

The Representation of Japan in Two Irish Plays: Rutherford Mayne's *Bridge Head* and Stewart Parker's *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner*

SATAKE Akiko



Key words: アイルランド演劇、日本、第二次世界大戦、土地改革
Irish drama, Japan, WWII, land reform

Abstract

This paper examines how Japan is portrayed in two Irish plays. In Rutherford Mayne's *Bridge Head* a Japanese character is included to enable an objective reassessment of the policy of Ireland's Land Commission. In addition, a Japanese folk motif provides a metaphor to express the ideal of public administration. The play pays tribute to the collective work ethic that characterizes traditional Japanese culture, although whether it derives from any influence Mayne may have had from his experience in Japan is open to question. In Stewart Parker's *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner*, Japanese WWII veterans provides Parker with a paradigm for men who exalt self-sacrificial acts of violence. He debunks their courage and idealism by juxtaposing the past with complex realities of the present. Parker's reading of the source material, written by a former Japanese officer, shows differences in cultural perception, but serves the purpose of the play, which is targeted at Western audience. The audience can laugh at the nonsense they hear taking place in an exotic setting and then reflect on parallels at home.

'Sensuality'(205), 'silent indifference,' 'feminine penetrability,' 'supine malleability' (206) are some of the words Edward Said used to describe the Orient. The image there is that of a passive object of perception, subject to interpretation by the rational West. As Japan is part of the broad spectrum covered by the concept of the Orient, I would like to examine by way of case study two Irish plays that make use of Japanese motifs to see why the playwrights chose Japan, how it is portrayed, and how much of it is a reflection of the beholder's needs rather than reality. The first play was written before WWII and set in the early 1920s when Japan, though modernizing itself at an alarming speed, was still an exotic island of the Orient, whose cultural motifs are invoked for whatever elucidation or inspiration called for in the West. The second play was written in the 1980s when long after the devastation of the war and consequent struggle for recovery, Japan has established for itself a secure place among the developed nations: easy of access, familiar in the media, and with the mystery that had once inspired or been mocked history.

In Rutherford Mayne's *Bridge Head* (1934), if anyone cares to remember, there was a minor character called Gosuki,¹⁾ who with his gauche intrusion and awkward English may have added a bit of colorful flamboyance to the otherwise somber realism at its staging. He is a Japanese Diet member on a visit to investigate Ireland's land reform. Being a creature out of the exotic East whose ignorance has to be condoned, Gosuki is used as a mirror on which the complex work of the Land Commission is projected. But why should he be Japanese is a question that can best be answered by Mayne's past and the activities of Japanese bureaucrats in the early 20th century.

Born in 1878 to a Presbyterian missionary who arrived in Tokyo one year after the removal of the ban on Christianity, Samuel John Waddel, or future playwright and actor Rutherford Mayne, lived in Japan until the age of fourteen. Whether or not it is due to any difficulties he may have experienced as a teenager when he had to adjust back to his homeland, Mayne never referred to his exotic upbringing in his work until his last play. Japan's interest in Irish land reform is a historical fact, which Mayne, who joined the Land Commission as junior surveyor in 1909 (the year the play's main character Moore was assigned to the post in Kilrea) and retired as chief inspector in 1950, would surely have known.

After the breakup of feudal domains at the Meiji Restoration (1871), there was an alarming surge in the number of small independent farmers in Japan, as in Ireland following the disintegration of the Big House. Since the Meiji government's agricultural policies, such as the stabilization of prices and the introduction of quality checks on rice, favored landowners at the expense of tenants, tenant discontent erupted in riots with the spread of democratic ideas during the Taisho period (1912–1926). Subsequent to the nationwide Rice Riots of 1918 and further intensification of tenant disputes, the Ministry

of Agriculture and Commerce set up a special committee to study tenant problems. The most thorough research was conducted by Sawamura Koe, who was sent to Germany, France and England from 1922 to 1923. He is known to have communicated directly with John Drennan, Head of the Land Commission, to get the data he used in his article "The Development of Land Policy in Ireland" (1929). Ireland being "the homeland of the land question"(7), wrote Sawamura, provided an excellent model for Japan's land reform. All his efforts proved in vain, however, when his committee's recommendations to lower rent and raise the land tax were quashed under the influence of the powerful landlords.

Mayne uses Gosuki in two ways: for entertainment and elucidation. Gosuki's nationality is marked by his broken English and by certain mannerisms such as his assiduous notetaking,²⁾ the softness of his knocks(212), and abundant smiles. For all the assurances by Wolfgang Zach of 'not only Mayne's great knowledge but also his high esteem of Japanese culture'(xxv), mistakes and mispronunciations in the most elementary Japanese words, sprinkled in Gosuki's lines, lead us to believe that Mayne's memory of Japan was shaky at best, and his character construct may owe as much to the stereotypes of the time as his memories. In the 1880s and 90s, things Japanese were all the rage on the London stage, as they were in the galleries of Paris(Miner: 37). Plays with titles like *The Geisha*, *The Mayor of Tokio*, *Cherry Blossom River*, *A Flower of Yeddo*, *The Lady of the Weeping Willow Tree* typically included characters Earl Miner labels the 'cruel Oriental' (originally the 'heathen Chinese'), the 'refined woman' (to be deserted by a Western naval officer on call) and the 'jolly Japanese', to the last of which Gosuki may belong.³⁾ A real-life Japanese at that time would have been too proud to be mixing Japanese words into his conversation during his travels abroad or to be as familiar and nosy as Gosuki is presented.

Gosuki's Oriental origin is gently made fun of, with the hotel owner backing a horse called 'Chinky'(200), and Gosuki himself referred to as 'the little Chinese gentleman'(204) or 'Mr. Cossacks'(199), and his tireless inquiry mocked as 'Jap taking notes on the land question' or 'No more study land problem for Japan tonight' (200) in imitation of his English. However, his role is not that of a buffoon. Mayne needed Gosuki to do what he most wanted: to commemorate public service. Land redistribution is a complex and controversial issue. To one who knows anything of Irish history, it seems only just that the Big House's properties should be given over to their long-suffering tenants. The Land Commissioner's decision, therefore, to hand it to a migrant with the remote prospect of future development elsewhere, would require convincing arguments to support it, just as to create a theatre out of administrative procedures would call for a certain tour-de-force to be effective. One way Mayne achieves these goals is to place an alien observer in the play. The land reform that has drawn a politician all the way from the other side of the

earth to study it would surely deserve a serious reexamination on the part of the audience.

From the moment the curtain opens, the issue of land redistribution is placed squarely at the centre of the stage. Set in the lodging-cum-office, the embattled Land Commissioner, Moore, is shown fielding attacks from all sides throughout the first Act as people try either to inveigle or threaten him to influence his choice of who should get the land. The attack starts from the periphery, with Martin the boots putting in a good word for his cousin, followed by the rambunctious Mrs. Morrissey, whose cousin is leader of the local malcontents. The stage is then laid open to core parties: Barrington the landlord, whose only desire is to pacify his former tenants and enjoy what's left of his life of leisure and hunting, and the migrant Dolan, whose previous holding the Commission covets to clear a bridgehead for a large estate across the river. Gosuki joins after the first assailants have failed and stays for much of Act I and about half of Act II. His being a foreigner is crucial in that everything has to be made simple and clear for him. As soon as he steps into the room, he poses blunt questions that are tolerated only on account of his limited language ability. The answers to them supply something of an annotation on the Irish land question. Key terms like 'migrant' are explained, so are a few basic premises. For one thing, this is no longer a feud between landlord and tenants—Barrington is no 'enemy'(195), at least in the Kilrea of 1922. A far more insidious contest is being set afoot between farmers who compete for more land(193).

As the conflict takes on an uglier aspect in Act II, Gosuki's questions come to serve more of a critical than just an explanatory function, guiding the audience's reaction. For instance, Gosuki declares the Moonlighter's letter unclean, and Councillor Mockler, another leader of the former tenants, is driven to publicly denounce such a method when Gosuki asks him whether he himself is the Moonlighter. But most important of all, Gosuki provides Moore with a means to express his calling and mission through the metaphor of the Temple of the Pig and of the Living God. The following is the exchange between Moore and his future successor O'Neill at the denouement of Act II. Barrington's demesne has just been declared; O'Neill has been told that he will be posted to a wasteland called Ballinasheeda, which signified the renouncement of his love for Barrington's daughter; and Gosuki takes his leave, presenting Moore with the gift of a fan dedicated to: 'Officer of Great Department of State, Ireland'.

Moore: Yes. This great department of the State that is slowly wiping out the wrongs of centuries of oppression. ...be proud to serve this great department of the State that gives us power for good or evil, reaching beyond the grave of this generation.

O'Neill: Did you hear the Japanese with his houses and his temples of the Fox and of the Cat? I tell you, Moore, Barrington was right. You and I serve in the Temple of the Pig. And the floors of it, and the walls of it, are the floors and the walls of a shambles.

Moore: A shambles? I used to think like you once. Years ago. But I do know this. That by this work we carry out, what was once a shambles and a house of greed may yet become—

O'Neill: Yes?

Moore: A Temple—of the Living God. (226–227)

Gosuki's first name Inari is the name of a Shinto god of grains, whose messenger is a fox. Originally an agricultural god, people came to regard him as a protector of commerce and houses, so that a miniature Inari shrine with stone images of a fox is a familiar sight in Japan not only on street corners and hillsides but within the premises of a private house. Gosuki, not understanding why Dolan should be so insistent on getting a pig house as part of the deal, ventures a guess that this may be a shrine for the pig. Still he is puzzled as to why pigs should be an object of veneration. It is the old Barrington in his particularly cynical mood who gives him the answer: because it is 'the greediest animal alive' (218). The exchange is immediately followed by a scene that exemplifies greed, with Dolan bargaining to wrest what little wood he can get. His initial demand is deal trees for a shed, which he lessens to larch poles for a cart, and then further down to a larch tree for a pole; but just as soon as this last wish is granted, he ups it with more stakes and wires. Greed may lie at the bottom of all this squabbling over land, but Mayne takes pain to show it is also the desire of poor farmers for a better life. And Moore seems to believe it is exactly the job of the civil servant to channel those individual greeds and desires into the good of the whole community, transforming the Temple of Pig to the Temple of the Living God. But to see what Mayne perceived in this image of the Living God, we need to look at some aspects of his family background.

The four youngest children of Reverend Hugh Waddell returned to Japan with their father after their mother's death back in Ireland, while Mayne and five other brothers stayed to finish their education in Ireland. As they grew up playing in the hills of Kamakura and Tokyo, the younger Waddell children seem to have been fascinated by Japanese folk beliefs. The older sister Margaret meticulously described and sketched an Inari shrine in her diary (Burleigh: 12–3). Helen, who later became a distinguished scholar and writer, wrote charming tales of her encounter with semi- or quasi-spiritual beings in daily life around her: a Buddha-like toad, Kwannon of the Single Grace, an old snake in front of a shrine, white irises in the graveyard, and the souls of the dead crying in birds.

The 'Living God' itself is most probably based on Mayne's experience of physically embodying the part in Helen's play *The Spoiled Buddha*. At its production in 1915 at Belfast Opera House, Mayne stepped out of the chancel as the statue of Buddha come alive. *The Spoiled Buddha* is a short play of two Acts. Act 1 tells how in 500 B.C Buddha's favored disciple Binzuru was condemned to sit outside the chancel as a healer of ailments because of his attraction to earthly beauty. Act 2 opens with a couple of tradesmen exchanging small talk at a popular temple in Asakusa, Japan at the end of the 19th century. This is followed by a miraculous scene in which Buddha comes outside to have a chat with Binzuru, in the course of which Buddha confesses how dull it is to sit in pure meditation. Helen's play is a paean to the bustling profane world of humanity.

In *Bridge Head*, Mayne's apologia for the Land Commission, the civil servant may be likened to Binzuru on account of his self-sacrifice for the good of the people. The work of the civil servant, whom we frequently find vilified or lampooned in literature, is here magnified to a sweeping, celestial scale, with the help of Gosuki's simple question.

Gosuki: Is not all Irish farmer owner of his lands?

Moore: Yes.

Gosuki: Den excuse me. Why more want? Do farmer want land and—ze sky also?"(193)

Moore: Mr Gosuki, did you ever look at the sky—at the stars on a clear night?

Gosuki: Oh. So. Yes.

Moore: Some parts of the sky, there are thousands of little stars, all close together. Then there's other parts of the sky...almost bare ...with very few... but very big stars.

Gosuki: Eh, so.

Moore: Well, all the places where the little stars cluster together would be like the congested districts of Ireland where the little farmers are huddled together, same as they are around here at Kilrea. Thousands of them. If you don't move them out, make the big stars give them room—space—their lights grow dim and are quenched. (194)

Through the work of the civil servants order and prosperity is brought to the land, which then turns into the Temple of the Living God. And it is not just Moore, however commanding his presence is, but successive generations of officials like him that the play is commemorating. Mayne carefully puts succession at the centre of the question throughout the play, with Moore having to decide who to send to Ballinasheeda, a post destined for his successor. Each Act closes with the overlapping silhouettes of Moore and

O'Neill—with Watersley as the next in line added at the end. In the coda-like final Act, on Moore's last day of service twelve years later, all the 'greedy' farmers gather to pay tribute. Again, Moore's work is set against the backdrop of three hundred years of similar efforts since the time of Cromwellian planters.

"Finish up the Kilrea country! Do you know, Martin, there were old fools like me here in Kilrea who thought the same thing three hundred years ago. And I suppose they, too, kept official diaries like this, and divided the land, and gave some to the Barringtons, some to the Burkes, and some to the Blakes" (230)

It is interesting that though Mayne's interest obviously lay in depicting the Irish situation and Gosuki was introduced simply as a lens through which to look at it, the final Act is suffused with a feeling of the transitoriness of human endeavours that has a close affinity with Japanese culture and way of thinking. Mount Nevin is now a patch of potatoes. "This life is nothing but changes"(232), Mockler says. Even Kearney, not usually a philosophical man, muses on this day of comings and goings, reunions and farewells, exclaiming "What fools we mortals be!"(234) The fools' good will is limited but not beyond salvation. That seems to be what Mockler is saying, "Sure we all means well, sometime or another. It mightn't last, but sure we all mean it while it's on us."(233) In other words, no ill feelings while the good will lasts, and as if in testimony to this good will, Dolan returns the burial plot to Barrington. The ending is not one of unalloyed happiness, however. Nobody knows where Moore is going; the fan is thrown away in a gesture of renouncement. His part is done, and the rest is for the future generation to carry on. It is as if the play is Mayne's valedictory, sixteen years in advance, to his colleagues in expiation for the double (or triple) career he enjoyed as actor, writer and civil servant.

If Mayne found use for Japan in a play extolling work, it may be no coincidence that our second example of an Irish play's treatment of Japan is by another Northern Protestant who consistently questioned the conflict between work and play in his writing.

Stewart Parker (1941–1988) was a boy scout. As a sickly child, he had no chance of success in sports but there at the camp fires he discovered his vocation: he could 'shine' doing skits and singing. Much later in life, he attended a reunion party of the boy scouts, which, Parker says, gave him the inspiration for *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner* (1980). He calls it 'a satire on masculine group behaviour' that shows 'how grown men revert to being boys on such occasions'. But surely when he drew on the suicide attackers

of WWII for the parallel he must have had more on his mind, especially since the topic seemed to have preoccupied him for some years in the context of the futile violence waged daily on the streets of Belfast.

As early as in *Catchpenny Twist* (1977), a schoolteacher stripping in a classroom to the vocal accompaniment of her two male colleagues is referred to as a 'flying kamikaze' and ground crew (82), while the play is set against the background of the city where a Catholic boy's death is commemorated with columns in the newspaper and eulogized in the phrase 'He died a patriot's death and it'll never be forgotten.' (84) In fact, for all their distinctive styles, plots, settings, and characters, *Catchpenny Twist* and *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner* have a lot more in common than may at first be apparent. The 'masculine' call to fight that catches up with (and destroys) the lives of three ex-teacher musicians in *Catchpenny Twist* lingers in the form of nostalgia in *Kamikaze's Tokyo*, ending in the futile and absurd death of two WWII veterans. In both plays the single-minded devotion to duty or cause is juxtaposed against the self-seeking—or fulfilling—world of business and entertainment. The difference is that whereas *Catchpenny* stands by the joy-seekers, as representing a nonsectarian 'pacifist' (87) stance in the conflict situation, *Kamikaze's* hedonistic capitalists come out as being at a loss for want of some cause.

As a further sign of a link binding the two plays, in the final conversation at the airport lounge (before the bomb goes off) in *Catchpenny*, we hear mentioned the hijacking of the airport, the paralyzed control tower, the planes flying in circles, running out of fuel and coming down(158)—all motifs that Parker weaves into his radio play three years later. Whether the idea of *Kamikaze* had already been taking shape in his mind or not, we can reasonably assume that Parker followed with interest the news of the students' protest against the construction of the new Narita International Airport in Japan at the time. After a series of clashes with the riot police in 1971, the long drawn-out protest culminated in the capture of the control tower in March 1978 by a desperate group of communists shortly before the planned opening of the airport. It is possible that the news of the disturbance by, some would say, 'fanatics' at a Japanese airport put Parker in mind of Japan's Special Attack Force during WWII—what better paradigm for the idealization of the violence that plagued the North of Ireland? And for source materials, there is no doubt that Parker read *The Divine Wind: Japan's Kamikaze Force in World War II* by Captain Rikihei Inoguchi, Commander Tadashi Nakajima and Roger Pineau, first published in 1959 and reprinted in 1978.

Most of the book's chapters are written by Nakajima, the flight operations officer who directly commanded the young pilots who flew on their suicidal mission from Mabalacat, the Philippines, giving them briefings, and flagging their take-off. The

Kamikaze mission was first implemented as part of the *Sho* naval operation to help Vice-Admiral Kurita Takeo's fleet attack Leyte Gulf in order to prevent the American landing. And it is at this base that Parker's characters are supposed to have been stationed. Nakajima's book can be an irritating read in parts in that despite his having been the officer most intimately involved in ordering the attack, one seeks in vain for any expression of regret or a personal sense of responsibility for those young lives cut short. What one finds instead is page after page of descriptions of how eager the pilots were to volunteer and how disappointed when they missed the chance(86, 88). Nakajima is toeing the Navy's official line of defense by casting all responsibility on Vice-Admiral Ohnishi Takijiro as the originator of the Special Attack Force(60, 93), and who alone among the top commanders apologized to the dead pilots before he cut his stomach in the traditional warrior fashion the day the war ended.⁴⁾

Limited as it is in terms of a balanced evaluation of the war, Nakajima's memoir is invaluable as a rare testimony of the man who saw implemented the Special Attack in the Philippines, Formosa and Okinawa. And it is easy to see how Parker, after reading the book, struck upon the idea of foregrounding the ground crew. The majority of anecdotes Parker uses in the play come from the chapter 'Life at a Kamikaze Base', which is distinguished by copious accounts of the ground crew's dedicated work (52, 55, 63, 90). Maintenance men seem to be scurrying about everywhere, but without ever being named and with no clear indication of what happened after they were left behind on the island. Actually, most of them perished in Mabalacat, because only the elite pilots were selected to evacuate to Formosa in what still remained of the planes, and the rest of the men were ordered to fend for themselves against the overwhelming American forces(120).

Parker's play can be divided into four parts, though not clearly so demarcated. The first part consists of snapshots of five former servicemen, now respectively a dentist, a pilot, a bakery owner, a taxi driver, and an insurance salesman, at their work shortly before they leave for the reunion party. Each of them, except for the last two who are in the taxi together, is accompanied by a junior assistant at work on whom he vents his frustration at the kind of society the country has turned into. The second part finds them together at the hotel function room proceeding through the inevitable rounds of toasts and getting increasingly drunk as they do so. The third part alternates between two of them(Tokkotai and Shimpu) hurrying to the airport to hijack a plane and the other three(Makoto, Shushin and Kamiwashi) in a none too eager car chase after them. The two hijackers were planning to plunge the plane into the rioting students so as to prove that the noble spirit of the *tokkotai* is still alive. The play ends with the three survivors paying tribute to the dead without knowing that the hijacked biplane simply crashed due to fuel shortage after the two men decided to postpone their suicide mission.

The five servicemen's names, as if in keeping with the anonymity in which the ground crew were kept in Nakajima's book, all have generic names. Makoto, the acerbic but the most discerning of the company, means truth or sincerity. Tokkotai is the Japanese for the Special Attack Force. His fatal companion, wimpish Shimpu (whose opening of the hatch during the crash landing must have brought the hijacked biplane down) is an alternative phonetic reading of Kamikaze, meaning Divine Wind. Shimpu, in fact, had been the official name, but Allied intelligence misread it as Kamikaze, and that was how it came to be known. Kamiwashi, meaning Divine Eagle, is the nickname used by newspapers to refer to *tokkotai* pilots, which can also be phonetically read as Shinshu. Shushin, therefore, could be an inversion of Shinshu. Or if Parker knew the Japanese word for ethics, *shushin*, the subject intensively taught at school in pre-war Japan to hammer in the virtues of industry, obedience and filial duty, he could have given it as the name for the character given to hypocritical moralizing.

Bravery and self-sacrifice for a cause was very much a problem in the Belfast of the 1970s. Parker was opposed to violence in any form, just as much as he was physically unsuited for any exhibition of machismo from childhood. The idealism of the Special Attack Force in Parker's play is undermined in several ways, most obviously by having the character named Tokkotai dare to recreate the mission for an idiotic cause, then back out, while his friends wrongly believe it was nobly accomplished. Secondly, the recollections of *tokkotai* pilots are juxtaposed with base activities of today's society so that the noble spirit of yore becomes somehow tainted in the mouths of men who remember. Almost the very first thing we hear when the play opens is a graphic description of the inside of a dental patient's mouth. With sardonic humour,⁵ Makoto identifies the pieces of sweets stuck between the teeth, as if it were a synecdoche for the ugliness of an indulgent society whose 'nerve's dead' (11). Likewise, the suave captain Tokkotai's announcement over the P.A. is followed in private by his maniacal invectives at his passengers, Air Traffic Control, the Ainu, immigrants, 'Commie students' (10) and shady businessmen (15).⁶ The feeling of revulsion at all that grovels on the ground—'vermin' (14) and 'pigs' (10) as Tokkotai calls them—is shared by his comrades, their targets in turn being medical suppliers(12), trade unions(16), or simply 'human garbage' (19).

But the former servicemen who find today's society so repugnant—'resentment, and greed and people looking out for their own ends'(16) as Shushin puts it—are no less mired in the dirt themselves. The flower arrangement that could have been a salvation in a world devoid of all that is 'strong and true and beautiful' (20) gives Shimpu only broken blossoms, instead of cherry blossoms, the symbol of a short but noble life. Men's descent to the present condition is impressed on the audience by synchronizing sundry activities at their workplaces with the account of the pilots' dive during the war: Tokkotai's hare-

brained landing of his plane, Makoto's drilling of a cavity, the report of a 'nose-dive' (12) in output figures at Shushin's bakery, and Shimpu's reckless driving. The last of which is not exactly a downward motion, but could be placed in parallel in that his taxi closely misses a bicycle, just as Tokkotai's plane misses a bus. The effect works in both ways, so that not only are we made to feel the disparity between today's actions and the past, but there is a suggestion of meretriciousness about the past itself. The greatest insult is that Shushin and his secretary seem to be sexually engaged while they talk about how 'the war brings out the best in people' (16), with the latter—named Miss Tosmishita, meaning 'wealth underneath', or 'crumpet under the counter' (21)—romanticizing the pilots' 'handsome young body'(13).

The third way that the spirit of *tokkotai* is debunked has to do with the way their acts are recounted and the small changes Parker wrought to the wording and facts of his sources. Whether the changes were made to reinforce the artificiality of the character's telling or whether Parker found something genuinely comic in the soldiers' conduct as Nakajima described it is hard to say, and probably there were elements of both. To illustrate, let us first look at the account given by Tokkotai, an ultraright grandpa, whose invariable theme is noble heroism. The two officers he recalls are the top leaders who committed suicide, Ugaki and Ohnishi. Here is his description of Ugaki's sortie on the evening of the Emperor's announcement of surrender, which he recounts to his copilot as he lands his own passenger plane:

"There were these steps cut into the cliff overlooking Sasebo Bay. They led down to a plank runway we'd got hidden in the sand. No sooner had we the planes trundled out and the warheads primed than Ugaki appears at the top of the steps, in full dress uniform holding a samurai sword, and his fellow officers behind him. Then it finally dawned on all of us. They were going to personally fly the final kamikaze mission of all. So we stood to attention as they came down the cliff steps and Ugaki marched right up to the Ohka which I had personally serviced. He handed me the sword to hold while he climbed in, and then he took it and laid it between his feet and gave the order for take off. And I don't mind telling you, sonny, that I was with him in spirit as he headed out over the Pacific. Just try to visualise it...dropped from the Ginga twenty-five miles from Okinawa...firing the rockets, roaring towards the bay at 600 miles an hour gaining speed as he dives through the flak...picking out the flight deck of the fattest carrier in the harbor, steering your nose right at it..." (15)

Vice Admiral (not Admiral as Parker indicates) Ugaki Matome and twenty-two airmen

in eleven planes took off from a beach in Ohita, instead of a cliff overlooking Sasebo. And instead of surprising everyone by descending austerely from the cliff steps to get on the plane, he stood on a small chair before a group of officers by the field to make his farewell speech. The sword he carried was a short one, which any petty officer would have carried on their belt upon joining the navy (though his was a special one given him by the legendary commander Yamamoto Isoroku), so that there was no need to hand it to anybody when he climbed in. Ugaki did not fly in an uncouth Ohka—called ‘Baka (stupid) Bomb’ by the Americans—which, as Tokkotai does explain, was more like a small glider released from a bomber which could fly a maximum of 37 km only. What Ugaki used for himself was a stylish Suisei, developed with state-of-the-art technology. Besides, the Ohka pilot does not climb down into it until the carrier plane nears the target. Finally, Ugaki’s plane dived not into any ship, but most probably near a tent on a coast in Okinawa. It is said that Lieutenant Nakatsuru, who flew the plane, veered off upon seeing American soldiers carousing on a carrier to avoid calamities after the cessation of war. Parker must have mixed in the image of cliffs at Mabalacat in Nakajima’s book and highlighted the sword and the notorious Ohka to envelop the whole episode in an air of cinematic grandeur.

A similar transformation can be seen in Makoto’s recollection of the way the pilots talked. Nakajima noted the conversation down to show their matter-of-fact attitude, as follows (underlines are mine).

“How about aiming for the funnel of a carrier? It would probably be very effective since a funnel is lightly armoured.” “Yes, but funnels are usually curved, so it is hard to hit into them.” Such talk always seemed more like a discussion of a good fishing place than an analysis of a rendezvous with death. (89)

Makoto’s rendition in the play, given as he treats his patient’s teeth, goes,

“Listening to the talk of those pilots...you couldn’t believe how cool they were. You’d hear one say to the other, something like ...Hey, what about aiming for a funnel?⁷⁾ Those funnels are very lightly armoured. And the other fellow would say, casual as you like—yes, but a funnel’s curved, it’s hard to smash right into it”

“You’d have thought they were discussing a game of snooker or something. (He chuckles.) Some men.” (16)

With a slightly more colloquial style and a change of simile, the pilots’ attitude shifts to

one of breezy nonchalance rather than that of earnest seriousness which had impressed Nakajima.

At the reunion party, anecdotes of *tokkotai* are again given piecemeal in a series of toasts, with the rank of the person being toasted successively falling. Starting with Tokkotai's Admiral Ohnishi, then, Shushin's Commander Nakajima, Makoto's dead comrades, and Shimpu's Lieutenant Kuno, Kamiwashi gives a finishing blow by toasting to the 'unheroic living'. Cynical Kamiwashi, who alone had been speaking in defense of today's society so far, hazards an exposé of the noble-pilot myth by citing their arrogance and cowardice, and Admiral Suzuki's labeling of the mission as a tactic of defeat.⁸⁾

But it is not only the pilots who are cut down to size by Parker in this way. Shushin's theme is industry, which has more to do with the ground crew, just as his pet complaint today is that his employees "want more money but they won't work for it."⁽²⁴⁾ As Shushin toasts Nakajima, who could be said to have given birth to the characters of this play with his praise of the maintenance men, he tells an edifying anecdote, ideal for a pre-war Japanese ethics textbook .

Shushin: ...he [Nakajima] gathered together the whole ground crew...to thank us for our splendid work...and upon which he advised us occasionally to relax.

Shimpu/Makoto: To which you had the honour of replying...

Shushin: To which it fell to me ...em, to have the honour to reply, 'Thank you, sir, but we can always nap in the shade of our planes' wings... whenever there is nothing needing to be done.

Dutiful/ironic applause (23-4)

The episode was originally related by Nakajima as follows,

The work of the maintenance men continued day and night. On one occasion I called them together to express my gratitude for the splendid work they had been doing, and advised that they relax occasionally. ... They replied that I need not worry about them. 'We can nap in the shade of our planes' wings whenever there is nothing to do during the day,' said one. (90)

A Japanese reader would have immediately identified with the feeling in this exchange. The men's reply is a statement of fact—it is hot in the Philippines—just as much as it is a form of self-deprecation, reflex declining when the Japanese feel embarrassed by the other's show of kindness. There is nothing inflated about it. But Parker may have felt the men's reply forced, so he creates a purely comical skit by showcasing the speech as

Shushin's routine number, every word being anticipated by his listeners while he himself has difficulty remembering. As a result the whole point of the anecdote becomes summarized in one word, 'Arse-licking'.

Similarly, Shimpu's story of Lieutenant Kuno⁹⁾ thanking him for cleaning the cockpit and his running alongside the departing plane is held up to ridicule by his friends' taunting, followed by his melodramatic attempt at suicide.

Shimpu: I raise my glass... to the memory of Lieutenant Kuno...to his young strong smiling face...to the day he thanked me....

Makoto: For doing what?

Shimpu: He thanked me...because I polished his cockpit.

Tokkotai: I'll bet you did.

Kamiwashi: You were always a great one for the old Vim and Brasso, Shimpu.

Shimpu: Those cockpits were their coffins...you wouldn't lay a man to rest in a slovenly coffin...that's why I scoured and polished them...I know they all appreciated it...but he personally thanked me as he warmed up his engine...my throat closed over, I couldn't reply...all I could do was run alongside as the plane taxied...touching his wing tips...

Kamiwashi; Well, here's to him, gents!

Cries of 'Lieutenant Kuno' and a few raspberries blown as they drink.

Shimpu: Tonight I follow his glorious wake! (27)

One may guess that Parker conceived the character of teary Shimpu from the following description in Nakajima's account.

There was one maintenance man who made a point of meticulously scouring and polishing the cockpit of each kamikaze plane he tended. It was his theory that the cockpit was the pilot's coffin and as such it should be spotless. One recipient of this service was so pleasantly surprised that he summoned and thanked his benefactor, saying that the neatness of the plane meant a great deal to him. The maintenance man's eyes dimmed with tears, and, unable to speak, he ran along with one hand on the wing tip of the plane as it taxied for its final take-off. (90)

It is understandable that a person reading this in English may find it sentimental and be even amused by the passion for cleaning and the tears displayed. Moreover, Parker plays it up by having the man speak for himself, so that it sounds as if he choked,

overwhelmed by the fact that his work was acknowledged, rather than the respect and sorrow he felt towards the pilot. Cleanliness¹⁰⁾ has a spiritual dimension in Japanese culture. It marks the sacred, so that just as a house has to be cleaned in preparation for the coming of the new year's god, or a grave for the return of the ancestors' souls on specific days of the year, it would be natural for a man to feel a sense of duty to purify the plane before its final mission.

I do not mean by this to criticize Parker's interpretation. The play is funny, intriguing and effective as it is, even if the conversation, especially its brisk wit and robust humour, is at odds with the manner in which Japanese men speak. The changes he made to Nakajima's accounts serve the purpose of poking fun at the idealization of violence. And some of the behaviours portrayed, such as men growing lachrymose (or bellicose) with each drink and the loud-mouthed nostalgia for the *tokkotai* spirit among the wartime generation are indeed recognizable types in Japan.

The two plays we looked at, *Bridge Head* and *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner*, show two very different ways of using a foreign motif. Mayne used it to establish an alien perspective within the play so that he could reveal what would otherwise have remained unexpressed, the grand design in land redistribution, as well as the greed of the former tenants. The image of the temple, moreover, enabled him to allegorize the ideal of public administration. His was a cameo-like use of Japan, accentuating its alien nature. What Parker did, on the other hand, was to zoom in on a problem at home, exultation of violence, and upon finding a convenient paradigm, transplant the action wholesale into a foreign setting. He provides the audience with a vicarious experience of an action that is Japanese but has its parallel in Ireland. This may have been made easier because of its purely aural nature, it being a radio play. The alien culture does not matter so much except to make the action seem cartoon-like, light and fun, a strip of fast-moving scenes away from the immediate tragedies in Belfast. In either case, quite apart from the two playwrights' purposes, a Japanese listener or reader has the added delight of seeing how his or her culture is interpreted by others and can make this an opportunity to expand their view.

Notes

- 1) Gosuki, played by Michael J. Dolan in the first production at the Abbey, is probably a mishearing of a common first name Gosuke.
- 2) The constant notetaking habit is something that is frequently mentioned in the newspaper reportings of the first Japanese delegates' visit to Europe in 1862. (Snowdon passim.)
- 3) The jolly image does not match the Oriental type Said calls 'yellow, melancholy, rigid'(119)

nor the commonly-held characterization of the Japanese as serious, especially in the moralistic ethos of the pre-war era when diligence, frugality, obedience, and public spirit were inculcated from early age at school.(see Garon) Miner speculates that the Japanese tendency to laugh when embarrassed might have fostered this image of jollity.

- 4) Ohnishi refused any medical intervention saying that he had no way but to descend to *mugen jigoku*, the lowest of the hell, and died after 15 hours of agony.
- 5) This type of humour is actually quite alien to the Japanese. Although Japanese humour has a strong scatological element, it tends not to be graphic.
- 6) Tokkotai's torrent of racial slurs, especially of Ainu, an indigenous ethnic minority, is not characteristic of Japanese, whose humour traditionally is not aggressive, according to Margueritte Wells.
- 7) By the time the special attacks were launched in Okinawa, a manual had been made which instructed specifically not to strike a funnel but to the side of it.
- 8) Nakajima has a section entitled "Not Always Gods" in which he writes "It was even more regrettable when a few of these pilots unduly influenced by a grateful and worshipping public, came to think of themselves actually as living gods and grew unbearably haughty. ... I feel that any criticism against the special attackers in general was undeserved because, neither better nor worse than other men, they were after all just ordinary men."(149) The view of Admiral/Premier Suzuki Kantaro, the hero of Sino- and Russo-Japanese Wars, is given in Inoguchi's part of the book(174).
- 9) The only one to succeed in the first sortie from Mabalacat happens to be a Kuno.
- 10) The earliest visitors to Japan (after it opened its doors in 1853) were impressed by its cleanliness, including Kipling.

References

- Bradley, Ian, ed. (1982) *The Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Burleigh, David ed. (2005) *Helen Waddell's Writings from Japan*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Garon, Sheldon. (1998) Fashioning a Culture of Diligence and Thrift: Savings and Frugality Campaigns in Japan 1900–1931 In Sharon A. Minichiello (Ed.), *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy 1900–1930*. Manoa: University of Hawaii Press.
- Inoguchi, Rikihei, Nakajima, Tadashi, & Pineau, Roger. (1978) *The Divine Wind: Japan's Kamikaze Force in World War II*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Mayne, Rutherford. (2000) *Selected Plays of Rutherford Mayne*, introduced by Wolfgang Zach. Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe.
- Miner, Earl. (1958) *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*. Princeton University Press.
- Parker, Stewart. (1981) *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner*, in *Best Radio Plays of 1980*. London: Eyre Methuen/BBC Publications.
- Parker, Stewart. (2000) *Catchpenny Twist* in *Stewart Parker Plays 1*. London: Methuen.

- Said, Edward W. (1994) *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage.
- Sawamura, Koe. (1929) Airurandoni okeru Tochiseisaku no Tenkai (The Development of Land Policy in Ireland). *Nougyou Keizai Kenkyu* (The Journal of Agricultural Economics), 5 (4), 575–608.
- Suzuki, Takeo, Snowden, Paul, & Zobel, Günter. (2005) *Europeans no mita Bunkyu Shisetsudan*, Tokyo: Waseda University Press.
- Wells, Marguerite. (1997) *Japanese Humour*. London: Macmillan.

