

Traditional Japanese Theater

An Anthology of Plays

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Japanese Theater: A Living Tradition

Traditional Japanese theater is living theater. Although its roots go back a millennium and its forms have changed considerably over time, the major genres—*noh*, *kyōgen*, *kabuki*, and the puppet theater—can claim continuous performance traditions. The theatrical arts were, and continue to be, passed down from parent to child, from master to disciple, with each new generation learning by imitation the skills of the previous one and each preserving both performance practices and theater artifacts from earlier periods. Only after they have totally mastered traditional performance practices do players experiment with innovations, the most successful of which may then become part of the continuing tradition.

In addition to producing classical plays according to time-honored conventions, performers sometimes research and reproduce old works that have been dropped from the repertoire, or they participate in the production of completely new works. Many of these new plays use traditional practices to dramatize nontraditional subject matter. For example, in 1956 the Japanese version of both *Hamlet* and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* were produced in the puppet theater (Jones 1976, 1983), and in 1991 a new *noh* play about heart transplants, written by Dr. Tomio Tada and scored by *noh* actor Cumas Hashioka, premiered in Japan. Three years later, *noh* performers presented it in the United States.

Experimentation is not limited to traditional performers. The author Mishima Yukio remade thirteen *noh* plays into modern theater, and Suzuki Tadashi, one of the best-known modern directors, developed a training regime based on traditional theatrical practices. The work of both men has achieved international acclaim. In the West, playwrights, choreographers, directors, and performers—such as William Butler Yeats, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Sergei Eisenstein, Max Reinhardt, Berthold Brecht, Benjamin Britten, George Balanchine, and the Théâtre du Soleil—have experimented with practices and materials from the Japanese theater. There also are

groups that produce traditional plays in English. Two of the translators of plays in this anthology are leaders in this field: Don Kenny leads an international kyōgen troupe that performs in both Japanese and English, and James R. Brandon regularly produces English kabuki with students in Hawaii, often with the assistance of professional kabuki actors. Traditional Japanese forms and performers are now active players on the world stage.

The traditional Japanese theater troupes, which perform at the Vatican, in London theaters, and in New York's Central Park, as well as in Japan, are composed almost entirely of men. Throughout Japanese history, most performing arts groups have been limited to a single sex, and although female performers have played crucial roles in the development of all types of theater, the major professional stages have been largely the preserve of men. Women perform most often in the more informal settings of teahouses, banquets, and recitals. In addition to professional actors, many men and women practice the arts of traditional theater as hobbies and, long before the advent of karaoke, would entertain one another with a bit of noh chant or a short kabuki dance. These amateurs, including many non-Japanese, are an important part of the economic backbone of traditional theater; they provide support by taking lessons with actors and regularly attending professional performances.

Theater as a distinct performance genre with well-developed texts appeared in Japan only after poetry, narrative literature, and a sophisticated poetics had flourished for more than six hundred years. During the early, pretheater period (ca. 700–1350), both religious and secular performing arts prospered. In addition, many of the early literary arts had performance aspects: stories, for example, were often read aloud in conjunction with displays of illustrations, or they were proclaimed from Buddhist pulpits as part of elaborate ceremonies. Court poetry was frequently recited aloud and sometimes composed in the voices of figures in screen paintings. Music and dance were important parts of both sacred and secular culture, and troupes of entertainers—acrobats, monkey trainers, puppeteers, and comic mimes—traversed the countryside amusing people of all classes. When a full-fledged theater did develop in the fourteenth century, it was, as one might expect, quite unlike its counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The introduction to this book traces the development of theater in Japan, suggests some of its general characteristics, and describes the stages on which the major genres are performed. More detailed descriptions of the genres, particularly of their performance aspects, are given in the introductions to parts 2 and 3.

Historical Perspectives

The earliest recorded Japanese performance, a sacred event depicted in the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihonshoki* (720), occurred in the mythological age of the deities. To induce the Sun Goddess to come out of a cave where she had hidden herself in anger at her brother's misbehavior, a female deity named Uzume put on a costume, stamped on an overturned bucket, became possessed, and, according to one version of the story, revealed her genitals. The divine audience roared in appreciative laughter, and the Sun Goddess, her curiosity aroused by this merriment, emerged from



FIGURE 1.1. A shrine priestess (*miko*) performs kagura before the inner sanctuary of Ima Hiei Shrine in Kyoto on November 14, 1991. The dancer holds bells (*suzu*) and a sword. (Photo by David Boggett.)



FIGURE 1.2. Bugaku dances continue to be presented to the deity and the public at Imagumano Shrine in Kyoto, where Kannami and his son Zeami performed *noh* for the shogun Yoshimitsu in 1374. Folded strips of paper (*gohei*) and straw ropes mark off sacred space. (Photo by Karen Brazell.)

the cave, thereby restoring light to the universe. This heavenly performance has long been proclaimed the origin of theater. Uzume later descended to earth to prepare the way for Ninigi, the mythological ancestor of the imperial family, and became the progenitor of a line of female shamans. These shamans and their successors, especially those known as *miko* and associated with Shinto shrines, were central to the ritual performance events generally known as *kagura*. Many types of *kagura*, which include music, song, dance, and some mime, are still in ritual use at Shinto shrines today (figure 1.1).

Performing arts imported from the Asian continent by way of China and Korea were popular in the imperial court during the Nara (710–784) and Heian (794–1186) periods. *Gigaku*, known today only through surviving masks and a few documents, was first introduced as a performing art in the sixth century by an immigrant from the Korean peninsula who had studied in China. It flourished under the patronage of the Nara court. The performances, which were held at Buddhist temples, consisted of a procession of masked figures followed by dances and mimes accompanied by flutes, drums, and cymbals. The lion dance (*shishi mai*), which remains popular today, was a featured part of the performances. *Bugaku* largely replaced *gigaku* in the Heian period and became the ceremonial music of the court.¹ This form of music and masked dance included elements from China, Korea, and even India and Tibet. The dances were sometimes performed by Heian aristocrats, who placed a high value on acquiring artistic skills. The hero of *The Tale of Genji* (Genji

1. Bugaku refers to the dance that is accompanied by *gagaku* music. I use bugaku as a generic term.

monogatari), for example, is praised for his splendid performance of a bugaku dance as well as for his poetic and musical skills. Although its continental prototypes have disappeared, bugaku is preserved today by shrines, the imperial household, and amateur groups in Japan (figure 1.2).

Another entertainment imported from China, known as *sarugaku* or *sangaku*, included acrobatics, magic, music, dance, comic pantomime, and trained animal acts, especially those using monkeys. The well-known scholar Fujiwara no Akihira (d. 1066) wrote *A Record of New Sarugaku* (*Shinsarugakuki*), which describes a rich variety show including solo sumo wrestling, rice-planting songs, puppets, lion dances, and what appear to have been comic sketches of various types of people, such as an aged local magistrate putting on airs, a respectable older woman blushing covering her face with a fan, someone pounding his belly after having overeaten, a reverend monk coveting a gaily colored stole, and a respected nun seeking diapers for her soon-to-be-born infant. Sarugaku performers were usually itinerants, who often had connections with religious institutions. Many of them lived as social outcasts in segregated areas (*sanjo*), along with other entertainers (puppeteers, dancers, storytellers) and various other social pariahs (such as butchers, prostitutes, and undertakers).

The second half of the twelfth century was a time of social and political disruption. Civil wars, which provided a rich source of material for later dramatists, ripped apart the basic fabric of Japanese life. In the ensuing medieval society (ca. 1185 to 1600), the warrior replaced the aristocrat at the center of power, and high-ranking women lost their economic independence and the prominent role they had occupied as both writers and readers of elite literature. Areas outside the capital grew in economic and political importance, with the result that travel increased markedly. Sharply increased communication with the continent accelerated the importation of ideas and artifacts. The literary language for prose narratives evolved from the women's style of the classical period, which used mostly Japanese diction and grammatical forms, to a mixed style that included many Chinese loan words and grammatical constructions. New sects of Pure Land and Zen Buddhism gained popularity, and large religious complexes that combined Buddhist and Shinto practices prospered as cultural centers. Services centering on the chanting of the *nembutsu* (the invocation *namu Amida Butsu*, "Hail Amida Buddha") became popular and increasingly included performance elements, some of which developed into long-lasting folk traditions. The Mibu Temple in Kyoto, for example, traces its performance tradition (called *Mibu dainembutsu kyōgen*) back to a *nembutsu* service held in the third month of 1300 (see figure 2.62).

In the medieval period, some of the performing arts that had been on the periphery of court culture moved toward center stage. Interaction increased between folk and aristocratic entertainments, religious and secular arts, and male and female performers. One good example is the popular song known as *imayō*. In the Heian period these were sung by lower-class female performers who were sometimes summoned to court to entertain the aristocrats. In the twelfth century the retired emperor GoShirakawa (1127–1192) became so intrigued by this art that he studied under a woman singer named Otomae (1085–1169), sponsored *imayō* events at court, and compiled an anthology of the songs and practical *imayō* criticism

(*Ryōjin hishō*). His efforts paid off: the songs remained so popular at the imperial court that a century later *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* (*Towazugatari*) depicts two emperors singing imayō. Unfortunately, GoShirakawa's anthology survives only in fragments, so our knowledge of the nature of these songs is limited.

Another type of song called *sōka* (or *sōga*) was created in Kamakura, headquarters of the military rulers between 1185 and 1333. Especially popular with the warrior class, the lyrics of these songs drew on past literature as well as contemporary activities. Some of them consist of lists of the virtues of almost anything—from blossoms to hawks and gambling; some feature interwoven strands of images and phrases from classical literary works; and others are poetic travel accounts enumerating the major sights along popular routes. The songs served as cultural mandalas for the Kamakura elite and remained popular for a century or more—even the noh actor and playwright Zeami (1363–1443) mentions them in his works. They probably influenced the development of the noh theater by providing precedents for its poetic language, and they may also have influenced its music and rhythms, although we cannot be sure of this because we know little about how *sōka* were performed.

Female dancers were crucial to the flowering of the performing arts in the medieval period. The *shirabyōshi* donned male court caps and white (*shira*) robes, danced to percussion accompaniment, and sang songs, including imayō. Although little is known about the nature of their performances, the dancers themselves figure prominently in the life and literature of the period. Shizuka Gozen, Giō, and Hotoke are immortalized in *The Tale of the Heike* and in the noh plays *Yoshino Shizuka*, *Futari Shizuka*, *Futari Giō*, and *Hotoke no Hara*. In his treatise entitled *Three Elements* (*Sandō*), Zeami places the artistic accomplishments of the *shirabyōshi* Giō, Gijo, and Shizuka alongside those of the famous Heian-period poets Lady Ise and Ono no Komachi. Other noh plays, such as *Dōjōji* (included in part 2), feature unnamed *shirabyōshi*, and the heroines in plays like *Izutsu* (part 2) and *Matsukaze* are modeled on the *shirabyōshi* figure, as the women dance wearing the caps and gowns of their lovers.

The successors of the *shirabyōshi* were the *kusemai* dancers whose art integrated song and dance more closely and had a lively rhythm. It so impressed the noh actor Kannami (or Kan'ami, 1333–1384) that he himself studied with the *kusemai* performer Otozuru (dates unknown) and incorporated into noh the rhythms and structures of her art. This innovation was an important step in the development of the classical noh theater, but it also hastened the demise of *kusemai* as an independent art. The *kusemai* texts preserved today were probably heavily influenced by the noh. The performers, however, were immortalized by the depictions of *kusemai* dancers in such noh plays as *Hyakuman* and *Yamamba* (in part 2). These and other plays also appear to have incorporated earlier *kusemai* into their structures.

In addition to these song (*utaimono*) and dance (*mai*) genres, recited narratives (*katarimono*) had an important place in medieval entertainments. These narratives were recited to the rhythmical accompaniment of a closed fan tapped against the palm of the hand, a hand drum (*tsuzumi*), the plucking and striking of the harsh lute-like *biwa*, or, later, to the sounds of *shamisen* (also pronounced *samisen*). The first popular performers of recited narratives were *biwa* priests (*biwa hōshi*), men who were generally blind and may have taken the Buddhist tonsure. These *biwa* priests

probably were originally ritual specialists who placated unsettled spirits, especially the malignant spirits of the dead. By the eleventh century there were at least two general types of biwa priests: those who followed military troops and sang battle songs and those who chanted Buddhist pieces at temples, especially those around Kyoto. These two aspects of the biwa priests' art were combined in battle tales couched in Buddhist terms. The most successful was *The Tale of Heike*, which wove the stories of hundreds of men and women who lived and died during the civil wars of the late twelfth century—was that the Heike lost—around Buddhist themes of impermanence, karmic retribution, and salvation. The first version of this tale, now lost, was written between 1219 and 1222 and was followed by various reciter's versions, the most influential of which was dictated by the talented biwa priest Kakuichi (d. 1371) to his disciple Teiichi a few months before his death. Zeami thought highly of this work and broadened its dissemination and its fame by treating it as a "classical" source to be drawn on in composing noh plays. *The Tale of the Heike* (whose recitation came to be called *heikyoku*) provided a rich mine of materials for later theater and literature, including the plays about the plight of Shunkan and the death of Atsumori translated here.

After 1333, when the shogunal headquarters moved from Kamakura to an area of Kyoto called Muromachi, military patronage of the arts increased as these leaders attempted to prove that they, like the aristocrats who had ruled before them, were a cultural elite and therefore had a legitimate right to power. Under the patronage of the Muromachi military rulers (1333–1574), the first major theatrical genres developed. In the mid-fourteenth century *dengaku*—a performance art that, like sarugaku, combined song, dance, and mime—was enthusiastically supported by the first Ashikaga shogun, Takauji (1305–1358) (figure 1.3). A performance attended by the shogun in the summer of 1349 on the broad riverbed in the center of the capital has been vividly described. At one point, a child actor wearing a monkey mask, a gold and red brocade robe, and fur slippers entered the arched bridgeway to a lively beat and leaped gracefully up onto the handrail. At this, the audience rose



FIGURE 1.3. Rice-planting songs (*taueuta*), a component of early *dengaku* (literally, "field music"), are still performed each spring. In June 1992, at Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto, festively clad women transplant rice as priestesses dance behind them. (Photo by David Boggett.)

up with stamps and cries of appreciation, which caused the stands to collapse, killing and injuring scores of people and inciting others to loot and fight. A quarter century later, the reputation of the actor Kannami, the head of one of several sarugaku troupes, attracted the attention of the third shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408). Kannami and his son Zeami performed for the shogun at the Imagumano Shrine in Kyoto in 1374. Yoshimitsu's admiration for Kannami's artistic skill and his attraction to the young Zeami led the shogun to patronize their art. Thus sarugaku noh became part of the cultural life of the capital.

The literary aesthetics of the capital's elite culture was based on the classical poetic tradition of *waka* and included the newer linked verse (*renga*). Zeami, who must have received more education than the average poor actor, proved talented at poetry, and he soon attracted the attention of litterateurs and arbiters of court taste such as Nijō Yoshimoto (1320–1388). The plays that Zeami composed and performed furthered the poetic and cultural ideals of the time. The concept of profound and refined beauty known as *yūgen*, which first emerged as an important aesthetic ideal in twelfth-century poetics, achieved three-dimensional representation on the noh stage, and the poetic techniques of imagistic association (*engo* and *yoritai*) and allusive variation (*honka dori*) were expanded in noh texts.

Although Zeami incorporated into his noh many techniques and much material from the poetic tradition, he did not limit himself to that legacy. The classical works that he used as sources were often filtered through medieval commentaries, handbooks, and legends. In addition to classical literature, Zeami and succeeding playwrights also drew heavily on more recent works, most notably *The Tale of the Heike*, but also tale literature (*setsuwa bungaku*) and sacred texts. Religious practices and beliefs also influenced the structure of Zeami's plays. The two-act noh play in which a spirit or ghost appears in the form of an ordinary person in act 1 and in its "true" form as a deity or a dead person in act 2 owes much to shamanistic practices, memorial services, and records of dreams and visions. Plays featuring the ghosts of dead people often include depictions of suffering in a Buddhist-style purgatory, and when demons take center stage, exorcism is almost sure to follow. Some of the main characters in noh plays are ordinary, living people, but even then the experiences enacted are usually extraordinary, with altered states of consciousness caused by obsessive grief, love, loyalty, or devotion, a favorite subject.

Kyōgen plays are normally interspersed between noh plays in a day's program. Quotidian experiences are the stuff of these plays, which feature husbands and wives, masters and servants, merchants, blind people, *yamabushi* (mountain priests), and even animals and plants. Popular songs of the period (*kouta*) were worked into kyōgen plays, and conversely, songs sung in kyōgen became popular outside the theater. Noh and kyōgen have common origins, and it is easy to see the beginnings of kyōgen in the comic mimes performed in the Heian period. Although the two theaters developed as companion arts, the early history of kyōgen is shadowy. Zeami's holographs of several complete noh texts have survived, although the earliest extant kyōgen scripts, the *Tenshō kyōgen bon* of 1578, are simply brief plot outlines. Full kyōgen texts were written down only in the Edo period (1600–1868); consequently, some of what is claimed to be an expression of Muromachi society may in fact be more typical of a later period. It is clear, however, that in the century after Zeami, kyōgen

enjoyed growing popularity in the numerous public performances typical of that period. In the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, *noh* and *kyōgen* were performed by both male and female professional troupes as well as by amateur and semi-amateur (*te sarugaku*) actors. Teaching amateurs quickly became an economic factor in preserving the theater, as it continues to be today.

Late medieval records mention *noh* plays staged with puppets. Although both string marionettes and mechanical dolls were known in Japan, hand-operated puppets have been the focus of most of the artistic development. Puppets served as mediums in Shinto rituals to express the words and perform the actions of the gods, and puppet performances were presented as offerings to please and petition the deities; any humans who happened to be around could also enjoy the performances. Puppeteers (*ebisu kake*) connected with the Ebisu Shrine at Nishinomiya (between modern Osaka and Kobe) and specializing in plays about the deity Ebisu were particularly well known. This troupe staged *noh* plays in 1555 and was invited to play at the imperial palace. Other puppeteers (*hotoke mawashi*) were connected with temples and presented tales about Buddhist deities and related themes. Not, however, until puppeteers joined forces with *jōruri* chanters and shamisen players was the puppet theater truly established.

To trace that development, we need to return to the history of recited narratives. The recitation of *The Tale of the Heike* to the accompaniment of the *biwa* (*heikyoku*) gradually declined in popularity and was partially replaced by a genre called *kōwaka*. The performers of *kōwaka* might be viewed as male successors to the *kusemai* entertainers. They also danced to the rhythmic accompaniment of a drum or fan, but their recitations were mostly battle tales, among which episodes from the *Heike* played a major role. Nothing is known about the movements accompanying this recitation, for only remnants of the performing art have survived. Dance, however, seems to have been secondary to the telling of the tales. *Kōwaka* gained prominence in the fifteenth century, and by the sixteenth century its popularity sometimes rivaled *noh* among warrior audiences. But thereafter, its decline was swift, and its performance practices have largely been lost, although some fifty texts remain. As the *kōwaka Atsumori* (translated in part 2) exemplifies, the plots of these tales suggest an intermediary stage between *noh* and the *kabuki* and puppet theaters, with the focus having moved from the individual warrior, his memories, and his search for salvation to a larger web of social relationships and obligations.

Other recited narratives attained broad popular appeal. One such genre, *sekkyō bushi* (literally “sermon ballads”), consisted of stories recited by itinerant entertainers accompanied by a variety of musical instruments, initially a bamboo instrument called the *sasara* and gongs (*shō*). In one type of tale popular with these reciters (*honji mono*), the main character was revealed to be a manifestation (*suijaku*) of a deity, the *honji* or true form. These stories also included their share of human emotions, especially grief caused by separation from a loved one. As these entertainers attracted more urban audiences, they added new musical instruments and finally puppets to their presentations, but their art was eventually overshadowed by the popularity of the livelier music of *jōruri* performances.

The most popular recited narrative in the sixteenth century was a piece entitled *A Tale in Twelve Episodes* (*Jūnidan sōshi*), which relates the story of Lady *Jōruri* and

Minamoto Yoshitsune, the warrior who helped the Genji win the twelfth-century wars and who was then attacked by his brother Yoritomo, the first Minamoto shogun. This tale was probably first recited to biwa music, but by about 1570, the shamisen had been introduced from the Ryūkyū Islands, and the nature of recited narratives underwent a radical change. This new instrument, with its sharp, almost percussive sound, was deemed better suited to accompany narrative chanting than was the more melodious biwa. When shamisen accompaniment was added to the recitation of *A Tale in Twelve Episodes*, jōruri chanting was born, the name attesting to the popularity of the story's heroine. At some point, probably around the turn of the seventeenth century, this type of narrative recitation and the art of puppetry were combined, and the puppet theater, which also came to be called jōruri—or more formally, doll (*ningyō*) jōruri—was on its way to becoming a fully developed theatrical form.

Another element involved in the creation of new theatrical forms was the growth of group dances called *odori*. In contrast to the term *mai* (literally “turning” or “circling”), which was used for the dance forms described thus far, *odori* (literally “jumping” or “leaping”) refers to a style of dancing in which the feet maintain less constant contact with the floor. *Odori*-type dancing as a religious practice was advocated by the priest Kūya (903–972) and was popularized by Ippen (1239–1289). This activity, called *nembutsu odori*, involved group dancing to the chanting of the nembutsu and the singing of Buddhist hymns with drum, gong, and rattle accompaniment. First performed by groups of priests and then by masses of parishioners as well, it was particularly popular during the summer festival of the dead (*obon*) as a ritual to pacify malignant souls. It continues to be a popular part of these summer festivals.

A parallel art called decorative dancing (*furyū odori*) consisted of mass processions of dancers in fancy costumes with masks and decorated props—typically, enormous umbrellas, elaborate floats, and the music of drums, flutes, and gongs. The popularity and ostentatiousness of these processions led to periodic government prohibitions, but they continued to be held well into the Tokugawa period and linger today in more sedate forms such as the Gion Festival held each July in Kyoto. These two performance types were sometimes combined into a syncretized form known as decorative nembutsu (*nembutsu furyū*). In this combination, popular songs joined religious ones, and costumes and masks added to the pleasure of the event and the effectiveness of the ritual propitiation of the deities and the souls of the dead. The nembutsu *furyū* tradition led directly to the development of the kabuki theater.

The second half of the sixteenth century, like the late twelfth century, was a period of major transitions and prolonged civil war. The three consecutive military leaders of this tumultuous period were patrons and devotees of the performing arts and used these arts to promote their own personal and political agendas. Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), the first of the three, was particularly partial to *kōwaka*. Before an important battle in 1560, he reportedly danced a felicitous section of the *kōwaka Atsumori*, and in 1582 he sponsored a competition between *kōwaka* and *noh*, which was won by the former group. On another occasion he is said to have dressed up as a celestial maiden and danced with the masses in a *furyū nembutsu*

during an obon festival. His successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598), proved to be the most enthusiastic thespian. Not only did he sponsor and participate in ostentatious *furyū* events, but he was also passionately fond of *noh*. In 1593 he celebrated the birth of a son by acting in sixteen *noh* plays in front of the emperor GoYōzei. His eventual successor, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), joined him in presenting a new *kyōgen* play. The next year Hideyoshi performed at the imperial palace again. This time in addition to doing traditional pieces, he starred in five plays about his own life, which he had commissioned. Besides celebrating his military exploits, the plays expressed his mother's claim that she owed her salvation to the prayers of her filial son! Such self-aggrandizement did little to further Hideyoshi's eternal fame, however, as the plays were never staged again after he died four years later without leaving a secure heir.

Tokugawa Ieyasu laid the groundwork for both the perpetuation of the Tokugawa shogunate and the role of *noh* as the ceremonial "music" (*shikigaku*) of the military rulers, a function similar to that of *bugaku* in the Heian period. Immediately after he became shogun in 1603, Ieyasu ordered three days of celebratory *noh* and *kyōgen* performances, a practice that his successors continued. Although Ieyasu himself performed in his earlier years (his earliest recorded performance was in 1571, when he was twenty-nine), later he preferred to remain a spectator and earned a reputation as a discerning and appreciative critic. He carried on Hideyoshi's policy of supporting the four schools (*za*) of *noh*—Kanze, Hōshō, Komparu, and Kōngō—with relatively generous grants of rice stipends and estate rights, which were continued until the Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown in 1868 and which made government-sponsored actors the equivalent of members of the warrior class. Under Ieyasu's immediate successors, the most famous *noh* actor of the seventeenth century, Kita Shichitayū Osayoshi (1586–1653), was patronized and permitted to found the Kita troupe, the fifth and last of the official *noh* schools, all of which are still active. In addition to *noh* actors, these schools originally included musicians, *kyōgen* players, and semiamateur performers (*te sarugaku*); all were male.

In 1603, the year in which Ieyasu was named the first Tokugawa shogun, a woman known as Okuni starred in an epoch-making event: she performed what was referred to as "kabuki dance" (*kabuki odori*) on the dry riverbed of the Kamo River in Kyoto. Although this is the first time that phrase appears in extant records, the word *kabuki*, which literally means "to tilt" or "to slant," was commonly used to refer to unusual or outlandish behavior or dress.² This seems an apt description of Okuni's performance, as early pictures show her dancing in Portuguese-style trousers, wearing a "southern barbarian" (that is, foreign) style coolie hat, with a gong in her hand and a Christian cross around her neck. An early-seventeenth-century source (*Kabuki zōshi*) claims that Okuni's performances included scenes depicting the more kabuki-like aspects of a samurai dandy, alleged to be Okuni's recently deceased lover, and a *nembutsu odori* (perhaps dedicated to her lover's ghost).

2. The way of writing the name of the theater was soon changed to the more felicitous ideographs for "song, dance, and art" (*ka-bu-ki*).

Kabuki odori excited the popular imagination, and troupes of female performers proliferated. The settings of these performances included teahouses and public baths, and the shamisen was soon added to the flute and drum accompaniment. Ranking members of the samurai class vied to become patrons of the actresses. On at least one occasion there was a serious riot as rival warriors thronged the kabuki stage seeking favors from the actresses. Declaring such behavior improper for members of the ruling class, the shogunate took action against the actresses and, in 1629, prohibited women from appearing on the stage. This prohibition effectively ended the direct participation of women in the major theatrical genres, although female dancers continued to perform in the more private settings of the banquet hall and the teahouse.

The prohibition against female performers brought new visibility to troupes of young men (*wakashu*), who had been competing with the women. These youths made major innovations in the rapidly developing art of kabuki, including the introduction of acrobatic skills and juggling known as *hōka* and *kyōgen*-like scenarios developed with the help of independent *noh* and *kyōgen* actors. The third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, was a particularly active patron of young men's kabuki. Like the women kabuki dancers, however, the youths were displaying themselves as available for prostitution, and once their protector Iemitsu died, they too were banned.

After 1652, only adult males could appear onstage. The passage between youth and adulthood was marked by shaving the front part of the head, an act usually undertaken in the late teens. Not surprisingly, however, some young kabuki actors became adults prematurely. To hide their bald spots, actors playing female roles covered the front part of their heads with purple cloths; remnants of this practice still appear in modern costuming (see figure 1.29). Males playing female roles had to register with the government to ensure that women did not appear onstage, a practice that helped speed role specialization, particularly that of female impersonators (*onnagata*). Eliminating women and young men from the stage reduced the direct sexual allure of the performances and led to significant innovations designed to attract wider audiences. The actors created more sophisticated, dialogue-oriented scenes to supplement the song and dance and depicted contemporary events onstage, the most popular of which were prostitute procurement, love suicides, scandalous murders, and fights among warriors.

The Tokugawa clan chose Edo (present-day Tokyo) as its headquarters, and early in the seventeenth century many entertainers decided to try their luck in this new city, among them several well-known *jōruri* chanters. The audiences they found in Edo—somewhat rougher than those in Osaka and Kyoto—were part of a growing class of urban dwellers, mostly merchants and artisans, who were eager to assert their own cultural identity. One early reflection of this was the creation of a bombastic martial hero named Kimpira, whose lively exploits in several popular puppet plays exemplify the frontier spirit of this new city. In 1673 a young kabuki actor, Ichikawa Danjūrō I (1660–1704), made his debut in Edo playing the role of Kimpira, and his bravura style (*aragoto*) of acting—performed with vivid red and black makeup (*kumadori*)—created a sensation. Danjūrō developed his acting style in some fifty plays he wrote under the name Mimasuya Hyōgo. Two of these, *Saint*

Narukami (1684) and *The God Fudō* (1697), became sources for the play *Saint Narukami and the God Fudō*, a section of which is translated in this volume. Danjūrō died in a manner befitting the creator of the bold aragoto style: he was stabbed to death onstage by a fellow actor.

Danjūrō lived during the Genroku era (roughly 1680 to 1720), one of the liveliest cultural periods in Japanese history and a time of prosperity for noh and kyōgen and of rapid progress in the development of the newer genres. The shogun from 1680 to 1709 was Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646–1709), an eccentric leader who was something of a noh “fanatic.” By his time noh had been established as the official ceremonial music (*shikigaku*), with formal performances regularly scheduled to ensure prosperity for the country and long life for the rulers. Tsunayoshi’s involvement with noh, however, went well beyond any official relationship. He was an impassioned performer; in 1697 alone he was the main actor (*shite*) seventy-one times in twenty-three different plays and performed independent noh dances 150 times! Furthermore, Tsunayoshi insisted that his retainers and the feudal lords (*daimyō*) also practice noh and sponsor players and performances. He granted dozens of actors the status of samurai and made some of them quite wealthy, but he would also banish performers or reduce their stipends if they displeased him, and his abrupt summons to actors to serve in his castle sometimes disrupted orderly lines of succession in the schools. His taste for unusual noh (which was shared by his immediate successor) resulted in the revival of many old plays, more than one hundred of which still remain in the repertory of at least one school. Some of these plays (like *Kinuta*, *Semimaru*, and *Ohara gokō*) are now highly valued pieces. The publication of five hundred noh plays and 150 summaries of kyōgen also encouraged the appreciation of the plays as literature. Noh’s popularity spread far beyond Edo, the shogunate, and the five official schools. Many *daimyō*—even in places as distant as Sendai—were active noh supporters, and provincial members of the warrior class and their families (including wives and daughters) would take up noh chanting or drumming. In Nara, temple performers (*negi*) were increasingly active; subscription noh (*kanjinnō*) performances, open to the public for a fee, were particularly popular in Osaka, and the imperial palace in Kyoto sponsored competitive performances. A document published in 1687 (*Nō no kimmōzui*) lists 274 noh and kyōgen performers residing in Kyoto. Noh had become a nationwide success.

The popularity of noh, however, was mostly limited to members of the warrior class, which left the majority of the townspeople of Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo open to newer forms of theater. A disastrous fire in 1657 destroyed most of Edo and its theaters and encouraged some of the leading jōruri chanters to return to their roots in Osaka, which remains the home of the puppet theater even today. An outstanding kabuki actor in Kyoto, Sakata Tōjūrō (1644–1709), enhanced a category of plays about prostitutes (*keisei goto*) by creating a gentle, amorous, and humorously ineffective male lover. *Love Letter from the Licensed Quarter* (*Kuruwa bunshō*, 1712) is a good example of a prostitute play featuring Izaemon, the role that Tōjūrō created, and the courtesan Yūgiri. Tōjūrō’s gentle, understated acting style is called *wagoto*, in contrast to Danjūrō’s bold and exaggerated aragoto. In the kabuki version of the play *Love Suicides at Amijima* (1721; translated here), Jihei is played in *wagoto* style (see figure 3.15). Sakata Tōjūrō’s ideas about his art and comments on



FIGURE 1.4. The role of Sukeroku, as defined by Danjūrō II, combines the gentle chic of the wagoto style in the costume and the pose on the left, with a hint of the aragoto style in the makeup and the glaring pose (*mie*) on the right. The purple crepe headband (*hachimaki*) rakishly tied is a symbol of the dashing man about town. (Photos by Aoki Shinji.)

the life of a female impersonator by the famous onnagata Yoshizawa Ayame (1673–1729) are recorded in *The Actor's Analects* (*Yakusha rongo*), the best Tokugawa work on acting.

The interplay between the Kyoto and Edo styles of kabuki is well illustrated by the history of the play *Sukeroku* (the full name is *Sukeroku yukari no Edo zakura*). The love suicide of the courtesan Agemaki and her lover Sukeroku was depicted in kabuki plays in Kyoto in the late seventeenth century. In 1713, an Edo play—with Ichikawa Danjūrō II (1688–1758) in the role of Sukeroku—ignored the suicide and concentrated instead on Sukeroku's rivalry with another samurai, named Ikyū. The gentle Kyoto lover takes on a decidedly Edo air swaggering about, bragging, and using Edo colloquialisms and bantering insults. Three years later, Danjūrō revised the play, adding a long entrance scene performed with a large umbrella, possibly to take advantage of the development of the rampway (*hanamichi*), which at about this time was extended to reach from the stage to the rear of the audience. Danjūrō, skilled in both the aragoto style his father had developed and the Kyoto wagoto, combined the two in this Sukeroku. Instead of the padded aragoto costume, Sukeroku wears a chic black kimono and ties a purple silk band around his head. His makeup includes narrow black and red lines over his eyes, alluding to the aragoto style (figure 1.4).

As the preceding comments may suggest, kabuki is very much an actor-oriented

theater, which accounts for the actors' rather cavalier treatment of scripts, especially in the early days of the theater's history. Although playwrights were first listed in theater programs as early as 1680, their function was more limited than this recognition might imply. Some parts of the play were left to the actors to improvise, and other sections appear to have been freely reworked by them. Since no kabuki scripts from the Genroku period have survived, it is impossible to know what they contained. It is clear, however, that the role of the playwright was not to create a literary masterpiece; instead, his task was to provide a vehicle for the actors' art.

The puppet theater, in contrast, centered on the chanter and his text. In 1684 the celebrated jōruri chanter Takemoto Gidayū (1651–1714) opened a theater in Osaka. Gidayū's innovative style of chanting became the standard, called *gidayū bushi* in his honor. Gidayū's influence goes deeper than his prominence as a performer, however; his understanding of music and theater, including his knowledge of *noh*, helped him create a new musical structure for puppet plays, which he developed in collaboration with the playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724).

Chikamatsu, the first known playwright who was not a performer, wrote both kabuki and puppet plays. Among his early puppet plays was *Kagekiyo Victorious* (Shusse Kagekiyo), produced in 1686 by Gidayū in his new theater. From about 1688, however, Chikamatsu served mainly as a staff playwright for the kabuki actor Sakata Tōjūrō, creating some of his prostitute plays. In 1703 he returned to writing for the puppets. The reasons for this change are not known, although commentators hypothesize that he objected to the many liberties the kabuki actors took with his texts. Perhaps he realized that Tōjūrō would soon leave the stage (he died in 1709), or perhaps he was attracted to the rising popularity of Gidayū. Whatever the initial reasons for his switch, it became permanent with the resounding success of his *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (*Sonezaki shinjū*), presented at Gidayū's theater in 1703. The kabuki theater had been producing love-suicide plays for at least twenty years, but the subject had been avoided in the more conservative puppet theater. Nevertheless, when Chikamatsu, who happened to be in Osaka, heard of the suicide of the shopkeeper Tokubei and the courtesan Ohatsu, he quickly produced a puppet play for Gidayū. Although *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* opened only three weeks after the actual event, a kabuki play on the subject had already premiered. Such rapid responses led to the nickname "overnight pickles" (*ichiyazuke*) for plays about current events.

Chikamatsu's "pickle" was so successful that it ensured the fortunes of the young Takemoto Theater and inaugurated the writing of domestic plays (*sewa mono*) for the puppet theater. In contrast to earlier pieces, which tended to depict historical events and feature superhuman characters such as Kimpira, these plays portray the tragedies of ordinary life. After this success Chikamatsu moved to Osaka and dedicated all his efforts to the puppet theater. He continued to write domestic plays, including his masterpiece *Love Suicides at Amijima* (*Ten no Amijima shinjū*, 1721; translated in part 3), but he did not limit himself to them. After Gidayū's death, when a successful play was needed to launch the career of Gidayū's young successor, Chikamatsu composed the period piece (*jidai mono*) *The Battles of Coxinga* (*Kokusen'ya kassen*; partially translated in part 3). It exceeded all expectations by running for a record seventeen months.



FIGURE 1.5. Three-man puppets with movable features were not created until the second quarter of the eighteenth century. In *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*, Matsuomarō has a Bunshichi head with movable eyeballs and eyebrows. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

In the early eighteenth century, great strides were made in the development of puppets. The hand-held puppets of Chikamatsu's time were small enough to be operated by one person and were of relatively simple construction; only in the 1690s were they given functional arms. String marionettes and mechanical dolls sometimes were mixed with the hand-operated puppets for special effect. From 1705 on, the puppeteers performed in full view of the audience, and the chanter and shamisen player moved from behind a curtain to a platform at stage left. It was not until after Chikamatsu's death in 1724 that the puppets' eyes, mouths, and fingers were made to move, and only in 1734 did puppets operated by three men appear (figure 1.5). The early eighteenth century was the heyday of the puppet theater and probably the only time in theater history when, in Osaka at least, inanimate dolls enjoyed greater fame than live actors.

In Chikamatsu Monzaemon's day, the chanter reigned supreme in the puppet theater. But by the mid-eighteenth century that too had changed, thanks partly to a puppeteer named Yoshida Bunzaburō (d. 1760), who introduced the three-man puppet and began using an extension rod to operate

the puppet's left arm. Bunzaburō gained considerable influence in the Takemoto Theater, then managed by the playwright Takeda Izumo II (1691–1756), who was particularly interested in the visual aspects of performance. A crisis occurred one day in 1748, when Bunzaburō requested that the chanter prolong a passage so the dolls would have more time to act. Considering the request an insult, the chanter refused. Izumo, uncertain how to adjudicate this dispute, finally ruled in favor of the puppeteer, precipitating the departure of the chanter to a rival theater.

Izumo and his fellow playwrights clearly wrote for the puppets. Although they were less literary than Chikamatsu Monzaemon, they had an unerring sense of the theatrical. They normally worked in groups. Izumo, Namiki Senryū (1695–1751; also called Sōsuke), and Miyoshi Shōraku (1696–?) together produced what are considered the three greatest works for puppets: *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy* (*Sugawara denjū tenarai kagami*, 1746), *Yoshitsune and a Thousand*

Cherry Trees (Yoshitsune sembon zakura, 1747), and *Chūshingura* (Kanadehon chūshingura, 1748), scenes of which are anthologized in part 3. After the death of a somewhat younger colleague, Chikamatsu Hanji (1725–1783)—an admirer but not a relative of Chikamatsu Monzaemon—no other great playwrights wrote for the puppets, and their popularity declined. The two major puppet theaters in Osaka folded in 1765 and 1767, handing over their facilities to kabuki actors, and for a century the puppet tradition was kept alive only in small urban theaters and in the countryside.

Shogunal authorities, who kept a close watch over the activities of the urban classes, did not hesitate to regulate the theater. As we have seen, two important governmental decisions had already greatly affected the growth of theater: the prohibition of women onstage and the decision to make noh and kyōgen the official performing art of the warrior class. Suspicious of the possible adverse effects of theater on behavior—arguments that are familiar even today—the government also censored the content of plays. In 1722 the love-suicide theme, a staple of both the kabuki and the puppet theater, was proscribed, and performers were not allowed to portray members of leading families or important current events. In order to circumvent the censorship, playwrights disguised current events by setting them in the past. Accordingly, *Chūshingura*, which enacts a vendetta carried out in 1703, was set in the fourteenth century, and the names of the characters were altered just enough to avoid problems with the law but not enough to prevent recognition by the audience. Various historical periods and people were selected as conventional settings or worlds (*sekai*), and the employment of these worlds—even when it was not really necessary—became increasingly popular, particularly in Edo, the castle town of the shogun.

During the peak of the puppet theater's success, kabuki borrowed heavily from it, especially in Osaka and Kyoto. (The influence actually went both ways, as is described in the introduction to part 3.) Popular puppet plays were often reproduced on the kabuki stage within a month of their premieres, with puppeteers and jōruri musicians sometimes assisting in the preparation of the kabuki versions. Gidayū-style music was adapted wholesale, sometimes used even for plays written originally for kabuki, and this in turn affected the movements of the actors. One playwright influential in kabuki's adaptation of puppet techniques was Namiki Shōzō (1730–1773), who became a disciple of Namiki Senryū for a year or so before Senryū died in 1751. After his teacher's death Shōzō returned to writing for the kabuki theater, but the puppet influence is clear in his later plays, in which he incorporated gidayū-style narrators. He is best known, however, for his employment of elaborate stage machinery. Starting in 1753 he began to make extensive use of stage traps (*seri*), which had been around for almost half a century, and he is credited with the first effective use of the revolving stage (*mawari butai*) in 1758, almost a century and a half before it appeared in German theater. These mechanisms, along with the already existing rampway (*hanamichi*) through the audience, played a large part in developing kabuki's spectacular aspects.

Meanwhile in Edo, the local culture was making itself felt in the theater. One good example is the history of the piece *Sukeroku*. In the 1716 Edo production, already discussed briefly, the play was set in the world (*sekai*) of the Soga brothers;

that is, the hero Sukeroku was revealed to be a disguise (*yatsushi*) for the historical and legendary figure Soga no Gorō (aka Tokimune, 1174–1193). The anachronistic identification of a typical Tokugawa-period dandy with a twelfth-century warrior was readily accepted. In a later revision (1753) the playwright Fujimoto Tobun (1716–1763) went a step further and inserted *Sukeroku* in a long play about the Soga brothers, an example of the Edo practice of combining domestic pieces (*sewa mono*) and period pieces (*jidai mono*) within a single play. Danjūrō II performed Sukeroku for the third and last time in 1749 at the age of sixty-two. For that performance the original *itchū bushi* accompaniment, a Kyoto musical style with a dignified and elegant melodic line, was changed to *katō bushi*, a type of music especially popular among wealthy Edo townspeople who were fans of kabuki and Danjūrō. *Katō bushi* also has an elegant vocal line but uses a stronger shamisen accompaniment.

A variety of new musical styles emerged in Edo kabuki along with the development of dance plays (*shosa goto*), which in the first half of the eighteenth century were the specialty of onnagata and in the second half were written for male roles as well. *Nagauta*, now considered kabuki music par excellence, was created in the Osaka area, where it was used mostly in teahouses and private homes. In Edo, however, it became an essential part of kabuki music. *Bungo bushi*, a style created by the chanter Miyakoji Bungonojō (ca. 1660–1740), who moved to Edo in 1739, was used for passionate and suggestive love-suicide pieces. Indeed, this style of music achieved such great popularity that it was banned by censorious government authorities. Bungonojō's tradition spawned other styles as well, including *tokiwazu* and *kiyomoto*, both of which continue to be used today, especially for dance pieces. Some of the dance plays, like the example in this anthology, *A Maiden at Dōjōji* (*Musume Dōjōji*), were derived from *noh* but became so imbued with the characteristics of kabuki that they are now considered an essential part of that theater.

The 1796 move from Osaka to Edo by the playwright Namiki Gohei I (1747–1808) marks the triumph of Edo as the theatrical center. In Edo, Gohei introduced some of Osaka's more successful dramaturgical practices. For example, he encouraged programs made up of two separate pieces, a period piece and a domestic piece, rather than continuing the earlier practice of combining the two modes. He himself is credited with more than 110 plays of both types.

Tsuruya Namboku IV (1755–1829), one of the greatest kabuki playwrights, was born in Edo, the son of a dyer. Although he became an apprentice playwright when he was twenty-one, he is best known for the domestic plays he wrote after he turned fifty. His *Osome and Hisamatsu* (*Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*, 1813) includes seven roles for the same actor, which makes it a popular showpiece for versatile actors such as the current Ichikawa Ennosuke (b. 1939). The open eroticism of Namboku's *Scarlet Princess of Edo* (*Sakura-hime Azuma Bunshō*, 1817) harks back to early plays like *Narukami*, and his best-known work, *Yotsuya Ghost Stories* (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*; partially translated in part 3), with its skillful blend of the supernatural and the quotidian, portrays the world of petty villains and corrupt samurai as well as the wretched lot of women. Namboku's depictions of the lower strata of society led to the growth of a new genre called "raw-life pieces" (*kizewa mono*). Plays of this type, which combined the sentimental, the grizzly, and the grotesque, influenced popular novels of the time.

During the first few decades of the nineteenth century, kabuki and kabuki-related arts prospered. Dance plays derived from noh and kyōgen (*matsubamme mono*) were particularly popular in this period. The first such piece, *The Subscription List* (Kanjinchō), based on the noh play *Ataka*, premiered in 1840 and is still one of the most popular plays in the repertoire. The cast of eleven, headed by Danjūrō VII in 1840, includes no female roles. Unlike earlier borrowings from noh, which were completely redone as kabuki (such as *A Maiden at Dōjōji*), the matsubamme mono adapted elements of noh performance as well as the story. They borrowed the music, costumes, props, and the pine-tree background, considered an audacious act when noh was the preserve of the samurai class. *Henge mono* (transformation piece), another dance genre, also reached the height of its popularity in the early nineteenth century. In these pieces the leading dancer changed costume and character from three to as many as twelve times. *Rokkasen* (Six saints of poetry) is the only one of these dances performed in its entirety today, but parts of other henge mono, such as *Fuji musume* (Wisteria maiden), remain popular.

The publication of illustrated kabuki playbooks designed for reading and of woodblock prints depicting actors and scenes from plays prospered in the early 1800s, and kabuki-style dances (*buyō*) were regularly performed in teahouses and at private homes by both male and female dancers. Kabuki also flourished outside the major urban centers; permanent and semipermanent stages were built in villages and religious centers throughout Japan. Traveling groups of actors (and puppeteers) performed on these stages, and local amateurs produced their own plays. Rural performances proliferated when the government banned farmers from attending urban theaters. The popularity of kabuki became so broad-based that the government threatened to ban it totally, a threat it fortunately did not carry out. In 1842, however, the authorities forced theaters in Edo to move from the center of town to the outskirts near the Yoshiwara pleasure district, proscribed all performances within the precincts of shrines and temples, and prohibited the publication of theater-related woodblock prints. Individual actors were also punished for breaking the very restrictive laws that governed their lives: Onoe Baikō was manacled for appearing without a sedge hat, Nakamura Utaemon was jailed for going to a sumo match, and Ichikawa Danjūrō VII (1791–1859) was exiled for his opulent lifestyle (Shively 1978:44).

Despite the overwhelming popularity of kabuki after the mid-eighteenth century and the government's censorship of theater in general, the puppet theater managed to survive. Sometime in the 1780s a puppeteer from the Inland Sea island of Awaji, Masai Kahei (d. 1810), better known by his stage name Bunrakuken, took his troupe to Osaka and began performing on the riverbanks. His skill revived interest in the puppet theater, and in 1811 his daughter and her husband were allowed to set up a theater at the Inari Shrine. The troupe prospered there until the edicts of 1842 forced it to close. Fortunately, the ban on theaters at religious institutions was lifted the following year (after its promulgator died), and the puppet theater continued performing at the shrine until 1872, when it moved to the western part of Osaka and was named the Bunraku Theater (Bunraku-za) after the troupe's founder. The theater was so successful that *bunraku* became widely used as a generic term for Japanese puppets; it is used today in the name of the National Bunraku Theater (Kokuritsu bunraku gekijō) in Osaka.

Although noh and kyōgen were largely the preserve of the warrior class during the Tokugawa era, there were some opportunities for others to attend performances. Selected commoners were admitted to some of the ceremonial performances sponsored by the shogun and the feudal lords. For example, the farmers of Kurokawa, who trace their still-active tradition of amateur noh back to the fifteenth century, saw noh at the Tsurugaoka castle of the Sakai family. Subscription performances open to the public for a fee were also held occasionally, more frequently in Osaka than elsewhere, and now and then the government sponsored large public performances by members of the five official schools. Records of such performances in 1750 and in 1848 show that approximately four thousand people attended each day for fifteen days (Omote and Amano 1987:153). Contemporary accounts reveal that it was difficult to hear or see the performers, that some of the audience drank or slept, and that the kyōgen pieces were more popular than the noh plays. Small groups of independent noh and kyōgen performers roamed the countryside, playing in empty lots or temple grounds, and occasionally attracting enough notice to arouse the ire of the five government-supported schools of noh actors. The chanting of noh texts was a popular pastime and spread beyond the warrior class to the public at large. Small sections of plays (*ko-utai*) were even included in the textbooks used by the temple schools. Publishing chantbooks (*utaibon*) was a profitable business, and some performers were even able to earn their living by giving chanting lessons to townspeople.

As the Tokugawa period drew to a close, the last great kabuki playwright, Kawatake Mokuami (1816–1893), portrayed life in his native Edo. Continuing in the tradition of Namboku, Mokuami wrote raw-life pieces (*kizewa mono*) about murderers, thieves, and lowlives, including the famous *Benten the Thief* (*Benten kozō*, 1862; excerpted in part 3) and *The Love of Izayoi and Seishin* (*Izayoi Seishin*, 1859). His plays are often unwieldy, but individual acts, especially extortion and murder scenes, are extremely effective and still very popular. They, too, encountered bouts of official censorship, such as the 1866 edict that forbade excessive realism in the portrayal of thieves and prostitutes to avoid tempting people to enter these professions. Mokuami also adapted some plays from the noh theater, most notably *Tsuchigumo* (The monstrous spider) and *Momijigari* (Hunting for autumn leaves; the names of the kabuki pieces and the noh plays are the same).

The opening of Japan to the West in the mid-nineteenth century and the establishment of a new form of government after 1868 brought changes to all forms of traditional Japanese theater. Noh and kyōgen, which had depended on the patronage of the defunct Tokugawa shogunate, were the most radically affected. Most actors entered new professions. Despite the overwhelming craze for new and foreign things, however, one stubborn actor, Umewaka Minoru I (1828–1909) was determined to preserve noh and was able to convince another actor, Hōshō Kurō XVI (1837–1917), to join him in his struggle.

Foreign relations contributed to their eventual success. In 1869 the Duke of Edinburgh had to be entertained, and even though noh was out of favor, it was deemed the only form dignified enough for the occasion. When Iwakura Tomomi (1825–1883) led a delegation of high-ranking government officials to the West in 1871, he saw similarities between noh and opera, the theatrical form most often used to entertain state dignitaries. Consequently, in 1876 Iwakura entertained the imperial family with noh

performances by both Umewaka and Hōshō, and thereafter the imperial family, especially the Meiji emperor's mother Eishō (1833–1897), began to patronize noh. The first head of state (actually former head) ever to visit Japan, U.S. president Ulysses S. Grant, arrived in 1879 and was entertained with performances of both noh and kyōgen. Grant reportedly admired the noh and urged that it be preserved. As a result Iwakura established the Noh Society (Nōgakusha), which built the first permanent noh stage for the general public at Shiba Park in Tokyo. It opened to great acclaim in 1881, and its success helped ensure the viability of noh in the modern world.

The puppet theater was able to thrive in the early Meiji period thanks to several excellent performers, including Toyozawa Dampei (1827–1898), one of the greatest shamisen players of all times and co-composer with his wife of the popular play *The Miracle of the Tsubosaka Kannon* (Tsubosaka Kannon reigenki; part 3), and the puppeteer Yoshida Tamazō I (1828–1905), who introduced many new puppet techniques. There was also a resurgence of popular female chanters, who had been relegated to amateur status but who now reappeared in the theaters for a brief period. The poor management of the Bunraku Theater, which housed the major troupe, led to its sale to the Shochiku Company in 1909. Then the theater building burned down in 1926, destroying most of the valuable old puppets. Dedicated and talented performers continued to struggle, but it was an uphill battle until the 1930s when the government began to encourage bunraku as a traditional Japanese art.

For kabuki, the end of the Tokugawa rule meant a reduction in government restrictions and a rise in the official status of the actors from outcasts to ordinary citizens. A modern kabuki theater was constructed in the heart of Tokyo in 1872 (the Morita-za), and the following year the metropolitan government licensed ten theaters—there had been only three during most of the Tokugawa period. In 1887 the emperor went to see a kabuki play, a historical first, and other members of the upper classes followed suit. A concerted effort was made to “modernize” kabuki. The theater buildings adapted more Western features: the original Kabuki-za (1889) had a Western-style exterior, and the Teikoku-gekijō (Imperial theater), which opened in 1911, was Japan's first purely Western-style theater.

New types of plays were also created. Ichikawa Danjūrō IX (1838–1903) produced living history plays (*katsureki geki*), which emphasized historical accuracy and often dealt with the recent past, and his rival Onoe Kikugorō V (1844–1903) produced “clipped-hair” pieces (*zangiri mono*), domestic pieces depicting contemporary men who had cut off their now forbidden topknots and wore Western clothes. Plays of both sorts were written by Mokuami, who also wrote for the third of the great Meiji kabuki actors Ichikawa Sadanji I (1842–1904). These plays, however, were still steeped in the old traditions and soon came to seem old-fashioned.

A somewhat different attempt to modernize kabuki and compete with the influx of Western plays resulted in “new kabuki” (*shin kabuki*), written by such scholars and litterateurs as Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), Mori Ōgai (1862–1922), and Okamoto Kidō (1827–1939), the most successful writer in this genre. Composed according to modern European dramaturgical norms, these plays were performed in kabuki style, often by Ichikawa Sadanji II (1880–1940), who in 1910 also revived some of the old Eighteen Kabuki of the Ichikawa family (*kabuki jūhachiban*), including *Narukami*. The efforts to make kabuki into a “modern” theater were, fortunately, unsuccessful.

When it became clear that other styles of theater could better present twentieth-century life onstage, kabuki returned to a more traditional repertory. Although many more “new” plays have become established in kabuki than in the other traditional theaters, the older plays remain the perennial favorites.

World War II left the theater world in disarray: the destruction of Osaka and Tokyo severely damaged or leveled most of the theater buildings, and poverty reduced the audience to a handful. In addition, censorship was reversed. The Occupation authorities prohibited the very classics that were almost the only plays allowed during the war. *Chūshingura*, for example, was alleged to glorify the feudal mentality that had led to war. The traditional theaters were thus slow to regain their audiences, but by the mid-1960s they were nearly back to their prewar levels.

In the 1960s, when the Japanese economy was expanding rapidly, the government once again began to support the arts seriously. Perhaps, like the shogun Yoshimitsu in the fourteenth century, the government felt a need to prove (this time in an international context) that Japan also had a culture.

Whatever the motivation, the policy continues to benefit the traditional performing arts: the government selects performers to name as Intangible Cultural Assets or National Living Treasures and awards them stipends; it encourages and underwrites foreign tours, supports international conferences of theater scholars, and, most important, builds and maintains new facilities. The National Theater (Kokuritsu gekijō) opened in Tokyo in November 1966. Its large auditorium seats 1,746 spectators and is used chiefly for kabuki; a smaller theater holds 630 and is equipped for puppet plays and other traditional forms, such as buyō (kabuki dance). In September 1983, the National Noh Theater (Kokuritsu nōgakudō), seating 591 people, opened in Tokyo, and the following April the National Bunraku Theater (Kokuritsu bunraku gekijō) was inaugurated in Osaka. These national theaters are more than performance places; they provide research facilities, archives, training schools, and opportunities for performers to revive older works and to create new ones. Their existence helps ensure the vitality of traditional theater in Japan today.

General Characteristics

It is impossible to generalize accurately about theatrical forms as diverse as noh, kyōgen, kabuki, and the puppet theater. But because these genres share the same historical background and a relatively isolated geographical context, it is instructive to try. In attempting to isolate and describe some of the characteristics shared by these genres, I usually have refrained from making comparisons with other types of theater, but the informed reader will discover many; none of the attributes discussed is unique to Japanese theater. Nevertheless, the particular ways in which these characteristics have been combined and emphasized in Japan’s performing arts may be what makes its theatrical tradition distinctive.

The Text Speaks Itself

The scripts of Japanese traditional theater are not solely, or even primarily, concerned with reproducing ordinary dialogue. That is, in addition to dialogue, they

also include descriptions of and commentary on the setting, the stage actions, and the characters. The lines may be in poetry or metered prose and may be sung, chanted, or spoken, often with patterned intonation. The words uttered by a particular actor are not limited to lines that his character might “logically” or “naturally” speak; that is, the actor is not restricted to remaining “in character.” Moreover, a chanter or chorus may recite large parts of a play, including the first-person utterances of the characters, in which case the reciter(s) may momentarily take on the voice of one or another character. These reciters, however, are never personified storytellers; the *noh* chorus is not a group of townspeople commenting or elaborating on the action, and the chanter in the puppet theater is not a garrulous, happy, wise, or foolish old man offering his own perspective on events. Rather, they are stage figures voicing the text,³ a text that is not limited to creating naturalistic characters or sustaining fixed points of view.

This aspect of theater is related in part to one characteristic of Japanese prose style, the fluidity of its narrative stance, in which the text flows from one subject position to another without necessarily naming either the speaker or the subject of a “sentence.” This is possible because of the structure of Japanese grammar: verbs or adjectives may stand alone as complete expressions; the same marker (generally *to* or *tote*) may indicate thoughts, speech, or intention; and singular or plural markers are not required. Consequently, distinguishing between direct and indirect speech or between thoughts and spoken expressions is often impossible, as is identifying the narrator, pinning down precisely who is making a statement.

This fluid narrative stance is exploited in both verbal and visual enactments of theatrical texts. Moments occur in all types of theater when the text speaks without apparently being spoken; that is, the words are voiced by the performers, but no character or clearly defined narrator is speaking them. Released from the limitations of direct mime and defined narrative voice, playwrights and/or actors can manipulate the presentation of the text for aesthetic effects and practical purposes. Important words can be put into the mouth of a major stage figure even if they do not logically belong to the character he is portraying. Likewise, an image or metaphor can be highlighted by having a stage figure step out of character to create it. On the other hand, the words of the character may be given to the chorus or chanters to exploit the magnification of multiple voices or to relieve the actor from speaking when he is involved in dance or other strenuous stage business. The enunciation of a single thought may be divided between two or more stage figures or spoken by them in unison. Let us turn to a few specific examples.

Instead of always assigning appropriate lines to the individual actors representing particular characters, *noh*, *kyōgen*, and *kabuki* regularly have stage figures speaking in unison or dividing lines among them. In *kabuki* this technique is called “pass-along dialogue” (*watari serifu*). The following example is from the end of *Saint Narukami* (translated in part 1), when a group of monks identify the source of Narukami’s downfall:

3. There is an important difference in visual presentation here: the members of the *noh* chorus maintain immobile positions and expressionless faces while the *jōruri* chanter employs exaggerated facial expressions to help emphasize the sense of the text.

THIRD MONK:

She is Lady Taema of the Clouds, ,

FOURTH MONK:

most beautiful lady of the Court,

WHITE CLOUD:

by the emperor's command, come to seduce

MONKS IN UNISON:

our master!

In this case, the sharing of lines serves to emphasize the words, to identify the nemesis.

A similar sharing of lines with a more complex effect occurs in the following passage (*kakeai*) from the noh play *Yamamba* (translated in part 2):

TSURE:

Yet I do fear, old woman,
the ebony gloom from which emerges
a figure with speech that's human, but

SHITE:

with a thicket of snowy brambles for hair,

TSURE:

with eyes that sparkle like stars,

SHITE:

and a face that's

TSURE:

painted red—

SHITE:

a demon gargoyle crouching at the eaves—*looks up to right*

TSURE:

this apparition, perceived for the first time tonight,

SHITE:

to what does it compare?

TOGETHER:

The demon of the ancient tale, who . . .

The two players—the main actor (*shite*) plays Yamamba (a supernatural old woman who lives in the mountains) and the companion actor (*tsure*) represents a woman who makes her livelihood performing a dance about Yamamba—are not carrying on a normal conversation. Rather, they are describing Yamamba, but in effect they are describing themselves. One of the metaphors used to describe the demon is that of a red-faced gargoyle, an image emphasized by the actor's pointing as though there were a real gargoyle onstage. Furthermore, the mask of the *shite*, which represents the face of Yamamba, is usually not red at all.⁴ The text paints a picture different from that presented onstage.

A final example of the complex manner in which a text may be expressed comes

4. Only the Kongō school of actors uses a reddish mask, a practice that seems to be inspired by this passage.

from the noh play *Tadanori*. Like the play *Atsumori* (translated in part 2), this piece is about the ghost of a warrior who, toward the end of the play, enacts the last moments of his former life. The main actor (shite), costumed as Tadanori, mimes his final battle while the chorus describes it from a third-person position that uses honorifics to refer to Tadanori. After a retainer of his enemy Rokuyata has sliced off Tadanori's right arm, the shite raises his left hand in prayer, leaving his right arm dangling down at his side. At this point the following rather extraordinary sequence occurs:

CHORUS: Rokuyata unsheathes his sword

The shite uses his right hand (no longer representing Tadanori's cut-off arm) to draw his sword—suggested by a closed fan.

and cuts off Tadanori's head

The shite raises his fan and lets the tip drop toward his head as he looks down [figure 1.6].

SHITE: Rokuyata ponders

The shite looks thoughtful.

CHORUS: How sad, when I look at his corpse

The shite stands and looks down as though viewing the corpse.

At the beginning of this passage, the shite is performing the actions of Tadanori, and at the end, those of Rokuyata. His right arm changes its stance before the rest of his body does, and the single line he speaks is in the third person, describing what his body is enacting. When the chorus takes up the chant again, it speaks from Rokuyata's point of view, using humble verb forms. The actor's words and movements clearly exceed the confines of the character whose costume he wears, and the chorus shares in the creation of the characters.

Flexibility of Time and Space

Theatrical time and space are manipulated quite differently in the various genres, but in all cases they are fluid and malleable. The action of the plays easily leaves the dramatic present and readily overflows the confines of the physical stage. Theatrical time may be contracted or expanded to match plot requirements or aesthetic values, and a given locale may disappear as quickly as it is invoked.



FIGURE 1.6. Toward the end of the noh play *Tadanori*, the actor's left arm represents Tadanori praying; then his right arm depicts Rokuyata drawing his sword and cutting off Tadanori's head. Dropping the tip of the raised fan to the back suggests the beheading. The musicians and kōken are wearing crested kimono and hakama. (Photo courtesy of Monica Bethe.)

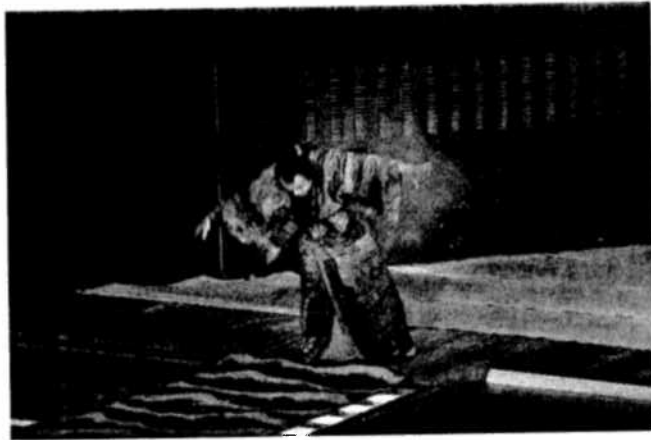


FIGURE 1.7. Wanting to escape from his exile on Devil Island, Shunkan finds the ocean approaching in the form of a ground cloth pulled along the rampway. The slats in the back walls are the facade of the music room (*geza*). (Photo by Aoki Shinji.)

Noh and *kyōgen* do not utilize sets; instead, a scene is created by verbal description, movements, and a few props, leaving much to the audience's imagination. In the first act of the noh play *Izutsu* (translated in part 2), a lonely evening at Ariwara Temple is evoked through poetic description, which is enhanced by the presence of a simple stage prop—a bamboo frame with pampas grass attached. During the opening passage the prop represents a grave mound covered with grasses, but later in the play it suggests both a well and a clump of pampas grass (see figures 2.12 and 2.16). In the *kyōgen* play *The Snail* (part 2), a dense thicket is conjured up by announcing its presence,

by miming the pushing aside of brambles and stepping over underbrush, and by uttering exaggerated sounds of effort (“*ei, ei yatto na*”). The mountain priest and the servant Tarō each employ these means of defining the thicket when they enter, yet when they leave, there is no sign of any obstacles. An imaginary scene is created and then erased, simply by ignoring its existence.

In all theatrical genres, offstage areas often are temporarily incorporated into the setting. In the noh play *Atsumori* (part 2), the main actor rushes to the front of the stage, raises his fan, and looks out over the heads of the audience at the ships at sea (see figure 2.10B); and in a noh play entitled *Tōru*, the actor dips his buckets over the front edge of the stage to draw water from an imaginary pond. Likewise, the frequent use of the kabuki rampway (*hanamichi*) incorporates the entire auditorium into the set, particularly when two rampways are used for simultaneous entrances (see figure 1.13). In *Shunkan at Devil Island*, the single rampway is converted into an ocean by running a blue ground cloth along it (figure 1.7), and when the actors look out over the audience at an approaching ship, the entire auditorium becomes the sea. In earlier performance practice, a boat moved across the back of the auditorium; now the performers watch an imaginary vessel following its progress around 180 degrees until a small boat actually appears moving across the back of the stage. Finally, the prow of an enormous ship is rolled onstage from stage left (figure 1.8).⁵ The imaginary remainder of the ship draws offstage space into the setting as characters appear to move around on board.

Theatrical time is as pliant as theatrical space. A journey may be signified by a few formulaic movements, or both time and place may be transformed by a turn of the actor's head. For instance, when the noh warrior *Atsumori* catches sight of the

5. This example also illustrates a technique for portraying perspective: a small stage figure is replaced by a large one, or vice versa. The difference in size between the two boats may be so exaggerated that it evokes laughter. This is a typical bit of kabuki self-reflectivity—the performance laughs at itself.

secondary actor portraying his former enemy turned monk, the past becomes the dramatic present (see figure 2.11). A kabuki actor breaches the boundaries of the dramatic present by referring to himself or other actors by their own names or by noting the popularity of the play in which he is starring. Moments of stillness in *noh* (when, for example, the woman in *Izutsu* stares into the well) and formal poses (*mie*) in the kabuki theater stop the flow of time, perhaps analogous to close-up shots. In kabuki and puppet plays, slow-motion actions are used to indicate darkness, particularly during fights at night. Fight scenes may also fragment time visually. For instance, simultaneous duels are presented sequentially as though a camera were switching shots from one pair to another. This same technique is effectively employed to depict traumatic events: when a severed head is presented for inspection, for example, the head is uncovered, and then the important characters react to the revelation one by one. Theatrical time is expanded to allow the audience to understand more fully the significance of the event.

Centrality of Form

Mime in Japanese theater is mediated by form. Movements, text, costumes, and music all are valued for their formal beauty as well as for their expressive effectiveness. An old man is created not by directly imitating all the details of his decrepitude, but by selecting the essential characteristics of age and presenting them in a stylized and aesthetically pleasing manner. This practice is related to the poetic concept of essential characteristics (*hon'i*), which Zeami and other playwrights adapted to theatrical purposes. Selected elements of expression gradually evolved into the fixed performance patterns (*kata* and *furi*) that are the building blocks of all theatrical genres. The expression of weeping is a good example. In *noh* this is rendered by tilting the upper body forward slightly, slowly raising the left hand with fingers extended up to eye level and then lowering it again (see figure 2.28). This graceful pattern (*shiori*) may be performed standing or sitting and is intensified by repetition or by using both hands. It suggests the concealing of tearful eyes. The other genres employ similar stylized gestures. In the puppet theater, the weeping

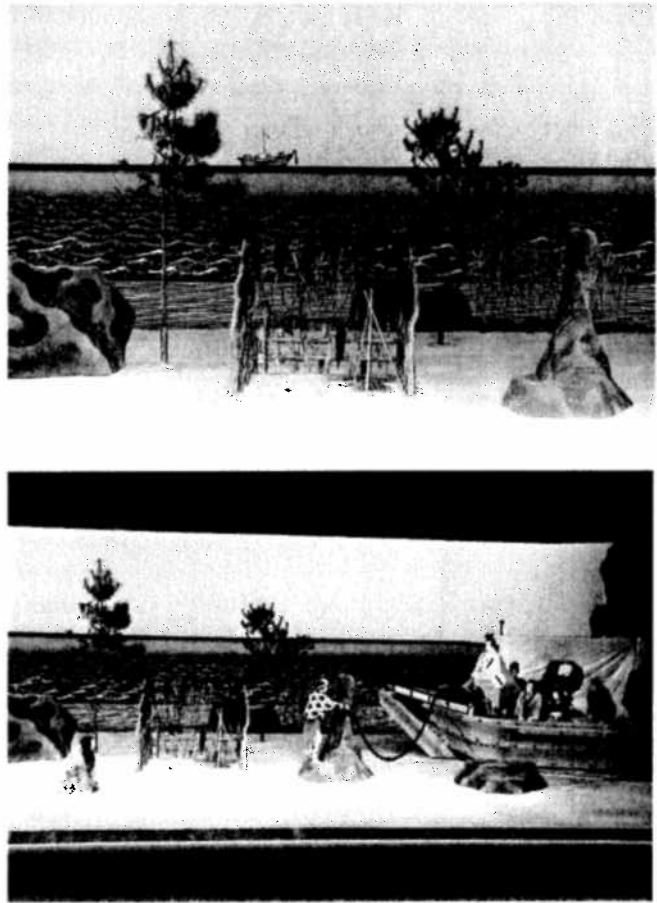


FIGURE 1.8. In *Shunkan at Devil Island*, perspective is represented by having a small ship move across the horizon and then rolling the prow of a large ship onstage. The disparity in sizes may also add a humorous touch to the performance. (Photo by Aoki Shinji.)



FIGURE 1.9. An *ushiro-buri* (turning to the rear) in the kabuki play *A Maiden at Dōjōji*. The long sleeves of the kimono (*furisode*) and the ends of the obi (*furisage*) are wrapped around the dancer's arms. This movement pattern was developed in the puppet theater and adapted by kabuki. (Photo by Aoki Shinji.)

pattern may be intensified by having a shaking puppet bite her sleeve (the edge of the raised sleeve is caught on a special needle, called *kuchibari*, “at the side of the lips”) to represent the stifling of her tears.

Not all movement patterns have this kind of referential meaning; some were developed basically for the beauty of their forms. For example, to show off an attractive kimono, a pattern called “turning to the rear” (*ushiro-buri*) was developed in the puppet theater and copied in kabuki. The female figure’s back is turned to the audience; the body bends slightly so that the full line of the kimono is revealed; the sleeves may be spread; and the head turned to look over the shoulder at the audience (figure 1.9). This elegant movement has no direct connection with the text but is included and appreciated for its formal beauty. It is also an example of the various types of movements that interrupt narrative time.

Stylized patterns occur in all the theatrical arts. Instrumental music consists of fixed patterns that are basically abstract, although the manner of their execution contributes to the meaning of the performance. In *noh*, for example, drummers accompany their drumming with vocal calls (*kakegoe*), and the style of these calls is varied to match the mood and action of a specific play. The intense, eerie calls used in *Dōjōji* create an effect quite different from that

of the softer sounds produced for *Izutsu*, even though the drummers may be voicing the same syllables on the same beats. Kabuki music uses instrumental patterns to evoke aspects of a scene such as the sounds of waves (*nami no oto*), the falling of snow (*yuki no oto*), or the clash of battle (*tōyose*). These highly conventionalized patterns are recognized through widespread use rather than more literal mimesis.

Likewise, props, costumes, masks, makeup, and puppet heads all are highly stylized, with the same or similar items appearing many times in different contexts. The puppet head *musume* (young girl), for example, is used for the Kannon in *The Miracle of the Tsubosaka Kannon* and the dancer in *A Maiden at Dōjōji*. The altar in *Kamo* and the well frame in *Izutsu* are variations of the same form, and the women characters in the *kyōgen* plays “Sickley” *Stomach* and *Kanaoka* wear the same basic costume. In fact, all genres use a limited number of basic forms over and over again, but with such variation in speed, timing, intensity, design, or color and in such different contexts that the untrained audience is unaware of the repetition.

This emphasis on stylized forms has particularly important ramifications for

training performers and producing plays. The implications for training are, simply put, that mastery of form is fundamental. A young player learns by imitating his teacher—questions about the meaning of a piece or even of specific words are not relevant at this point. A traditional Japanese actor is perhaps better compared with a musician than with a Western actor; that is, only after he has memorized every movement and every sound of a piece does he consider questions of interpretation. All performers are well trained. Traditionally they begin as young children and learn their roles individually with their teachers—group rehearsal time is minimal. In *noh* and *kyōgen*, there is a preperformance gathering (*mōshiawase*), but the players only discuss the piece and run through tricky or unusual sections. Puppeteers also learn their roles with their individual teachers; the three operators begin to work together and with the musicians only at dress rehearsal. *Kabuki* players devote more time to rehearsals, scheduling several the week before a program opens. Not surprisingly, more thorough rehearsals are needed for new or rarely performed plays than for old favorites. Even new plays, however, can be prepared quickly because they, too, are built around traditional stylized forms.

Two productions of a *noh* or *kyōgen* play by actors of the same school are almost identical, and even the variations among performers of different schools are relatively minor. Again, the musical analogy works best: one attends two different performances of a Mozart quartet or a *noh* play by Zeami expecting to experience the same basic forms, but in different renditions. Although puppet and *kabuki* productions show more variety, most of the traditional plays were codified long ago. Somewhere along the way a great performer created a set of effective forms (*kata*) that have come to define a particular role. In recent years, thanks partly to the efforts of the national theaters, a considerable number of old plays have been revived in all genres. When only the words have survived, performance patterns are adapted from similar contexts in plays from the active repertory. Performers may experiment with new forms for a while, but then they too become part of the tradition.

Emphasis on form diminishes interest in verisimilitude. The attention given to formal beauty in the creation of some movement patterns is apparent in other areas as well. In the *kabuki* play *Saint Narukami*, for example, Black Cloud uses a small bottle and cup he had concealed on his person to serve White Cloud some sake. Later, when Saint Narukami serves sake to Taema, he takes out a cup twenty inches across and a large wooden casket and says, "The little monks thought they could hide these from me by the waterfall, but I saw them." Black Cloud's simple utensils would not suit the more elegant seduction scene, and no voice of realism demands that the same utensils be used. Similarly, the outrageous costume worn by the main character in the play *Shibaraku* has nothing to do with realism, but it creates wonderful visual effects.

Theatricalization of the Mechanics of Theater

Traditional Japanese theater's lack of interest in verisimilitude is reflected not only in its emphasis on form and formal beauty but also in its incorporation into the show of the mechanics of theatrical production. Most notably, the majority of the musicians—the music room (*geza*) players are the major exception—perform

onstage, in full view of the audience. Appropriately costumed, with their postures and movements dictated by convention, these performers become an important part of the visual as well as the aural show (see figures 2.12 and 3.94).

Other people are onstage but not as part of the scene; they are considered “invisible.” The most prominent of these invisible figures are the puppeteers. That the audience can become involved with a three-quarter life-size doll when it is surrounded by three manipulators seems incredible, but anyone who has attended a puppet performance knows how soon the puppeteers fade from sight. As mentioned earlier, this was not always so. In the early days of the puppet theater, the puppeteers held the one-person puppets over their heads while they themselves were shielded by a curtain, which also hid the chanter and shamisen player from view. Donald Keene suggests that as the dolls themselves became more lifelike and the scripts more realistic, these steps were deliberately taken to maintain the balance between realism and nonrealism, a balance that Chikamatsu emphasized in his writings (Keene 1990:141).

Attendants regularly enter and exit the stage during performances. In *noh* the two stage attendants (*kōken*) for the *shite* kneel at backstage right whenever the *shite* is onstage (see figure 2.8). These attendants have vital roles. The older one is usually of equal or senior status to the *shite* and is responsible generally for the performance. He serves as the prompter, speaking the next lines from memory should an actor forget, and as an understudy, ready to step in and take over should an actor become disabled. The *kōken*’s responsibilities also include bringing out and retrieving props, helping with onstage costume changes, and rearranging any disheveled costume parts while the actor continues to perform. Attendants to the drummers also enter the stage (usually during the *kyōgen* interlude) to deliver a hip drum (*ōtsuzumi*) with freshly dried skins or to perform other chores. Some *kabuki* stage attendants—dressed as the *noh* attendants are in kimono and *hakama* (dark, divided skirts)—are onstage during danced portions of the plays to aid the performer (see figure 3.94). Most attendants in *kabuki*, however, are dressed from head to toe in black (much as the puppeteers are) and serve a multitude of functions. The *kyōgen kata* serves as the prompter and plays the hand-held, wooden clackers (*hyōshigi* or *ki*), whose sound announces the opening and closing of the main curtain (see figure 3.4). Other black-clad attendants (*kurogo*, literally “black dress”) scurry about delivering and retrieving props and costume pieces. These attendants, usually young actors who also serve as understudies, remain “invisible” by switching to white costumes during snow scenes. Stagehands, also dressed in black, adjust sets as necessary, especially when the stage revolves. The attendants in the puppet theater scamper around the legs of the puppeteers, usually hidden in large part by the low, front partition.

In *kabuki*, and to a lesser extent in the puppet theater, curtains and stage machinery are openly manipulated as part of the visual picture. Lifts and traps transport props and performers from below the stage to high above it. The top portions of flats fall forward to create new scenes; doors open onto smaller doors to create perspective; and the stage revolves in full view of the audience. In addition to the main curtain, which is pulled aside, drop curtains may keep the set or a group of musicians temporarily concealed to heighten expectation (figure 1.10), and small

curtains carried by stage attendants are used to hide a “corpse” as he walks off stage or to delay an important entrance. The skill with which these mechanics are performed is meant to be appreciated as part of the show.

The transformation of stage figures, at the heart of much Japanese theater, may take place onstage, often with rapid changes of costume, make-up, and masks or puppet heads accompanied by abrupt shifts in music and dance styles. The puppet character Sugawara no Michizane and the kabuki character Saint Narukami both make dramatic transformations onstage into thunder gods, and the young woman in the noh *Dōjōji* metamorphoses into a demon inside the bell

prop. The bell conceals the shite from the eyes of the audience, but everyone is aware of the difficulty of the costume change being made in dark, cramped quarters. The numerous costume changes in the kabuki play *Musume Dōjōji* have become an aesthetic end in themselves. In some kabuki plays, such as *Yotsuya Ghost Stories*, the transformation trope is reversed: the character being presented is not transformed; rather, a single actor plays several characters, switching rapidly from one to another. He is applauded for doing so skillfully and quickly.

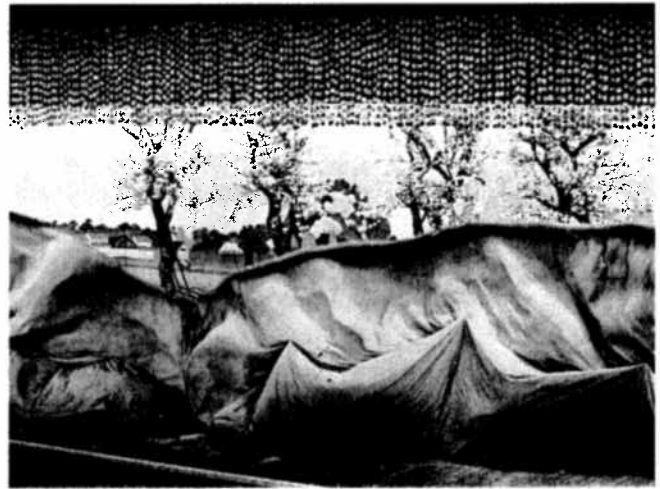


FIGURE 1.10. A drop curtain (*donchō*) falls to reveal the set in a kabuki production. Stage hands (visible as bumps under the curtain) carry it offstage. (Photo by Aoki Shinji.)

Intensity of Intertextuality

Originality as it is prized in twentieth-century America is not of great significance in Japanese art in general. Instead, copying, alluding to, manipulating, and varying the familiar is generally accorded high aesthetic value. In Japanese theater, most plots are based on earlier texts. These may be literary, historical, or religious works or accounts of a current event (a suicide or revenge killing, perhaps). Zeami advocated using an earlier text (*honsetsu*), although he allowed the possibility of producing a successful made-up play (*tsukuri noh*) by using a famous locale as the setting and incorporating poems about that place into the script. Kyōgen plays are exceptional. Although they draw on earlier materials, their plots usually have no identifiable sources. Instead, they explore quotidian crises through the creation of fictional characters.

The art of allusion is highly developed in the Japanese literary tradition and is freely used in theater. Noh, for example, often makes use of multiple, related allusions by stringing them together in sequences, as occurs in the list of rivers in *Kamo* or of bells in *Miidera*. Allusions from various sources may be combined to create an effect or make a point. Through a skillful use of allusion, Zeami relates the young warrior Atsumori to the courtier and poet Ariwara no Yukihiro (818–893) and the

shining prince of *The Tale of Genji*. His success is attested to in the puppet play *Ichinotani*, which draws on the noh play in the Suma Bay scene and goes on to claim that Atsumori is the son of an emperor! Noh also often fragments an old poem, introducing and repeating individual images and phrases until it re-creates the whole with expanded meaning. In *Izutsu*, two poems are treated in this manner. The first is a “passage poem” about Tatsuta Mountain, which originally concerned Ariwara no Narihira’s travels to meet his lover but which, by the end of act 1, has come to suggest the passage of his wife’s ghost back to earth. The second is the poem about the well, the prop and imagistic center of the play. The first phrases of this poem, *tsutsu izutsu ni*, are repeated so many times that they achieve mantric intensity, and the well itself becomes a mirror of the past and of self-awareness.

Kyōgen treats noh texts parodically. In addition to humorous allusions to specific noh plays (for some good examples, see *The Cicada* and *Mushrooms* in part 2), kyōgen parodies the characters and the general plots of noh. For instance, the thunderbolt in *Kaminari* is a kyōgen version of a noh deity, and the presentation of mountain priests in kyōgen, though based on real-life figures, is mediated by their treatment in noh. The humor of the failed exorcism in *The Mushrooms* is increased by an awareness of the noh models, such as the one in *Dōjōji*. *Kanaoka* is clearly a takeoff on crazed-person plays such as *Miidera*. Although in this kyōgen a man is befuddled by longing, in noh it is usually women who are driven “crazy” by love. The main point of *The Cicada*—and other kyōgen dance plays (*maikyōgen*) in which fauna, flora, or lowly humans return as ghosts to reenact their deaths—is, of course, to spoof the warrior plays of noh, such as *Atsumori*.

The puppet and kabuki theaters directly allude to noh and kyōgen plays (Chikamatsu’s works include more than ninety such references) and often recycle their stories, dances, and music. In addition, they exploit prior texts through the use of conventionalized “worlds” (*sekai*), discussed earlier. Because censorship prohibited direct reference to many types of current events, the plays were recast into an early setting, and the actions were attributed to well-known historical or literary figures. The resulting plays rewrote history freely and often anachronistically. The pleasure quarters depicted in the “Teahouse scene” of *Chūshingura*, for example, are clearly from the seventeenth century, not the fourteenth-century world of Kō no Moronao that the play purports to present. These worlds became highly conventionalized. Handbooks, such as the authoritative *Classification of Worlds* (*Sekai kōmoku*; published sometime before 1791), provided playwrights with a setting and characters to which the audience could easily relate.

In short, traditional Japanese theater is a theater of fluid transformations in which time, space, character, and action are often fragmented and then recombined in new contexts. The lack of concern for verisimilitude allows theatrically effective devices to be exploited freely and stage mechanics to be revealed to the audience. Earlier texts are constantly reused but are often broken up and reintegrated with new meanings or interspersed with other texts, old or new. Earle Ernst probably best summed up these characteristics when he described kabuki as presentational rather than representational theater: “In the representational theater every effort is made to convince the audience that the stage is not a stage and that the actor is not an actor” (1956:19). In presentational theater, however, the actor

presents his character on an acting platform, and the audience enjoys the performance for the play they know that it is. Although all Japanese traditional theater is presentational and the major genres share the characteristics discussed here to a greater or lesser extent, the differences among the performance traditions are significant. The following section and the introductions to parts 2 and 3 describe more fully the elements of each genre, and the translations present concrete examples.



FIGURE 1.11. The stage for noh and kyōgen. The bridgeway (*hashigakari*) at the left leads to the curtained exit (*agemaku*) and is lined with three pines; only the first pine is visible here. An epiphany pine (*yōgōmatsu*) is painted on the back wall, and bamboo are painted around the small door (*kirido*) at stage left that is used by the chorus and stage attendants. The stage is always empty when the audience enters the performance space. (Photo by Monica Bethe.)

The Stages

The stage on which noh and kyōgen are currently performed is a small architectural gem with an austere beauty that is never compromised by sets. It is a raised and roofed structure with a square performing space approximately nineteen feet by nineteen feet, surrounded by a small area for the musicians, another at stage left for the chorus, and a bridgeway (*hashigakari*) that serves as a secondary performing area leading from backstage right to a curtained exit into the dressing rooms (figure 1.11). The stage was once a separate structure, with the audience seated in the surrounding garden or in a facing building, but the modern stage is more commonly a roofed structure within a larger auditorium. The floor is constructed of highly polished wooden boards, with ceramic jars strategically placed underneath to add resonance to the stamps of the stocking-footed actors, and pillars at each corner and along the bridgeway. The back wall of the stage proper is decorated with a large, painted pine tree, and three small pines line the front of the bridgeway. There is a tiny door (*kirido*) at the rear of stage left for inconspicuous entrances and exits, which most often is used by the chorus and stage attendants, but characters who have been killed also exit there. The wall around this door is decorated with painted bamboo. The audience is seated, nowadays usually in chairs, in a semicircle from the front of the bridgeway around to far stage left.

Three types of actors participate in a noh play. The most numerous are shite actors who function as the main performer (called shite), companion actors (*tsure*), the chorus (*jiutai*), stage attendants (*kōken*), and child actors (*kokata*). *Waki* actors perform the secondary role (*waki*) and serve as companions to the *waki* (*wakizure*); kyōgen actors function as minor characters in noh plays and present the interludes between acts (*aikyōgen*), as well as performing independent kyōgen plays. In addition, there are four types of musicians, all of whom appear on the stage: the flutist, two hand drummers who play the larger, hip drum (*ōtsuzumi* or *ōkawa*) and the



FIGURE 1.12. The noh instrumentalists playing entrance music: the stick drum (*taiko*), the hip drum (*ōtsuzumi*), the shoulder drum (*kotsuzumi*), and the flute (*nōkan*). Compare the pine on this back wall with that in figure 1.11. (Photo by Karen Brazell.)

smaller, shoulder drum (*kotsuzumi*), and a stick drummer who plays the *taiko* (figure 1.12).

Noh plays rarely focus on character development or dramatic conflict; rather, they explore an emotion (love, anguish, longing, regret, resentment), celebrate deities, poetry, longevity, fertility, or harmony, or exorcise external or internal ghosts and demons. The action is expressed through a stream of associated images and danced movement. Act 1 generally introduces a narrative—the establishment of a shrine, the death of a warrior, the loss of a loved one—and act 2 presents some portion or result of that story in song and dance.⁶ A single player, nor-

normally the *shite*, usually performs most of the action and is the visual center of interest. He is garbed in a large, brightly colored costume and a carved, wooden mask, both of which may be of museum quality. The *shite*, however, is always surrounded by supporting performers, a large number for such a small stage, and it is the interaction among the entire ensemble that creates the power and the beauty of the performance.

Kyōgen plays are performed between noh plays, which they complement in many respects. Whereas a noh play requires at least thirteen participants (three actors, six members of the chorus, three musicians, and a stage attendant), two players are sufficient for many kyōgen plays: a *shite* and a second actor, usually labeled *ado*. The characters that these actors portray are ordinary, even lowly, beings. Visually, kyōgen is more austere than noh: large props are rare, and the costumes are less voluminous, more somber, and less richly textured than noh garments. Masks are worn infrequently. When musicians are needed, both the instrumentalists and a chorus of four to six members sit along the back of the stage. The mood of kyōgen plays is generally light and humorous, and a delicate balance is maintained between simplification and exaggeration.⁷ A long journey may be accomplished in a few steps, yet a moment of laughter may be so prolonged and overplayed that the audience cannot help but laugh at the laughing. In kyōgen an actor's personality and face (or at least the persona and stage face) are much more accessible to the audience than they are in noh; hence the actor's art seems more individualized and intimate.

Kabuki theaters have relatively wide stages (about ninety feet across) and rather shallow auditoriums (about sixty feet deep). Hence even in a large theater (the

6. One subgroup of the category of living-character plays (*genzai nō*) does depict direct conflict. Good examples are plays about the Soga brothers translated by Kominz 1995.

7. A few kyōgen plays are not humorous at all but are poignant vignettes of human suffering. The "blind men" plays, such as *Kawakami*, are good examples.

Kabuki-za seats 2,600 and the National Theater 1,746), no viewer is far from the action, although one may be rather high above it in the top balcony of the Kabuki-za, where connoisseurs mix with people who purchase tickets by the act. There is a raised rampway (*hanamichi*), about five feet wide, which runs from the right part of the stage to the back of the auditorium where a curtain is hung, and for some performances a second *hanamichi* is temporarily placed at stage left (figure 1.13). Until the early twentieth century, a forestage projected out into the audience, providing a prominent acting area, but Western influence pushed the whole stage back behind a proscenium arch.

Kabuki sets, often opulently decorated, are not meant to create illusionary places but instead serve as decorative backdrops against which brightly costumed actors perform. Sophisticated stage traps (*seri*)—on both the seven-three spot of the *hanamichi* (three-sevenths of the way from the stage) and the stage proper—and a revolving stage are used to move scenery, actors, and props (figure 1.14).

The stage is often populated with a great many figures (see, for example, figure 3.94). The heroes of *aragoto*-style plays and the courtesans of domestic pieces are larger than life: their elaborate costumes and wigs may weigh fifty or sixty pounds, and their faces are painted flat white or marked with stylized lines. They may be accompanied by a group of similarly dressed servants, warriors, or monks who act as an ensemble, and as many as thirty chanters and musicians may be seated along the back of the stage. At other times, a pair of lovers is alone on the stage, or a single figure may enter or exit slowly down the rampway while an instrument or two plays from a concealed music room at stage right (*geza*) or stage left (*chobo*). Variety is valued, as are rapid changes of pace and scene.

The puppet stage is traditionally about thirty-six feet wide and fifteen feet high, although the stage at the National Bunraku Theater in Osaka is somewhat wider. Its depth of about twenty-four feet is divided into sections by three partitions (*tesuri*)



FIGURE 1.13. The National Theater (*Kokuritsu gekijo*) with two rampways (*hanamichi*). The closer one is temporary, set up as needed. The boats are being pushed by stage assistants in black (*kurogo*), and the musicians are lined up on stage. (Photo by Aoki Shinji.)

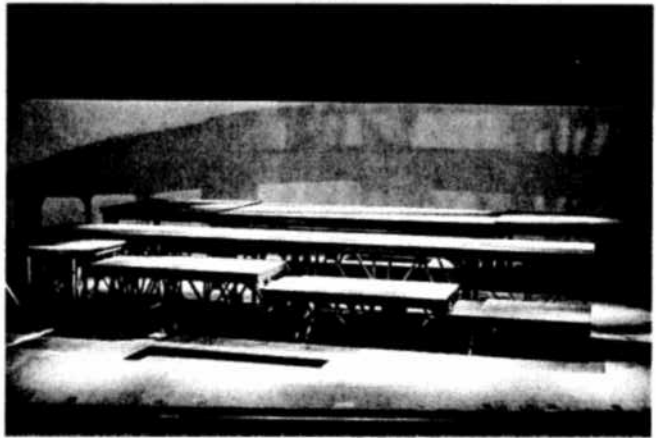


FIGURE 1.14. The complex series of lifts (*seri*) on the revolving stage in the National Theater, on which actors, props, or sets can be raised or lowered. (Photo by Aoki Shinji.)



FIGURE 1.15. The puppet theater chanter and shamisen player sit on an auxiliary stage jutting out into the auditorium at stage left. There is a revolving platform in the middle of the auxiliary stage that allows the performers to be changed smoothly. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

of different heights that run the width of the stage, concealing the puppeteers' lower bodies and serving as a "floor" or "ground" on which the puppets appear to walk or sit. The area immediately behind the first partition (a black, ten-inch-high wall) contains footlights and the curtain. Behind the second partition (nineteen inches above the forestage and usually painted a neutral color) is the major performing area, approximately seven feet deep with a floor recessed fourteen inches below stage level. This area, called *funazoko* (ship's bottom), runs the entire width of the stage and has curtained exits at both sides (Adachi 1985:175). The rear area contains the major set, sometimes simply a painted flat but often an interior space. In the latter case, the third partition (thirty-three inches high) is designed as the base of the building, and the puppets appear to be moving or sitting on tatami mats. Exits may be made from either side or at the back. Because of the number of people who must move around (each major puppet has three manipulators), stage props are relatively few, and furnishings, such as chests or scrolls, are often painted on the backdrop. Essential large props (gates, bridges, trees) may be wheeled in and out as needed. A boat, for example, is made from a flat on wheels and is pushed along by the puppeteers, who walk behind it (see figure 3.9).

Players in a small music room (*geza*) concealed by a bamboo blind above the exit at stage right produce offstage music and limited sound effects. An auxiliary stage jutting out into the auditorium at stage left has a small, revolving platform on which the chanter and shamisen player sit, the chanter closer to the stage (figure 1.15). A rampway (*hanamichi*) through the audience at stage right, borrowed from the kabuki theater, is used only occasionally for dramatic exits and even less frequently for entrances.

When a performance is in progress, it is immediately apparent that there are two centers of interest, the movements of the puppets and the sounds produced by the chanter and the shamisen. The power of the music may draw one's attention to the auxiliary stage, where the chanter and the shamisen player are a pleasure to observe. Inevitably, however, the viewer turns to watch the dolls come to life with delicate and graceful movements or exaggerated bombastic gestures. As Barbara Adachi describes it:

The puppets gradually assume life-size proportions. No longer do the faces seem small and immobile as they turn this way and that, glancing at each other, then away. The faces of the principal puppeteers are ciphers: neutral, immobile elements present onstage only to be ignored. The assistants are no more obtrusive than shadows. One postpones the question of how the illusions are created as one enjoys watching the lovers in animated conversation, noting only in passing that the unmasked puppeteer's hand is visible beneath that of the doll's. (1985:28)

Illusion is at the heart of all theater. Although the stages of the traditional Japanese theaters do not attempt to represent realistic or naturalistic characters or places, they do effectively draw the audience into the dramatic action, the illusion created onstage. The gasp of horror of parents being shown the severed head of their son is no less real because the performers are puppets. One weeps as a young woman grieves over her lover's death, forgetting momentarily that the "woman" is a male *noh* actor singing in a masculine voice and with coarse hands shielding his eyes. The gall of servants deliberately destroying their master's treasures is astonishing, even though the treasures are conjured up only through movements and sounds. And the appealing, feminine grace of an *onnagata* may arouse envy in the hearts of the female spectators.

Four Figures of the Thunder God: Examples of the Four Major Genres

Storm gods have raged and romped through the literature and art of Japan since at least the autumn of 463, when Emperor Yūroku is said to have ordered the capture of the deity of Mount Miwa. Presented with an enormous serpent roaring thunderously and flashing flames, the terrified emperor renamed the deity "thunder" (*ikazuchi*, meaning "powerful, fearsome thing") and returned it to the mountain. Later retellings of this tale transformed the great serpent into dragon gods, traditional dispensers of rain. Other tales recount how vengeful spirits of the dead transform themselves into thunder gods and strike down their enemies with bolts of lightning. Conversely, thunder is sometimes depicted in a benign anthropomorphic form—most often with an arc of drums around his head and a drum stick in his hand and paired with a wind deity.

All types of Japanese theaters have made use of the figure of thunder, so here, to introduce the four major genres, are selections from four plays featuring thunder gods. These pieces are not textually related; but they simply share the figure of a thunder god, be he ferocious, funny, friendly, or frightened. Each play also involves

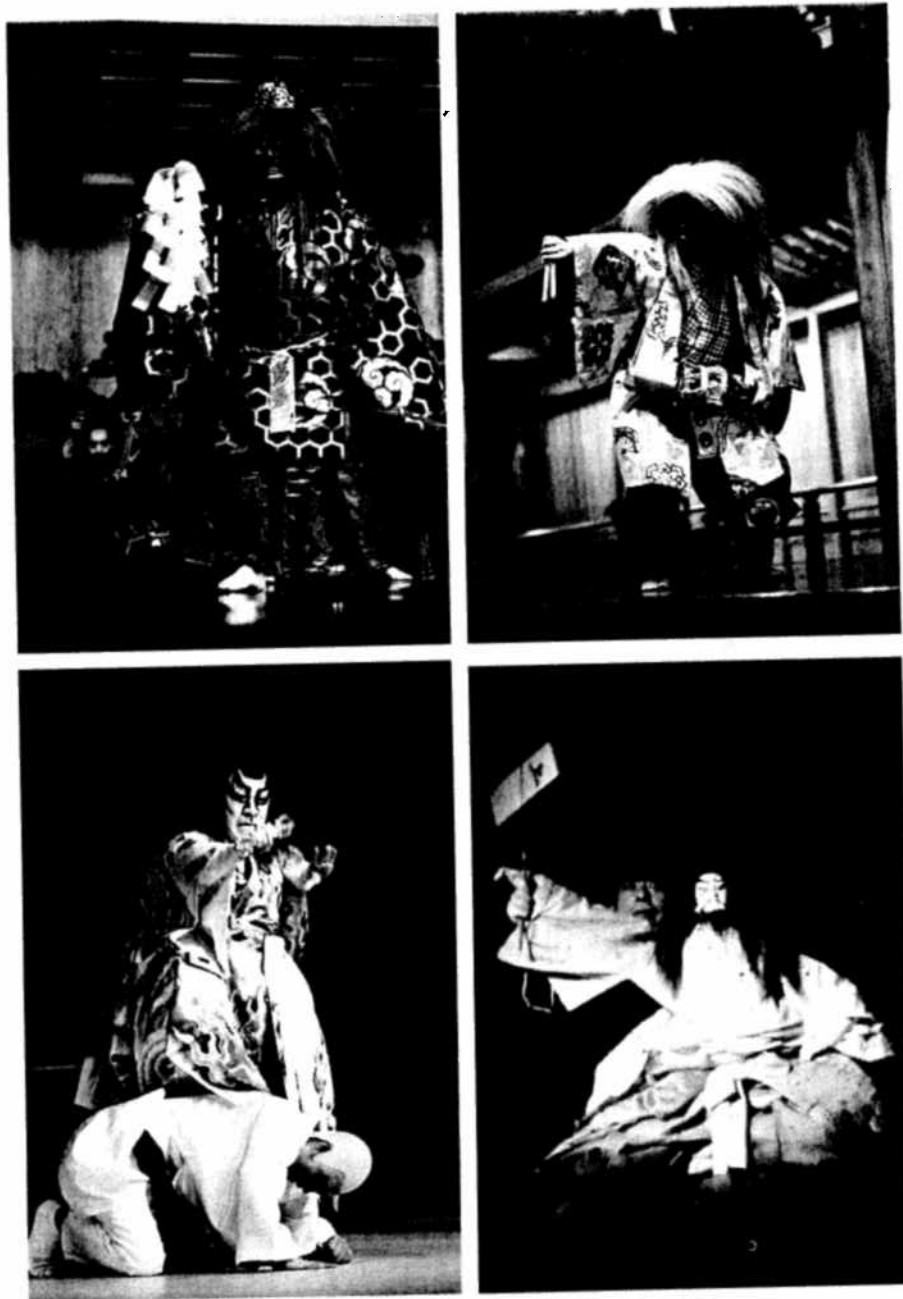


FIGURE 1.16. Four theatrical figures of the thunder god. The noh deity in *Kamo* (top left) has cloud circles, hexagons, and bold diagonals (lightning) in his costume design. The strips of paper attached to the purification wand (*gohei*) also suggest lightning. The kyōgen costume for *Kaminari* (top right) is a simplified version of the noh apparel. The drum (*taiko*) at the actor's waist is "struck" with the closed fan to indicate thunder. In the kabuki play *Saint Narukami* (bottom left), the thunder god holds a *vajra* (a ritual object in esoteric Buddhism); his makeup is in the bold aragoto style, and his outer robe has flame designs. In *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy* (bottom right), the puppet representing the thunder god ascends a cliff where he waves a white paper over his head and poses fiercely. (Top two photos: Courtesy of the Noh Research Archive of Musashino Women's College; bottom left: photo by Aoki Shinji; bottom right: photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

physical transformation, and each depicts a thunderstorm. The nature of the transformations and the techniques used to present the storms illustrate basic characteristics of the theatrical forms (figure 1.16).

In the *noh* play *Kamo*, a play retaining traces of *noh*'s religious origins, the thunder god in his benign aspect sends timely rains to nourish crops. In the first act of the play, a young woman relates one version of the legend of the thunder god (*wake-ikazuchi*) worshiped at the Kamo shrines in northern Kyoto: a woman drawing water from a river scoops up an arrow in her bucket and later gives birth to the thunder god's son. The recitation of this tale is followed by a poetic enumeration of rivers and streams—an incantation to water, which contributes to the ritual effect of the play. Then the maiden draws water to offer to the deity and to purify herself. In act 2, the mother goddess appears, performs a dance, and dips her sleeve in the river, precipitating the arrival of the thunder god. The original act of scooping up the arrow is thus enacted in two forms as the old tale is retold and the thunder god's theophany is re-created. After majestically announcing himself, the thunder god dances up a storm for the benefit of the land and the reign of its lord—a virtuous reign is reflected in a bountiful harvest. Indeed, early versions of *Kamo* might have been employed as ritual rain dances in services requesting rain or celebrating its arrival.

The *kyōgen* play *Thunderbolt* (*Kaminari*, literally “the deity who roars”) also presents a theophany, but sacrality is not central here. Thunderbolt falls from heaven, injuring his hip, and is cured by a frightened country quack with an oversized needle. The deity pays the doctor with a promise of eight hundred years of beneficial rain; then he storms back to heaven, once again terrifying the apprehensive quack. In typical *kyōgen* fashion, this piece spoofs doctors and deities, fear of storms, and fear of needles. The august deity of *Kamo* is clearly brought down to earth.

The *kabuki* play *Saint Narukami and the God Fudō* illustrates how the powers of transformation attained through ascetic practices can be used for evil as well as for good. A powerful monk quells a thunderstorm and receives the name “roaring deity” (*narukami*) from a grateful emperor. After the emperor refuses Narukami's request that a temple be built in his honor, the “saint” captures the dragon gods and locks them in a cave, causing a severe drought. In the act of the play translated here, a beautiful woman sent by the emperor gets Narukami drunk, seduces him, and releases the rain gods. To wreak his revenge, Narukami transforms himself into a thunder deity. The seduction scene blends comedy—resulting mostly from the antics of the disciples—and eroticism, a combination typical of early *kabuki*. In the midst of the seduction scene, Narukami relates the story that is the model for this play, showing that he is aware of the dangers of succumbing to sake and sex. No amount of intellectualization, however, can compensate for the power of lust.

The transformation of the exiled courtier Sugawara no Michizane into a thunder god is presented in the first, brief excerpt from act 4 of the puppet play *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*. Sugawara undergoes the transformation in order to return to the capital and prevent his enemy Fujiwara no Shihei from usurping the throne. Act 5 of the play recounts his success in that endeavor. By means of a thunderstorm, which kills his two henchmen, the traitor Shihei is prevented from assas-

sinating Sugawara's son. As Shihei flees to an altar for protection, snakes emerge from his ears and turn into the ghosts of two of Sugawara's loyal retainers, who reveal Shihei's treasonous intentions and kill him. The emperor thereupon reinstates the Sugawara family and orders the building of Kitano Shrine in Kyoto to honor Sugawara as a divine protector of the imperial realm. The play thus ends, as the *noh Kamo* began, with the story of the origins of a shrine.

The depiction of the thunderstorm in the *kyōgen* play is a model of simplicity produced by the appearance, words, and movements of the two players. Wearing a fierce *buaku* mask, a red demon hairpiece, and a thick, boldly patterned kimono, Thunderbolt enters beating a drum at his waist and crying "*Pikkari, gwarari, gwarari, pikkari, gwarari, gwarari, gwarari, gwarari, don don don*"—the sounds for lightning and thunder. Onomatopoeia are the typical means of creating sound effects in *kyōgen*. The characters' reactions also are a means of portraying events. Here the doctor covers his ears and flees from the thunder god, shouting a parodic spell ("Mulberry, mulberry," *kuwabara, kuwabara*) against the lightning as he races away.

In the *noh* play, the storm is visually represented by motifs in the *shite*'s costume—clouds, zigzags, and/or dragons—and by the zigzag shape of the paper dangling from the purification wand the *shite* brandishes, as well as by his movements onstage. Dance movements emphasize verbal descriptions as the dancer leaps up and then falls to his knees, his sleeve tossed over his head, as "bolts of lightning" strike. At the words "claps of thunder carry rain, falling footsteps far, *horo horo horo horo*, and near *todoro todomo*, stamping feet resound, drums of thundering god," the dancer's numerous stamps resound to the chant. The mention of drums draws the viewer's attention to the actual drums producing standard rhythmic patterns behind the dancer. Thus the thunder resounds in the descriptive text and the onomatopoeia (divided between the *shite* and the chorus), the sight and sound of the dancer's stamps, and the drumbeats. This is a typical *noh* presentation: onstage music, movements, costume, and words work together to create the scene.

The storm in the *kabuki* selection is first produced with sound effects and stage movements without verbal description. Concealed drums and a flute produce thunder and rain motifs as the seductress Taema cuts the sacred ropes and frees the dragon gods—costumed actors who climb up a waterfall and disappear. As in *kyōgen*, the characters' reactions are important to the presentation: the woman stumbles, falls, and looks fearful; and a crowd of monks, entering along the two rampways through the audience, hold up their sleeves to protect their faces from the driving rain. Only then do they describe the storm in shared lines:

WHITE CLOUD: And so the rains
 MONKS: come pouring down,
 BLACK CLOUD: lightning and thunder
 MONKS: flash and roar.

The words are accompanied by the large drum (*ōdaiko*) beating sound-of-rain patterns (*ame no oto*), and stylized bolts of white lightning appear overhead. The storm fills the eyes and the ears of the audience.

In the puppet piece, the chanter first describes a storm to sound effects provided by music-room drums. Then, as Shihei and his companions attempt to kill

Sugawara's son, gongs join the drums to underscore the text: "Wind and rain descend, and bolts of lightning blaze across the firmament, while claps of monstrous thunder rend heaven and earth—Crack! Bang! Rumble! BOOM!!!" Then the storm turns murderous: "Above his head a wheel of fire appears to descend, and Mareyo's body is enveloped in the searing flames." The puppet collapses as the drums and gongs play on. A serpentine storm emblem appears over Shihei's head as he cowers before the altar, and "from each of his ears appear small snakes." The snakes, analogous to the dragon gods in the kabuki play, are held on long poles by stage assistants. The depiction of the storm in the puppet play depends more on textual description than does the kabuki version, which relies more on gestures and stage effects.

A human character is transformed into a thunder deity in three of these plays. The kyōgen play *Thunderbolt* does not involve a physical transformation, although there is a transfer of fear from doctor to deity and back again as power shifts between the characters. In the noh play *Kamo*, the physical transformations (costume changes) occur offstage between the acts. In act 1, the thunder god is represented by an arrow, and the woman is a maiden; in act 2, the female character is the mother goddess, and the thunder god appears in his "true" form. In the kabuki play, Narukami's transformation is an onstage spectacle. First the Saint, who has been sleeping in a grotto, raises his head to reveal a change of makeup and wig; then the outer layer of his costume is stripped away twice, each time revealing a more vivid lightning design on the kimono beneath. As Narukami declares, "I shall become a living thunder god," he hurls accordion-pleated sutras, which unfold to each side of him like lightning bolts. Fierce poses to shamisen and drum music emphasize his transfiguration. The transformation of Sugawara in the bunraku play involves a change of puppet heads. When the puppet presenting Sugawara reenters in act 5, it has a different, fiercer head, but the full effect of this substitution is not readily apparent, for the face may be partially covered with a white cloth, and the hair is tied back until it is time for Sugawara to turn into a thunder god. Then the cloth is removed, the hair is loosened, and several layers of kimono are peeled back, one after the other. The puppet's vigorous movements, accompanied by drums, gongs, and clappers, emphasize the transformation, which culminates in a change of sets—the temple becomes a cliff covered with swirling gray and black clouds. Sugawara mounts the cliff, waves a piece of white paper attached to a stick, and strikes a fierce pose.

These four selections can serve as an introduction to the diversity and range of traditional Japanese theater and its performance practices. Each is typical of its genre, and at least parts of all the plays are regularly performed in Japan today.