

Tsūew

GRANNY MOUNTAINS

A Cycle of Nō Plays

(The second of two volumes)

Translated by Royall Tyler

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East Asia Program  
Cornell University  
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TSÜEN  
(A parody of Yorimasa)

(To music, Monk enters and stands at main spot facing rear of stage. He is followed by Local, who sits at Fool's spot.)

MONK There's hardly a soul on the road there's hardly a soul on the road and alas! not a cent for tea!

(He faces front.)

I'm a brother from the lands of the East. I'd never seen Miyako, so I decided to come on up here and have a look at the sights. And now I'm going on to take a look at the Southern Capital.

On the flood chestnut husks sailing along chestnut husks sailing along: it's by dropping their meat they float. So let me too drop my body and float, say I, hurrying on till I end up under the globes up on the end of the end posts of Uji Bridge.

(While singing the above, he takes a few steps forward, then steps back the same distance.)

Hurrying along that way, here I am already at the end of Uji Bridge. And in this teahouse I see hot tea set out as an offering. It looks as though there's some story behind this. There can't possibly be no special reason. I'll ask someone local about it.

(He goes to stage end of bridgeway and faces curtain.)

Is anyone from around here around?

(Local stands at first pine.)

LOCAL You want someone from around here? What's your problem?

MONK I'm a monk taking a look at this place for the first time. And in that teahouse yonder I see hot tea set out as an offering. It looks as though there's some story behind this. There can't possibly be no special reason. Do please tell me what it is.

LOCAL Well, yes, once upon a time a teamaster named Tsüen lived here. He died brewing tea during the celebration for the completion of Uji Bridge. Today's the anniversary, so his relatives must have set out some tea as an offering. You, brother, never even knew him, but I wish you'd comfort him before you pass on.

MONK It was very kind of you to tell me, I'm really delighted. So I'll go over there and comfort him before I pass on.

LOCAL If you need anything, just let me know!

MONK Thank you, I'll do that.

LOCAL Fine.

(Local goes back to Fool's spot. Monk retires to Sideman's spot.)

MONK A haven now in the teahouse a haven now in the teahouse matting's old, on this bench here, on tattered cloak, I'll lie me down and wait for the dream encounter and wait for the dream encounter.

(To music, Tsüen enters wearing the tsüen mask, and stands at first pine. He dances as he sings, brandishing a big, round fan.)

TSÜEN Grim sum! Waifs bloat tea's array, parched hordes press home. Sorely the stream's waters test me, though I dip on. Ah, I miss Jamboree! A teaman in the sorry whirl's alas, in hot water

(Chorus now sits at back of stage, having entered through the slit door a few moments ago.)

CHORUS and his kettle handle's burning to hold,  
 TSŪEN though the boiled tea looks mighty fine!  
 (He goes to main spot.)  
 MONK Astonishing! Over the pillow where I'm napping,  
 I see a shadowlike being with a ladle stuck in his  
 sash. Pray, sir, who are you?  
 TSŪEN Now what need I conceal? I am the teamaster Tsūen,  
 who in the old days died brewing tea at the celebra-  
 tion for the completion of Uji Bridge.  
 MONK You're Tsūen, are you? Do tell me how it was then.  
 I'll comfort your shade.  
 TSŪEN Then I'll tell you how it was. Please comfort my  
 shade!  
 (Tsūen sits before drums, on a stool  
 provided by stagehand. He slips the handle of  
 his fan into his sash, then takes a ladle and a  
 tea whisk in his right hand and a tea bowl in  
 his left.)  
 You see, just as the Uji Bridge celebration seemed  
 to be half over, some people who looked like pil-  
 grims from Miyako came bawling, 'Let's drink up  
 Tsūen's tea!' And without introductions, three  
 hundred of them  
 (Below, Tsūen mimes as the Chorus sings.)  
 CHORUS and without introductions, three hundred of them,  
 jaws agape, thronged in calling, 'Tea! Tea!' So to  
 satisfy them I grabbed my tea spoon, quick slipped  
 in some twiggy tea, and, bobbing high and low,  
 worked away at the brew.  
 TSŪEN Tsūen to his minions gave these orders:  
 CHORUS Where water curls back, there is sand; be aware, let  
 the weaker seize a ladle, and let the stronger carry

water! Anyone about to be swept down, let him  
 grasp your tea whisk, and both hold fast! So,  
 thanks to one man's orders, ever so huge though the  
 throng was, not one horseman was lost; we brewed  
 and brewed till, with tea whisks massed, in death's  
 face we brewed on. As meanwhile the struggle  
 raged, each bent on sipping,  
 TSŪEN Tsūen's crusted support,  
 (Tsūen stands.)  
 CHORUS his tea bowl, his ladle, were smashed to bits.  
 (He goes near mark post, puts down bowl,  
 ladle, and whisk.)  
 TSŪEN This is the end, thought he  
 CHORUS This is the end, thought he, and under the Byōdō-in's  
 broad veranda, on this very sand, laid he his fan,  
 (Down front, he takes out fan, lays it be-  
 fore him, and sits.)  
 all his clothes stripped off and cast away, sat in  
 lotus posture,  
 (He takes off his outer garment.)  
 and with whisk drawn  
 (He picks up whisk.)  
 --not for nothing the fame Tsūen had won--  
 (He puts whisk back down, picks up fan  
 and stands. Then, to accompaniment of flute and  
 drums, he dances a dance movement called kakeri.  
 As text resumes, he is before drums.)  
 TSŪEN The buried flame never in the world did burn;  
 when hot water's gone, you can't even get froth.  
 (He dances some more.)

CHORUS

Comfort my shade, I beg, o saint! So  
barely now have we touched, yet even this  
is a link from tea sipped in past lives.  
And now, under the fan on the grass on the sand,  
he's whisked in and gone from sight

(He drops fan.)

he's whisked in and gone from sight.

(He stops dancing. Then he exits, followed  
by Monk and Local. Chorus slips out through the  
slit door.)

KOMACHI ON THE GRAVEPOST  
(Sotoba Komachi: a fourth-category play)

Komachi on the Gravepost is a play of such astonishing contrasts that one can feel hard put to make of them a whole. Komachi is here, as in Komachi at Gateway Temple, a hundred-year-old crone, but she still debates brilliantly with two monks from the Shingon center of Mount Kōya. Hardly has she triumphed, however, and confessed her name, when she is savagely possessed by the spirit of a former suitor who re-enacts, through her body, his fruitless courtship of her. At last the spirit leaves Komachi and she vows to enter the path of enlightenment (which, in the first half of the play, she seemed to have traveled to the end) by accumulating such countless little acts of devotion as are mentioned in the Lotus Sutra. This sutra says that even children who make sand towers (mud pies) in the name of the Buddha accumulate by this act incalculable merit. Thus, at the very end of Komachi on the Gravepost there is a hint of the innocence that pervades Komachi at Gateway Temple. Perhaps the whole play suggests that knowledge is nothing without love, and that humility is greater than pride. Perhaps when Komachi reminds the monks that 'Back links it is that lift one high' (for 'back link' and 'right links,' see Glossary), she is saying more than even she realizes at the time.

Komachi's suitor is Shii no Shōshō, also known as Fukakusa no Shōshō, the 'Captain from Deepgrass.' According to legend, Komachi promised Shōshō she would yield to him if he would appear before her house each night for a hundred nights. He was to record his visit by cutting a notch on the shaft-rest there, the wooden support for the