

April 2021

“Are you that flighty?” “I am that flighty.”: *The Cat and the Moon* and *Kyogen* Revisited

Akiko Manabe
Shiga University, Japan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/iys>

Recommended Citation

Manabe, Akiko (2021) “Are you that flighty?” “I am that flighty.”: *The Cat and the Moon* and *Kyogen* Revisited,” *International Yeats Studies*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/iys/vol5/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in *International Yeats Studies* by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

**“ARE YOU THAT FLIGHTY?” “I AM THAT FLIGHTY”:
THE CAT AND THE MOON AND KYOGEN REVISITED**

Akiko Manabe

In a note in *The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems* (1924), Yeats explained that *The Cat and the Moon*¹ was “intended [...] to be what the Japanese call a ‘Kiogen,’ and to come as a relaxation of attention between, let us say, ‘The Hawk’s Well’ and ‘The Dreaming of the Bones’” (*VPl* 805). It is commonly known that the latter plays were inspired by Japanese traditional Noh, which Yeats encountered via Ezra Pound, who worked from the notes and translations left behind by the American art historian Ernest Francisco Fenollosa. The influence of the *kyogen* style, which developed in conjunction with Noh during the 14th century, is less well understood. Whereas Noh plays typically deal with serious or tragic matters rooted in history, mythology, and classical literature, *kyogen* plays are generally comical or farcical, performed between individual Noh plays in order to relieve the tense atmosphere of the Noh theater and to provoke a joyful response on the part of the audience.² At the center of *kyogen*’s ethos is laughter—though broadly speaking there are, it must be noted, two different types of laughter that tend to be evoked. One reflects the audience’s experience of delight and happiness, while the other contains an element of cruelty and often occurs in response to moments when the characters mock each other.³

Although Yeats’s note reveals that he clearly understood *kyogen*’s role, his *kyogen*-inspired play had never been performed in Japanese as a *kyogen* piece until 2015, when the prestigious Kyoto-based Shigeyama Sengoro Troupe, whose founding dates back to 1600, produced it in celebration of the 150th anniversary of Yeats’s birth.⁴ I was among the producers for this *kyogen*-style version of *The Cat and the Moon*, which was ultimately performed a total of nine times, including at venues in Dublin, Sligo, and Waterford during the summer of 2017 to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the diplomatic relationship between Ireland and Japan.⁵ My discussion here of Yeats’s attitudes towards laughter owes much to my involvement in these performances, to my observation of the actors’ practices during rehearsals, and to our ongoing exchange of ideas about the play. Among these productions, a performance on a Noh stage in a traditional Japanese house, accommodating one hundred people for the Joint Symposium of the International Yeats Society and the Yeats Society of Japan in Kyoto in 2018, gave an ideal backdrop for exploring Yeats’s theatrical philosophy.⁶ This performance would certainly have satisfied his original desire for a piece that “has no need of scenery that runs away with money nor of a theatre-building” and “that can be played in a room for so little

money that forty or fifty readers of poetry can pay the price” (CW4 173, 163). My article reveals what Yeats’s play acquired through its encounter with *kyogen*, focusing on its relation to the Japanese aesthetic concept of *karumi*, as well as on the contemporary *kyogen* actors’ reflections about this play that developed out of a transnational exchange between an Irish playwright and Japanese culture. I conclude with a discussion of Toyohiko Kagawa, “the Japanese labour leader and Christian saint” referenced in Yeats’s introduction, who is now mostly forgotten in Japan but who exercised a crucial role in Yeats’s characterization of the Saint in *The Cat and the Moon* (VPI 806, 808).⁷

Yeats said about this light-toned play that “no audience could discover its dark, mythical secrets” (VPI 806). To find these “dark mythical secrets,” I will focus on an adjective, which is used six times in the play to describe the Lame Beggar and which seems to have little to do with hidden occult knowledge—the word “flighty.” For scholars such as Katherine Worth, “flighty” can be defined within the basic contexts of the play as “telling lies that are bound to be found out,” or it can be defined in reference to a central Yeatsian antinomy—spiritualism versus materialism (the choice in the play to be “blessed” or to be physically “cured”)—whereby “flighty” means “putting a higher value on something remote and visionary [...] than on the material satisfaction of being able to walk.”⁸ This interpretation is justified, but the term takes on additional, more complicated associations when we focus on the comical words and behaviors of the Lame Beggar. It is this “flightiness” that beguilingly hides the “dark mythical secrets” from the audience, except for the selected cultured audience, or “readers of poetry,” who understand Yeats’s embedded philosophy. This is exactly what Yeats learned from *kyogen*, where life’s deeper mysteries and complexities are given form in a casual, “flighty” depiction of a world where people readily accept whatever life offers. *Kyogen*, with laughter at its center, encompasses the daily obstacles facing individual human beings. Studying one *kyogen* piece in Fenollosa’s manuscript, *Kikazu Zato*, which attracted Yeats’s attention, can clarify how “dark mythical secrets” are represented in *kyogen*. Similarly, a comparison between *Kikazu Zato* and *The Cat and the Moon* will reveal how the term “flighty” is crucial to understanding both *kyogen* pieces.

Kikazu Zato belongs to a category of *kyogen* plays known as *Zato Mono* (*Zato* meaning “blind person” and *Mono* meaning “category”), in which physically disabled characters play the main roles. *Zato* originally referred to blind monks who usually played musical instruments, notably *biwa* lutes, and also sometimes chanted stories or historical legends. Yoko Sato has attempted to research the exact version of the play to which Fenollosa referred since there have been a variety of renditions depending on the *kyogen* school and the time of production.⁹ As the major principle that runs through *kyogen* is common throughout the different schools, in my discussion of *Kikazu Zato* I will include

another version which has been handed down and is at present used by the Shigeyama Sengoro Troupe. It explicates the earlier version called *Torahiro Bon* (Torahiro Version) of the Okura School, transcribed by Yaemon Torahiro in 1792.¹⁰ My aim is to explain how this particular *kyogen* piece, which reveals the dark side of human beings, contains “flighty” elements as a crucial theatrical principle. In *Kikazu Zato*, a blind man, Kikuichi, and a deaf person, Taro-kaja, are ordered to look after a house while their master is away. Alone in the house together, they employ abusive language and engage in cruel behavior, as they mock each other’s physical disability—which might help to explain why the play is rarely staged in Japan these days. In this particular *kyogen*, however, audience members laugh because of the characters’ absurdity and playfulness, even though they are aware of the cruelty manifested in their laughter. In fact, this gets to the very crux of the matter: *Kyogen* is a drama of laughter. There is no other alternative but to laugh. Thus, by accepting reality, in this case physical disability, one accepts this as a necessary part of life.

In *Kikazu Zato*, *kyogen kouta* songs and *komai* dances reflect the psychological state of the characters and this *kyogen’s* thematic motif. *Kouta* and *komai* represent *kyogen’s* artistic and dramatic uniqueness, supported by an actor’s mastery of stylized forms called *kata*. In this play, there are two occasions when a *kyogen* actor dances *komai* to his own *kouta* singing.¹¹ The first is “*Itaikeshi-taru-mono*” (pretty loveable things) in the Shigeyama Sengoro Troupe version, or “*Kazaguruma*” (a pinwheel) in the *Torahiro Bon*—these are the same *kouta* and *komai* with different titles—or “*Uji no Sarashi*” (cloth design based on the scenery of waves and a bird on the Uji River), as performed by the Izumi School. The second one is “*Tsuchiguruma*” (a cart, which is used to carry earth) in the Shigeyama and Izumi versions, or “*Itten Shikai no Nami*” (waves of the world)” in the *Torahiro Bon*. These are also the same *kouta* and *komai*, whose script and music are from the Noh play *Tsuchiguruma*, starting with “*Itten Shikai no Nami*.”¹² Actors dance and sing playfully in a “flighty” fashion. In the course of this dance, seemingly crude actions are tactically inserted. For example, Taro-kaja strokes Kikuichi’s face with his foot, and Kikuichi, being blind, does not notice that it is Tarokaja’s foot rather than his hand touching his cheeks. However, because the way they dance and sing is comical, graceful, and “flighty,” the whole atmosphere is more jovial than callous. Without any instruments, actors sing and dance light-heartedly with delightfully rhythmical steps.

In addition, the lyrics in *utai* songs are thematically related to the context of the play. “*Itaikeshi-taru-mono*” or “*Kazaguruma*,” which presents a list of children’s toys and pets, fits well with Taro-kaja and Kikuichi frolicking like children. In the end, they wrestle in a manner recalling small boys at play, as Kikuichi grabs Tarokaja’s legs and throws him to the ground. Yet there is

no sense of violence implied here. “*Tsuchiguruma*” or “*Itten Shikai no Umi*” has a clear association with physical disability, as in the past a *tsuchiguruma* was used to carry physically disabled people. In “*Uji no Sarashi*,” which was a popular song sung among people when this *kyogen* was created, rhythmical onomatopoeia such as “chiri chiri ya chiri chiri” and “karari korori” give a sense of joy to the whole atmosphere. In this way, *kyogen’s* sometimes absurd but refined way of employing dance and song is an integral part of a play.

Just as the *komai* and *kouta* contribute to the whole theatrical atmosphere in *Kikazu Zato*, the three-stanza poem “The Cat and the Moon,” which is sung at three distinct places in *The Cat and the Moon*, functions as an essential thematic part of the play. In Shigeyama’s *kyogen* version, the poem is sung in the *kyogen kouta* recitation style. The first stanza, sung by the Saint, impressively opens the play, mesmerizing the audience and immediately drawing them into the world of *The Cat and the Moon*. Just as this idiosyncratic image and singing style at the beginning of the play works perfectly, the third stanza which ends the play works equally well. This final stanza, both sung and danced, presents how the Lame Man and the Saint, who recently got acquainted, have now become true friends, united together as one. This process is articulated brilliantly in the *kyogen* version. First, the Saint teaches the Lame Man how to dance and sing. The Saint sings, and immediately afterward the Lame Man follows with the same words and melody. The movement of the Lame Man is, at first, very clumsy. However, gradually his dance becomes smoother and more refined. The “flighty” Lame Man’s movements become lighter and more skillful. Their movements merge, and the Lame Man’s movements become much more graceful. Finally, they become almost one inseparable entity. The whole atmosphere is delicately warm and soft. At first the Saint teaches him the proper way to dance, but in the end, the Saint—who originally danced in a “courtly fashion”—learns “a new dance turn” from the Lame Man, who, like a cat slowly creeping around on the ground, seems deeply rooted in the Irish soil. The Saint, on the other hand, lives in the world beyond this one. Since “two close kindred” from the two different dimensions “meet” and dance, this dance embodies the integrated state of the united Saint and Lame Man. Since the Lame Man is flighty, he can transcend the boundary between this world and the other world easily. The final dance that brings about the ultimate union reflects Yeats’ understanding of *komai* and *kouta*. The whole atmosphere around these three songs and dances is in itself quite “flighty.”

Andrew Parkin explains that “in Irish speech, the meaning [of flighty] is close to the ‘wild’ or ‘full of imagination’ found in Johnson’s dictionary as a secondary meaning and to the ‘disorderly’ and ‘skittish’ recorded in the *OED*.”¹³ In the word *flighty* one hears “flight” and “light,” as well as the sound “f.” The image of the “light” “flight” in the air surrounds the “flighty” blessed Lame man

while the “light” from outside and inside “enlightens” him. In addition, the “f” sound strengthens all these characteristics with light, dry, soft, and airy sound connotations. “Flighty” gives the Lame Man “light”-hearted and “skittish” characteristics without deep consideration, which leads to “enlightenment.”

The physical movements which represent the Lame Beggar’s inner state culminate in the final dance of the Lame Man uniting himself with the Saint. With reference to this final dance, Yeats explains:

Minnaloushe and the Moon were perhaps [...] an exposition of man’s relation to what I called the Antithetical Tincture, and when the Saint mounts upon the back of the Lame Beggar he personifies a certain great spiritual event which may take place when Primary Tincture, as I have called it, supersedes Antithetical (*VPI* 805).

The Lame Man could be the cat, Minnaloushe, while the Saint is symbolized by the Moon. The Lame Man, just like the cat, aspires to grasp something sacred in the sky and has chosen to be blessed spiritually without being cured physically. With his newly acquired blessed legs, he dances, though physically he is not cured. Still he is not used to being blessed, as his choice was made flightily and thus without deep reflection. Meanwhile the Saint, who was tired of “the courtly fashion” of this same celestial dance in his own world and was “lonely” in his sacred heavenly world, mounts the Lame Man’s back and learns “a new dance turn” together with him.

Here I focus on the expression in the first stanza of the poem that represents the movement of the moon—it always “spun like a top.” This suggests that on one level the Saint, who has learned the new dance step, continues to dance but never stays in the same state. On another level, this idiosyncratic description—odd because the moon in the real sky does not “spin like a top” but gradually moves in a circular orbit—catches the attention of the audience and the reader, with the top reflecting Yeats’s “cones” in a “gyre” turning and never stopping. Then in the second stanza, this moon learns a new dance step from the cat. The choice of vocabulary to describe this dance step, “a new dance turn,” suggests that their movements should recall Yeats’s famous line, “[t]urning and turning in the widening gyre” (*CW1* 189), and that the time they are united should last only momentarily before they move on forever. This was tactfully presented in the *kyogen*-style performance held in Kyoto in 2018: the serenely exquisite *kyogen* dance of the Lame Man and the Saint, which reached the ultimate state of two beings united into one at the moment when they together look upwards—towards the moon. After this union, the Lame Man leans on his walking stick, limping—not gracefully as when he danced with the Saint a moment ago—along the *hashigakari*, which is the bridge that connects the main stage and the backstage, exiting into the backstage. Director Masumoto’s

interpretation suggests there will be no final state of stasis, as the gyres must always be turning. The Lame Man's spiritual legs have been blessed/cured, but not his physical legs.

In addition, the moon spinning like a top suggests a fantasy image, like those one finds in children's nursery rhymes. At the beginning of the play, this song establishes the atmosphere of the magical and mythical world of a fairy tale. The tone is flightily light, just like the tone of *kyogen kouta*. We may well remember the playfully rhythmical tone of the description of children's toys in "Itaikeshi-taru-mono" or "Kazaguruma." A *kazaguruma*, meaning pinwheel, turns endlessly through the air, similar to a top spinning. "The Cat and the Moon" is, indeed, a *kouta* song in Yeats's *kyogen*.

Since Yeats attached so much significance to this final dance, it took him fourteen years to get it right. He wanted a more energetic ending when he saw the premiere performance in 1926, so he elaborated upon it during rehearsals for a week-long run at the Abbey Theatre in 1931. Yeats realized the importance of the final dance in Noh and *kyogen*, in which the "one image" Pound and Yeats saw in both Noh and *kyogen* ultimately culminates. As Pound, drawing on Fenollosa's papers, explains:

When a text seems to "go off into nothing" at the end, the reader must remember "that the vagueness or paleness of words is made good by the emotion of the final dance," for the Noh has its unity in emotion. It has also what we may call Unity of Image. At least, the better plays are all built into the intensification of a single Image.¹⁴

When the Saint tells the blessed Lame Man to bless the road, the Lame Man says he does not know the words:

First Musician [i.e., The Saint]. But you must bless the road.

Lame Beggar. I haven't the right words.

First Musician. What do you want the words for? Bow to what is before you, bow to what is behind you, bow to what is to the left of you, bow to what is to the right of you. [*The Lame Beggar begins to bow*].

First Musician. That's no good.

Lame Beggar. No good, Holy Man?

First Musician. No good at all. You must dance.

Lame Beggar. But how can I dance? Ain't I a lame man?

First Musician. Aren't you blessed?

Lame Beggar. Maybe so.

First Musician. Aren't you a miracle?

Lame Beggar. I am, Holy Man.

First Musician. Then dance, and that'll be a miracle (CW2 453).

For the blessed person to give a blessing, anything that shows physicality, even words, should be unnecessary. Thus, here indeed “the vagueness or paleness of words” is superseded by the “emotion of the final dance,” which is the act of blessing. In the ordinary world, a physical body dances, but the blessed one’s dance should evoke and express the spiritual transcending the physical, that is, “a miracle.” For in the Noh tradition, “the words,” according to Pound,

are only one part of this art. The words are fused with the music and with the ceremonial dancing. One must read or “examine” these texts “as if one were listening to music.” One must build out of their indefiniteness a definite image. The plays are at their best, I think, an image; that is to say, their unity lies in the image [...] so also the Japanese plays rely upon a certain knowledge of past story or legend.¹⁵

It is worth noting here that in the *kyogen* production of *The Cat and the Moon*, the Saint was put on stage, though Yeats let the First Musician on stage speak and sing for the Saint. Yeats wanted the audience’s imagination to work to the fullest, without being disturbed by the visibility of the unnecessary physical reality of the celestial Man, so he employed only voice—coming from nowhere. In contrast Matsumoto, the Japanese *kyogen* actor and director, thought the physicality or visibility of the First Musician, from whom the actual voice originates, would be an obstacle to the audience’s imagination since the actor’s presence before the audience is too forceful. Worth argues that “the absence of realism makes it easier to believe.”¹⁶ She is right, but in this case, rather than the absence of realism, the presence of the human body of the First Musician makes it harder for the audience to believe. Ironically, the presence of “realism,” of having the actual Saint on stage, better accords with Yeats’s overall desire to awaken the audience’s imagination so that they might visualize all that cannot be perceived with their eyes alone.¹⁷ Yeats’s version, with no visual image of the Saint on stage, works on our imagination mysteriously, but in the *kyogen* version the physicality of the Saint is overwhelming—arrayed in his gorgeous costume and the smiling black mask which usually portrays *Daikoku*, the god of happiness and prosperity. The audience’s imagination is stimulated all the more to create a specific image of this magical and mythical being with strongly human characteristics—just like the physical presence of Paula Meehan’s Superman-like Saint on the dune at Dollymount Strand, Dublin in her 1995 production of *The Cat and the Moon* for children.

The decision of who should be seen on the stage and who should not, based on the subtle and delicate consideration of how the audience’s imagination would work, is crucial in the actual staging of *kyogen*, since the traditional *kyogen* stage is usually an empty space. Beyond the actors’ strong presences, there are no elaborate settings or props so that one’s imagination is required, just as in Yeats’s

ideal plays created out of his encounter with Noh and *kyogen*—“[T]hese plays, which substitute speech and music for painted scenery” (VPI 805). The actors’ words, spoken or sung, are combined with restricted acting using the formal *kata* style, thereby stimulating the audience’s imagination while metaphorically painting a background scenery.

I now proceed to another aspect of “flightiness” that touches on an important element in Japanese culture and in Zen Buddhism. The principle that runs through “flightiness” is quite close to *karumi* or *karomi* (軽み), which literally translate as “lightness,” in a positive sense without any associations with superficiality or capriciousness. *Karumi* is regarded as central in the poetics of *haiku/haikai*. Basho Matsuo, who established *haiku/haikai* as a distinguished literary form of poetry in the latter half of the seventeenth century, found *karumi* to be essential in his poetics near the end of his life. Basho elevated *haikai* from its original associations with comedy and even vulgarity to a more serious artistic state. His ideal poetics is achieved when one keeps one’s sense and mind on “poetic sincerity,” which is sophisticated, cultured, wise, and artistically elevated. By pursuing “poetic sincerity,” one becomes enlightened—*satori*, the same term used in Zen Buddhism to describe the ultimate state of enlightenment achieved. Daisetsu Suzuki, whose writings on Zen fascinated Yeats, defines *satori* as follows:

The essence of Zen Buddhism consists in acquiring a new viewpoint of looking at life and things generally. By this I mean that if we want to get into the inmost life of Zen, we must forgo all our ordinary habits of thinking which control our everyday life, we must try to see if there is any other way of judging things, or rather if our ordinary way is always sufficient to give us the ultimate satisfaction of our spiritual needs. If we feel dissatisfied somehow with this life, if there is something in our ordinary way of living that deprives us of freedom in its most sanctified sense, we must endeavour to find a way somewhere which gives us a sense of finality and contentment. Zen proposes to do this for us and assures us of the acquirement of a new point of view in which life assumes a fresher, deeper, and more satisfying aspect. This acquirement, however, is really and naturally the greatest mental cataclysm one can go through with in life. It is not easy task, it is a kind of fiery baptism, and one has to go through the storm, the earthquake, the over-throwing of the mountains, and the breaking in pieces of the rocks.

This acquiring of a new point of view in our dealings with life and the world is popularly called by Japanese Zen students ‘*satori*’ (*wu* in Chinese). It is really another name for Enlightenment (*annuttara-samyak-sambodhi*).¹⁸

At the same time, Basho thinks that by immersing oneself in daily activities among the people, one can find one’s own poetry or *haiku*. Basho’s simple but profound principle shares something in common with what Yeats pursued—an

artistically high, elitist poetics which cultured people would appreciate but that would, at the same time, remain connected with his ideal conception of a folk culture and of a people whose soul is rooted in traditions handed down over centuries: “we sought the peasant’s imagination which presses beyond himself as if to the next age” (VPI 806). As Yeats explained in his note to *The Cat and the Moon*, this imagination is akin to what “Lady Gregory must have felt when at the sight of an old man in a wood she said to me, ‘That man may have the wisdom of the ages’” (VPI 806). We should note that the subject matter of *kyogen* is often taken from the local folklore, transmitted orally over many years. To create *The Cat and the Moon*, Yeats used the legend of “a blessed well” “[a] couple of miles as the crow flies from my Galway house” (VPI 806).

The tradition is that centuries ago a blind man and a lame man dreamed that somewhere in Ireland a well would cure them and set out to find it, the lame man on the blind man’s back. I wanted to give the Gaelic League, or some like body, a model for little plays, commemorations of known places and events, and wanted some light entertainment to join a couple of dance plays or *The Resurrection* and a dance play, and chose for theme the lame man, the blind man, and the well (VPI 807).

Yeats wanted to create “light entertainment” in the form of “a dance play,” using a folk belief founded upon a local legend for “commemoration of known places”—all characteristics that *karumi* and *kyogen* attempt to convey.

As we have seen, *karumi* covers both a literal principle or style and a living principle or philosophy. Basho appreciated *karumi* as a poetic principle as well as a living principle, one that can be found throughout Japanese aesthetics, philosophy, and culture, and in the religious philosophy of Zen Buddhism, though the term *karumi* is not necessarily used in other arts.¹⁹ As mentioned earlier, in order to describe the ideal poetical state, Basho used the word *satori*, which is the ultimate state for which Zen Buddhism strives. In this way, Basho’s *karumi* is backed up with his understanding of Zen. Basho studied Zen, practiced *zazen* meditation seriously under Buccho, and employed Zen philosophy in his daily life. What is important in *karumi* is that it always retains the sense of joy—even in the face of bitter reality. One just laughs away any troubles or problems with a light heart—as we have seen, a familiar characteristic of *kyogen*. This leads us to what Yeats found in Zen. Yeats expressed his interest in Zen to various people, including, for example, a Japanese admirer named Junzo Sato who was sent by the Agriculture and Commerce Ministry of Japan to conduct research in Portland, Oregon. When the two met in 1920 during Yeats’s American lecture tour, Sato famously presented the poet with a sword that his family had handed down for 500 years. On that occasion, Yeats talked of his fascination with Zen Buddhism. His enthusiasm endured; seven years

later, Yeats wrote to Shotaro Oshima, “I am at present reading with excitement Zuzuki’s [sic] *Essays in Zen Buddhism*.”²⁰ In a letter to Sturge Moore, Yeats said, “This [Zen] seems to me the simplest and to liberate us from all manner of abstractions and create at once a joyous artistic life.”²¹ The reference to “This” here could be easily exchanged for *karumi*, which embodies this “joy,” “lightness,” and even “enlightenment” in Zen practice.

As a guiding creative principle, *karumi* can be achieved when what emerges out of a poet’s intricate or complex self is expressed simply and naturally without any elaborate technical or decorative expression—the simple yet refined *haiku*. The material for such poems should be found in all that we encounter in our daily lives, where one can see the very essence of things. One can find sacredness in one’s daily life, and the poems created from that experience can never be vulgar but will instead reach an elegantly sophisticated level of understanding. These characteristics of *karumi* have a lot in common with the ideals found in Pound’s *Imagist* manifesto: concise expression, direct treatment of things, appreciation of nature, and the creation of integrated images.²² Given that Pound found in *haiku* a significant breakthrough in Imagist poetics, and given the role he played in Yeats’s poetic development, it was natural that Yeats should also learn from *haiku*.²³ Its result can be found not only in a *haiku*-like short poem with an explicitly Japanese title, “Imitated from the Japanese,” published in 1938, but in his concisely restricted poetic style which urges one to accept reality as it is. This style became obvious in his work after his collaboration with Pound. This happy encounter with Japan answered Yeats’s inner needs at a perfect time. Interestingly, Imagism did not take *karumi* seriously, but Yeats understood its essence as a crucial poetic element that he shared; and he perceived exactly the same thing in *kyogen*. *Karumi* exists in Yeats’s thematic approach in *The Cat and the Moon*, which is reflected in theatrical details such as the play’s language and choreography. For example, compared with other plays, in *The Cat and the Moon* the exchange of words is more rhythmical and shorter, and the actors on stage speak much less than in other plays, thus contributing to a light-hearted *karumi* or “flighty” backdrop that runs throughout the play.

We should again remember *kyogen* is a comedy or farce, a play of laughter, performed in between the more serious and tragic Noh. *Kyogen*, with its flighty or *karumi* character at its center, makes the audience relax. Protagonists of Noh are often the ghosts of famous people in Japanese history or from classic literary works, such as *The Tale of Genji* or *The Tale of the Heike*—warriors, their lovers, emperors and empresses who passed away with some strong recrimination or desire unfulfilled, or gods related to specific places.²⁴ Characters in *kyogen*, on the other hand, are mostly anonymous human beings, just like anyone in the audience, and their stories are often based on local folktales and beliefs rooted in the reality of common people. In the Japanese Medieval period, the

life of commoners in a hierarchal feudal system, such as peasants and servants of samurai warriors, was not necessarily easy, but these commoners appear in *kyogen* with energetic personalities and are filled with life, always laughing easily in a manner that shows an acceptance of reality as it is. This means they lived flightily, with light-hearted joy as their guiding principle—with, that is, *karumi*.

It is worth noting here an idiosyncratic style of expression in *kyogen* called *naki-warai*, a strange combination of simultaneous laughing (*warai*) and weeping (*naki*). Characters on stage laugh even when they face hardships, but owing to their inner sorrow they cannot help but cry, so they express these two opposite emotions simultaneously. Yeats, near the end of his life, reached a similar kind of positive state of resignation or acceptance by giving voice in his art to *naki-warai*, laughter born out of deep inner sorrow and an awareness of life's tragic reality. It is that state of "tragic joy" we find in "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli." The three Chinese men carved on the piece of lapis lazuli stare "On all the tragic scene," and "Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes, / Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay" (CW1 301). Their laughter is light hearted and comes out of a sincere sense of joy, though it contains a deep understanding of tragedy and sorrow in life. Their laughter is the laughter of *karumi*, a reflection of *satori*.

In *The Cat and the Moon* there is only one character on stage whose "laughter" has the same kind of jovial characteristic described earlier, and that is the Saint. His laughter is visible only to the "flighty" Lame Beggar, after he is blessed.

First Musician. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit I give this Blind Man sight and I make this Lame Man blessed.

Blind Beggar. I see it all now, the blue sky and the big ash-tree and the well and the flat stone,—all as I have heard the people say—and the things the praying people put on the stone, the beads and the candles and the leaves torn out of prayer-books, and the hairpins and the buttons. It is a great sight and a blessed sight, but I don't see yourself, Holy Man—is it up in the big tree you are?

Lame Beggar. Why, there he is in front of you and he laughing out of his wrinkled face (CW2 450).

This is the only place in the whole play where "laughter" is mentioned, and one cannot help but associate this laughter coming out of the wrinkled face with the old Chinese men in "Lapis Lazuli." The "blessed" Lame Beggar "sees" the Saint's "blessed sight" through his spiritual eyes, while the Blind Beggar who got his "blessed sight" back in his physical eyes can see everything except the Holy Man. Actually, the audience sees nothing on stage through their physical eyes, but using their "eye of the mind" (CW2 297) can apprehend the specific details the Blind Man lists, as well as this laughter on the wrinkled face with the Lame Man. This is the craft Yeats acquired from *kyogen*, whose stage is an

empty space, forcing the audience's imagination to work to its fullest degree. (As noted earlier, our *kyogen* version put the laughing-faced Saint on stage, with the smiling black mask of Daikoku.)

Laughter or smiling here is both warm and embracing. The Saint seems to Matsumoto like *Ksitigarbha*, or *Jizo* in Japanese, adored and worshipped in Japan as a bodhisattva to protect children, as the popular folk belief goes. Its stone statues and images are everywhere on the streets. Indeed, this Saint in *The Cat and the Moon* is extremely tender and human. I cannot think of any other saint who says, "I am a saint and lonely" (CW2 449). This Saint wants to find a friend. The Lame Man, being flighty, casually thinks getting blessed may be "grand." He does not reflect on this deeply but says, "I will stay lame, Holy Man, and I will be blessed" (CW2 450), which sounds like "I can be your friend." In addition, after the Saint has blessed the Lame Man, even the Saint himself seems not so sure if the Lame Man appreciates what he has done for him, so he asks "Are you happy?" after he gets up on the Lame Man, sounding very human. This image resonates with the previous image of the Lame Man atop the Blind Beggar. Unlike the Blind and the Lame, two separate beings, one atop another, who were constantly fussing about their own respective problems, the Lame Man and the Saint become united, merged into one as friends. Matsumoto's image of this Saint as a *Jizo*, this adored figure in Japanese folk culture, perfectly captures what Yeats tried to convey. St. Colman, being a Christian Saint, has been worshipped reverently, but at the same time, like the holy well, he also has a deep association with Celtic local beliefs. By evoking this friendly saint of the well, Yeats tried to communicate the Irish spirit or soul, the spirit of the Gael, and the mythic world of Celts and Druids. The language used in the exchange of the Lame Man and the Blind Man is also Hiberno-English, with highly unique Irish characteristics, meant to communicate the Irish spirit or soul to the audience.

Yeats says, "Belief is the spring of all action; we assent to the conclusions of reflection but believe what myth presents; belief is love, and the concrete alone is loved" (VPl 806). People have accepted the "belief" about the "myth" of the well of Saint Colman whom they "love" and who loves them. And the Saint in *The Cat and the Moon* is a "concrete" being, not a "conclusion of (abstract) reflection." The two Beggars who believed the myth took "action" and came to the well. Their "spring of action" was the desire to be blessed or cured, and they had their wishes fulfilled. Belief in Irish local myth can be a source of action; indeed, Yeats hoped the Irish people would take action to fulfill their nationalistic ideal after watching the plays he and Lady Gregory put on at the Abbey Theatre.

The now-blessed Lame Man says, "Why, there he [i.e., the Saint] is in front of you and he laughing out of his wrinkled face." The Lame Man has acquired (spiritual) sight, allowing him to see the Saint, while the Blind Man is finally

able to see this world but not the world beyond, the spiritual world. The Saint's laughter is not resigned or dry but instead is a warm expression of happiness. Interestingly enough, in our *kyogen* version, there was another character who gave an impressive laughter in a very different style and with a very different meaning. It was the Blind Man, who laughed in a loud voice—in a special *kyogen* style, which is essential to this form of theater—when he exited from the stage after beating the Lame Man in a stylistic movement based on *kata*, with the accompanying *kyogen* expression of “*Yattona Yattona*,”²⁵ though Yeats's script just says “*The Blind Beggar goes out*” (CW2, 452). Matsumoto's interpretation embellishes this even further. The beating could be seen as an expression of human cruelty. However, this *kyogen* production does not give the impression of too much cruelty, partly because of *kyogen*'s comically stylized movement and the tone of voice adopted by the two actors. Another reason originates in the way the story flows in this production. Because the Blind Man, being blessed, gets his sight back, naturally he becomes extremely happy. Among the things he enjoys seeing is the skin of his own black sheep on the Lame Man's back. The “flighty” Lame Man continues to tell his lie that the sheepskin is white, just as he did when the Blind Man did not have his eyesight. The exchange between the Blind Man and the Lame Man is resonant of a children's quarrel, like the exchange of the blind Kikuichi and the deaf Taro-kaja. The Blind Man, now having his eyesight back, wants to use this newly given ability, just like a child wanting to try out a new toy. The moment he can see the world, he excitedly catalogues all that he sees, as if the entire world is made up of objects, like the list of toys in “*Itaikeshi-taru-mono*,” there for his delight. He thus exerts his energy outwards toward the Lame Man, whose lie triggers his beating at the hands of the Blind Man. The Blind Man is now happy to go around by himself without the Lame Man's help, so laughingly he disappears from the stage—with Sengoro Shigeyama's impressive *kyogen* laughter, filled with life's energy. In this way, essentially the Blind Man's beating and laughter are also quite “flighty.”

I conclude here by introducing Toyohiko Kagawa, “[t]he Japanese labour leader and Christian saint” who, I believe, contributed to Yeats's creation of the Saint. In his letter to Oshima dated August 19, 1927, Yeats wrote that he had

read Toyohiko Kagawa's Novel which is translated into English under the title “Before the Dawn,” and find it about the most moving account of a modern saint that I have met, a Tolstoyan saint which is probably all wrong for Japan, but very exciting to an European. [...]”²⁶

In his note to *The Cat and the Moon* Yeats mentions Kagawa twice:

The Japanese labour leader and Christian saint Kagawa... speaks of that early phase of every civilisation where a man must follow his father's occupation, where everything is prescribed, as buried under dream and myth (*VPI* 806).

...to study natures that seemed upon the edge of the myth-haunted semi-somnambulism of Kagawa's first period. Perhaps now that the abstract intellect has split the mind into categories, the body into cubes, we may be about to turn back towards the unconscious, the whole, the miraculous (*VPI* 808).

Kagawa, first of all, is here designated as a "Christian saint," related to both "myth" and "dream," which are connected to "the unconscious, the whole and miraculous"—everything Yeats cherishes. Kagawa's first period can be traced in his autobiographical novel *Before the Dawn*.²⁷ Kagawa went back and forth on the border between life and death, first infected with dysentery at the age of seven and then with tuberculosis at nineteen. Miraculously returning to full health, Kagawa decided to devote his life to people who were suffering in extreme poverty at the bottom layers of society and chose to live in a slum in Kobe, where he took care of the poor, the sick, and children. During his childhood he was desperately unhappy, the illegitimate son of a declining merchant family that eventually went bankrupt. His father was an enlightened politician while his mother was a *geisha*, and both of them passed away when Kagawa was only five. He was then raised by his grandmother and his father's legitimate wife, who treated him cruelly. Two American missionaries he met in his teens saved him, and he became an ardent Christian, fired with a sincere belief in God's love that drove him to work in the slums. Although he was beaten, attacked, and robbed, he was finally accepted and was able to improve the living standards of those living in poverty, especially with respect to the education of children.

The details of Kagawa's life shed light on how we might interpret the actions of the Blind Beggar and the Lame Beggar in *The Cat and the Moon*. The Blind Man's newly acquired eyesight originates in a blessed miracle, and yet these miraculous eyes are what enable him to attack the Lame Man, who has worked as his eyes for forty years. The Lame Man steals the Blind Man's black sheep, and even after being blessed, still flightily goes on lying to him about his innocence, although he is wearing the obvious evidence of his robbery. Both cases show that even after they have encountered the Saint, they go on being sinful. People in the slums beat Kagawa up like the Blind Beggar and robbed him like the Lame Man, but these actions only strengthened Kagawa's acceptance of the fallible nature of all human beings and deepened his commitment to better their lot. The fundamental attitude of the Saint in *The Cat and the Moon*, marked by warm acceptance and laughter, is also that of Kagawa, who offered acceptance despite extreme violence and lies. Kagawa is an embodiment of the

Saint in *The Cat and the Moon*, and the two main characters in the play are beggars, whose position in society is equivalent to that of the people in the slum. Kagawa, especially in “his first period,” thus inspired Yeats’s depiction of the Saint and, equally important, reinforced his commitment to a form of drama, exemplified by *The Cat and the Moon*, that seeks “wisdom, peace, and communion with the people” (VPI 806).

In the final dance, “two close kindred” from two different dimensions “meet” and dance with a newly acquired “dance turn,” and the integrated state of the Saint and the Lame Beggar is momentarily revealed. Still, everything turns around eternally on the gyre like a spinning top. Therefore, at the end of the play, the Lame Beggar, just like Minnaloushe, “creeps through the grass,” “lifts to the changing moon / His changing eyes,” rising from this world adoring the moon, the metaphoric equivalent of the Saint.

NOTES

- 1 Written in 1917, the play was first published in *The Criterion* and *The Dial* in 1924, and was included in *The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1924). It was first performed at the Abbey Theatre on May 9, 1926. The final version was published in *Wheels and Butterflies* (London: Macmillan, 1934) after the emendation done during the 1931 production at the Abbey Theatre. I am grateful to the *kyogen* actor Kaoru Matsumoto, who showed insightful understanding of the play in his direction of *The Cat and the Moon* in the Japanese *kyogen* style, and offer special thanks to Ian Shortreed for proofreading an earlier version of this paper. This paper is supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP17k02542.
- 2 In addition to acting in a separate *kyogen* repertoire, *kyogen* actors also play important parts in Noh plays. Both the sections of Noh plays in which *kyogen* players act and also the *kyogen* players’ role in those sections are called *ai* or *ai-kyogen*. *Ai-kyogen* characters sometimes work as narrators, explaining the whole scene, as reporters giving information to the main characters, or as comical characters doing something foolish, often becoming a key to a crucial turning point in a drama. They are integral parts of the drama, but at the same time they contribute an unusual objectivity, from quite a different perspective. You may well see similarity in the two old men appearing at the beginning of *The Player Queen* (VPI 715–16).
- 3 At present two schools of *kyogen* exist, the Izumi School and the Okura School. Most of the time each school performs independently, but sometimes actors of both schools perform on the same stage. Their dramatic principles are fundamentally the same, but slight differences do exist. The most popular and active group of the Izumi School is the Nomura Family, based in Tokyo, while that of the Okura is the Shigeyama Sengoro Family in Kyoto. The crucial difference between the two troupes lies in their treatment of laughter. The Shigeyama Sengoro Troupe regards laughter as a core element, putting the utmost emphasis on laughter in their dramaturgy (Interviews with Sengoro Shigeyama XIV and Kaoru Matsumoto; I have interviewed both *kyogen* actors frequently since 2004.) Regarding actual performing practice, I owe a lot to my direct communication with the Shigeyama Sengoro Family; thus, Yoko Sato’s paper stating that Nomura Mansai ranks laughter as their troupe’s third priority gave me a shocking surprise: “Nomura Mansai, a very popular *kyogen* actor who has attempted a number of global collaborations, states that his father, Nomura

- Mansaku, designated as a living national treasure, always encouraged him to achieve ‘beauty first, amusement second and laughter last.’” Yoko Sato, “Yeatsian Heroes and Laughter,” *Journal of Irish Studies* XXXIV (Tokyo: IASIL Japan, 2019): 50. Sengoro XIV, the grandson of the late Sensaku IV Shime, who was also designated as a living national treasure and was a mentor to Matsumoto, learned that laughter is central in their craft. Akiko Manabe, “W. B. Yeats and *Kyogen*: Individualism and Communal Harmony in Japan’s Classical Repertoire,” *Études Anglaises: revue du monde anglophone* (octobre-décembre 2015): 425–41.
- 4 Performed at Kobe Gakuin University, November 10, 2015, as a part of the 370th Kobe Gakuin University Green Festival, produced by Professor Shigeru Ito. The script was translated into Japanese by Tetsuro Sano and the play was directed by Kaoru Matsumoto. The Blind Beggar was played by Masakuni Shigeyama (present Sengoro Shigeyama XIV), the Lame Beggar by Shigeru Shigeyama, and the Saint by Senzaburo Shigeyama. In Yeats’s original the Saint does not appear on stage but the First Musician speaks/sings in his stead; in this production an actor portrays the Saint. I will explain the meaning of this below.
 - 5 These productions had the same personnel as in note 4, except that the Saint was performed by Kaoru Matsumoto. The Irish performances took place at Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin (July 24, 2017); Factory Performance Space, Sligo (July 27, 2017); and Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford (July 29, 2017).
 - 6 Directed by Kaoru Matsumoto at Kashokaku Noh Stage in Kyoto, December 15, 2018. The Blind Beggar was played by Sengoro Shigeyama XIV, the Lame Beggar by Shigeru Shigeyama, and the Saint by Kaoru Matsumoto.
 - 7 Yoko Sato has recently written on *kyogen* and *The Cat and the Moon*, focusing mainly on the play’s conclusion and on the symbolic importance of sound. See “Yeats’s ‘Kiogen’: The Symbolic Structure of *The Cat and the Moon*,” *Irish University Review* 47, no. 2 (2017): 298–314.
 - 8 Katherine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), 181.
 - 9 Yoko Sato, “Fenollosa’s Manuscript of *Kikazu Zato*: The Japanese Source of Yeats’s *The Cat and the Moon*,” *Journal of Irish Studies* 30 (Tokyo: IASIL Japan, 2015): 27–38.
 - 10 *Kikazu Zato*, 『不聞座頭』, transcribed and handwritten by Sensaku Shigeyama III, Masakazu. I was allowed to see this manuscript, which is privately owned by the Shigeyama Sengoro Family, by their special permission. *Okura Torahiro Bon Noh Kyogen*, ed. Takashi Sasano (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1945).
 - 11 Traditionally, *kyogen* actors were male. Quite recently, women have practiced *kyogen*, especially at the amateur level, but still almost all professional *kyogen* actors are men. Therefore, I use gender-biased pronouns when referring to *kyogen* players.
 - 12 For this second *kouta/komai*, Izumi Manzaburo Family employs “*Kumano Doja*” (pilgrims to Kumano Shrine). According to Sato, no other groups except the Izumi Matasaburo Family has the *komai* “*Kumamo Doja*.” Sato, “Fenollosa’s Manuscript,” 34.
 - 13 W. B. Yeats, *At the Hawk’s Well and The Cat and the Moon*, *Manuscript Materials*, ed. Andrew Parkin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 214.
 - 14 Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, *The Noh Theatre of Japan, With Complete Texts of 15 Classic Plays* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1917, 2004), 45–46.
 - 15 Fenollosa and Pound, *The Noh Theatre of Japan*, 63.
 - 16 Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe*, 181.
 - 17 When Paula Meehan produced *The Cat and the Moon* for children at Dollymount Strand in Dublin, she let two actors mingle with the kids throughout the morning as “just a couple of vagrants on the beach.” Then, suddenly, the actors began to perform *The Cat and the Moon* on the spot. Regarding the Saint, Meehan, like Matsumoto, “had an actor, who looked a bit like Superman in his face make up and body suit, rise from a big barrel which acted as the holy well.” When the play ended, one of the boys who “had a beautiful Dublin voice”

- sorrowfully asked the Saint to give him back his boy's voice instead of his girlish voice, for which he was bullied not only by other boys but also his father. This shows that the physicality of the Saint rendered the play genuinely and realistically close to the truth. Paula Meehan, "Paula Meehan recalls a day when a troupe of Dublin actors wished they had magic powers," *Irish Times* (August 24, 1996); <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/paula-meehan-recalls-a-day-when-a-troupe-of-dublin-actors-wished-they-had-magic-powers-1.79922>.
- 18 "D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Souvenir Press, 2010, digital edition, 2011). Daisetsu Suzuki, *Zen* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo. 1987), 187.
- 19 Taizo Ebara points out that the spirit that respects lightness, close to Basho's *karumi*, could be found in various kinds of art such as *renga* poems, *kado* (flower arrangements), *sado* (tea ceremonies), *gagaku* (traditional Japanese music), and the visual arts. See Taizo Ebara, "Karumi no Shingi" (True Meaning of *Karumi*), *Basho Kenkyu* (Basho Study) No. 2, (1943), referred to by Hana Kaneko, "A History of 'Karumi' Researches: from The Taisho Era to 30s of The Showa Era," *Bulletin of the Graduate School, Toyo University* 50 (2014), 18. My discussion of *karumi* here owes an enormous debt to Kaneko's three-part article, "A History of 'Karumi' Researches," in *Bulletin of the Graduate School, Toyo University* 50 (2014): 13–35; 51 (2014): 49–65; and 52 (2015): 85–99.
- 20 Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1965), 125–27, 6. Sean Golden kindly let me read two sets of his masterworks on Zen and Yeats, prior to their publication. One includes his contributions to the collection *Yeats and Asia*: "Introduction," "The Ghost of Fenollosa in the Wings of the Abbey Theatre," and "Yeats on Asia." See *Yeats and Asia: Overviews and Case Studies*, ed. Sean Golden (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020). The other is his article, "W. B. Yeats and Laughter: Wit and Humour, Irony and Satire, Zen and Joy," *Yeats Studies, the Bulletin of the Yeats Society of Japan* no. 50 (2019); 3–27. They are among the best studies published on Yeats and Zen. I do not refer to details of his studies in this paper but I would like to acknowledge their significance here.
- 21 *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901–1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 69, cited by Hiro Ishibashi, *Yeats and the Noh: Types of Japanese Beauty and their Reflection in Yeats's Plays*, ed. Anthony Kerrigan, no. VI of the Dolmen Press Yeats Centenary Papers MCMLXV (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1966), 194.
- 22 Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1918, 1968), 3.
- 23 Indeed, there were other Japanese individuals who introduced *haiku* and *Noh* to Yeats, notably Yone Noguchi, but it is Pound whose contribution inscribed these Japanese elements into Yeats's poetics most forcefully.
- 24 Pound and Yeats were drawn to the highly sophisticated form of *Noh* called *Fukushihi Mugen Noh*—whose literal translation is a double-layered dream-fantasy *Noh* play. *Fukushiki Mugen Noh* is divided into two scenes. In the first half, a ghost of the protagonist appears as a living human being, while in the second half the same protagonist dramatically shows his or her real identity as a ghost.
- 25 This expression—exclamation and onomatopoeia—is used when actors engage in an action requiring some strength or power. Depending on the situation, the movement may require huge effort but sometimes just a small amount of power. Actors use this expression sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly. For example, they may say "*Yattona Yattona*" when they carry a log up or down a hill; when they sit down or stand up; when they latch or unlatch a door; when, acting as thieves, they creep through a hole made in a hedge. This versatile expression can be used in various situations, and there is not one specific meaning.
- 26 Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan*, 6–7.
- 27 Toyohiko Kagawa, *Shisen wo Koete (Beyond the Border between Life and Death)* (Tokyo: Kaizo Sha, 1920). Its English version is *Before the Dawn*, trans. by J. Fukumoto and T. Satchell (New

York: George H. Doran Company on Murray Hill, 1924). Other major references to Kagawa are *Comic: Shisen wo Koete* (Tokyo: Ie no Hikari Kyokai, 2009), Mikio Sumitani, *Kagawa Toyohiko* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2011), Tadashi Mikyu, *Kagawa Toyohiko Den* (Tokyo: Bungeisha, 2020), and the home page of the Kagawa Archives & Resource Center, accessed January 10, 2020; <https://t-kagawa.or.jp/>. I would like to express my gratitude to Michael McAteer for reminding me of Kagawa.