The Nō Plays of Japan
translated by Arthur Waley

Noh (Nō)—derived from the Sino-Japanese word for "skill" or "talent"—is a form of classical Japanese musical drama that has been performed since the 14th century. Developed by Kan'ami and his son, it is the oldest major theatre art still regularly performed today. Traditionally, a Noh program includes five Noh plays with comedic kyōgen plays in between, but an abbreviated program of two Noh and one kyōgen has become common. Noh is often based on tales from traditional literature with a supernatural being transformed into human form as a hero narrating a story. Noh integrates masks, costumes and various props in a dance-based performance, requiring highly trained actors and musicians. Emotions are primarily conveyed by stylized gestures while the masks represent the roles such as ghosts, women, children, and old people. Written in ancient Japanese, the text "vividly describes the ordinary people of the twelfth to sixteenth centuries."

These translations are done by renowned scholar Arthur Waley, who is often regarded as the most important transmitter of East Asian culture to the West in history.

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