

**DIALOG WITH A GHOST:
MODERN NŌ PLAYS BY MISHIMA YUKIO
ON THE STAGES OF THE POLISH THEATRE**

Introduction

The Japanese medieval Nō 能 theatre – a poetic, song and dance performance, where demons, gods and ghosts dialog with humans on the border between the illusory and the real world – became an important source of inspiration for one of the greatest Japanese writers of the 20th century, Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–1970). In the years 1950–1962, on the basis of Nō plays, he wrote as many as nine dramas, altogether entitled “Modern Nō Plays” (*kindai nōgaku* 近代能楽)¹. They are entitled as classical Nō plays, however, their action occurs in the 20th century, and the acting characters, contrarily to the archaic and often singing language of the Nō theatre, speak a common everyday language, fully comprehensible for the contemporary spectator. Those plays gained popularity quickly not only in Japan, but abroad as well: some of them, translated into English, German, Spanish and French, have been successfully staged in the West since the 1950s. Also Polish theatre directors couldn’t resist the power of those short, one-act dramas and made Mishima’s plays appear and reappear on the stages of Polish theatres, just as ghosts in the classical Nō theatre. Already in 1965, Tadeusz Łomnicki staged three of the modern Nō plays by Mishima, and nearly 30 years later, in 1994, Andrzej Wajda directed four of the Japanese writer’s plays. The younger generation of directors became interested in Nō plays as well: in 2007, unexpectedly as many as two of them, Agnieszka Olsten and Natalia Sołtysik, presented their visions of Mishima’s Nō theatre.

¹ These plays are: *Kantan* 邯鄲 (*The Magic Pillow*, 1950), *Aya no tsuzumi* 綾の鼓 (*The Damask Drum*, 1951), *Sotoba Komachi* 卒塔婆小町 (*Komachi at the Stupa*, 1952), *Aoi no ue* 葵上 (*The Lady Aoi*, 1954), *Hanjo* 班女 (*The Waiting Lady with the Fan*, 1955), *Dōjōji* 道成寺 (*Dōjō Temple*, 1957), *Yuya* 熊野 (Yuya, 1959), *Yoroboshi* 弱法師 (*The Begging Monk*, 1960), *Genji kuyō* 源氏供養 (*Memorial Service of The Tale of Genji*, 1962). Cf. Mishima 1975h,b,l, vol. 20; Mishima 1974a,e,c vol. 21; Mishima 1975n,m vol.22; Mishima 1974 vol. 23. All these plays have been translated into English.

It is quite surprising that plays written by a Japanese playwright using means of expression and poetics seemingly different from the Western ones, have been attracting the attention of Polish stage directors, beginning from such masters of classics and theatrical art as Andrzej Wajda, and ending with the youngest creatresses such as Natalia Sołtysik. Thanks to this fact, Mishima's dialog with the classical Nō theatre has had the chance to develop into a dialog of Polish directors and actors with Mishima, and through him – with the medieval Nō theatre itself.

The traditional Nō theatre vs Mishima and his modern Nō

Fully formed at the turn of the 14th and 15th century, the Nō theatre constitutes one of the oldest Japanese theatre forms. Its great creators and codifiers were a father and a son: Kan'ami 観阿弥 (1333–1384) and Zeami 世阿弥 (1363–1443). The Nō convention was settled by the 18th century, including fixed, symbolic gestures and figures (*kata* 型). Nō is not a dramatic theatre in the Western meaning of the word. It can rather be defined as a poetic performance, where, apart from the actors (always men, regardless of the character performed), an important role was held by the orchestra (*hayashi* 囃子) and a choir composed of several people (*jiutai* 地謡). The actors appearing on the stage (*shite* シテ – the performing actor, wearing a mask, and *waki* ワキ – the secondary actor) narrate a story rather than play roles, and the text they melodiously recite is called *yōkyoku* 謡曲 (a song, a melody), which indicates its direct connection with music. The stage movement, where a significant role is held by dance (*mai* 舞) and *kata*, is performed with the accompaniment of drums, the flute and the choir. The contents of around two hundred and forty known Nō plays (of which around a hundred are staged nowadays) are composed of legends, folk tales, themes taken from classical literature and Buddhist stories. This theatre, formed in the times of long-lasting civil wars caused by a fierce struggle for power, and very popular at that time especially among the samurai aristocracy, is steeped in an atmosphere of suffering and sorrow. It is associated with Buddhist meditation on transience and the impermanence of everything in this world (the so called *mujō* 無常). In the Nō theatre, this world and the beyond coexist in a time that has nothing to do with the linear one. Usually on the stage, the ghost of a dead warrior or that of a high born woman appears, who, in the presence of a Buddhist monk, a pilgrim or an ascetic, narrates about some tragic moments from his/her life and relives unspeakable suffering. Symbolism, understatement, suggestion as well as sublimity and elegance are the values considered to be the most characteristic of the Nō theatre. They co-create the complex aesthetic category of *yūgen* (profound and mysterious beauty), finding its fullest expression precisely in theatre.

Mishima admired Nō – its formal rigor, simplicity of plot, symbolism and extremely condensed dramatic expression. He was also fond of the ancient canon

of female beauty presented in Nō plays. As he wrote in his essay *Nō – sono kokoro ni manabu* 能—その心に学ぶ (learning from Nō), this was an ideal beauty, from before the Middle Ages², represented by a high born woman, always sad and suffering, incorporating “the eternal beauty as from a dream”³. Although the Kabuki 歌舞伎 theatre was closer to his temper, the combination of poetry and drama found in Nō (and impossible to achieve in traditional Western theatre) was to him the manifestation of the highest art. He claimed that the text of Nō plays “was truly perfect as a poetic drama”, and saw the greatness of Nō theatre in an unparalleled synthesis of the word with independent dance and music⁴. Mishima had come back several years in a row to the form of Nō miniatures he was fond of, writing one of his famous plays nearly each year. He spoke jokingly about them with his characteristic irony, calling them “a strange new dish” (*kimyō na atarashii ryōri* 奇妙な新しい料理) that he had proposed to the modern Japanese theatre *shingeki* 新劇 (the new theatre)⁵. This new form of theatre, modelled on Western theatre and its psychological realism, at the same time completely departing from the popular convention of the traditional Japanese Kabuki theatre and the so called “new school” (*shinpa* 新派) derived from it, was created in Japan in the early 20th century and prevailed mostly in the years 1945–1960. In the beginning, the *shingeki* theatre showed Western works of playwrights such as Ibsen, Chekhov, Gorky or O’Neill, then later – Japanese authors. The theatres Bungakuza 文学座 (the literary theatre) and Haiyūza 俳優座 (the actor theatre), where Mishima staged his modern Nō plays, were counted among the most important post-war *shingeki* theatres.

As for his “new dish”, i.e. Nō plays *à la* Mishima, the author wrote them in the following way: from the classical Nō theatre, he took over the stories from the plays in the most superficial way, and he used the atmosphere of the border of sleep and wakefulness so characteristic of Nō, along with the way of joining the scenes; but he dressed his characters in entirely modern costumes⁶.

It is worth stressing that for Mishima, a born playwright and an unfulfilled poet, the most important was, above all, the text of the play, where the classical literary theme taken from Nō harmonizes with extremely condensed words, bringing to mind the famous tirades by Racine. Each of Mishima’s Nō plays, before it was staged, was first published in a literary paper. In the rather brief stage directions of his plays, Mishima sporadically gives hints about stage movement, limiting

² The writer meant the ideal of female beauty represented by the ladies of the imperial court from the Heian 平安 period (8th–12th centuries), when a beautiful woman had to have spotless white skin, tiny red lips, thick eyebrows painted high on her forehead, as well as beautiful black hair reaching the ground.

³ See Mishima 1976j, vol. 35: 274-275.

⁴ See Mishima 1975f, vol. 27: 532-537.

⁵ Mishima 1975g, vol. 27: 25-26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

himself to simple remarks concerning actors' moving on the stage, the character of costumes or the type of music. In no way does he refer to the element of dance, so important in the Nō theatre.

It is with the example of *Aoi no ue* 葵上 (*The Lady Aoi*), a play belonging to Mishima's classical Nō repertory, that we can observe what constituted Mishima's "modernization" of the classical Nō theatre. The play's original version, due to its simplicity and perfect construction, was one of the writer's favourites.

The authorship of the classical *The Lady Aoi* is not entirely certain: it is attributed to Zeami or to his son-in-law, Konparu Zenchiku 金春禅竹 (1405–1471). The story of Lady Aoi (the beautiful young wife of prince Genji known from his love conquests) and her torments by the ghost of the jealous Lady Rokujō 六条, was inspired for the purpose of Nō from the famous *Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語, XI) by Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部. In this story, Lady Rokujō's pain, suffering and jealousy, after being left by Genji 源氏 for Lady Aoi, lead to the materialization of all her negative feelings in the form of a so-called "living ghost" (*ikiriyō* 生霊)⁷. A ghost that once set free from Lady Rokujō's body, haunted the pregnant Aoi, causing her long-term illness and finally, death. The plot of the Nō play focuses on the scene of performing exorcisms by a shaman and an ascetic in order to chase away the revengeful ghost. At the same time, the playwright accentuated compassion for the unhappy Lady Rokujō, condemned due to jealousy to terrible suffering and asking revenge for her pain. In a fragment of the play, Lady Rokujō's ghost approaches an article of clothing laying on the stage, representing the sick Lady Aoi, and in order to cause pain to her rival, she strikes her with a fan. At that time, the *shite* actor is still wearing the mask of a beautiful woman, but he will soon change it, thus fully showing the nature of the revengeful demon. The stage assistant (*kōken* 後見) will help the actor change from Lady Rokujō into a terrible demon. In front of the audience, hidden behind a piece of clothing thrown over the actor's head, the mask of a woman will be swapped for the mask of a demon (*hannya* 般若), and the actor will be given, to his right hand, a small hammer (*uchizue* 打杖), the attribute of an angry ghost. Until that time, neither the high ranked priests nor the shaman could chase the demon away. Only the ascetic who fights with the ghost using a Buddhist rosary and reciting a prayer from the *Heart Sutra* is able to vanquish it.

Buddhist mercy and compassion, so characteristic of the medieval Nō theatre, are completely absent in *The Lady Aoi* by Mishima. The eponymous Aoi 葵, the

⁷ Since the ancient times, it was believed that *ikiriyō* 生霊 (also called *seirei* 生霊, *shōryō* 精霊 or *ikisudama* 生き霊/生き魍魎) – the ghost of a living person – could leave the body and without the person's knowledge, it could torment hated people. *Ikiryō* belongs, next to *shiryō* 死霊 (the ghost of a dead person), to so-called *mononoke* 物の怪: revengeful ghosts. The belief in ghosts, demons and all kinds of supernatural creatures is traditionally very strong in Japan.

wife of Hikaru Wakabayashi 光若林⁸, is not lying in the residence of the Left Side Minister, as it happens in the original play, but in a modern hospital. She shakes in her sleep, sighs, rolls over – she clearly suffers. The cause of her illness was diagnosed as sexual complexes. Before the start of psychoanalytic treatment, Aoi is subjected to sleep therapy. And it is precisely during that sleep that every night, an extremely elegant lady comes to her, just as a frivolous nurse informs her visiting husband. It turns out that it's the living ghost of Yasuko Rokujō 康子六条 who recounts the details of their love affair to Hikaru, and by finally seducing the weak man, she makes Aoi die⁹.

In one of his essays, Mishima wrote that the main theme of both the classical *The Lady Aoi* and his own version of this play was jealousy. He stated that it was the less philosophical theme among his modern Nō plays, which made it easy to understand by the audience. He saw in this play also some elements of a thriller, which was supposed to make it attractive to modern spectators. Mishima saw difficulties in staging *The Lady Aoi*, mainly in the skilful presentation by the actors of precisely this “thriller” motif, i.e. the moment when the voice of Rokujō's ghost in the hospital mixes and superimposes with the voice of the woman sleeping in her apartment and unaware of anything¹⁰.

As in the case of *The Lady Aoi*, the action of Mishima's other modern Nō plays occurs in ordinary places: a park (*Komachi at the Stupa*), a fashion salon (*The Damask Drum*), an apartment (*The Waiting Lady with the Fan*), etc. The protagonists speak in modern Japanese and though it is the literary register, distinguished by its elegance, it isn't styled on the archaic Japanese so characteristic of traditional Nō plays. They do not wear masks either, nor exquisite, rich costumes: they are ordinary, modern people. However, the Japanese spectator sees in the modern Aoi a court lady from the classical Nō theatre, and her husband Hikaru Wakabayashi evokes the image of the famous Prince Genji from the Heian period. At the same time, a less experienced spectator, for example a foreigner unfamiliar with Japanese culture and unable to taste the intertextuality of modern Nō plays, will have no difficulties in understanding Mishima's works. This is due to the skilfully orchestrated action and authentic protagonists, entangled in universal problems of love, jealousy and loneliness. Due to this, Mishima's Nō plays became popular not only in Japan, but also after being translated in 1957 (only a year after the publishing of the Japanese collective edition), they were successfully staged in the West.

⁸ Hikaru, which means “Shining”, is also Prince Genji's nickname in the *Tale of Genji*.

⁹ For Polish translation of this drama see Mishima 1998k: 15-25.

¹⁰ See Mishima 1975g, vol. 27: 25. Mishima meant here the last scene of the play, where Hikaru calls Yasuko Rokujō and he learns that while he was convinced he was talking to her by the side of his sick wife, Rokujō actually was sleeping tightly in her apartment. In the same moment, Hikaru hears Rokujō's voice coming from behind the hospital room's door (it's the ghost's voice) and becomes totally puzzled.

The writer was present at several foreign premieres of his modern Nō plays, and though it may seem surprising, he considered foreign actresses playing the main characters more reliable than their Japanese counterparts¹¹.

Modern Nō plays in adaptations by Tadeusz Łomnicki and Andrzej Wajda

The premiere of Mishima's modern Nō plays directed by Tadeusz Łomnicki took place on 9 March 1965 at the Small Stage of the Teatr Współczesny (Contemporary Theatre). The spectacle consisted of three plays: *The Damask Drum*¹², *Komachi at the Stupa*¹³ and *The Waiting Lady with the Fan*¹⁴. In the traditional Nō theatre, the first play narrates the sad story of an old gardener in love with a beautiful young girl. In Mishima's play, he was replaced by a seventy-year-old concierge of a law office, and his loved one was a beautiful client from a fashion salon nearby. The concierge expresses his great love towards a woman he knows only by sight in letters he is ashamed to send her. Only the hundredth letter with a love confession and a request for one kiss comes to her hands. But the woman turns out to be vain and wicked. Despising the concierge's feelings, she presents him with a damask drum that emits no sound, and she promises the man that she will kiss him as soon as she hears the sound of the drum. When the old man, trying hopelessly to play the drum, realises that his pure love was tricked, he takes his own life, jumping from the office window.

The common motif of both plays is the damask drum given by a woman to a man in love with her, but the topics of the plays are different. Whilst in the classical Nō theatre, it is the cruelty of love's deception – a theme well known in classical Japanese literature – in Mishima's work, it is about a clear opposition between what is right and true and what is wrong and false¹⁵.

As for the play *Komachi at the Stupa*, it was based on a story known from the Nō theatre, about the famous ancient poetess Ono no Komachi 小野小町 who enamoured men and even drove one of them to his death with her cruelty¹⁶. In Mishima's work, it was transformed into a story about eternal and imperishable beauty. A poor poet, unmindful of warnings against imminent death, recognises

¹¹ See Mishima 1975i, vol. 30: 217. For more about modern Nō plays in Mishima's Works see Kubiak Ho-Chi 1995a: 129-155.

¹² Its author is Kan'ami.

¹³ Łomnicki's title is *Jesteś piękna* (you are beautiful).

¹⁴ In Łomnicki's adaptation the title was *Wachlarz* (fan) and this title will be used in subsequent adaptations of the play.

¹⁵ Cf. Konishi 1975: 193.

¹⁶ The author of the medieval Nō play is unknown.

in a repulsive old beggar he met in a park a onetime beauty, and he signs his own warrant, unable to keep himself from shouting: “you are beautiful!”

Hanako 花子 is beautiful as well. She is the heroine of *The Waiting Lady with the Fan*, the third of Mishima’s plays adapted by Łomnicki. As her classical Nō counterpart¹⁷, she waits incessantly for her beloved who once promised to come back to her. As a proof of love, they exchanged their fans. In Mishima’s play, Hanako is an insane geisha 芸者 who goes to the Tokyo Railway Station everyday, one day hoping to see her beloved among the travellers. There is also a very important character, i.e. an eccentric paintress who brought the geisha out of her hotel and took good care of her. One can have the impression that she draws from her charge not only artistic inspiration, but also the strength to live. The paralysing fear that she might lose Hanako is dispelled when the young woman doesn’t recognise her lover, or maybe she doesn’t want to recognise him, when he comes to her apartment with the intention of getting her back. The torment of waiting seems to her less painful than reality, and her ideal love (because unfulfilled), unafraid of lies and betrayal, will remain beautiful forever¹⁸.

These are precisely the three plays that Tadeusz Łomnicki chose for his debut, already being at that time a known and esteemed theatrical and film actor. When asked for the reason he made such an original choice, he named his interest in Japanese art, which began with the fascination with movies by Kurosawa Akira 黒澤明 (1910–1998). As he admitted in an interview, he was greatly impressed by *Rashomon* 羅生門 as well as every other Japanese movie he saw later on¹⁹.

The movies by Kurosawa, along with their Japanese Buddhist Zen philosophy and aesthetics, in the 1960s, constituted the main source of interest in Japan, and not only that of Polish intellectuals, but elsewhere in the world as well. We can assume that Łomnicki (though he didn’t say it directly), in his adaptation of Mishima’s plays, was partly inspired by Zen 禅 aesthetics with its famous simplicity and symbolism. It was best seen in the stage design, entrusted by Łomnicki to a well-known graphic designer and poster artist, professor and rector of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, Julian Pałka (1923–2002), then working for the theatre for the first time. In a review of the show, Pałka’s stage design was described as extremely frugal, and even “a bit too grey in its austerity and briefness”²⁰.

The director tried to get away from an excessive realism and too obvious associations with Japan not only in stage design:

As for the ‘Japaneserie’ – he says in an interview – we avoided it in this literal meaning. Plastic, make-up, gesture, and even voice intonation in traditional Japanese

¹⁷ Its authorship is attributed to Zeami.

¹⁸ In the classical Nō play, the girl waiting for her beloved finally sees him coming back.

¹⁹ See Strzemińska 1965.03.05 (consulted: 2012.07.03).

²⁰ Przewoska 1964.04.04 (consulted: 2012.07.10).

theatre are a bit like conventional signs between the actor and the spectator. We do not use this here. Mishima doesn't require it. The whole is conceived according to the European poetic theatre, where we have to agree for a certain convention. At the same time, in order to achieve the pure functionality of particular elements in the spectacle, we introduced, at the beginning of each act, descriptions of the decoration and topography, pronounced by the actor²¹.

Łomnicki, undoubtedly aware of the importance of music in Japanese theatre, asked the well-known composer and conductor Zbigniew Turcki (1908–1979), gold medallist of the Olympic Competition of Art and Literature at the Summer Olympic Games in 1948, to compose music especially for this performance. The music was supposed to have a dramaturgic function and constitute an element closely connected with the action²².

In the three plays staged by Łomnicki, next to the director himself (already known for his ability to create outstanding theatrical roles), the main protagonists were played by young actors whose talent was to be confirmed in the future: Marta Lipińska and Damian Damiński. But the main star of the show, being at the same time Łomnicki's muse in that performance, was undoubtedly the great Irena Eichlerówna (1908–1990), considered to be the greatest Polish dramatic actress of that time. This is how the director spoke of his choice of Mishima's plays and Eichlerówna's part in his show:

I chose those three one-act pieces among six of his plays, because it seemed to me that they formed some sort of entity. What unites them, in my opinion, is the motive of love, giving to each of those plays an individual shape and character. There is some lyricism in those plays, and at the same time, a noticeable stylistic distinctiveness and poetical climate. But this wouldn't be all. In each of those one-act plays, there is a woman character. They are performed by Irena Eichlerówna who will appear on the stage in three different roles during the evening. I wish to stress that Mrs Eichlerówna's interest in those plays brought extremely valuable points to the performance. Our cooperation consists of exchanging ideas concerning the whole matter and in continuous joint discussion. I am happy, while directing in the theatre for the first time, that I have the opportunity of working with such a great actress²³.

Łomnicki considered love and at the same time the woman character as leading themes in Mishima's plays that he chose. He perfectly felt the poetical atmosphere of the plays and their moving lyricism. In reviews, he was praised for his successful debut as a stage director and for the excellent three leading men he himself

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

performed. But it was not the director, and event not Mishima, who became the main character of the modern Nō plays' Polish staging. The greatest merit was attributed to Irena Eichlerówna, who, as it was written in reviews, performed "in a way that amazed with the greatness of her mastery"²⁴, and "her extraordinary personality (...) conferred its character to the whole performance"²⁵.

An actress who can be compared with Eichlerówna is Anna Polony, who excellently performed the leading women in Andrzej Wajda's *Mishima*. This is the common title given by the director to four of Mishima's modern Nō plays which he staged nearly thirty years later on the occasion of the opening of the Manggha Centre of Japanese Art and Technology in Cracow²⁶. These plays were *The Damask Drum*, *The Lady Aoi*, *The Waiting Lady with the Fan* and *Dōjō Temple*²⁷, and their premiere took place in the Old Theatre in Cracow on 23 November 1994. *Dōjō Temple* was then shown for the first time, a play that, in the traditional Nō theatre, is about the history of an ancient bell at the Dōjō temple and the unfulfilled love related to it. A young monk once hid under the bell, seeking refuge from a girl who was madly in love with him. She transformed into a snake in order to pass a rapid river in the pursuit of her beloved, who chose service for Buddha instead of her. The snake coiled firmly around the bell which, becoming red hot, burned with the monk inside. The temple remained without a bell for many years, and when somebody tried to hang a new one, history repeated itself: a great snake made the bell fall. It was only after incantations of sutras and the monks' fervent prayers that the snake left the bell alone.

In Mishima's version of the play, we also have the history of a great passion and unfulfilled love; however, the main theme here seems to be beauty. The main protagonist of *Dōjō Temple*, a young dancer known for her beauty, Kiyoko清子, was betrayed by her beloved who didn't choose Buddhist belief in this case, but life with an older married woman, much uglier than Kiyoko. He stayed hidden everyday in a large antique wardrobe in his lover's room, waiting for her call. One day, the husband of the unfaithful woman heard a noise coming from the wardrobe; he took a gun and kept shooting until blood began to flow. Kiyoko told this story to people at an auction, during which the wardrobe was supposed to be sold. When she didn't manage to lower the price of the expensive piece of furniture she wanted to buy, she locked herself inside. Convinced that beauty was her curse, she decided to disfigure her face by pouring hydrochloric acid on it. However, when she

²⁴ Zagórski 1965.03.11 (consulted: 2012.07.03).

²⁵ Przewoska 1964.04.04 (consulted: 2012.07.10).

²⁶ Presently – the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology. It was created on the initiative of Andrzej Wajda, with the money he collected for the Centre construction.

²⁷ The classical *Dōjō Temple*'s authorship is not definitely certain; usually this play is attributed to Kanze Nobumitsu 観世信光. In Wajda's adaptation the title was *Szafa* (wardrobe) and this title will be used in subsequent adaptations of the play.

saw her beautiful appearance in the mirror inside the wardrobe, she gave up this idea. She realised that if the loss of the greatest love in her life couldn't destroy her beauty, only the ugliness of her soul would be able to do so. Mysteriousness and ambiguity, characteristic of Nō aesthetics, were clearly exposed at the end of this play, along with the motif of immaculate beauty, so close to Mishima.

In his staging of Mishima's plays, Andrzej Wajda remained extremely faithful to the author as well as to the psychological realism of the Japanese *shingeki* theatre. The lines spoken by the actors correspond almost word for word to the expanded text of Mishima's plays, and the stage movement as well as musical dramaturgy faithfully execute the instructions from the stage directions. At the same time, the intended interpenetration of the classical Nō theatre's tradition and the modern Nō's novelty in Mishima's dramas, was exposed due to the stage design and the costumes designed by Krystyna Zachwatowicz, as well as the music composed by Stanisław Radwan, discrete and perfectly fitting to the play's dramaturgy.

During the showing of Wajda's *Mishima* in Warsaw, as part of the Warsaw Theatre Meetings, two months after its premiere in Cracow, the great hall at the Dramatic Theatre was full to bursting, and after the end of the performance, the audience rewarded the "Japanising" stage director with endless applause. The show was impressive, although apart from the excellent Anna Polony, the performance of most of the actors left much to be desired²⁸. The same show, and to be more exact: its TV variant, is a bit disappointing when watched many years later in the form of a digital recording. It seems that Wajda's staging did not resist the passage of time. The protagonists' acting, subject to a certain manner, makes the whole performance a bit fusty, and the imperishable actuality of Mishima's Nō plays, possible thanks to the great themes the writer took on, is clearly weakened.

Mishima's Nō in the eyes of Agnieszka Olsten and Natalia Sołtysik

However, one cannot deny the poignancy of the modern Nō in the adaptation by Agnieszka Olsten and the youngest stage director tempted by Mishima's plays, Natalia Sołtysik.

The performance by Agnieszka Olsten, belonging to the middle generation of directors, was entitled: *Lincz: Pani Aoi, Wachlarz i Szafa* (Lynch: *The Lady Aoi, The Waiting Lady with the Fan and Dōjō Temple*), and its premiere took place on 10 February 2007 at Teatr Polski in Wrocław, on the Świebodzki Train Station Stage. The show was presented successfully during the III International Theatre Festival "Premieres" in Strasburg. The director's inspiration for the work on Mishima's texts was taken from the mysterious and dark movies by David Lynch, such as *The Lost*

²⁸ Cf. Reviews of this performance by Kubiak Ho-Chi 1995b: 142-144 Wolska 1995: 144-145.

Highway or *Mulholland Drive*²⁹. This atmosphere of unreality and dreamlike hallucinations unites all the plays, presented as individual stories:

The almost empty stage is either bathed in semi-darkness or there is an image of tree branches swinging slowly, played from the projector. Black and white dominate, here and there varied by a vivid, gaudy colour: a violet couch, a red wig. The action develops unhurriedly, to the rhythm of gently pulsating music. The actors speak quietly, the time between words is filled with long moments of silence, sometimes interrupted by eruptions of violent emotions. Each of Mishima's three one-act plays composing Agnieszka Olsten's show constitutes a distinct staging entity – and the intensive, hypnotic atmosphere cements the whole performance³⁰.

Marzena Sadocha, responsible for the show's dramaturgy, when asked if she tried to preserve the spirit of Mishima in *Lincz*, denied, clearly explaining the primary assumptions of the staging and text interpretation:

We didn't think about the spirit of Mishima. Apart from the *Forefathers' Eve*, I guess theatre shouldn't actually think of spirits at all. I prefer to search for something living. Instead of preserving the spirit, we began to search for people. Conversations during rehearsals gave a chance to find the characters the actors wanted to speak through. What does it mean, "preserve the spirit of a text"? I guess it means to find a similarity – in oneself. A reconstruction of something external is not possible. We tried to run as far as we could from the Japanese "folk art", and at the end it turned out that Mishima is really close to it. *Lincz* is the condensation of Mishima, an extract of him. And I guess this is true faithfulness. Instead of invoking a ghost, reaching the essence³¹.

According to those assumptions, the text of Mishima's plays was treated very freely – cut and completed with new lines constituting variations or developments of motifs from Mishima's plays. The modernisation of the staging, putting it at the borders of tradition and pop-cultural reality of the 21st century, was marked in Olsten's performance by the language, some of the costumes³², as well as aesthetics expressed through the categories of vehemence, concreteness and corporeality. In order for the audience not to have doubts that the strong emotions overflowing Mishima's plays are still invariably present in the modern world dominated

²⁹ See Matuszewska 2007.02.08 (consulted: 2012.10.07) and 2012. Kyzioł 2009.08.12 (consulted: 2012.07.10).

³⁰ Kościelniak 2007.02.20 (consulted: 2012.07.10).

³¹ Bryś 2007.11.10 (consulted: 2012.07.12).

³² As a theatre critic wrote, "Bartosz Porczyk, with long hair and in white tight-fitting pants, resembled a character from Japanese cartoons. As for Ewa Skibińska, with her black wig and latex gloves, she looked like the personage from the Asian horror *Ring*." See Kopeć 2007.02.06 (consulted: 2012.07.10).

by popular culture, in the spectacle program, the story of *The Lady Aoi* was presented in the form of manga.

As for Natalia Sołtysik, she definitely cut off from direct associations with modern popular culture, and her *Szafa* (*Wachlarz, Pani Aoi, Szafa*) (wardrobe: *The Waiting Lady with the Fan, The Lady Aoi* and *Dōjō Temple*), as this was the title of her diploma performance based on modern Mishima's Nō plays in Teatr Współczesny (contemporary theatre) in Warsaw, was an exceptionally successful directing debut. After that, Natalia Sołtysik was recognised as one of the most promising young stage directors in Poland³³. The choice of the same plays as Olsten and staging them only ten months later, on 29 December 2007, was a complete coincidence. Natalia Sołtysik, originating from Cracow, already began to know Japan in her early youth, mainly thanks to Andrzej Wajda who, fascinated with Japanese art, very actively promoted knowledge about it in Cracow³⁴. As Natalia Sołtysik admits in an interview with the author of the present article, Japanese culture touched her mostly with its "aesthetics, beauty, and condensation of this beauty in small elements, in items of everyday use, in art."³⁵ Later on, during her directing studies at the Warsaw Theatre Academy, she found herself in workshops conducted by the Japanese master Kanze Hideo 観世 栄夫 (1927–2007), who made her discover the world of the Nō theatre's convention and extremely codified language³⁶. And when she searched for a text for her diploma performance, her choice fell on the Nō dramas of Mishima, whose short stories and novels she had already read earlier. And then it turned out that precisely in those one-act plays, especially in *The Waiting Lady with the Fan* and *The Lady Aoi*, the very spirit of Mishima was present, the one that she felt so strong in his prose. This spirit manifests itself in the omnipresent theme of death:

What is terribly acute to me in Mishima's works, which I think is also the expression of Japanese culture in general, is death: death present since the moment of birth. There is something in this culture that we can call a "celebration of transience". Death and melancholy related to passing, and the celebration of that passing, have been very acute to me. Love passes away and there begins a new one. And it's not the fact that love ends that is terrible, but that a new love will appear just a while later, making us forget the previous one. (...) I think that in his one-act plays, to this cruel reality unfavourable to men, Mishima opposes a dream. In this dream, he seeks defence against the inevitability of passing, protects us against

³³ See interviews with Natalia Sołtysik and reviews from the spectacle *Wardrobe*, e.g. Bator 2008.12.08 (consulted: 2012.07.12), Mościcki 2008.01.07 (consulted: 2012.07.12).

³⁴ Sołtysik writes on the subject of her encounters with Japan and work on Mishima's plays in her essay "Peruka Mishimy – szkice z pracy nad przedstawieniem *Szafa* według jednoaktówek Mishimy Yukio" (Mishima's wig: sketches of working on the performance of *The Wardrobe*, a compilation piece based on the one-act plays of Mishima Yukio). See Sołtysik 2012b: 69-76.

³⁵ Sołtysik 2012.07.26a.

³⁶ See Sołtysik 2012b: 72.

it. And at the same time, what fascinates me in Mishima's dramas is the lack of unambiguous answers, non-obviousness. This is the kind of texts I'm looking for, without a ready-made recipe, without answers³⁷.

The texts of Mishima's plays were truncated a bit by the director, as she claims that the words in the Japanese writer's dramas are too condensed³⁸. At the same time, Mishima's original text and the poetic atmosphere it creates still remains important in Natalia Sołtysik's adaptation. Contrary to the modern Nō plays directed by Agnieszka Olsten, nothing was added in everyday language going beyond Mishima's original plays. At the same time, in Sołtysik's show, movement similar to dance, as well as music, hold a vital role. Dramaturgic love triangles translate into triangular mise-en-scenes, *kata* movements so specific to Nō pulsate in an alternation of movement and motionlessness. Unfulfilled love, transient love, painful love is spoken of with fine words, completed with rhythmical movement and Paweł Szymański's penetrating music keeping emotional tension at the breaking point. Elegant and sophisticated costumes designed by Julia Skrzynecka, on the background of her ascetic stage design, are an inseparable element of this picture.

A feature particularly striking and intensifying the force of artistic expression in Natalia Sołtysik's show is formal rigour handled by the director with a, so to say, "Mishima ease". The Japanese writer was well known for his love of form, enabling him to master strong passions and what he called his "romantic sensitivity". So, violent love passions tormenting the protagonists of modern Nō plays are, in Sołtysik's performance, hidden behind formalised gesture, elegant and moderate movement, and precise words. As wrote one of the critics charmed by her adaptation, "the young director came back to what is the essence of theatricality. She embraced human passions with a clearly specified convention, she constructed a world governed by its own rules, a world that you believe in."³⁹

Indeed, thanks to such a thoughtful and conscious approach to Japanese plays, searching for sense and meanings through symbols, events and people's behaviours towards each other, Natalia Sołtysik made Mishima's plays in her adaptation breathe not only with freshness, but also with truth.

Conclusion

Mishima drew inspiration for his plays from the classical Nō theatre, completed with realistic means of expression borrowed from the western stages. From Nō, he took storylines and the atmosphere of uncommonness, illusion and transience,

³⁷ Sołtysik 2012.07.26a.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Mościcki 2008.01.07 (consulted: 2012.07.12).

full of mysterious and sublime beauty, *yūgen*. However, in the place of slow, hieratic movements and pauses so characteristic of Nō, Mishima introduced – in the Western fashion – a dramatic sequence of tensions and emotions provided by precise words and emotional reactions. All of this – plus the themes of love, death, truth, and beauty contained in Mishima’s modern Nō plays, also present in nearly every other of his works and having a universal character – make Polish stage directors fall under the spell of his dramas. On the one hand, they breathe with sophisticated Japanese aesthetics, and on the other hand, they bear contents close to Western sensitivity. At the same time, it is surprising that in spite of such an internationalisation of art during the last three decades and despite the existence of many valuable playwrights in Japan, Mishima seems to be the only Japanese author staged by Polish theatre directors. One of the reasons is certainly the relatively low number of translations of Japanese dramas into Polish, and also the distance between Japan and Poland – not only cultural, but geographical as well.

Returning to Mishima’s modern Nō plays and their four different adaptations on Polish stages: if the mysterious beauty, *yūgen*, was adopted as the main criterion of their evaluation (on the model of the classical Nō theatre), then it seems that among all Polish stagings, the equivalent of that beauty is most complete in the performance directed by Natalia Sołtysik.

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論文概要

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ベアタ・クビアク・ホ＝チ

霊魂との会話、ポーランドの劇場における三島由紀夫の近代能楽

20世紀の日本の偉大な作家の一人である三島由紀夫(1925-1970)にとって、中世の能は重要な靈感の源であった。1950年から1962年にかけて、彼は九つの能作品を書き、これらを「近代能楽集」と名付けた。能とは呼ばれるものの、舞台は20世紀であり、登場人物は古典的な作品とは対照的に現代の話し言葉を用い、現代の観客が無理なく理解できるものとなっている。これらの作品は、日本のみならず、海外でも瞬く間に人気を得た。幾つかの作品は英語、ドイツ語、スペイン語、フランス語、そしてポーランド語にも翻訳され、1950年代からはアメリカおよびヨーロッパの舞台で成功を収めた。ポーランドの演出家もこれらの短い劇作品に魅せられ、幾度もポーランドの劇場で上演してきた。既に1965年に、タデウシュ・ウォムニツキは三島由紀夫の三作品の近代能楽を演出し、それからおよそ30年後、1994年にアンジェイ・ワイダは四作品の舞台化を実現した。若い演出家達は、それによって能に興味を示すようになった。2007年には、アグニェシカ・オルステンとナタリア・ソウティシクの二人の演出家が、三島の能に対する彼女らの解釈を示した。

筆者はこの論文で二つの問題に取り組みたい。第一には、日本の劇作家によって書かれ、西洋とは異なると思われる表現や詩情に満ちた作品が、どのようにポーランドの重鎮とも言える演出家達や若手の関心をひいたのか。第二に、三島由紀夫はどのように中世の能の世界を自身の作品の中に反映させたのか。そしてポーランドの演出家達はこれらの三島作品をどのようにポーランドの文脈の中で発展させていったのかを考察したい。

Keywords: Mishima Yukio, Tadeusz Łomnicki, Andrzej Wajda, Agnieszka Olsten, Natalia Sołtysik, Nō theatre, modern Nō plays, Polish theatre, *shingeki*