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# Review of "Dramatic Action in Greek Tragedy and Noh: Reading with and beyond Aristotle" by Mae J. Smethurst

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cal. The focus of the book clearly is on the description of people and practices, not on constructing new theoretical paradigms. Rather than a fault of the book, however, this editorial premise has produced something like a textbook that could form a significant part of the foundation of a variety of courses. For classes of advanced undergraduates mature enough to read beyond the book's often quirky English this book offers reasonably accessible introductions to a variety of South Asian performance phenomena and to basic performance and ritual theory. The book may make more sense as principal reading for graduate seminars on festival, ritual, and/or folk performance in South Asia. Certainly the book's broad topical scope and its competent handling of fundamental theories make it valuable for graduate students. Scholars already with some specialty in South Asian performance will also find it valuable as an introduction to subjects with which they will inevitably be unfamiliar, in spite of their time in South Asia.

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**DRAMATIC ACTION IN GREEK TRAGEDY AND NOH: READING WITH AND BEYOND ARISTOTLE.** By Mae J. Smethurst. New York: Lexington Books, 2013. 115 pp. \$55.00.

Mae J. Smethurst's scholarship offers an illuminating examination of aspects of Japanese *nō* through Aristotle's *Poetics*. Smethurst focuses on *genzai* or realistic *nō* alongside tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides that Aristotle favored. Published by Lexington Books, this text is part of the series Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches curated in partnership with Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies. As an interdisciplinary text, this scholarship is distinctive for its impressive depth and intricate knowledge in the areas of both Greek tragedy and Japanese *nō*. This allows for an incredibly rich examination of the structures of *nō* and tragedy. This work is informed by a breadth of knowledge of both forms, references to multiple plays, and keen awareness of scholarship in both fields. As a result, the text makes an enriching and profound contribution to studies in world theatre and, in particular, curriculum and scholarship that seek to diminish an East-West dichotomy. It is a dynamic text that contributes an in-depth examination of dramatic devices in *genzai nō* (also called present-day *nō*) with plot and Greek tragedy along with detailed insights into Aristotle's poetics.

*Genzai nō* are seen as peripheral to the most celebrated *mugen* (dream) plays of the *nō* tradition. In *genzai nō* the characters are alive at the same moment in time. This contrasts with *mugen nō*, in which a spirit of the dead can speak to the living. Zeami in his treatises wrote that *mugen nō* and particularly the play *Izutsu*, in which a ghost remembers her departed husband and sees him as her reflection in a well, is an ideal example of the highest beauty

of *nō*. At first glance, this study could be seen to overlook the central *nō* plays and focus on the outliers of the *nō* tradition. However, Smethurst points out the importance of *genzai nō* at different points in the history of the form and that there were many popular *genzai nō* plays in the repertoire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Furthermore, when we consider the larger body of Smethurst's work, this recent focus on *genzai nō* is immediately appropriate. Her earlier book, *The Artistry of Aeschylus and Zeami: A Comparative Study of Greek Tragedy and Noh*, focuses on Zeami's treatises and examines *mugen nō* alongside Aeschylean tragedy. This current work, reads *nō* and Greek tragedy through the *Poetics*. Smethurst's volume focuses on realistic *nō* with plot for an examination of how these plays adhere to the ideals of Aristotle's prescriptions for tragedy.

A detailed introduction explains the goals of this scholarship as both to elucidate the artistic value of *genzai nō* and to examine Aristotle's preference for a three-actor limit in tragedy. While it may seem to be a stretch to make comparisons and connections between *nō* and tragedy, Smethurst focuses narrowly on specific structures of text in the two forms and is careful to avoid larger generalizations. Cognizant of the vast differences that she describes as spatial, temporal, and cultural, between these forms, Smethurst seeks to evaluate precise features of particular plays to provide insights into their dramatic structures. She acknowledges that the similarities between *mugen nō* and Greek tragedy are vast but finds points of connection between plot driven *genzai nō* and tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides. My skepticism for her approach gave way after reading her introduction, which is informed by key scholars and actors in *nō* and a sensitivity to the difficulties these kinds of analysis present. I came to see that in many ways this is distinctive scholarship that contributes to broader understandings of the structures of dramatic action in two radically different and unconnected theatre traditions. The analysis is possible because it is largely based on the texts and narratives of the plays. The introduction offers a brief discussion of staging techniques in terms of props, stage space, audience, and masks. Performative aspects of *nō* and tragedy are set aside in the later chapters that closely examine dramatic action through structures of the text in many *nō* plays and a number of tragedies.

Chapter 2, "The Tragic Action of Realistic Noh," offers a close examination of *Aisomegawa*, which, as Smethurst explains, "satisf[ies] the prescriptions of Aristotle" (p. 43). Much like a recipe, Smethurst offers a detailed and insightful reading of the *Poetics* to analyze the success of a number of realistic *nō* plays and Greek tragedies. In an extended discussion, the *nō Aisomegawa* is compared to *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Smethurst argues that *Aisomegawa* satisfies many of the ingredients for tragedy articulated by Aristotle and even has the required elements for "complex plot," which Aristotle considered the best kind (p. 47). This chapter evaluates an expansive number of *nō*, including *Ikenie* (Sacrifice), *Dampū* (Sandalwood Wind), *Nishikido* (named after a person), *Hibariyama* (Skylark Mountain), *Nakamitsu* (also called *Manjū*; both names derive from persons), and *Shichikiōchi* (Seven Warriors in Flight). In this chapter, Smethurst also addresses issues connected to the centralization of *mugen*

*nō* as an ideal of *nō*. Muromachi playwright Komparu Zenchiku thought plays that portrayed children were vulgar and saw themes of filial piety as too close to everyday life to reach artistic ideals (p. 42). Smethurst connects Zenchiku's criticisms of *genzai nō* as one of the factors that compounded to relegate this grouping of *nō* plays as second in artistic merit to *mugen nō*. Another key factor in the devaluation of *genzai nō* were efforts in the modern era to distinguish which arts were distinctively Japanese. *Mugen nō* was upheld as an example of a highly sophisticated and uniquely Japanese art.

Chapter 3 explores “distanciation,” in which an actor in *genzai nō* speaks in the third person about the character he is performing. This is most obvious when the actor recites both inner thoughts and stage directions such as a speech that ends with the recitation of the words “he said.” Smethurst explains distanciation as follows: “The actor in the *nō* will not only speak of himself qua the fictive figure in the third person, but will also turn and face the audience briefly and speak as himself qua actor’s part” (p. 63). Smethurst finds that these moments of distanciation are more common in *genzai nō* than *mugen nō*. She explains the three methods of reciting poetry according to Aristotle as, “Narration, narration and changing to a character’s voice as in epic poetry, and finally acting as in tragedy” (p. 63). In a fascinating discussion, she positions “distanciation” as a fourth method that is found in *nō* but not found in Greek traditions. This opens an exploration of how emotional intensity is created in *genzai nō* plays such as *Aisomegawa*, *Ikenie*, and *Nishikido* as well as tragedies such as *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Moments of the greatest emotional intensity are created when the actor steps out of his role and into a third-person narrative of the character’s speech or actions (p. 66). This is also described as when an actor self-consciously references the character he is portraying. Smethurst describes this technique in the *genzai nō* *Nakamitsu* when the two actors playing a father and son “shift to the third person, with the effect of simultaneously drawing attention to the highly tragic moment and distancing themselves as individuals from it; it enters, so to speak, a higher place of multiple perspectives or dimensions” (p. 67). This chapter offers an in-depth investigation of how the most intensely emotional scenes of a play are structured. One interesting insight seeks to explain why there are more distanciation moments in *genzai nō* than in *mugen nō*. Smethurst argues that distanciation is used to heighten emotion in prosaic *nō* rather than *mugen nō*, which employs poetic intensity as a key device to heighten emotion (p. 71). Smethurst also addresses the intricacies and risks of a translation that does not maintain specific aspects of person and point of view from the source text. A translation that does not maintain the subtle shifts in speech between first person and third person diminishes or erases the distanciation and with it important aspects of the dramatic structure (p. 72).

The fourth chapter connects the distanciation of certain *genzai nō* scenes with an equivalent dramatic technique in tragedy—that of three-actor scenes. Smethurst argues that the distanciation in *genzai nō* functions as a third actor, whereas in tragedy perspective shifts in the most dramatic scenes through the addition of a third character. It was during her research evaluat-

ing *genzai nō* in terms of Aristotle's *Poetics* that Smethurst discovered the three-person scene structure of certain tragedies. The dramatic effect of the distanciation in *genzai nō* is paralleled by three-person scenes in tragedy in which a third actor interrupts dialog between two other actors. This interruption happens in scenes that Aristotle marked as crucial to an outstanding tragedy. As Smethurst explains, "The use of that third character in the tragedy serves as a catalyst for a 'sudden reversal of action' (*peripeteia*), for the 'recognition' of two people one of the other or of each other (*anagnorisis*), or for some equally important step in the development of the plot, one that leads to a 'fatal or painful action' (*pathos*) committed or averted" (p. 79). The fourth chapter is largely an examination of this three-character structure in *Oedipus the King* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. These plays, which Aristotle distinguishes as particularly successful, use the three-person dialog sparingly. However, the dramatic structure is employed in the scenes from *Oedipus the King* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* that Aristotle points out as having outstanding plot structure. This last chapter focuses mainly on tragedy but shares insights that were generated through the interdisciplinary examination of *nō* and tragedy.

For scholars of Asian theatre, this is a rewarding text. It offers new approaches to understanding *nō* and examines aspects of the *nō* tradition that receive little attention. It also shares new and rewarding pathways for reading the *Poetics*. There is an appendix of short passages from fifteen *genzai nō* in which the actor speaks in third person about the character. Smethurst's *Dramatic Representations of Filial Piety, Five Noh in Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Program, 1998) includes full translations of some of the *nō* discussed in this volume. A short glossary offers a list of key Japanese terms with English translations. The list of Greek terms that are important to Aristotle's definition of tragedy is particularly useful to non-Classics scholars in reading this text. Paired with Smethurst's earlier work, this scholarship offers an important frame of reference to support world theatre studies and is a contribution to scholarship on central aspects of theatre, such as how emotional intensity and dramatic action are created in these two performance traditions.

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**HIJIKATA: REVOLT OF THE BODY.** By Stephen Barber. Washington, DC: Solar Books, 2010. 136 pp. 28 illus. Paperback, \$19.95.

In 2013, two major museum exhibitions in New York revisited the prolific post-war Japanese avant-garde. The Museum of Modern Art's *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde* provided an overview of the myriad artists and artist groups making visual, performance, and installation work during this pivotal and productive period, and argues that this avant-garde made significant contributions to body-based and intermedial arts practices. *Gutai: Splendid Playground*