

## Sadayakko

### - Image of woman -

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In this paper I would like to examine the image of the Japanese woman that the dancer and actress Sadayakko presented within the iconography and visual imagination of fin-de-siecle Europe, and how her experiences abroad in Europe and America caused a deep mutation in Sadayakko's own perception of her social role as woman and wife, geisha, actress and mistress.

The image of Sadayakko, which had the most impact on foreign imagination, came of course from the scenes of the play <Geisha and the Knight>, the entrancing figure of Sadayakko on the front page of *Le Theatre*, also reproduced in a sequential of six scenes in the *Harper's Bazaar*: i.e., the courtesan's costume having the front obi, the costume of the shirabyoushi; and the morohadanugi, in which the torso is disrobed of the upper kimono to reveal the kimono in white silk underneath, symbolically expressing <nakedness> in the climax scenes of Katsuragi's death; we have already discussed the dramaturgy of the play, a confluence of Doujouji motifs and Sayaate, and also how not only the acting, but the costumes were attacked by that part of the Japanese press representing the interests of traditional Kabuki milieu: however, the play had an ecstatic reception by those foreigners who saw the human truth expressed in their scenes, thanks to Kawakami's adept manipulation of stereotypes, as I mentioned in the conference last year. These scenes were reproduced and spread in the media; we see examples of photographs, caricatures and drawings in *New York's Dramatic Mirror*, and *Le Theatre of Paris*, also in Louis Fournier's book *Kawakami and Sadayakko: a curiosity most likely commissioned by Otojirou Kawakami for the promotion of their own activities, and published in English; being an album of caricatures, photographs, of their main stages in Paris, with illustrated insertions of japonaiserie: all this framing Otojirou's manifesto in Japanese.*

As to Sadayakko's influence on artists and critics of the era, we have much evidence, such as Paul Klee's entries in his diaries. There is also graphic evidence: for instance, the pastel drawing attributed to Picasso, very likely drawn from real life, whose present whereabouts we do not know. There is another ink-drawing named Sadayakko attributed to Picasso, which is definitely not a portrait drawn from real life, but Picasso's re-interpretation of the topos < Sadayakko>, or a rather slovenly attempt to copy and blend sentimentally Picasso's impressions of various ukiyoe prints; it is on the other hand, an indication and proof of the fact that Picasso placed Sadayakko's image in the tradition of the ukiyoe, to which he had been exposed; ukiyoe being continually imported to Europe during the Edo, Meiji eras. Here we not only see the influences of Japonisme, but also the specific and vivid fascination with the geisha, or mousmee as symbolized in the

exotic and sexy woman creature epitomised by Sadayakko, a fascination found in many works of the period, such as the opera.

In the printed media of the period, we see Sadayakko's portraits retouched and given caucasoid characteristics; a few articles refer to her facial features as being italianate: on the other hand we also find crude, brutal caricatures of Kawakami's troupe; in magazines such as the *Femina*, however, we often come across advertisements of the Yakko costume for the boudoir. The housecoat had three characteristics in common with the kimono; furisode sleeves, the characteristic lapped front closing (*uchiawase*), the obi tied at the waist. Although the French admired the quaintness and the beauty of Sadayakko's movements and her flowing robes, they seem to have avoided reproducing the cut of the kimono: either it was that they still considered it too far-fetched and foreign to reproduce the straight cut of her kimonos; or that they could not divine that it was the straight cut of the kimono itself, which wrapped, encased and constrained severely the movements of her legs and arms, and at the same time, induced that deep seated indefinable rhythm of her body, intriguing vital and definitely sexual.

A very unseemingly ancient scrapbook is preserved in the Narita-san Teishouji, the treasury of the temple and ultimate resting place of Sadayakko's remains, built by the actress herself and consecrated to the buddhist divinity Fudou. The scrap book is filled with newspaper clippings articles: mainly referring to Sadayakko's activities as an actress. It is remarkable that there seem to be no clippings made until after Otojirou Kawakami's death, with only a few exceptions: among the memorabilia, there is of course the lovely dancing figure Sadayakko, the very often reproduced front page of *Le Theatre* 1900. The clippings after her husband's death continue breathlessly, one after another, as if in desperate anxiety; then break off as suddenly with the articles touching on Sadayakko's relationship with Fukuzawa Momosuke, one of the most renowned industrialists of the era; it was for him that she broke off her career as actress; she agreed to become his mistress and to run the household at his magnificent villa, the Futaba Goten; thus she became the driving power behind the series of successful business enterprises, including the construction of a hydroelectric power plant, that Momosuke undertook in the Nagoya area.

In fact, during the series of *tournees* devoted to her dead husband Otojirou's memory, Sadayakko had continued to play Hotoke Gozen (<Dancer Buddha>), a legend about three *shirabyoushi* dancer-prostitutes of the 12th century, celebrating the pious rejection of love and self-sacrifice of woman for man. Ironically enough, it was during this time, that she was courted by her future patron Momosuke. The motif self-sacrifice was indeed of great significance for Sadayakko, separated from her family and adopted or <sold> into apprenticeship to become geisha, a ruse often used by families with beautiful daughters in desperate circumstances.

Back from Europe, Sadayakko was feted and continued to receive enormous public attention as the first Japanese actress. Together with her husband, she set up a school for actresses at the imperial theatre; and made great efforts for the improvement of women's position in the theatre;

wife and husband also managed to continue their activities as artists and actors. Instead of their <Geisha and the Knight>, which had received much criticism from the traditional Kabuki milieu, Otojirou and Sadayakko now played the <Shin-dojouji>, evidently a somewhat tamed down re-interpretation for the Japanese audience: we begin to see <Shin-dojouji> newspaper clippings around 1910; no more snide remarks about costumes or the dramaturgy, but on the contrary <Shin-dojouji> is described as an <youkou-okimiyage>: i.e., a faded memento of their tournees overseas.

From their memorable <Geisha and the Knight>, Sadayakko not only loved the climax scenes of Katsuragi's death, but also the scenes adapted from <Sayaate>, where the two lovers quarrel over the love of the courtesan Katsuragi. It is remarkable that in pictures of the house-performance of the play at their luxurious villa, Futaba-Goten in Nagoya, Sadayakko appears in the role of the preferred lover Sanzaburou, and her lover and patron in real life, the industrialist Momosuke appears in the role of the courtesan Katsuragi. If we accept that clothes are an artificial extension of our epidermis and serve as an intimidating encasement for our egos, fraught and studded with our stereotyped world views and longings, perhaps it might be justified to see in this playful exchange of gender and social class, at least one aspect of Sadayakko's critique on the situation of woman, mistress, actress and geisha in Japan.