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The Ethos of Noh: Actors and Their Art (review)

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Monumenta Nipponica, Volume 60, Number 1, Spring 2005, pp. 134-137
(Review)

Published by Sophia University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mni.2005.0001>



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that of Takeoka Tadao] I referred to in setting up that problem is itself broadly influenced by Tokieda grammar” (p. 159). Of course, this “ruse” was apparent to any reader either already familiar with Tokieda’s work, or with wit enough to look him up when Yoda first introduced him without specifying his time period.

The final chapter, which focuses on *Kagerō nikki*, is also founded on circular argumentation. Yoda starts by examining the uses of the words *ware*, *hito*, and *waga* in this text. She insists that *ware* is a first-person pronoun and *waga* a first-person possessive pronoun (even though *Kōjien* gives both *watakushi no* [my] and *jibun no* [one’s] as definitions of the latter). She then discovers passages where *waga* cannot be translated as “my” and uses this as evidence that we should not think of *Kagerō* as an instance of first-person narration. She goes on to give some sensitive readings of scenes expressing the narrator’s sense of isolation and alienation, a circumstance that Yoda labels “the estranged voice”—a term she does little to define at this point, except to mark its gendered component. Yet, in the end, these scenes can manifest isolation and “estrangement” only if we presuppose an identification between the narrator and the protagonist—the definition, in other words, of autobiographical writing. Debates about grammatical person derived from Indo-European grammar are largely beside the point.

The epilogue is not a simple summation of the book’s main arguments. Rather, Yoda attempts to tie her study to contemporary debates in feminist theory, specifically, to a critique of Judith Butler. Yoda accordingly spends several pages introducing and critiquing Butler and then suggests that her “objections to Butler’s analysis of the gendered subject” are fundamentally similar to her “critique of Tokieda’s and his follower’s conceptualizations of the discursive subject” in that both are attempts to challenge “the modern (nominalized) subject, proposing instead to examine the subject performatively through its signifying practices” (p. 221). Yoda asserts that her conceptualization of the “estranged voice”—defined here, finally, as the “voice that frames the self . . . not a hidden speaking subject but the enunciatory context from which the self emerges and into which it recurrently disappears, most notably at the moment of self-reflection” (p. 225)—suggests a way “to simultaneously address both the symbolic mediation of the subject, which has no history of its own, and the historicity and sociality of the subject” (p. 229).

Yoda’s is a bold, if flawed, critique of Japanese literary studies, critical theory, and women’s studies, and an ambitious, if uneven, examination of the institution of the study of Heian texts under modernization. It will provide a challenging reading to all concerned with these fundamental topics and disciplines.

The Ethos of Noh: Actors and Their Art. By Eric C. Rath. Harvard University Asia Center, 2004. 317 pages. Hardcover \$49.50/£31.95/€45.60.

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Books about *noh* have appeared in abundance in recent years, but none has succeeded so well in rethinking the tradition in its historical context as this study. Eric Rath asks himself a question that, once it has been posed, seems obvious: how was *noh* trans-

formed from a medieval theatrical form performed by a motley assortment of entertainers into a classic art dominated by a small group of elite professionals? This transformation has often been explained by analyzing changes in the sponsorship and patronage of noh from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries. Rath, however, views the situation from the “inside out” and endows noh actors and authors with a far greater degree of agency than is customary. By focusing on how certain performers succeeded in articulating an “ethos” (defined on page 5 as “the sum of a group’s traditions, the memories that become important to the group”) that fostered institutional changes, Rath succeeds in outlining “the maturation of noh as a profession and its ethos over six hundred years of history” (p. 5).

Chapter 1 begins by analyzing masks as a medium of group memory and identity for noh troupes of the fourteenth century. Masks were often accompanied by tales of magical or divine powers; some were thought to have fallen from heaven. Rath sees masks and the tales that surround them as reminders of the past, ones that become especially important in the absence of writing. Owning a mask or maintaining a monopoly on its use linked the owner or user to an origin and to claims of legitimacy and authority. By the 1450s noh performers had won their case for a monopoly on using masks in noh plays, and shortly thereafter mask-making itself became a profession. Classificatory schemes were created and myths grew more abstract and standardized as certain mask makers and noh performers sought to confirm their rights to formulate and impose standards.

Rath focuses in chapter 2 on the impact of literacy and the creation of secret technical writings on the noh-performing community in the fifteenth century. The introduction of writing, he argues, tended to strengthen the link between the production of myths and the maintenance of hierarchy within each noh troupe. At this time, Zeami’s troupe was only one among a number active in the Kyoto area. Other performers included *shōmonji*, outcasts who received the sponsorship of several major temples. Rath’s treatment of the *shōmonji* is important not just because this group has been almost entirely ignored in English-language discussions of medieval history, but because the effort to eliminate their influence shaped Zeami’s and Konparu Zenchiku’s representations of what noh is or ought to be.

Chapter 3 traces the popularization of secret manuscripts in the sixteenth century, in particular *Hachijō kadensho* (the most widely read treatise on noh until the twentieth century). By analyzing the origins, authorship, and content of this treatise, Rath determines that one of its chief rationales was to establish the superiority of the Yamato troupes over the Hie (Hiyoshi) tradition. The Tokugawa bakufu’s insistence on unigeniture and bloodlines, as well as the popularization of treatises revealing noh’s “secrets” meant that by the seventeenth century genealogy had replaced secret manuscripts as the fundamental medium of myth. Genealogy is discussed in more detail in chapter 4, where it is shown to be inextricably linked to attempts by troupes to connect themselves to founders (in some cases mythical). Pedigree also allowed certain noh performers to contrast themselves to those they deemed “amateurs” (performers often no less skilled or successful in making money from their art) and laid the foundation for claims to secret oral transmissions or other knowledge that came from appropriate ancestry.

Rath turns his attention in chapter 5 to the benefits and challenges that the publishing industry brought to the world of noh during the Edo period. Printed volumes of

noh texts (*utaibon*) became bestsellers from the early years of the period; other books introduced costumes, staging, and repertoire. Amateur study of noh became something of a fad as the publishing industry converted what had once been private information into public commodities. Noh performers now began to construct their authority less on references to physical objects and secrets, but rather on the authorship of texts. The name of Zeami and the bloodline that followed from him became perhaps the most important legitimating factor in the noh world, especially once publishers attached his name to *Hachijō kadensho* (which he did not write).

Chapter 6 takes the reader to the *iemoto* system and probes the connection between control over the publishing industry and the family head's consolidation of the leadership of noh schools. *Iemoto* systems in noh developed rapidly from the second half of eighteenth century, in tandem with the rise of the publishing industry. Noh actors, chanters, and musicians now derived significant revenues from teaching amateur students. Kanze Motoakira's "reform" of what was to be included in the repertory and his revisions of published noh texts signaled the solid establishment of a "canon" that codified the Kanze school's style. At around the same time Kita Hisayoshi (d. 1829) attempted to standardize masks as well.

The notion of noh as "ritual," the cornerstone of noh's ethos in the modern period, is the subject of chapter 7. "Okina," already treated in chapter 2, did of course contain ritualistic elements, but Rath stresses that the concept of noh as the "ritual theater" (*shikigaku*) of the Tokugawa bakufu is a modern one, created during a period of institutional crisis for noh. The "ritualization" of noh gained speed after this theatrical form received support by the Imperial Household Ministry and wealthy business magnates during the Meiji period. In 1902 the Noh Association moved from Shiba to the Yasukuni shrine, and links between the emperor and people were enacted when "imperial command performances" were opened to the general public. "Okina," which became the dominant medium of noh's authenticity and original sanctity, also sustained a large number of varying and conflicting religious meanings.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this book is the surefooted manner with which the author contextualizes the statements, writings, and actions of noh performers and authors, thereby shedding much new light on what the old texts mean. What at first glance appears to be a pristine "aesthetic" tenet turns out to be in fact highly political; an obscure old myth suddenly reveals itself to have had highly practical contemporary implications. The emphasis on the performers and what they did or did not do or say allows Rath to dismantle old prejudices shared by many Japanese and Western scholars alike. When he argues, for example, that performance practice and programming during the Edo period became standardized not simply because of some vague "warrior influence," but because noh performers themselves wished to professionalize and raise their own social position, the performers suddenly become three-dimensional active subjects rather than mere passive receptors of imputed warrior wills.

Seeing it "from the inside out" has its limitations, of course, and one rarely gets a sense of the links between noh and the great economic development that supported it during its long history. The emphasis placed on the oral/written dichotomy and the insistence on seeing the advent of the technology of writing and the printed media as the driving force of noh history is, I would contend, somewhat overstated. To stress, say, that "the publishing industry made *su'utai* an accessible hobby for the rest of society by printing *utaibon*" (p. 191), would seem to be getting the cart before the horse.

Surely it was commoners' desire to learn *su'utai* (which cannot be learned simply by purchasing a book) that drove the publishing industry to issue such texts. Why commoners could and did learn *su'utai* during the Edo period is, of course, another story, but that would take one far beyond texts and secret professional transmissions.

But these complaints are minor and in no way detract from Rath's splendid achievement. By demonstrating that "tradition" is always contested and that orthodoxies and heresies are the product of power relations, Rath has succeeded in showing how power, tradition, and artistic production have interacted through the ages to produce what we know (or think we know) as "noh." Some may wish to cling to the belief that the plays themselves are "timeless" and "ritualistic," but in this volume Rath demonstrates convincingly that the history of noh—which of course includes the plays and performance practice—is not so much a repository of eternal elite values as it is a dynamic and exciting tale, fraught with as much contention as the history of any other art. Too bad that the book could not have been read by Ezra Pound.

Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity. By Maeda Ai. Edited and with an introduction by James Fujii. Duke University Press, 2004. 391 pages. Softcover \$24.95.

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Few will miss the pun on the popular TV series in the title of this book, although, needless to say, it is a serious publication. Eleven paradigmatic texts by the critic Maeda Ai have been carefully selected and rendered into effective English by nine translators, whose own careers, we are told, intersected in various ways with that of the author (p. vii). Except for one member of the Ph.D. candidate generation, all the translators are themselves accomplished scholars in the fields of study covered by the essays, namely the social and cultural history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Japan and late Edo as well as modern Japanese literature. In his concise foreword, Harry Harootunian describes Maeda's interpretative strategy as that of cultural studies "before the letter," bringing together history, urban geography and planning, ethnography, material culture, and literature (p. xiii). *Text and the City* is indeed an apt condensation of the concerns of the author, who took literary texts as his point of departure and as the primary instrument of analysis in an attempt to decipher the city as the very site of modernity. The emergence of this new urban space, which absorbed the countryside as well, is the core subject of Maeda's cultural analysis.

James Fujii's introduction contextualizes Maeda's work, pointing out his creative assimilation of what Fujii terms "continental high theory," while also mentioning—although not elaborating on—Maeda's continuation of the legacy of earlier generations of Japanese intellectuals such as Nishida Kitarō and Watsuji Tetsurō as well as Marxist thinkers like Nakano Shigeharu and Aono Suekichi (p. 4). In passing, we may note that Fujii somewhat overshoots the mark by stating that, unlike Japanese intellectuals, their European counterparts "typically know nothing of non-European thought," even though he is certainly right in pointing out that a term like "cosmopolitan" may often denote nothing but "a parochial Western European continentalism" (p. 5). We often encounter this kind of perspective in Japan scholars eager to