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RITUALS OF THE ENCHANTED WORLD:  
NOH THEATER AND RELIGION IN MEDIEVAL JAPAN

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

This study explores of the religious underpinnings of medieval Noh theater and its operating as a form of ritual. As a multifaceted performance art and genre of literature, Noh is understood as having rich and diverse religious influences, but is often studied as a predominantly artistic and literary form that moved away from its religious/ritual origin. This study aims to recapture some of the Noh's religious aura and reclaim its religious efficacy, by exploring the ways in which the art and performance of Noh contributed to broader religious contexts of medieval Japan.

Chapter One, the Introduction, provides the background necessary to establish the context for analyzing a selection of Noh plays which serve as case studies of Noh's religious and ritual functioning. Historical and cultural context of Noh for this study is set up as a medieval Japanese world view, which is an enchanted world with blurred boundaries between the visible and invisible world, human and non-human, sentient and non-sentient, enlightened and conditioned. The introduction traces the religious and ritual origins of Noh theater, and establishes the characteristics of the genre that make it possible for Noh to be offered up as an alternative to the mainstream ritual, and proposes an analysis of this ritual through dynamic and evolving schemes of ritualization and mythmaking, rather than ritual as a superimposed structure.

Chapters Two through Five are analyses of four Noh plays, *Kanawa*, *Dōjōji*, *Yamamba*, and *Hyakuman*. This selection reflects my argument that a particularly efficacious form of Noh ritual is one that best responds to the liminal quality of the medieval worldview, and this is expressed through a specific way in which the main protagonist of each play is constructed as a ritualist and an object of ritual, and symbolically embodied in various incarnations of the character of demon - *oni*.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past three decades, scholarship on medieval Noh theater has been steadily calling into question the presumed unchanging character of Noh by placing it within historically- and culturally-specific frames of reference. Among others, Janet Goff, Michele Marra, Arthur Thornhill, and more recently Steven Brown, Susan Blakely Klein, Shelley Fenno Quinn, Eric Rath, Paul Atkins, and Thomas Looser have interpreted Noh theater through analyzing its performative aspects, its interaction with literary and religious sources, and the ways it reflected or responded to its political and social contexts.<sup>1</sup> Within this trend, much valuable research has been done on the relationship between Noh theater and religion. Klein has drawn attention to the relationship between the Kamakura esoteric literary commentaries, waka poetry, and the Noh. Thornhill and Noel Pinnington examined the religious and philosophical underpinnings of Komparu Zenchiku's (1405 – c. 1470) treatises,<sup>2</sup> and how Zenchiku's aesthetics was informed by the religious ideologies of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Kami-worship traditions.<sup>3</sup> Atkins does the same in analyzing

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<sup>1</sup> See Goff 1992, Mara 1993, Thornhill 1993, Brown 2002, Klein 2003, Quinn 2005, Rath 2006, Atkins 2006, Looser 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Noel Pinnington, *Traces in the Way: Michi and the Writings of Komparu Zenchiku* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Series, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this study I will use term “kami-worship,” due to the problematic nature of the term Shinto with its long-held association with an indigenous Japanese religion. Scholarship has recognized that, rather than being indigenous religion of Japan with continuity throughout history, “Shinto” as institutionalized monolithic religion is a purely modern construct, and the term *kami*, likewise, does not designate a specific native Japanese deity or deities, but can be applicable to a host of varied “moot” entities. For more detailed discussion on this issue see Kuroda 1981: 1–21, and Teeuwen and Rambelli 2006: 1-2.

Zenchiku's plays. Thomas Hare in a similar vein explores the treatises and performance notes of Zeami (c. 1363 – c. 1443).<sup>4</sup> Most of these studies, broadly speaking, have looked at how diverse religious elements were appropriated and employed by Noh. Building on this foundation, my dissertation examines the relationship between religion and Noh theater by treating Noh as an arena within which many of the processes that marked developments on the medieval Japanese religious landscape could be enacted. In doing so, I explore the ways in which Noh contributed to these processes.

There is a consensus in both Japanese and Western scholarship on Noh theater that religion is intimately related to Noh. However, when it comes to pinpointing the exact nature of the religious aspect of Noh, there has been somewhat less agreement. Was there a consistent religious topos or dimension common to all Noh performance and reception? Conversely, might it be that, depending on the period and specific production of Noh, the religious expectations differed greatly in their extent and character? It may be that a multifarious array of expectations and even frameworks were performed through many media that informed what we now recognize as Noh. Rather than relying on a single dominant tradition, religious influence in Noh consisted of conceptual and narrative elements from Buddhist and Kami-worship traditions, as well as other traditions, such as *Onmyōdō* (yin-yang divination), Confucianism, and even hybrid cults that were influential at the time, such

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<sup>4</sup> Zeami and Thomas Blenman Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes* (Translations from the Asian Classics. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).



as Ryōbu Shintō. These elements were never considered incongruous, nor were they isolated from one another. They were, rather, harmonized and complemented each other, reflecting the way the relationship between religious traditions that, beyond the Noh stage, existed within Japanese medieval society. In fact, Noh did more than simply reflect this relationship: rather than being just a performance on the stage passively observed by the audience, Noh, I suggest, used the religious tools at its disposal to establish an interaction between the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and kami, between the living and the dead, between sentient and non-sentient beings.

This study seeks to identify a body of discourse within which this connection can be explored. In particular, if we examine the religious elements in Noh, do we find a fundamental connection between such performance and religion? In this vein, can Noh be interpreted as not merely featuring religious aspects but also as itself a mode of religious ritual in which non-Buddhist and Buddhist discourses and practices were united? With this in mind, I examine a set of works in the canonical corpus in order to understand the ways in which Noh constituted a religious ritual, (by which I mean how it applied the ritualization strategy). I focus on articulating the workings of Noh as a ritual intimately related to kami-buddha thought (*shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合 – “amalgamation of kami and buddhas”) that characterized what I describe here as the medieval Japanese worldview.

## Framing the “Medieval”

“Medieval” (*chūsei* 中世) in the context of Japanese history is generally understood to cover the Kamakura (1185-1333) and Muromachi (1333-1600) periods. The term, however, is rooted in Western historiography and cannot unequivocally be applied to the above time frame. William Bodiford places the period “between classical and early modern” – eleventh to sixteenth centuries – but at the same time cautions that assigning precise dates to “medieval” as far as Japan is concerned will very much depend on the specific topic of research in any given field (history, art history, literature etc.), and the periodization schemes will consequently vary.<sup>5</sup> William LaFleur opted to forgo both the Western periodization of medieval and Japanese historiographical meaning of *chūsei*. He marks the beginning of medieval with what he perceives to be an epistemological shift, a “new mode of understanding reality and a new mode of discourse.”<sup>6</sup> He identifies this shift in the texts, “especially those of the eighth and ninth centuries, which seemed to suggest that the Japanese were entering a new epoch.”<sup>7</sup> This epoch for LaFleur coincides with the establishment of ideology marked by “Buddhist hegemony,” with a particular emphasis on the *rokudō* (六道)

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Swanson and Clark Chilson, eds, *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 163.

<sup>6</sup> William LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Reprint edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), xii.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

cosmology.<sup>8</sup> For LaFleur, thus, “medieval” is not a period bookended by a transition of a form of government or changes in social or institutional structures; he rather refers to an “episteme,” an “era during which certain assumptions are commonly held and certain epistemic possibilities widely entertained.”<sup>9</sup> While finding both the traditional historiographical periodization of *chūsei* and LaFleur’s reframing convincing on their own terms, Arthur Thornhill suggests yet another demarcation of “medieval” in Japan. Taking up LaFleur’s approach in emphasizing a cultural rather than political or institutional transformation, Thornhill privileges one that occurs at the beginning of what he acknowledges is more conventionally considered the medieval age, in the late twelfth century, “the appearance of formal Shinto discourse, in response to the Buddhist hegemony,”<sup>10</sup> which was significant in strengthening the *shinbutsu*, kami-buddha, discourses. Bernard Faure proposes the same timeline, the twelfth to sixteenth centuries,<sup>11</sup> and similar criteria as Thornhill for determining “medieval.” He asserts that this period was the site of a “prodigious thought experiment” whose objective was “to represent the world in Buddhist mythological terms – through a thorough rewriting of local traditions,” which led to the

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<sup>8</sup> *Rokudō*, translated by LaFleur as “six courses,” refers to six kinds of rebirths (gods, humans, asuras, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-dwellers) that sentient beings can undergo based on the effects of their good or evil actions conducted during their lifetimes, that is, their *karma*. For LaFleur’s discussion on *rokudō*, see LaFleur 1986: 27-9.

<sup>9</sup> LaFleur, *Karma*, xii.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur H. Thornhill, “The Goddess Emerges: Shinto Paradigms in the Aesthetics of Zeami and Zenchiku.” *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 24, no. 1 (1990): 49.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Faure, *Gods of Medieval Japan: Protectors and Predators* (University of Hawaii Press, 2015), 1.

development of the so-called “medieval myth” (*chūsei shinwa*), distinct from “classical Shinto mythology.”<sup>12</sup>

For the purpose of this study, I find a combination of LaFleur’s, Thornhill’s and Faure’s approaches useful. While it is imprudent to apply LaFleur’s broad ideological brush to a period as long and as culturally diverse as eighth through seventeenth century Japan, it holds true that the “substance of discussion and debates” that take place over a long period of time reveal significant continuities resistant to political and institutional changes, continue to inform a variety of discourses, and influence literature and the arts. It also holds true, as Thornhill notes, that these discourses were particularly energized with the strengthening of the *shinbutsu* paradigm. This I understand to be crucial in establishing the worldview of Noh that, as a unique, multifaceted art form, was inspired as well as informed by folk traditions, classical literature, and religion, while also being influenced by the shifting social and historical circumstances. Therefore, in terms of periodization I adopt Thornhill and Faure’s timeline, due to their emphasis on the development of the *shinbutsu* paradigm and “medieval myth,” while I appreciate the idea of the continuity of discourses proposed by LaFleur.

### **Kami-buddha Discourse – The *Shinbutsu* Paradigm**

The medieval Japanese worldview, as illustrated by literary works, poetry, picture scrolls and other sources, was that of an enchanted world, with sensitive and porous

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<sup>12</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Fluid Pantheon* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), 6.

boundaries between the visible and invisible realm. In this world, beings such as spirits, demons, and various creatures occupied the same space with humans and interacted with them, while abstract, immaterial forces were ever present. Numerous taboos concerning practically all aspects of one's life served as constant reminder of this. Additionally, it was a worldview within which disparate religious ideologies coexisted and interacted in complex ways.

The relationship between kami worship and Buddhism, ever since the latter was introduced to the Japanese isles, has been changing, dynamic, often fraught with contention, but always intimate and mutually influential. There is a long history of interaction between Buddhism and different religious systems, both in India where it was born and throughout Asia as it spread. In Japan, the process of devising a comprehensive system of understanding of the varied phenomenal powers of Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions as they interacted is known as *shinbutsu shugō* 神仏習合 – the combinatory paradigm of interaction between the buddhas and the kami. It is generally understood that this process developed in Japan in stages, between the eighth and twelfth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Initially, the buddhas and bodhisattvas were viewed as foreign kami, entities in need of placation. With further introduction of Buddhist philosophy, cosmology, and ontology, a new understanding arose. Using the teaching about karma, the law of cause-and-effect, kami are initially interpreted as sentient beings in need of

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<sup>13</sup> Fabio Rambelli and Mark Teeuwen, eds, *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: Honji Suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm* (Routledge, 2006), 8-30.

salvation, and later promoted to being dharma-protectors. Later phase saw the development of the doctrine *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 (original source/trace manifestation), influenced by the teachings of Tendai and Shingon lineages, according to which kami are manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas.<sup>14</sup> Some early scholarship viewed this process as historically evolving in a linear fashion,<sup>15</sup> but scholars such as Sato Hiro have criticized such approach and demonstrated that *shinbutsu* as a combinatory paradigm had throughout the period been applied variedly and unevenly to all kinds of deities hailing from diverse religious traditions present in Japan, and that the purported phases of the *shinbutsu shūgō* process often overlapped and/or interfered with each other.

In the Kamakura period, the *shinbutsu* paradigm culminated in what came to be known as “inverted *honji suijaku*,” a concept developed under the influence of the Tendai doctrine of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覚). *Hongaku* doctrine drew on the doctrine of *sunyata* (emptiness of all phenomena), interpreted as a non-dualist understanding, with an upshot that the phenomenal word is identified with ultimate Buddhist enlightenment.<sup>16</sup> This provided for a possibility to now interpret kami as the *honji* – original source. Not only could they be viewed as equal to the buddhas, but thanks to another doctrine - *wakō dōjin* 和光同塵 (“dimming the light and mingling with the dust”), the kami as being present in the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> For extensive discussion see Matsunaga 1969.

<sup>16</sup> Rambelli and Teeuwen eds, *Buddhas and Kami*, 35-6. For extensive discussion on medieval *hongaku* discourses see Stone 2003.

phenomenal world are expression of the utmost compassion, and as such are even superior to the buddhas.<sup>17</sup>

Exploring the pantheon of Esoteric deities, Faure has recently proposed a reevaluation of the scholarly discourse on the *shinbutsu* paradigm to account for the high level of dynamism and a necessary measure of randomness that the scholarship fails to account for. While denouncing the outdated concept of “syncretism,” Faure is also wary of the recently more accepted term “combinatory” asserting that

While this term does account for the ideological activity of official Buddhist theology [...] it tends to overemphasize a systematic aspect of the process as well as ascribe to it a dualistic nature (‘combination’ deriving from ‘binary’). Esoteric Buddhism is not simply an *ars combinatoria*. While it relies heavily on analogical thinking, its tangle is vastly more complex and unpredictable than any combinatory system [...] instead we have constant reconstruction or recreation, in which elements reconstitute themselves into a new whole.<sup>18</sup>

In his criticism of the scholarly treatment of esoteric deities, Faure particularly objects to discussions that relegate these deities to “moot” or “hybrid,” when in fact they were in their own right associated with rich ritual activities and mythologies. Moreover, Faure submits that “they are Janus-faced deities, gods of obstacles as well as controllers of human destiny. Even when integrated as ‘protectors’ in Esoteric Buddhism, they still retained their demonic and

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<sup>17</sup> Term *wakō dōjin* originates from Lao Zi, but was adopted by Chinese Buddhism to describe buddhas and bodhisattvas manifesting in the phenomenal world of illusion to aid sentient beings on the Path. Teeuwen and Rambelli 2006: 20.

<sup>18</sup> Faure, *Protectors and Predators*, 3.

threatening nature, aspects that elude the grasp of the *honji suijaku* network.”<sup>19</sup> This I take to be an especially significant point that helps elucidate both the nature of the *shinbutsu* discourse, and the ambivalent nature of the medieval worldview that created and was reflected in the Noh.

Medieval Japan was clearly characterized by very rich and diverse worldviews, with multiple religious ideologies and ritual systems overlapping and interacting. These needed to be carefully handled, and performance arts and Noh had a significant part to play in this. The connection was an intricate one, and Noh theater was an important node at the intersection of religious and artistic concerns, brought them together and served as a locus within which they interacted and influenced one another. I suggest that Noh positioned itself prominently within the discourse of the medieval combinatorial processes, by offering a ritual model that could address simultaneously all different sides of the *shinbutsu* paradigm.

### **From Ritual to Noh: Religious and Ritual Origins of Noh**

The “Father” of Noh, Zeami, famously dates the beginnings of Noh to the ahistorical times and the myth of the Heavenly Cave,<sup>20</sup> in which Ame no Uzume with her frenzied dance draws the Sun Goddess Amaterasu out of the cave in which she hid following the battle with her wayward brother Susanoo.<sup>21</sup> In reality, a number of factors came together in influencing

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>20</sup> Zeami, *Kadensho* (Kyoto: Sumiya-Shinobe Pub. Institute, 1968), 54.

<sup>21</sup> For the most recent translations of the myth of the Heavenly Cave see Borgen and Ury 1990.



birth and development of Noh as an independent performance art: kami worship traditions and folk performance arts associated with them, Buddhist philosophy and ritual activities, and the rich literary tradition of classical and medieval Japan. While these vastly diverse influences each helped inform specific distinct dimension of Noh, they all in fact had ritual, performative and artistic aspect to them (albeit in unequal measure) and eventually their interaction shaped the art (and religion) of Noh as a whole.

Most folk performing arts (*geinō* 芸能) were performed in the context of an annual cycle of the shrine ritual and ceremonial activities. Yasuji Honda separated them in three categories based on when and for what purpose they were performed: *kagura* (神楽), consisting of dances and dramatic enactments, was performed as a part of year-end and New Year festivals, to invoke and entertain the deities of a community; *furyū* (風流), consisting of costumed processions accompanied by music and dramatic performance, was performed typically mid-summer, with an objective to ward off pestilence or crop failure for the community, and *dengaku* (田楽), performed in late winter or early spring, was associated with the agricultural cycle.<sup>22</sup> In exploring and describing a great variety of *kagura* performances in many provinces, as well as their relationship to old kami worship practices,

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<sup>22</sup> Barbara Thornbury, "Folklorism and Japan's Folk Performing Arts." *Journal of Folklore Research* 32, no. 3 (1995): 207-10.

Honda observed that some elements of Noh originated in shamanic ritual. Zeami's usage of term *kagura* to identify Noh's mythic origins is also meant in this sense.<sup>23</sup>

Irit Averbuch holds that *kagura* is the prototype of ancient shamanic rituals of Japan,<sup>24</sup> where the ritualist is in a particular kind of communion with the divine, both channeling and “entertaining” the deity. This kind of relation is a natural and organic expression of the worldview and cosmology of Japanese folk beliefs and practices that also gave birth to the folk performing arts. To describe this worldview, Averbuch borrows a term from Joseph Kitagawa, calling it the “seamless world.” This is a world animated by divine spirits, or kami, revered as deities, but who “exist on a continuum that runs between the human and the divine,”<sup>25</sup> blurring the boundary between the two. The “seamless world” does not focus on the distinction between sacred and profane (*sei/zoku*; 聖/俗), but between things pure, quotidian, and defiled (*hare/ke/kegare*; 晴れ/褻/穢れ),<sup>26</sup> a delineation that is easily breached and manipulated. A crucial element of *kagura* is spirit pacification (*chinkon* 鎮魂), a rite whose purpose is strengthening the soul (*tamashii* 魂) of a dying person. Matsuo Kōichi agrees with Averbuch that *kagura* is the earliest documented ritual activity serving as a source of performing arts, but theorizes that *chinkon* was originally directed at strengthening

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<sup>23</sup> Benito Ortolani, “Shamanism in the Origins of the Nō Theatre.” *Asian Theatre Journal* 1, no. 2 (1984): 175.

<sup>24</sup> Irit Averbuch, *The Gods Come Dancing: A Study of the Japanese Ritual Dance of Yamabushi Kagura* (Cornell East Asia Series 79. Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995), 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

the soul within the living.<sup>27</sup> This, however, need not be a contradiction. In fact, it only further confirms the blurring of the boundaries between the visible and invisible realms, and the role of *kagura* as the bridge between them:

The boundaries between the two realms are blurred and dissolved not only on the stage, but also in its environs. On the abstract level, the *kagura*'s human audience is transported to the realm of the *kami* by the power of the performance and the affective powers of the dance, as are the performers themselves. And, by appearing in human form, on the earthbound stage, the *kami* are transported to the human realm as well. In blurring the boundaries between the human and the divine, the *kagura* enacts its underlying cosmology of the "seamless world." It does this, however, by first establishing that boundary. Invoking the *kami* to appear on stage renders the *kagura* stage a threshold of both realms, the very boundary between them, in which humans and *kami* are simultaneously distinguished and united.<sup>28</sup>

Not only are boundaries between the visible and invisible realms blurred in *kagura*, but as different philosophies and ritual systems from the continent took hold in Japan, they found their way into the folk performances, moving *kagura* away from being a quintessentially *kami* worshipping ritual. In the Nara (710 – 794) and Heian (794 – 1185) periods the practice of *kagura* rose in popularity, while at the same time (and perhaps thanks to) being fortified by elements of Buddhism, Esoteric Buddhism, *Onmyōdō*, and others. This development became evident in reinterpretations of both performance and mythology behind it.<sup>29</sup> In the course of this epoch, prominent Buddhist complexes, such as Enryakuji temple on

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<sup>27</sup> Matsuo Koichi, "Kagura and Chinkon for the Spirits of the Dead Izanagi-ryū and the Kōjin of Hiba." *Religious Performance, City and Country in East Asia*. Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013: 202.

<sup>28</sup> Averbuch, *Gods*, 259.

<sup>29</sup> Terence Lancashire, "Kagura' - A 'Shinto' Dance? Or Perhaps Not." *Asian Music* 33, no. 1 (2001): 31.

Mt. Hiei and Kōfukuji temple and Kasuga shrine in Nara, became prominent centers where performance arts found powerful patronage.<sup>30</sup> Amongst them *Dengaku*, *Ennen* (延年),<sup>31</sup> and *sarugaku* (申樂), which were later intimately tied to the development of Noh, emerged as the most prominent.<sup>32</sup> These performance traditions associated themselves closely with the Buddhist repentance rites of *Shushōe* 修正会 and *Shunie* 修二会 that were believed to bring peace and prosperity to the realm.

Throughout the medieval period, the arts were closely connected to religion, from their institutional and functional makeup being guided by a system of secret transmissions and initiations as a way to legitimize them<sup>33</sup> to being conceived of as *dō*, practices on the path to enlightenment. In this atmosphere, religious performance developed in conjunction with artistic traditions, characterized by eclecticism and a broad scope of influences. A number of activities more narrowly related to Buddhist performance, such as preaching with the aid of illustrations and other similar activities that combined visual representation with written word

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<sup>30</sup> Yasuda Tsuguo, *Jisha to geinō no chūsei* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2009), 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ennen* 延年 or (“longevity festival”) is a type of performance consisting of musical and dramatic elements, performed historically at Buddhist temples, such as Kōfukuji and Enryakuji. When the *ennen* became further developed and began to take more dramatic forms, it was called *ennen noh*. Kanami and Zeami in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries took certain elements from *ennen noh* and incorporated them into the Noh drama that we have today. Presently, performances of *ennen* at Mōtsuji temple in Hiraizumi (Iwate prefecture) are thought to have best preserved the traditional style and still draw crowds for their annual performances (on January 20<sup>th</sup>). Hamatani and Hamatani 1992: 225.

<sup>32</sup> Hitoshi Hamatani and Eloise Pearson Hamatani, “Preserving Tradition: Ennen, Dengaku, and Nōmai in Japan Today.” *Asian Theatre Journal* 9, no. 2 (1992): 226.

<sup>33</sup> For full discussion on this topic see Klein 2002.

and oral narration became increasingly more prominent. The Buddhist lineages all over the country sponsored elaborate ritual activities within the confines of their temple complexes, while outside these surroundings, religious figures such as mountain ascetics or proselytizing monks who would sometimes be affiliated with a particular lineage engaged in practices such as performing prayers at major public rituals or “dharma assemblies” (*hōe* 法会) sponsored by patrons, and chanting prayers accompanied by music and dance that proselytized the Pure Land faith. These activities, such as *etoki* 絵解き,<sup>34</sup> *shōdō* 唱導 (preaching or performative liturgy), and *kanjin* 勧進 (various activities aimed at soliciting funds for Buddhist temples) are also considered to be among the precursors of Noh.<sup>35</sup> Due to the nature of these activities, as well as its purported audience, Buddhist ritual practice in this period began to place more emphasis on elements such as music, dance, visual imagery, etc., while preachers started showing concern with the performative aspects of preaching, such as voice manipulation or nuance of wording.

*Shunie* 修二会, “liturgical assemblies of the second month,” were held, as the name indicates, during the second month of the lunar calendar, and centered on purification,

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<sup>34</sup> *Etoki* (絵解き), meaning “picture explaining,” is a practice related to Buddhist preaching and proselytizing by storytelling, with the aid of a painted scroll. The scroll is typically a visual representation of a Buddhist-themed narrative. In the case of specific temples, the practice would frequently be related to narrating the origins of the locale where the “explaining” is taking place, and the painted scroll would depict the founding legend of the temple (*engi emaki* 縁起絵巻). Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoki Storytelling in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Akiko Takeuchi. “Ritual, Storytelling, and Zeami’s reformation of Noh Drama: Issues on Representation and Performance” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008), 86-120.

exorcism and repentance (*keka* 悔過).<sup>36</sup> In that sense, they naturally benefitted those who directly participated, but beyond that, they were directed at the community at large, and were intended to bring peace, prosperity, and well-being to the populace. Lucia Dolce notes that the Buddhist rites of repentance emphasized action over mental processes, that is, bodily movements, melodic chanting and recitations over any concept of individual awareness or concentration, the attitude she calls a “ritualization of repentance.”<sup>37</sup> Gradually, elements were added to the *Shunie* that had entertainment value, which also was true of another type of public ritual held at New Year, called *shushōe* 修正会.<sup>38</sup> Dolce credits the political and institutional changes with the developments in ritual and performance of *shushōe/shunie*, as temples were set free from control, but also lost the protection they had under the Ritsuryō system, adopting new directions to their practices which they still maintain today.<sup>39</sup> Two motifs stemming from these developments were particularly significant in Buddhist ceremonies paving the path to Noh, emphases on the entertainment dimension, and the

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<sup>36</sup> Abe notes that *Shunie* is the longest lived Buddhist ritual in Japan (begun in 756). Abe 2010: 12.

<sup>37</sup> Lucia Dolce, “The Contested Space of Buddhist Public Rituals: The *shunie* of Tōdaiji” in *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual: II: Body, Performance, Agency and Experience*, ed. Axel Michaels et. al. (Har/Cdr edition. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 433.

<sup>38</sup> *Shushōe* was performed in the first month of the year and especially revered in Tōdaiji complex, whereas *Shunie* was in the second month of the year, revered in the Kofukuji-Kasuga complex. Both of them lasted for seven successive days. Sato 2009: 1-15.

<sup>39</sup> *Shunie* performed today emphasize the entertainment and “ludic” aspect of the performance, which is very popular with the audiences. For example, the *hanaeshiki* of Yakushiji closes the ceremony with a performance of demon-chasing (*onioishiki* 鬼追い式). Dolce suggests that this finale “caters to a ‘ludic catharsis’ of the audience, which is at once entertainment and soteriological enactment.” Dolce 2009: 435 – 6.

aesthetic dimension of the performance. The latter in particular “may be regarded as the inward and experiential dimension of the ritual, but which has affected its public presentation with notions of bodily purity, construction of sacred space, and physical expression of repentance.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, the performative, “ludic,” and aesthetic dimensions of the ceremonies were not just adornments, but strongly contributed to the religious function of the ritual.

It is in this atmosphere that *sarugaku* 猿楽 troupes created Noh under the patronage of major temple complexes, with which they maintained a close relationship throughout the era. *Sarugaku* developed from a performance known as *sangaku* 散楽, imported from China in early Nara period, and which consisted of entertainments such as acrobatics, juggling, and mime. Gradually, the part of the performance consisting of comical skits had gained in popularity and evolved into a separate art form, consisting of short comical skits focusing on wordplay and improvisation. This form came to be known as *sarugaku* (“monkey play”).<sup>41</sup> Jacob Raz argues that *sarugaku* became popular with Buddhist clergy because of its specific way of communicating with the audience, and the ability to attract large audiences, something that was not necessarily a feature of a mainstream ritual.<sup>42</sup> The changing concept of audience and its complexity implied additional blurring of the boundaries: the ritual and

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<sup>40</sup> Dolce, “Contested Space,” 454.

<sup>41</sup> Takeuchi. “Ritual,” 104.

<sup>42</sup> Jacob Raz, *Audience and Actors: A Study of Their Interaction in the Japanese Traditional Theatre* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 72.

entertainment was not directed to a limited audience, but in equal measure to commoners and elites, humans and gods. Early Noh began to take shape as *sarugaku* troupes altered their repertoire which centered on comical entertainment pieces, to create more “serious” performance pieces that incorporated narrative motifs from legends and literary classics, with strongly Buddhist coloring. By this time, *sarugaku* troupes had already established strong ties with major temples and shrines, and their actors had prominent roles in the penance rites of *shushōe* and *shunie*.<sup>43</sup> Just as the Buddhist ceremonies sought to cater to wider audiences by including entertainment and aesthetic elements, the performance arts that were incorporated in the ceremonies registered a shift from an emphasis on the entertainment value to emphasis on the religious efficacy, and it is clear that development of *sarugaku*, and consequently Noh, was directly shaped by their religious role. In particular, two sets of activities performed by *sarugaku* actors in religious context lay at the beginnings of Noh: *okina* (翁) performances that developed from *shunie*, and *tsuina* (追儺) – demon exorcism ritual that were incorporated in the *shushōe/shunie* rites.

*Okina* performances, frequently cited as the most immediate precursor of Noh, are thought to have developed from the performances of *sarugaku shushi* (呪師), who had prominent roles in the *shunie* and *shushōe* rituals.<sup>44</sup> *Okina* (“old man”) is a performance

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<sup>43</sup> Nose Asaji, *Nōgaku genryūkō* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten. 1938), 152 – 160.

<sup>44</sup> Sato Michiko, *Tōdaiji omizutori: haru o matsu inori to zange no hōe* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 2009), 117 – 121.



consisting of a series of dances without a specific plot, accompanied by songs celebrating longevity, peace, and prosperity of the realm. The performers wear an “old man” mask, which is thought to be a representation of a deity. The origin and nature of *okina* have been matters of some speculation. It is likely that *okina* represented different deities depending on where the performance took place, assuming the identity of a prominent local deity, or even that it was a composite figure, comprised of a number of deities. Furthermore, he was regarded as the mediator between the buddhas and the kami,<sup>45</sup> which places Okina squarely within the *shinbutsu* context. Matsuoka Shinpei theorized that development of Noh could be, on some level, a result of further elaboration of stories surrounding *okina*, and it is likely that both early “god” plays and “warrior” plays originated from *okina* performances.<sup>46</sup> Akiko Takeuchi has noted that much earlier, Orikuchi Shinobu developed idea that various stages of performance and different plays in the Noh repertoire were based on a “folding” (*fukuenshutsu* 服演出) of the main motif from the previous play. For example, *okina* consists of three dances performed in succession, and each of the dances is a variant of the previous one. God play (which would follow *okina*) is a variant on that, the warrior play following the god play is yet another variant, and so on.<sup>47</sup> While this theory is applied by Orikuchi to the five-category division which is a later development in Noh history, the idea of repetition of

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<sup>45</sup> Matsuoka Shinpei, *Oni to geinō: Higashi Ajia no engeki keisei* (Tōkyō: Shinwasha. 2000), 9 – 40.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Takeuchi, “Ritual,” 115.

basic motifs in different performances and different types of Noh plays is one worth keeping in mind. *Tsuina* (also known as *onioishiki* 鬼追い式) is a ritual of banishment of a demon who symbolizes defilement (*kegare* 穢れ). In the *tsuina* narrative Buddhist deities *Ryūten* 龍天<sup>48</sup> and *Bishamonten* 毘沙門天<sup>49</sup> perform the banishment, and the ritual is conducted by *sarugaku* actors. Involvement in demon exorcism rituals influenced *sarugaku* performers in developing the budding art form which is to become Noh, which is testified to by the fact that early Noh most frequently takes the motif of demons and hell as a primary theme.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to drawing on kami worship, Buddhist ritual, and the tradition of folk performances, Noh as a performance art as well as a literary text draws on the overall ritual context of literature. All genres of literature in Japan – prose, poetry, and drama – have been known to have ritual function. This is particularly true of those works that are in some way associated with performance or public display; for example, much has been said about ritual framing of poetry,<sup>51</sup> or placatory function of epics such as the *Tale of the Heike*.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the eclectic nature of literature allows for a rich interlay of symbol and symbolic associations,

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<sup>48</sup> A name designated a group of deities known as “dragon kings.” For extensive discussion on dragon kings, see Faure, *Pantheon*: 250 – 303.

<sup>49</sup> Originally associated with a Hindu deity of wealth, *Bishamonten* is a Buddhist deity who protects people from demonic *yakhsas* and *rakshasas*. He is the guardian of the Buddhas’s preaching site. In Kamakura period, he was regarded one of Seven Gods of Good Fortune (*shichifukujin* 七福神). For extensive discussion on *Bishamonten* see Faure, *Protectors*: 18 – 43.

<sup>50</sup> Matsuoka, *Oni*, 9 – 40.

<sup>51</sup> Plutschow 1990: 145 - 177, Ebersole 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Herbert Plutschow, *Chaos and Cosmos: Ritual in Early and Medieval Japanese Literature* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1990), 217 – 29.

and overlapping of symbolic orders,<sup>53</sup> which allows for varied religious traditions to interact in the same medium. Gary Ebersole recognizes that standing tropes of Japanese literature, such as death, parting, longing, travel etc., are all loaded with symbolic meaning and potency to produce specific results if manipulated in certain ways. The role of literature-as-ritual, thus, is not only in (re)confirming the reality, but also constructing and creating it, as the performer is constructing the “common world”<sup>54</sup> with the audience.

Drawing on its religious, ritual and literary origin, Noh emerged as performance art and a literary genre with a unique structure, aesthetic, and content that made it appropriate as a peculiar kind of ritual. Incorporating kami worship-related mythology and cosmology, Buddhist spirituality, literary sophistication, and aesthetics of mysterious beauty, intensity and depth, Noh, in an interactive and dynamic fashion, responded to the medieval Japanese worldview where boundaries between beings, entities, worlds were blurred, and where concepts and ideologies were in an open dialogue. The Noh stage was a particularly appropriate site for such interaction.

### **Ritual and Ritualization**

Ritual offers insight into religion-culture-personhood dynamics. It is a socio-cultural medium that invokes ordered relationships (power, authority, value etc.) between us and

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<sup>53</sup> Plutschow 1990: 145 – 158; Ebersole 1989: 6.

<sup>54</sup> Gary Ebersole, *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 11.

“other.” One of the goals of this study is uncovering the logic behind, and symbolic structure of, Noh as ritual practice. With this in mind, I find helpful Victor Turner’s expansion on Arnold van Gennep’s concept of the liminal phase of the ritual process,<sup>55</sup> and Catherine Bell’s reevaluation of the definition of ritual and her definition of “ritualization.”

Rather than attempting to give a definitive definition of ritual, Bell instead focuses on strategies of "ritualization" that serve to distinguish ritual practice from other kinds of practice. The term “ritualization” comes out of performance theory, and Bell defines it as a “mode of action that is situational, strategic and essentially an interaction of ritualized bodies and the ritual environment, which are mutually structured and structuring.” Ritualization accomplishes this by taking the components of ritual that, in scholarship, have for a long time been seen as the defining features of ritual, such as formalization, fixity, and repetitiveness, and mobilize them as strategies to draw a distinction between the ritualized activities from mundane activities, thereby giving them a certain prestige and authority. Strategies of ritualization work by positing any number of underlying oppositions (male/female, up/down, within/without), and as these oppositions are constructed through physical action, by “privileging of certain oppositions [ritualization] both constructs an environment (spatially

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<sup>55</sup> Gennep devised a common three-fold structure applied to “rites of passage,” that is, rites marking significant transitions in the course of a life cycle. The structure consisted in: 1) preliminal phase (separation), which marked the breaking off from the previous practices and routines; 2) liminal phase (transition), the period of passing the threshold, marking the in-between phase, when the previous stage has been terminated, and new stage had not yet begun; 3) postliminal phase (incorporation), being incorporated into society with the new identity. Gennep 1960: 21.

and temporally) and impresses this environment on the bodies of participants.”<sup>56</sup> Through this interplay, ritualization “manipulates and reorchestrates cultural schemes”<sup>57</sup> and thus cannot be taken as a simple reflection of a worldview, or religious ideology, but as simultaneously constitutive of reality. This move in ritual studies towards recognizing and emphasizing dynamism has helped reconstitute the way of describing ritual and replacing the terminology with the one that better reflects this dynamism (i.e. “ritualization” rather than “ritual,” “mythmaking,” rather than “myth”). Noh captures the workings of these dynamic processes fully.

Turner’s liminal phase of ritual is characterized by “anti-structure” and dissolution of order. During the liminal phase, those who are involved in the ritual have a special ambiguous status transcending the regular social structure, which places them both on the bottom of the social ladder, as marginalized (which Noh actors were). But at the same time it grants them a special kind of power.<sup>58</sup> An integral part of Turner’s theory of myth are symbols which he deems the smallest unit of the ritual structure. Turner views these elementary symbols as dynamic and “multivocal” (polyvalent); as such, symbols can change meanings or hold different meanings simultaneously.<sup>59</sup> Workings of ritual are expressed

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<sup>56</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 116.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Michele Marra, *Representations of Power: The Literary Politics of Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: Univ of Hawaii Pr, 1993), 70 – 95.

<sup>59</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Symbol, Myth, and Ritual Series, CP-163. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1977), 74.

through manipulation of these symbols, their meanings and interrelationships. Ritual, thus, relies on a vocabulary of symbols that create a symbolic language, and a ritual grammar.<sup>60</sup>

Thinking of elements, or “units,” of ritual in terms of a symbolic language helps account for the extraordinary complexity of Noh as ritual, and provides grounds to analyze the layered religious, liturgical, and social implications of performance as ritual. This process is dialectical, as the new “structure” although re-affirmed is not exactly the same.

The way in which an ostensibly entertainment-centered performance works as a ritual was explored by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, using as a case study monkey performance as street entertainment, and her conclusions reflect the above points. She explores the processual nature of ritual and its ways of constructing meaning, and observes that “in contrast to stable ritual, which engenders one structure of meaning at all times for all participants, multiple structures of meaning seem to emerge.”<sup>61</sup> A significant part of this is that the nature of performance that is not a mainstream ritual establishes a specific dynamic between the event and the audience, and engenders self-reflexivity:

Most important, the simultaneous presence of transformation and counter-transformation produces yet a higher level of meaning, that of reflexivity. It forces spectators to contemplate their assumptions about cosmology and society: it implicitly urges them to question the universe in which humans claim superiority of the animals, and in which warrior class holds absolute power over the rest of the population. The spectators are forced to realize,

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<sup>60</sup> See Bell 2009: 178 – 85, and *Ritual Dynamics* 2010: 7 – 28.

<sup>61</sup> Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Monkey as Mirror: Symbolic Transformations in Japanese History and Ritual* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987), 168.

although perhaps not in an articulate manner, that this universe can easily be toppled.<sup>62</sup>

This idea that universe can be toppled is particularly important as it enables the dialectical processes of ritualization, is specifically achievable in Noh, and resonates with Turner's "antistructure." The premise in Turner's construct, however, is that the antistructure is mostly re-arranged back to the original state in the end, which is what seemingly happens in Noh, but in the latter whether this occurs or not is left open-ended. This kind of outcome is a possibility precisely because Noh is a performance, with a much more flexible process of combining action and meaning than is the case with mainstream ritual.

Recent years have seen great contributions to religious studies and ritual theory coming from performance theory. As Turner and others have noted, there is much in common between ritual and theater.<sup>63</sup> Carlson talks about performance as "border, margin, site of negotiation."<sup>64</sup> Drama enacts Order as well as alternate/alternative orders, and is a site where "normative structure" and alternate order(s) can be rehearsed. A major focus of performance studies that has helped further studies of ritual is observing that ritual performance, as any performance, is dynamic, and that the meaning and function of ritual (and performance) is always produced in the course of performance. Bell notes that "what performance theory contributed to ritual studies is a new way of looking at ritual as dynamic, contextual

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>63</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2004), 3-23.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 16

(framing) and productive (focusing on effect). It helped recognize that ritual is first and foremost a dynamic process. Also, looking at theater/performance, it is something that allows for resolving contradictions, or at least allowing them to co-exist.”<sup>65</sup> This dimension of performance is precisely what affords Noh with its ritual potency. Noh as ritual takes various religious symbols and re-constitutes them in new, constructive ways. That is the dynamism that is at the core of the ritualization process, and as this process tries to reconcile inherently disparate concepts, this “ritualization” process is inevitably dialectical. Through the process of ritualization, Noh addresses opposing, or seemingly opposing, concepts and categories, and proceeds to resolve the dichotomy and demonstrate how they effectively work together, as well as depend on one another. In Noh this is possible because the genre enacts the notions of ambiguity of the medieval worldview. In other words, we can look at Noh as a way to organize symbols belonging to disparate traditions and make them work together cohesively. Noh is not just a reflection of religion but an arena in which religious traditions can be in a dialogue, through their respective symbolic languages. In Noh, various religious elements are being harmonized through a process of ritualization by enacting the tensions and conflict that underlie their relationship. What is particularly interesting about Noh as ritual, however, is that while it usually reinforces social normativity at the end of the play (through appeasement

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<sup>65</sup> Catherine Bell and Reza Aslan. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74.



of angry spirits, celebration of deities, etc.),<sup>66</sup> it is simultaneously characterized by an ambiguous ending that promises the return of the malevolent forces it purportedly appeased moments before. I believe that by enacting this ambiguity, the ritual of Noh both resolved and reinforced the tensions that characterized medieval Japanese worldview.

### ***Oni* – Embodiment of the Enchanted World**

Precursors of Noh, the folk performance arts (*geinō*), as pointed out, created space and time for the visible and invisible worlds to meet and interact. *Kagura* and *okina* were directed towards celebration and entertainment of the kami of the community, whereas *dengaku* and *furyū* were concerned with appeasement and pacification of spirits. In the eleventh century *dengaku* in particular became popular for appeasing malevolent spirits (*akuryō* 悪霊),<sup>67</sup> and were performed at *goryōe* 御霊会 festivals, directed at spirits of those who died a wrongful death and became vengeful ghosts (*onryō* 怨霊) who caused disasters and calamities. Not only were *goryōe* were performed to appease the vengeful ghosts, but also deify them and turn them into a kami or a “revered” spirit (*goryō* 御霊). The transformation of the *onryō* into a kami was achieved in *geinō* through performative media such as music, dance, and oral storytelling, as well as through visual media such as *emaki*. In Noh especially, the tradition of the sound of musical instruments (such as the flute)

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<sup>66</sup> Takeuchi, “Ritual,” 71 – 2.

<sup>67</sup> Haruo Shirane, "Japanese Performance Arts, Demons, and the Pacification of Angry Spirits." (*Religious Performance, City and Country in East Asia*. Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 24 – 30.

summoning the spirit of the dead played a key role.<sup>68</sup> On the Noh stage in the Muromachi period (1336 – 1573), the figure of *onryō* appears, I argue, as a demon – *oni* – a figure serving as the main character of one category of Noh plays. Thus, basic ritual concerns from precursors of Noh remain a significant part of the medieval Noh repertoire, and the basic motif of expulsion of evil and appeasement, common both to Buddhist repentance rites (during which demon-banishment *tsuina* was performed) and the kami appeasement *chinkon* remains at the basis of Noh drama. I argue that the figure of “demon” and “demonic” was a way in which the ambiguity, inherent in the medieval worldview that permeated and the political and social reality, found expression and fixed this concern at the core of Noh. The aim of this section is to capture the ambiguity of the figure of the demon, and the idea of “demonic” in this context, and investigate the plethora of interpretative possibilities that have, due to this, opened up and been richly utilized by the Noh playwrights.

Reider points out the difficulty of translation of the term “oni” and notes the ambiguity of the nature of oni as not “evil” but rather ambivalent. Despite being featured in narratives which display many of their horrific and gruesome characteristics, due to a complex origin of both the name and the concept of oni, labeling them simply as “evil” would be a gross oversimplification. There are many, sometimes contradicting descriptions of oni and accounts of their origin, which only testifies to their multifaceted nature and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

difficulty to be pinned down. These representations were formulated through adopting, embodying, and assimilating multifaceted elements, concepts and characteristics of entities that draw from Chinese origins, Buddhist religious traditions, and *onmyōdō*,<sup>69</sup> which makes their origins pan-Asian. Oni can be: evil, frightful, monstrous, shapeshifting, benevolent, or auspicious. All this makes oni a perfect metaphor for all things “other,” religiously and socially, and a suitable stand-in for an assortment of anti-establishment and marginal(ized) figures, human or otherwise.<sup>70</sup> Reider notes that “examining oni—what and how they were and are represented, their vicissitudes and transformation—reveals a problematic and

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<sup>69</sup> *Onmyōdō* 陰陽道, translatable as “The Way of Yin and Yang,” refers to a system of beliefs and practices based on the Chinese yin/yang philosophy that was in Japan supplemented with ideas and concepts from Esoteric Buddhism, as well as local, Kami-worship -associated beliefs and practices. It is difficult to determine the exact *Onmyōdō*’s beginnings in Japan; the Bureau of Yin and Yang (*Onmyōryō* 陰陽寮) was established during Emperor Tenmu’s reign (673-686) but interest in *Onmyōdō* has definitely existed before that time. Chinese ideas at the basis of *Onmyōdō* included the concept of Yin and Yang, the complementary cosmic principles that govern all things in the universe, the Five Elements (wood, fire, water, earth, and metal), astronomy and the calendar, and the place of numbers and their combinations, seen particularly in the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. From Japan came the ideas of defilement and purification. By the late Heian (794 – 1185), *onmyōji* 陰陽師, the Yin/Yang specialists, were in charge of a series official and private ceremonies. The official ones included charting the stars and noting celestial aberrations, performing monthly, yearly, and extraordinary purification ceremonies (for the protection of both state and emperor), and divining auspicious days for court ceremonies and other public events. The private ceremonies and practices included divination on the avoidance of inauspicious directions, and divining of auspicious days for a wide range of activities, but also activities such as exorcism, placing and lifting curses etc. One of the more popular practices associated with *Onmyōdō* that has found its way into popular culture such as anime and manga, is manipulation of *Shikigami* 式神, the “spirit servants.” Butler 1996: 190-1; Pang 2013: 99-100.

<sup>70</sup> Noriko Reider, *Japanese Demon Lore: Oni, from Ancient Times to the Present* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2010), xix - xx.

unstable aspect of the human psyche and of society in general, not exclusively endemic to Japanese society.”<sup>71</sup>

Four major lines of tradition from which oni stories have evolved can be identified: Japanese, Chinese, Buddhist and *onmyōdō*.<sup>72</sup> According to pre-Buddhist beliefs on the isles (as far as we can gather) oni are mainly understood as immaterial forces, and associated with fear, particularly before forces of nature, especially thunder and lightning.<sup>73</sup> The Chinese line of tradition introduces the character 鬼 which in Chinese designates invisible soul or spirit of the dead, both ancestral and evil.<sup>74</sup> However, this tradition also brings an embodied form of oni, with the description arguably most recognizable today, a creature with horns, claws, canine teeth, a third eye, three digits (on both hands and feet), etc.<sup>75</sup> In the Buddhist line of tradition, oni are mainly related to idea of hell, in the form of creatures torturing humans in Buddhist hell.<sup>76</sup> In the *onmyōdō* tradition, oni referred specifically to invisible evil spirits that cause human ailment.<sup>77</sup> In sum, the oni has amassed numerous characteristics drawing on this

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>76</sup> Of these, Reider identifies two types – *yasha* 夜叉 and *rasetsu* 羅刹. The former are corresponding with devas, Hindu deities, and the latter are hell-dwellers who torture humans. Both are followers of *Bishamonten* (vaisravana). *Yasha* in Japan they have the evil side of devouring flesh and drinking blood, but there are female representation that are related to fertility and abundance. High-class yaksha are ‘promoted’ to heavenly realm (Bishamonten), whereas the lower ones are relegated to oni/jaki. These devas are both awesome and fearsome and can bring both misfortune and prosperity. Reider 2010: 10

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 13.

multitude of origins, with some associating it with harm and fear, and others with prosperity and righteousness. Moreover, these characteristics made oni a symbol suitable for various kinds of ritual manipulation; a creature to be appeased, afforded with respect and gratitude, and, appealing to more ludic elements of ritual and ceremony, even providing moments of levity and catharsis. These representations were taken up by Noh playwrights and used on the Noh stage in much the similar way. This is perhaps why Reider notes that “more than any time in Japanese history the medieval period was the oni`s time.”<sup>78</sup>

The relationship between *oni* and performance is more complex than utilization of *oni* as a subject matter or a character to inhabit on stage. In depictions of performances in folk tradition, literature, and picture scrolls from the medieval period performers are frequently referred to as “not ordinary” or “not of this world,” and even portrayed as demons in disguise.<sup>79</sup> One of the famous representations of oni performing as a *dengaku* troupe comes from the legend of Minamoto no Yorimitsu (源頼光) and his dealings with the infamous demon Shutendōji (酒呑童子), in which at one point the demonic performers entertain Shutendōji and his guests.<sup>80</sup> The scene later became a subject of a picture scroll (Figure 1). From this it can be inferred that the performers who perform to assuage evil spirits and

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>79</sup> Yasuda Tsuguo, *Jisha to geinō no chūsei* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2009), 17.

<sup>80</sup> Shutendōji (酒呑童子) is a fierce demon who is the legendary leader of a band of *oni*/demons at Mt. Ōe. Having terrorized the surrounding populace as well as random passers-through in various ways, he is finally defeated by Minamoto no Yorimitsu (源頼光), also known as Raikō, who tricks him, gets him drunk, and slays him with the help of his retainers.

disruptive forces are themselves viewed as being close to, or even embodiment of, such threatening forces, in accordance with the nature of *shinbutsu* discourse. This added more layers to the already complex status of performers within the medieval worldview.

### **Performer – Ritualist of the Enchanted World**

Performers can be considered the quintessential dwellers of the “enchanted world” as they embody in multiple ways the liminality that characterizes the medieval worldview. This comes both from the status of their profession (which was complex and changed over time), and the imagination surrounding them as being vested with a special kind of power (stemming from their liminality). In other words, the characteristics associated with their profession became constitutive of the imagination of them as beings. This, in turn, made it possible eventually for Noh actors to both act and “act” as ritualists on the Noh stage. With the caveat that the term “performer” and the characteristics and status of the profession encompass a wide range of diverse art forms and shifting circumstances over time, I suggest there is just enough consensus regarding the origins of Noh performance and status of performers as extra-ordinary to allow for an interpretation of Noh performers as ritualists of the enchanted world.

As discussed earlier, beginning with Zeami establishing the mythical roots of Noh in the proto-kami-worshipping ritual, the practices of *kagura* performances were associated with various key elements of Noh. Analysis of the movements and functions of Noh actors have

been interpreted as deriving from the structure and the functions of possession in *kagura* ritual,<sup>81</sup> while the principal roles in Noh, *shite* – the protagonist, and *waki* – the counterpart, can be traced to ritualists of *kagura*.<sup>82</sup> The travel scene (*michiyuki* 道行) at the beginning of Noh plays has been theorized to have its origins in the self-introduction of the visiting god in *kagura*. Drawing parallels between kami worshiping ritual practices in *kagura* and continental shamanism, Blacker has noted that in some cases it is believed that the shaman travels in spirit to the "other world" and there encounters gods and spirits, from whom (s)he brings messages into this world.<sup>83</sup> However, the Noh stage allows for this journey to be enacted symbolically; that is, Noh collapses the boundaries of space and time on the stage, and the journey between the worlds that the shaman undertakes in their subconscious or a state of trance takes place before the audience.

The imagination of performers as liminal beings is also strongly connected to their actual marginal social status. Meeks cautions that “assumptions of marginality of the performers needs to be carefully taken into consideration, as processes and strategies as well as facts of marginalization are hardly straightforward” and schemes of marginalization of performers were never consistent and uniform, but rather “fluid sites” in which the roles and

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<sup>81</sup> Benito Ortolani, “Shamanism in the Origins of the Nō Theater,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 1, no. 2 (1984): 166–90.

<sup>82</sup> Shite is performs a function similar to a possessed shaman, whereas the origin of the waki's role in Noh is akin to that of the god-assistant to the principal god in the Hanamatsuri (Festival of Flowers). Ikeda 1957: 34–35.

<sup>83</sup> For extensive discussion on shamanism in the context of Japanese practice see Blacker 1975.

identities of performers were “constantly negotiated and redefined.”<sup>84</sup> While she here speaks primarily of female performers, the same holds true for medieval performers in general.

Ortolani notes that in a series of articles tracing the personal line of descent of the Konparu school of Noh performance, Hattori Yukio presents revealing information about the structural organization and sponsorship relationship of the *sarugaku* and *denagku* troupes, as well as insights into the low social status of troupe members. He has shown, for example, that while performers were exempt from conscripted labor and taxes, they were forced to reside in areas known as *sanjō*, where they lived alongside outcasts.<sup>85</sup> However, even though marginalized, Noh actors were generally in a better position than other marginalized groups.<sup>86</sup> The low social status (and implicit association with defilement given the actors’ area of residence<sup>87</sup>) was in a way counterbalanced by the close relationship with and fervent patronage by the Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1368 – 1394) and his court in Kyoto, which led to the development of *sarugaku* into Noh, and gave the art form aristocratic prestige. However, scholars like Hajime Goto assert that Noh never completely did away with the tastes and interests of its provincial audiences, and continued to cater to those tastes as well,

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<sup>84</sup> Lori Meeks, “The Disappearing Medium: Reassessing the Place of Miko in the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan.” *History of Religions* 50, no. 3 (2011): 229.

<sup>85</sup> Ortolani, “Shamanism,” 168.

<sup>86</sup> Rath Eric, *The Ethos of Noh: Actors and Their Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 177.

<sup>87</sup> Marra, *Representations*, 70 –75.



which remained one of the foundations of Noh art.<sup>88</sup> Ortolani notes that this “harmonization of city and country, of entertainment and religion, of the comic and the serious, and of popular and elite tastes. In a word, *nogaku* is a uniquely fascinating mirror of the colorful and multifaceted medieval Japanese culture,”<sup>89</sup> as it enacted the coexisting contradictions and blurring of the boundaries that characterized it.

### Overview of Chapters

The main discussion of this dissertation consists of an analysis of a selection of Noh plays. I suggest that having had such a long connection with ritual, Noh did not move away from it as its literary and performative value increased. By reexamining the concept of ritual and thinking about it in the sense of “ritualization,” a dynamic, evolving, and interactive process, we can better see that Noh continued to expand on its religious underpinnings offering an alternative to a mainstream ritual. The main elements of this ritual are fluid multilayered identities, opening and transgressing of boundaries, and a ritualist with a peculiar symbolic and ritual status as a liminal polyvalent figure. These features, in turn, are best represented in the demon category plays that are performed at the end of the Noh cycle, which is at the same the beginning of a new cycle (performative and ritual). I present a selection of plays whose ritual structure is built around a singular character who is simultaneously object of ritual and ritualist. It can be that there are two or more rituals are

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<sup>88</sup> Goto Hajime, *Nōgaku No Kigen* (Tōkyō: Mokujisha, 50., 1975), 574 – 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ortolani, “Shamanism,” 173.

juxtaposed (*Dōjōji*, *Kanawa*), one ritual begun by one ritualist and usurped by another (*Yamanba*), or a ritualist begins one ritual but ends up doing another (*Hyakuman*).

Chapter One presents the close reading of the play *Kanawa*. The plot revolves around a well-known story of a jealous wife who prays to deities of Kibune shrine to be transformed into a demon in order to exact revenge on her husband. In the play, certain familiar plot points are left ambiguous, as well as the meaning, function, and outcome of the rituals performed. This chapter explores the discursive process that establishes the relationship between demonic forces, domestic(ated) female power, and aberrant emotional and spiritual disposition (*kurui*) on one, and the logic of the ritualization of this process on the other.

Chapter Two analyzes *Dōjōji*, another play with a long standing narrative tradition behind it. It dramatizes the famous story of a young woman who falls in love with a monk, and is deceived by him. She chased him down to Dōjōji temple, where, transformed into a serpent, she burns him alive under the temple bell. In the play, the story picks up some unspecified amount of time later, as the temple prepares for the ceremonial consecration of a new bell. Disguised as a female performer (*shirabyōshi*) and pretending to have come to dedicate a performance to the bell, the serpent demon reappears to settle scores. A curious plot point presents the return of the female protagonist who had been absolved from her damning passions in the narrative tradition and achieved enlightenment. This chapter explores the religious structure of *Dōjōji* by examining the multiple layers of identity of its

*shite*, and the character and significance of both her human and non-human status. The ritual structure of this particular play juxtaposes two rituals that are connected in the single structure by way of the same figure which in one case is the ritualist and in the other the object/target of the ritual. I suggest that in this case, the dynamic processes of ritualization overlap with the equally dynamic processes of myth-making, and that the narrative tradition and the play together inform a unique ritual(ization) scheme.

Chapter Three analyzes the play *Yamanba*, in many ways unique in this selection, and, indeed, the Noh tradition as a whole. The play is a rare one that has an original plot, vaguely drawing on a series of beliefs and traditions about a mountain crone Yamanba. In the play, the dancer Hyakuma Yamanba with her retinue is on a pilgrimage to the Zenkoji temple. Deep in the mountains, they are encountered by an old woman who reveals herself to be the demoness Yamanba. She asks the performer to dance for her, but takes over the performance, blurring the boundaries between ritualist and object of ritual, ritual and entertainment, demon and enlightened being, human and non-human, sentient and non-sentient.

Chapter Four focusing on the play *Hyakuman*, is the only in the selection that is not a demon category play, but a so-called “crazed” woman play. As such, however, *Hyakuman* is unique, both in its origin, its plot, and its structure. Through analysis of this play I explore the possibility of a “demon” play structure projecting on non-demon plays, in sharing the

structural characteristics of inversions and blurred boundaries. *Hyakuman* is a story of a dancer who had gone mad from sadness over the loss of her child. She has made herself famous by giving a crazed performance to the amusement of her audience. Her performance is triggered by someone performing the Nembutsu Odori the “wrong” way, which she seeks to rectify. However, what is the “right” way to perform the ritual, is there a right way to perform a ritual, and how do we know this? These are the questions at the basis of the play, but also of this study as a whole.

## Chapter 2: Kanawa

Author unknown, the play *Kanawa* (鉄輪) is first mentioned in records in 1488, and probably was composed after Zeami's time.<sup>90</sup> It is a fifth-category<sup>91</sup> play of the *kijo-mono* (鬼女) type, where a woman is transformed from a human being into a demon, *oni*. As such, *Kanawa* belongs to a larger tradition of *monogurui* (物狂い), a type of plays that focus on a protagonist with an aberrant spiritual and/or emotional disposition.<sup>92</sup> Such disposition is typically caused by some sort of deep attachment, such as excessive grief (e.g. *Sumidagawa*, *Hyakuman*) or amorous longing (e.g. *Hanjo*), but a specific subset of *monogurui* plays has the protagonist act out as a jealous avenging spirit (e.g. *Aoi no ue*), or undergo a demonic transformation (e.g. *Dōjōji*, *Kanawa*). Moreover, in the plays mentioned above these motifs, in fact, frequently intersect. In *Kanawa*, this aberrant disposition manifests as demonic transformation of a woman tortured by her husband's betrayal, and her attempt to exact revenge, only to be thwarted by a ritual intervention of the counterpart of the protagonist of the play, the figure known as *waki*. That way the *oni* figure is configured as the protagonist,

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<sup>90</sup> There are sources that attribute the play to Zeami, but *Kanawa* is today considered to be of anonymous authorship. Sanari 1931: 703.

<sup>91</sup> The five categories of Noh plays (*gobandate* 五番立; God, Warrior, Women, Miscellaneous, Demon) codified sometime in the Edo period (1600 – 1868). When performed as entertainment in official setting (before the Shōgun etc.), the full program would consist of five plays, one category each, plus the *Okina* piece and four *Kyōgen* comical plays. Brazell, ed: 530.

<sup>92</sup> *Kurui* 狂い is typically translated as “madness”; I am deliberately choosing to avoid this label as I find it reductive and limiting. Furthermore, considering the range and types of narratives developed in the plays, it is clear that in Noh *kurui* is not simply “madness” but a state of being that is much more complex and as such deserves careful consideration and nuanced approach.

or *shite*, in ways that position the *shite* as both ritualist and object of ritual pacification. The aim of this chapter is to explore the discursive process that establishes the relationship between demonic forces, domestic(ated) female power, and aberrant disposition (*kurui*) on one hand, and the logic of the ritualization of this process on the other.

### ***Kurui*, Jealousy, and Aberrant Disposition**

*Kanawa* narrates the story of a woman from the capital who had been going on nightly pilgrimages to the Kibune (貴船) shrine, her heart and mind burdened by the betrayal of her husband who had taken a new wife. On one of her visits the woman is informed by the attendant priest that an oracle about her has been received, saying that she is to perform a ritual in a specifically prescribed manner, after which she would turn into a demon. Although puzzled and in disbelief, the woman proceeds according to the oracle and, indeed, transforms into a horrifying demon. In this form, she faces off against a yin-yang specialist Abe no Seimei (安倍晴明), hired by her husband to ward off his, now demonic, former spouse. The exorcism staged by Seimei concludes ambiguously, with the woman being chased off the stage, but not before voicing a promise she would return.<sup>93</sup>

Most scholarly approaches to *Kanawa* have, unsurprisingly, placed their analytical focus on the aspect of jealousy and revenge. Such approaches have had the tendency to look at both *monogurui* and the woman's jealous rage as symbolically exercising (and exorcising)

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<sup>93</sup> *Kanawa*. Sanari Kentarō, ed. *Yōyoku taikan*, vol. 1. (Tokyo, Meiji Shoin, 1931), 703-14.

the frustration of the marginalized and the disenfranchised.<sup>94</sup> There have, however, been attempts to move away from the jealousy-centered narrative and broaden the scope of analysis. Shared narrative and structural concerns with other plays (e.g. *Aoi no ue* 葵上), lead Hirai Shūsei to suggest that the central emotion governing the *Kanawa* woman's motivations is not jealousy but rather embarrassment. That is, she is embarrassed by her jealousy and wishes to hide it, while her mysterious visits to the Kibune shrine are due to seeking privacy and desire to calm her disturbed spirit.<sup>95</sup> Saito Sumiko takes the psychoanalytical approach, reading *Kanawa* as a way (for both the protagonist and the audience) to eliminate a “grudge” (*urami* 恨み). As an emotional process, a grudge develops differently from jealousy as, unlike the latter, it remains hidden, festers, eventually causing the psyche to erupt, sometimes, violently. As such, the performance has a cathartic effect with the audience releasing their own pent up negative emotions, vicariously through protagonists on the stage.<sup>96</sup>

While exploring and unraveling crucial aspects of *Kanawa* (and other *kijo-mono* pieces), these approaches end up narrowing, and thereby limiting, their focus to the inner processes of the protagonist, interpreting the play either as a psychological remedial strategy

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<sup>94</sup> Kawashima 2001: 255-265; Reider 2010: 53-60.

<sup>95</sup> Hirai Shūsei. “Kanawakō: Kyōkai hakai no monogatari to shite.” *Tokoha kokubun*. Tokoha daigaku tanki daigakubu, Vol. 21, 1996: 28-30.

<sup>96</sup> Saito Sumiko. “Nōgaku kanawa ni okeru urami no kōzō to mekanizumu – shujinko no shinri bunseki o to shite urami to juso hofuku no kekka o saguru.” *Ibaraki kirisutokyō daigaku kiyō I, Jinbunkagaku* Vol. 47, 2013: 142.

or a social critique. While these readings are valuable and insightful, by emphasizing what the *shite* is *feeling*, they tend to gloss over what the *shite* is *doing*, or, to put it more accurately, they tend to interpret what *shite* is doing in terms of what she is feeling. That way a significant dimension of the play is overlooked, namely the meaning of the acts themselves, performed on the stage (and in the text). While utilizing the conclusions of the existing readings of *Kanawa* I suggest an alternative route of analysis of the key factors of the text and its context, in the ways they relate to religious and ritual characteristics of Noh in general, and *kijo-mono* plays specifically.

In the *monogurui* plays there is always a point of disintegration, so to speak, where the aberrant disposition of the *shite* is fully revealed. Identifying this moment, and determining its meaning and significance is the first important step in uncovering the relationship between *monogurui*, demonic transformation, and ritual structure and character of *Kanawa*.

In analyzing the structure of the grudge, *urami*, in *Kanawa*, Saito points out the *shite*'s inner contradictions. She surmises that everything the *Kanawa* woman does is directed not outwardly, to the husband and his punishment, but inwardly, seeking relief for her own toxic emotions.<sup>97</sup> Is she, then, rather than exacting punishment (in which case the possible death of her husband could be merely viewed as collateral) actually exorcising herself? Or, in

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 137-140



order to truly get revenge for the grudge, does she need to completely discard her human nature, so as not to feel any compassion or hesitation that her human self would? For example, another play about jealousy and revenge, *Aoi no Ue*,<sup>98</sup> is in this sense significantly different; this play's *shite*, Lady Rokujō, only directs her anger to the other woman (Aoi). That is because not having become an *oni*, therefore not discarding her actual self (she *is* her own jealous spirit), Rokujō still harbors lingering attachment to the man who betrayed her (Genji), and cannot bring herself to harm him. The *Kanawa* wife, on the other hand, by virtue of her transformation, has overcome this lingering attachment and is thus enabled to punish the actual culprit. For the *Kanawa* woman the betrayal of her husband is not just love betrayal, but the negation of her entire life, everything she knew and believed, all aspects of her life are suddenly snatched away.

Nagao Kazuo directly contrasts *Aoi no ue* with *Kanawa*. He points out that *Kanawa* woman, unlike Rokujō, focuses on the duplicitous husband, making the interiority and the motivations of these two protagonists very different. He further argues that the world of *Kanawa* should be considered separately from the world of *Aoi no ue*, that is, the *Kanawa* story is removed from aristocratic society. Rokujō as *shite*, as he points out, is at pains to

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<sup>98</sup> *Aoi no Ue* is a dramatization of the *Aoi* chapter of the *Tale of Genji*. Genji's discarded lover Lady Rokujo's jealousy manifests as a malign spirit and possesses his wife Aoi in labor. The play dramatizes the attempts to exorcise the spirit, with an ambiguous outcome. Sanari 1931: 157-168.

retain her aristocratic dignity. Her struggle is between reason and emotion, which becomes the point of her emotional disintegration of this play.<sup>99</sup>

Being a *monogurui*, as already noted, *Kanawa* is a play that is in the framework of performance that centers on *kurui*, and as such, focuses on an aberrant internal development and disrupted balance of spirit/mind. Most typical case of *kurui*, and cause of the aberrant frame of mind, is a woman going mad over loss of, and search for her child, or, husband or lover. *Sumidagawa* (隅田川),<sup>100</sup> for example, is a story of a woman searching for her son, who had been kidnapped by slave traders. She has traveled a long way from the capital and is trying embark on a ferry, which is when she makes her first appearance on stage, already mad with grief. As the story unravels, the woman learns her son has died, and with the help of the ferryman she makes her way to his grave, where she has one final encounter with her son's ghost. *Hanjo* (斑女),<sup>101</sup> is a tale of a different kind of loss and attachment. Hanago, the beautiful performer meets and falls in love with a visitor at the inn where she is employed as an entertainer. The two exchange fans as a token of their love, and promise of a joint future. After the man leaves, Hanago starts neglecting her duties, and spends her time longingly gazing at the fan with which she had become obsessed, which results in her being banished from the inn. Hanago ends up at the Shimogamo shrine, having meanwhile become deranged

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<sup>99</sup> Nagao Kazuo. "Kanawakō." *Geibun kenkyū*. Vol. 12, (Jun, 1961): 25-33.

<sup>100</sup> *Sumidagawa*. Sanari, ed. *Yōyoku taikan*, 1517-1536.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 2597-2612.

as a result of her amorous longing. The play, however, ends on a positive note, with Hanago reuniting with her lover.

In the two aforementioned plays, the audience either witnesses the lengthy and gradual process of descent into *kurui* (*Hanjo*), or is only introduced to the protagonist that is already *kurui*, (therefore, *after* the emotional/spiritual transition), neither displaying an identifiably clear point of disintegration. *Kanawa's kurui*, however, is of a different sort. She displays determination and moves into her *kurui* quickly (and deliberately), shortening and condensing the process of the slow disintegration caused by grief. In *Hanjo* and *Sumidagawa*, *kurui* is entirely caused by psychological distress, whereas in *Kanawa* this is not the case.

The character development of *Kanawa* and *Aoi no Ue's shite* follows the same emotional/spiritual trajectory, where the audience witnesses the process of transition in full. *Kanawa*, however, adds yet another twist to *kurui*, having it caused or at least catalyzed by a third party – in this case deities who aide her transformation. Nagao goes as far as suggesting that the woman is possessed by the violent aspect (*ara-mitama* 荒魂) of the Kibune diety, and thus becomes *oni*.<sup>102</sup> Be this the case or not, the workings of *Kanawa* take place in both the visible and the invisible realm, which sets the stage for *Kanawa's* ritual character.

As a play that is placed between the visible and invisible realm, the narrative of *Kanawa* is closely centered on themes of transgression and disruption of boundaries. This

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<sup>102</sup> Nagao, “Kanawakō,” 29-31.

raises the question of how the motif of a woman's jealousy is situated in relation to this; namely, is the woman's jealousy itself the point of the play, or is it a catalyst for something else? In many ways *Kanawa* is the quintessential jealous woman revenge tale. At the center of the narrative is a woman exasperated by the faithless husband, who prays for him to receive the deserved retribution. Moreover, she is visiting Kibune shrine at the Hour of the Ox – *ushi no koku* 丑の刻 (at 3 a.m.), a custom at the time of the play's production already discursively established as aimed at placing a curse on someone.<sup>103</sup> The connection between this act and female jealousy is also established and familiar to the audience,<sup>104</sup> so as the play moves towards its denouement it seems to follow a straightforward cautionary tale of a jealous wife. The ambiguous ending, with the demon being “exorcized” assuring the audience of her return, however, poses more questions than it answers, and interrogates both the

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<sup>103</sup> It is not certain that *ushi no koku mairi* was actually taking place by the time play *Kanawa* was written, even though the custom is prominently present in literature surrounding the play and the legend(s) it is based on (which will be discussed later in the chapter). The origin of the custom (real or imagined) is uncertain, and it most likely derives from the *onmyōdō* practice and mixture of rituals associated with it. In his study on the contemporary practice of *ushi no koku mairi*, Murguia elucidates the meaning of the practice: “The parameters of Ushi no Koku Mairi are bound to Onmyōdō's system of cosmologies originating in China and brought to Japan during the sixth century. Within this system, certain animals and items in nature correspond with various qualities of time, date, and direction, designating their level of malevolence or benevolence. In this system, Ushi no Koku Mairi is believed to designate a period between 1:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m., corresponding to the animal signs of the ox or cow (*ushi*) and the tiger (*tora*). As the layout of a twelve-hour clock simulates the cosmic order of the Onmyōdō, the upper-right-hand quadrant between the hours of 1:00 and 3:00 is also representative of the northeast direction. In combination, these times, symbols, and directions are said to represent a dimension where malevolent spirits roam free.” Murguia 2013: 76

<sup>104</sup> Hirai, “Kanawakō,” 27.

purpose and the outcome of the ritual(s) that took place on the stage in the course of the performance.

Jealous rage of the *shite* is the threshold of sanity, and therefore creates the possibility for opening up different boundaries between poles which are poetically and metonymically equated (insanity/sanity, demonic/exorcist, this-worldly/other-worldly). Within the text this is achieved through textual construction of the *shite*, her actions (and those directed at her), and the spaces within which these actions take place, which will be discussed in more detail below, in the analysis of the play. The fissure in the *shite*'s frame of mind created by her aberrant disposition allows for her to communicate across these boundaries. Thus, the role of jealousy/*monogurui* in the ritual of this play is that it makes the ritual possible, and serves the catalyst for the ritualization process.

### **Origins of Kanawa: *Hashihime* Legend, Generic Conventions and Ritual Concerns**

The play's central narrative had a long history of development, with origins in the popular *Hashihime* folk tales. One of the earliest scholarly considerations of the *Hashihime* legend and its origins comes from Yanagita Kunio. Some of his considerations bring *Hashihime* to a relationship with the deity of the bridge, *Hashihime Daimyōjin* 橋姫大明神, who also is the wife of *Sumiyoshi Myōjin*.<sup>105</sup> Although elements of Yanagita's research on

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<sup>105</sup> Shimura Kunihiro, ed. *Ibō No Kamigami to Onryō* (Shomin Shūkyō Minzokugaku Sōsho, bessatsu 1. Tōkyō: Bensei Shuppan, 10): 42.

this topic have been called into question,<sup>106</sup> it is clear that a set of connections between a female figure, the Uji bridge and supernatural forces, both godly and demonic, had been a familiar construct in people's imagination, which becomes clear from a look at the evolution of the *Hashihime* trope in literature.

The earliest appearance in literature is in a poem from the early 10<sup>th</sup> century anthology *Kokin wakashū*, telling of the frustrated meeting of two lovers:

さ筵に衣片敷き今宵もやわれを待つらむ宇治の橋姫<sup>107</sup>  
*samushiro ni koromo katashiki koyoi mo ya ware o matsuramu uji no hashihime*  
Spreading only one side of your robe on the straw-mat tonight again  
I wonder if you are waiting for me, Lady of the Uji bridge<sup>108</sup>

The *Kokinshū* poem turns the *Hashihime* trope into a poetic image of the longing of the waiting woman, and as such *Hashihime* becomes a recurring image in poetry. In the poetic figurations, the predominant mood is loneliness and melancholy. On the other hand, *setsuwa*<sup>109</sup> renditions of the *Hashihime* legend turn this poetic imagery into horrific tales of dangerous female potency. Consider, for example, the following tale from the twelfth century collection *Konjaku monogatari shū*, in which a man by the name of Ki no Tosuke, on his way home one night, is approached by a mysterious woman with a request to deliver a box,

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<sup>106</sup> Particularly the marital coupling of deities; Kawashima, 2001: 219-221.

<sup>107</sup> Utsubo Kubota. *Kokinwakashū hyōshaku, chūkan* (Tōkyō: Tōkyōdō, 1960), 405.

<sup>108</sup> All translations in this chapter are mine.

<sup>109</sup> *Setsuwa* 説話 are a genre of anecdotal literature originating in the late Heian (794 - 1185) period. The collections comprise of stories, mostly originating in the folk oral tradition, which are then placed within the Buddhist framework to serve a didactic purpose.

warning him not to look inside. Tosuke brings the box home, where his wife takes a peek (suspecting the box may be a gift for another woman) and discovers its gruesome contents – human eyeballs and male genitalia. Terrified, Tosuke immediately takes the box to the bridge delivering it to a woman he finds waiting there, but since the ocular taboo has been violated, he suffers his punishment and dies on his way back home.<sup>110</sup> This curious story places the male/husband character completely at the will of the females in the story, and suffering the consequences of their actions – both the sender and the recipient of the box are ghostly women, whereas the wife, prompted by jealousy, opens the box, thus sealing his fate. Moreover, both the male gaze and virility are symbolically confined within the box, and revealed only to the detriment of the man.

Building further on the *Hashihime* trope, the *Tsurugi no maki* chapter from the *Yashirobon* version of *The Tales of the Heike* narrates the story of the wife of an aristocrat, who prays to the deity of the Kibune shrine to turn her into an *oni* in order to take revenge on her unfaithful husband, and murder the woman he left her for. The deity takes pity on her and instructs her to change her appearance, and bathe in Uji river for twenty-one days. The woman returns to the Capital, and performs a ritual as instructed to turn into a demon. She then proceeds to take her revenge on the husband and his new wife, as well as all their relatives. When she wanted to kill a man she would assume the guise of a beautiful woman,

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<sup>110</sup> Nagano Joichi, ed. *Konjaku Monogatari Shū* (Koten Nihon Bungaku Zenshū 10. Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 35), 237-240.

and when she wanted to kill a woman, she would turn into a man.<sup>111</sup> This version is used as the basis for Noh *Kanawa*, with, as shall be demonstrated below, subtle but significant changes to the narrative.

Observing the variegated iterations of the *Hashihime* trope and its literary metamorphosis one can trace the trajectory of its development, while keeping in mind the generic conventions and contexts. In poetic renditions (appearing in *waka* anthologies and *The Tale of Genji*) the motif is marked by *mono-no-aware*-tinged longing and pining. On the other hand, the *setsuwa* have a didactic bent and function as cautionary tales, the direction that carried over into *Tsurugi*.

Kawashima further sees the historical textual development of the *Hashihime* trope as moving in two directions: 1) lonely waiting woman and 2) jealous demon. Kawashima wonders what the relationship between the two representations of *Hashihime* is; she feels they are related, and views the point of relation through the feminist lens. They represent, she suggests, an interplay of marginalization, empowerment and re-marginalization of female in the text. Another question she asks is why Hashihime demon is depicted as powerful, and offers two possible answers:

[T]he figure of Hashihime in Yashirobon can be understood as an effect of the text's interest in depicting heroic and awe-inspiring demonstrations of power. Second, if [...] the reciters of the Heike stories, the *biwa hoshi*, were responsible for exorcising the vengeful spirits of those who had died in battle,

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<sup>111</sup> Sato Kenzo. *Yashiro-bon Heike monogatari*, Haruta, Sen; editor (Tokyo, Ofusha, 1973), 542-44.



then one could interpret Hashihime as one of the vengeful (although not exactly deceased) who must be appeased through telling of his or her story;<sup>112</sup>

The first one is that “war tale” (*gunki monogatari* 軍記物語) as a genre is interested in presenting expressions of power and violence, and that, particularly in the case of *Heike*, pacification as the overall function of the text requires it: in order to pacify her properly she has to be portrayed as very powerful and awe-inspiring. At the same time, allowing for her horrific aspect to completely materialize and express itself mitigates the danger she would otherwise pose. Moreover, both typified representations have textual and aesthetic concerns stemming from the generic conventions, as will be the case with Noh as well.

However, the placement of the story in the context of ritualistic performance, I believe, points to another possible interpretation. I suggest that in the case of Noh play *Kanawa* the relational point is the ritual ambiguity, as the two representations converge. The “ambivalent” representation comes from the use of the genre as liturgical narrative and as a conduit for this ambivalence: the *shite* is materialized as demon (*oni*). Both Noriko Reider and Kawashima suggest that forging the *Kanawa* woman as *oni* in the play is primarily based on *oni* being a symbol of a marginalized entity; for Reider it is the “marginalized other,” the politically and socially disenfranchised,<sup>113</sup> and for Kawashima it is the woman suffering

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<sup>112</sup> Terry Kawashima. *Writing Margins: The Textual Construction of Gender in Heian and Kamakura Japan* (Harvard East Asian Monographs 201. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center: distributed by Harvard University Press, 2001), 272.

<sup>113</sup> Reider, *Demon Lore*, 58 – 60.

under a polygynous marital system. But rather than just being the voice for the voiceless, the *oni* takes the stage in *Kanawa* on both ends of power/agency vector (both as the ritualist as object of ritual). However, the issue of marginalization is also important and undoubtedly has a relationship with Noh's ritual concerns. In particular, two senses of the term are evident – marginality of certain people (as Reider and Kawashima suggest) and marginality of spaces associated with them. Indeed, both senses appear in textual as well as theatrical presentations of *Hashihime*. Thus we see that Noh constructs a retelling within a ritual structure of the exorcism and pacification, readjusting and re-evaluating original ritual concerns.

### **Counterpoint: Abe no Seimei, Demons and Exorcism**

Yin-yang masters, *onmyōji* 陰陽師, feature infrequently in Noh, and *Kanawa* is the only canonical play that has the *onmyōji* as the *waki*. What, then, accounts for the choice of Abe no Seimei as the *waki* of this play? To answer this one needs to look at both the practice of *onmyōdō* and the character of the master himself.

It is initially important to recognize that there are two Abe no Seimeis in Japanese tradition: one is the historical Abe no Seimei, renowned court official and *onmyōdō* practitioner, the other, Abe no Seimei the literary construct, built on the folk traditions and popular imagination surrounding the historical figure. Both, however, seem to owe their success and popularity, in the large part, to the ability to handle *oni*:

Heian period was the apex of the *oni*'s hold on popular imagination as a real entity. Within the Heian period, the era of Engi-Tenryaku (901–947) is

considered a time when onmyōdō prospered and produced excellent practitioners of its tradition. Official practitioners of onmyōdō, which included Abe no Seimei (921?–1005), were the employees of a government ministry that observed and examined astronomy, astrology and divination, and the current almanac. [...] It was believed, in this period, that the practitioners of onmyōdō could use magic, and that some could see, and even create oni. Onmyōji or yin-yang diviners used their magic at the request of their royal and aristocratic patrons and not infrequently against their patrons' political enemies. Importantly, Tanaka Takako surmises that the shikigami that were left underneath the bridge—not just any bridge but Modoribashi Bridge in the capital—by practitioners of onmyōdo such as Abe no Seimei, became various oni who stroll on certain nights in the capital (Tanaka, *Hyakki yagyo no mieru toshi* 141).<sup>114</sup>

The fictional Abe no Seimei acquired the reputation for a multitude of extraordinary characteristics and abilities. He was believed to be the son of a *kitsune* (fox), which characterized him as a changeling, or a shape-shifter (*kasei* 化生).<sup>115</sup> One episode from the *Konjaku monogatari shū* narrates the instance when Seimei's ability to see *oni* is revealed: as a young man, Seimei was in the service of Kamo no Tadayuki (himself a prominent *onmyōji*). Tadayuki was asleep in his carriage while Seimei was walking behind. When by chance he glanced to the front of the carriage, he saw *oni*<sup>116</sup> and woke up Tadayuki. Tadayuki used magic (*sube* 術) to make himself and the others invisible, thereby avoiding the danger of the demons. Thereafter, having recognized the young Seimei's ability, Tadayuki taught Seimei

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<sup>114</sup> Noriko Reider. "Onmyōji Sex, Pathos, and Grotesquery in Yumemakura Bakus Oni." *Asian Folklore Studies* 66, no. 1/2 (2007): 109.

<sup>115</sup> Shimura ed. *Ibō*, 53-53

<sup>116</sup> In the original text "*oni*" is in the plural, so what Seimei saw may have been "the night procession of one-hundred *oni*," (百鬼夜行), which would deem his ability all the more remarkable.

the art of *onmyōdō*, whereupon Seimei became a renowned *onmyōji*. This account is, at least, inspired by historical circumstances, as the relationship between Seimei and Tadayuki is very much a historical one. Seimei, in fact, learned astronomy from Tadayuki and his son Yasunori. Kamo no Yasunori taught Seimei astronomy, and his own son Mitsuyoshi the calendar. Until then the Kamo family had monopolized *onmyōdō* activities at court, and since then Abe house took over astronomy while the Kamo house retained prominence in calendrical activities. Thereafter the two lineages developed in these two directions.<sup>117</sup>

There are other literary accounts of Seimei that put him on an even keel with or superior to Buddhist practitioners. Seimei is depicted doing ascetic practices with, or, on the contrary, outwitting famous ascetics. In one account, for example, he saves the life of the Emperor Kazan (984-986) by being able to look into the emperor's previous lives.<sup>118</sup> A more direct traditional association with the *Kanawa* narrative and *Hashihime* legends is Seimei's appearance in the stories from *Yashirobon* where he fights demons or prescribes remedies for their malign influences.

Bringing the threads from historical and fictional narratives presented above together, there are several points we can confirm about Abe no Seimei that are significant for *Kanawa*: he was seen as an effective ritual practitioner; his practice seems to have been seen as simultaneously magico-religious and technical in character; and he was seen as having a

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<sup>117</sup> Shimura ed, *Ibō*, 53-4.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-60.

long-established association with demons and the demonic – fighting them, being able to create them, or even being one himself. Recognizing this background, when we consider his confrontation with the *Kanawa* woman, we can interpret Seimei's presence in the *nochiba* (second act) in multiple ways. In any case, he is clearly invoked to maintain the balance with the first act (*maeba*) and forces established therein, whether by that we mean the demonic *Kanawa* woman, or the Kibune dieties working through her.

### **Kanawa: Demonic Wife**

The role of the play's *shite* as a figure (and figuration) at the intersection of different religious ritual activities can help illuminate how a number of tensions are enacted in the Noh play. Multiple ritual structures are rehearsed through this play, which posit the *shite* both as a ritualist and the object of ritual. I suggest that the interweaving and confronting distinct ritual systems is eventually harmonizing and integrating them. This is the process of ritualization that borrows or co-opts already existing ritual structures and reconfigures them to achieve alternative outcome(s). Normally this ritual would be straightforward in its intention, and would aim for a successful outcome. That it does not, I argue, is a sign of resistance. This complexity in the play is revealed through extracting key moments in the play and re-explaining the familiar rituals (Kibune pilgrimage, delivery of the oracle, demonic transformation, *onmyōdō* exorcism) in the new context of alternative re-associations of these motifs, leaning on the narrative, performative, and religious traditions underpinning *Kanawa*.

That is, we must examine key points in the play, their symbolism, significance, structural ordering, the internal context they create, and the positionality of the protagonists within it, and through that, demonstrate the work accomplished by the process of ritualization strategy and ritual dialectic.

The play opens with the attendant of Kibune shrine waiting for a woman about whom he had an eerie prophetic dream, and who finally arrives at the Hour of the Ox. The time of her arrival is significant; this hour is deemed magically potent, and there were midnight worships associated with certain shrines, where a person could perform a ritual to cast a curse on someone.<sup>119</sup> This sets the stage for the arrival of the *shite* and already establishes that the setting of this play extends to the invisible world.

The *shite* enters the stage lamenting her husband's infidelity, whereby the audience is already alerted that her state of mind is compromised. Visually, this is fortified by the *shite* wearing a *deigan* (泥眼)<sup>120</sup> mask (Figure 2), a type of a woman mask (*onnamen* 女面) used to indicate the character wearing it is not an ordinary human being, and in this case can be

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<sup>119</sup> Kondo Yoshihiro. *Nihon no oni: nihon bunka tankyū no shikaku* (Jūhan. Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 42), 209-222.

<sup>120</sup> *Deigan* is named for the application of gold paint “kundeī” to the eyes. It is also translated as “gilt eyes.” Gold is used both for the eyes and the teeth, to depict an otherworldly being and underline she is not an ordinary woman. Michishige Udaka notes that “*deigan*’s challenges for the maskmaker include painting her disheveled hair, fashioning the mouth yearning to speak, and rendering the pitiful look in her eyes,” adding that *deigan* is a mask of “noble character, imbued with a spectral aura.” (Udaka 2010: p. 42). This way the mask evokes in the viewer a feeling of unease and fear mixed with empathy and compassion.

taken to mean that some kind of transformation is already taking place within her.<sup>121</sup> The

shite proceeds to narrate a *michiyuki* (道行), “travel sequence”, which is filled with places of significance foreshadowing this *shite*’s status:

通ひ馴れたる道の末通ひ馴れたる道の末夜も糺のかはらぬは。思ひに  
沈むみぞろいけ。生けるかひなきうき身の消えんほどとや草深き市原  
野辺の露分けて。月遅き夜の鞍馬川。橋を過ぐれば程もなく。貴船の  
宮に着きにけり。／＼。<sup>122</sup>

*Kayoi naretaru michi no sue kayoi naretaru michi no sue yoru mo tadasu no  
kawaranu wa omohi ni shizumu mizoro ike. Ikeru kahinaki ukimi no kien hodo  
to ya kusa fukaki ichiware nobe no tsuyu wakete tsuki osoki yo no kurama  
gawa hashi wo sugureba hodo mo naku. Kibune no miya ni tsuki ni keru.  
Kibune no miya ni tsuki ni keru.*

At the end of the path I often tread, at the end of the path I often tread, lie the  
Tadasu river-banks, true and unchanging even at night; (sank) deep in thought  
(I pass by) the Mizoro pond. With no purpose in life till the time I fade, I wipe  
off the dew from the tall grass of the Ichiware plane and having crossed the  
bridge over Kurama river in the darkness of the belated moon, in no time I  
have arrived at the Kibune shrine. I have arrived at the Kibune shrine.

The primary function of the *michiyuki* in a Noh play is to depict a character’s  
journey, which is achieved through a narrative description in the form of a monologue on the  
part of the actor. This monologue typically presents places known to the audience, thereby  
placing the narrative in a familiar and relatable geographical, historical, and cultural  
framework. However, the *michiyuki* also provides a technique to communicate other levels of  
meaning significant to the play. It can display evocative language and poetic devices to

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<sup>121</sup> Shimazaki Chifumi, ed. *Troubled Souls: From Japanese Noh Plays of the Fourth Group*. Cornell East Asia Series, no. 95. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1998., p. 11.

<sup>122</sup> Kanawa. Sanari, Kentarō, ed. *Yōyoku taikan*, vol. 1. Tokyo, Meiji Shoin, 1931., p. 706.

achieve aesthetic effect, and it can subtly give clues to some truth revealed later in the play.

*Kanawa's michiyuki* functions on all these levels. It is saturated with subtle clues, evocative poetic language, and builds a spatial frame of reference for both the medieval and the contemporary audiences.

The woman follows her oft-trod path, as unchanging as the geography that surrounds her, starting with the river banks at Tadasu. This marks her as steadfast and “true” (糾す/正す) of heart, but also shows how, fettered by the chains of her attachment, she treads the same path over and over again, just as deluded beings are caught in the endless repetition of rebirths. The Tadasu river-banks (糾河原 *Tadasukawara*), as the banks at the confluence of the Kamo and Takano rivers are known, is a famed religious locale. The banks lead to a thick grove, known as Tadasumori (糾森), which has since at least the Heian period (794 - 1185) been known a site of religious ascetic practice,<sup>123</sup> and there is even a legend of the priest Gyōki 行基 (668-794) having an encounter with Maitreya (弥勒菩薩 *Miroku bosatsu*) there.<sup>124</sup> At the same, the Tadasumori is situated on the grounds of the Simogamo (下賀茂) shrine, a part of the Kamo Shirine (賀茂神社) complex, which marks it as a sacred kami site. Therefore, this geographical setup places the narrative within the *shinbutsu* framework, along with symbolically foreshadowing the split within the *shite's* interiority.

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<sup>123</sup> Rekishi jinmei taikai

<sup>124</sup> Hirai, “Kanawakō,” 26.



Continuing the *michiyuki*, the woman's journey to Kibune shrine leads her through more significant locales. Sank deep in her thoughts she moves by the Mizoro pond and Ichiwara plain, scenery that recalls for the audience a legendary encounter between the aforementioned hero Minamoto no Yorimitsu (源頼光) and the fierce demon Madōmaru (鬼同丸), which in turn carries the indirect connection with another famous demon, Shutendōji (酒吞童子), with whom both of the aforementioned characters are elsewhere associated.<sup>125</sup> This reference emphasizes the danger of the path the woman is taking, both physically and mentally, and foreshadows the presence of demonic forces to appear later on the stage.

The locales named in the *michiyuki* had particular meanings for the residents of the capital on which the playwright and the performers could capitalize when staging the narrative. Taking into account the topography and the sites we can reconstruct from the woman's monologue, there are connections established with folk performance (芸能), Noh tradition, and broader medieval literary framework.<sup>126</sup>

Being both a famous pilgrimage site as well as an eerie locale, Kibune shrine and its surroundings are appropriate setting for the woman's nightly visits and their horrific

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<sup>125</sup> The encounter with Madōmaru (鬼同丸) is a well-known example of Yorimitsu's strength and resourcefulness. After catching and chaining the demon, Yorimitsu retires to his bedchamber. Madōmaru, however manages to free himself from the shackles, and peeks into Yorimitsu's room angrily. Realizing what had happened, Yorimitsu announces aloud going for a pilgrimage the following day, upon which Madōmaru decides to ambush the samurai at Ichiwara and take his vengeance. The story ends with Yorimitsu being victorious. Reider 2010: 34-5; Tachibana et. al. 1977: p. 409-13.

<sup>126</sup> Hirai, "Kanawakō," 25-7.

outcome. The reason why Kibune shrine is a locale with this reputation relies every bit as much on its surrounding as it does on its religious and ritual associations. The stature and significance of Kibune shrine is confirmed by the fact of its inclusion in the so-called *nijūnisha* (二十二社), the twenty-two shrines that were the object of imperial support since the first part of the Heian period, and thus “became major symbols of the cultic system of the imperial state.”<sup>127</sup> Kibune consists of the main shrine and a rear shrine. The location of the buildings is in the forest at the foot of the Mt. Kurama, situated along the upper stream of the Kibune river. Due to these surroundings, the area is frequently shrouded in thick fog, which gives the locale its mysterious outlook.

The tutelary deity, Kibune myōjin (貴船明神), was recognized early in the Heian period, in the *Engishiki jinmyōchō* (延喜式神名帳) as a deity to pray for rain so it was strongly associated with water, both in terms of providing rain and protecting from flood. In the Kōnin 弘仁 era (810 - 824) the deity was promoted to the rank of a “great kami” (大神 *ōkami*).<sup>128</sup> Kondō Yoshihiro, however, brings to light an etymological issue, arguing that *ōkami*, in this case, does not designate a “great kami,” but is a corruption of the term *okami* (尾神) meaning “kami with a tail.” If this is true, given this kami’s relationship with water, water-source, and rain-making, that would also associate this kami with dragons and serpents.

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<sup>127</sup> John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, eds. *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000), 70-1.

<sup>128</sup> Kondo, *Nihon No Oni*, 209.

With the origins of the deity associated with water affirmed, this aspect was disseminated through different parts and branch shrines throughout the Heian period. However, as the belief spread in this way amongst the populace, the kami took on an increasingly horrific form. This process continued until, Kondō suggests, the belief in the kami and its monstrous aspect have separated.<sup>129</sup> I would here briefly note that association between the Kibune deity and water illuminates the significance of water/river in the transformation of the *Kanawa* woman into *oni*, which will be discussed in more detail below.

One other, perhaps more commonly known, aspect of the Kibune deity, that of the protector of conjugal love, is intimately, and even more straightforwardly related to the narrative of *Kanawa*. This is the aspect that the deity had taken on later in its cultic development, but is one that had amongst the wider populace gradually overshadowed its original role as rain-bestowing deity.<sup>130</sup> This association of the Kibune deity appears elsewhere in Noh; for example, in the earlier discussed play *Hanjo*, there is a passage where the lovelorn dancer Hanago prays to the Kibune deity to be reunited with her beloved. Therefore, Kibune as a symbol of marital bliss and devotion is established both in religious practice and as a literary trope by the time *Kanawa* came about.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 218-222.

<sup>130</sup> Wakita Haruko, *Nihon Chūsei Joseishi No Kenkyū: Seibetsu Yakuwari Buntan to Bosei, Kasei, Seiai* (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1992), 30-1.

Several points in the *michiyuki* monologue imply spatial and temporal (and interdimensional) boundary crossing. From the urban, social space of the capital, the *shite* goes to Kibune, passing the wild and unrestrained scenery of Mizoro Pond, and Tadasu Grove, towards Kurama Mountain, leaving the urban, ordered, safe, but confining space behind. Furthermore, as noted above, the area has narrative and literary links with some of the most powerful demonic figures in the tradition, as well as a reputation as powerful sacred ground where ascetics practice on the Buddhist Path. Apart from boundary crossing, there is an additional dimension of seclusion, and moving farther away from the space of safety. This is not an easy path to undertake, and it is especially difficult for a woman from the capital. And in this case, there are many reasons why this particular woman is especially vulnerable; she is betrayed, distressed, ashamed, and far from the capital, entering a space both sacred and demonic. At the same time, she is traversing this space repeatedly and with ease, suggesting that, in contrast with her vulnerability, there is a source of some kind of strength or power, from within or without, that aids her on her way. This needs to be considered when looking into the possession moment. It is a significant point of questioning whether her subsequent demonic transformation is a matter of choice or happenstance, or something else altogether.

While *michiyuki* is a typical element in a Noh play, it is less typical (although not unheard of) that it is undertaken by the *shite*, so we might say there is a structural inversion in

*Kanawa* from the outset. The very typical construct of a Noh play involves a male religious figure traveling to a significant locale, following an itinerary (*michiyuki*) filled with poetic and semantic significance. That we find a *shite* who is also a woman performing the *michiyuki*, which allows for a number of interpretations: 1) she is mobile, and assumes agency, which has implications for her role later as the ritualist, 2) as such, she has a different kind of relationship with her *waki*. Her trajectory as she walks down the *hashigakari*<sup>131</sup> takes her from everyday life space to an extra-ordinary space. And since she makes this journey on a daily basis, that means that she is crossing the boundary between the urban/domestic space and the “other” space on a daily basis as well. In sum, this *michiyuki* and the actual physical geographical transition it depicts also designates the transition from the visible to the invisible world, as well as symbolizes the emotional transition of the *shite*’s inner feelings, foreshadowing the point of disintegration.

Through her *michiyuki* and the interplay with her surroundings the *shite* is forged as an ambivalent figure, and this ambivalence affords her the possibility to be cast as ritualist and object of ritual. Her character is constructed in a way that it bifurcates along a number of opposing poles. She is a woman, traveling on her own, displaying freedom of movement and agency. At the same time, she is a woman of the capital – the Center, wife of a nobleman, a being of stability and fixity, and not, for example, a female performer, or a ghost, or some

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<sup>131</sup> Bridgeway on the Noh stage

other creature of the margin. While she is the wife of nobleman, her marriage has dissolved, as she has been rejected, replaced, and so prompted away from stability and fixity, and pushed closer to the margin. This ambiguity of her character will continue to develop throughout the play.

Already with her first monologue the woman seems to be positioned as a potential destabilizing force and a threat to order, both social and religious: by expressing anguish over her marital situation, she is rebelling against the role she is expected to play (i.e. be resigned to her fate), while from the Buddhist point of view she clearly clings strongly to earthly attachments. The text hints at this as by the time she arrives “the moon is late” and she is in “darkness”:

月遅き夜の鞍馬川橋を過ぐれば <sup>132</sup>

*Tsuki osoki yoru no kurama gawa hashi wo sugureba*

(I crossed) the bridge of Kurama river in the darkness of the belated moon.

and she speaks to the audience of how consumed she is with her love:

日も數添ひて戀衣 <sup>133</sup>

*Hi mo kazu sohite koigoromo*

Just like the days pile up, my love envelops me like a robe more and more with each (day) that passes.

At the same time, she informs the audience that her husband is “a fickle man (whose heart is) drawn two-ways” (*futamichi kakuru adahito* 二道かくるあだ人 <sup>134</sup>), whereas she is

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<sup>132</sup> Kanawa. Sanari, ed. *Yōyoku taikan*, 706.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 705.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

the one who treads the “well-known path” (*kayoi naretaru michi* 通ひ馴れたる道). Thus, her confession constructs the framework in which audience is prepared that disruption of order comes from the husband’s side. The path she treads is the familiar, set, orderly “well-known” (通ひ馴れたる), whereas the husband disrupts this orderliness by splitting the “well-known” path in two. Given that “path” (also) denotes the Buddhist path, it is clear that both social and religious order are disrupted, and the very fabric of human existence is endangered.

*Kanawa* presents a peculiar ritual interplay. There are two major rituals taking place on the stage, one in the *maeba*, the first act, the other in *nochiba*, the second. The first is the ritual of “invited” possession/transformation. This occurs when the shite is notified of the message from the “buddhas and kami” (*butsujin* 仏神) and given instructions for the transformation. A significant difference between this most immediate source of the play and the play itself is the difference in the message given by the deities of the Kibune shrine.

Consider this section from the *Yashirobon*:

明神あわれと思しけん、誠に申す所不便なり、実に鬼になりたくば、姿を改めて、宇治の河瀬に行きて三七日浸れと示現あり。女房悦びて都に帰り、人なき所にたて籠りて、長なる髪をば五つに分け、五つの角にぞ造りける。顔には朱を指し、身には丹を塗、鉄輪を戴きて、三つの足には松を燃し、続松を綜て、両方に火をつけて、口にくはへつく／夜更け人定りて後、大和大路へ走り出で、南を指して行きければ、頭より五つの火燃え上り、屑太く鉄漿にて、面赤く身も赤ければ、さながら鬼形に異ならず<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Sato, *Yashiro-bon*, 543.

*Myōjin aware to ya omoshiken, makoto ni mōsu tokoro fuben nari, jitsu ni oni ni naritakuba, sugata wo aratamete, uji no kawase ni yukite minanoka hitare to jigen ari. Nyūbō yorokobite miyako ni kaeri, hito naki tokoro ni tate komorite, naganaru kami wo ba itsutsu ni wake, itsutsu no kaku ni zo tsukurikeru. Kao ni wa ake wo sashi mi ni wa ni wo nuri, kanawa wo itadakite, mitsu no ashi ni wa matsu wo moyashi, zokumatsu wo hete, ryōhō hi wo tsukete, kuchi ni kuwahe tusuku yofuke hito sadamarite ato, yamatoōji he hashiriidete, minami wo sashite yukikereba, atama yori itsutsu no hi moeagari, kuzu futoku hagoro nite, omoakaku mi mo akakereba, sanagara onikata ni kotonarazu.*

The Deity took pity on her and said: “What you say is truly distressing; if you really want to become an oni, change your appearance, and submerge in the rapids of Uji river for 21 days.” The wife, rejoicing, returned to the capital, withdrew to a secluded place, divided her long hair in five parts, and fashioned them into five horns. She painted her face red and rubbed her body with vermillion, she placed an iron trivet on her head, fastened lit branches to its legs, lit up a torch on both sides and placed it in her mouth. Late at night, after people settled in, she ran down the Yamato road, and while going southwards, with five flames burning on her head, with blackened teeth and red face and body, she truly could not be told apart from a demon.

The message received by the woman centers on her submerging in the waters of the Uji River in order to become an *oni*. As discussed earlier, the deity of the Kibune shrine has strong associations with water, and rivers, and may have originally been a serpent or a dragon deity, so, that it draws its power from water does not come as a surprise. At the same time, it seems curious that a demon-transforming rite would be performed in a manner that is typically associated with purification, hence, restoration of order. From the ritual point of view, transformation into a demon by virtue of bathing in the river in *Yashirobon* is clearly an



inversion/reinterpretation of the purification ritual, which instead of purification leads to transgression.

Now consider the same episode from *Kanawa*:

アイ「いかに申すべき事の候あれには都より丑の刻参り召さるるおん方にてわたり候ふな今夜おおん身の上を御夢想に蒙りて候 おん申しあることははや叶ひて候今夜より後はおん参りあるまじく候その子細は鬼になりたきとのおん願にて候ふほどに我が家へおん帰りあつて身には赤き衣を裁ち着 顔には丹を塗り髪には鉄輪を戴き三つの足に火を灯し怒る心を持つならばたちまち鬼神とおんなりあらうずるとのおん告にて候急ぎおん帰りあつて告の如く召され候へなんぼう奇特なる御告にて御座候ふぞ。

シテ「これは思ひもよらぬ仰せにて候わらはがことにてはあるまじく候さだめて人違ひにておん入り候ふべし。

アイ「いやいやしかとあらたなるご夢想にて候ふほどにおん身の上にて候ふぞか様に申す内に何とやらん恐ろしく見え給ひて候 急ぎおん帰り候へ<sup>136</sup>

*Ai: ika ni mōsu beki koto no sōrō are ni wa miyako yori ushi no koku mairi mesaruru on kata nite watari sorofu na. Konya onmi no ue wo gomusō ni kōmurite sōrō. On mōshi aru koto wa haya kanahite sōrō. Konya yori nochi wa on mairi arumajiku sōrō. Sono shisai wa oni ni nari taki to no on negahi nite sorofu hodoni waga ya he onkaeri astute mi ni wa aki kinu wo tachiki atama ni wa ni wo nuri kami ni wa kanawa wo itadaki mitsu no ashi ni hi wo tomoshi ikaru kokoro wo motsu naraba tachimachi kijin to onnari arauzuru to no ontsuge nite sōrō isogi onkaeri astute tsuge no gotoku mesare sōrohe nanbō kidoku naru ontsuge nite goza sōrofu zo.*

*Shite: kore wa omohi mo yo ranu ōse nite sōrō warawa ga koto nite wa arumajiku sōrō sadamete hito chigahi nite oniri sōrofu beshi.*

*Ai: Iyaiya shika to aratanaru gomusō nite sōrō hodo ni onmi no ue nite sōrofu zo kayōni mōsu uchi ni nani to yaran osoroshiku mietamahite sōrō isogi onkaeri sorōohe*

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<sup>136</sup> *Kanawa*. Sanari, *Yōkyoku Taikan*, 706 – 7.

Ai: Excuse me, there is something I need to tell you. Are you not (you must be) the lady from the capital who was coming here to worship? Tonight I had a prophetic dream about you: the thing you want to ask for has already been granted. After tonight you shouldn't come to worship any more. The details are as follows: since you asked to become a demon, go back home, tailor a red robe and put it on, paint your face with vermillion, put an iron trivet on your head, set its three legs on fire, and if you hold anger in your heart you will instantly become a demonic deity, according to the message. Hurry back and do as the message says. What a strange message indeed!

Shite: This is an unthinkable message. (Surely) It cannot be about me; the chosen person must be someone else (about to come)!

Ai: No, no; since this is a very clear vision, it definitely is your ladyship! Even as I say this, you somehow look terrifying. Please, hurry back!

Through rearranging the dialogue, the Noh *Kanawa* changes both the source and content of the message. Nagao suggests that the *Yashirobon* woman willfully reinterprets deity's message that really was centered on purification (emphasizing soaking in the river water), without providing details of how exactly to change her appearance (姿を改め), whereas in the play *Kanawa* the entirety of the command that she subsequently faithfully follows comes from the deities. Looking at the *Yashirobon* version, Nagao surmises that the woman went outside of the restriction of the deity's command, and also, since her actions are deliberate and sober, she cannot be considered *kurui* (here, meaning mad).<sup>137</sup> In the play, however, the deity itself issues the command for the revenge on the husband, and the content of the message is very different. The command to bathe in the river from *Yashirobon* is replaced in the play by an injunction to "hold anger in her heart" (怒る心を持つ). The implication of

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<sup>137</sup> Nagao, "Kanawakō," 26.

this is that only when she gets possessed (holds anger in her heart) does she acquire the desire to proceed to punish the husband – the “angry heart” (怒る心), then, functions as *kamigakari* (神懸かり), possession by a deity.

That also puts in question the level of the woman’s personal willful involvement in this event in the play. Unlike *Yashirobon* version, we never see her make an explicit plea to become an *oni*, and there is a sense that she is a tool of a higher power, the nature of which is also never entirely clarified. In fact, the message given by the shrine attendant is said to have arrived from the “buddhas and kami” (*butsujin* 仏神). At the shrine the attendant conveys to the woman that a divine injunction was put forth for her to perform a ritual, in which she is explicitly instructed how to manipulate her own body, and with “anger in her heart” (怒る心を持つならば) she will become an *oni*. The divine message leaves the woman puzzled and in disbelief. The *Yashirobon* message focuses on bathing in the river, *Kanawa* on anger in her heart; where the *Yashirobon* wife is sufficiently angry from the outset, as we watch her furiously proclaim: I will kill the hateful woman! (*netamushito omoitsuru onna torikorosan* 妬しと思ひつる女取殺さん),<sup>138</sup> the *Kanawa* woman starts off as more despondent and melancholy than angry, as seen from her elegant poetic lamentations in the first act. It is when she receives the command of the deity that she reaches the “anger in her heart,” required for the demonic transformation. Her anger is actuated and necessary.

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<sup>138</sup> Sato, *Yashiro-bon*, 543.

On one level we can assume that the woman's anger is a breach of the normative behavior, and transgressing the boundary of her proscribed gender role. Casting her as a demon would then be a metaphorical representation of the threat to the social order she poses through her transgressive behavior. While this interpretation is certainly valid, there is another deeper level where forces operate quite apart from human will, or even ability to comprehend. A curious part of the bizarre ritual by which the woman is transformed, where the marker of her domesticity (the trivet) morphs into the marker of demonic identity, seems to embody a fear much deeper than the potential destabilization of gender roles – the primal fear of annihilating the sacred safety of the home. Woman, as a protector of this (domestic) space, is susceptible to such attack, and this woman whose domestic space is already compromised by the unfaithful husband, is particularly vulnerable. So, as a ritualist she has a specific religious purpose; her action goes beyond that of the jealous wife, and the “anger in her heart” more than just jealousy. It is a possession, a *kamigakari*, that transforms her into a deity of the hearth in its fierce form.

In the *nochiba*, the second act, the husband, who is having his own share of eerie dreams seeks the help of the renowned *onmyōji*, yin-yang diviner, Abe no Seimei (安倍晴明), who is the *waki* of the play, reinforcing the shift of the conflict from social (wife/husband) to metaphysical (god /demon). Initially reluctant, he declares that the woman has “prayed numerous times to the *butsujin*,” and the husband is irrevocably doomed,

かの者仏神に祈るその数積もつておん命 も今夜に極まりて候ふ程にそれがしが調法には叶ひがたく候。<sup>139</sup>

*Kano mono butsujin ni inoru kazu tsumotsute on inochi mo konya ni  
kiwamarite sōrofu hodo ni soregashi ga chōbō ni wa kanahi gataku sōrō*  
Your wife has been praying to the buddhas and the kami, and with those  
prayers having accumulated, your life is bound to end tonight, so it is too  
difficult for my powers.

but upon the husband's pleas he decides to intervene in the only possible way, by deceiving  
fate, and one wonders whether he is, then, also not deceiving the *butsujin* themselves, by  
whose divine will the entire story unfolds. Also, he is not actually breaking the curse, he is  
merely transferring it to the effigies:

いで／＼転じ変へ申さんと 茅の人形を人尺に作り夫婦の名字を内に籠  
め三重の高棚五色の幣おのおの供物を調へて肝胆を砕き祈りけり<sup>140</sup>  
*Ideide tenjikahe mōsan to chi no hitogata wo ninshaku ni tsukuri fūfu no myōji  
wo uchi ni kome sanjū no takadama goshiki no hei onono gumotsu wo  
totonohete kantan wo kudaki inorikeri*

To perform the transfer, I made two life-size human dolls, I inserted the names  
of the couple in them, I arranged the five-colored hei and all manner of  
offerings in the three-tiered stall, and I prayed earnestly.

Seimei proceeds to invoke a host of kami, yin/yang deities, buddhas and  
bodhisattvas. He calls upon the cosmogonic myth of Izanami and Izanagi, the deities who  
created the Japanese isles through their conjugal coupling, and who established the sanctity of  
marital relations, solidifying the continuity of the “way” of yin and yang (*inyō no michi  
nagaku tsutawaru* 陰陽の道永く傳はる).<sup>141</sup> Appealing to the forces of creating and

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<sup>139</sup> Kanawa. Sanari, *Yōkyoku Taikan*, 709.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 710.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

maintaining the cosmos Izanami/Izanagi and yin/yang, Seimei aims to restore the chaos created by the preceding events of the play.

The *nohijite*<sup>142</sup> makes her appearance, fully transformed, as indicated by the mask she now wears (Figure 2).<sup>143</sup> Her reemergence is in the text accompanied by thunder and rain (just as was her disappearance from the first act). This is an effect that is meant to amplify the horror of the demonic haunting on the stage, but there is a room to ascribe an additional meaning to it. If we follow the logic of the earlier discussion about the overlaps between the demonic transformation and possession by the angry form of the Kibune deity, the image of ample rain and thunder is in line with the associations of the kami with water and rain specifically. However, the complication does not end here, either. Note the shite's monologue from the second act, right before she is about to attack the effigies of her husband and his new wife that Seimei planted to trick her:

それ春の花は斜脚の暖風に開けて同じく暮春の風に散り月は東山より  
出でて早く西嶺に隠れぬ世情の無常かくのごとし因果は車輪の廻るが  
ごとくわれに憂かりし人びとにたちまち報ひを見すべきなり<sup>144</sup>

*Sore haru no hana wa shagyaku no danbū ni hirakete onajiku boshun no kaze  
ni chiri tsuki wa tōzan yori idete hayaku seirei ni kakurenu sejō no mujō kaku*

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<sup>142</sup> Shite of the *nochi-ba*, the second act.

<sup>143</sup> The *nohijite* of *Kanawa* will most typically wear *Hashihime* mask, that was designed to specifically depict the demon-woman of the *Hashihime* legend, although it was not necessarily made for the play *Kanawa*. It is possible that the mask was created for an earlier play, no longer performed, named *Hashihime*. This mask looks more like a logical continuation of *Deigan* mask from the first act, with a woman's face distorted by anger and torment, and painted locks of disheveled hair to indicate her *kurui*. The demon horns, as noted earlier, are provided by the inverted iron tripod, and are not a part of the mask itself. Sanari 1939: 711; Shimazaki 1998: 11.

<sup>144</sup> *Kanawa*. Sanari, *Yōkyoku Taikan*, 711.

*no gotoshi inga wa sharin no meguru ga gotoku ware ni ukarishi hitobito ni  
tachimachi mukuhi wo misu beki nari*

In the warm breeze of early spring that slants the raindrops` path these spring flowers open, and in the same vein they scatter in the late spring wind. The moon rises from the Eastern mountains and quickly sets behind the Western peaks. This world is likewise impermanent. The wheel of cause and effect likewise turns, and those who caused me distress should immediately be served their retribution.

The *shite* is on the one hand a demon - *oni*; terrifying, destructive, vengeful and murderous, a jealous woman driven unnaturally mad by the infidelity of her husband. However, as such she also represents a horrific/angry aspect of the kami that protects the concept of conjugal relationship, which is not only significant for this particular woman`s marriage, or even just marriage in general, but lies at the very basis of the cosmogonic creation. Additionally, the woman is the one with the deep understanding of the Buddha`s Law. She reminds the audience of the truth of impermanence and she serves retribution. If we may recall, she is the one who walks the well-known path, or rather, the well-known Path. At the end of the ritual/play, the demon-woman/kami/enlightened being leaves, as Seimei`s intervention was momentarily successful, but not without assurance that she would be back:

時節を待つべしやまづこのたびは帰るべし <sup>145</sup>

*Jisetsu wo matsu beshi ya mazu kono tabi wa kaeru beshi*

I should wait for another opportunity; I should first go back (there) for now.

In other words, the ritual of the restoration of chaos to cosmos is interrupted, with a promise that the cycle is likely to be repeated. The process is momentarily suspended but not

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<sup>145</sup> Kanawa. Sanari, *Yōyoku taikan*, 1931.

eliminated. As we can see, the latter ritual, the post-transformation ritual, is the remedial ritual by the *onmyōji* Abe no Seimei, that functions as an exorcism, but vectors of ritual objectives of the two key rituals in the play are curiously intertwined. These two intertwining rituals have the same person at the center – in one case as the ritualist, in the other as the object.

The play *Kanawa* is clearly concerned with the blurring of the boundaries between good and evil, Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious codes, ritualist and object of ritual, etc. Through the network of dreams and visions and the series of rituals that open the channels of direct communication between this world and the other, the play establishes that the actual spaces in which the drama takes place – Kibune shrine and Abe no Seimei's residence - are gateways to a liminal, enchanted realm, and that this realm, for better or worse, is accessible. Eventually, the audience witnesses the drama being resolved only to realize that it really was not, as the ambiguous demonic force will be back, and the cycle will keep repeating itself.

### **Conclusion**

*Kanawa* deals with eruption of latent socio-religious instabilities embodied as *oni*, and an attempt to resolve them, mediated by an “official” (mainstream) religious practitioner(s), with an ambiguous outcome. The ambiguity of this outcome is further complicated by blurring the boundary between the object of ritual and a ritualist, and having multiple rituals taking place. Examining the status of the protagonist as *oni* “reveals a problematic and unstable aspect of the human psyche and of society in general, not



exclusively endemic to Japanese society.”<sup>146</sup> For the medieval Japanese, *oni* in Noh not only revealed but provided a way to negotiate the “unstable aspects” that permeated their everyday reality and to cope with these destabilizing forces that threatened the established structures. Having these instabilities play out on the stage embodied as *oni*, provided for facing, identifying and challenging them, with any real threat safely enclosed within in the performance and text, which functioned as a controlled environment. At the same time, not only were the “instabilities” being interrogated and challenged, but the structures themselves as well. By having the “demonic” protagonist simultaneously ambiguously aligned with both malevolent forces and enlightened regimen, medieval Noh plays reflected and utilized the overlapping religious codes to highlight the open-endedness that characterized the medieval Japanese worldview.

Furthermore, by blurring the boundaries between the religious ritualist and the object of the ritual, Noh provided the possibility for the competing rituals (or ritual systems) to merge together in a sort of ritual dialectic. The network of multiple layers of identity ascribed to the protagonist, allows for such ritual dialectic to be sustainable, as at any given time the ritual contains elements of diverse overlapping religious and ritual codes, and they simultaneously work together and against one another, so that the ritual is at the same time both success and failure. Exploring the connection between these identities and the ritual

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<sup>146</sup> Reider, *Demon Lore*, xv.

codes they are associated with reveals that they are related in such a way that the dichotomy is both negated and reproduced, while being constantly inverted.

But what is also being blurred is the objective and the result of the ritual, by reinterpreting the already existing ritual structures, questioning and reordering them. Noh as a performative, ritual and literary text provided mechanisms that allow for such layering.

### Chapter 3: *Dōjōji*

*Dōjōji* (道成寺), one the best-known and popular plays in the Noh repertoire today, has drawn much scholarly attention.<sup>147</sup> The play and its source material have been studied with particular emphasis on religion, ritual, and performance. Discussions of *Dōjōji* and its sources, many of which will be treated in this chapter, explore issues of Buddhism and salvation, symbolism of the mythological motifs, and gender relations, while examining the complex relationship between the play and its source material. Joining this conversation, this chapter analyzes *Dōjōji* and the ways it relates to its sources by looking at how the character of the play's *shite* is gradually constructed over time through meticulous layering of distinct but related identities. The ritualization process of *Dōjōji* is not strictly confined to the play itself, but begins with early renditions of the background narrative in the form of folk anecdotes, continuing through painted scrolls and related oral performances, culminating in two Noh plays. Uniting the religio-ritual frameworks of Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions by navigating interaction between Buddhist concepts and non-Buddhist mythologies in a dialectical process, *Dōjōji* problematizes the efficacy of the salvific efforts ostensibly at the basis of the tradition, and offers up an alternative rooted in and born out of this interaction.

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<sup>147</sup> Brazell ed. *TJT*, 198-199.

At first glance, *Dōjōji*, a fifteenth-century play of uncertain authorship,<sup>148</sup> appears as a tale of damning and dangerous attachment to earthly passions. The play opens with preparations for the bell-dedication ceremony at Dōjōji temple, where no bell has been in place for centuries. In a mysterious tone, the abbot cautions servants in attendance to make sure no woman approaches the bell “for certain reasons [best known to him]” (*mata saru shisai aru aida* 又さる仔細ある間).<sup>149</sup> However, a *shirabyōshi* dancer appears and manages to persuade the servants to allow her in, under the pretense of having come to perform a dedication dance of her own. Midway through her enticing dance she suddenly leaps into the bell, which then falls down, blazing hot. Having learned what happened, the abbot is now compelled to shed some light on his initial admonition. Long ago, he tells the servants, an inn-keeper’s young daughter became infatuated with a monk who would take lodging at her father’s inn when on regular pilgrimages to Kumano shrine. On one of these occasions, the girl became quite insistent to have the monk take her as his bride, so in an effort to dodge her advances, he promised to come back for her, but took an alternative route on his return instead. Realizing she had been deceived by the monk, the girl transformed herself into a

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<sup>148</sup>In the most recent book-length study on the life and work of Kanze Kojiro Nobumitsu, Beng Choo Lim notes that, although having long been attributed to Nobumitsu (after an early history of association with Zeami and Kanami), *Dōjōji* is currently classified as “author unknown.” Lim, however, surmises that, given inconsistencies in the language, and ‘fragmented narrative,’ the play is likely to have been edited multiple times, with Nobumitsu likely being one of its editors. Lim, Beng Choo. *Another Stage: Kanze Nobumitsu and the Late Muromachi Noh Theater*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ East Asia Program, 2012, 71

<sup>149</sup>*Dōjōji*. Sanari, *Yōyoku taikan*, 1792

furious snake and gave chase. Eventually, she caught up with him at Dōjōji temple, and having found him hiding under the temple bell, she coiled herself around it, whereupon the bell was engulfed in flames, burning the unfortunate monk to death. As the abbot concludes his story, the woman reappears from under the bell, now revealed as a serpent-demon. She is eventually driven away by the monks' ritual and disappears into the river with the final outcome of the abbot's exorcist intervention unclear.<sup>150</sup>

As can be seen even from this brief synopsis, the play weaves a number of enduring religious symbols into a complex interplay, outlining a peculiar ritual juxtaposition, with the *shite* acting first as a female performer-ritualist dancing for the bell dedication, and then as the object of ritual exorcism following her transformation into a serpent-demon. In order to untangle both this tapestry of symbols and the ritual structure they create, a closer look at the play's source material is in order.

### **Origins of *Dōjōji*: The *Kiyohime* Legend and Its Rebirths**

Just as *Kanawa*'s backstory is grounded in the Hashihime legend and its literary reimaginings, *Dōjōji*'s core narrative is based on the so-called Anchin/Kiyohime (安珍・清姫) tradition, a series of tales with powerful religious associations.<sup>151</sup> The Kiyohime story has

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 1788-1804.

<sup>151</sup> This tradition is most often referred to as the Anchin/Kiyohime (安珍・清姫) legend (see *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, *Nihon jinmei daijiten*), Anchin being the personal name of the monk, although the only source that cites his name as such is *Genkō Shakushō*; in other versions of the legend, including the play *Dōjōji*, the monk remains unnamed. The girl's moniker, *Kiyohime*, originates in *Dōjōji engi emaki*, where she is cast as the daughter-in-law of a local man named Kiyotsugu. In the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to the tradition as

been retold and refashioned over time in a number of narrative, performative, and visual media. The earliest recorded sources for the Kiyohime legend come from *setsuwa* collections, the *Dai nihon hokekyō genki* (also known as *Hokke genki*; “Tales of the *Lotus Sutra* Responses of Great Japan”), an eleventh century text authored by the Tendai monk Chingen, and the twelfth century *Konjaku monogatari shū*. A somewhat later account, also in the *setsuwa* fashion, appears in the fourteenth century Buddhist chronicle *Genkō shakushō*, compiled by Rinzai patriarch Kokan Shiren (1278 – 1347). The story was further popularized to wider audiences as the subject of *etoki* performances utilizing painted scrolls based on the tradition, the first of which is *Dōjōji engi emaki*, which served as a template for all subsequent renderings. The *Kiyohime* legend was transposed to the Noh stage in two different plays, an earlier version, *Kanemaki* (鐘巻), and *Dōjōji*.<sup>152</sup> In each case the emphasis and the objective of the tale, the narrative structure, and properties of the characters shift somewhat, complicating both religious and gender-related agendas of these varied “texts.” Playing off and building on each other, these different interpretations, each drawing on its own unique generic properties, contributed to the process of narrative and performative development that resulted in *Dōjōji*.

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Kiyohime, both for the sake of convenience, but also because I feel that choice highlights my own focus on the protagonist.

<sup>152</sup> The two plays are today considered as separate pieces, with *Kanemaki* being recently re-introduced into the regular repertory, but considering that much of the text of the two plays is identical or nearly-identical, scholars such as Beng Choo Lim, and Susan Blakeley Klein have suggested that *Dōjōji* is a later revision of *Kanemaki* rather than a different play. Klein: 1995; Lim: 2012

These literary incarnations of the Kiyohime legend grew out of the folk tradition and collective imagination woven into a Buddhist framework. The plot of both *setsuwa* and *emaki* versions follows a very similar three-part outline:

1) A young monk is on a pilgrimage to Kumano; at the place where he breaks his journey he unwittingly entices a young woman living there; in an effort to escape the woman's advances he leaves with a false promise to come back for her.

2) Realizing she has been duped, the woman catches up to the monk at Dōjōji temple; transformed into a serpent she kills the monk by burning him under the temple bell.

3) Both the woman and the monk appear to one of the elder Dōjōji monks in a dream-like apparition, requesting that the Lotus Sutra be copied; some days after the copying has been performed they reappear to express their gratitude, each having been born into separate Buddhist celestial realm.

The denouement of the shared plot thus reflects the fact that *setsuwa* and *emaki* authors were concerned with situating their narrative within the Lotus Sutra discourse of salvation. *Hokke genki* was devised specifically with the aim of propagating the Lotus Sutra faith, whereas the *Engi emaki* was produced for *etoki* performances, primarily with the intention to contribute to the temple's prosperity, and the Kiyohime legend was chosen as fitting that purpose.

Comparing the *setsuwa* and *emaki* narratives, elements they have in common emerge: a handsome young monk, a young woman/widow, a fearsome serpent, concealment under the bell, the Lotus Sutra memorial service. The similarities and differences in how these elements and tropes are developed within each narrative, how they are combined and re-combined, how they are introduced or omitted, convey something about the mythmaking process that resulted in the Noh *Dōjōji*, and the ritualization process guiding the play.

When it comes to characterization of the two protagonists, the distinctions between the *setsuwa* and *emaki* sources are subtle and restricted to seemingly minor details, but they are revealing when considering the choices later used by the Noh playwright. Below is a parallel comparison of the characterization of the two protagonists. The citation is from

*Hokke genki*:

二人の沙門あり。一人は年若くしてその形端正なり。一人は年老いたり。共に熊野に詣り、牟婁郡に至りて、路の辺の宅に宿しぬ。その宅の主は寡婦なり。<sup>153</sup>

*Futari no shamon ari. Hitori wa toshi wakaku shite sono katachi tansei nari. Hitori wa toshioitari. Tomo ni kumano ni mairi, muro no gun ni itarite, ji no hotori no ie ni yadori shinu. Sono ie no aruji wa yamome nari.*

Two wandering monks were together on a pilgrimage to Kumano. One young and handsome, the other old. Arriving at the district of Muro, they stayed the night at the roadside inn. The inn was run by a widow.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Inoue Mitsusada and Shosuke Osone eds. *Ōjōden, Hokke Genki* (Nihon Shisō Taikēi 7. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 49), 217.

<sup>154</sup> All translations in this chapter are mine.



*Konjaku* and *Genkō* differ only in detail. The monk's name, Anchin, appears only in *Genko*; In *Genkō* the Monk is from Kurama, while in others, without specifying, he is just a monk going on a pilgrimage to Kumano, accompanied by another elderly monk. In all sources the monk is described as being young and good-looking, having a beautiful face, etc. (年若くして形良美麗,<sup>155</sup> 年若くしてその形端正), whereas the woman is only described as a “widow” (寡婦). Considering that the story is told in a Buddhist framework that typically focuses on women being temptresses and drawing men away from the Path with their erotic allure, it is curious that the woman's appearance or attractiveness are not mentioned, while all sources insist on the monk being exceptionally attractive.

By the time the story is translated into the *Dōjōji engi emaki* picture scroll, the monk has changed his place of origin and lost his traveling companion, but retained his good looks, while the young woman has acquired a family (she is the daughter-in-law of a respectable household) rather than just living with a few servants, as was the case in the *setsuwa* versions:

奥州より見目よき僧の浄衣着たるが熊野参詣するありけり。紀伊国室の郡真砂と云所に宿あり。此亭主、清次庄司と申人の姫にて、相随ふ者数在けり。<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Nagano Joichi ed. *Konjaku Monogatari Shū* (Koten Nihon Bungaku Zenshū 10. Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 35), 77.

<sup>156</sup> Tosa Mitsumochi and Shigemi Komatsu. *Kuwanomidera Engi. Dōjōji Engi* (Zoku Nihon Emaki Taisei 13. Tōkyō: Chūō Kōronsha, 57), 63.

*Ōshū yori mime yoki sō no jōe kitaru ga kumano sankei suru arikeri. Kii no kuni Muro no gun manago to iu tokoro ni yado ari. Kono teishu, kiyotsugu no shoji to mōsu hito no yome nite, shitagau mono kazu arikeri.*

From the province of Ōshū, a good-looking man wearing a monk's robe went on a pilgrimage to Kumano. In the district of Muro, province of Kii, he spent the night at a place called Manago. The master of the household, by the name of Kiyotsugu no Shōji, had a (widowed) daughter-in-law and many servants.

With these changes, the details of the story highlighted in the Noh begin to take shape.

In Noh, the young woman is even younger and becomes the innocent daughter of the inn-keeper, whereas the monk is now a yamabushi, which will become significant in the context of the shift of the play's overall religio-ritual framework:

ワキ：昔この所にまなごの莊司という者あり。かの者一人の息女を持つ。又その頃奥より熊野へ年詣でする山伏ありしが、莊司がもとを宿坊と定め、いつもかの所に来たりぬ。<sup>157</sup>

*Waki: mukashi kono tokoro ni manago no shōji to iu mono ari. Kano mono ichi nin no sokujo wo motsu. Mata sono koro oku yori kumano he toshi mōde suru yamabushi no arishi ga, shōji ga moto wo shukubō to sadame, itsumo kano tokoro ni kitarinu.*

Waki: Long ago, in this area there was a man known as Shōji of Manago. He had an only daughter. At the time, there was a yamabushi who would go on pilgrimage to Kumano every year, and after he stayed at Shōji's place on one occasion, he kept coming back ever since.

The yamabushi is young and, presumably, attractive, like the corresponding character in the *setsuwa* and *engi*. The Noh libretto does not dwell on his physical appearance, but since the lore is well-established by the time the story was put on stage, that characteristic is an assumption that audiences presumably brought to a performance.

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<sup>157</sup> *Dōjōji*. Sanari ed, *Yōyoku taikan*, 1799. The waki's monologue narrating the events is identical to *Kanemaki*.

However, not emphasizing the monk's physical attributes, and highlighting, instead, a familiar, friendly figure who had been a part of the young woman's life for years, provides for a new perspective on the established storyline where her gruesome revenge is motivated by sheer lust and anger. Identifying this shift already in *Dōjōji engi emaki* and the way it is treated visually, Virginia Skord Waters notes that positioning the protagonists in the paintings in a certain way and providing additional conventional visual clues, the elements otherwise absent from the written text come to the fore, and refigure the familiar narrative, adding to it a new layer of meaning:

[...] the illustrations of the meeting and interaction reflect contemporaneous conventions of presenting a lyric idyll of two lovers, with the effect of rendering the monk far more perfidious. Rather than a last resort of extreme desperation, his promise to return becomes a premeditated evasion following a casual dalliance. His fate, then, is as much a consequence of the woman's justifiable anger at his deception as of her own frustrated sexual desire. This readjustment in culpability has important ramifications for the *Dōjōji* narrative of the *Engi*, for audience reception of the remainder of the tale will be significantly affected by rendering the woman as a far more sympathetic character.<sup>158</sup>

Young woman's sense of betrayal is, then, all the more understandable in *Dōjōji*, with the entire backstory buildup, where the two had met long before while she was a child, and her father had started teasing her that she is to become the monk's bride to which he jokingly acquiesced. The girl kept waiting, but once the monk realized she had taken the prospect

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<sup>158</sup> Virginia Skord Waters. "Sex, Lies, and the Illustrated Scroll: The Dojoji Engi Emaki." *Monumenta Nipponica* 52, no. 1 (1997): 66.

seriously, he lied his way out of the situation, so she understood that as a broken promise.

Once we look at the story from the perspective of the young woman's experience, it is clear, then, that in the Noh play, the woman's motivation and the resultant demonic transformation, come from the kind of aberrant spiritual disposition akin to *Kanawa's*.

*Hokke genki*, *Konjaku*, and *Genkō* all present a frightening depiction of the woman's anger made manifest, as she dies of anguish and emerges from her bed-chamber in the form of a giant serpent. *Engi* and *Dōjōji* change this part of the narrative and present the transformation in real time, and have it take place at the river site, where the moment of metamorphosis is no longer concealed (Figures 3 and 4: transformation scene in *Dōjōji Engi Emaki*). This choice on the part of the story-tellers is, undoubtedly, due in large part to the fact that, being visual and performative genres, *etoki* and Noh can capitalize on the striking imagery depicting the moment of transformation. This is particularly true for Noh, where the moment of transformation can be exploited to the maximum, both in the sense of the theatricality aspect of the performance, as well as the meaning and the significance of this transformation within the ritual context of Noh. It is not a surprise, then, that this specific moment became a centerpiece for *Dōjōji*, becoming one of the most recognizable moments in the entire Noh tradition.

Komine Michihiko points to a more straightforwardly Buddhist analysis, that transformation of woman into a serpent is not an embodiment of the woman's jealousy but

that she is placed on the monk's pilgrimage route as a temptation, and as such, an aid on the path to salvation.<sup>159</sup> This interpretation draws on the expedient devices (*hōben* 方便) doctrine, with the eventual conclusion that the young woman is the embodiment of the Bodhisattva Kannon (*Kannon bosatsu* 観音菩薩).<sup>160</sup> This reading can be seen as too narrowly focused on the Buddhological interpretation neglecting other factors, such as the nature of the relationship between the man and the woman. As seen in the discussion above, by circumventing the Buddhist androcentric perspective, the *Engi* and the *Noh* redirect focus to the female instead, providing different or additional venues of interpretation. These need not exclude the already existing interpretations, but from both a literary and a religious point of view, they provide a more nuanced reading of the narrative, as well as the performative and religio-ritual structure. Pointing out the significance of the interplay of versions of the story, Waters notes:

[...] the requirements of the setsuwa genre allow relatively little interpretive play to setsuwa versions of the Dōjōji legend, for the audience is bound to the hermeneutic expressed overtly in the text and covertly through the generic context of the Buddhist tale collection. The tale functions as a relatively

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<sup>159</sup> Komine Michihiko, "Nihonjin no seishin bunka no haikai: dōjōji engi emaki o megutte." *Chizan gaku* 55, March 2006: 58

<sup>160</sup> The Mahayana doctrine of "expedient devices" or "skillful means" (Skt. *upāya*) refers to the idea of teaching to the capacity of the one being taught, and to that end using any means that would prove beneficial to the recipient. Following from the doctrine was the idea that even sexual attraction can be applied as an expedient device, with an upshot that various female figures, from immaterial conjured mirages of feminine beauty, through random anonymous women, or courtesans and female performers, to famous literary figures, and, eventually female Bodhisattvas (including Kannon/Guanyin), could serve as an object of sexual desire, while in reality leading to enlightenment. Wilson 1996: 111-26; Faure 1998: 120; Kimbrough 2008: 233-8.

conventional, if lurid, account of a lustful woman turned serpent and of the power of homage to the Lotus Sutra. Recast into the format of an illustrated scroll (*emaki*), however, the Dōjōji legend emerges as an independent work in its own right, with a new dynamism and fascinating ambivalence.<sup>161</sup>

The transformative power of the generic switch extends especially to theater, stretching further the potentiality of “dynamism” and “ambivalence,” considering the performative implications of the Noh text (or layers of “texts”). Noh and *etoki* are both performance arts, and as such possess a religio-ritual dimension different from that of a narrative text such as *setsuwa*. The Noh play will have a dimension of polyvalence in its dramatic expression which is verbal, graphic, corporeal, and also musical. The “theatricality” of the genre allows it to maximize the narrative potential of the *Kiyohime* legend, transforming it from a seemingly straightforward cautionary tale about carnal lust into a complex and layered piece about suffering and salvation, transgressing boundaries, and overlapping religious frameworks.

The Noh *Dōjōji* builds on the legend in several significant ways. The most striking innovation, however, lies not in what is added or changed, but rather in the complete omission of one major part of the *Kiyohime* tale. From the narrative standpoint, *Dōjōji* is a sequel of sorts, and the original story exists there in the form of a rumor. A curious element of this “sequel” is that the woman who is ostensibly saved in all versions of the *Kiyohime* legend now comes back. This idea of the return of the well-known character from literature or folklore to the stage is typical in Noh. However, what is interesting about *Dōjōji* is that the

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<sup>161</sup> Waters, “Illustrated Scroll,” 60.

tradition had already determined the successful outcome for the protagonist's salvation, whereas the play ignores this, thereby turning the entire project of the narrative and performative tradition on its head. What kind of dialogue with the tradition is *Dōjōji* in, and what are the ritual implications of this dialogue? What is the significance of the serpent's disguise as a woman, and the woman's appearance on the stage as a *shirabyōshi*? The answer to these questions lie in the character of the shite, and layers of her identities and the ways these identities function together in the narrative as well as on the stage.

### **Religious Implications Of the Serpent Motif**

The serpent is an ambiguous entity prominent in both the Buddhist tradition and non-Buddhist mythology, and within the medieval Japanese epistemology assumes a significant position in the *shinbutsu* discourse.<sup>162</sup> Discursive development of the serpent motif in the folkloric tradition, myth, Buddhist reinterpretation of the folklore (*setsuwa*), and Buddhist literature, presents the serpent as a powerful tool for negotiating aspects of the interacting religious traditions. The malleability of the serpent concept, and its varied, sometimes contradictory qualities, allow for it to be the perfect metaphor for this interaction. Discussing the symbolism of the serpent in Japanese religion and myth, Michael Kelsey suggests that “we can find in these stories first conflict between Buddhism and Shinto, and

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<sup>162</sup> One of the most prominent examples would be a hybrid *shinbutsu* cult of Benzaiten (弁才天) and Ugajin (宇賀神); for a detailed discussion of the development of this cult refer to Faure, *Protectors and Predators*, 163-295.

then, as the relationships between the two settle down, a creative Buddhist use of those ancient Shinto deities that appeared as reptiles.”<sup>163</sup>

The serpent in ancient folklore is depicted as a powerful, violent, awe-inspiring deity, but with Buddhism this image is slowly transformed into a yet another aid on the path to enlightenment and salvation. However, the image of the serpent in the popular imagination never quite shed its associations with violence and danger. In these characteristics, the serpent is quite similar to another major symbol of medieval Japanese combinatory religiosity, the demon, and it is not unusual that the theatrical representations of the two come to overlap, as they do in *Dōjōji*. The serpent symbol seems to have gone through a development reflective of the *shinbutsu* process to a large extent.

The serpent starts out as a potent mythical creature, is slowly coopted within the Buddhist episteme, and becomes a Dharma-protector. The process culminates in a “mytho-Buddist” hybrid, and finally the serpent, as the bringer of salvation.<sup>164</sup> Kelsey cautions that, while the mythical snake is characterized by a general hostility to mortals, it should not be considered an “evil” deity, “since the reptilian form is only one of the manifestations of the water or thunder deity, a complex creature with both desirable and undesirable personality traits.”<sup>165</sup> Therefore, the serpent is, at worst, an outward manifestation of the violent aspect,

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<sup>163</sup> Michael Kelsey, “Salvation of the Snake, the Snake of Salvation: Buddhist-Shinto Conflict and Resolution.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 8, no. 1/2 (1981): 83.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.



*ara-mitama* (荒魂), of the kami. Nomura Shin'ichi recalls the existence of an old tradition of revering serpents, both in Japan and on the continent. In early chthonic traditions, the serpent did not have negative connotation *per se*, but had a close relationship with people's lives, and was believed to bring prosperity and happiness.<sup>166</sup>

The *Kiyohime* tradition clearly builds on beliefs in the darker and more violent aspects of the serpent. It also associates these aspects with the feminine, and as such fits within a rich tradition of *setsuwa* and folk beliefs associating female sexuality and snakes.<sup>167</sup> It is, however, important to note that there are a number of examples in the tradition where the male snake lusts over a woman, sexually violates her and/or devours her. The pattern is similar to the *Kiyohime* narrative, only with inverted gender roles. Citing an example from the ninth century *setsuwa* collection *Nihon ryōiki*, Kelsey points out this characteristic as belonging to a corpus of legends known as *hitoyozuma* (一夜妻), where a woman is married to a deity, and is subsequently consummated sexually, and consumed literally.<sup>168</sup> Another story in *Ryōiki* depicts an encounter between a girl and a snake in which the snake crawls up the girl's vagina, upon which the girl is subjected to a lengthy public process of driving the

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<sup>166</sup> Nomura Shinichi, "Higashi shina kai: hebisei no genshō." *Keiō gijuku daigaku geibun gakkai*. Geibun kenkyū 77 (1990): 1-5

<sup>167</sup> Folk tradition and beliefs both in Japan and on the continent treated the serpent as the representations of fertility, water, and chthonic forces, and associated those representations with the feminine. This tendency continued when the folk traditions were couched in the Buddhist framework to help proselytize in the form of the *setsuwa*. As a result, the serpent retained strong association with female sex and female sexuality well into the medieval period and beyond. Shinichi 1990: 1-5; Naito 2014: 95-105; Li 2009; Dumas 2013: 270-2.

<sup>168</sup> Kelsey, "Salvation," 96

snake out of her.<sup>169</sup> In other words, a sexual aggressor in the form of the snake traditionally can be of either gender.

The *setsuwa* tradition is also responsible for drawing out and framing the mythical serpent (with all its religious, sexual, and other ambivalences) within the Buddhist context, with which *Hokke genki* is particularly credited.<sup>170</sup> This is undoubtedly due to the strong associations between salvation of serpents and the Lotus Sutra. After all, the arguably best-known chapter from the sutra, and so often referenced in Japanese classical literature, is the Devadatta chapter (*Daibadattahon* 提婆達多本) which contains the story of the enlightenment of the Dragon king's daughter – *Ryūnyō Jōbutsu* (竜如成仏).<sup>171</sup>

However, even with this in mind, serpents as such are not necessarily slated to be enlightened given that they are part of the bestial realm – one of the three “lower courses” of rebirth – and this can be inferred even from Lotus Sutra itself; namely, the Dragon King's daughter reaches enlightenment only after having been transformed into a man, which can be interpreted that she achieved enlightenment despite being both a woman and a dragon/snake,

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<sup>169</sup> Keikai and Osamu Izumoji. *Nihon Ryōiki* (Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei 30. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), II:41.

<sup>170</sup> Dykstra, Yoshiko K, “Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra. The Dainihonkoku Hokkegenki.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 32, no. 2 (1977): 1-9.

<sup>171</sup> Hearing Mañjuśrī tell the story of how the 8-year-old daughter of the Dragon King achieved enlightenment in an instant with the help of the Lotus Sutra, Śāriputra challenges the report, as women, being subject to “five obstructions” (inability to become Brahma, Shakra, Mara (a devil king), Cakravartin (a wheel-turning king), and *Buddha*) cannot achieve enlightenment. Mañjuśrī explains how the girl transformed into a man and swiftly perfected bodhisattva practices, transported herself beneath a bodhi tree and achieved enlightenment.

something Faure termed “inclusive exclusion.”<sup>172</sup> In the sutra, women’s inability to achieve enlightenment was ideologically rooted in the doctrine of the “five obstructions,” (*goshō/itsutsu no sawari* 五障) corresponding to the five categories of existence they were not able to attain. In Japan, however, this concept acquired an additional dimension, as Yoshida Kazuhiko explains: “the five obstructions came to mean all the transgressions, passions, wrongdoing, or (negative) karma that are inherent to women in particular.”<sup>173</sup> This “semantic drift,”<sup>174</sup> as Monica Dix puts it, transformed the idea of a barrier preventing women to achieve categories of being external to them, to the idea of an insurmountable obstacle due to a characteristic inherent in them. Moreover, an additional, sixth meaning of *sawari*, “menstruation,” was added, also reflecting the association with women’s intrinsic nature, and the concept of female pollution.<sup>175</sup> This notion is particularly significant in theorizing women’s (in)ability to become enlightened, and in the case of the *Dōjōji* woman, enlightenment seems, at the first glance at least, to be precisely what is at stake as she is doubly condemned, being both ideologically marked as lacking, and ritually marked as impure.

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<sup>172</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Buddhisms. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>173</sup> Yoshida Kazuhiko. “The Enlightenment of the Dragon King’s Daughter in The Lotus Sutra” In Ruch, Barbara, ed. *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies, no. 43. Ann Arbor, Mich: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), 310

<sup>174</sup> Bryan S Turner and Zheng Yangwen, eds. *The Body in Asia* (Berghahn Books, 2009), 49.

<sup>175</sup> Yoshida, “Enlightenment,” 310.

In sum, the serpent is a figure belonging to pan-Asian mythology and Japanese kami worship tradition. On the other hand, it is a prominent figure in Buddhism, and a significant part of the *shinbutsu* hybrid cults. The perceived role of the snake, however, changes and transforms as a result of interaction between traditions, especially in the context of *shinbutsu* combinatory processes. It is this quality of the serpent that makes it both malleable enough and resistant enough to endure the generic transformations of the *Kiyohime* tradition. As the story was reshaped from one telling to the next, the serpent protagonist could draw on a large repository of symbolic, narrative, and religious content attached to her serpentine character, to follow up on, respond to, or completely reverse the expectations of the tradition. In the case of Noh, the serpent maiden returns to what the tradition determined to be the site of her transgression and her salvation, having shed parts of the tradition like old skin, interrogating and reevaluating a conclusion that had already been made. Those precise qualities of the snake, the ambiguity and malleability, the simultaneous potential for great good and great evil, are, I believe, what made it fit for a reconfiguration into a demon on the Noh stage.

### **The Ritualist Snake – Shirabyōshi**

The first thing we learn about the *shite* in the first act is that she is a *shirabyōshi* (白拍子) and that she wishes to perform a dedication ceremony for the temple bell to ameliorate karma incurred by an unnamed sin. This reminds the audience of few traits typically attributed to female entertainers; that “sin” (*tsumi* 罪) or transgression is frequently

associated with their profession, and that female performers can act as ritualists. In the above discussion we see how, on the symbolic level, the serpentine aspect of the character of the *shite* is multifaceted and polysemic, with multiple overlapping layers. But what about her aspect as a performer?

The character layers of the *shite* in *Dōjōji* pertaining to her identity as a performer are to a large extent reflective of the views of women in medieval Japan, and particularly those who made a living as entertainers or performers. Female performers have had the perceived characteristics of their profession (performance), their bodies (their female sexuality), and their origins as ritualists conflated in the representations and understanding of their persons, with serious ramifications.

Examining this issue, Marra built the concept he termed the “shamaness / courtesan / bodhisattva” paradigm,<sup>176</sup> which united different female identities and treated them as different aspects of a singular imagined female identity. This paradigmatic woman was constructed by piecing together characteristics of different groups of women who existed and made their living in the real world, largely on the margin. Among these women were various types of sex workers – “courtesans” – as well as various types of female performers, and the two sometimes overlapped. Furthermore, female performers earned an association with religious performance both due to their dancing, which recalled female shrine ritualists, as

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<sup>176</sup> Michele Marra, “The Buddhist Mythmaking of Defilement: Sacred Courtesans in Medieval Japan.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (1993): 55.

well as their songs, which recalled the shrine female oracles. Finally, these activities were reframed within the Buddhist eschatological scheme:

Buddhist thinkers assimilated the courtesan's performing act into their dialectic of skillful devices (*hōben*), interpreting the woman's locutions as an expression aimed at the realization of the supreme truth. The doctrine justified the courtesan's song as an expedient provided by the Buddha for the enlightenment of common people [...] The transformation of the courtesan's song into a medium for enlightenment was the Buddhist version of a more ancient religious practice in which female priests were believed to lend their voices to a deity to convey sacred messages to the common people who were unable to communicate with the god.<sup>177</sup>

Marra argued that ritualistic origins of female performers were combined with Buddhist discourse to portray entertainers as vehicles of salvation. However, in the context of Buddhist doctrines such as expedient devices, or “passions equal to enlightenment” (*bonnō soku bodai* 煩惱即菩提), this role was exercised in such a way that transgressive actions (such as sexual allure) could and would be interpreted as paths to enlightenment.

In her inquiry into the workings of various modes of sex trade in medieval Japan, Janet Goodwin has largely debunked the long standing and popular assumption of equating sexual activity with religious service and thinking of shamanesses' activities in sexual terms.<sup>178</sup> While Marra's paradigm operates within these exact assumptions, his model is helpful in illuminating a representation of intertwining concepts of female sexuality and religious activity, both Buddhist and kami-related. Namely, while female ritual activity may

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>178</sup> Janet R. Goodwin, *Selling Songs and Smiles* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 85-119.

not have necessarily included sex, and while not all female performers engaged in sex or ritual, the imaginary construct that conflated female performance, sex, and ritual activity and spiritual authority was definitely present in the medieval discourse, which Goodwin herself acknowledges:

Overlapping these three dimensions of the woman's being is coopted within the Buddhist context to simultaneously condemn the female as defiled and an impediment to enlightenment, and an intruder from the margin into the normative, and on the other hand vest her with power to aid the exact opposite – be a mouthpiece for the sacred, ritually handle it, and ultimately facilitate achievement of enlightenment.<sup>179</sup>

As the discourse of female religious authority was intrinsically connected with the discourse of her transgressive nature, in the medieval period, female performers experience a great decline in status, the most consistent disapproval coming from the Buddhist clergy, who especially denigrate female entertainers, referring to them as “base women” (*bonbi no onna* 凡卑女).<sup>180</sup> However, being a religious ritualist did not help women achieve a more elevated status, or that, at best, their status was ambiguous:

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, miracle tales, saints' hagiographies, and *noh* plays portrayed *asobi* specifically as prostitutes and presented them as obstructions to the religious practice of both monks and laymen [...] When *asobi* became Buddhist instructors, this transgression was turned on its head. Female sexuality was first used as a tool to win men's attention, then

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<sup>179</sup> Janet R. Goodwin, “Shadows of Transgression: Heian and Kamakura Constructions of Prostitution.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 55, no. 3 (2000): 327–68.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

devalORIZED as the women themselves were transformed from seducers into agents of salvation<sup>181</sup>

Although Goodwin in this excerpt focuses her argument on *asobi*, the same principle applies to *shirabyōshi* who also frequently appear in *setsuwa*, Noh, and other literary genres. Therefore, the entertainers were at the same time viewed as a threat to salvation due to their association with sex (even if this was an imaginary situation propelled by medieval Buddhist literature), the same association found them celebrated as guides to enlightenment. Marra explains how complexity and the allure of this concept made performers favorite topic of medieval Noh:

The paradigm of the shamaness/courtesan/ bodhisattva became a common topic in one strain of anecdotal literature of the Japanese Middle Ages that asked the courtesan to play the role of spokeswoman for the Buddha. Kan'ami combines the threads developed by Buddhist mythographers in a theatrical unity that perfectly answers the Buddhist need for an exorcising performance in which the threat of defilement is domesticated and assimilated into the structure of the sacred.<sup>182</sup>

As an example of this, Marra cites the play *Eguchi*. A priest on a pilgrimage disembarks at the village of Eguchi. Seeing a gravesite, he learns a courtesan, known as the Lady of Eguchi, was buried there. She has a reputation of being a poet, a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Fugen, and a history of once denying overnight lodging to the monk and poet Saigyō (1118 – 1190) so as not to allow him be corrupted by dwelling in her home. As the priest recalls Saigyō's poem a mysterious woman appears and recites the reply. In the course of their

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 355

<sup>182</sup> Mara, "Mythmaking," 58.



conversation, it is revealed she is the ghost of Lady Eguchi and she vanishes. In the interlude, a local villager narrates a story of the lady's encounter with another famous monk, Shōkū (910 – 1007), the devotee of Bodhisattva Fugen (普賢菩薩) who was instructed in a dream to visit the courtesan Lady Eguchi. As he would look at her he would see her in her earthly form of a beautiful woman; when he closed his eyes he would see her as Fugen. The second act brings the Lady back to the stage, aboard a boat floating in the moonlight, reenacting a scene of entertaining a customer. In her monologue she reveals a deep understanding of the Buddhist Truth and with that the play concludes.<sup>183</sup> Lady Eguchi, therefore, is a being of transgression, but that very feature vests her with the contrasting, but corresponding role of the teacher of the Dharma, and an aid to enlightenment.

Marra's paradigm cannot be applied as straightforwardly in *Dōjōji* as in *Eguchi*, but the ritualist *shite* still draws on these schematic elements. Whereas the character of Lady Eguchi neatly reflects the entirety of the paradigm as envisaged by Marra, Kiyohime may need to rely on disparate elements of her characterizations over time. The eroticism and sexual attraction implied draw on the erotic imagination attached to the *shirabyōshi*, fortified with the early incarnations of Kiyohime that depict her as someone who potentially offers sex as entertainment (as the inn proprietor), and is definitely familiar with the ways of male/female intimacy (being a widow). The more recent Kiyohime, on the other hand, is an

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<sup>183</sup> *Eguchi*. Sanari, ed. *Yōyoku taikan*, 471-487.

innocent peasant girl, reducing the sexual component and amplifying the salvific one. These elements then all converge in her present-day incarnation as a shirabyōshi. As one such representation, the *Dōjōji* woman demonstrates how all these identities are a part of that paradigm, as she assumes all these ambiguous roles. Additionally, the serpent mythology is introduced into this context, in an astonishing move that places the serpent into a position of a ritualist (along with being the object of ritual). The formulation of her character as the Noh *Dōjōji* ritualist, therefore, is extraordinarily complex, with each of these separate identities carrying complexities all on its own.

### **Competing Rituals; Ritualization and Ritual Dialectic; Subject/Object Dichotomy**

While the ritual dimension of the *Kiyohime* tradition is undoubtedly strongest in *Dōjōji* it, of course, emerges from the performative context of *setsuwa*: since they were intimately related to Buddhist proselytization in Japan, they were “performed” as sermons intended to inspire enlightenment, before they were committed to ink and brush. Moreover, listening to the teaching, even in the form of an anecdote was no doubt considered meritorious for both the listeners as well as proselytizers (“performers”).

The ritualistic as well as performative dimension is even more overt in the case of *etoki*. Focusing on the iteration of the story through the *etoki* practice, Hiroshi Izuoka has investigated the act of story-telling (*katari* 語) in the context of different iterations of *Dōjōji engi emaki* over time. He is interrogating the meaning and function of *katari* relative to the generic diversity it is a part of; namely, how storytelling functions in *etoki* practice as a

multi-media undertaking. It is a narrative practice and performance art, supported by visual representation in the form of painted scrolls. Izuoka draws attention to *katari* as not only different from everyday speech, but being, in fact, of divine origin. Human speech materializes in different expressions, one of which is *katari*, and compared to everyday speech, the element of deliberate integration of the word and the meaning is less prominent, emphasize is on the manner of expression, and form assumes an increasing significance relative to content.<sup>184</sup> From this point of view, we can look at the transformation of the *Kiyohime* narrative not merely a matter of mobilizing a popular motif and rehearsing it through different genre; rather it is the transformation of the narrative in ever more ritualistic form culminating in Noh. I am not suggesting that there is a conscious and direct linear trajectory of this transformation; merely that it is helpful to observe how certain narrative tropes have endured multiple generic transformations over time (while others have not), in a way that each had built on the previous one.

There are two major rituals taking place in *Dōjōji*: the *ranbyōshi* (乱拍子)<sup>185</sup> cum *kaneiri* (鐘入; bell-entering), in the first act, and the Buddhist exorcism ritual in the second. What is the meaning and significance of the two rituals taking place, what is the meaning and significance of the fact that in one case the *shite* is the object and in the other the ritualist, and

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<sup>184</sup> Izuoka Hiroshi. “Dōjōji engi etoki o megutte: katari no ba ni tsuite no ketsuron.” *Senshū daigaku jinbunkagaku kenkyūjo, jinbunkagaku nenbō*, no. 44 (2014): 16.

<sup>185</sup> “Disordered rhythm”; an action piece with flexible rhythms controlled by the drummer watching the movements of the dancer. Brazell 1999: 42.

how are these two rituals, by virtue of their common denominator married through the process of ritualization/ritual dialectic?

As noted earlier in this chapter, the very first appearance of the *Dōjōji* woman already betrays that she is somehow different or extraordinary. She alerts the audience that she is burdened by a specific sin, and there is a feverish urgency of an “impatient heart” (*isogi kokoro* 急ぎ心)<sup>186</sup> in her efforts to arrive at the temple. Shite proceeds to introduce herself as a *shirabyōshi*, and so announces herself, in a way, as a ritualist (Figure 5):

これはこの國の傍に住む白拍子にて候。鐘の供養にそと舞を舞ひ候べし。供養を拝ませてたまはり候へ。<sup>187</sup>

*Kore ha kono kuni no katawara ni sumu shirabyōshi nite sōrō. Kane no kuyō ni soto mai wo mai sōrō beshi. Kuyo wo ogamasete tamawari sōrō he.*

I am a *shirabyōshi* living in the vicinity of this province. I intend to perform a dance at the bell dedication ceremony. Please allow me to pay my obeisance at the ceremony.

Following a brief hesitation, the temple servant concludes aloud that she is “not an ordinary woman” (*tada no nyonin to ha chigai* 唯の女人とは違ひ).<sup>188</sup> Indeed, as the audience is about to learn, she is not; there is more to her than meets the eye. Her insistence to arrive in a hurry, and her impatience to attend the ceremony betray a restless heart and disturbed spirit – an aberrant spiritual disposition. On the everyday plane, the woman simply seems anxious to reap the karmic benefits of attending a grand ceremony, such as consecration of the temple

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<sup>186</sup> *Dōjōji*. Sanari, ed. *Yōyoku taikan*, 1793.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 1794.

bell. However, having tricked her way near the bell, it becomes clear that this bell is of particular significance to the woman. With this, the *shite* moves into her first ritual, the *ranbyōshi*.

*Ranbyōshi* is the famous scene in which the *shite* dances in a serpent-like style corresponding to each sound of the *kotsuzumi*<sup>189</sup> which is hit vigorously as if to show the violent pounding of her heart. To represent the costume of a *shirabyōshi*, who performed dressed like men, the *shite* puts on a courtier's cap, and begins the dance, starting to slowly stomp her feet, moving towards the bell as if climbing.<sup>190</sup> Initially the *shite* performs a usual dedication dance, recalling the origins of the temple, stomping feet in increasing speed, culminating in a rapid dance (*kyū no mai* 急の舞). She then starts moving closer to the bell, which is also where her mood starts shifting, and her emotion towards the bell erupts as she exclaims “Oh how I remember this hateful bell!” (*omeba kane urameshiya tote* 思へば鐘うらめしやとて).<sup>191</sup> What ensues is, arguably, the most “theatrical” moment in Noh performative tradition – the *shite* leaps into the falling bell. This concludes the first act, and during the interlude, the Abbot narrates the story of the Kiyohime, revealing her identity and connection to the bell. This is confirmed when the bell is lifted and the *shite* reemerges in the form of the furious serpent – demon (Figure 6).

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<sup>189</sup> Shoulder drum

<sup>190</sup> This particular “climbing” movement is a specific feature of the *Dōjōji*'s *ranbyōshi*. Fukuzawa 2012: 263-270.

<sup>191</sup> *Dōjōji*. Sanari, ed. *Yōyoku taikan*, 1796.

The transformation is taking place inside the bell, which makes the bell the central part of the ritual. The shape of the bell symbolizes the womb, and in this womblike bell, the dragon serpent is supposed to wish to transform herself into an entity which can attain buddhahood. On the other hand, the transformation taking place in the bell can also be the serpent being reborn, and reclaiming her identity as the Earth spirit.<sup>192</sup> In this way the *kaneiri*, and what takes place immediately after it under the bell, concealed from the audience's eyes, integrates the Buddhist and kami-related transformation.

What is the *shite* as the ritualist positioned within this performance? The scene in which she leaps into the great bell on the surface seems like a desperate action, and we could say that the *shite*'s vigorous dance hints at her true identity as a serpent-demon as she expresses her pent up agony, sadness, and fury. However, the *shite* is both a *shirabyōshi*, and the serpent-demon. Both these identities, as discussed above, carry their own set of ambivalences: *shirabyōshi* as a type of a female entertainer with an ambiguous ritual function, and the serpent as a deity that traditionally carries both negative and auspicious connotations, in either case requiring ritual handling. Furthermore, taking these two identities into account, the *shite* is either a shape-shifting serpent demon, or a religious ritualist possessed by one; in other words, she could either be a demon pretending to be a *shirabyōshi*, or a *shirabyōshi* transformed into a demon by way of possession, meaning that either of these

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<sup>192</sup> Nomura, "Hebisei no genshō," 1-5.

identities can be “true” or “false” (or both). I would draw a parallel here between the scene and the Myth of the Heavenly Cave, with *Dōjōji* women taking on the role of both the performer/ritualist Ame no Uzume, and the deity Amaterasu being lured out of the Cave.

Relying on a Freudian psycho-analysis and phallic symbolism, Klein has suggested that it may be that the woman on some level represents the monk himself,<sup>193</sup> and this would be nothing new in Noh. In fact, continuous spiraling gender inversions - man “performing” a woman “performing” a man - are seen elsewhere in plays.<sup>194</sup> Even the pre-serpentine form of the shite, the *shirabyōshi*, carries similar gender ambivalence, as these types of performers were famous for performing in male attire, sometimes carrying swords. I would like to propose an additional interpretation of this ambivalence, one that recalls another famous transformation with the male, female, and serpentine meshed together. If we observe the trajectory of the transformation in *Dōjōji*, could we not say that *Dōjōji* transformation works like the transformation of the Dragon Princess in the Lotus Sutra in reverse? Where serpent in the form of a woman transforms into a man to escape her serpentine form and achieve buddhahood, in the case of *Dōjōji*, there is Kiyohime, who had within the tradition already been granted enlightenment, and having assumed a female form, transforms (symbolically) into a man, in order to return to the serpentine form.

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<sup>193</sup> Jane Marie Law, ed. *Religious Reflections on the Human Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 107-112.

<sup>194</sup> Plays such as *Kakitsubata*, or *Matsukaze*, for example.

To conclude, the objective of the ritual is the transformation and drawing the result of the transformation out in the open. Having achieved that, *ranbyōshi/kaneiri*, therefore, can function as a self-contained ritual, but in the case of *Dōjōji*, it works together with the other ritual of the play, the demonic exorcism.

The background story of *Dōjōji*, featuring the girl's misguided attachment towards the ill-fated monk, and the posthumous revenge of her spirit now transformed into a serpent-demon seems to steer the reading of the play all too neatly towards the battle-of-the sexes interpretation. Klein, for example, characterizes the play as the “dramatically compelling vision of a stark conflict: the masculine forces of noble and pure spirituality battling the demonic feminine, a monstrous embodiment of profane and bestial sexuality.”<sup>195</sup> While this interpretation is certainly valid, complicating the gendered reading somewhat, or at least highlighting some underlying layers of the conflict presented in *Dōjōji*, may bring forth further insight into the character of the conflict and its ritual resolution.

Unlike *Kanemaki*, *Dōjōji* is much shorter, stripped of much of additional context and very much is performance-centered (rather than text-centered). In fact, apart from the Abbot's recounting the story of the girl and the young monk, it can be said that the entirety of the play consists of these two rituals. If we are to analyze *Dōjōji* from a predominantly Buddhist point of view, the incantations of the monks in their battle against the serpent is straightforwardly

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<sup>195</sup> Law, *Reflections*, 100.



posited as an exorcism of the evil demon, aiming to break her shameful attachment and bring her to the Path. As such, from the Buddhist viewpoint, that would be the central ritual of the play. However, the serpent demon retreats as “her body burns in her own fire,” (*iki ha myōka to natsute sono mi wo yaku* 息は猛火となつてその身を焼く) still consumed by the flames of her misguided passion, and she disappears into rapids of the Hitaka river, her final destiny unknown, clearly indicating that the exorcism only worked halfway, at best. I suggest that the exorcism is there to serve as the foil for the central rite of Dōjōji – the ranbyōshi.

In the same way the attendants are mesmerized by the *shirabyōshi*, the shite is transfixed by the bell that reminds her of her wretched fate. However, the bell, as pointed out earlier, as a symbol and a metaphor is pregnant with meaning and possible interpretations; it is a womb, a cave, and Lotus Sutra itself, all of which plays a potential role in the outcome of the ritual. The woman is performing the dance to trick the monks and get closer to the bell, but at the same time she is performing an exorcism/pacification for herself. Through her overlapping identities she is able to act simultaneously as both the performer and the target of the exorcism/pacification. As the *shirabyōshi*, the *Dōjōji* woman performs the ambiguous alluring dance that both seduces the monks and performs a religious function; as the ghost of the girl, she is clearly suffering from what she perceives to be her “transgressions,” moving towards the bell to atone for them, but she succumbs to the fury and jealousy. The way the woman relates to the bell is ambivalent, she is drawn to it, and afraid of it. Her serpentine

identity feeds into this ambivalence. As the serpent, she on one level represents protector of the Dharma, but she also has strong chthonic connotations as a deity of old with unclear ambivalent intentions. Bergen notes that *Dōjōji* is the kind of play where kami-worship and Buddhism “join forces in their complementary goals of pacification and enlightenment [...] effecting a collusion of past and present.”<sup>196</sup> There seems to be a sense that the dance/performance/ritual simultaneously disguises the real role/identity and performs the real role/identity. The play concludes with a revelation of what is real, but what eventually is “real” remains a question mark. So, yes, the *Dōjōji* woman’s trials and tribulations are, on a certain level a battle between the sexes and what they stand for, or even an unfortunate love story, and perhaps even a Buddhist morality tale, but more than that, they symbolize and perform the tension between, as well as balancing out of, the overlapping religious (Buddhist and kami-worshipping) and ritual codes.

As noted before, the serpent motif is embedded in the long line of mythical and literary narratives with negative and horrific associations. But, it also betrays kinship with powerful non-Buddhist deities,<sup>197</sup> and in *Dōjōji* these aspects converge. Further, thinking of the shite’s words and actions while taking into account the complexity of her layered identities discussed above makes it somewhat uncertain for us to ascribe a gender (or,

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<sup>196</sup> Doris G. Bergen, *A Woman’s Weapon: Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997), 103.

<sup>197</sup> Kelsey, “Salvation,” 84-85.

ultimately, even species) to her. For example, when *Dōjōji*'s shite enters and proclaims that she needs to have her evil deeds canceled out she says: "my sin will surely be erased" (*tsukurishi tsumi mo kienu beshi* 作りし罪も消えぬべし).<sup>198</sup> Who is coming and saying this. The *shirabyōshi*? The ghost of the original woman? The serpent? All three?

I would like to suggest that the way the *Dōjōji* shite is constructed, as a web of spiraling dichotomous identities, renders the ritual treatment she is subjected to equally directed to all these identities. Taking that to the level of actual staged Noh performance, all these facets are embodied in the figure of demon because of its ambiguity/ambivalence. Casting the protagonist as a demon, furthermore is helpful because it acts as a catalyst for all these orders (gender/religious/biological) as demon as an entity belongs to all of them, but to none completely.

## Conclusion

By blurring the boundaries between the religious ritualist and the object of the ritual, Noh provides the possibility for the two competing rituals (or ritual regimes) to merge together in a sort of ritual dialectic. The network of multiple layers of identity ascribed to the protagonist (female / *shirabyōshi* /serpent/demon), allows for such ritual dialectic to be sustainable, as at any given time the ritual contains elements of diverse overlapping religious and ritual codes, and they simultaneously work together and against one another, so that the

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<sup>198</sup> *Dōjōji*. Sanari, ed, *Yōyoku taikan*, 1793.

ritual is at the same time both success and failure. Exploring the connection between these identities and ritual codes they are associated with reveals that they are related in such a way that the dichotomy is both negated and reproduced, while being constantly inverted.

## Chapter 4: Yamanba

*Yamanba* (山姥 “Mountain Crone”) a fourteen-century Noh play attributed to Zeami,<sup>199</sup> takes as the subject matter a popular creature from folklore, widely known through legend and oral tradition. Unlike *Dōjōji* or *Kanawa* which are reimaginings of well-known, established narratives, the storyline of *Yamanba* is entirely original in content, even while its protagonist is a familiar figure. *Yamanba* is a *tsukuri noh*, which Zeami defines as a type of play that is created with “no authentic source but is newly conceived and formed in connection with a noted place or historical site,” adding that, if well-written, *tsukuri noh* “can give rise to moving visual affect.”<sup>200</sup> Indeed, *Yamanba* is considered one of the finest *tsukuri noh* in the repertory.<sup>201</sup> It remains the representation that cemented the character of

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<sup>199</sup> There is some debate among scholars about the authorship of *Yamanba*. While there is no documentation that clearly determines the author, Royall Tyler, for example, is of the opinion that the play in many ways does not resemble Zeami’s hand, and that “the vigor and themes” of *Yamanba* “richly recall Kan’ami,” Zeami’s father. Masaki Dōmoto, on the other hand, credits Zeami with the play’s authorship. Drawing on Tsutome Kōsai and Haruo Nishino, as well as her own discussion on the overall “ideology” of the play, Kaori Harada concludes that *Yamanba* was most likely penned by Zeami, allowing for the possibility that there was a *kusemai* by Kanami it was based on. Whether he actually authored *Yamanba* or not, Zeami had written about it in his treatises, so it clearly was a significant piece to him, and if he did author it, it would be amongst his early pieces. Tyler 1992: p. 155; Dōmoto 1997: p. 187; Harada 2009: p. 113.

<sup>200</sup> Quinn, Shelley Fenno. “How to Write a Noh Play Zeami’s Sando.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 48, no. 1 (1993): 53–88., p. 60.

<sup>201</sup> Abe Yasuro, *Yuya no kōgō: chūsei no sei to seinaru mono* (Nagoya-shi: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 1998), 192.

Yamanba for later periods, and one that had the most significant influence on later literary and artistic retellings.<sup>202</sup>

The opening scene of the play finds a performer from the capital, Hyakuma Yamanba (百ま山姥), and her retinue on the pilgrimage to Zenkōji temple. The company stops to ask for directions and a local villager reluctantly agrees to lead them along the dangerous path through the mountain. Hyakuma is a *kusemai* (曲舞) dancer who composes and performs songs about Yamanba, a demon-like creature living in the mountains, who appears to people in the form of an old woman. Hyakuma has earned her name by “performing” Yamanba, that is, enacting Yamanba’s “mountain rounds” (*yamameguri* 山廻り). Deep in the woods, the party has an encounter with an old woman who offers them lodging for the night because she wants to hear the “Yamanba” song and dance. She then proceeds to introduce herself as the actual wildling Yamanba, and announces she will be back later that night. At the designated time, appearing now in the form of a mountain demon, Yamanba comes to observe the promised performance, but gradually takes over the performance, finishes the dance herself and dances off into the mountains, “her destiny never to be known” (*yukuhe mo shirazu* 行方も知らず).<sup>203</sup> On this ambiguous note the play concludes, and it becomes clear that it is not only Yamanba’s destiny that remains unknown to the audience, but also her true identity

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<sup>202</sup> Reider 2010: 66; Vishwanathan, 1996: 241.

<sup>203</sup> *Yamanba*. Sanari, ed. *Yōkyoku taikan*, 3165-84.

juxtaposed with her human counterpart. Who or what is the “real” Yamanba? Who performs the religious ritual for whom, and to what end? These are the questions that lie at the heart of the peculiar ritual of Noh *Yamanba*.

Like the *shite* of *Dōjōji* and *Kanawa*, the *shite* of *Yamanba* seems to embody both ritualist and ritual object, but here she begins as object of ritual and then becomes the ritualist. The process of ritualization works in this play through positioning Yamanba within the framework of the Buddhist doctrine of non-dualism and related discourses, and the way they relate to the kami-worshipping traditions, the other major religious component of the play, resulting in placing of the play within kami-buddha combinatory processes. Demonic, divine, and human at the same time, *Yamanba*’s *shite* is configured in this play to represent the ultimate expression of this religio-philosophical concept, as we see the demon Yamanba moving back and forth throughout the play between being an *oni* and an enlightened being. As a result, the Noh *Yamanba*, and particularly its main protagonist, represent a unique example of the astonishing dynamism of diverse religious beliefs, practices, and concepts folded into a single framework within the Noh.

### **Yamanba-as-*oni***

*Yamanba* is categorized as a “demon” (*kijo* 鬼女) play, but rather than highlighting the horrific dimension of *oni*, the demonic character of Yamanba is rooted in the deep ambivalence of the idea of *oni*, with its potential for both harm and good. Yamanba in the

play is a complex multidimensional creation made up of dualities and contradictions; she is “a god, a demon, an entertainer, a mother, enlightened, tormented, helpful, and harmful.”<sup>204</sup> Moreover, her character draws on a number of complex religious concepts, and as such she emerges in the play as a product of sophisticated doctrinal interplay rather than simply a monster from folk tales.

The figuration of Yamanba as *oni* in the play presents a complex and multifaceted image of not only Yamanba herself, but also of the very concept of *oni*, which it both complicates and illuminates. Yamanba is a unique creature within Japanese folklore, and is a unique character in the Noh. The way Yamanba-as-*oni* is constructed in the play is also unique, as it challenges the conventional notions of the *oni*. Rather than, or in addition to, being a fear-inducing monster, both in the narrative development and the stage presence, her character is developed as evoking fear, then curiosity, and finally empathy. More than anything, it is the fear of the unknown, and then, the fear of the unknown within oneself.

Yamanba-as-*oni* is a particularly nuanced and reformulated version of the already hard-to-pin-down identity, evidenced most visually in her stage appearance. The most representative demon mask in Noh is the *Hanya* (般若), with wide-open red-colored mouth and large bulging eyes with brows prominently overhung, denoting rage-driven insanity.

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<sup>204</sup> Monica Bethe and Karen Brazell, *Nō as Performance: An Analysis of the Kuse Scene of Yamanba*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978 (1990)), 8.



Emphasizing its supernatural character, the mask is crowned by two long protruding horns, the quintessential mark of a demon (Figure 7). *Yamanba*, however, does not utilize a typical *oni* mask, but a specialty mask. The facial expression on this mask is much less pronounced, without the vigor of *Hannya*. It looks less frightful, with a gold ring around the pupil, the iris also lined by a vermillion or gold ring, and the teeth are clenched (Figure 8).<sup>205</sup> This marks the character as a non-human, supernatural being, but one that is more like a fae woodling than an angry demon. Furthermore, her expression is not one of anger or bloodthirstiness, but one of deep pathos. This alludes to humanness buried deep within. The human / demon ambiguity is retained even as the play identifies *Yamanba* as an *oni* in the enigmatic self-introduction by the *shite*:

鬼女とは女の鬼とや。よし鬼なりとも人なりとも、山に住む女ならば、妾が身の上にてはさむらはずや。<sup>206</sup>

*Kijo to ha onna no oni toya. Yoshi oni nari tomo hito nari tomo, yama ni sumu onna naraba, warawa ga mi no ue nite ha samurawazuya.*

A demoness is a female demon. It is both a demon and a human, so if it is a woman living in the mountain, doesn't that apply to me?<sup>207</sup>

Acknowledging that she is both a demon and human is significant and defines the crucial aspect of *Yamanba* in the play. This characterization seems particularly meaningful in light of

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<sup>205</sup> Uzawa Hikaru and Tetsuo Nishi, "Nō no kijo: hanya to *Yamanba*," *Musashino daigaku nōgaku shiryō sentai kiyō*, no. 26 (2014): 105

<sup>206</sup> *Yamanba*. Sanari, ed. *Yōkyoku taikan*, 3172-3.

<sup>207</sup> All translations in this chapter are mine.

Zeami's description of a *shite* embracing "the form of a demon and the heart of a person"

when he theorized about the ideal way to perform a demon in Noh.<sup>208</sup>

The human / demon identity split in Yamanba is highlighted in the Noh, but does not originate in it. Folk tradition frequently features some version of a character who is a likely prototype of Yamanba: an old hag who possesses demon-like traits such as an appetite for human flesh, vengefulness, or fearsome appearance, but can also exhibit an inclination to be kind or helpful. The *Konjaku monogatari shū* narrates the story of a young woman who became pregnant out of wedlock, and in order to cover her shameful situation, decided to stealthily give birth in the mountain and abandon her child there. She happened upon a thatched old cottage, and, thinking it abandoned, decided to give birth there. Suddenly, an old woman emerged from the cottage and, to the young woman's surprise and astonishment, offered to help her with labor and care for the infant. Grateful, the woman accepted, happily giving birth to a handsome boy. One night, waking up unexpectedly, she saw the old woman by her infant's side and overheard her intention to eat him, which made her realize that her kindly caretaker was, in fact, an *oni*:

此れは鬼にこそ有けれ。我れは必ず噉はれなむ<sup>209</sup>

*Kore ha oni ni koso ari kere. Ware ha kanarazu kuwarenamu.*

This is a demon! She will surely devour us!

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<sup>208</sup> Reider, *Demon Lore*, 67.

<sup>209</sup> Satake, Akihiro. *Konjaku monogatari shū* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten), 241.

Terrified, taking the first convenient opportunity, the woman made off with her child, and the old woman was never heard of again.<sup>210</sup>

While this tale reads like a horror story, with a build-up and a twist that emphasizes the terrifying aspect of its villain, it also brings out the duality of the old woman figure.

While she is not referred to as “yamauba” (山姥), but rather an *oni* (鬼) disguised as an old woman (嬬) in the mountain, she represents the prototype that will come to be known as such later.<sup>211</sup> However, as demonic as she eventually turns out to be, her first appearance presents her as a kindly, almost, Bodhisattva-like figure, acknowledged by the young woman herself:

仏の助け給ふ也けり<sup>212</sup>

*Hotoke no tasuke tamau nari keri*

This is help from the Buddha!

A detail of note is that, before the old woman takes in her young visitor and her infant, the woman’s initial intention was to leave her child behind. As she seems to change her mind and rejoices in her offspring, the old woman’s demonic persona emerges. Twice within the story, then, the old woman represents an opposite or a counterpart to the young mother, a pattern that will be of significance when discussing Noh *Yamanba*. A curious point in the story adds

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 240-4.

<sup>211</sup> The first appearance of the word “yamauba” is in the Muromachi period (1336–1573). Reider 2010: 63.

<sup>212</sup> Satake, *Konjaku*, 241.

a layer of meaning and air of mystique to the old woman. Right after the young mother gives birth, the old woman says to her:

喜き事也。己は年老て、此る田舎に侍る身なれば、物忌もし侍らず。  
七日許は此て御して返り給へ<sup>213</sup>

*Yoki koto nari. Onore ha toshioite, kuru inaka ni haberu mi naraba, monoimi moshi haberazu. Nanoka moto ha kakute on shite kaeritamae.*

What a joyous thing! Since I am an old woman from the countryside, I don't care to observe taboos. Feel free to stay here for the seven days.

The “seven days” in question refer to the period during which the young woman needs to be confined, due to the defilement (*kegare* 穢れ) caused by the postpartum bleeding. Her explanation notwithstanding, the old woman being so casual about such a serious defilement suggests she possesses a peculiar ontological status, and her presence at childbirth associates her with another folk figure that may have served as an inspiration in constructing the Yamanba legend,<sup>214</sup> the *Datsueba* (奪衣婆):

In Japanese folklore, Datsueba is an old woman who takes away the clothes of the dead as they cross the river into hell. Her name means ‘clothes-snatching granny, and she is an ugly old hag who exposes her long, hanging breasts. However frightening the legend of Datsueba might originally have been, over time she came to be regarded as a deity with miraculous powers to heal and to protect children.’<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Reider 2010: 68-75; Kretschmer 2000: 398-400.

<sup>215</sup> Angelika Kretschmer, “Mortuary Rites for Inanimate Objects: The Case of Hari Kuyō.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27, no. 3/4 (2000): 398.

*Datsueba* is, thus, also an old woman with a dichotomous function of being present, and providing aid, at both death and birth. It is interesting that while Yamanba resides in the mountain, Datsueba is in charge of river-crossing, vesting both figures with the ability to traverse liminal spaces and cross a boundary between the visible and the invisible world, a trait that will symbolically be emphasized in the play. At any rate, the two contradicting images that inform Yamanba converged, while continuing to develop in literature and tradition, including the Noh. By the end of the medieval period she was recognized as a frightening demon-like old woman, as well as a protective motherly figure,<sup>216</sup> in either case possessing super-human powers and abilities.

While the descriptions of Yamanba as an ugly old woman with cannibalistic propensity may most readily resonate with that of the witch to the Western audience, Yoko Takashima finds Yamanba as a folkloric figure more similar to elves or fairies than witches in European folklore. She contends that Yamauba-as-witch trope has been accepted as certain traits of Yamanba correspond to characteristics of witches, such as cannibalism, shape-shifting, etc., but other characteristics are closer to European counterparts as the goddess-like donor, or judge who gives rewards to the good and punishes the bad, such as the character of

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<sup>216</sup> Reider, *Demon Lore*, 64-69.

the fairy-godmother, or Baba Yaga<sup>217</sup> from the Slavic tradition.<sup>218</sup> This difference indicates that the role of Yamanba or her counterparts is different from that of the witches in real folk life and beliefs. Yamauba is worshiped as a goddess, or feared as powerful supernatural being, while a witch is a human woman who may have come into knowledge of powerful technology or “magic,” but her powers are limited and exhaustive.

The compassionate and “motherly” aspect of Yamanba resonates with the humanness in her, but as a human, she is also an anomaly and, as such, is associated with the anomalous aspect of human community, something Reider identifies as Yamauba’s status as marginalized “other.” In this sense, she can be associated with the “other” from either within, or without; namely, either members of the community who have fallen into a marginalized status, or strangers who are spatially removed from the community. This “otherness” of Yamanba is, in turn, another trait she shares with the figure of *oni*, so the humanness, *oni*-ness and otherness of Yamanba are constantly eclipsed and reproduced by internal aspects of her nature.

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<sup>217</sup> Baba Yaga (Баба-яга) in particular possesses traits remarkably similar to Yammaba. She was originally an ancient Slavic deity who would assume the form of an ugly old woman, living deep in the forest. Baba Yaga is moody and unpredictable, and is capable of causing great harm, but also granting boon. For more on this character see Propp 1928 (1968): 8-15.

<sup>218</sup> Takashima Yoko, “Minkan setsuwa: denshō ni okeru yamauba, yōsei, majo (Horiuchi Tatsuo kyōju tainin kinen),” *Jinbun kenkyō* 65 (2014): 115–35.

Moreover, Yamanba is gendered female, but also challenges the categories of femaleness and gender:

“From the viewpoint of gender studies, Mizuta Noriko considers yamauba as gender transcendent. She contrasts yamauba with the women of the village (*sato*). [...] According to Mizuta, the women of the *sato* are idealized and standardized—they are good mothers, good wives, chaste, humble, and obedient to their fathers and husbands (10–12). Conversely, yamauba is someone who falls distinctly outside the norm. Yamauba defies the norm for the *sato*’s women, for her essential qualities are so complex, nebulous and multivalent that she nullifies traditional gender roles. In other words, yamauba exists outside the *sato*’s system of gender normativity.”<sup>219</sup>

This insight is significant as it contextualizes the Yamanba’s gender in a way that transcends strictly feminist readings of her character, and places it within a larger framework of medieval religiosity. I suggest it is illuminating to consider Yamanba’s femaleness in the context of her chthonic aspects and her activities as a performer / ritualist placed against the backdrop of medieval kami-buddha combinatorics. That is, we should evaluate Yamanba’s materialization as female as a significant, but not the defining component of her identity. In fact, *all* of the forms in which Yamanba is materialized – demon/human/female – are significant, without any *one* of them being defining. Or, to word it differently, they are all defining, but only so long as they are being evaluated in concert.

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<sup>219</sup> Reider, *Demon Lore*, 66.

Noh *Yamanba* takes on all these traits but recasts Yamanba in a way that further deconstructs both her human-ness and her *oni*-ness in a way that is not supernatural, but rather hyper-natural: Yamanba seems to embody nature itself, with all the complexities presupposed by the play's religio-ritual framework. During the *ai* interlude between the play's two acts, as the party from the capital waits for the promised return of the old woman, they ask their guide to elaborate on the background of Yamanba. The varied accounts of Yamanba's origin he shares with them notably involve non-sentient objects coming to life:

山姥には山中の堂宮に掛けてある鰐口がなると申し候。[...] まづ鰐口と申すものは口の大きなものにて、目には團栗がなり鼻には胡桃がなる。耳には茸がなりそれに手足が出来て、恐ろしき山姥になると申し候。[...] また何やらござつた野老がなると申し候。まづ野老と申すものは、髭の多きものにて、長雨などが致し、やまの崩れ目より野老が出た。この髭がしやれて白髭となり。これに目鼻がつき頭となり。さてからだには大山の松油が大風に谷へ吹き落され。これに塵芥が取りつき。手足が出来山姥となり申し候。<sup>220</sup>

*Yamauba ni ha yamanaka no doumiya ni kakete aru waniguchi ga naru to mōshi sōrō. [...] Mazu waniguchi to mōsu mono ha kuchi no okinaru mono nite, me ni ha donguri ga nari hana ni ha kurumi ga naru. [...] Mata nani yara gozatsuta tokoro ga naru to mōshi sōrō. Mazu tokoro to mōsu mono ha, hige no ōki mono nite, nagame nado ga itashi, yama no kuzure me yori tokoro ga kita. Kono hige ga shiyarete shirohige to nari. Kore ni mehana ga tsuki atama to nari. Sate karada ni ha ōyama no matsuya ga ōkaze ni tamae fuki otosare. Kore ni chiriakuta ga toritsuki. Teashi ga derai yamauba to nari mōshi sōrō.*

They say that Yamanba came to be from a shrine gong [...] The shrine gong – you know, the one they call the “crocodile gong” because of the hole that resembles a gaping mouth of the crocodile – well, that became her mouth. Her

<sup>220</sup> *Yamanba*. Sanari, ed. *Yōkyoku taikan*, 3175-6.



eyes came from acorns, her nose from a walnut, her ears from mushrooms, then she grew arms and legs, and thus became the terrible Yamanba [...] Then, what was that other story...? Ah, yes! They say she came to be from a wild potato. You know how wild potatoes have long sprouts like whiskers? Well, when heavy rains came, the wild potatoes were pulled out by the landslide. Those whiskers turned white, the eyes and ears grew out and created a head. As far as her body goes, it came from pine sap that the wind scattered from a large mountain all over the valley, to which all manner of dust and debris attached. Then arms and legs grew out and that's how Yamanba came to be. Or so they say.

The above excerpt indicates that legends of Yamanba's origin not only depict her being born out of non-sentient natural elements (field potato, mushrooms, walnuts, etc.), but even inanimate objects coming to life (stones and debris, pinesap). An especially intriguing account is how Yamanba came to be from an animated shrine gong known as "crocodile gong" (*waniguchi* 鰐口). The choice of this particular object is likely due to its unique form; its circular shape with an opening at the bottom rim resembles a face with a slit mouth, while the manner in which *waniguchi* is usually hung, by a rope or a chain drawn through two loops on either side of the upper rim of the circle, makes the entire object look like a horned head of an *oni* (Figure 9). The sixteenth century painted scroll *Hyakki yagyō emaki* (百鬼夜行絵巻), depicting "the night procession of one hundred *oni*," features an amphibian creature with a *waniguchi* for head as one of the monsters in the procession (Figures 10 and 11).<sup>221</sup> The scroll, obviously, postdates *Yamanba*, but the inclusion of the *waniguchi* monster testifies to

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<sup>221</sup> Komatsu Kazuhiko, *Yōkai emaki*, (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 2010), 92-7.

the fact that such a being existed in the popular imagination. In fact, it was associated with an older and more general belief in the so-called “tool kami” (*tsukumogami* 付喪神).<sup>222</sup> The suggestive shape and already established lore certainly made waniguchi a suitable motif for utilization in the narrative, but it should not be neglected that waniguchi has a primary function in a shrine to summon the kami and draw their attention. It is a pertinent question to ask why a shrine implement would be represented as transforming into a she-demon, and what implication this might have for her emphatically repeated desire for enlightenment.

Noh’s Yamanba defies many of the tropes associated with both Yamanba-as-human, and Yamanba-as-*oni*. She is clearly not an ordinary woman, she is not a typical demon, and while there are aspects of her that are kami-like, she is an unusual deity as well. The way she is said to be auto-created out of nature portrays her really as a life-infusing energy, an animating force of nature that is awe-inspiring and dangerous at the same time. Indeed, this aspect of Yamanba is present in the lore, where she is portrayed as a Mother-Goddess figure, where objects of both nature and culture are created from her body, and where an encounter with her can lead to obtaining wealth or fertility, or where she brings good harvest.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> The popular belief goes that, if left unused for a long period of time, an object will come to life as a begrudged kami. Animated tools appear occasionally in the late Heian period (794- 1185) sources, but the term *tsukumogami* designating these phenomena solidifies sometime in the Muromachi period (1336-1573). Komatsu 2010: 95; Reider 2009: 242.

<sup>223</sup> Kondo Yoshihiro, “Nihon bunka to Yamanba: minzoku shakai ni okeru yōkai no yakuwari,” *Teikyō nihon bunka ronshū*, no. 17 (October 2010): 278.

However, the birth of Yamanba as passed down according to the play's *kyōgen*, reads almost like an inversion of a creation myth, thus coming full circle; nature emanates from Yamanba and is also absorbed by her. But we also find Yamanba amplified in the play into an enlightened being. The “good and evil” (*yoshiashi* 善悪)<sup>224</sup> Yamanba drags her feet through the mountains seeking salvation, appearing at the same time to aid pilgrims on the Amida Buddha's Agero path. The play in this way introduces layer upon layer of Yamanba's character, and then moves on to peeling the layers back off without certainty of the outcome. Because Yamanba is not any one thing, but many things simultaneously. She was never in any way stable to begin with, she is not any one person, or one entity, but is every person, and every entity, and then all persons and entities conjured up in one. Furthermore, these entities and characteristics are a series of opposing binary structures, within which parts of the structure are not in clear opposition, but rather a continuum that is constantly dialectically reproduced.

### ***Yamanba*: Dragging Feet on Buddha's Path**

Just as its name-sake protagonist, Noh *Yamanba* is somewhat of an anomaly in the repertory, as conventions of the genre are disrupted, and many typical and fixed categories are free-floating and shifting. The setting for the play is somewhat unusual, as the action takes place on the road: most Noh plays are firmly associated with places that are very

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<sup>224</sup> *Yamanba*. Sanari, ed, *Yōkyoku taikan*, 3172.

specific destinations in themselves. While like the setting of Yamanba, they may be liminal locations, it is rare to find a setting that is the journey through the mysterious fastness of the deep mountains. Zenkōji temple, therefore not at the point of destination, as would be expected, but within the liminal space deep in the mountains, infused with mysterious power. The intended point of destination of the journey is Zenkōji, the “Temple of the Good Light” (善光寺), signifying the enlightenment at the end of the Path. Zenkōji is a significant locale both historically and as a part of the folk tradition, and it is featured in *setsuwa*, and in *emaki* throughout the medieval and early modern period. It was (and still is) run both by Tendai and Pure Land schools, but as a prominent site of worship it was so popular that it practically developed its own base of believers (Zenkōji shinkō 善光寺信仰).<sup>225</sup> Zenkōji also has strong ties with performance, and in Noh it is the site of the play *Kashiwazaki* (柏崎), themed with reunion of mother and child.

As a *tsukuri noh*, without a literary source (*honzetsu* 本説) *Yamanba* did not confront the playwright with the same set of audience anticipations about the story that one would have in a play with a *honzetsu*. The role distribution is also somewhat atypical. With the two main characters both assuming roles with ritual significance, an expected set-up would cast them as *shite* versus *waki*; however, Hyakuma is cast as a *tsure* (連れ)<sup>226</sup> to *Yamanba*’s *shite*,

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<sup>225</sup> Abe Yasuro, *Yuya no kōgō: chūsei no sei to seinaru mono* (Nagoya-shi: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 1998), 194-6.

<sup>226</sup> *Tsure* is a companion role to either the protagonist (*shite*) or the counterpart (*waki*).

with one of the dancer's retinue acting as *waki*. Hyakuma is a *kusemai* dancer, but Yamanba requests her to dance to help break her (Yamanba's) illusions, defining the young woman, thus, as a religious ritualist. And although Yamanba demands that Hyakuma perform for her, she ends up doing the performance herself (performing, eventually, a ritual of her own exorcism/pacification). All of these unusual characteristics combine to create complex relationship between the two women.

One of the most prominent traits of Noh present in *Yamanba* is using physical, natural and geographical space metaphorically to convey religious and philosophical meaning. Hyakuma's journey is most transparently a metaphor for a lifetime of suffering, as much as it is a religious pilgrimage, and she is traversing the symbolic sacred geography as she moves through the physical space. This is depicted through her *michiyki*, in which sacred space is configured to establish its Buddhological confines.

梢波立つ汐越の、梢波立つ汐越の、安宅の松の夕煙消えぬ憂き身の、  
罪を斬る彌陀の劔の礪波山。雲路うながす三越路の國の末なる里問へ  
ば、いとど都は遠ざかる境川にも着きにけり、境川にも着きにけり <sup>227</sup>

*Kozuenami tatsu shiokoshi no, kozuenami tatsu shiokoshi no, ataka no matsu  
no yūkemuri kienu uki mi no, tsumi wo kiru mida no tsurugi no tonamiyama.  
Kumoji unagasu mikoji no kuni no sue naru sato toeba, itodo miyako ha  
tōzakarū sakai kawa ni mot suki ni kerī, sakai kawa ni mot suki ni kerī.*

Tidal waves as high as treetops, tidal waves as high as treetops of the Ataka pines. As persistent as the evening mists gathering in them are the sins of our own selves adrift in the realm of suffering, cut down by the sword of Amida,

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<sup>227</sup> *Yamanba*. Sanari, ed. *Yōkyoku taikan*, 3167-8.

whose shape the Tonami peak borrows. Passing along the cloudy road province after province, three in all, we ask for directions in the remote village, far from the capital. We arrive at the Sakai river, we arrive at the Boundary river.

The party is making its way through mists and obstacles of the temptations and sins of the suffering world, province after province, lifetime after lifetime, with the sword of Amida aiding them along the Path, and the Good Light as their destination, symbolizing the enlightenment. Their journey is about to make a significant detour, as they cross the Boundary river, a boundary in both literal and metaphorical senses. Here they enter the mountains, the realm of Yamanba. The Buddhist space of the Path is inscribed within pre-Buddhist sacred space, and proceeding up the mountain, Hyakuma and her retinue enter the ancient spiritual world, transgressing into a space of a different kind. So simultaneously, they are encroaching on a sacred territory populated by kami, and following Amida Buddha's path. And it is Amida's path that takes them into the heart of the realm of Yamanba, suggesting that perhaps Yamanba is also Amida Buddha. This is perfectly consistent with the philosophy of non-dualism that permeates the play, and is a basis for a complex and multi-layered network of overlaps and identifications. In a way, Hyakuma's journey resonates with the one that *Kanawa* woman undertakes, as here too the crossing of the center/margin boundary is such a dramatic transition that it disrupts boundaries between this and the other world and opens up the way to the Other. Unlike *Kanawa* woman, however, Hyakuma is a performer, and therefore, likely better prepared to respond to the situation as a ritualist.

The path leads Hyakuma and her retinue through a magnificent landscape saturated with religious and poetic symbolism. Earlier, when they asked for directions, the party was informed that there are different ways to reach their destination; one of the paths is bound to grant them karmic merit, but that path is, unsurprisingly, the most difficult one and fraught with danger, and this is the path that Hyakuma chooses. As a literary strategy, this choice highlights how with moving away from the capital Hyakuma's identity shifts; leaving her carriage behind and continuing on foot, like a pilgrim, is a step away from the Center, and moving closer to the liminal space. It is also a hint that her identity as the entertainer is about to be supplanted by her identity as a ritualist:

げにや常に承る西方の浄土は十萬億土とかや。これは又彌陀来迎の直路なれば、上路の山とやらんに参り候べし。とても修行の旅なれば乗物をばこれに留め置き、徒跣にて参り候べし。<sup>228</sup>

*Geniya tsune ni uketamawaru saihō no jōdo ha manokudo tokaya kore ha mata mida raikō no chokuro nareba, agero no yama to yaran ni mairi sōrō beshi. Totemo shugyō no tabi nareba norimono wo ba kore ni tomeoki, kachihadashi nite mairi sōrō beshi.*

Indeed, I have always been told that the Western Paradise is something on the order of tens of millions worlds away. Since this is the path that Amida Buddha takes to welcome the spirits of the dead, we should go up the Agero mountain path, then. As this trip is an ascetic pilgrimage, I should leave the carriage here and continue barefoot.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 3169.

As soon as the company moves into the mountain the sun sets suddenly in the middle of the day. This establishes the extra-ordinary character of the space by describing a fantastic occurrence, but darkness here also stands for attachment and delusion – the clouds of delusion that prevent enlightenment. It becomes clear that the real reason for going into the mountains is because it is inevitable for the two Yamanbas to face each other.

Deep in the woods, the party encounters the real Yamanba, who appears to them in the form of an old woman. The old woman does not even bother to hide her identity as we would expect in the Noh, and as we saw in *Dōjōji*. She says she is offering them lodging because she wants to hear the famous Hyakuma perform “Yamanba” song and dance, and this is “why [she] had the sun set” (*sono tame no koso hi wo kurashi* そのためにこそ日を暮らし).<sup>229</sup> Yamanba has come to satisfy her curiosity, but also to express her resentment. She confronts Hyakuma:

年頃色には出ださせ給ふ言の葉草の露ほども御心にはかけ給はぬ。恨み申しに來りたり。<sup>230</sup>

*Toshigoro iro ni wa idasasetamau koto no hagusa no tsuyu hodo mo onkokoro ni ha kake tamawanu. Urami mōshi ni kitaritari.*

For years your song has given form to words as numerous as the leaves on trees, yet their meaning holds to your heart no firmer than dew on the grass. I have come to tell you how much I begrudge you this!

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 3172.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 3173.



Yamanba, the mountain crone, is known for making rounds across the mountains – her *yamameguri* (山廻り). The dance that Hyakuma performs, and has built her reputation on, is specifically this *yamameguri*. Yamanba irascibly suggests that the dancer is ignorant of the very thing that makes her who she is – the dance that earned her renown and gave her her name. Despite reprimanding her, though, Yamanba continues to insist on seeing Hyakuma’s performance. She is drawn to Hyakuma: although Hyakuma has chosen to venture into Yamanba’s abode, Yamanba has lured the woman in for her own purpose – she needs Hyakuma’s help.

As noted above, Hyakuma is a *tsure* and not a *waki*, which places her in a specific relationship with Yamanba. From the structural point of view, as a *tsure*, she is “attached” to Yamanba and not confronted with her. She nevertheless performs a function in the play that would typically be expected of the *waki* – she is asked to perform a ritual of pacification for the shite:

妾が身をも弔ひ、舞歌音楽の妙音の聲佛事をもなし給はば、などか妾も輪廻を遁れ歸性の善所に至らざらん <sup>231</sup>

*Warawa ga mi wo tomurai, bukaongaku no myōon no koebutsuji wo mo nashi tamawaba, nado ka warawa mo rinne wo nogare kishō no zensho ni itarazaran.*

If you offer a prayer for me, if you let your magnificent song and dance be a Buddhist service for me, then I too can escape transmigration and return to the blessed state of enlightenment.

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 3173.

Yamanba thus frames the dance – what we would conventionally see as entertainment – as religious ritual and Hyakuma is the ritualist who perform it. Yamanba pleads: “Please, sing your song and thus dispel my illusory attachments” (*waga mōshū wo harashi tamae* わが妄執を晴らし給へ).<sup>232</sup> At a first glance it seems clear that she is asking for Buddhist service, which is textually additionally fortified by describing the site of the ritual as illuminated by the moonlight – a common reference to Buddhist enlightenment. At the same time, given the nature of Hyakuma’s profession, the nature of Yamanba as an *oni* and her association with the kami-worshipping folk tradition, and the fact that the moonlit space is a mountain, a significant kami-worshipping site, Hyakuma’s service can be read as a ritual of pacification, in which, as we saw in the introductory chapter, female performers have been known to participate. This way, pre-Buddhist and Buddhist ritual overlap under the aegis of non-dualism. However, this familiar Noh plot, where the wandering Hyakuma is asked to pacify the demoness Yamanba and aid her achieve enlightenment, conceals a twist.

Not daring to refuse Yamanba’s request, Hyakuma begins her performance with a song:

松風ともにふく笛の、松風ともにふく笛、聲澄み渡る谷川に手まづ遮  
る曲水の月に聲澄む深山かな、月に聲澄む深山かな<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 3176.

*Matsukaze to mo ni fuku fue, matsukaze to mo ni fuku fue, koe sumi wataru  
tanigawa ni te mazu saegiru kyokusui no tsuki ni koe sumu miyama kana*

The purest sound of the flute joined by wind in the pines, the purest sound of the flute joined by wind in the pines echoes through the valley; the poets' hands interrupt the river's meandering stream with their cups. Oh, the crystal clear voices deep in the moonlit mountain! Oh, the crystal clear voices deep in the moonlit mountain...

Yamanba approaches along the *hashigakari* and interrupts Hyakuma:

あら物凄の深谷やな、あら物凄の深谷やな寒林に骨を打つ、靈鬼泣く  
泣く前生の業を恨む。深野に供ずる天人返す返すも幾生の善を喜ぶ。

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*Ara monosugo no shinkoku ya na, ara monosugo no shinkoku ya na, kanrin ni  
hone wo utsu, reiki nakunaku zenjō wo uramu. Shinya ni hana wo kuzuru  
tennin kaesugaesu mo kisho no zen wo yorokobu.*

Ah, how amazing these deep valleys, how amazing these deep valleys! In cold and dark graveyards, the furious restless spirits beat on their bones, crying in regret over the misdeeds of their former lives. On peaceful gravesites, the celestial spirits return ever again to bring offerings to their tombs, rejoicing in the good acts of their many lifetimes.

Hyakuma's invocation of the poetic pastoral scene, celebrating this-worldly beauties of the scenery and human relations, recalling the sensory enjoyment of nature, poetry, companionship, and mundane excursions is countered and contrasted by Yamanba's harsh reminder of this-worldly life's impermanence and the consequences of human actions.

Yamanba seems to once again rebuke Hyakuma on her lack of understanding of these existential truths. However, she then moves on to categorically counter her own statement:

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 3177.

いや。善悪不二。何をか恨む。何を喜ばんや。<sup>235</sup>

*Iya. Zenaku funi. Nani wo ka uramu. Nani wo ka yorokobanya.*

No! Good and evil are not two! What is there to regret? What to rejoice in?

This line opens Yamanba's counter-performance and draws the main idea of the play into focus. It is clear that non-dualist presuppositions infuse the *Yamanba* narrative. Numerous statements of identifications point to this, culminating in the adage "good and evil are not two" (善悪不二).

One of the ways non-dualist ideology works in *Yamanba* is through this layering and overlapping of the characters. This refers to the multi-faceted character of the protagonist, but also to the overlapping of the two women – Hyakuma and Yamanba. Yamanba is a being materialized, as opposed to Hyakuma, who is a flesh-and-blood woman, but one who metaphorically dissolves and disappears as Yamanba (re)appropriates her performance: the two characters overlap in different planes of reality. The women and their mirror images are polarization that gets amended. Analysis of the "mirror images" in the play will help illuminate the inner workings of this realization.

Whether the dancer is drawn to/obsessed by Yamanba, or, whether she actually *is* Yamanba is a lingering question. The motif of a young pseudo-religious dancer inexplicably drawn to a spiritual entity (demon) resonates with *Dōjōji*, in which the shite is mysteriously

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

drawn to the bell of the Dōjōji temple. In both plays the dancer and the demon seem to be one and the same, but whereas in *Dōjōji* there is one body for two persons, in “Yamanba” there seem to be two bodies for the same person. From this perspective the main protagonist of the play is not (only) the Yamanba but the dancer Hyakuma, for she is the motivating force, the agent propelling the plot. She is the one who decides which path to take. She willfully relinquishes the carriage, which stands for the life of luxuries and attachment, determined to take Amida’s path. This invests her not only with agency to mobilize both herself and others (deciding the path and having others follow it) but also with capability to choose the right path, the path of enlightenment.

Hyakuma’s performance of Yamanba is as complex and layered, as is the very identity of the mountain crone. Hyakuma starts singing to invoke the crone in her true form, as the old woman promised. This produces Yamanba’s appearance but also engenders her reproach: the real Yamanba rebukes her for performing the dance without knowing the true nature of Yamanba; for using the Yamanba’s name without knowing who she really is; for not recognizing Yamanba’s true nature. In other words Yamanba claims: you do not realize *your* true nature. You need to perform this dance in this sacred space, on the Amida path with proper concentration and I will reveal myself to you in my true form - you will realize who *you* really are.

## ***Yamanba's Religious Framework***

In order to understand how this realization works for *Yamanba* and Hyakuma, but also performers and the audience, it is important to more closely analyze the overall religious framework of the play.

Noh *Yamanba* is regarded as a literary work that is an example *par excellence* of medieval Japanese religiosity.<sup>236</sup> Abe Yasurō identifies *Yamanba* as an expression of principles of the Buddhist doctrines of emptiness, non-dualism, and original enlightenment,<sup>237</sup> while Harada Kaori, acknowledging significance on non-dualism, privileges emphasis on Zen aesthetics and attitudes towards language.<sup>238</sup> Both scholars concur that along with the Buddhist philosophy, we also find strong representation of kami-worship, female performers as ritualists, and the shinbutsu paradigm in *Yamanba*.<sup>239</sup> Abe suspects that Hyakuma is a *miko* from the imperial shrine or a *nenbutsu* dancer who became a *shirabyōshi*: in other words a performing woman with a ritual association.<sup>240</sup> Female performers, as we have seen in earlier chapters, frequently and significantly performed various types of ritual functions, while an image of a performing woman vested with a ritual

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<sup>236</sup> Abe 1998: 192; Harada 2009: 115.

<sup>237</sup> Abe, *Yuya no kōgō*, 192-6.

<sup>238</sup> Harada Kaori, “Jisei henka – yōkyoku “Yamanba” nochiba no shisō,” *Bungaku ronsō*, no. 84 (February 2010): 82-5.

<sup>239</sup> Abe 1998: 192-6; Harada 2009: 115.

<sup>240</sup> Abe, *Yuya no kōgō*, 190.

authority or religious power was a popular literary construct. Furthermore, *kusemai* specifically was related to shinbutsu ritual practices, and Kanami himself had been trained in *kusemai*. Wakita Haruko agrees with Harada that a significant part of the overall religious framework of the play is developed under the influence of Zen philosophy, adding that the shinbutsu paradigm is nestled within this framework, along with the influence of the philosophy of non-dualism, strongly connected to the Tendai's concept of original enlightenment.<sup>241</sup> There is clearly an overall consensus amongst scholars as to which religious orientations and concepts are present in *Yamanba*, and the discrepancies are mainly in the specific emphasis. Through incorporating a panoply of ideas and concepts related to both Buddhist and non-Buddhist orientations, *Yamanba* reflects the richness of the medieval religiosity. Noh as a genre made this possible, as it embraced disparate discourses to be harmonized as a part of a shared structure.

While it is difficult to have a single philosophy, concept, or school extrapolated as dominant in *Yamanba*'s expression and aesthetics, it would be hard to deny that the most explicitly expressed in the text is the concept of non-dualism (*funi* 不二), which is reaffirmed through the protagonist's repeated pronouncements. Non-dualism, in turn draws on the Mahayana doctrine of Emptiness (*kū* 空). It is encapsulated in the Heart Sutra (*Hannya*

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<sup>241</sup> Wakita Haruko, *Josei Geinō No Genryū: Kugutsu Kusemai Shirabyōshi* (Kadokawa Sensho 326. Tōkyō: Kadokawa Shoten), 13, 31.

*shingyo*), along with the Lotus Sutra, arguably the best-known and most oft-cited Mahayana sutra in Japan. It states that “form is none other than emptiness, emptiness is none other than form” (*shiki soku ze kū, kū soku ze shiki* 色即是空、空即是色),<sup>242</sup> which allows for both ontological and epistemological explanation of Yamanba’s nature as non-dual. We can see this when Yamanba herself invokes the Sutra:

一念化生の鬼女となつて、目前に来れども、邪正一如と見る時は、色  
即是空。そのままに仏法あれば、世法あり。煩惱あれば、菩提あり。  
仏あれば、衆生あり。衆生あれば、山姥あり。<sup>243</sup>

*Ichinen keshō no kijo to natsute, mokuzen ni kitaredomo jashō ichinyo to miru  
toki ha shiki zoku ze kū. Sono mama ni buppō areba sehō ari. Bonnnno areba,  
bodai ari. Hotoke areba, shujō ari. Shujō areba, Yamanba ari.*

In the span of a thought-moment transformed into a she-demon, even as I appear before your eyes like this, when you realize there is no distinction between right and wrong, form is none other than emptiness. By the same token, the Buddhist Law is no different than this-worldly phenomena, worldly passions are no different than enlightenment, buddhas are no different than people, and people are no different than Yamanba.

This is the framework within which Yamanba can be demon, human, an enlightened being, ritualist, object of ritual. At the heart of *Yamanba* is a story of the duality and oneness of the (realm of) suffering and enlightenment, or rather overcoming of the duality of suffering and enlightenment by realizing their oneness, or lack of distinction. Wakita notes that, while it may easily be inferred that *Yamanba* symbolizes resistance of the old faith to the Buddhism

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<sup>242</sup> Hannya shingyō, Kongō hannyakyō / Nakamura Hajime, Kino Kazuyoshi yakuchū. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2001 (2002 printing)

<sup>243</sup> *Yamanba*. Sanari, ed. *Yōkyoku taikan*, 3181.



subduing old deities, it is precisely non-dualist framework of the play which makes this interpretation insubstantial. She counters the idea by emphasizing non-dualism, or rather insisting that there is no contradiction in Buddhism and pre-Buddhist beliefs and practices existing side by side, and there is no contradiction whether Yamanba is an *oni* or a kami protecting humans.<sup>244</sup>

The same interpretive possibilities extend to characters, spaces, words, and actions in the play. Just as the realm of the Buddha's Law is equated with here and now, by implication the world of suffering is equated with the sacred space of the kami – Yamanba's mountain. Harada ponders why the *shite* materializes as Yamanba, how her identity as Yamanba is related to her (in)ability to dispel attachment, and how the worldview of world of suffering (*samsara*) interacts with the idea of the mountain as the sacred kami space. Focusing specifically on the second act of the play containing the famous *kusemai*, Harada posits that the structure of the aesthetic world of the *kusemai*, where *tsure* and *shite* are juxtaposed, reflects the integral characteristics of the character of Yamanba, the dualities and contradictions of her character, such as good/evil, beauty/ugliness, youth/old age.<sup>245</sup> Hyakuma comes from the capital, she represents culture, order, and center, whereas Yamanba represents nature, chaos, and margin. The *kusemai* represents the highlight of the play that distills all these oppositions; Hyakuma,

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<sup>244</sup> Wakita Haruko, *Nōgaku no naka no onnatachi: onnamai no fūshi* (Iwanami shoten, 2005), 35.

<sup>245</sup> Harada, "Nochiba no shisō," 82–100.

Yamanba's reverse mirror image, embodies youth, the present moment, and beauty (in a way the transient world). She symbolizes light, whereas Yamanba symbolizes darkness.

However, the two women are not a simple opposition. I suggest that Yamanba and her counterpart make up a continuum (being "not two," which is in the scene symbolized by them dancing off of each other), and that Harada's concept of "transformation" can be interpreted in different ways. The "transformation" could be a transformation within Yamanba herself, as she is having her "illusions dispelled," or the shifting of the ritual/performance is this transformation within the continuum (the being that is the "not two" Hyakuma and Yamanba). Noh *Yamanba* unfolds around the concept that "good and evil are not two" and that there is also no boundary between life and death. This is consistent with the doctrine of Samsara, as there is no true dying as being just transforms through different identities, while continuing through the link of deaths and births. In that sense, the play *Yamanba* and its eponymous protagonist provide a visualization of Samsara, in which Yamanba represents not any one person but all existences bundled up together. Her old age does not only symbolize passing of time and aging, but actually the transformation in the entirety of Samsara of one's many lives, and imprints of the consequences of one's attachments and delusions. In other words, *Yamanba* is mirror image for this life of delusion and aging and attachment, and watching it, the hope is that audience would realize that.

Aesthetically speaking, Harada suggests that *Yamanba* predominantly reflects a Zen

worldview and visual aesthetics. Working through the forest of religious concepts and overlapping frameworks, Harada notes that the Zen quality of the play can be drawn from the language use and effect it produces, which is influenced by the Zen philosophy of language, rooted in a acute mistrust of language. *Yamanba*'s rich poeticism, Harada contends, is akin to *kōan*, the seemingly nonsensical formulations intended to promote enlightenment. What makes *Yamanba* Zen-like is its attitude towards language, in the way that it transcends its direct meaning, pointing to the deeper meaning of language, or rather the suspicion about human language being able to reflect Truth.<sup>246</sup> *Yamanba* has that quality of the intellectual game like a *kōan*. This quality of *Yammaba* is a very conscious and deliberate choice of expression of the Noh playwright. This sophistication of expression and “Zen-ness” of language is precisely why Harada argues for Zeami authorship when it comes to *Yamanba*.

Hyakuma's performance of *Yamanba* is not based in any particular narrative or physical feature. It is based on her “mountain rounds” (*yamameguri* 山廻り), and the mountain rounds are the crux of *Yamanba*'s existence. She speaks of her surroundings with affection but also melancholy:

春は梢に咲くかと待ちし、花を尋ねて山廻り。秋はさやけき影を尋ねて、月見る方に山廻り。冬は冴え行く時雨の雲の雪を誘ひて、山廻り。<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>247</sup> *Yamanba*. Sanari, ed. *Yōkyoku taikan*, 3183.

*Haru ha kozue ni saku ka to mochishi, hana wo tazunete yamameguri. Aki ha sayakeki kage wo tazunete tsuki mirukata ni yamameguri. Fuyu ha saeyuku shigure no kumo no yuki wo sasohite yamameguri.*

In spring, waiting for the treetops to bloom, I look for the blossoms, and make my mountain rounds. In autumn, searching for bright reflections I go to view the Moon, and make my mountain rounds. In autumn, from clouds whose rain has already turned cold, I summon the snow and make my mountain rounds.

The nature of Yamanba's existence is suggested through scenery of deep mountains and ravines with which she is synonymous and from and of which she had come into existence.

The description of Yamanba in this setting recalls a kami asserting her control over the space, but her musings on suffering and her mountain "rounds" that recall hardships of ascetic practice, steers the play into the shinbutsu territory. Of course, the idyllic description of the beauty of her mountain concludes with another proclamation of the Buddhist truth:

廻り廻りて輪廻を離れぬ。妄執の雲の塵積つて山姥となれる鬼女が有様。<sup>248</sup>

*Meguri megurite rinne wo hanarenu. Mōshū no kumo no chiri tsumotsute Yamanba to nareru kijo ga arisama.*

Round and round, there is no breaking out of the circle of rebirths. Lo, Yamanba who has become a she-demon by accumulating the debris from the clouds of delusion.

As the *shite*, Yamanba's abode is representative of non-dualism and is marked by ambiguity and contradiction. It is unclear whether Yamanba's mountain and her realm are hell or the physical world of desire, and there is a possibility to argue for both. Yamanba may not even

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

be a being per se, but through materializing out of the natural world she takes form of a female demon. Furthermore, Yamanba's mountain is dark and mysterious, implying a boundary to the world of spirits; this creates a sense of fear of breaching that boundary.

Yamanba is a multi-layered, multi-faceted being. But in Yamanba's genealogy as female oni there is strong element of mystery and divinity and, she arises from characters in the folk tradition understood as both a kami and *oni*, frightening and powerful, but at the same time benevolent and motherly. This makes Yamanba particularly given to feel compassionate to women performers and their situation in life. Given the existence of records of performing women living in, and traveling along the mountain paths, the association, and the overlapping identity, between Yamanba and Hyakuma, is more than just poetic.<sup>249</sup> We might say that Yamanba's mountain rounds are a metaphysical backdrop to Hyakuma's actual wanderings. Or, to remain within the Buddhist framework, Hyakuma is a Manifest Truth to Yamanba's Absolute Truth.

In the end, we are left with the notion that Yamanba will go on making her mountain rounds indefinitely:

山また山に山廻り、山また山に山廻りして、行方も知らずなりにけ。

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*Yama mata yama yamameguri, yama mata yama yamameguri shite, yukuhe mo shirazu nari ni keru.*

Mountain upon mountain she makes her rounds, mountain upon mountain she

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<sup>249</sup> Abe 1998: 195-6; Wakita 2005: 39.

<sup>250</sup> *Yamanba*. Sanari, ed, *Yōkyoku taikan*, 3184.

makes her rounds, in the direction never to be known.

I will conclude this part of the discussion by suggesting an additional line of interpretation regarding Yamanba's nature, and posing some questions about the implications this interpretation may have for the overall religio-ritual dimension of the play. Scholarship is fairly unanimous in identifying the importance of Tendai Original Enlightenment thought and related discourses as frames for *Yamanba*. It is also readily accepted that amongst the many concepts supporting the ideological framework of the play, non-dualism assumes the place of dominance. A concept that has also been brought up in this context, but not discussed prominently in reference to *Yamanba* is the so-called "enlightenment of trees and plants" (*sōmoku jōbutsu* 草木成仏).

The doctrine was born out of debates related to the Original Enlightenment thought on whether non-sentient beings have the ability to achieve enlightenment or not. In medieval Japan, Jacqueline Stone suggests, the interest in the idea may have developed due to a long standing sense, predating Buddhism, of powers existing in nature, as well as the unstable political situation that lead to an "increasing valorization of the natural world as a place of reclusion and enhanced soteriological meaning, in contrast to the turmoil and political scheming that marked the imperial capital."<sup>251</sup> Perhaps thanks to these same reasons,

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<sup>251</sup> Jacqueline Ilyse Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 30.

referencing the doctrine became popular in literature and Noh theater. A number of plays, such as *Kakitsubata* (“Iris”) or *Ominameshi* (“Maiden Flower”) that feature anthropomorphized plants explored the *sōmoku jōbutsu* teaching for poetic and artistic ends. In the case of *Yamanba*, I believe, *sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrine can be illuminating when interrogating the soteriological aspect of the play. *Yamanba*’s major concern throughout the play (as in most Noh) is her great desire for enlightenment, and anxiety about her ability to achieve it. She goes on her repeated “rounds” that, as human life, have the allure of beauty and sensory pleasures (depicted through sounds, sensations, etc.), but end up being repetitive, unfulfilling, and filled with the sense of being trapped (“mountain upon mountain...”).

Fabio Rambelli explains the soteriological views of the *sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrine from the point of view of both Tendai and Shingon schools, pointing out the distinction between the two interpretations:

Mature Tendai hongaku doctrines claim that plants *do not* become buddhas because they are already absolute and unconditioned part of Thusness, and therefore they play an essential and unchangeable role in the economy of the cosmos. [...] According to Shingon, plants *do* perform religious practices but religious practices are actually described as secular, everyday practices: in the case of plants, their vital cycle itself is a soteriologic process. In addition, both Tendai and Shingon traditions eliminated the sentient-nonsentient dichotomy by showing that all beings are actually endowed with mind and consciousness. Their difference is thus not ontological but epistemological.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Fabio Rambelli, *Vegetal Buddhas: Ideological Effects Of Japanese Buddhist Doctrines On The Salvation Of Inanimate Beings* (Kyoto: Cheng & Tsui, 2001), 91.

Yamanba, clearly, is not a “plant,” but aspects of her person very much place her deep within the natural and elemental world. As we saw, many of her origin stories depict her as being manifested out of the natural world, and, even, inanimate objects. While never confirmed (or disproved) by her, there is a sense that Yamanba is an organic part of her environment, and as such, both she and the environment can benefit from the soteriological venue provided by *sōmoku jōbutsu*.

### **Good and Evil – The “Way” of the Actor**

A remaining question is how the literary and religious dimension of *Yamanba* and complexities and identifications of the protagonist intertwine with the performative aspect.

Paul Atkins uses the idea of non-dualist overlaps as the key theoretical concept and the lens through which to consider Zenchiku’s work, referring to them as “revealed identity.” He defines them as “presenting opposites which turn out to be the same – identical, but that what is seemingly identical turns out to be the indistinguishable at the end of the play.”<sup>253</sup> leaving the narrative without a proper resolve, but revealing the state in which the shite had already always been in.

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<sup>253</sup> Paul S Atkins, *Revealed Identity: The Noh Plays of Komparu Zenchiku* (Michigan: University of Michigan Ann Arbor, 2006), 21.



Royal Tyler stresses that “however little the dancer may have to say, she and Yamanba are counterparts of one another. They are paired opposites. Medieval Japanese Buddhism was intensely concerned with the play of paired opposites (such as delusion and enlightenment) and constantly affirmed their non-duality.”<sup>254</sup> He identifies seed to the dancer and fruit to Yamanba:

The dancer, too, has suffered or she would not take the difficult road over the Tops and meet Yamanba. Moreover, when at last she sees the mountain wilderness, she surely realizes with mingled terror and awe that she had never known what her own *kusemai* was actually about. Yamanba herself than appears – she who, in part two, seems less to suffer from “wrongful clinging” than to *be* this clinging, as conjured up in a sentient being’s mind.”<sup>255</sup>

Yamanba’s message to Hyakuma not to be afraid of her, can be considered a charge not to be afraid of oneself. In accordance with non-dualism and original enlightenment, all beings already possess the buddha nature, they have but to realize it. By the same token, Hyakuma should not be afraid to realize the “demon” (Yamanba) within her, as it is none other than buddha nature: good and evil are not two. But what does this have to do with the (in)ability to achieve enlightenment? The difficulty to achieve enlightenment comes from the fact that one first realizes the demon (as Hyakuma did) and is afraid to face it. Yamanba then becomes materialized as a subject of a tale, and is thus immortalized, passed on from generation to generation, lifetime to lifetime (“mountain upon mountain”) trapped in the

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<sup>254</sup> Royal Tyler, *Japanese Noh Dramas* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 311.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 312.

limbo. She continues to make her mountain rounds, unsure of whether she will ever break her attachment – for the tale is a trace, and as long as it is told, she is attached to the world of suffering. On one level, then, the play is inconsistent so the cycle can start over, as each individual needs to go through this process of facing the “evil,” their inner Yamanba, on their path to buddhahood. Yamanba exits the stage, “her destination never to be known.”

In the same way that Hyakuma faces Yamanba on the stage, so does the actor playing Yamanba’s part, for he, too, repeatedly performs (and “performs”) Yamanba. With a thin line between a religious service and an artistic performance in the noh, Yamanba, is a work of art, but also is a perfect example of the intimate relationship that exists between arts, performance, ritual and enlightenment.

An important basis and background for the play is the idea of “michi” arts, that is, the idea of practicing art as a way to enlightenment. It adds an important dimension to the complex schema of non-dualist identification (or Atkins’ “revealed identities”), and accentuates the multilayeredness of the play. Art is a way for Hyakuma and Yamanba, but also for actors on the stage, to reach an insight into their own identity, their own truth, and consequently, enlightenment. In this sense, *Yamanba* is a play where actors themselves can feel the highest level of identification. Both Zeami’s and Zenchiku’s philosophy of theater, and the way the actor’s art is accomplished is closely connected to the Noh’s spiritual and religious underpinnings. Drawing a comparison between Zeami and Zenchiku, Arthur

Thornhill points out that for Zenchiku, *monomane* (“imitation”) is based on possession rather than impersonation.<sup>256</sup> Demon roles were performed by older, accomplished actors, but not, as one might assume, due to their stage experience and competence associated with it; it was due to the assumption that after years of practicing the *michi* of acting, one achieves an enlightened state of mind that protects him from being seduced by “unorthodox” or “base” techniques. Only then could an actor perform demon roles, such as Yamanba, with detachment and “without transgressing moral principles.”<sup>257</sup>

Zeami also relied heavily on this notion even if he understood it somewhat differently from his mysticist successor. Royall Tyler emphasizes the importance of Yamanba in the *noh* repertoire, and concludes that Yamanba belongs to the “Zeami’s late style, since it so clearly manifests his principle [...] of *kyakurai*, or ‘returning.’ Zeami came to hold that the actor who has mastered the highest flower of his art should then return to disport himself among the lower, less refined styles of *no*”<sup>258</sup> such as demon plays like *Yamanba*. He further explains that “the earlier Zeami had little use for *oni* plays, despite their popularity, because an *oni* is neither beautiful nor elegant. In the [*Yamanba*], however, he gave a female *oni* figure awesome dignity and linked her with the very sources of art.”<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Arthur Thornhill, *Six Circles One Dewdrop: The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 59.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>258</sup> Royall Tyler, *Japanese Noh Dramas* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 309.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

Zenchiku, as we saw, very clearly laid this out in his treatises in the part where he deals with development of an actor: a successful demon can only be an actor who has achieved enlightenment. Along with realization of buddhahood, this at the same time represents the realization of the highest aesthetic principles, and the convergence of the two gives birth to the highest level of transcendental existence on stage - the Sun-goddess that is the Mahavairocana Buddha at the same time. I suggest that if we look closely at the scene where Hyakuma tries to make Yamanba appear, we can notice an uncanny resemblance between the scene and the Myth of the Heavenly Cave: the party in the mountains is surprised by the sudden disappearance of sunlight, followed by Hyakuma's dance, performed in order to make Yamanba come forth. Appearance of Yamanba results in dispelling the darkness of attachment (for Hyakuma and the spectators), just as Sun-goddess' appearance in the myth dispels the darkness of the eclipse.

One additional dimension of *Yamanba* important for the religio-philosophical significance of the play, as well as the identification of actors with Yamanba, is her status as an anomaly. The source of her pain seems to be her liminal existence. Although she helps people relieve their sufferings, she is still an object of dread and loathing. This existential liminality as a category resonates with actors themselves – they are liminal beings, inasmuch as they spend their lives imitating (according to Zeami), or being possessed by (according to Zenchiku) someone else. Like a religious ritualist, Hyakuma is the medium for spirits, and

actors are mediums for the spirits appearing on stage. Just as each human transmigrates through different lifetimes, so they constantly transmigrate on the stage. That is why the art of the actor is so closely associated with enlightenment and self-cultivation, and also why Yamanba's pain is so close to heart to a performer: she is so many things that people have forgotten who she really is – her real identity is lost in the host of identities she has taken on over time. In reference to Yamanba's complex and layered identity as a god, a demon, an entertainer, a mother, enlightened, tormented, helpful, and harmful, Bethe and Brazell note that "capitalizing on this ambivalence, the [Noh] adds new dimensions to the figure of Yamanba. It highlights the questions of appearance, reality and art by introducing an entertainer who impersonates Yamanba to the real Yamanba who in turn entertains her impersonator."<sup>260</sup>

Michele Marra establishes the actor's connection to the dangerous power of the outcast. The magicians (*zushi sarugaku*) spoken of in Ben no Naishi's diary were assigned the dangerous task of confronting the mysterious power of the unknown. *Sarugaku* was used as a kind of exorcising ritual. "The outcasts' connection with the secret and inscrutable power of the unknown [...] surrounded them with a divine aura that commoners could never claim. This contradiction [...] marginalized the outcasts as human beings while centralizing them as symbols of exorcised chaos and reestablished order [...] First rejected by society as an image

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<sup>260</sup> Bethe and Brazell, *Nō as Performance*, 17.

of defilement – at once both a scapegoat and a votive offering – the actor eventually came to be regarded as the deity’s means to manifest himself onstage.”<sup>261</sup>

Brazell explains that Noh does not require a suspension of disbelief; <sup>262</sup> it is all too obvious that what takes place is performance, but perhaps the suspension of disbelief is not needed in the first place. Reality in the Shinto-buddhological contest is so fluid and fragmented that it is almost taken for granted that there is no reality to speak of. The actors freely get in and out of reality, or illusion, just as they freely get in and out of a character, and “not only does the shite transcend the boundaries of a dramatization of the character, but the character also transcends the boundaries of the shite”<sup>263</sup> Not only actor, the play as a whole is an expression of Yamanba: “Every movement, every sound in the performance expresses the nature of Yamanba, for the play as a totality is the embodiment of her being.”<sup>264</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Yamanba, “a conglomerate of many things,” for centuries has stirred people’s imagination and inspired numerous narratives: from folk stories and legends, through theater to contemporary novels. A fierce mountain demon, a fairy god-mother, an aid in people’s hard labor; a human being, a plant, a shrine gong – Yamanba seems to be everyone and

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<sup>261</sup> Marra, *Representations*, 61.

<sup>262</sup> Bethe and Brazell, *Nō as Performance*, 12.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

*everything*. People made up stories about her, deeming her dangerous and ridiculous at the same time, although she is benevolent and seeks compassion. No doubt she is a liminal, fragmented, and unstable existence. But it is precisely the nature of this existence that allows for Yamanba to be cast as the ritualist of her own exorcism. It is on the backdrop of non-dualist philosophy and the shinbutsu paradigm, that the play is configured as a dialectical ritualization process, where all binaries (human/non-human, good/evil, attachment/enlightenment) are finally collapsed.

## Chapter Five: *Hyakuman*

*Hyakuman* 百万 is Zeami's revision of a play called *Saga monogurui* 嵯峨物狂, by his father Kanami. It is the only play in this study that does not fall under the "demon" category, but is a fourth category "crazed woman" play. Therefore, it does not have an overt supernatural framing. It is also a part of a group of plays that deal with a grief of a mother over losing a child. The play opens with a man from Yoshino entering the stage with a male child in tow. He intimates that he found the lost child, and is now taking him along to Saga, the site of a famous *Nembutsu* 念仏 (Amida Buddha invocation) ceremony. Having arrived, the man asks a local whether there is anything of interest to see in Saga, and the man replies that there is a crazy woman named Hyakuman who, if someone does the *Nembutsu* wrong, comes out to scold them, and performs an amusing dance. The man asks the local to take him to see the woman, and the local proceeds to do an erroneous chant of the *Nembutsu*. The woman, Hyakuman, appears on the bridgeway looking disheveled and unkempt. She clearly was once a lady of great beauty and bearing, but her lot in life has clearly taken a sharp downturn. She strikes the local with a bamboo branch as a sign of her disapproval and proceeds to perform her idiosyncratic dance, invoking Amida and Sakyamuni Buddha. She reveals through her song that she suffers because she has lost her son, and prays to be reunited with him. The boy who followed the man from Yoshino recognizes Hyakuman as



his lost mother, and at the end of the performance (which in Noh is a rare case of a full performance of *kusemai*)<sup>265</sup> the truth is revealed and mother and son are happily reunited.

While *Hyakuman* is not a demon play, I suggest that it still uses much of the same symbolic language with the same ritual-minded outcome. It is an example of how a story of motherhood, loss, and suffering is ritualized into a narrative of salvation with an efficacious result for performers and audience. The play mirrors many of the ritual aspects discussed in previous chapters: blurring of the boundaries between ritual and entertainment, the motif of *monogurui* as a threshold for breaking the boundaries between illusion and reality, a peculiarly constructed ritualist whose appearance is, in a sense, ritualistically invoked, and who then proceeds to perform as the ritualist herself.

### **Liminality of Womanhood and Female Performers**

While the shite character in the plays considered in the previous chapters are all (at least initially) gendered female, their femaleness is in various ways a gateway permitting an eventual transformation of identities. That is not to say that their being female is not their “true” identity, it is, rather, one layer of their multifaceted characters. I argued that the femaleness of these characters had more to do with their associations with chthonic origins (as the serpent in *Dōjōji*), or is just one “face” of the many in an essentially genderless or even species-less entity (as in *Yamamba*). In *Hyakuman*, however, the shite of the entire play is a

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<sup>265</sup> Royall Tyler ed, *Granny Mountains: A Cycle of Nō Plays* (Cornell East Asia Series 18. Ithaca, N.Y.: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1992), 117.

woman performer, and her femaleness is further emphasized by the fact of her motherhood, so her femaleness is crucially constitutive of her character. I intend to show, however, it is also a part of how the underlying meaning of her character is configured. For that reason, before moving further with the discussion on the play, it will be helpful to take a closer look at the kind of discourses that informed the understanding of women (and womanhood) in Japanese religion.

In Mahayana Buddhism, women are often associated with mysterious and disruptive powers. They are portrayed as temptresses and are thought to represent a dangerous impediment in the context of salvation. The more positive portrayals of women describe them as either de-sexualized or motherly (thereby also, in a way, de-sexualized). As discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, in the Mahayanist tradition, arguably the most famous formulation comes from the Lotus Sutra, which proposes women's inability to achieve enlightenment due to "five obstacles" so the only way to achieve enlightenment is to transform into a male body. Additionally, in evaluating the discourses on womanhood that arose in Japan, one must also consider the non-Buddhist ideas and concepts that already existed in Japan prior to arrival of Buddhism. These are based on the kami-worshipping traditions, where the view of women is twofold. On the one hand, women are in possession of mysterious powers and abilities (such as to communicate with the divine entities), and on the other, women are sources of pollution due to their physiology (menstruation and child-

bearing). This view of women as “dangerous” due to the fact of her gender from both Buddhist and kami-worship traditions fueled a mindset that produced marginalizing discourses about women.

The medieval period shifted the roles for women in religion, and particularly women as practitioners and ritualists. A growing number of women who practiced different kinds of religious practices outside the “official” institutions. Barbara Ruch notes that appearance of such women significantly challenged the traditional proselytizing paradigm according to which men are the teachers and women are followers. Numerous stories from *setsuwa* and the illustrated short stories *otogizōshi* paint a picture of itinerant women storytellers preaching and proselytizing through performing Buddhist tales and parables. Arguably, the most popular of these itinerant storytellers were itinerant nuns associated with Kumano and known as Kumano Bikuni. Records of Kumano Bikuni created a picture of women who engage in a number of different activities, including sexual services. Numerous texts, paintings, and various records offer diverse descriptions of the Kumano Bikuni as miracle-workers who also expound doctrine, wear makeup or headdress, “look sexy,” and sing for male entertainment. Ruch came to the conclusion that in fact a host of different kind of unrelated practitioners, religious or otherwise, some of which were probably prostitutes, came to be lumped together under this single moniker. This in turn established and perpetuated an erroneous misconception of Kumano nuns being associated with sexual services, which led to further

marginalization of both female religious practitioners as well as women more generally.<sup>266</sup>

While Hyakuman of the play is not overtly a part of the sexualizing paradigm, it is not a stretch to conclude that her overall character is still informed with the influence of the images, representations, and ideas about women as ritualists and performers that circulated at the time. The character of Hyakuman, both in the narrative construction and stage appearance, is that of a liminal being on the threshold of planes of reality. But more narrowly, Hyakuman very much resonates with the character of female artists and poets.

Discussing marginalizing discourses related to topics popular with the itinerant female storytellers, Terry Kawashima and Keller Kimbrough come to opposing conclusions.

Namely, many of these itinerant storytellers throughout medieval times narrated apocryphal, largely fictional stories about the famous female poets of the Heian period, such as Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu. These stories portray the poetes in extreme terms: as women of great beauty and talent, but also in narratives of decline and disfigurement. On the surface the stories are straightforwardly didactic, and Komachi and Shikibu represent a depiction of consequences of karmic retribution for their evil deeds. However, the stories incorporate themes from not only Buddhist repertoire but also folk tales, myths and ritual traditions which sometimes render elements and even the outcome of the stories ambiguous in terms of their didactic intension. Kimbrough interprets such moves as suggesting that Komachi and

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<sup>266</sup> For detailed discussion on (mis)conceptions about relationship between women, performance, and sex, see Goodwin 2006.

Izumi are not being exploited, their sexual and literary powers are not being domesticated or diminished, but are reaffirmed, whereas Kawashima asserts that narratives of decline of women like Komachi or Izumi Shikibu arose as a part of a Buddhist misogynistic and marginalizing agenda.<sup>267</sup> Hyakuman mirrors one such story of decline, and it is interesting to see how the play treats her portrayal in the context of diminishing or promoting her status, and how that reflects on her performative and religious authority. It seems that the both the marginalizing and re-empowering dimensions are present and dialectically converge.

Throughout the classical and medieval periods there were different types of female performers: in the Heian period performers such as *asobi* 遊女 and *kugutsu* 傀儡子 were more prominent, whereas *shirabyōshi* and *kusemai* become dominant in the medieval times.<sup>268</sup> However, it is difficult to strictly separate categories of performers, as they frequently overlapped in the kinds of arts they performed and when in history they did it, as well as in whether they would engage in other types of activities (some of which may have been providing sexual favors, or acting as religious practitioners, or both). *Shirabyōshi*, for example, were known to perform songs with both secular and religious content.<sup>269</sup> Whether *kusemai* performers developed from the art of *shirabyōshi* or they developed alongside each other is not entirely clear, but both these types of performers feature prominently in Noh,

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<sup>267</sup> Kawashima 2001 and Kimbrough 2008.

<sup>268</sup> *Asobi* entertained with song and dance, whereas *kugutsu* operated puppets. Wakita 2001: 85 – 112.

<sup>269</sup> Wakita, *Josei Geinō No Genryū*, 132 – 7.

while *kusemai* as a type of dance is integrated in a number of Noh plays, including *Yamamba*.

Kanami himself was trained in the art of *kusemai*, and this experience may be at the basis of Noh *Hyakuman*, which is thought to have been inspired by an actual historical person who may have trained Kanami.<sup>270</sup>

It is clear that in the enchanted worldview of the mediaval imagination, women occupied a particular place, and this was especially the case with particular kinds of women who, thanks to a series of overlapping marginalizing discourses, emerge as liminal beings vested with an aura of “otherness,” and, perhaps, special kinds of powers. Some of these women, because of this peculiar status, but also due to their association with high art, beauty, and elegance, become a significant part of Noh. Performers such as Hotoke and Gio from the *Tale of the Heike*, Shizuka from the historical tale *Taiheki*, or the poetess Ono no Komachi are beloved protagonists of Noh. One of the reason for choosing these women is because they are mediums for channeling aesthetic ideals of beauty and elegance so important in Noh. Another reason is that being performers, they can effectively be cast as religious ritualists.

### **Demon Hiding in Plain Sight – Monogurui**

Exploring the idea of the demonic female Moerman notes that women as an objects of male anxiety and desire have long been a stock character in Japanese Buddhist literature. Women are frequently represented as " the emissaries of hell; they cut off forever the seed of

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

buddhahood. On the outside they have the faces of bodhisattvas, but on the inside they have the hearts of demons."<sup>271</sup> The popular genres of medieval literature, such as *setsuwa* and *otogizōshi* contain numerous descriptions of deceptive, and dangerous women.

Attractive and alluring in appearance, they are invariably devils in disguise: ferocious figures of insatiable passion. Conjured by the fantasies and frustrations of celibate ideals, the demonic female, an object of displaced desire and one of the oldest figments of the Buddhist imagination, remained an obsessive presence in the visual and literary culture of the age.<sup>272</sup>

In other words, one of the marginalizing discourses directed at women posits their sexual desire as a dangerous quality of their nature, which is frequently displayed, as we saw in legendary tradition that inspired *Dōjōji*, in the form of a demonic transformation. The question remains, however, whether it is the women who transform into demons, or the other way around. In the Noh tradition, sexual frustration or love disappointment often turns into *kurui* – an aberrant emotional disposition, some examples of which are presented in previous chapters. Hyakuman, however, is an example of a different kind of *kurui*, that of a grieving mother, and is not a play where physical transformation takes place on stage; all shifts and transformations in the shite are internal.

The meaning behind representations of “madness” in literature and the arts generally goes well beyond simply the clinical diagnosis of a mental illness, or focusing solely on

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<sup>271</sup> Max Moerman, “Demonology and Eroticism: Islands of Women in the Japanese Buddhist Imagination.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 2 (2009): 352.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

changes in the interiority of a single character. Instead, the “madness” motif is often symbolic of a breaking down of social norms, or provides a non-censored and unrestrained voice for expressing all kinds of human grievances. In the Noh, however, while this opportunity of utilizing madness to provide a social commentary or even critique can be taken into account, *kurui* frequently has a more metaphysical function and meaning. It should first be noted, as briefly discussed in Chapter Two, *kurui* in Noh does not have a one-to-one correlation with “madness.” *Kurui* is presented in a play as a movement of the character’s interiority that is as aesthetically sophisticated as it is narratively complex. One of the significant characteristics of *kurui* in Noh is that person who is *kurui* retains an acute awareness of the cause of their resentment and of the fact that they are, in fact, *kurui*. This awareness ends up being a kernel of the character’s hope and possibility of achieving enlightenment. *Monogurui* in this sense can be said to correspond with Turner’s concept of “betwixt and between” and the liminal phase of the ritual process. This description, in fact, in many ways can be applied to Yamamba, as other parallels that can be drawn between these two plays and their main protagonists. Yamamba, however, is a demonic being, and her suffering comes from her liminal existential status. But as a demon, she embodies dimension of a demonic nature that evokes empathy and compassion rather than fear. In that sense she is closer to Hyakuman’s *kurui*, than some more popular depictions of demon in the tradition. By the same token, Hyakuman’s *kurui* is closer to this expression of liminal all-encompassing demonic existence



than to madness. In other words, the *shite* of the play *Hyakuman* is constructed and functions as demonic figure, without actually being an *oni*. The features that make her such are her *kurui*, and her liminality as a performer and a female.

### **Hyakuman – Origins and Inspirations**

A number of Noh plays in the repertory depict the mental and emotional disintegration mothers experience due to separation from their children. Some examples include plays like *Miidera*, or the aforementioned *Sumidagawa*; the former ending in a reunion between mother and child, and the latter with a tragic outcome. *Hyakuman* represents a typical play of this kind.

Hashimoto Naoki notes that there are different generic derivations of the *Hyakuman* narrative which have throughout the medieval period influenced one another, without much certainty on how they can be dated vis-à-vis one another.<sup>273</sup> However the most accepted version of the play's origin is that *Hyakuman* is a revised version of a play originally written by Kanami, and considered to be one of his best, *Saga monogurui*. The highlight of Kanami's play is the famous *kusemai* scene, and the play itself, among other things is meant to serve as a vehicle for displaying the artistry and skill of the performer. However, the *kuse* section also

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<sup>273</sup> Hashimoto Naoki, "Yokyoku soshika no – tenkei – 'Hyakuman' to 'Hyakuman monogatari' no baai." *Kokubungaku*, no. 58 (December 1981): 28.

has a strong ideological element, and is devised to encourage maternal love and the filial piety of the child.<sup>274</sup>

*Hyakuman* is set in the Seiryōji Temple in Saga, in the early spring, the time of the famous Dainenbutsu service.<sup>275</sup> This ritual was established by the head priest Enkaku Shōnin, whose own personal life mirrors that of Hyakuman, as he was an abandoned child who had prayed to the Jizō Bodhisattva to be reunited with his mother. His prayer was realized and to express gratitude he established the Jizō-in sub-temple at Seiryōji. This is why the son character of the play was later thought to have been based on Enkaku himself, and that Seiryōji was chosen as the setting for the same reason. However, there is no indication that there is an actual connection between the historical performer Hyakuman and mother of Enkaku.<sup>276</sup>

Zeami's writings narrate the story of a famous and skillful *kusemai* dancer by the name of Hyakuman whose reputation spread in Nara. Kanami was trained in the art of *kusemai* by another reputed dancer by the name of Ototsuru, who was, in turn, taught, by this Hyakuman.<sup>277</sup> As Kanami's play has a strong emphasis on the performance itself, it is likely that Kanami's intention with turning Hyakuman into the shite of his play is to display his own *kusemai* skills, as well as to celebrate his artistic lineage.

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<sup>274</sup> Wakita, *Josei Geinō No Genryū*, 64.

<sup>275</sup> Dainenbutsu at Seiryōji takes place every year on the 15<sup>th</sup> day on March. Abe 2013: 258.

<sup>276</sup> Wakita, *Josei Geinō No Genryū*, 65.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

Abe Mika's research complicates the traditional interpretation of the meaning and the context of the play *Hyakuman*. She explores relationships between the tradition of *Yūzū nenbutsu* 融通念仏 and *Noh Hyakuman*. She finds that *Hyakuman* was composed by incorporating the *Jigoku no kusemai* 地獄の曲舞 of Ebina Naami, and relying on the famous "Letter of jokei" in the first half and on the *Mokurenkyo* 目連経<sup>278</sup> in the second half. Based on this juxtaposition, the shite Hyakuman's performance is positioned in the first half of the play to represent the sorrows and travels of a mother separated from her child in one piece, whereas the second half includes the motifs of filial piety of the son towards his mother.<sup>279</sup> What this insight afforded to the interpretation of *Hyakuman*, is a change in the perspective about the relationship between the play, the practice of Dainenbutsu, and Saga as the locale where the play takes place. This relationship has been mainly interpreted as stemming from the aforementioned tradition about Shōnin himself being a child who had lost contact with this mother. In that sense there was not much more than the content of plot connecting these threads.

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<sup>278</sup> Mokuren (Skt. Maudgalyāyana) was a disciple of Buddha Sakyamuni. In the Mahayana tradition a story of him saving his mother from a Buddhist hell through compassion became popular due resonating with value of filial piety in China and Japan. For an extensive discussion on Mokurenkyo in the context of filial piety see Teiser 1996.

<sup>279</sup> Abe Mika. "The Festive Yuzu Dainenbutsu and The No Hyakuman: Rituals, Picture Scrolls, And Performance Celebrating the Virtue of August Reign." *Religious Performance, City and Country in East Asia*. Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013: 260.

However, Abe calls attention to the *Shakadō dainenbutsu engi*, which was composed by Enkaku, and where he reveals the motivation for establishing the Saga Dainenbutsu. There is a story of Shōnin of how he fell into hell and was reproached by *Enmaō* 閻魔王.<sup>280</sup> This, Abe surmises, resonated with the words sung to the *Jigoku no kusemai* in the first half of the play reminiscing *Enma*'s reproach, while the wording sung in the second half that relies on the *Mokurenkyō*, with motifs that overlap with the image of Shōnin who wished to save his own mother.<sup>281</sup> This insight illuminates the much stronger religious concerns, especially within the Buddhist context, and opens the play to new interpretations.

### **Hyakuman – Saving Mother, Possessed Mother**

The play opens with *waki* introducing himself as a man of Yoshino, who finds himself a caretaker of a lost boy he encountered by accident. Now the pair is on their way to Saga to attend the famous Dainenbutsu ceremony. Upon arrival to the site of the festivities, the man decides to ask a local about possible diversions of the place. The local relates a curious story of a crazy woman named Hyakuman (*hyakuman to mōshite onna monogurui* 百万と申して女物狂), who performs an amusing dance. It is clear from this that the woman in question is only unwittingly amusing, which immediately posits her story as poignant rather than diverting. The man expresses his desire to see this lady, upon which the local relates a rather bizarre characteristic of the woman's performance:

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<sup>280</sup> *Enma* or *Yama* is the king of Hell in Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

<sup>281</sup> Abe Mika, "Yuzu Dainenbutsu," 260.

心得申して候、ただ呼び出しては出で申さず、念仏を悪しざまに申せばもどかしきとて出で申し候。<sup>282</sup>

*Kokoroe mōshite sōrō, tada yobidashite ha idemōsazu, nenbutsu wo warushizama ni mōseba modokashiki tote idemōshisōrō.*

All right, sir, but she will not come if you just call her name; if you say Nembutsu the wrong way she will come to express her disapproval.<sup>283</sup>

Sure enough, Hyakuman makes her appearance. She carries bamboo branches in her hand and drags along a small cart. The play places great focus on the peculiarity of the woman's appearance, so much so, that it is included in the monologue in great detail:

輓けや輓けやこの車、物見なり物見なり、げに百万が姿は、もとより長き黒髪を、荊棘の如く乱して、古りたる烏帽子引きかづき、又眉根黒き乱れ墨[...] 思はぬ人を尋ねれば、親子の契り麻衣

*Hike ya hike ya kono kuruma, Mono mi nari, mono mi nari, ge ni hyakuman ga sugata ha, motoyori nagaki kurogami wo, odorō no gotoku midashite, furitaru eboshi hika ka zuki mata mayu neguroki midare zumi [...] omowanu hito wo tazunereba, oyako no chigiri asagoromo*

Drag and drag this cart, sure is a sight to be seen, sure a sight to be seen, the appearance of Hyakuman, hair eternally long, like thicket tangled, old eboshi cap placed crookedly, blackened brows, smudges of ink [...] I search for the one who thinks not of me, bond between parent and child thinned out like my hempen robe.

Hyakuman's appearance is laden with symbolism. She has characteristics of both miko and shirabyoshi; she wears the eboshi cap, and holds the bamboo grass that resemble *hei* and function like a *yorishiro*, a landing place for kami. She looks disheveled, her hair long "eternally," as if she had been in existence forever. She drags her cart, which is both a

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<sup>282</sup> Hyakuman. Sanari, ed. *Yōkyoku taikan*, 2670.

<sup>283</sup> All translations in this chapter are mine.

beggar's cart, symbolizing her lot in life,<sup>284</sup> but also a kind of cart used for small children, highlighting the loneliness of a mother who had lost her child. The dissolution of the parent-child relationship is impressed on her body through the clothes she wears, her hempen robe has thinned, as did her bond with her son who thinks of her no more.

Hyakuman's name is also symbolic. Tyler explains that "the name suggests endlessly repeated circular motion. Hyakuman's wagon is a sign of such motion, and her ceaseless reciting of the Nembutsu conveys it as well."<sup>285</sup> This incessant repetition of the Nembutsu on the surface may seem like a sign of great devotion. However, at the basis of the practice is the idea that only one utterance made with absolute faith leads to birth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. It follows, then, that her chanting of the Nembutsu is not grounded in perfect faith. Her motivations are also suspect, as the reason for her frenzied dace and chant of the Nembutsu is the desire for being reunited with her son, so her practice is grounded in deep attachment instead. This is all the more peculiar, given her obsession with the "correct" chanting of the Nembutsu. Tyler does not see this as problematic:

Everything about Hyakuman in fact is topsy-turvy not only with her wits but her clothes as well. And yet, because back links are every bit as efficacious as right links to enlightenment, Hyakuman comes out right in the end and is reunited with her boy. When the play is over, both go off together not to Nara,

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<sup>284</sup> Wakita suggests that this description of Hyakuman symbolizes all performers, as the (presumably) beautiful appearance she once sported, and her current beggar like persona are conflated in the play, as it had become conflated in reality as performers' status declines over time. Wakita 2001: 134.

<sup>285</sup> Tyler ed, *Granny Mountains*, 117.

their homes, but to Miyako. Miyako often seems to be the place in *nō* where all is truly well.<sup>286</sup>

However, Hyakuma's crazed dance and her obsessive repetitions of the Nembutsu may be hiding an additional meaning.

Wakita recalls Yanagita Kunio's research, which pointed to the link between miraculous parent-child reunions and the dance of the crazed person, suggesting that the female character wearing the eboshi cap recalled the appearance of both *miko* and *shirabyōshi*, and indicated that what Hyakuman is performing was, in fact, the dance of a medium entered by a god. Yanagita further speculated that the combination of a crazed character and a mother-child reunion also recalls the ancient custom of itinerant religious women such as *miko*, who performed rituals for the safe delivery and growth of children.<sup>287</sup>

Therefore, in the background of Hyakuman is the overlap of the Buddhist practice of Nembutsu and the kami worshiping practices reminiscent of *miko kagura*. Wakita notes that it is significant that in *Hyakuman*, which she considers the prototype of crazed woman plays, the main character is a *kusemai* dancer, and that *kusemai* dancer (as well as similar performer *shirabyōshi*) possessed religious powers to bring good fortune. Certainly, in the play, Hyakuman does lead the nenbutsu ritual and performs and offertory dance intended to draw a favorable response from gods. Wakita concludes that:

This drama of the reunion of mother and child has an implied subplot.

Hyakuman has the power to achieve a divine response in the form of a reunion

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<sup>286</sup> Tyler ed., *Granny Mountains*, 118.

<sup>287</sup> Wakita, *Josei Geinō No Genryū*, 61.

with her child. Someone watching this play and praying for a reunion with a lost child might well have believed that such miracles could happen if they requested a miko such as Hyakuman to perform a dance-ritual prayer for them. Even in our day, the miko dance in kagura performance has the same meaning and function.<sup>288</sup>

In other words, the play presents Hyakuman as an effective ritualist who is capable of eliciting response from the kami who are protectors of mothers, children, and families. Rather than a negative disposition stemming from attachment and desire the *kurui* of Hyakuman is a sign of possession and Hyakuman's ability to both communicate with the kami and achieve positive outcome in this interaction. The emphasis on Hyakuman as the central (and really, only) ritualist of the play can also be understood from the play's waki. He himself is not a ritualist or a religious figure of any kind. He is not a Buddhist monk, or an Onmyōji, or even a ritual surrogate to a *waki* that we see in *Yamamba*. Instead, he is a rather nondescript "man from Yoshino," whose only role is to physically bring the child to the site of his reunion with his mother. A more interesting (and unquestionably more significant) character is the boy, who is in the play performed by an actual child, a role known as *kokata*.

The *kokata* is a child actor who takes the child role but also performs a number of adult roles. For example, people of high rank, such as the emperor, would be played by *kokata*, and they may also be cast as lovers of the shite character. The latter is a move that has the objective to avoid any association with real romance, in line with Noh's aesthetic

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid. 66.



ideology of mystery and depth, symbolism, and suggestion.<sup>289</sup> Alexander Alland notes that the “kokata, whose actions are performed in a specially stylized mechanical manner, reduce their roles intentionally to a subsidiary place in the plays. They are given these roles in order to avoid undue distraction from the shite who must occupy the central place throughout the performance.” I would suggest however, that apart from the stylistic and aesthetic concerns that kokata address, there is an additional significance of the “child” role, especially in mother-child *monogurui*, and especially in *Hyakuman*. As a child *kokata* is an inherently liminal being, not completely developed into an adult (which is also why it satisfies the aesthetic requirements noted by Alland). In a symbolic way, all major characters on the stage are invoked: Hyakuman is herself invoked by a kind of a backwards ritual (of the “wrong” Nembutsu). *Kokata* in this play is also doubly invoked. On one level he is drawn by the merit of filial piety (symbolized by references to the Mokurenkyō), on another, he is a child protected by the efficacious performance of a *miko*, and on a yet third level, we can interpret the appearance of kokata as a deity summoned by Hyakuman as *miko*. On a completely different level, the *kokata* himself saves and invokes Hyakuman, both in the Buddhist context, as a filial son in the tradition of Mokuren, and in the kagura context by prompting the “wrong” Nembutsu that conjures up her appearance.

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<sup>289</sup> Alexander Alland, “The Construction of Reality and Unreality in Japanese Theatre,” *The Drama Review: TDR* 23, no. 2 (1979): 6.

## Conclusion

Hyakuman can be observed as a quintessential piece about performers, and a quintessential *monogurui*. At the same time it is in many ways an atypical *monogurui*, and Hyakuman is in many ways an atypical performer. The dance she performs is at the same time a Nembutsu, but also a kami worship ritual *chinkon*, and she is being possessed. Even though it is a different category from Yamamba, Dōjōji, and Kanawa, it shares many elements in common with the other plays. In Yamamba, in fact, there is a very close connection with the character of Hyakuman, as many have theorized that this Hyakuman is the same as Hyakuma of *Yamamba*. But more than that, what Hyakuman, above all has in common with these plays is the same symbolic language, and ritual concerns at the basis of the strategies of ritualization applied.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In both scholarly and lay discussions, Noh conjures up an image, first and foremost, of an elegant and skillful, if sometimes soporific, performance art. Secondly it is known and beloved as a genre of literature, famous (or infamous) for the complexity of expression, copious references to Japanese and Chinese classical poetry and prose, and Buddhist doctrine. Discussions on the religious dimensions of Noh, even while acknowledging their significance, frequently position them as secondary to the literature and aesthetics, and portray them largely as being in the function of the former.<sup>290</sup> Otherwise, if there is stronger emphasis on religion, it is usually focused on the treatises by the great playwrights such as Zeami and Zenchiku, where the masters expound on their ideology of performance and aesthetics, which usually heavily influenced by Buddhist and Chinese philosophical sources.<sup>291</sup> What this study had hoped to achieve is bring to the for the ritual dimension of Noh performance *and* text, and explore the ways in which they work together.

As Noh developed from its religious origins in *kagura*, through *geinō*, and Buddhist festivals such as *Shushōe* and *Shunie*, it grew into an art form of extraordinary sophistication. However, as the early stages of the art grew increasingly more complex (partly in order to cater to its newly acquired aristocratic audience and their tastes), Noh never completely shed

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<sup>290</sup> I am here referring to the already mentioned, excellent, studies by scholars such as Paul Atkins, Steven Brown, Etsuko Terasaki et. al.

<sup>291</sup> Such as the earlier noted recent studies on this topic by Tom Hare, Noel Pinnington, Arthur Thornhill et. al.

its early ritual concerns and contexts. It actually acquired some new ones as well. Deeply steeped into the enchanted world(view) of the *shinbutsu* paradigm, Noh latched on to these new contexts and sought novel ways to address them in text and performance. I am deliberately using the impersonal personifying “Noh” here, as the interaction and integration of the different religious and ideological codes and symbolic languages did not necessarily take place consciously and deliberately on the part of playwrights/performers. It is also not the case that any specific existing ritual structure could be neatly and directly applied to the Noh performance, which is why rethinking the ritual structuring and schematization of Noh was helpful to best capture these underlying processes.

This study understands the ritual of Noh, or Noh-as-ritual, as a process of ritualization, which is a dialectical process expressed by presenting a ritualist and object of ritual overlap in a number of different ways. In the plays considered, the figure of the ritualist conceived of in this way represents a central symbol of the ritualization process, and draws on a figure of demon which represents the medieval Japanese worldview, the enchanted world, with all its inherent contradictions and ambiguities. A ritual system drawing on such worldview produces rituals that are not in any way “neat” and that is precisely why Noh is a good arena for them.

By reexamining the concept of ritual and thinking about it in the sense of “ritualization,” a dynamic, evolving, and interactive process, we can better see how Noh

continued to expand on its religious underpinnings offering an alternative to a mainstream ritual. Main elements of this ritual are fluid multilayered identities, opening and transgressing of boundaries, and a ritualist with a peculiar symbolic and ritual status as a liminal polyvalent figure. These features, in turn, are best represented in the demon category plays, that are performed at the end of the Noh cycle, which is at the same the beginning of a new cycle (performative and ritual).

## Chapter 7: Figures



Figure 1: *Deigan* mask<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> [http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en/noh\\_mask/noh\\_maskghost.html](http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en/noh_mask/noh_maskghost.html)



Figure 2: *Hashihime* mask<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> [http://nippon-kichi.jp/article\\_list.do?ml\\_lang=en&p=2486](http://nippon-kichi.jp/article_list.do?ml_lang=en&p=2486)



Figure 3: *Dōjōji Engi Emaki*, Scroll I, Illustration 5.<sup>294</sup>



Figure 4: *Dōjōji Engi Emaki*, Scroll I, Illustration 5 (cont.)

<sup>294</sup> <http://www.geocities.jp/noharakamemushi/Koshaji/Nanki2/Doujouji2.html>





Figure 5: *Shite* performing as the *shirabyōshi*<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> [http://blogs.yahoo.co.jp/sea\\_chigasaki/14127856.html](http://blogs.yahoo.co.jp/sea_chigasaki/14127856.html)



Figure 6: *Shite* transformed into a serpent. The triangular shapes on the kimono represent serpent scales.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> <http://blog.goo.ne.jp/nippondentougeinou/e/4d05b1dd46aa548affff105d8c048bbe>

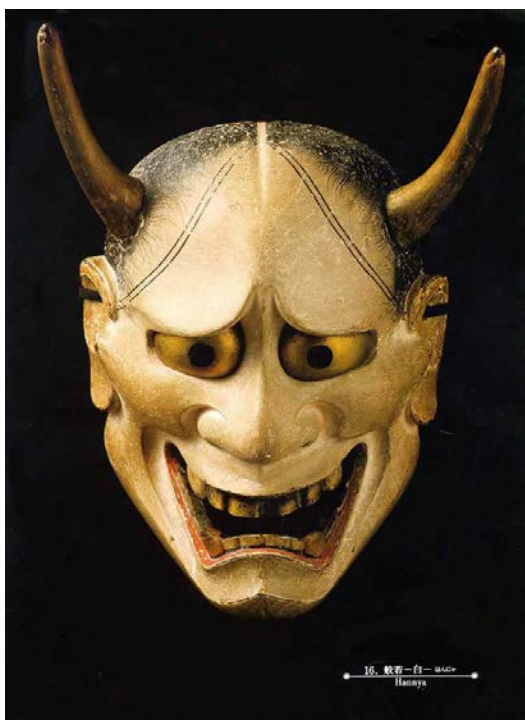


Figure 7: *Hannya* mask<sup>297</sup>



Figure 8: *Yamanba* mask<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> <http://faculty.humanities.uci.edu/sbklein/images/NOH/nohmask/pages/hannya.htm>

<sup>298</sup> <http://www.noh-kyogen.com/encyclopedia/mask/images/yamanba.jpg>



Figure 9: waniguchi<sup>299</sup>



Figure 10: *Hyakki Yagyō Emaki* (detail)<sup>300</sup>; note the waniguchi at the bottom right corner



Figure 11: *Hyakki Yagyō Emaki* (detail)<sup>301</sup>

<sup>299</sup> <https://kotobank.jp/word/%E9%B0%90%E5%8F%A3-154265>

<sup>300</sup> [http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/YoukaiGazouCard/U426\\_nichibunken\\_0054\\_0003\\_0000.html](http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/YoukaiGazouCard/U426_nichibunken_0054_0003_0000.html)

<sup>301</sup> [http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/YoukaiGazouCard/U426\\_nichibunken\\_0054\\_0003\\_0001.html](http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/YoukaiGazouCard/U426_nichibunken_0054_0003_0001.html)

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