

Traditional Japanese Theater

An Anthology of Plays

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Kanaoka

A crazed-person play

Translated by Carolyn Haynes

This is a play of bittersweet humor, a gentle depiction of human foibles, in which farcical elements give way to a warm humanity. *Kanaoka* does not stand alone in this respect, however; some of the blind-person plays, such as *Kawakami* (translated as “Sight gained and lost”), delve even further into pathos. In this *kyōgen*, the painter Kanaoka is obsessed with a lady he met only briefly, much as the mother in *Miidera* was crazed by obsessive longing for her child. But *Kanaoka* is not so much a parody of the *noh* as a *kyōgen* treatment of a similar theme. A more parodic treatment of the obsessed-person theme is found in *Makura monogurui* (Pillow mania), which comically depicts an old man in love with a young girl. *Hōshigahaha* (The baby’s mother) similarly portrays a man who recklessly divorced his wife and wants her back.

As Carolyn Haynes’s translation reveals, *Kanaoka* is more *noh*-like in its structure than are the previous *kyōgen* plays. It uses a chorus, flute, and two drums, and dance is central. The *shite* first reveals his madness in a *kyōgen* version of the *noh kakeri* dance, and then he continues to dance as he sings of his obsession. Another *kakeri* occurs toward the end of the play, when the dance incorporates painting the wife’s face in a farcically serious attempt to make her resemble the woman who infatuates him. This dance is technically difficult: the dancer must hold two long brushes, wet with real paint, in one hand. The emotional import of the dance, the despair of the painter’s unattainable love, also is difficult to convey. When the dance ends and the song resumes, the mood changes: the husband grows angry at his impossible task, his own artistic failure, and his wife’s lack of beauty. His movements and the singing speed up and become more dramatic. The intensity of this struggle dissolves into slapstick as he pushes his wife off her stool and she chases him offstage in a typical *kyōgen* ending.

The ending may be conventional, but the subject matter is not; the play, like *Yamamba*, explores the nature and potential of art, albeit in an unconventional and

humorous manner. Along with *The “Sickley” Stomach*, *Kanaoka* is categorized as a woman play, but again, the emphasis is almost entirely on the man. Even though the wife is sympathetic to her husband’s plight, he fails at what, in hindsight, was an impossible task.

Although texts of this play exist in the Ōkura school and the now defunct Sagi school versions, *Kanaoka* remains in the active repertory only in the Izumi school, which counts it as one of its major works (*daikyoku*), along with *Hanago* and *Tsurigitsune* (Fox trapping). Carolyn Haynes’s detailed movement descriptions are based on a videotaped performance by Izumi Motohide, broadcast on NHK on November 3, 1975. The translation is based on the Izumi text found in Nonomura and Andō 1931.

CHARACTERS

SHITE: Kanaoka, a painter

ADO: his wife

MUSICIANS

Chorus of four or five members

A noh flute and two hand drums

A Play in One Act

The instrumentalists enter from the little door at backstage right and sit at the back of the stage, with the drummers facing the flutist. A chorus of four or five enter and sit behind the musicians. The ado, costumed as a woman, enters the bridgeway and goes to the shite spot.

WIFE: I am the wife of the painter Kanaoka. My husband went off suddenly some ten days ago and hasn't returned yet. When I ask about him, people tell me he's lost his senses and is wandering madly around the outskirts of the capital. Today I'm going to try to find him. (*Circles stage as she talks*) What a fix this is! He's always so sensible—what could possibly have driven him mad? People will surely gossip. I certainly hope I can get him to come home with me today. Well, here I am at Kiyomizu already. I'll wait for him here (*sits down in front of the flutist*).

Issei entrance music *The shite enters to instrumental music and stands at the first pine. He carries a branch of bamboo in his right hand, balanced on his right shoulder. He points with his left hand and calls out toward stage front.*

SHITE: "Hey, you children over there, what are you laughing at? (*Lowers his left hand*) What's that?"¹

You think my madness strange?

Facing front, the shite slowly sings the following in the melodic mode without accompaniment.

"How cruel they are!
The branch was still just now,
but beckoned by the wind (*looks right*)
a single leaf will fall.

Looks down, watching the falling leaf.

My mind for once was calm,

Lowers the branch of bamboo.

but then they called me mad
and lo, my distracted heart

1. This line is taken from the noh play *Semimaru*.

Crosses rapidly to the corner.

CHORUS:

runs wild”² (*circles left to backstage center*).

Kakeri The shite dances to flute music.³ He stamps slowly ten times, then circles the stage, first right and then left, with slow, melancholy movements. The pace quickens as he crosses the stage again and hurries to the first pine on the bridgeway, where he comes to an abrupt halt. He returns to center stage and points toward the waki spot. The slow, deliberate movements of this dance reflect the anguish of searching for a loved one. The measured pace is punctuated by the vigorous flips necessary to straighten the trailing legs of the long trousers at each change of direction.

SHITE: Ohh, that lady over there! I’d surely like to see under your veil! What?
Again they laugh, calling me mad!

Singing very slowly.

“In the Blossom Capital’s crisscross weave,

Faces front.

if there’s a street you’ve never seen,

Slowly pivots left.

just ask, and you won’t lose your way.

Crosses slowly to the bridgeway.

But oh, the road of love!

You may think you know it well,
but you could lose your wits!”⁴

Faces front at the first pine.

“Love, oh love,
do not forsake me
halfway to love!”⁵

“The winds of love blow

He holds his left sleeve in front of his body to protect himself from the winds.

twining my sleeves about me.

Flips his left sleeve over his arm.

Oh, how heavy are my sleeves,

Returns his sleeve to its normal position.

how weighty the winds of love!”

2. Quoted, with minor alterations, from the noh play *Hanjo*.

3. Usually both drums and the flute play for this dance.

4. This section consists of several popular songs strung together. This one is song 18 in the *Kanginshū* (Hoff 1978). “Crisscross weave” is a translation of *tatenuki*, a weaving term referring to the warp and woof of fabric, here used as a metaphor for the grid of streets.

5. Probably a popular song, although of uncertain origin. It occurs in other noh and kyōgen plays, often paired with the song that follows it here, *Kanginshū* poem 72.

Raises the bamboo grass and drops it back on his shoulder, crouching slightly as if under its weight. Speaks the next line.

Oh, her lovely face!

Lowers the bamboo and looks toward the curtain. Sings again.

“What spring was it that first I saw,

Goes rapidly to the second pine.

that first I loved her?

Returns to the first pine.

Never shall I forget—

Makes a circlet to the left.

that feast of blossoms!”⁶

“Beneath the cherry trees

Stamps and goes to the shite spot; the pace quickens.

at Kiyomizu, at Kiyomizu,

I trysted with a lovely youth.

Oh, you mustn’t kiss just once,

Opens his arms wide and brings them together while moving toward center stage.

and you mustn’t kiss just twice!

He makes circlets, flaps his arms together again, and goes to the corner.

How wretched, wretched I am!”⁷

Backs up to the shite spot, drops the bamboo branch, sits, and weeps.

WIFE (*Moves forward to the waki spot and addresses her husband*): This is madness, just madness! Tell me what this is all about, right now!

SHITE (*Looks up*): Is that you, wife? What are you doing here?

He takes out his fan and stands. A stage attendant removes the branch.

WIFE: You’ve been gone for more than ten days. People said you’d lost your senses and were wandering around the outskirts of the capital. *That’s* why I came looking for you. What is it that’s driven you mad?

SHITE: Now, now, you’re speaking recklessly. I haven’t lost my wits. Don’t act so crazy!

WIFE: Look at you! Wandering around all disheveled like this. Isn’t that madness?

SHITE: Hmm, it’s that obvious, is it? But you won’t like it when you hear what this is about, I warn you.

WIFE: Now, now, you’re my husband—I won’t make a fuss, even if it’s something I don’t want to hear. Please just tell me.

SHITE: Well, if you insist, I’ll tell you. But don’t get angry when you hear it.

6. A song (*kouta*) also used in the kyōgen *Hanago*. The “feast of blossoms” (*hana no en*) is a poetic term for conjugal felicity.

7. There are no other occurrences of this song, but it is presumed to be a contemporary *kouta*.

WIFE: Why ever should I get angry? Just tell me what it is.

SHITE (*Both face front*): Well, some time ago I went to the palace, where I'd been summoned to do some paintings. I was commanded to paint scenes of the four seasons on the sliding doors of the dressing room. "At once," I said, and I set to work, exhausting every secret of my art to paint beautiful scenes in the tradition of my ancestors. When I'd finished, a number of women in gorgeous robes, looking like so many poppies in a vase, crowded in to see my work. They all were incomparably beautiful. Then one of the ladies—she couldn't have been more than twenty years old, a true beauty—approached me (*turns slightly toward his wife*).

WIFE: This will never do. This will never do.

SHITE: Remember, don't get angry!

WIFE: Don't worry; go on.

SHITE (*Faces front*): Oh! Her expression was so gentle, so elegant! How can I describe it? Her hair like a cloud, her face, a blossom.⁸ I never saw the Chinese beauties Yang Kuei-Fei or Empress Li,⁹ but even the celestial maidens in my paintings couldn't compare with her! (*Vigorously shaking his head*) Oh, I thought, what a beautiful lady! And I was gazing at her shyly when she held out a white fan and said, "Would you draw something on this?" (*Holds out his fan, handle first*) I was so happy, overcome by her generosity. Right then and there (*opens his fan and holds it vertically*), in a light ink wash, I drew autumn grasses in a field on the front (*switches his fan to his left hand*), and on the other side, I made a quick sketch of a Chinese scene. (*Gazes at his fan, then closes it*) I dashed these off, then handed the sketch back to her. But I couldn't contain myself, and as I handed back the fan (*holds out his fan, handle first*), I squeezed her hand. (*Lowers his right hand quickly and reaches forward as if grasping with his left hand*) She glanced at me and laughed. Dawn or dusk, sleeping or waking, I cannot forget how beautiful she looked as she laughed. This is what has driven me mad! (*Builds up to exaggerated weeping. His sobbing and his wife's cry of anger overlap.*)

WIFE: Ohhh, I'm furious! Just furious! Has there ever been anything so preposterous—ever?!

SHITE (*Faces her*): You see? You made me tell you something you wouldn't like, and now you're angry.

WIFE: No, no, I'm not angry. Calm down and listen to me. Women make themselves beautiful with makeup—especially a lady like that, with her tooth-black, rouge, and powder, her hairpieces and gorgeous robes.¹⁰ Of course you think her incomparable. I'll bet if I dressed up like that, I'd be just as pretty as that lady.

SHITE: Don't be absurd! Even if you applied makeup for three days and nights, you wouldn't come close.

8. A line used in various noh plays including *Yōkihi*, whose main character is Yang Kuei-fei (715–756), consort of the Chinese emperor Hsüan Tsung (r. 713–756).

9. Empress Li was consort to Emperor Wu (r. 140–86 B.C.).

10. A similar list of women's cosmetics appears in the kyōgen *Kagami otoko* (The mirror).



FIGURE 2.58. The wife in *Kanaoka* is ready to have her face painted by her husband. She is sitting on the round lacquered cask (*shōgi*) used in both *noh* and *kyōgen*. The husband wears a brightly designed gown over patterned hakama, and the wife has on a typical *kyōgen* woman's kimono and white headdress (*binan*). (Courtesy of the Noh Research Archive of Musashino Women's College.)

WIFE: Well then, I have an idea. Thank heavens you're such a good artist. Why don't you just paint my face to look like what you want?

SHITE: Now that's an idea. I paint Chinese trees and grasses when I've never seen them. This plan is a bit like that situation—even easier, in fact, for I certainly remember what she looked like. All right, let me get my tools, the heirlooms passed down from my ancestors. Then, entrusting everything to my brushes, I'll try to paint her likeness. To start with, sit over here.

WIFE: Certainly.

She sits on a lacquered barrel that the stage attendant has placed in front of the drummers. The attendant hands the shite a paint box and two long brushes.

SHITE: This is a very interesting plan of yours! First I'll dissolve the glue in a spiral shell.

He places the paint box in front of her. The following lines are sung in the melodic mode.

WIFE: Then he opens the box [figure 2.58].

SHITE: And now I'll begin to paint.

He crosses to the shite spot, holding both paintbrushes in his right hand.

Kakeri Danced to the noncongruent rhythms of the drums and flute. He begins with a series of stamps and circlets that end in a formal obeisance, going down on one knee and lowering his head. He approaches his wife twice, each

time drawing a white circle with a red center on one of her cheeks. As he completes each circle, he goes to the front of the stage, the first time to the corner and the second to the waki spot, turns slowly to look back at the woman, and registers seeing her with an exaggerated start followed by a slow, disappointed shake of his head. He then goes to the shite spot, turns left and right circling his fan, and stamps.

SHITE: And now I'll begin to paint.

He goes to the corner. The dance movements switch to the martial style, and the chanting, to the dynamic mode.

CHORUS:

He dabs with rouge and white powder,
He approaches the woman and points at her.

but the base is dark as mountain crows.
*He backs up, looks sharply left, right, left, right,
 and center.*

People will only laugh!
*He backs up to the shite spot, spreads his arms,
 and brings them together sharply.*

SHITE:
 Still hoping to make her resemble the
 other

Goes to the corner.

CHORUS:
 he approaches once again.
*Goes to the woman, kneels, and paints a red
 streak across her chin and a white streak on
 her nose [figure 2.59].*

Her blossom red lips, her gentle
 silhouette—

Stands.

yet no matter what he does,

Stamps.

this face will never match
 his beloved's countenance,
 will never match his beloved's
 countenance.

*He circles to the shite spot, circles his arm, and
 throws down his brushes.*

She's a fox spirit in disguise!

Pushes the woman off her seat.

WIFE: What? Ohh, I'm furious! Just furious!

SHITE: Now wait a minute!

WIFE: What do you mean, "wait"?

SHITE: With a face as swarthy as yours, no matter how I paint it, it'll never
 match hers.

WIFE: What? Ohh, I'm furious! Just furious!

SHITE: Forgive me! Forgive me!

*These last two lines are repeated several times as the woman chases her husband
 up the bridgeway and offstage.*



FIGURE 2.59. Having decorated his wife's cheeks with red spots surrounded with white circles, the husband paints her chin, holding two different-colored brushes in one hand. (Courtesy of the Noh Research Archive of Musashino Women's College.)

