

Fukuro Yamabushi  
(OWIS)

# **Transformation, Miracles, and Mischief**

**The Mountain Priest Plays of Kyōgen**

Translations with Commentary

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Owls

## OWLS<sup>1</sup>

### Characters

- Shite: Mountain Priest. Dressed in the usual mountain priest costume, but with broad stiff white hakama, a three-quarter length travel cloak worn over a yellow checked robe and a hood with a pointed top.<sup>2</sup>
- Ado: Older brother. Dressed in a vest with matching long hakama or a vest with ankle-length hakama.
- Ado: Tarō. Dressed in a soft white silk under-kimono, long hakama. His hair is loose and wild and he wears a strip of red cloth bound around his forehead and draped on one side.<sup>3</sup>

### Brother

*(enters and announces himself at the shite spot)* I live in the neighborhood. I don't know what's going on but ever since my little brother returned from the mountains he's been possessed by something or other. I've tried all sorts of cures but nothing works. There's a powerful mountain priest nearby so I've decided to ask him to perform a spell for me. *(circles stage)* I just don't understand it! How on earth could he have gotten into such bad shape? Oh well, if I can get that mountain priest to come and pray, he should be back to his old self in no time. *(stops at the shite spot)* Here I am already. I'll just announce myself.

*(Proceeds to the first pine on the bridgeway and kneels on one knee facing the curtain.)*

### Priest

*(Enters, marching with legs high as if climbing a mountain, and chanting in noh style.)*

Before the window of the nine realms of the senses;  
On a pallet of the ten vehicles of the law;  
Sprinkled with the holy waters of yoga;  
*(changes to spoken style)*  
Purified by the moon of the three mysteries;  
Who goes there!<sup>4</sup>

- Brother *(leaps up as if to charge him)* It's me!
- Priest *(falls on his seat in surprise and slowly rises)* What? It's you, is it?
- Brother Yes, sir.
- Priest Hey! I didn't know who it was—flying up in my face like that—what do you want?
- Brother It's just that, well, you remember my little brother?
- Priest Of course, of course. I know Tarō. What's the matter with him?
- Brother That's just it. He came down from Mount Obi and he's been possessed by something ever since. Could you come and perform a spell? I'd be grateful to you, sir.
- Priest Hold on! That's a bit difficult. *(sings in noh style)* I'm in the midst of some special rites and shouldn't go anywhere. *(returns to normal speech)* But, for you, I'll do it.<sup>5</sup>
- Brother Thank you, sir. Can you come right away?
- Priest Of course. Let's go!
- Brother Well then, after you, sir.
- Priest You go first and lead the way.
- Brother Shall I go first, sir?
- Priest Yes, yes. Go ahead.
- Brother Then, I'll lead the way. Please, follow me. *(leads the way as they circle the stage)*
- Priest Of course. *(follows the brother)*

- Brother I'm so glad you could come as soon as I asked.
- Priest Don't bother to thank me. With one prayer I'll have him back to normal.
- Brother Thank you, sir.
- Priest Tarō is usually so healthy. It's hard to know what to make of this.
- Brother *(stops at the white spot)* Here we are already.
- Priest *(passes the brother and stops at the first pine on the bridgeway)* This is the place then?
- Brother Please come in. *(they exchange places)*
- Priest All right. *(in noh style)* Now, where is the sick boy?
- Brother I made him lie down in the back. I'll go and get him.
- Priest Hurry. Bring him out.
- Brother Certainly, sir.
- (Goes offstage and returns with Taro leaning against him with one arm over his shoulder. He supports Tarō around the waist and holds on to his right hand.)*
- Tarō! Tarō! The master is here. Try to pull yourself together! Excuse me, sir. Here's Tarō!
- Priest What? This is Tarō? *(peers quizzically into Tarō's face)*<sup>6</sup>
- Brother Yes, sir.
- Priest Oh, no. How pitiful. He's in a bad way.
- Brother Exactly, sir.

Priest All right, let me examine him.

*(Approaches gingerly with his beads dangling from his left hand, and leans forward.)*

Brother Please help him, sir.

*(Watches as the priest stretches out his hand and rubs Tarō's head vigorously.)*

What're you doing? What're you doing to him?

Priest *(Backs off as if frightened and switches his beads to his right hand.)*

Take it easy. Usually you take a pulse from the right or left wrist but in cases of possession, you take it from the head. It's known as the head pulse.

Brother I see. How is he?

Priest Very bad. Very bad. It's really evil all right.

Brother It's evil, is it?

Priest *(Peers up at Tarō's face and can't seem to suppress his amusement at it.)*

Probably a high fever. Taro! Hey there, Tarō! He seems to be in a daze.

Brother He's lost consciousness completely.

Priest Just as I thought.

Brother Could you say a spell, sir? We'd be really grateful.

Priest That's easy. I'll pray once and have him back to normal.

Brother Thank you, sir.

*incantation (noh style, dynamic mode)*

Priest           *(Faces front and performs a hiraki, then walks toward the waki spot and begins to chant.)*

The ascetic will now offer an incantation.  
 I follow in the path of the Great Ascetic En.  
 I have climbed the twin peaks of Ōmine and Kazuragi  
 and entered the gates of the Diamond Mandala  
 and the Womb Mandala.  
 I wear the *suzukake* mantle  
 Brushing aside the mountain mists of the seven  
 treasures,  
 I am shielded by a mantle of fortitude  
 from the filth of this world.  
 These beads (*examines his prayer beads*)  
 are not irataka,  
 they're just any old beads I've strung up  
 and call "irataka." (*winds them up in his hands*)  
 If I offer a prayer (*rubs the beads*)  
 how can a miracle fail to occur?<sup>7</sup>  
 Boron, boron, boron, boron. . . (*faces Tarō, who begins to tremble*)

Brother           Hold on! He's in pain!

Priest            Another minute and he'll be cured.

Brother           That's fine, then.

Priest            (*prays hard*) Boron, boron, boron, boron.

Tarō             (*Writhes in pain and flings himself about until he faces the priest and hoots.*)

Whooo!

Priest            (*startled, he stops praying*) Ha! I don't know what it was but he said something all right! (*frees his left hand from the beads and takes them up in his right*)

- Brother Yes, he did say something, sir.
- Priest He sounds bewitched to me. What did he say?
- Brother It sounded like "whooo."
- Priest Exactly! But that doesn't make any sense. Can you understand it?
- Brother No, except that he said something about knocking down an owl's nest when he was in the mountains.
- Priest So that's it! Say no more. It's a case of owl possession. It's a very persistent owl, but don't worry. I'll make the sign of the crow<sup>8</sup> and have him free in no time. Now then, I'll pray out the owl.
- Brother Thank you, sir.

*incantation* (noh style, dynamic mode)

- Priest No matter how frightening an owl spirit  
When I make the sign of the crow  
and offer a prayer  
how can you refuse to go?  
Boron, boron, boron, boron.<sup>9</sup>  
Oh no! This is terrible! Now the older brother is  
possessed too. What a persistent owl. Oh no! They're  
both in pain.
- Brother *(Begins to yawn as he watches Tarō and then stretches  
his arms and legs, turns to the priest, and hoots.)*  
  
Whooo.
- Priest *(Alarmed and disgusted he stops praying and studies  
both of them.)*  
  
Ugh! That's disgusting! Get away!
- Tarō *(hoots in pain)* Whooh!



Brother *(hoots in pain) Whooo!*

Priest *(Tries to sneak away but as he heads up the bridgeway the brothers hoot again and again. He returns to the waki spot.)*

*This is terrible. I can't just leave them like this. What'll I do? Oh, what's there to be scared of, anyway? I'll just give a short prayer and free them both instantly. (takes a deep breath and begins to pray)*

*incantation (noh style, dynamic mode)*

Oh persistent owl!  
Flapping about possessing people here and there.  
If I offer a prayer  
How can you fail to disappear?  
Boron, boron, boron, boron. . .

*(Begins to yawn and look ill. He faces Tarō and makes the sign of the crow.)*

Boron, boron, boron, boron. . .

*(The brothers continue to hoot in pain.)*

Boron, boron, boron, boron. . .

*(Begins to get sleepy and wavers about. His "boron, boron," changes into "who, who.")*

Who, whoo, whooo, whooo.

*(Tarō and his brother dart about the stage, hooting. The three stagger and get tangled up together. The brother staggers off stage followed by the priest and finally, Tarō.)<sup>10</sup>*