

# Japanese Nō Dramas

*Edited and translated by* ROYALL TYLER

Hanjo  
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(Chao) family danced very beautifully, and the emperor fell in love with her and forgot Shōyō. Shōyō was deeply hurt, and the flames of jealousy coursed so unbearably through her breast that she made a round hoop, stretched it with silk, and had herself fanned with this fan. That is why, in [Chinese] poetry, the fan is called 'white silk'. Further, being round and white, it is compared to the full moon. Since it is white, it is likened to snow and called the 'round snow' fan. Fanned with such a fan, Han Shōyō forgot her heat.

In poetry, as in the play, the key image of the story is therefore a round, snowy, moon-like fan: the fan Han Shōyō herself evoked in a poem of grief, when she compared herself to a fan abandoned in autumn, after summer is past. The same fan in all these guises adorns the poetry of *Lady Han*, although the fan Hanago treasures is actually unlike Han Shōyō's. When Hanago's lover left, the pair, like many lovers before them, exchanged fans ('fan-shaped' ones). Hers had on it a painting of moonflowers (*yūgao*), his a painting of the moon.

Nogami, where Hanago met her gentleman, was in old Mino province (Gifu Prefecture), on the road from Kyoto to what were then the wilds of the East. The spot is near the present Sekigahara station on the 'bullet train' line to Tokyo. Throughout medieval times, Nogami was in poetry just what it is in the play: a place where a gentleman traveller and a lady of pleasure might fall in love, only to suffer afterwards the pangs of longing. (Alas, the poet Shōtetsu, passing through Nogami in 1408, found the village a dreary place where 'there was nothing going on'.) Hanago's lover, a courtier named Yoshida, would have been on some official mission to the East when he broke his journey there. Other plays associated with Zeami, set at other provincial spots, spring from similar encounters (*Higaki, Matsura*). *Eguchi*, too, alludes to the theme.

The fate of Hanago in Edo times (1600-1868) is a surprise, for popular fiction and theatre (*bunraku* and *kabuki*) based on the *nō* play immediately confused her with the tragic mother of *The River Sumida*. Perhaps this happened simply because the name Yoshida is shared by the gentleman in *Lady Han* and the dead boy in *The River Sumida*, and because both plays involve a journey to the East. At any rate, on the grounds of Shinnen-ji at old Nogami, now sandwiched between a noisy highway and the 'bullet train' tracks, a sign before a 'Lady Han's Kannon Chapel' reads:

## Hanjo · LADY HAN

There is no doubt that Zeami wrote *Lady Han*, a play that resembles an old love ballad with a haunting tune. Hanago, a singing-girl at a provincial inn, entertains a passing guest from the capital and then, hopelessly lost in love, starts out to look for him. At a shrine in Kyoto, where he has gone to pray that he may find her, the two meet again.

The literary levels of *Lady Han* are comparable to those of a ballad: anecdote, rhyme, and melody. As anecdote, Hanago's troubles, like the story told in many a ballad, are affecting but easily forgotten. The inn madam, in her opening speech, treats Hanago's predicament as vexing but quite ordinary. In poetry, however, the very name of Nogami (the location of the inn in question) evoked a mood of romantic sorrow, and this mood might be likened to a ballad's metre and rhyme. Finally, the haunting melody is Chinese. For well over a thousand years, Chinese poets, and Japanese poets after them, had celebrated a Han Dynasty emperor's abandoned concubine: Han Shōyō (Pan Chieh-yü, 'Pan the Favourite Beauty'). Hanago, in her distress, is assimilated to Han Shōyō (Hanjo, or 'Lady Han').

The story of Lady Han was first recorded in the *Han shu* ('History of the Early Han Dynasty', 206 B.C.-24 A.D.), and then, having been taken up by poets and painters in China, was developed in Chinese and Japanese verse by the nobles of the Heian court (794-1180). From there, it passed into *enkyōka*, long songs popular among warriors and aristocrats alike after about the mid thirteenth century. In the play, once Hanago has reached the shrine in Kyoto and has been provoked, in her troubled state of mind, to 'rave', her speech becomes a tissue of allusions to such poems and songs.

A medieval commentary on the *Wakan rōi shū* ('A Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems for Chanting Aloud', 1013) explains the story of Han Shōyō as follows.

Han Shōyō was a consort of Emperor Sei (Ch'eng) of Kan (Han), who

who served him. When he left, he told her that if their child was a boy she should name him Umewaka-maru, and as a keepsake he left her his fan . . . When Umewaka-maru grew up a little he travelled east to look for his father, and in time, his anxious mother followed him. On reaching Mokubo-ji in Edo [which did not yet exist in Zeami's time], she learned that Yoshida had gone up to Miyako, and that Umewaka-maru had died and was now buried at the temple. Distracted, Hanago returned to Nogami, where she worshipped the image of Kannon on Kannon-yama and died insane . . .

Not far from Shinnen-ji, a fine old house is said to occupy the site-of the Nogami brothel. The family there preserve a statue of Umewaka-maru, and a statue and several paintings identified as 'Lady Han'.

## LADY HAN

### *Persons in order of appearance*

A post-station Madam *ai*  
 Hanago, a post-station courtesan (*Zō-ama* or *Kō-omote* mask) *shite*  
 The Yoshida Minor Captain, a gentleman of Miyako *tsure*  
 A Gentleman, friend of Yoshida *wakei*  
 Two or three Attendants to Yoshida *wakeizure*

*Remarks:* A fourth-category (*yombanmi-mono*) play current in all five schools of nō. The text translated here is dated 1543. In modern performances, the Yoshida Minor Captain is defined as the *wakei* and the Gentleman is assimilated to one of his attendants, the *wakeizure*.

\* \* \*

*Enter Hanago, fan in hand – the standard fan of nō, and not in fact the one described in the play. She sits before drums. Enter then Madam, to stand in bare square.*

MADAM (*nanori*) You have before you the madam of the inn at Nogami in the province of Mino. One among the many girls in my service,

forever toying with her fan, which has a special meaning for her, and that is why everyone calls her Lady Han. This spring, you see, a gentleman known as the Yoshida Minor Captain spent the night here, on his way down from Miyako towards the East. It was Hanago I had entertain him, and he exchanged fans with her before continuing on his way. Ever since, she has done nothing but stare at his fan. It is no use my telling her to go and entertain a guest: she will not do it. She just stays in her room. Guests are constantly accusing me of providing poor service. That is why I am now going to have Hanago clear out.

*Madam steps towards Hanago. (In modern performances, Madam goes to first pine and calls to Hanago, who is not yet on stage.)*

(*mondō*) So Hanago, there you are! Time and again lately I have had to speak to you, yet you never listen to a word I say. I have had enough. I will not have you stay in this room a moment longer. Clear out now and go wherever you please. [*Notices Hanago's fan.*] Oh, you make me so angry! Look at you, mooning over that fan again! The very sight of it drives me to distraction! [*Snatches the fan and throws it down.*] Now, clear out, do you hear? Clear out! Clear out!

*Exit Madam. Hanago picks up the fan and weeps.*

HANAGO (*kuibōki*) O the world does play us false, and always will; yet many sorrows break her days' swift flow – she whom fate bends to be a woman of the stream.<sup>1</sup>

(*agentia*) Now I go wandering, knowing nothing of what lies ahead; robe wet with weeping,

(*agentia*) Nogami I abandon and set forth  
 Nogami I abandon and set forth

along the Ōmi Road<sup>2</sup> – to him, perhaps, that cruel man – for since he left,

dew forever lingers on my sleeves.

O that I might vanish with my grief!

O that I might vanish with my grief!

*To ashira misir, exit Hanago.*

*Weeps.*  
*Slowly rises.*

*Weeps.*

Enter Gentleman, who sits before chorus.

To shidai music, enter Yoshida and Attendants; they stand along the side of stage.  
(In modern performances, Gentleman does not appear, his part being taken by an Attendant.)

YOSHIDA and ATTENDANTS

(shidai) Sad is our farewell to towering Fuji<sup>3</sup>  
sad is our farewell to towering Fuji,  
whose snows we shall praise in Miyako!

YOSHIDA (*namori*) I whom you see before you now am the Yoshida  
Minor Captain. You must know that last spring I travelled down to  
the East, and that with autumn now so soon upon us, I am making  
my way back up to Miyako.

YOSHIDA and ATTENDANTS

(*ogenita*) Forth from Miyako  
we sallied as the spring mists rose  
we sallied as the spring mists rose,  
lingered a while, and now the fall winds blow,  
sweeping through the gate at Shirakawa,<sup>4</sup>  
whence, in travel wear, we start for home.

By shore and mountain, on to Mino province  
we have come, and to the village of Nogami  
we have come, and to the village of Nogami.

YOSHIDA (*monō*) Are you there, my man? [*An Attendant goes down on one knee.*] Having come so swiftly, we have already reached the inn at  
Nogami in Mino province. This is where I pledged my love to a  
young woman whom people quickly dubbed Lady Han. Please go  
and find out whether she is still here.

ATTENDANT Sir, I have inquired about Lady Han. It appears that she  
and the madam had a falling-out, and I am sorry to report that she  
has left.

YOSHIDA I see. Then perhaps I made too much of what passed  
between her and me. None the less, make sure that word reaches me  
in Miyako if Lady Han ever returns.

3. Mount Fuji, far beyond Nogami on the road to the East, was naturally a major attraction for a traveller, and had been poetically consecrated as such by its presence on Narihira's path in *Ise monogatari* ("Tales of Ise", 10th c.).

4. The Shirakawa Barrier (a tollgate and checkpoint) in Iwashiro province (the present

(*tsukiterifu*) Having travelled so swiftly, we are already here in  
Miyako. A certain matter preoccupies me greatly. I will therefore  
go straight to Tadasu,<sup>5</sup> to pray. All of you, follow me, please!

Yoshida sits on a stool at witness position, while Attendants sit directly on the stage nearby.  
To issai music, enter Hango. Her right shoulder is bare to the under-robe and she  
carries a spray of dwarf bamboo (*sasa*); stems: these are signs that she is mad.  
She stops at first pine.

HANAGO (*sabū*) Where snow is gone,

the new shoots, love,  
upon Kasuga meadow,  
spring: slender and few,  
those glimpses I had of you!<sup>6</sup>

He was untrue, who took my love with him.  
Now day follows day, the months wheel round,  
while wearily I listen to the wind,  
for no one else will speak to me of him.  
Before the banners of the sunset clouds,  
I grieve, longing to reach beyond those skies,<sup>7</sup>  
and lost to any thought of present need.  
O Gods, O blessed Buddhas, pity me!  
O bring to pass what I so desire!

The Gods of Ashigara and Hakone,  
Tamatsushima, Kibune, and Miwa,<sup>8</sup>  
graciously have vowed to lend their aid  
and protect the love of men and women.  
Should I address my prayers to all of these, *Kanels in prayer*.  
surely they will send an answering boon.

To boss square.

*Accept with profound respect obedience returned . . .*

5. The name of the sacred wood around the Lower Kamo Shrine, still one of the major shrines of Kyoto. Yoshida will pray to be reunited with Hango.

6. A poem by Min no Tadamine, from the imperial collection *Kokinshū* ("Poems Old and New", 905). Very early in spring, in the time of the Nara court (8th c.), ladies and gentlemen went into the meadows near the Kasuga Shrine to pick new shoots amid the lingering snow, and the occasion became established in poetry. A gentleman might glimpse a lady and fall in love.

7. From a *Kokinshū* love poem: the words of a woman of humble station who longs for her noble lover in far-off Miyako.

8. These are all deities of mountains or of the streams that flow from them, and several are associated (like the Kamo Shrine where Yoshida and Hango finally meet again) with

(QUASI-DANCE: *kaketeri*)

To music, Hanago performs a kaketeri tour of the stage. Though short, her kaketeri changes rhythm several times, thus conveying her disturbed state of mind. As text resumes, she is in base square.

(*issui*) The lady is in love:

everyone knows,  
and so quickly, too.

He never knew,

when he first stole my heart.<sup>10</sup>

HANAGO The faithless man! O he is hateful, hateful! *W eeps.*

(*sabbi*) Simply pray and let a sacred stream

cleans you, till you love no more:<sup>11</sup>

whoever said that lied. The human heart

truly is a shallow, turbid pool;

and if we, impure, entreat the Gods,

it is no wonder they reject us!

I only know that *he* has not divined

the tears of love

CHORUS (*sageuta*) that leave me unconsoled.

O where will my sad journey end?

(*ageuta*) Only let your heart

come into accord

with the true Way

come into accord with the true Way,

and you need not pray:

the Gods will keep you.<sup>12</sup>

Even for such as me, the moon of truth

might shine bright and clear, but time goes by,

and nothing comes from him, who is unkind.

The jewel of love is mine, yet I must weep

as he withholds it.<sup>13</sup> Ah, what can I do?

I only pray we two should share our life.

10. A poem from the imperial collection *Shūishū* ('Poetic Gleanings', c. 1006) by Mibu no Tadami.

11. A *Kokinshū* poet cited this method, only to lament that it did not work.

12. An old poem of uncertain origin, often cited in medieval literature.

13. The 'jewel of love' is, more literally, the 'jewel in the robe' that figures in a parable

I only pray we two should share our life.

*Gentleman rises.*

GENTLEMAN (*mondo*) You, the mad girl! Why are you not raving today? Come, rave and entertain us!<sup>14</sup>

HANAGO You are too cruel! Why, see there! Those boughs, till now, had looked firm enough, yet at the wind's touch, one leaf falls.

For once I have my wits, you gentlemen would have me rave. It is you, I think, the wild wind turns. That flying autumn leaf spins my heart away to storms of love.

O please, do not ask me to rave!

GENTLEMAN Well, what have you done with Lady Han's fan?

HANAGO You are quite mad! Are you now calling me Lady Han?

This fan, you see, was his – that cruel man's whose faithlessness I mourn. It was his gift, and once I touch it, I cannot put it from me, though my tears fall like rain.

Ah, I recall the words of an old song:

In Lady Han's chamber, whiteness of an autumn fan; on the So King's terrace, music of an evening ch'in.<sup>15</sup>

*Hanago takes a few steps forward. Gentleman sits before Chorus.*

CHORUS (*uta*) With summer done,

the fan and autumn's

pale, pale dew –

O, of these two,

which will be first to fall?<sup>16</sup>

Day and night, upon a desolate bed,

14. This apparently callous utterance is typical of *nō* plays that feature a mad person. People hardly distinguished between the ravings of the mad and the antics of entertainers, and it appears that Hanago (who is an entertainer anyway) has been entertaining people here for some time. Women entertainers often travelled the roads in medieval Japan, but if any other kind of woman had done so, alone like Hanago, she probably would have had to pretend she was an entertainer in order to escape notice.

15. A couplet in Chinese included in the *Wakan rōji shūi*. The *ch'in* belongs to the zither family, like the Japanese *koza*. Its music here, like the fan, is meant to evoke the whiteness of snow.

16. A Japanese poem, also from the *Wakan rōji shūi*, and attributed elsewhere to Mibu no Tadamine. It suggests that Lady Han was abandoned like a fan in the cool of autumn.

I lie alone, downcast and forlorn,  
 from my chamber gazing on the moon.  
 (*kurî*) Now the moon has sunk behind Mount Chô,  
 I lift my fan to double for the moon.  
 HANAGO Flower petals scatter on brocade:  
 CHORUS I gather snow and weep for fleeting spring.  
 HANAGO (*sashî*) Evening storms and the morning clouds:  
 how could either stir no troubled thoughts?  
 CHORUS A bell tolling in the lonely night  
 echoes from the heights of Cockcrow Hill  
 as dawn comes on, urging love away.  
 HANAGO O that at least moonlight, slanting in,  
 CHORUS might linger on my pillow! Yet it leaves,  
 and, as before, I lie here alone.  
 (*kurî*) Green the curtains, red the dainty room  
 where he and I lay, our pillows twinned,  
 warm all night under welcoming quilts;  
 but those sweet dreams of bliss fled long ago.  
 Yet he lives and I live. The day must come,  
 so my heart says, when we two shall meet.  
 Might it be soon! O how *they* hastened, too,<sup>17</sup>  
 to whisper each to each enraptured vows  
 to share as birds one wing, as trees one root,  
 there in his fair palace at Ri-san.  
 Whoever could have heard them and passed on,  
 to people even now, what they said then?

*Hanago rises and begins to dance.*

Ah, but my own love promised me  
 he would return before autumn came,  
 and still the nights go by: so many nights  
 that prove he lied, he with his false heart!  
 I believed him, and he never comes.  
 Evenings I spend leaning on the railing,  
 gazing out towards far distant skies.  
 A autumn wind at twilight, rushing gales,  
 chill air from the heights, the late fall storms,  
 all come calling on that pine nearby.

HANAGO When will I hear from him, for whom I pine?  
 CHORUS At least I have his gift: the fan I hold,  
 that its breeze might whisper me some word.  
 Yet summer now is past, and through my window  
 the autumn wind sinks, cold. Round Snow, my fan,  
 so frosty white, starts me shivering  
 merely to hear its name. O autumn wind,  
 I would quarrel with you.  
 Yet well I know, to meet means to part,  
 and loss follows from past happiness.  
 No, I should not blame him or the world.  
 But how can I forget my unloved state?  
 That is all that matters. He is gone,  
 and Lady Han's poor room is desolate.

*Hanago passes a moment near base pillar.*

(*wake*) The painted moon

(DANCE: *jo-no-mai*)

*She now does a jo-no-mai dance, or, in many modern performances, a slightly faster chû-no-mai. As the text resumes, she continues dancing and abstract miming.*

HANAGO I slip beneath my robe,  
 the fan I hold,  
 CHORUS (*noji*) my bright sleeve, make three –  
 HANAGO so pretty, too –  
 CHORUS his most earnest vow,  
 HANAGO to return by fall. Yet suns and moons  
 CHORUS in procession pass, while fall winds blow,  
 HANAGO and still no word breathes to stir the reeds,<sup>18</sup>  
 CHORUS The belling of the stag, shrill insect cries  
 recede and lapse. So too his promise fades.  
 Better, then, if he had never made it!  
 HANAGO (*ata*) His gift to me, this fan  
 CHORUS his gift to me, this fan,  
 with its back and front, is less two-faced  
 than the giver's heart. Oh yes, he lied.  
 I shall not see him, nor will my love die  
 I shall not see him, nor will my love die.

*Weeps.*

YOSHIDA (*mondo*) Are you there, my friend? Please tell that mad girl that I wish to see her fan.

*Gentleman rises and turns to Hanago, who is in base square.*

GENTLEMAN Come, Lady Han, the gentleman in the palanquin says he wants a look at your fan. Do let him have it.

HANAGO This fan was my love's parting gift, and that is why I keep it with me always. Oh, it is true,

His parting gift:

that is my enemy.

Were it gone from me,

a moment of forgetfulness

might even now be mine.<sup>19</sup>

(*sio*) That is my own thought. Yet, all the same,

at times I feel him with me.

Then, how I would miss my fan!

No, I cannot show it to another.

*Hides the fan protectively in the fold of her robe and turns away. Gentleman sits.*

CHORUS (*rougi*) I myself remember well that keepsake

and her lover's words, yet do not speak

or make her any sign. How could she know?

Yet, one look, and she will know my fan.

You want a look at it, you say – but why?

Why should you require, so urgently,

a fan painted with an evening moon?

What can your purpose be?

CHORUS (*rougi*) Ah, then perhaps you have forgotten

all those ardent promises you heard

at Nogami, while beside you lay

a traveller, to return by fall:

do they mean nothing to you now?

Nogami, yes – why, Nogami lies

far along the highway to the East

where seas have overwhelmed the pine-clad hills<sup>20</sup>

in reproach to one who went away

and never came again.

19: A poem from the *Kokinshû*, also quoted in *Pining Wind*.

20. In a *Kokinshû* poem, a lover swears that if he is ever false, waves will sweep over a

Are you that man?

*Pears at his face. Gentleman takes Yoshida's fan and starts towards her.*

CHORUS (*rougi*) O do not reprove me with those waves

that may have swept the hills, for I am true,

HANAGO and you, too, preserve a keepsake fan

*Sits at centre and receives Yoshida's fan.*

CHORUS that never leaves my side: a treasured fan

HANAGO now offered me,

CHORUS for you to take,

and examine in the gathering dusk:

*Hanago opens the fan, with both hands lifts it reverently, and gazes at it.*

Yes, I glimpse a painting of moonflowers.

*Takes out her own fan, rises, and gives it to Yoshida. She then sits at centre.*

Then why delay? Koremitsu, come,

bring me a lamp, that I may see her fan!<sup>21</sup>

*Each, holding an open fan, compares it with the other's. They look into each other's eyes.*

Each in the other's fan knows that lost friend

who now is found. For each, these gifts

sealed after all the bond of steadfast love

sealed after all the bond of steadfast love.

*In base square, Hanago stamps the final beat.*

21. With a last, literary flourish brought on by the mention of 'moonflowers', Yoshida speaks (through the Chorus) as though he were Prince Genji in the 'Yûgao' chapter of the *Tale of Genji*; for the lady Yûgao sent a maid to offer Genji white moonflowers