

Gone Berserk in Paradise

(Notes on the Aesthetics of Total Culture in Japan)

I.

The European man's longing for something perfect is at least as fundamental, supreme and irrepressible as his suspicion towards anything perfect. Since he rejected the transcendent world throughout the centuries of the constant rise of the age of reason and devoted himself to apparent reality mesmerized by the loss of all illusions, he has also lost his long-standing faith in the transcendent world, that is in Plato's inevitable idealism despite all skepticism. This devastating though revealingly heroic bravado ("being alone in the Universe without God"), however, could not erase his memories of the ideal, God and his faith in Plato.

Gazing into the Universe that left its subject alone with his knowledge, and that the prolific complexity of processes of obvious cause and effect needs no *raison d'être* just functions as such has all become such a diabolic charm and conviction that has set forth the European man's path and has given him enough strength to declare his irrevocable domination in Europe without despair or pathos: no more idealism, transcendentalism, God or Plato's world of ideas. Yet, in the course of this revealing and stirring purification the remnants of the past, the debris of art and religions enthrall us with their sheer beauty and restless perfection indicating the existence of something that cannot exist at all...

These relics are stored in graveyards called museums; their perilous gist altered so that this whole perfection-debris-business could be brought to an end. The existence of these remnants could prove the reality of perfection like in Jorge Luis Borges' renowned short story on *Al-Mu'-Tasim* where the idea of partial existence points to its hard core; in other words, the belief once perished must not arise from its ashes again, but leave the debris of perfection such as the heartbreakingly distant look of the Venus of Milo ("What's attracted your gaze?"), the ludicrous grandiosity of Johann Sebastian Bach or the unique dignity of *Divina Comedia* where they belong i.e.

the dead remains of eternal tradition which the modern man rejects once and for all though not without a trace of bad conscience.

The inexcusable negligence to be on the safe side is only good for the way out: however, the trouble comes unexpected where the modern man wouldn't anticipate it at all, because the trouble doesn't come from the masterminds of our graciously distracting museums leading us from partial to total; NO, it came after he had discovered, advanced and spoiled America, had discovered, advanced and spoiled Africa, had discovered, advanced and spoiled India then in the wake of his failed penetration into China finally arrived in Japan to discover, advance and spoil her together with himself as he intended to, far from Europe and ready for the not-so-cathartic encounter with exotic emptiness; then he looks around with a flicker in his eyes, because in Japan and not even there losing even the sense of perfection suddenly going insane and blind, in Japan and not even there this modern man comes across an untouched and untouchable culture of perfection.

II.

In a Shinto shrine in Kyoto in 1374 Ashigaka Yoshimitsu, the real warlord of Japan was watching Kan'ami Kiyuzugu's sarugaku play, the Okina the most mysterious noh-play ever and fell in love with Ze'ami Motokiyo Kan'ami's beautiful eleven-year-old son. Moreover, through this eternal love he also fell in love with the peculiar art of the Kan'ami family. He supported and protected this essentially fragile and delicate "divine revelation" called sarugaku-no-noh the first Western explorer of which, the leading 20th century poet Ezra Pound presented as not only an important theatrical event, but rather as "one of the great arts of the world".

You may surely declare that 1374 was an exceptional year in the history of world culture that should be celebrated with true honor as the look of the Venus of Milo, or the births of Johann Sebastian Bach or Dante Alighieri. Nonetheless, the proposition would be somewhat different, since through the eyes of this modern European artist you also learn about what happened later, and if you believe that your fascination could be celebrated at all, you would place that celebration somewhere else. The Kan'ami noh, which meant the enchantingly immediate evolution of the noh even in the father's life according to his son's memories and eternal judgment, got fatally endangered in 1408 following the death of shogun Yoshimitsu. His successor, shogun Yoshimochi, however, supported a certain dengaku company, namely the dengaku instead of the sarugaku; therefore, losing its privileged status and natural environment as the noh nurtured only by the chosen top intellectuals, the sarugaku suddenly became prone to extinction following a brief flourish and would descend

into mediocrity, lose its significance and vanish forever from the stage of world culture that would be penetrating into Japan much later. Yet, the course of events took a different trail, though the aftermath of 1408 could have been even more threatening a fatal to the existence of the noh.

After Kan'ami's death, the noh as the secret art of the Ze'ami family descended into the countryside and into the status of so-called "riverside-pauper-status". The noh received an almost lethal blow when Ze'ami's pride and hope, his son Juro Motomasa died in 1432. It was Ze'ami's unique genius that created the noh from his father's art; therefore the noh was equivalent with Ze'ami himself. Consequently, the disasters – his final disgrace and his son's tragic death – that had fallen hard on him had an almost fatal impact on the noh itself. Yet, the calamities were not over: he was sent to exile at the age of 72 – seven years before his death – because he hadn't given his secret noh wisdom to the new shogun's noh master.

Do we know Ze'ami's real path until he finally arrived in the Isle of Sado his exile? Do we know that the seventy-two-year-old Ze'ami was as handsome as the eleven-year-old, or when carried by servants and family members the old man sailed to the isle and settled in the Shoho-ji temple where he finished his writings of 22 volumes which was hidden from the public for more than four centuries and are among the most original set of thoughts of world culture, he set to carve a mask revealing his overall wisdom?

It's difficult to judge whether all of these stories are known. Nevertheless, Ze'ami's radiating and wonderfully striking look on his way to Sado then in the monastery of Sado has ever been haunting the modern European man. At the very site of the noh plays this look alone could reveal the perfect and real art beyond the "theatre" or the actual "play". It is the art it should be and could be; the finite certainty instead of a mimetic play to prove the only and one reality, where the earthly and heavenly are both parts of the same reality, where the divine profanely emerges by transcendental practice and knowledge, where the recall would not bring forth the imitation of the recalled, but the real one itself. It is not the year 1374, but rather the fine thread of time, as some fragile lightning, flashing through the massive flow of history that should be rejoiced. That thread could have been broken any time, anywhere, but it did not break or get lost, but lingered on and is still there for the modern man to gaze at in current noh plays where the well-prepared shite leans on his mask in the room of mirrors, then straightens up to face a different creature from the depth of the mirror, and when the fue shrieks and the eternal kakegoe drums beat from within; in other words, when the mono-no-aware – the sorrow for the transience of things - settles in the awakening space of the noh, then from Ze'ami's gracious look to contemporary attempts to recreate the noh, the man of modern age simply cannot believe his eyes though he had better does so, because it is there in front of his eyes in Kyoto, Tokyo and Osaka on the stages of Kanze, Kongo, Komparu and Kita

schools or on the most unexpected green patches. One may call it magic just to get rid of it, because it cannot be called anything but the perception of divine presence that is very much profane on the one hand. On the other hand it is the incredible transcendent perfection the reality of yugen.

III.

In his blind daze, the European traveler drifted to Japan may easily pray for not to be exposed to this blind and dazzling vulnerability, this sudden enthusiasm in the unexpected beam, this unbelievable beauty which shook his roots, foundations, and axis that include everything. In the meanwhile he is ready to conclude that the Heian era is the final explanation, the unprecedented climax that strays around in the 9th, 10th and 11th century and never emerged before or after that period; there happened to be a pause in the flow of time, in the massive bloodshed when in the Heian-kyo, the capital of archaic Shinto the tenno and its aristocracy, i.e. some hundred people had created the unimaginable and established the transcendent as mundane existence. This closed order of supremacy brought forth a culture that was not only created by its close and almost childish admiration for the Chinese culture, but also the desire that could not be derived from that brutal, archaic barbarism built on Shinto, or from anything at all, because it was exceptional that an elite was not only daydreaming but fully realizing the paradise of sophisticated sensitivity. The modern traveler has acknowledged this profane perfection at the highest peak of Heian as the correlation between the poetry of Tang and its own Manyoshu and Kokin poetry, as the ideals spread over all aspects of life forming general moral rules, as the love of some precisely defined and perceived gusto, as the late autumn dusk, as the sophisticated location of a lock of hair, as the mourning over a child's sudden and tragic death, or as the sight of a tranquil valley, and that traveler was searching for and finally found the eternal holiness which exists only within perfection.

IV.

Nevertheless, one must admit that the modern traveler needs some blindness and haze in order to gain heavenly security and protection. You can acquire this blindness and haze while on the second day of his visit to Japan he walks along the banks of the river Kamo, south of the Sanjo bridge – the spiritual center of the city – and, after gazing at the tiny waterfalls of the river in the March sun, takes a turn to the left towards the famous temple of Sanjusangendo which gives home for 500 Buddha statues on each side. Still, the traveler – due to some vague internal drive – first goes into the dull building of the National Museum across from the temple without any

specific purpose; and he does it right, because he enters a labyrinth sloping to his own spiritual center; therefore the modern traveler, on his second day in Japan, happens to come across an exceptional artifact of the essence of the Japanese culture. This encounter is sheer luck, since this wonderful masterpiece is owned by the National Museum in Tokyo and has only been lent to be displayed in Kyoto.

Then in the main chamber of the museum he bounces into Hasegawa Tohaku's famous and monumental painting '*Pine Trees on Moonlight*' which is probably the most outstanding work of not only the Momoyama era but that of the whole Japanese culture. As he is looking at this masterpiece he gets almost blind and stunned, since he is submerging in this wonder in a way that was described by Rokuro Sensei, master of the Umewaka branch of the noh school: Tohaku must have thought of various things before painting his masterpiece, but he probably did not think of anything while working on his painting. The visitor may well have the same experience, because this special status was not only needed to create this masterpiece but also to enjoy it; this painting intimately incorporates the essence of eternal existence that cannot be delivered by any knowledge, as knowledge is rather restricted and faint in this process. However, Tohaku's masterpiece is not above, beyond or before, but rather from without knowledge; it comes from a place where knowledge is irrelevant, meaningless, useless and strange, because Tohaku's masterpiece encloses not only "*the essence of eternal existence*", but also its reality. Thus, in the European traveler suddenly catches sight of the Paradise itself, and paralyzed by its absolute beauty he almost bumps into this painting, since deprived of understanding and knowledge he instantly "knows and understands" that its not only a painting of some pines in the moonlight mist; no, the traveler is stunned that the two by six screen set up and lit at the far end of the main chamber displays nothing but *reality* for ever; it is the reality that shows so-and-so pines in the moonlight mist. Hence Hasegawa, that lone genius, who moved from Nanao to Kyoto in his early thirties, turning against the Kano school which also provided an astonishing art though enforced a strict and despotic rule on the painters' way of life, managed to achieve the impossible: to paint the reality of a landscape, the *live* reality creating not only a painting but actual reality what makes a difference. The traveler cannot believe his eyes or his mouth, while he mumbles to himself 'it's incredible', then moves closer than retreats, but he cannot help wondering: in the gloomy chamber thanks to Tohaku's genius there is a landscape on the screens, the liveliness of eternal reality; across from Sanjusangendo art has finally achieved its perfection with its grand master called Hasegawa Tohaku blinded and dazed by brightness in a double meaning now and then.

V.

Blood, and blood, everlasting massacre, torture and peril, hunger and fear, implausible personal grief, inferno and earthquakes, tsunami and typhoon, destruction, demolition, lunacy and cruelty, fight and fight, war and war, insane and voluntary death and the collapse of all creation, selfish and diabolic desire for power, pride and prejudice, folly, thickness, ignorance, lust, laziness, meanness and sedition, deception and fraud, ruthlessness and mercilessness, selfish motives and malice, in other words the everyday history, the real time the profane and thoughtless tapestry of human affairs; but still, in the midst of mines of evil, there is a boozy path that is shown to the searching mind revealing the "*destination of the walk*", a narrow lane. As one of the uninvited visitors, the author of this essay was given the directions when he arrived at the gigantic torii of the outer shrine of Ise, or Geku, or rather Tojyouke-Daijingu on an early morning when the air was cool and the sun was hazy and smooth; then he stepped over the sacred threshold and headed towards the main buildings of the shrine following the desolate forest path, then suddenly a butterfly black as the night emerged from nowhere and without a cause. It had huge wings, moreover, those wings seemed too large, and too gigantic for that tiny body, as if there had been a hurry to deliver the heavenly message and the fragile, little body was provided wings three times the size of a usual butterfly; Its sudden appearance and its misty locus of its position made the visitor come to a sudden halt realizing its pure magnificence as an important part of the first impressions, i.e. its suddenness and beauty, that slow and solemn flight were all exceptional. Among the rows of Japanese cedars and beyond the threshold of the first torii, the visitor had better meditate over the meaning, that is the non-accidental existence of this phenomenon when the butterfly started to fly in circles one foot above the ground and completing five more circles suddenly flew off and vanished among the thick leaves of the bushes guarding the path.

The main shrine and the two treasuries are inaccessible according to the regulations of Shinto, i.e. you may not intrude the privacy of goddess Tojyouke-omikami; therefore prayers and visitors may only get to the central gate of the sacred place divided by the three internal fences. As there were no prayers at all in this early morning hour, the visitor found himself alone at the gate and was stunned by the silent strength of Geku and could hear the birds' songs and the rustle of leaves, nothing but that wonderful whispering of leaves and the joyful singing of the birds in the sunshine, and the white curtains of the main gate were just silently wavered by the breeze and that flutter was so soundless that even the slightest sound could not be heard at all, though the sunlight and the wind quietly wavered the white curtain at the gate leading to the main shrine and the transparent shadows were just quivering on the curtain which sort of blocked the way. The visitor should have opened the curtain to enter

and stroll along the pebbled pathway to the main shrine, but the wavering curtain just blocked the way though its transparent drape disclosed the lead to the interior. After careful consideration you may realize that it was not a simple wavering or quivering, there was just enough sunshine and breeze to tamper with the edge of the drape swinging it back and forth scratching the ground; yes this wavering clearly shows what happened at the gate in the eternal realm of the Geku forest and that may have been the reason why the visitor walking in Ise longed for the quiet of the Geku in order to stand in the unknown and inaccessible tranquility. He strolled along the extraordinary sights of Ise and saw the dignity of Naiku the Internal Shrine dedicated to Amaterasu; he would have liked to stand – with his head leaned down – in front of the gate leading to the Main Shrine and be exposed to the draft that was quivering the curtain. And when he returned to the railway station in the evening dusk he realized that he had almost an hour before leaving for Kyoto, so decided to return to the shrine for a final climax of this wonderful day. Then back to the railway station and took the late night train to the imperial capital. Yet, the farewell was quite different, since it was not him but rather the sacred sight to say goodbye to him as he was stealthily walking back to that morning tranquility. He was said goodbye with an inevitable straightforwardness, and it was not him who said farewell to that quiet holiness in the Geku. While he was walking from the railway station of Ise back to the Geku, the visitor checked his watch to turn back to the railway station at exactly half time. So he arrived at the gate of the torii, walked through it and took his steps towards the Main Shrine along the shadowy alley of cedars, then suddenly that black butterfly just appeared by his feet again, and before he could say Jack Robinson it made three playful circles around him then vanished in the leaves, now, forever. The visitor, paralyzed by astonishment, just tried to spot the butterfly and locate the tiny and fragile path among the “*mines of history*”. He was just staring and, of course, he missed his train back to Kyoto.

VI.

No doubts, that the doors of the Paradise of Japanese aesthetics are not only open for the European traveler, or the existence of this Paradise is not hidden from anyone. There are accessible and simple facts and items in Japanese art which reveal themselves even for eyes and minds of so-called arrogant koestlerian colonists who are usually irritated not only by Japan, but also by all Non-European-American cultures and respond with intolerant and malevolent impatience and folly. The real nature of Japanese art, i.e. what it is and is not at the same time is revealed occasionally: e.g. walking to the Eastern section of Kyoto you stroll along under the shielding shades of Mount Hiei and the late Saigyō and past the imperial villas of Shugaku-in and pay a relaxed visit to the amazing

gardens of Manju-in and Shisen-do and then, finally declare the garden of Ginkaku-ji the most wonderful of all gardens. Finally you enter the Zenrin-ji, perhaps the friendliest and most receptive Buddhist monastery, which is commonly called Eikan-don named after Eikan, a Buddhist monk who used to teach there. As you stride along the brilliant buildings of the terraced monastery built in to the hillside, you plan – like many others – to finish your walk at the main shrine so as to see the world famous Amitabha statue, the so-called "Reversed Amitabha", which commemorates the legend of Amitabha having been moved by Eikan's preaching so much that he turned back to the monk and got stuck in that position forever. With sober suspicion you reach the central hall and enter the gloomy interior to discover Amitabha in the protective shelter of the altar; as you look at Amitabha's uniquely sensitive sculpture you don't have to be a biased Japanese to see the obvious: the name must have been a mistake, a misunderstood legend, since this delicate and sophisticated Amitabha can't have looked back to Eikan, he must have turned away from the world which – with its absurd brutality, hypocrisy, folly and depravity – was not only unable to decipher Amitabha's supreme knowledge, but Amitabha must have felt distressed by what he saw. It is not the false legend but rather an eternally sensitive Amitabha, that strikes you from the very beginning; a vulnerable god withdrawn from the rough world, in other words, Amitabha means rejection, a momentary rejection that retained in time rejecting everything false and aggressive; an instinctive amazement and pride referring to a universe that has been rejected by Koestlerian disdain which, however, can see with its scrutinizing, moderate and revealing look what Amitabha in Eikan-do turns away from. Nevertheless, it denies the existence of any universe beyond Amitabha where Amitabha's wonderful look and divine pride come from: if Amitabha's reversed look means anything at all for this cynical Koestlerian view, and it surely does, then how can the Koestlerian cynic deny the existence of this superior vision of the world causing this strange reversed look. Yet, so to say, what he accepts on the one hand he cannot deny on the other hand; thus Amitabha of Eikan-do means an utmost ointment not only for the Koestlerian cynic but also for all nonbelievers including the amazed European traveler who, trying to resolve the meaning of that specific look in the Main Shrine of Eikan-do, is standing right there again where he thought - based on his primary suspicion and disbelief - he couldn't reach ever: a Paradise of idealized perfection. Then, being absorbed in his thoughts in Eikan-do, he looks back to Amitabha and suddenly realizes that awesome strength and power which emanates from that reversed face glimmering through the wooden lattice of the altar towards the outer garden where on the slopes the tourists, cynics, fanatics and amazed visitors are shuffling homeward, just as usual, from a typical excursion.

VII.

To understand, or rather, approach Japanese art you'd better use a technique, a most amazing one that you does not need to master, since it is so obvious: it is the technique of first glance. From within and from without Japan, as you encounter this culture of Paradise, no matter where you head for, the first glance at the masterpieces of this art, the constitution of this Paradise is crucial and enough to decipher what you see and where you are driven by this sight. This technique, however, may be occasionally used for non-Japanese art. Yet the Japanese contribution to this approach is unique, since Japan, amazingly enough, declares that there is no need for a second glance beyond the first one; it is fair enough to read the first glance, as you are standing there transfixed and need no time to understand what you see, so you had better stick to that first glance that will never pass away, or rather, this "first glance" is the final phase of time, an unbelievably solid "point" where time is almost suspended; therefore it the fact is that there is no first, second or third glance. There must be, however, a so-called "moment" when the work of art, i.e. the real depth of reality and the spectator meet; it is a direct revelation and amazement of sudden "understanding" wherever you go: e.g. when you first enter the hallways of Nishi-Hogan-ji Dai-shoin or Shiro-shoin in Kyoto and you first encounter the transcendent splendor, the heavenly gleaming of trees, gardens, beasts and men painted on the golden tiles, created by the Kano school. You have the same experience in the Mii-dera Temple originally built to honor Kobun tenno and situated on a huge area near Gichu-ju, which guards Basho's grave, on the way from Kyoto to Lake Biwa over the Eastern Mountains, when you – bearing your special permission – finally arrive at the otherwise closed pavilions at the right time and place and an old monk leads you inside the desired pavilion. You admire at the Kano paintings, especially a landscape inserted in to the wall of the chamber, on the sliding doors, but it is just the outcome of an ordinary motion that mesmerizes you: as you are sipping your tea and telling the old monk about your respect and interest for medieval Japanese painting and Kano Eitoku 's art, he suddenly pulls off a sliding door to let in some fresh air and sunshine. Then, out of the blue, there is again: that revelation and amazement of the first encounter, for what that old monk opened the door to was a breathtaking garden - a stone emerging from the green, almost burnt moss, a blossoming camellia bush, an old hinoki Cyprus and a fraction of pond reflecting the deep-blue sky above - which pierce into then leaves the visitor's mind almost at one instance. It is exactly the same view of the landscape that you have seen on Eitoku's painting in that niche; so you are just stunned and moved deep in your hart as in the following three random cases of thousands alike: as you arrive at one of the cherry parks in Nara, the capital before the Heian era, at the time of the cherry blossom and you first live through what cherry blossom means from within and without Japan and you are startled not simply by countless variety of the fluffy

pink flowers, but rather by that transcendent floating that embraces the whole world within one single instance. You do not have any time for glancing, because it is not the time, but the fact of meeting the Paradise, Perfection, and the Great Art of Japan that really counts. You need to have some internal urge to admire this "first glance" and realize that the existence of Paradise is inevitable.

VIII.

On June 30 2000 a small group of pilgrims set off on the ferry for the distant Kyushu from the Osaka Bay. The pilgrims had fundamentally two goals.

On the one hand, they wanted reach the foot of Takachiho, the most sacred mountain of South Kyushu, to worship Nigini's, Amaterasu's grandson's soul and memory who was sent by the Sun Goddess to descend to the people on Earth and establish the Country with the three royal insignia and become the first tenno named Jimmu and who reached the Earth here at the peak of Takachiho.

The pilgrims' second goal, however, proved to be much more uncertain, triggered by a hope that they would meet a heavenly messenger on the way who will confirm their faith and beliefs. The reason for that hope was a confused rumor that had spread in Kyoto: the chosen one would randomly incarnate in a human being and will wait for the pilgrims with the heavenly message.

The night had come and the ferry peacefully arrived in Miyazaki on the Isle of Kyusho by down. The pilgrims went to shore happily and relaxed at sunrise, then set off for the highlands of Ebino. They spent the first two nights in Obino, a small village, where they were put up by some family contacts of one of the pilgrims. Their accommodation was in a remote and desolated manufacture, called Nippon Telenix, which was full of weed and giant spiders. The accommodation was free provided the pilgrims would clean up both buildings of the manufacture to make them ready for the noh performance due two days later. They were even offered free seats for the noh performance if they did a decent job.

Next day and even the day after next, the pilgrims were quite busy with clearing all the weeds and spiders and disinfecting the toilets, providing water supply and electricity. By July 2 both buildings were clean and tidy and the noh stage had been constructed and erected with the help of local people. The villagers brought the home-made scaffold, the agemaku, they were doing a lot of carpentry, fixing and carrying, then finally the stage was divided from the audience with a curtain and the sacred pine was spread on the background. Although that noh

stage was not equipped with the conventional hasigakari or hall of mirrors, everyone agreed that they had erected a perfect stage for Shimai, i.e. the performance of noh dances and songs.

Thanks to the local contact family about 30-40 elderly villagers gathered and were seated on the clean floors in the evening. The pilgrims were also seated, but with an absolutely different expectation in their hearts and minds: during the two days of cleaning and preparation one or the other had always brought up the idea, *what if this would be the place of revelation?* By the time the old villagers had been seated the pilgrims' excitement was so high that they were absolutely involved in expectation.

The amateur performers danced and sang well, but their performance never reached over the average level of such amateur noh performances. Although the performance and innocent grace of two brilliant children made the audience cheer occasionally, the following shimai performance of men and women cooled the enthusiasm of the villagers as well as the expectations of the pilgrims. After two and a half hours of performance it was obvious that the messenger would not come.

After the last part of the performance when the applause stopped, still nobody moved. The elderly villagers were not sure whether the show was over, so they did not want to be rude and leave the performance before the end, though they seemed quite exhausted. The pilgrims did not want to go, or just couldn't move because of their disappointment. The discomforting silence was lasting so long that it was obviously the silence of expectation. First, it was just a transient perception, but as time was passing and nothing happened or stirred beyond the occasional scenes on the stage, the expectation was growing and transforming to hope, then it vanished and declined into despair soon after some minutes had elapsed. The audience, especially the pilgrims' mood was wavering, when in the end one of the elderly villagers stirred and stood up and was quickly followed by others here and there.

About half of the audience had already risen and was looking at the exit when there was a sign from the stage that the performance was not over yet, something would be coming.

The pilgrims would never ever forget that very moment. After the agony of waiting and all the hopes gone, suddenly the agemaku, the ritual curtain dividing the stage from the concealed backstage, quivered. Then two helpers pulled off the curtain revealing the passage to the stage. After a long silence and stunned emptiness the shite-je of Hagoromo, the magnificent fairy Tennin was slowly walking to that occasional stage under the revealed agemaku so as to perform the heavenly dance – the beauty of which is beyond human endurance – to Hakuryo's people.

The fairy was unbelievably beautiful.

Her splendid kimono, magical cloak and crown, the Hagoromo enthralled the audience. Most of them, their mouths dropped, were just staring at the amazing phenomenon on the stage, since that was the truth that all the villagers understood: the Tennin's astonishing appearance and involvement with amateurs; the pilgrims first thought that some famous noh artist appeared there on the stage to assist the enthusiastic amateurs, but then the pilgrims believed that it was the Tennin herself who appeared, i.e. something must have happened behind the scenes and instead of a Tennin actress the real Tennin – by some divine freak – had come to mesmerize the villagers and confirm the pilgrims with her amazingly splendid dance as the rumors in Kyoto had predicted.

It was not in 1401, 1681 or 1939, but at around nine or nine-thirty on July 20, 2000.

IX.

You may talk about Ze'ami's look, the heights of Heian, the Hasugawa, the quivering of the curtain in the shrine of Ise, the Amitabha, the Nishi-Hongan-ji, the cherry blossom, or the Hagoromo among the villagers, you may recall everything that makes up the ritual order of everyday life from the beauty of the most sophisticated and mysterious women of Kyoto to the rigorous and almost too intricate ceremonies, or the memorable nights and days, a day among the archers of Enkaku-ji in Kamakura, a night in the unique atmosphere of the old oden inn at the Gion side of the Shijo Bridge in Kyoto; you may recall, talk or list anything, but you must admit something at the end of these notes: to reach and maintain this wonderful Paradise built on amazingly high standards and ideas and penetrating our whole life needs not only the European and Japanese blindness and amazement, but also a complete insanity, moreover a full range of insanity starting from everyday madness through paranoia to holy frenzy what is fundamentally the insanity of stamina and diligence, an intensive mental concentration without which there is no way to look into the heavenly empire: it is a frenzy even though you may be directed in this Ninigi land by chance. You can see this insanity in the strikingly sober look of that wonderful mask master of noh, when he shows the visitor how the numerous mirrors are placed while he is working; in the meanwhile, he shows some of the noh masks and controls them in the mirrors. This insanity gleams in the staring eyes of the Buddhist monk who kneels in front of the altar and blows the sho, the diabolic sounding mouthpiece organ among the fue and cuzumi. You see insanity anywhere the traditional art or everyday rituals are daily routine, in other words, where the Japanese way of life is settled; this is the insanity of everyday practice and routine that is the severe insanity of self-perception, meditation and self-discipline. This insanity is based on the devotion to extremes and on a revelation that incorporates the spirit and the system of the paths leading to

perfection: it doesn't matter whether it is gardening, the ceremony of drinking tea, calligraphy, waka poetry, the technique of making the obi for the kimono, the quality of sake or the proportions of a building in a landscape, because it is the path, the essence of practice and routine, the repeated action, the set of movements, the uncountable restarts and the continuous and unbroken practice, repetition and repetition for ever. On the one hand, it is sheer insanity, folly and frenzy. On the other hand, it is the understanding that only symmetric eternity leads to perfection, in other words it is the repeated practice itself, this process of practice creates the perfection as an idea, the inevitable truth that perfection can only be found in the distant and inaccessible goals of a motion. This knowledge is rather practical; therefore the question for an artist practicing before the inaccessible idea of perfection is needless, because not the answer but the understanding of the answer is missing, since this knowledge has no theory, in other words there is no difference between the content and the understanding of this knowledge.

Yet, if you ask a question – as the modern European author of these notes asked Inoue Kazuyuki, noh master in Kyoto – you encounter the same experience: you have both the answer and the explanation, still the internal content of nor the answer neither the explanation is accessible.

Only Inoue Sensei's eyes were and are telling: there is something utterly ambiguous in an unexpected corner of the world from within and without Japan in an age of disappointment and painful cynicism. Master Inoue's eyes reflect something that you will never-ever learn, that is the only hope is reflected in his eyes.

Ford. Kis-Dózsai András