
Kinuta · THE FULLING BLOCK

Zeami was probably in his late sixties when, 'one quiet evening, listening to the music of *The Fulling Block*, he said: "I can't imagine anyone these days appreciating a play like this. Writing one is more trouble than it's worth." ' The passage is from *Sarugaku dangi* ('Conversations on Nō'), a record of Zeami's sayings taken down by his second son, Motoyoshi. Zeami had probably written the play quite recently, under the unhappy circumstances created by the accession of a shogun (Ashikaga Yoshimochi) who did not care at all for Zeami or his art. Elsewhere in *Sarugaku dangi*, Zeami said: 'In generations to come, no one will appreciate this play. It's a shame.'

Actually, the play is greatly admired today. It is true, however, that performances of it lapsed shortly after Zeami's time. Amateurs continued to sing it, but it was not staged again until the 1690s. Since no staging traditions for it survived, each school of nō has had to work out its own, with the result that performances of *The Fulling Block* differ more widely than usual from school to school. The play is now in the repertoire of all five schools, but the Komparu, the last to adopt it, did so only after the Second World War.

The Fulling Block certainly does not cater to anyone's taste for colourful, exciting, or even lyrical entertainment. It is what Zeami called a *hiataru nō*: a 'cold play' that avoids display in order to pursue a higher purpose. The lofty ideal of 'coldness' has been championed in modern times, but in the case of *The Fulling Block*, the issue of the play's true worth seems even now not to have been entirely resolved.

Surely *The Fulling Block* is a work of extraordinary stature. If Zeami, considering his own and future times, felt that no one could truly 'taste' it (his own word), then he must have believed men were now heartless indeed. For despite its theatrical 'coldness', the play has enormous human warmth. It is a tragedy, certainly: a wife, mistakenly believing herself abandoned, dies insane and suffers in Hell. Yet she is saved in the end by her husband's love, and, for both, the play ends in dignity.

One who admires *The Fulling Block* in this way will be deeply moved by part two: the wife returns as a spirit, describes the torments of Hell, unburdens herself to her husband of all her complaints, then, transformed by his care, finds eternal rest. Yet, even in recent times, this part has gone relatively unappreciated. There may be two reasons for this: the character of part one and the conception of the *shite* as the sole actor in the play.

In several ways, literary technique among them, *The Fulling Block* resembles *Lady Han*. Zeami imagined a commonplace misfortune and, especially in part one, embellished it with a haunting Chinese 'melody': the story of Sobu (Su Wu), supplemented by further ornaments from poetry in Chinese. The poetic style of part one, like that of *Lady Han*, seems directly influenced by the medieval songs known as *enkyoku*. Moreover, each play is a study of love and separation – romantic love in *Lady Han*, conjugal love in *The Fulling Block*; and in each, Zeami kept to his subject by avoiding the issue of fault. The woman's conviction that her love has forgotten her is entirely natural, but wrong. At the end of each play the truth emerges: the man and woman are equal in love. In this respect, these plays are unique in *nō*.

The poetry of part one of *The Fulling Block*, in the original, is astonishing. Nowhere did Zeami spread himself more generously as a poet. However, this beauty is of a kind easily recognizable to a modern audience and one critic (Kanai Kiyomitsu) observed that for many people, part one is enough. The spirit's complaint, in part two, can seem pale in comparison.

It may pale not only because part one is so beautiful, but because the conception of the *shite* as the sole actor obscures its value. This conception represents a trend that began shortly after Zeami's time, and it was given definitive expression in 1930 by Nogami Toyochirō. It means that the only significant presence on the *nō* stage is that of the *shite*: there is only one 'actor' in the play. The other figures only set off the *shite*. As a result, *nō* is not 'drama' (*gikyoku*) at all. Although Nogami did not say so explicitly, this conception therefore stresses a radical inwardness: *nō* is not mere theatre, but a vehicle for the expression of the *shite* character's inner being. A play like *The Well-Cradle* supports this view and so does part one of *The Fulling Block*. However, part two of *The Fulling Block* is another matter. The problem is the significance of the husband, the *waki*.

The view of the *shite* as the sole actor denies any dramatic interaction

between the *shite* and the *waki*. This idea can be debated even for a play like *The Well-Cradle* (can the seer be dismissed from what is seen, the dreamer from his dream?), but in the case of *Lady Han* or *The Fulling Block* it has serious consequences. A representative writer on *Lady Han* (Sagara Tōru) delicately analysed the distraught girl's feelings so as to prove that she meets her lover again because of her own purity of heart, yet ignored a much plainer explanation: the lover – as the play makes clear – is just as anxious to find *her* as she is to find him. In fact, the same writer hardly acknowledged the lover as a presence in the play, as distinguished from a presence in the girl's mind.

This is the difficulty with part two of *The Fulling Block*. Part one having already revealed the wife's innermost feelings, part two is relatively obvious if one takes it as a soliloquy – if the 'sole actor' is really alone on stage. Yet part two is not a soliloquy. It is a conversation. The husband says nothing, it is true, but his presence matters a great deal. The foremost contemporary historian of nō (Omote Akira) has warned against discussing Zeami's art on the basis of *The Fulling Block* as it is presently performed, but the text itself carefully stresses the husband's concern, and this, surely, was Zeami's intention. The husband is patient and he listens. While he listens, the chanting of the *Lotus Sutra* goes on (although not on stage), and all his love is present in this chanting. The lyric beauty of *Lady Han* would be misplaced in part two of *The Fulling Block*. The wife's words, spoken in extreme agony, are the unadorned truth. So is the husband's care. Both are so convincing that *The Fulling Block* does not fall back from the heights of part one. It rises.

It rises so high that when the wife has spoken, there is nothing left to say. Ascetics chanted the *Lotus Sutra* to 'abolish sins' (*metsuzai*). The wife's sin is of course psychological, not moral: anxiety about the husband she loves has caused her to hate him, and this hate has sunk her in Hell. Yet the voice of love, speaking through the sutra, has turned anguish to knowledge, darkness to light. Sin is exhausted and Hell dissolves. No doubt that is why the end of the play, which may seem abrupt, comes so suddenly. With pain gone, release is swift. Some scholars (especially Yashima Masaharu) have shown that Zeami accorded *The Fulling Block* his highest possible rank, that of the 'wondrous flower' (*myōka*). The term recalls the *Lotus Sutra*'s full title, 'The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Teaching'. It is a rank, as Zeami said, beyond praise.

The 'fulling block' of the title was beaten to soften the silk of a robe and restore its lustre. This could be done at any time of year, but Chinese poetry associated the block's dull thud with the melancholy of autumn. The motif, as developed by Japanese poets, settled into its final pattern in about the twelfth century. By convention, the beater was a widow or a lonely wife who, with each stroke under the autumn moon, lamented her husband's absence.

The site of *The Fulling Block* is Ashiya, a locality on the north coast of Kyushu (Fukuoka Prefecture). Another Ashiya, near the present Osaka, appears in *Pining Wind* and elsewhere. Perhaps Zeami's choice alludes to this much closer, more familiar Ashiya, and so emphasizes the gravity of the wife's estrangement from a happier truth.

The Ashiya in Kyushu is at a river mouth. A few kilometres upstream stands the small Yatsurugi Jinja, formerly known as Kinutahime Jinja: the Shrine of the Lady of the Fulling Block. According to the legend of the shrine, the hero Yamato Takeru was passing that way when he heard someone beating a block. The beater turned out to be a lovely young woman who told him, in tears, that she had served in the imperial palace until her companions' vicious tongues so wounded her that she sought lonely refuge here. The hero made love to her and found, when he passed by again, that she was soon to give birth. Alas, he had to go on to the capital, but in memory of their liaison he planted a ginkgo tree. The shrine, now practically deserted, is in a grove of huge ginkgo trees. What this legend has to do with *The Fulling Block* is hard to say, yet its presence at the spot is very interesting. It evokes the baffling depths of history and meaning that lurk behind many masterpieces of nō.

THE FULLING BLOCK

Persons in order of appearance

The Husband, a local squire	<i>waki</i>
His Sword-bearer	<i>wakizure</i>
A Maid, Yūgiri (<i>Ko-omote</i> mask)	<i>tsure</i>
The Wife (<i>Fukai</i> mask)	<i>Maeshite</i>
A Manservant	<i>ai</i>
The Spirit of the wife, after her death (<i>Deigan</i> or <i>Yase-onna</i> mask)	<i>nochijite</i>

Remarks: A fourth-category play (*yonbamme-mono*) current in all five schools of nō.

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To nanori-bue flute music, enter Husband followed by Maid. He stands in base square while she kneels on one knee behind him.

HUSBAND (*nanori*) You have before you a squire from Ashiya in Kyushu. Presently I am staying in Miyako, where I have a lawsuit of mine to look after.¹ Although I had not thought I would be in Miyako long, this year is already my third, and I am very worried about my wife and my home. For that reason, I mean to send my maid, Yūgiri, down to Ashiya.

(*mondō*) Listen to me, Yūgiri. I am very worried about my wife and my home, and for that reason I am sending you down to Ashiya. Please announce that I myself will surely be home by the end of the year.

MAID Then I will be on my way immediately, sir. You yourself will surely arrive by the end of the year.

Exit Husband. Maid rises and comes forward to base square.

MAID (*agenta*) This little while,
 in travel wear the days unfold
 in travel wear the days unfold
 toward nightfall in endless inns;

1. The lawsuit probably involves land. This motif (a local squire pressing a lawsuit in Kyoto, and consequently being separated from his wife) appears in several other nō and kyōgen plays.

dream follows dream on borrowed pillows.

So days and nights go by, till soon, *Mimes walking.*

Ashiya I have reached at last

Ashiya I have reached at last.

(*tsukizerifu*) How happy I am! Having come so swiftly, I have already reached the village of Ashiya. I must first announce my arrival.

(*unnamed*) I beg your pardon! Is anyone at home? It is I, Yūgiri. Please announce that I have arrived from Miyako.²

To ashirai music, enter Wife. She stops at third pine, facing audience. Maid, meanwhile, retires to stage assistant position.

WIFE (*sashi*) Snug beneath mandarin duck covers,
 lovers still grieve that they must part;
 fish of the deep, pillowed side by side,
 they yet fear the sundering waves.³
 And I, whose love has turned away,
 though living still, can only suffer
 the rush of memories; my sobs
 cry that I have not forgotten.
 Tears spill from sleeves like rain
 that never ends for this stricken heart!

Weeps.

Maid has come forward to first pine.

MAID (*mondō*) Please convey the news that Yūgiri has arrived.

Wife turns to her.

WIFE Yūgiri, you say? Why, there is no need to have yourself announced! Please come straight in. [*Wife sits before Chorus, Maid before drums.*] Now, Yūgiri, I am of course pleased to see you, but I also have reason to be most unhappy with you. No doubt his heart has changed towards me, but if so, why did you not somehow send me the news?⁴

2. In both *nō* and *kyōgen*, a servant always ceremoniously announces his or her arrival at a house, however familiar the servant may be there. Here, the Maid assumes that the news will be passed on to her mistress by another servant within the house. The response of the master or mistress is always, as here, that there was no need for such ceremony.

3. Since mandarin ducks mate for life, they are a symbol of conjugal happiness. The fish is, literally, the turbot (or sole, or flounder), which has both eyes on the same side of its body, and which therefore was thought to be unable to swim unless paired (underside to underside) with its mate.

4. The complete failure of communication between Kyoto and Ashiya is crucial in this play, but no explanation is ever given for it. Zeami seems to have radically stripped the play of any anecdotal material that might distract one's attention from his theme.

MAID You see, madam, I wanted to come home sooner, but the service I owe my master allowed me no time to do so. Quite against my will, I ended up spending three years in Miyako.

WIFE It was against your will, you say, that you stayed on in Miyako? Think of that! There in the blossoming Capital,⁵ amid a wealth of consolations, it is still the heart's way to grieve.

CHORUS (*sagenta*) Village life palls as autumn ends.

None pass the door, the grasses die;
old loves and friendships lapse.

Weeps.

What have I to trust, in time to come?

(*agenta*) Were they a dream, these three autumn years
were they a dream, these three autumn years,
I should wake from sorrow, yet do not.

Only memories stay with me.

The old days are changed and gone.

O it is true:

Were this world of ours
unstained by lies
the heart would leap
to hear him speak
such sweet, welcome words.⁶

O foolish heart! O foolish, foolish trust!

During the passage above, Manservant slips in to sit at villager position.

WIFE (*mondō*) How strange! I hear a noise some way away. What can it be?

MAID Someone in the village is beating a fulling block.

WIFE Why yes, in my present misery I remember an old tale.⁷ In China, a man named Sobu was taken captive by the Huns. Imagining him lying sleepless through the cold nights, the wife and child he had left behind climbed a high tower and beat a fulling block. And perhaps the message of their love did reach him, for Sobu in his exile's sleep, ten thousand leagues away, heard that block beating at

5. The glories of Miyako were conventionally summed up by its cherry blossoms, which Zeami celebrated in *Saigyō's Cherry Tree*.

6. An anonymous poem from the *Kokinshū* (905).

7. The story of Sobu (Su Wu) is from the *Han shu*, the history of the early Han dynasty (206 B.C.–24 A.D.). However, the idea that his wife beat a fulling block to call him first appears in a couplet by Ōe no Masafusa, in *Shinsen rōei* ('A New Selection of Chinese Poems for Chanting Aloud', c. 1115).

his home. It may ease my heart to do the same. Yes, this desolate evening, I will lay upon the fulling block his bright-patterned robe⁸ and beat it to comfort my own heart.

MAID Oh my dear mistress, beating the fulling block is something poor folk do! But if it will ease your pain, then I will prepare you a block.

To ashirai music, Wife retires to stage assistant position. Stage assistant then brings on the fulling block, a light stand over which a robe might be draped, though none is draped over this one. Wife slips the outer robe off her right shoulder; this is at once a preparation for work and a sign that she is not in her right mind. She comes forward to stand in base square.

WIFE (*kakeai*) Come, come, I shall pound the block:

where he and I, fond lovers, lay,

MAID and desolate tears now stain a lonely bed,

WIFE the beat shall tell my thoughts abroad!

Wife and Maid sit facing each other across the fulling block, with Maid at witness position. They gaze at it, absorbed.

MAID Yūgiri joins her, till mistress and maid

WIFE beat upon the block of angry pain.

CHORUS (*shidai*) Pine trees' sighing falls across the robe
pine trees' sighing falls across the robe:
wind with tidings of the chill of night.

Both rise. Wife moves to base square, Maid before Chorus. Below, Wife dances and mimes in consonance with the text.

WIFE (*issei*) The autumn wind tells of love grown cold,
the autumn wind tells of love grown cold,

CHORUS bringing me tonight nothing but sorrow.

WIFE Others too, in far-flung villages,
will, no doubt, be gazing at this moon

CHORUS that never asks which watcher claims the night.⁹

WIFE (*sashi*) O the hour has its own beauty!
Autumn is here, and the closing dusk.

8. 'Bright-patterned robe' paraphrases the *kurehatori aya no koromo* of the original. These words recall the language of *Kureba*, the present text of which alludes directly to the end of the *kuse* passage of *The Fulling Block*.

9. In poetry, separated lovers often watched the moon, feeling sure the other was watching it, too. The wife assumes this of her husband, but knows that many others as well, strangers to her, are watching the moon. The moon shines equally on them all and has no comfort to give her.

CHORUS Loud on the unseen mountain wind,
 a stag's cry quivers in the heart,¹⁰
 and somewhere a twig lets one leaf fall.¹¹
 From desolate heavens, the moon
 shines in through grasses at the eaves¹²

WIFE agleam with dew, while I,

CHORUS night-long, disclose abiding grief.

(*kami-no-ei*) The palace clock points aloft; the wind veers to the north.
 Nearby, a block beats slow then fast; the westering moon sinks low.¹³

(*uta*) Sobu, exiled, slept in northern lands,
 while my love lies under eastern skies.
 Winds of fall, that sweep in from the west,
 blow him my message. Come,
 beat upon his robe, of weave so thin!

(*agenta*) O pine at the eaves of this, his home,
 I beg, be kind! In your branches,
 hold back nothing of the storm's loud cry!
 Take up this block's voice, O wind,
 blow it to my husband yonder!
 Yet softly, kind wind in the pine –
 for should all of my heart
 reach him, and he dream of me . . .
 O do not break his dream!
 For if you do, this robe of his –
 who ever will come and wear it?
 But if he comes, then for all time,
 we shall cut the cloth anew.
 Ah, summer robe, so thin: so thin,
 his old promises, I hate them!
 Yes, may the man I love live long
 as those long nights the moon
 keeps me from sleep!

10. The mating call of the stag, in autumn, was a powerful motif in countless poems.

11. This sign of autumn also suggests, here as in *Lady Han*, that the speaker's mind is shaken and turning to madness.

12. *Shinobu* grasses that grow in the thatch. The name puns on *shinobu* 'to remember with longing'. The full moon brought back memories, and doubly so when seen through *shinobu* fronds gleaming with dew (tears).

13. A couplet in Chinese by Prince Tomohira, from *Shinsen rōei*. The clock is a water clock.

Come, beat upon the robe!

Wife continues to dance and mime until, at the end of the kuse passage below, she and Maid sit once more facing each other across the fulling block.

(*kuse*) This promise binds the Tanabata Stars:¹⁴

that one night of every year
they shall lie, briefly, together,
till waves of the Celestial River
surge once more and part them.

This poor tryst yields them nothing
but distracted hearts; and tears,
weak as dewdrops, wet their sleeves.
Let them, O waves, be waterweeds
that you might wash into close embrace
that pair, foam on the stream.

WIFE O dawn, the seventh of the seventh moon!

CHORUS Come the eighth moon and the ninth,
when the nights grow long,
thousand, ten thousand-voiced¹⁵
sorrows are the news I would send him!
Brilliance of the moon, touch of the wind,
frost gleaming in pale light,
chill the heart as the block beats
and night winds moan.
Cries of grief, shrill insect cries
mingle with weeping dew:
boro boro hara hara hara,
they go, and among them all,
O which cry is the block's?

Maid rises, moves towards corner pillar, then goes down on one knee facing Wife.

MAID (*mondō*) I beg your pardon, madam. It appears that our lord will
not be back this autumn.

WIFE (*kudoki*) I detest him, then!

14. This Chinese legend is still universally known in Japan. The Herd Boy and the Weaver Maid (Altair and Vega) are two stars on either side of the Celestial River (the Milky Way). Although lovers, they can meet only one night a year, the seventh night of the seventh month. The Tanabata festival is held on that evening.

15. These three lines are based on a couplet by Po Chū-i (772-846), included in the *Wakan rōei shū* ('A Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems for Chanting Aloud', 1013).

He promised, 'By the year's end,'
and I, who well knew he lied,
still looked for him.

Buries face in hands.

So it is true.

His love really has grown cold.

Maid, moving behind Wife, places her hands on Wife's shoulders to comfort her.

CHORUS (*sagenta*) Never think it of him,
urged my too fond heart,
that now is breaking.

As Chorus sings on, Wife slowly traverses stage and bridge, and vanishes through the curtain. At first, Maid follows her, supporting her faltering steps. At third pine, Maid stops abruptly, withdraws her hands, and weeps.

(*agenta*) The cries fade out. In wintry fields,
insect voices falter and die.
The tangled grasses' blossom heart
feels the wild wind's withering touch.
Sunk upon a bed of sickness,
she yields up her breath and is no more
she yields up her breath and is no more.

Exit Maid. Stage assistant moves the fulling block to front of stage.

* * *

Manservant rises and comes forward to base square.

MANSERVANT You have before you one who serves the squire of Ashiya Kyushu. Now, while pressing a lawsuit for three years in Miyako, my master missed his home so badly that he very much wanted to return. When at last judgement was pronounced in his favour, he sent his maid Yūgiri on ahead to announce his arrival. She was to convey the message that he would be back at the year's end. My mistress was very happy, for since he had been away three years, she naturally was anxious to see him. The end of the year was not far off, but she could not for a moment forget her concern about him; and so it occurred to her she might at least relieve her feelings by beating a fulling block, such as the village women beat. To this she did constantly, and Yūgiri with her, for Yūgiri was deeply affected by her distress and kept her faithful company. In short, Yūgiri did her best to improve her mistress's spirits. But then there came the news from Miyako that my master would not be home at the year's end after all. My mistress took it badly, as a woman is apt to do, and decided that he was

returning because he no longer cared for her. She started raving then, till at last she died. I need hardly say that the household mourned her with heartfelt tears. When in due course my master learned of her death, he rushed home at once, overwhelmed with grief. Yet the tragedy was beyond recall. He therefore had the bowstring plucked to summon her spirit, and offered to the buddhas the fulling block that she had beaten until the moment she expired. And he decided that a service should be held for her comfort and guidance. He ordered me to go to the people of this place and announce this service to them, so that all should attend it. Hear me, good people! Come now, gather for the service! Come, gather now! Gather now! [*Starts down bridge towards curtain when Husband enters, rosary in hand and followed by Sword-bearer.*] Ah! Here is my master now! [*Goes down on one knee. Husband stops. Sword-bearer too goes down on one knee.*] Excuse me, master. I announced the service, as you asked.

HUSBAND Is the fulling block still exactly as it was?

MANSERVANT Yes, sir, it is.

Husband sits before the fulling block. Sword-bearer sits behind him to one side and reverently bows.

Manservant retires to villager position; he will slip out after the Spirit's entrance.

* * *

HUSBAND (*unnamed*) It is too cruel!

Angry that three years had gone,
the wife I missed in separation
now has left me, never to return.

(*agenta*) All in vain,
remorse stings me a thousand times
remorse stings me a thousand times.
Yet from beneath the sod, I hear,
there is a way to bring her once again,
to call her to the curved bow's tip,
poor soul, that we two may speak¹⁶
poor soul, that we two may speak.

Husband sits at witness position, and Sword-bearer near him.

To deha music, enter Spirit, weakly leaning on a staff. She stops at first pine.

16. This shamanic procedure was probably done by a professional medium. Having been summoned, the spirit would then speak through the medium's mouth.

SPIRIT (*agenta*) River of Three Crossings:¹⁷

down I sank, swallowed by the waters:
a fleck of foam consigned to a dark fate.

Below, comes to shite spot and begins to mime in consonance with text.

(*kuri*) Grave-marker plums bloom gaily side by side,
displaying spring to our unhappy world;
lanterns lit to guide the wandering shade
show the autumn moon, face of the truth.

(*kudoki*) Yet love's lustful karma rules me still.
Fires of longing smoulder night and day.
Now as before, I have no peace: this sin,
a heart in pain, yields me its reward:
assaults of hell-fiends, the Ahōrasetsu,

Turns angrily to Husband, steps towards him, then weeps.

brandishing their rods and raining blows.
Beat on, beat (they howl), as you deserve,
the block:¹⁸ for all my hate

(*noriji*) reaps me the fruit of wrongful clinging
CHORUS reaps me the fruit of wrongful clinging.
Anguished tears, touching the block,
turn from tears to fire.

Smothering in smoke and flame,
I shriek, yet soundlessly.
The block makes no noise, and wind
in silence passes through the pines.
Fiends' foul curses fill my ears, O terror!

Below, mimes and dances a passage which musically is the climax of the play.

(*dan-uta*) As sheep loiter or a colt flicks by¹⁹
as sheep loiter or a colt flicks by,
the Six Realms²⁰ revolve, for karma's wheel

17. The river that the soul must cross to reach the afterworld.

18. The demon in part two of *The Damask Drum* cries the same thing to the Consort that play, who beats a drum that will not sound. The motifs of the drum and the full block are here closely related, and one scholar (Yashima Masaharu) has explicitly linked these two plays.

19. A simile (derived by Zeami from Buddhist and Chinese sources) for the passage of time, either slow or fast, from birth to death and rebirth. More fully stated: slow as gait of a sheep being led to slaughter, fast as a running colt glimpsed through a crack in a wall.

20. The six realms of reincarnation: Heaven, the human realm, the realm of warlike demons, the realm of beasts, the realm of starving ghosts, and Hell.

turns on and on, and unless we drive
 our carriage out the Burning Mansion's gate,²¹
 we turn and turn among them,
 ever drowning in the sea of birth and death.

O cruel, O unhappy world!

SPIRIT Anger, creeping like a vine

CHORUS Anger, creeping like a vine,

only spreads. My face, O shame,
 is the very face of desperate clinging!
 Husband I so love, it was two lives
 you pledged to me, as man and wife will do,²²
 and swore devotion for a thousand ages,
 till seas swallow the inviolate mountains.²³

Yet your vows were empty.

They were lies.

Was that really all your love was worth?

'Fibber-bird', they call the crow,²⁴

yet even he keeps his own faith.

What madman could call *you* true?

Plants and trees, yes, know the seasons;

birds and beasts have feelings.

How rightly I recalled Sobu

who, to a wild goose southward-bound,

tied a letter that across ten thousand leagues

carried her his message: for he loved her,

and his vows were anything but shallow.

Why, O why, my husband, far away,

if not in daylight thought, at least in dream,

21. The parable of the burning mansion, in the *Lotus Sutra*, likens the world of transmigration to a house in which children are playing. The children are so absorbed in their games that they do not notice the house is burning, and must be enticed out by their father with promises of gifts.

22. The bond between husband and wife is believed to last for two lifetimes. The parent-child bond lasted one and the bond between retainer and lord lasted three.

23. The 'inviolable mountains' are, in the original, Sue-no-matsuyama ('the pine mountains of Sue'). In a *Kokinshū* poem, a lover swears that if he is ever false, waves will sweep over Sue-no-matsuyama in the far north of Japan, and the oath became proverbial.

24. An idea based on a poem in a work of poetic criticism entitled *Toshiyori zuinō* ('The Teachings of Minamoto no Toshiyori', c. 1115). The reason why the crow should be a 'fibber-bird' is unclear.

did you not hear me beating on the block
and know my pain? O you are hateful!

Spirit, above, moves towards Husband, goes down on one knee before him, strikes stage with her fan, points left hand accusingly, and suddenly weeps. Palms pressed together over the beads of his rosary, he greets her reverently.

(*kiri*) So powerful, the chanted Lotus Sutra
so powerful, the chanted Lotus Sutra,
before the spirit a bright path of light
opens out straight to Buddhahood.
See, how from the block she briefly beat,
its complaint her own, a perfect flower
has blossomed: the true Teaching,
now the seed of her illumination
now the seed of her illumination.

Facing side from base square, stamps a final beat.