (Noda 2012B, p. 112). When Ido realized the police were simply waiting for Ogoro to surrender and doing nothing to rescue his family, he decided to take matters into his own hands. He asked to talk with Ogoro directly, but Dodoyama was afraid this would lead to a dispute. Ido then asked to talk with Ogoro's wife in the hope she could persuade her husband to leave the house. The detective agreed with this plan, but Ogoro's wife refused to help, so Ido changed his strategy. He knocked down the policeman who brought him to Ogoro's house, disarmed him, and took Ogoro's wife and son hostages in return. He forced the police to set up a direct telephone line between the two houses and began to negotiate with Ogoro himself.<sup>9)</sup> Ogoro was an unintelligent stutterer, so Ido threatened he would rape

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8) On stage Ido seemed to be wrapped up by the microphone cables of the reporters, a significant scene which made concrete the notion that Ido was from now on enmeshed in trouble.

9) When both men were talking on the telephone, Ogoro appeared visible on stage because both Ogoro and his son were played by the same actor, slipping quickly from one role to the other.

his wife if Ogoro did not free Ido's captive family. To show he meant business, Ido cut off one finger of Ogoro's son and had Dodoyama deliver it to Ogoro in an envelope. Unfortunately, this tactic backfired and Ogoro repeated what Ido had done by cutting off the finger of Ido's son. Despite the hopelessness of continuing, neither Ido nor Ogoro could stop, so the play ended with a silent scene of cartoonish slapstick repeated several times, accompanied by the famous Humming Chorus from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (Senda 2008, p. 32): Ido raped Ogoro's wife, then cut off another finger of Ogoro's son and sent it to Ogoro. When all fingers were cut off, Ido started to cut off Ogoro's wife's fingers, and at the very end when Ogoro's son and wife were already dead, Ido cut off his own fingers. The reporters eventually lose all interest in the proceeding, and the incompetent detective Dodoyama is left still waiting for the case to resolve itself.

### ***Tsutsui vs. Noda versions***

The first part of Noda's version of *The Bee* largely followed Tsutsui's script, except for one significant difference. Tsutsui's Ido was prompted by the police to say "I feel sympathy for Mr. Ogoro" (Tsutsui 2002, p. 180), but Noda's Ido said it in a kind of helpless confusion because he did not know what else to say. Tsutsui's Ido proceeded with a concrete plan, but Noda's Ido acted only out of embarrassment. As a result, Noda needed to find an external reason as to why Ido started down his violent path. The play was entitled *The Bee* because a bee had appeared at Ogoro's house. At first Ido was able to trap it in a cup, but later, when by mistake he removed the cup, the bee flew free. Frightened by the bee, Ido got nervous and shot it with a gun. This episode was of no direct importance to the story and therefore was not contained in the Tsutsui's original. For Noda, however, it was essential in illustrating the change in Ido's mental status. He also used the bee's buzzing as a threatening sound on stage (Kitagawa 2008, p. 39). So long as



the bee was captured, Ido was able to control the situation, but after it escaped he lost the control over his mind and went crazy.<sup>10)</sup> In an English review the title *The Bee* was interpreted as indicating that a bee “may protect itself with its sting, but it pays a heavy price for doing so”,<sup>11)</sup> because the act of self-protection leads to death. However, since the Japanese word *hachi* [bee] embraces wasps, the word *mitsubachi* [honey bee] is used to refer to the insect which dies in using its sting. Thus in Ido’s case the meaning pointed rather to ‘having a bee in one’s bonnet’, or having an obsession, than suicidal self-defense.

In the latter part of the play, Noda followed Tsutsui’s original story only roughly. He no longer used the original dialogues and added more background details. For example, in the original it was only implied that Ogoro’s wife worked at night. To a Japanese audience, this meant she had a dubious occupation, but there were no derogatory remarks used against her in Tsutsui’s script. However in Noda/Teevan version, it was explicitly mentioned that she made her living as a stripper, and her personality is described making it seem as if the size of her breasts is her most important quality.<sup>12)</sup> This gave the script a touch of sexism and opened the way for misogynistic jokes (Noda 2012B, p. 110). In this way, the dialogue leads in a direction that had nothing to do with Tsutsui’s original intent.

In fact, Tsutsui’s version of the story was written as a criticism of the sensationalistic Japanese mass media. He published it when the audience’s

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10) There is a very similar scene in Keralino Sandorovich’s play *Frozen Beach* (premiered 1998). In the last part of this black comedy, in an already absurd situation, an uncanny insect appears. Although it is shot many times this always fails or else it is immortal, and in the end it drives everyone crazy.

11) [www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/feb/01/the-bee-review](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/feb/01/the-bee-review)

12) A strange contradiction to Noda’s meager on stage appearance without any sex appeal as Ogoro’s wife.

collective memory freshly recalled the 1972 *Asama-Sansô* incident, a hostage crisis in the mountains near *Karuizawa*. This was a kidnapping that lasted nine days, and on the last day, a continuous ten hour live report attained a 90% viewing rate. However, the coverage trivialized and sensationalized the incident, reducing a complicated situation to a fight between police heroes and terroristic villains, playing on the classic Western showdown between good guys and bad guys. Although Tsutsui did not refer directly to this incident, he was obviously inspired by it in his depiction of inept police and stupid reporters able to think only in stereotypes. Noda/Teevan's version, on the other hand, weakened this critical aspect and made the plot about private vengeance between Ido and Ogoro. In their version, Ido's statement, "I found I have no aptitude for being a victim" (Noda 2012B, p. 104), an original quotation from Tsutsui, is a key sentence. In Tsutsui's script, however, this refers to the image of a victim created by the mass media. Tsutusi's Ido refuses to appear as a tearful caricature, so he chooses to be a perpetrator instead. This role is more in line with his self-image, and he goes on his way to a fatal end. However, Noda/Teevan's Ido remains till the end a victim of circumstances and must finally become insane in order to fulfill his mission.

Another aspect of the play strengthened in Noda/Teevan's version is the logic behind the intense violence. Ido and Ogoro both maintain that they love their families. Ogoro had escaped from prison because he had heard the rumor that his wife was having an affair with another man and wanted a divorce. He broke into Ido's house only because the police were already staking out his home. Later, when Ido took Ogoro's wife and son as hostages, he justified his actions by saying he wanted to save his family. However, both men were only following the dictum of "if you take my things I will take your things", thus reducing wives and sons to mere objects that can be easily exchanged. At home, Ido was a gentle loving

husband, but with Ogoro's wife, he can act without regard to constraint. The finger-cutting is also based on this sort of family-as-property thinking. In Ido's logic, a son is merely the father's alter ego, so what belongs to the father can be destroyed by him. It is only logical that Ido starts to cut off his own fingers in the end as this way of thinking leads finally to self-destruction.

As with the production of the *Red Demon*, a few actors played all the roles in *The Bee*. For example, the actors playing the policemen in the opening scene were also the pushy reporters later on. This constant switching of parts culminated in the scenes where the actor playing Ogoro alternated with the role of his six year old son (Noda 2012B, p. 81). By slipping back and forth between perpetrator and victim roles, the actor highlighted the cruelty against the son and also the symbolic punishment of the father, suggesting a kind of poetic justice is at work.

### ***English vs. Japanese versions***

After *The Bee* premiered in England, Noda wrote a Japanese version of his play. Comparing the two versions, it appears that the English script is much like a short extract from the Japanese one. For the latter, Noda was able to flesh out his message with subtle aspects of Japanese culture. These important elements were therefore lost to the English version, things such as the vertical structure of Japanese society, where in spite of seeming social equality, every relationship includes a touch of above and below. For instance in both Tsutsui's and Noda's scripts, the educational backgrounds of the main characters was highly significant. Ido graduated from a top-level university, Dodoyama went to a third-class school, and Ogoro lacked any higher education (Noda 2012B, p. 72). These social differences were recognizable from the forms of Japanese spoken by the three. In Noda's English version, Ogoro's wife was despised because she made her living as a stripper; in Tsutsui's original version, she was simply the wife of a lower

class man. This fact alone told enough about her social status, meaning there was no need for the additional derogatory remarks that appeared in Noda/Teevan's English script. Given the social inclinations of British society, this aspect could be considered relevant, but in the English version it was displaced. As Dodoyama explains, "Ogoro despises the middle classes, the establishment, and the *élite*" (Noda 2012B, p. 113). This sounds like the authentically inferior feelings of a lower class man, but they are not Ogoro's own words. They are Dodoyama's explanation about what he guessed Ogoro was thinking and feeling. As a result, Dodoyama's statement sounds as if the differences between social classes could be disregarded.

In Noda's later Japanese version, Ido denies being a member of the *élite* class as in the English version, but it is clear that this is nothing more than lip-service. The differences in social status of the protagonists are made very clear. Tsutsui drew Ogoro originally as a caricature of a lower class man. He was a convict and a stutterer, and from his first appearance it was obvious he lacked intelligence and therefore was not respected by his wife. He was the born loser, unable to win, and he could not even commit evil acts as competently as Ido could. Their struggle was in no way a fight between equal opponents. Although there are differences in their forms of Japanese, all the characters speak in a common style, whereas the English version uses both prose and verse. Dialogues are written in blank verse, and sometimes even with rhyming couplets. Setting aside of a few rough passages, this poetry gives the English version a kind of lyrical quality that serves to minimize the social differences between the characters. The conflict of vengeance plays out as a private duel between two men fighting with equal weapons, which is not in line with the play's original concept. Thus there remains a gap between the Japanese and English versions, similar to the gap between the Japanese and

English versions of *Red Demon*.

The most significant difference between the English and the Japanese versions was the different acting styles employed. Noda directed both, but in London had to acquiesce to the British style of acting. In Japan, body language played a considerably larger role (Noda 2012A, p. 41). In contemporary as well as in traditional Japanese theater, the physical presence of the actors is considered more important than the spoken lines. Body language therefore plays a very important function in conveying meaning. In spite of the artistic value of the dialogue, Noda's theatrical style is mainly centered on the body. Ever since his *Dream Wanderers* era, Noda has stressed not so much on literary meaning of his lines but rather the actor's ability to energize the audience (Kazama 1992, p. 118). In contrast, British theater appears very static and word-centered.

While difficulties with translation and differences in acting styles have made it hard to adequately bring Noda's plays to the British stage, audience expectations have also added to the challenge. Although *The Bee* was announced as a black comedy, some spectators were astonished at the cruelty depicted on stage. Even though the acting was stylized, the violent scenes were unexpected, as one review stated: "One is left with the impression that the play is merely a vehicle for experimental direction".<sup>13)</sup> It was mainly considered to be an experimental piece, "a fascinating piece of cross-cultural drama".<sup>14)</sup> In another review it was called "a tale of the macabre".<sup>15)</sup> The cartoonish characters might excuse the cruel

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13) [thebeaveronline.co.uk/2012/01/31/review-the-bee-soho-theatre/](http://thebeaveronline.co.uk/2012/01/31/review-the-bee-soho-theatre/)

14) [www.whatsonstage.com/index.php?pg=207&story=E8831327922357](http://www.whatsonstage.com/index.php?pg=207&story=E8831327922357)

15) <http://diversejapan.com/2012/02/17/stage-play-review-the-bee-a-tale-of-the-macabre-starring-hideki-noda-kathryn-hunter/>

scenes, but the play was described as “a wild theatrical manga comic strip”,<sup>16)</sup> or as a “clowning impression”.<sup>17)</sup> Framed like this, the form and content of Noda/Teevan's play could be made acceptable to the British press and audiences. On the Japanese stage, Noda's theater style is main stream, but abroad it appears as experimental theater.

### ***Critical reactions to performances abroad***

In 2012 *The Bee* went on world tour. In New York, the audience reacted with more amusement than in London, but it was in Hong Kong that the play seemed to be best understood. The spectators were laughing from beginning to end, even during the cruel scenes (Noda 2012A, p. 40). As stage director, Noda stylized the cruel scenes in a grotesque way so as to portray the spiral of violence as a parable equally valid for daily life as well as for conflicts such as terrorism and war (Kitagawa 2008, p. 38). Violence is thus shown to be a typical symptom of our age in a way that resembles the cruelty of some Hong Kong movies as well as the films of Quentin Tarantino.

Nevertheless, Noda's production was regarded abroad as “very Japanese” (Noda 2012A, p. 40). This was due the fact that the Japanese culture and ambience was strongly emphasized. Designer Miriam Buether created a stage design “like a Bento-box, with contrasting deep reds and blacks and objects melded into the resin”.<sup>18)</sup> The stage was made of red acrylic plastic, evoking an association with blood and cruelty (Takahashi 2008, p. 24). And “a mirror was pitched as the back drop to the stage, suggesting the parallel stories taking place in each household

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16) [www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/feb/01/the-bee-review](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/feb/01/the-bee-review)

17) [thebeaveronline.co.uk/2012/01/31/review-the-bee-soho-theatre/](http://thebeaveronline.co.uk/2012/01/31/review-the-bee-soho-theatre/)

18) [http://www.musicomh.com/theatre/bee\\_0606.htm](http://www.musicomh.com/theatre/bee_0606.htm)

as this history of vengeance progresses”.<sup>19)</sup> This mirror also revealed the audience<sup>20)</sup> and it shared “the suggestion that we all have a savage beast lurking underneath our civilized veneers”.<sup>21)</sup> In contrast, the Japanese production featured a design with a nearly plain stage and only a single giant piece of paper used as a decoration that could be moved about in surprising ways (Senda 2008, p. 32).

### **The Diver**

*The Diver*, written by Noda and Teevan, premiered in 2008 in London. Later the same production was also shown in Tokyo at the Setagaya Public Theater. After its London run, *The Diver* was presented in Japan as a contemporary Noh play in English. In Tokyo, Noda found it difficult to find an audience that could understand all aspects of the pretentious plot and complicated structure. Likewise in London, knowledge of Japanese culture could not be presupposed. As a result, the play could not be fully appreciated in either locale.

### ***Plot summary***

The protagonist, played by Kathryn Hunter, was known only as “the Woman”. She was accused of setting a fire that killed two children. The police found her wandering the streets, covered with soot, and with no memory of the incident. Frustrated by her amnesia, the police sent her to a psychiatrist (played by Noda himself) to get to the bottom of her identity crisis.<sup>22)</sup> Although she was obviously connected with the arson, the Woman’s mental condition made a normal

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19) [http://www.musicomh.com/theatre/bee\\_0606.htm](http://www.musicomh.com/theatre/bee_0606.htm)

20) [theater.nytimes.com/2012/01/11theater/reviews/the-bee-at-japan-society-review.html](http://theater.nytimes.com/2012/01/11theater/reviews/the-bee-at-japan-society-review.html)

21) [theater.nytimes.com/2012/01/11theater/reviews/the-bee-at-japan-society-review.html](http://theater.nytimes.com/2012/01/11theater/reviews/the-bee-at-japan-society-review.html)

22) [www.musicomh.com/theatre/diver\\_0608.htm](http://www.musicomh.com/theatre/diver_0608.htm)

interrogation impossible. The Psychiatrist heard her give various accounts, such as her relationship to a certain Prince Genji. She identified herself variously as Lady Rokujô, a Pearl Diver, and other identities. The Psychiatrist knew of course the famous Japanese tale about Prince Genji, but he puzzled how this all might connect with the real story of the Woman. The Chief of Police (Glyn Pritchard) and the Prosecutor (Harry Gostelow) were both dissatisfied with the Psychiatrist's line of questioning, so they demanded a rougher and more direct interrogation. The Chief of Police threatened the Woman with the death penalty if she did not confess to her crime, but the Woman only answered, "I'm sorry, but I'm not this Miss Yamanaka" (Noda & Teevan 2008, p. 29). The Psychiatrist therefore insisted on treating her with understanding, empathy, and patience until she could recall her memories.

### ***Critical reaction***

Although on the surface *The Diver's* plot seemed like a simple police procedural, it was actually difficult to follow because all the Woman's many stories were acted out as interludes within the main story. The impression for one English critic was of "scenes jumping around in time and taking place underwater or behind masks".<sup>23)</sup> Not only did the actors have to switch roles on stage as in the *Red Demon* or *The Bee*, but also between different levels of the multi-layered plot. The Woman metamorphosed into various characters, all of whom emotionally represented a segment of her "real" story.<sup>24)</sup> *The Guardian* stated that this kind of hybrid between modernity and the past was "thematically overloaded", and that Noda had "over-egged the pudding".<sup>25)</sup>

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23) <http://www.britishtheatreinfo.com/reviews/diver-rev>

24) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/jun/24/theatre.reviews1>

25) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/jun/24/theatre.reviews1>



### *Elements of Noh theater*

The stage design and all the interludes were performed in a style that certainly contained elements of traditional Japanese Noh theater. Catherine Chapman's stage design was described as follows: "The psychiatrist's office, with its paper screen doors (which disconcertingly clank like those of a prison cell), is often pulled apart, literally, to become the world of Yumi's dreaming. A sofa becomes a boat on a river and masked figures leap up from behind the cushions. Billowing lengths of coloured silk are used to denote shifts in character and, in one instance, a clump of red silk is used to symbolize blood and viscera."<sup>26)</sup> In *Red Demon*, Noda had used simple decorative set pieces in various ways, such as a wardrobe that transformed into a boat (Noda 2006, p. 45). In *The Diver*, the sets more closely followed Noh stage customs, where items such as fans could symbolize almost anything - even things for modern daily use, such as mobile phones, slices of pizza, pencils, and knives. The music was composed by Tanaka Denzaemon XIII and performed by a Noh orchestra (Uchida 2008B, p. 40). However, many in the London audience were not used to the traditional percussive music and vocal ululations.<sup>27)</sup>

Without such background knowledge of Noh theatrical style, the London audience understandably had a difficult time fully appreciating *The Diver*. For example, the appearance of Noda as the Psychiatrist in the opening scene recalled that of the *waki* [supporting actor] in a Noh play. Likewise, the Woman could be seen as the *shite* [principal actor]. Noda himself appeared as *waki* alongside the musicians

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26) [www.musicomh.com/theatre/diver\\_0608.htm](http://www.musicomh.com/theatre/diver_0608.htm)

27) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/jun/24/theatre.reviews1>

holding a book with a cover like a Noh mask before his face (although in actual Noh plays only a *shite* wears a mask). The Woman entered the stage slowly as a *shite* actor does walking the *hashigakari* [walk way] onto a Noh stage (Uchida 2008B, p. 40). To fully comprehend these subtleties, one must have already seen a Noh drama since such rituals are alien to a western audience.<sup>28)</sup>

### ***Sources for The Driver's interludes***

For the interludes in *The Diver*, Noda drew mainly from three literary sources. One is the novel *Tale of Genji*, written in the Heian era about a thousand years ago. The others are old Noh plays about Lady Aoi [*Aoi no Ue*] and the Pearl Diver [*Ama*]. For the Woman's "real" story, the basis is an actual contemporary incident in Japan in which an office lady had had an affair with her married superior at work. After the man decided to end it, she killed his children. In the play, Noda did not need to tell the Woman's story explicitly as knowledge of the real incident upon which it was based was presupposed. In addition, the allusion to the *Tale of Genji* immediately indicates a link because the Prince Genji of the novel, the son of an Emperor, was portrayed as a playboy. Therefore, in the interludes, the Woman identifies her lover with Prince Genji and herself with one of his mistresses. In another interlude, she identifies herself with the Pearl Diver from the Noh play *Ama*. This recounts the story of a female Pearl Diver who was forced to wrest a jewel from the sea bottom. Because she was pursued by the Dragon Queen, she cut herself beneath the breast and hid the jewel in the wound. Barely reaching the shore, she ends up dying as a symbol of female self-sacrifice (Noda & Teevan 2008, p. 27).

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28) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/jun/24/theatre.reviews1>

In *The Diver*, it becomes obvious that the Woman is not able to sacrifice herself in the same way as the Pearl Diver. In another interlude, she appears wearing the mask of a *Hannya*, a Japanese demon of jealousy, because she has identified herself with Lady Rokujô, the rival of Genji's first wife, Lady Aoi. In the Noh play *Aoi no Ue*, Lady Rokujô wanted to possess Lady Aoi's mind and kill her, so she appeared as a *Hannya* during a rite of exorcism. Thus in *The Diver*: "Genji and Woman dance, drink, embrace, and make love. The Woman becomes a *Hannya*, an evil spirit. The *Hannya* drives Genji off and kills *Evening Faces*" (Noda & Teevan 2008, p. 51). Within the theatrical symbolism of the play, this sequence of actions should mean that *Hannya* begins to possess the Woman. On the other hand, *Evening Faces*<sup>29)</sup> was the name she gave herself as the blissful lover of Prince Genji, before that romance turned bad. Hence, *Evening Faces*, the Woman, and the *Hannya* are all incorporated in one person, the protagonist of the play.

### ***Uncovering the Woman's "real" story***

From the following scenes in *The Diver*, all based on the Tale of Genji, it is possible to uncover what actually happened to the Woman (Noda & Teevan, 2008). In scene 18, she says, "A man needs some warmth when his wife is made of ice", but also "I cannot leave my wife, that's clear". In scene 19, she tries to cut her wrists, but in scene 21, she repeats the vow made by her former lover: "I'll leave her, Rokujo, she's always been cold. I'll leave her next year". In scene 23 the Woman says: "I am the happiest woman in the world. He's going to leave her, he's going to marry me". Near the end of the play, in scene 25, there is a jealous dispute on the phone between Lady Aoi and the Woman as Lady Rokujô. Lady

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29) "Evening Faces" [*yugao*] is a type of flower in Japan, but is used as a woman's name in the novel. It is also the title of the fourth chapter of *Tale of Genji*.

Aoi shouts at the Woman, “You are good for nothing, bitch, but scraping babies from your womb“. This line referred to the original case which used by Noda as the basis for the Woman's story. In scene 27, when the circumstances of the Woman's crime finally became clear, the Chief of Police and Prosecutor present her confession, an execution chamber having already been prepared, the Woman is hanged in scene 28.

***Leaving it up to the imagination***

The execution is not the end of the play, however, two small scenes were added. In scene 29, the Psychiatrist listens to the Woman's taped testimony and puzzles over her statement, “I killed four children.” Why did she confess to four murders when she was only accused of two?

In scene 30, the final scene, a quiet interlude is performed again: “Under the sea, they swim searching for lost treasure. The Psychiatrist leads the Woman to the red ribbon that was her aborted child. She gathers it to herself. The Psychiatrist takes one end. It resembles an umbilical cord. The Psychiatrist resembles her lost child. She is reunited with her lost child. She is at peace. The umbilical cord is cut to release the Psychiatrist. The Woman remains on the bottom of the ocean as the Psychiatrist resurfaces and gasps for air.” (Noda & Teevan, 2008, p. 77) This scene recalls the first interlude in scene 3, where the Woman performed an underwater dance in slow motion. Here she was playing the Pearl Diver who wrested a jewel from the Dragon Queen and then barely reached the sea shore alive. Then the Psychiatrist revived her as if she were awaking from death (Uchida, 2008B). In the final scene she remains dead, but the reunion with her aborted child symbolizes for Noda a kind of happy end.

Some parts of these interludes are based on translations by Edward G. Seidensticker for *Tale of Genji*, Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound for *Lady*

*Aoi*, and Kawai Shōichirō for *The Diver*. Between these poetic sources and the Woman's "real" story there is a consciously created gap and ultimately it is up to the audience to decide on how that gap should be closed. Although all the interludes are associatively interconnected with the Woman's story, what really happened is left to the imagination: Not even the Psychiatrist could deduce a definitive and final answer.

### *Real-life sources*

However, many Japanese spectators knew exactly what had in reality happened to the Woman because of their familiarity with a well-publicized murder that had taken place on December 14th, 1993, in Tokyo.<sup>30)</sup> Two small children, left alone at home in the morning by their parents, were killed by arson. It was established that the children's father had recently ended an extramarital affair with an office lady in the company where he worked. Although she was a primary suspect from the beginning, since there was no proof that she committed the crime, the police could not arrest her. Two months later she confessed and the case became big news because of its exceptional circumstances. Reports tended to two extremes: on one hand the lady was described as a cold and cruel killer and on the other hand, she was portrayed with compassion as a betrayed woman and the victim of a selfish and immoral man. The father had talked about getting a divorce and promised to marry the woman, but he never followed through. When the wife found out about her husband's affair, she confronted him with an alternative: Either get a divorce and pay a big settlement, or end the relationship. So the husband ended the affair by phone, but the wife was not satisfied and continued to call up the office lady in order to insult and mock her about her past abortions,

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30) <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/日野OL不倫放火殺人事件>

saying she was a bad woman who only killed children. The office lady not only felt jealousy towards the wife but also began to hate the children. She decided to kill them so as to let the wife know what it felt like to lose one's children. She was sentenced in court to life imprisonment, although her defense lawyer portrayed her as more victim than perpetrator, arguing that she was abused by her lover's lying and thus became mentally unstable. The judges admitted she was naive and that the man was morally guilty, but let the conviction stand.

To understand the ramifications of this case, one must consider ancient Japanese social customs. Conflicts between a wife and an extramarital lover are not new. They are very much a traditional topic in Japan and this case resembled the conflict between a *seishitsu* [official wife] and *sokushitsu* [concubine] of historic times. In old Japan, concubines lived in the household of high-ranking persons, but their status was always below that of the official wife. This caused jealous rivalries between the women and created questions concerning whose child would inherit the father's rank. In modern Japan, although strict monogamy is the law, a husband's extramarital affairs are still tolerated. What made the office lady murderer so exceptional was not the fact that this was another case of adultery, but the fact that she killed the children of the official wife and therefore the official heirs. It was this fact, not just the cold-blooded cruelty that made the crime especially unpardonable from a Japanese moral perspective.

### ***The Diver as social commentary***

There are a number of ways in which *The Diver* provides commentary on contemporary Japanese society. One critiques the double moral standard caused by a superficial acceptance of Western morals while keeping alive beneath them the old categories of thinking. Another questions the superficial way in which social

roles are sometimes played. When people are required to act in a way that goes against their true feelings or personality, they effectively put on a mask in order to accomplish the role. Taken to an extreme, this can lead to a situation such as with the wife and mistress, where they act with tenderness in front of the man and the children, but treat each other with severe contempt. This triangular relationship could only end badly in one way or another, but the struggle continued because of greedy desire for the status being the man's official wife. Further, as in *The Bee*, *The Diver* criticizes biased reporting and the sensationalization of the news. However, all of these comments are indicated in the play rather than stressed. Noda's aim was to create a sentimental story about a poor lady with broken heart who finally became so confused that she seemed not to know what she had done.

### ***The drawbacks of Noda's style***

The arrest of a mentally confused woman wandering the streets but carrying proof of her guilt also reminded Japanese people of the notorious *Abe Sada* case. In May of 1936, Abe Sada strangled her lover and cut-off his genitals. Some days afterwards, she was found in a state of mental confusion. It came out that while working as a maid she had had an obsessive affair with her married employer. Although alluding to the Sada case in the play helped Noda foreshadow the potentially fatal consequences of adultery, it also demonstrated a drawback in Noda's tendencies towards ambiguity. The Sada and the arson cases were very different, with no similarities between the perpetrators' characters. Arbitrarily drawing from a loosely connected source may be seen as artistic freedom, but by doing so in this case Noda led his story down a false path. This tendency has become something of a trade mark in his writing as he does not seem to mind sacrificing artistic truth for the sake of a good phrase or a surprising effect. He has been repeatedly criticized for this tendency. As one prominent Japanese critic

stated, "If we speak of the dichotomy between *truth* and *falsehood*, many have found Noda to be a writer who chooses falsehood and never shores up any vision of the truth" (Senda 1997, p. 205). This remains a justifiable criticism today.

Another example of Noda's practice of playing fast and loose with artistic truth is his use of the Noh play *Ama* as a literary source in *The Diver*. The dramatic core of *Ama* contradicts the story of the Woman but Noda used it anyway because it gives him the opportunity to create seemingly meaningful symbolism alluding to life and death, birth and abortion, and life after death. For example, following *Ama* in scene 3 he has the Woman-as-Pearl-Diver say, "So, though it might cost me my life, I'll do it for our son" (Noda & Teevan 2008, p. 26). However, there was no son in the Woman's life for whom she could die. If she had had one, her story would have developed differently.

Traditional Noh plays usually end with a Buddhist purification, where the souls of any deceased characters reconcile to their fates and find ultimate peace. The message is that human passions are the source of all human suffering and should therefore be overcome. For example, in *Aoi no Ue*, the angry spirit of revenge personified as a Hannya was not merely exorcised but calmed. Nothing of this sort appears in *The Diver*. The Woman's confession contains no words of regret, and the symbolic reunion of the hanged Woman with one of her aborted children in the last scene is simply a cliché of an idealized mother-child relationship without a father. Where did the souls of the other killed children go, and how would they find peace after death? These questions are left unanswered.

Another example in *The Diver* makes it obvious that Noda is only superficially using Noh dramas. At first glance, his play seems to fall in the category of Noh



plays about mentally unbalanced women. They become this way because of grief from a lost lover or beloved child and cannot overcome their sorrow. Eventually, they find their way to inner acceptance (Lee 1983, p. 51). Although *The Diver's Woman* appears mentally unbalanced and is clearly suffering from deep grief, when asked about the causes of her anguish, she refuses to talk about it and even denies her identity by pretending to be another person: "I'm not this Yamanaka" (Noda & Teevan 2008, p. 29). These behaviors certainly recall the Noh plays, where the *shite* first appears disguised and only in the second part acknowledges her identity and admits the truth of her own past. However the integration of this dramaturgical concept from Noh drama did not succeed in *The Diver*, not only due to the obscurity of Noh to foreign audiences,<sup>31)</sup> but because the Woman never tells her own story. All of the interludes in her story are poetically expressed via ancient tales. By doing it this way, Noda reverses the dramatic structure of Noh. In a Noh play, the Woman's acknowledgement of her own story would have been the dramatic climax, a kind of dramatic catharsis resembling the effects of classic psychoanalysis. In Noda's play, the Woman's confession is presented only by others as a matter of fact. After her death, the Woman takes refuge in a dream world -- as she has done all during the play. As a result, she never takes full ownership and responsibility for her action and crimes. This made it obvious in performance that Noda had only superficially used formal elements of Noh and did not enter the deeper reaches of that art form.

Noda later wrote that "I believe good theatre resists the urge to explain too much; the theatrical imagination can understand things that are implied through action, suggestion, image, gesture, simplicity" (Noda & Teevan 2008, p. 13).

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31) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/jun/24/theatre.reviews1>

This statement may be true, generally speaking, but the especially difficult nature of this play actually required a considerable degree of explanation. Even for a Japanese audience it was difficult to understand (Uchida 2008B) and much more so for an audience abroad. The topic and plot were too specifically Japanese, and without knowing the facts behind the original incident, as well as the socio-cultural background and the traditional style of Japanese Noh theater, the play was simply incomprehensible.

### **Conclusion**

The difficulties of comprehending Noda's plays abroad are mainly due to three factors: literary language, acting style vis-a-vis body-language, and cultural background. In Noda's plays, messages are often hidden between the lines or hinted at subtly through body language (Noda 2006). Japanese audiences are used to his style and generally understand the intent. On the contrary, English audiences tend to look for less implied and more explicitly stated messages. A related difficulty is caused by Noda's plot choices. Abroad he cannot rely on his sixth sense of what the audience is interested in, as he has often done in Japan. Likewise, he cannot rely on a shared intellectual horizon with his spectators abroad. The English version of *The Bee* was successful precisely because the topic of domestic violence was internationally understood. In addition, since the play was described as a satirical, macabre tale, or as a manga comic strip, the audience and critics could handle it. The reception of *The Diver* was quite different, because audiences and critics could not adequately comprehend it.

Foreign audiences have also had difficulty understanding Noda's use of body language. This includes not only significant gazes or expressive gestures, but also extreme moves such as a sudden kick-boxing attack in lieu of a verbal

assault. After this jarring physical deviation, the actors perform again as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened. While not all contemporary Japanese theater practitioners use such exaggerated methods, they are widely accepted, but according to Western standards of theater, such elements are only possible in slapstick comedies.

Even in an increasingly globalized world, socio-cultural backgrounds remain different. Similarities reside primarily on the surface, and the cultural differences between Europe and Japan are larger than Noda seems to comprehend. For example, when he complained in his book *Akaoni no Chôsen* [Red Demon's Challenge] about the vast differences between London and Tokyo, he was referring to theater production not to differences between the respective societal structures and cultural backgrounds (Noda 2006). One is left wondering whether the naivety in some of his statements is only a mask or an indication of his true beliefs. Now in his fifties, Noda has at times described his outlook as cosmopolitan, while at other times he has stated that he can never leave behind his Japanese point of view, even when he lives and works abroad.

Many Japanese are not aware that abroad knowledge of Japanese culture cannot be presupposed. European theater is much better understood in Japan than vice versa. In the last 150 years, Japanese people have adopted many cultural elements from the West, yet have also been able to preserve their own culture. On the contrary, the reception of Japanese theater in Europe has remained largely within the frame of the exotic, seen as specific, and very different. With his cross-cultural theater projects, Noda has tried to overcome this point of view, but in some ways has confirmed these prejudices precisely because the “very Japanese” aspects of his plays are not understandable without supplemental explanation. Even the *Red*

*Demon*, whose message seems so simple and generally valid, ran into problems, much more so with a play like *The Diver*, where comprehension difficulties could have been foreseen from the beginning. It is a pity that mutual cultural understanding even today is still not matter-of-course. However, this remains a good incentive for further endeavors.

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