

The Japanese Noh Drama in Ritual Perspective

RICHARD B. PILGRIM

Introduction

As others have pointed out, the power of the Japanese noh lies in its (skillful) performance. However overtly the performance theories of Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443) or Komparu Zenchiku (1405–1468) carry religio-aesthetic meaning, and noh as plot and story reflects religious beliefs and practices, it is the noh as *performing* art that establishes its artistic prestige and it is noh as *ritual* art that establishes its religious power.

Twentieth century professional noh is not, of course, a religious ritual art by virtue of belonging to or within some specific sect or institutionalized religion, nor by virtue of presenting plays such as “Okina” and occasional performances at temples or shrines on special festival days. It is *religious* ritual art to the degree that it genuinely embodies a living mythos and evokes religious experience. It is ritual art as long as it breaks into and through the ethos of daily life and evokes/presents a sacred world for its audience.

Since noh in general is only truly religious when it *lives* (religiously) in some community’s experience, the following descriptions of audience experience become important in underlining the locus of power and specifying clearly just where the ritual or religious phenomenon, as such, is taking place. Noh, in general, is ritual art only to the degree and on the occasion it can evoke such experience.

That which chanted and moved about on the stage bathed in moonlight was now no longer the ghosts of two beautiful women but something beyond description. One might call it the essence of time, the pith of emotion, the dream that stubbornly obtrudes upon reality. It had no purpose, no meaning.

JAPANESE NOH DRAMA

From moment to moment it fashioned a beauty not of this world . . . The No stage, so close at hand, shone like a world beyond. Spirits walked there.¹

.

The principal actor stamped his foot, the play was ended. But no one moved, for there was yet his long, slow exit. Like a ghost, which was the role he played, he seemed literally fading from sight. He disappeared, as into the coldness of the grave, and the audience sat there in the gathering darkness, as though at vespers. Something vaguely religious, ritualistic, had happened, was still happening. Nothing explicit. An evocation, perhaps, not merely of these six-hundred-year-old figures and a historic past, but also of what is timeless.²

Body Faith: Such experience does not, of course, arise in a vacuum. Particular forms and gestures are not only the occasion for this experience but evoke and lead it. Insofar as they do, they continue to “have” power and to live for a community or individual. When they fail, the art ceases to be religious ritual and may even degenerate into secular entertainment or powerless (i.e., non-religious) ritual. One important condition for their continued religious power, however, is what might be called body faith: the ritual forms can be seen as a “body” of actional (bodily) orderings into which authentic participants, actor and audience alike, pour themselves, in faith, and by which participants are led into the appropriate experience.

Surely body faith is what Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253) means when he speaks of genuine, true practice as “the mind which truly has faith, the body which truly has faith” (*seishinjin nari, seishinni nari*).³ No praxis, least of all religious and ritual praxis, has power or authenticity unless the practitioner is prepared to give body and mind over to

¹ Yukio Mishima, *Runaway Horses* (New York: Pocket Books, 1975), pp. 212, 218.

² Earle Ernest, “The Noh: An Appreciation” in Yasuo Nakamura, *Noh: The Classical Theater* (New York and Tokyo: Walker/Weatherhill, 1971), p. 8.

³ From Dōgen’s “Keisei-sanshoku” in *Shōbōgenzō* as translated in Francis Cook, *How To Raise An Ox* (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978), p. 113. Cf. Ōkubo Dōshū, ed., *Dōgen zenji zenshū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1969), Vol. I, p. 233.

PILGRIM

it in an act of entrusting faith. The practitioner must be open to training (*keiko*) in that particular form (*kata*) of religious discipline (*dō*). As Yuasa Yasuo says for the discipline of poetry (*kadō*), "Such an ideal state cannot be attained in a momentary conscious effort. At times, the mind is in such disorder that it is helpless, but still, if one undergoes a long period of training (*keiko*), forgetting the 'I' and immersing oneself in writing poetry, the way of artistry opens of itself."⁴

The ritual forms of *noh*, both as entered into by the actors and the audience, can thereby be seen as a "body" of forms acting as containers into which the body/mind can pour itself, and as vehicles by which individuals or communities are "trained" and disciplined in the appropriate experience. To the degree that this is true, orthopraxis is prior to orthodoxy and body is prior to experience. Zeami certainly must mean this when he says, "(The performer) matches (the mimetic aspects of) the piece and the performance style with the greatest skill, and puts his mental power completely into his whole body—torso and limbs."⁵

The forms themselves must, of course, be worthy of this faith. They must belong to or be recognizable within a community of shared discourse and—at least in the case of *noh*—be performed with skill and power. (Indeed, they must reflect a "spiritual power," or *shinriki*, as far as Zeami is concerned.)⁶ In order to be religious or ritual forms they must remember and present a living mythos within someone's experience. Moreover, especially in *noh*, the ritual performer must be thoroughly schooled in both the conventions of the art (roles, techniques, style) and the appropriate mental states, for example *mushin* ("no-mind") and/or *shinriki*. Acting is, after all, a religious vocation—a Way (*dō*) or a spiritual exercise (*shugyō*). Pursuit of this vocation and success in it depends on training in the forms of the art and in the proper mind, as Zeami makes clear:

⁴ Yuasa Yasuo, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 101.

⁵ From Zeami's "Nikkyoku santai ezū" as translated in Mark Nearman, "Kyakuraika: Zeami's Final Legacy for the Master Actor," in *Monumenta Nipponica* (Vol. 35, No. 2, 1980), p. 188.

⁶ See Zeami's "Kakyō" in Nose Asaji (ed.), *Zeami jūrokubushū hyōshōku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1940–44), Vol. 1, pp. 375, 378.

JAPANESE NOH DRAMA

The flower (*hana*) . . . blossoms from out of the performer's technique (*waza*) . . . The flower is the mind and its seed the technique. The ancient master (Hui-neng) says: "The ground of the mind contains many seeds. All of them sprout completely in the universal rain. If one suddenly realizes the mind of the flower, the fruit of bodhi (enlightenment) matures of itself."⁷

To say this not only underlines the importance of training in the forms or techniques of the art, but simultaneously offers an example of the actor's body faith whereby the body of forms acts as container and vehicle for pursuing the "flowers" of this art. As with many of the artistic Ways (*dō*) in Japan, spiritual cultivation (*shugyō*) in the religio-aesthetic vocation begins in the forms (*kata*) and the techniques (*waza*) of the art, continues in highly disciplined training (*keiko*), and blossoms in the mind-flower (*hana*) of profound beauty (*yūgen, myō*).

Ethos Dis-membered, Mythos Remembered

As others have pointed out, genuine religious ritual must break open an ethos in order to remember mythos and evoke a transformative experience. The word ethos, in this context, might best be characterized as representing the customary shape of things, both as the character and customs (cf. "ethical") of individuals and groups, and the guiding or motivating values and life-patterns. The word mythos, by comparison and contrast, can be understood as the enduring or ideal shape of things, of "the patterns of meaning and valuation expressive of the basic truths and enduring valuations of a people's historic experience characteristically expressed through the medium of high symbolism (as poetry, art, or drama)."⁸ Ethos and mythos can therefore be seen as two distinct but interpenetrating "realms" operative within human valuation and culture, with ethos representing ordinary or "para-

⁷ From Zeami's "Kadensho" as translated in Yuasa, *The Body*, pp. 105f. Cf. Nose, *Zeami*, Vol. 1, p. 120. Zeami says, here, "*hana wa kokoro, tane wa waza naru beshi.*" ("Flower is mind, seed is technique.") Cf. William LaFleur, *The Karma of Words* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 126f.

⁸ *Webster's Third International Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam Co., 1965), p. 1497. See this same source on "ethos," p. 781.

PILGRIM

mount" reality, and mythos representing non-ordinary, enduring (especially sacred) reality.

Such a distinction is, of course, nothing new, and many others have pointed to it in discussions of the nature of religion. Two particularly interesting analyses, however, might be helpful in clarifying what is meant by ethos and mythos in the context of *noh*, and seeing just how ethos is "dis-membered."

Herbert Fingarette, in his provocative study of Confucius, seems to have a very similar distinction in mind when discussing "memory narratives" and "meaning narratives."⁹ Like ethos, memory narratives in human discourse provide or shape a "real" and ordinary/historical world out of living memory. Like mythos, meaning narratives in human discourse shape a parallel but transcendent "world" which provides a fundamental meaning for all aspects of life and are a source of true significance.

Fingarette's analysis is important to us for two reasons: Not only does it help explain the distinction between ethos and mythos, and underline the importance or significance of mythos, but it also introduces the narrative (storied) character of these realms as they appear in and to human experience. While I will not want to follow his use of memory below, I will want to invoke the two realms as given in narratives.

A second and similar kind of distinction can be found in Peter Berger's *The Heretical Imperative*.¹⁰ Here, ethos is described as "paramount reality" and mythos as a sacred order which breaks in upon the paramount reality in non-ordinary experience of *exstasis*. What Berger helps us understand is the fact that this apparently solid and massive paramount reality (or ethos) is extremely precarious. It is easily ruptured (dis-membered) in the experience of "other realities." When the latter realities are of sacred character to individuals or communities, they are religious (or mythos).

It is precisely here that the firsthand accounts of audience experience given above become crucial. Such accounts vividly capture the ex-

⁹ Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius—The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 65f.

¹⁰ Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980), pp. 35-37.

perience of a sacred order evoked in the performances of noh; the experience of mythos in and through a dis-membered ethos of everyday experience. The ritual character of noh lies in its ability to dis-member an ethos and remember a sacred mythos in the mind of performer and audience.

Poetic Reality and Dis-membered Ethos: While noh dis-members an ethos in a great variety of ways, not the least of which is the appearance of the fourfold mythos described below, a general comment applicable to all noh needs to be made: Neither the world of the noh plays themselves, nor the world of the theatrical performance of them, is a world of ethos, paramount reality, or memory narrative. Noh makes use of but in no way replicates an ethos of historico-descriptive reality. Its narratives are not the memory narratives of a descriptive and ordinary reality, and almost everything in its character, style, and performance is designed to break through such an ordinary reality by the creation of a poetic reality that Earle Ernest describes for even the most “contemporary” (*genzai*) noh plays as serving “the purpose of theater in creating the sense of felt life completely set off from the exigencies and involvements of everyday living.”¹¹

Thomas Hare seems to move in this direction, too, when he discusses the lyricism of Zeami's plays, with special reference to those of the *mugen* (“phantasmal”) type, and the “*renga*-like” progressions in much of the language and images of noh. After translating one example of the latter, in fact, he says: “This is not an easy passage, and does not seem to lead anywhere if read as discursive narrative.”¹²

The analogy to *renga* (“linked verse”) is apt: Not only is *renga* a poetic form, but its very process is a continual establishment/dis-establishment of narrative orders—especially of the discursive or historico-descriptive sort. Like noh it evokes a poetic reality of “felt life” in and with the continual dis-membering of discursive narratives. The analogy only breaks down to the degree that noh *does* contain narratives—albeit not historico-descriptive ones. Even then, however, the aesthetic or poetic power of noh is already dis-membering ethos.

¹¹ Earle Ernest, “The Noh,” p. 12.

¹² Thomas Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), pp. 236–242, 118, 77. Cf. Chifumi Shimazaki, *The Noh: Volume One, God Noh* (Tokyo: Hinoki Shoten, 1972), pp. xiff.

PILGRIM

Mythos Remembered: The creation of a poetic reality may dis-member an ethos but it remains for mythos remembered to dis-member and re-member in a religious context, and establish noh as a religious, ritual art. The creation of a poetic reality within a dis-membered ethos may not, by itself, be sufficient to establish the *religious* character of this ritual form. Mythos must be remembered in and through meaning narratives and the performative or presentational power of the experienced event; mythos must be received and recognized as having “enduring value” and sacred character within a community of discourse. For noh, this mythos appears in four distinct but mutually dependent and interpenetrating types.

1. ***Theophany:*** Quoting the French playwright Paul Claudel, Nakamura Yasuo suggests that “in Western drama, something happens; in Noh, someone appears.”¹³ Such a comment captures exactly both a fundamental difference between noh and most of Western drama, and one most elemental characteristic of noh: The primary purpose of noh is not to tell what happened but to create a religio-poetic effect and to be the occasion for the appearance of the *shite* (main character). As seen in the noh mask, moreover, the *shite* of various plays are overwhelmingly non-ordinary beings from sacred worlds, and their appearance constitutes a theophanic event.

This should not be surprising, of course, since both the historical and mythological foundations of noh are in theophanic traditions. Mythologically noh sees itself based in the appearance and dance of the *kami* of Kasuga Shrine via the Yōgō pine tree—a tradition still honored by the ubiquitous pine painted on the back wall of noh stages, and by the standard opening song (*shida*) dedicated to this *kami*.¹⁴ Behind that, of course, is the dance of the shamanistic goddess Uzume in classical Shinto mythology—a dance which was not only itself theophanic, but functioned to create the theophany of the goddess Amaterasu.

Historically, as E. T. Kirby has shown, both noh and *kagura* share a common antecedent in shamanic possession and ritual performance. The primary forms of noh, importantly including the stage itself and the basic structure of most plays, provide evidence of this tradition in which *kami* or spirits of the dead are called to be present and bring

¹³ Nakamura, *Noh*, pp. 29f.

¹⁴ Shimazaki, *The Noh*, p. 9.

JAPANESE NOH DRAMA

their blessings. The stage replicates the ancient shrine structure called *himorogi*, complete with pine trees for descent, a bridge for coming to this world, a cleaned out stone "garden," and a "mirror room" where mask/spirit possession takes place. The structure of the plays themselves shows the shamanic search for *kami* or spirits, the bringing forth, the seeking answers to questions, and the sending off. More specifically, the five groups of plays, categorized according to the nature of the *shite*, can be seen to imply the three basic types of shamanic possession: *kamikuchi* (god or demon possession), *shikuchi* (possession by spirits of the dead), and *ikikuchi* (possession by living souls).¹⁵

The *kami noh*, those featuring a *kami* as *shite* and here including "Okina," are only the most obvious plays representing the theophanic model. As *shugen* plays, or "congratulatory" plays prior to a day's program, they very clearly retain not only these shamanic/theophanic structures but a religious intention in their performance as well. As Shimazaki says:

Waki (or *kami*)-Noh . . . are religious in nature . . . Noh has developed from an entertainment during religious ritual offered to gods, and *waki*-Noh remains an integral part of the ritual . . . Deities in *waki*-Noh are all congenial to humans, appearing before pious visitors to tell the stories of their shrines and give blessings on the land in songs and dance . . . Thus *waki*-Noh is religious, ceremonial, and felicitous in nature.¹⁶

The combined effect in the performance of *noh* is a "remembering" of this theophanic model as a sacred meaning narrative, or mythos, resonating deeply back through the Japanese ritual tradition (Shinto/folk) and cutting across religions as well in a pan-Japanese model for the ritual performing arts. The theophanic appearance and recital upstages, moreover, any narrative happening as the center of *noh*—including any story-line (and discursive meaning), dramatic tension, character development, or focus on ethos. The use of generic masks representing *shite* types rather than specific beings only heightens and

¹⁵ E. T. Kirby, "The Origin of Nô Drama," *Educational Theatre Journal*, #25 (Oct. 1973), pp. 269–84.

¹⁶ Shimazaki, *The Noh*, p. 87.

PILGRIM

underscores this fact. As Zeami says, "while noh is mime, it is *kagura* as well."¹⁷

2. *Sacred History*: While clearly overlapping with other elements in this fourfold mythos, one important and distinctive thread of meaning narrative can be identified and singled out for attention: This meaning narrative might be referred to as a distinctive sacred history in which selected historical/literary "events" constitute paradigmatic, sacred, and culture-defining models. Primarily this means the literary/historical traditions out of the later Heian period, but also folk traditions in oral history. Closely related is the presence in many plays of legendary and historical/cultural heroes or divine figures such as Saigyō, Komachi, Atsumori or the heavenly maiden in "Hagoromo." The "gods" of this sacred history are poetic gods out of *Genji monogatari*, *Heike monogatari*, and the poetic and folk tale traditions of China and Japan. These meaning narratives define sacred geographies, times and seasons, places, and the exploits of actors in a second-order mythology. Moreover, and in large part, they define what it means to be Japanese.

The choice of these literary sources, and the shaping of themes to explicate them, should not be surprising. Not only is the late Heian period a definitive high point in the classical culture of Japan, but Zeami pressed fifteenth century noh in the direction of the sophisticated, neo-Heian cultural/aesthetic models of his day. Music and dance in a context of poetic elegance and depth (*yūgen*) were clearly his interest. Feminine, courtly, and poetic characters and styles were his preference, and even his warriors (and demons) are adapted to this model.¹⁸ It is no wonder that noh not only picks up this particular tradition but perpetuates it as well.

This element of mythos implies not only enduring (sacred) values, but a fundamental Japanese paradigm or 'way of seeing' as at least one primary element in a Japanese Way. The enduring values are religio-aesthetic values, and the meaning narratives that carry them break in upon ethos with easy recognition. As with any sacred history, since it

¹⁷ From Zeami's "Sarugaku dangi" as translated by Masaru Sekine, *Ze-ami and His Theories of Noh Drama* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smyth, 1985), p. 29.

¹⁸ Cf. Hare, *Zeami's Style*, p. 211.

has already told us who we are before, it is easily “remembered” when brought before us again.

3. *Religions*: The clear presence of the Japanese religions (*shakyō*) within the text and contexts of noh constitutes a third aspect in the fourfold mythos. While this aspect easily overlaps with both the above, it is sufficiently distinct to warrant separate treatment.

The religions as mythos features a remembering of the history, symbols, beliefs, and practices of the religions of Japan, especially Buddhism, Shinto, and folk religion. One finds the traces of these religions primarily in the texts of the plays as they explicitly reference or implicitly suggest this variety of religious symbol systems, and their presence permeates the repertoire. Little more needs to be said in this context since much exemplary work has already been done to show this presence. In any event, the specific content of the Buddhist or Shinto presence in the plays is less our concern than the fact that, together, their presence constitutes a mythos or sacred meaning narrative—assuming, of course, that such symbols continue to live within a particular community of discourse, and truly carry enduring values and provide meanings of significance.

4. *Presentational Power*: This aspect of a fourfold mythos is less a distinctive fourth in a typology of meaning narratives than a religio-aesthetic ground upon which everything else takes place. This is not a mythos of specific representational symbols remembered out of a sacred past, but a religio-aesthetic power discovered (experienced) in/through the performance itself—a power literally presented before one in the experienced event. As “presented before one,” it does not point beyond itself to some meaning (as does a representational symbol) but draws one into the immediate experience or creates an experienced effect by virtue of its “presentational power.”

This power is very closely related to the poetic reality and “felt life” already discussed above, but now can be more specifically identified as *religious* and as directly related to the nature of acting and performance—especially when discussed in terms of the theories of Zeami as they continue to permeate the ideals of the tradition. Before turning to Zeami, however, two other important elements need to be briefly referenced: One is the power of the poetic reality already discussed and the other is the power of stylized, ritual gesture in general.

PILGRIM

Poetic reality dis-members not only ethos but works generally and “*renga-like*” to deconstruct representational, abstracting, ideational reality-constructs. It draws one into immediate, intersubjective experience where even representational symbols function presentationally. This is especially true where the symbols are primarily found within a poetic utterance (the language and vocal delivery of *noh*), and the primary genres of performance are music and dance (not rhetoric and oratory). As we shall see later,¹⁹ Zeami suggests that *noh* should open the “spiritual ears and eyes” of the audience by its presentational power. The spiritual ear, he says, is opened primarily by the choice of compositional forms (text, music, choreography). That is, the proper (poetic) elements must already be in place in the composition of the plays themselves in order to evoke a poetic reality in the performance. The presentational power of *noh* owes much, therefore, to the poetic/aesthetic character of the compositional forms themselves as they serve to draw one into immediate presentational experience.

There is also, however, intrinsic presentational power in the highly stylized, impeccably performed ritual gesture. On this score, both Shinto and Confucianism contribute importantly to the presentational power of *noh*: *Noh* arises out of a Shinto milieu and history in which ritual gestures shape a Shinto paradigm, and impeccable (pure) ritual is central. The power and function of such gestures is not merely in their representational meaning but also in the raw, effective, presentational power of the stylized, ritual gesture. Similarly, and as others have pointed out, Confucian ideals related to the importance of ceremonial forms exerted considerable influence on *noh* performance styles during the Tokugawa period. Such influences only increased the actual presentational power of *noh* as Zeami envisioned it; for example, by stressing a more stylized gesture conducive to the *yūgen* effect.²⁰

These factors must be at least noted in passing lest we think Zeami's Buddhist theories are the only religious influences on the presentational power of *noh*. Zeami's influence is great, of course, as are the Buddhist models. However, both can be overestimated, especially if they exclude a broader picture.

¹⁹ See p. 67 and fn. 29.

²⁰ E.g., see Yoshinobu Inoura and Toshio Kawatake, *The Traditional Theater of Japan* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 1971), pp. 103f.

JAPANESE NOH DRAMA

One way to begin with Zeami is to point to the underlying notion that to pursue the vocation of noh, and the action that is crucial to it, is to pursue the Buddhist path. The following quote seems to bear this out:

The universe is a vessel producing the various things, each in its own season: the flowers and leaves, the snow and the moon, (etc.) . . . By making these things the essence of your artistic vision, by becoming one with the universal vessel, and by securing your vessel in the great *mu* style of the Way of emptiness (*kūdo*), you will attain ineffable flowers (*myōka*) of this art.²¹

This, in one summary statement, is Zeami's fundamental point for our purposes. The ineffable (*myō*) flowers (*hana*) point to the experienced effect on the part of the audience; securing one's vessel in the *mu* style and the Way of emptiness refers to the actor's attaining buddha-mind in the midst of performance; and becoming one with the universal vessel and the universe of things means the multiple (poetic) forms and artistic images that constitute this art. The Way of noh is the Way of buddha and, "Zeami's paradigm for an actor's training is the spiritual training of a Buddhist acolyte, and his views on the psychology of acting and audience response are inextricably tied to Buddhist conceptions of the mind and its working."²²

Zeami's purpose, here, is clearly artistic/aesthetic and not merely religious, however. The individual attainment of some kind of Buddhist "salvation" is not so much the point as attaining an effective, presentational power by which the flowers bloom on the stage. Zeami makes this very clear in discussing his five wisdoms (*gochi*) of dance (and the master actor):²³ 1) gesture wisdom (*shuchi*), 2) dance wisdom (*buchi*), 3) united performance wisdom (*sōkyokuchi*), 4) gesture-

²¹ From Zeami's "Yūgyaku shūdō kempūsho" in Nose, *Zeami*, Vol. 1, pp. 573f. (Author's translation.)

²² Arthur Thornhill, Review of *On the Art of Nō Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami* by J. T. Rimer and Masakazu Yamazaki (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), in *Journal of Asian Studies* 44/2 (Feb. 85), p. 406.

²³ My discussion of the five wisdoms is based on Zeami's "Kakyō" in Nose, *Zeami*, Vol. 1, p. 303. (Cf. Nearman, "Kyakuraika," pp. 190f.)

PILGRIM

featured-style wisdom (*shutai-fuchi*), and 5) dance-featured-style wisdom (*butai-fuchi*). Whatever Zeami's specific meaning is for each of these, the general inspiration of Buddhist thought is clear in the use of the word *chi* (*prajñā*, "wisdom") and in the apparent adaptation of a generalized Mahayana typology of wisdoms, ranks, or truths (as in the Tendai *sandai* or "three truths"). The adaptation is crucial, however, for wisdom is seen as functioning specifically and importantly within the context of artistic performance: Gesture wisdom (#1) is buddha-mind as it functions with the specific forms/gestures/movements of dance; dance wisdom (#2) is buddha-mind as it functions intrinsically in *mu* and makes things "move" even when there is no movement (*mushu*) (as 'a bird floating on the wind'); and united performance wisdom (#3) is a gesture/dance wisdom simultaneously realized and performed in co-dependent mutuality (*sō*)—i.e., in middle (*chū*) or empty (*kū*) awareness.

The first three wisdoms together are, like the Tendai *sandai* formulation, an articulation of enlightenment within relative, absolute, and middle perspectives. As Zeami says, #1 is *u* (being, form, thing), #2 is *mu* (no-thing, empty, *kū*), and #3 is a co-dependent mutuality (*sō*) of *u* and *mu* in an *umu* style (*umufu*). (This is no doubt exactly the same as his *umuchudō*—"u/mu middle Way"—in "Kyūi-shida,"²⁴ and his use of the *Heart Sutra* formulation "form is emptiness, emptiness form" in "Yūgaku shūdō kempū sho."²⁵) These three are a true performance wisdom which Zeami says produces a "fascinating" (*omoshiroi*) effect. It only remains, in the discussion of five wisdoms, to indicate that for Zeami the male roles in the plays emphasize the gesture as their essential style (wisdom #4) while the female roles (especially the heavenly maiden) emphasize the dance (*bu* as *mu*) as their essential style (wisdom #5).

In these and other formulations Zeami makes very clear that, presuming all the techniques and forms are impeccably done, it is Mind that constitutes the true spiritual power (*shinriki*) and issues in *omoshiroki*, *yūgen*, and *myō* as the true flowers of the art. It is, for example,

²⁴ Nose, *Zeami*, Vol. I, p. 573.

²⁵ Nose, *Zeami*, Vol. I, p. 527. Zeami quotes the *Heart Sutra* exactly in saying "shikisoku zekū, kūsoku zeshiki."

this Mind that is the *naishin* ("inner mind"), *anshin* ("detached mind"), *mushin*, or *isshin* ("one mind") which "links all one's powers" and makes the "moments of no action" (*senu tokoro, ma*) the most fascinating.²⁶ It is upon this Mind that the actor rides when he "dances the dance, is danced by the dance, (and) manifests both surface and depth. He is like a bird among the flowers who glides upon a spring breeze. He creates the appearance of the miraculous (*myō*) and attains a total coordination and unification of all aspects of performing at all levels."²⁷

Such an art creates an ineffable effect (*myō*) of profound/sublime beauty (*yūgen*) and thereby breaks through ethos with presentational power and opens up an ecstatic, spiritual space/time "in between" (*ma*).²⁸ Specifically, Zeami refers to it as an "ear opening" (*kaimon*) and "eye opening" (*kaigen*) effect on the audience²⁹—the former being largely due to the beauty of text and the latter to the spiritual strength (*shinriki*) of the actor. (The eye opening is particularly important for us since it not only relates directly to the actor's *shinriki* and the production of an ineffable feeling (*myōkan*), but the same term is used in Buddhism to refer to the finishing touches on a buddha statue whereby the eyes, and hence "life," are given to it!)

The presentational power is thus not a meaning narrative or a mythos in the usual sense, but a religio-aesthetic power within the performance itself that creates a profound effect on the audience. For the audience it is not so much that something is remembered, but rather that something is (vaguely) 'brought to life' (*kaigen*) before them which empowers *all* the elements of the art and enlivens the sacred character of the whole event.

²⁶ From "Kakyō," in Nose, *Zeami*, Vol. I, p. 375f.

²⁷ From Zeami's "Nikkyoku santai ezu" as translated in Nearman, "Kyakuraika," p. 188. (Cf. Nose, *Zeami*, Vol. I, p. 500.)

²⁸ The possible relationship of *ma* to noh is explored in Richard Pilgrim, "Ma: A Cultural Paradigm," *Chanoyu Quarterly* (No. 46), pp. 32-53. Cf. Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives* (New York/Tokyo: Weatherhill/Tankōsha, 1983), pp. 73f.

²⁹ "Nōsakusho" in Nose, *Zeami*, Vol. I, p. 643f. (Cf. Rimer and Yamazaki, *On the Art*, pp. 158f.)

PILGRIM

Re-membering

One of the descriptions of noh experience that we began with indicated that even after the play was over, "the audience sat there in the gathering darkness, as though at vespers. Something vaguely religious, ritualistic, had happened, was still happening." Later, the same commentator says, "(Great) theater exists when the audience's sense of what life is, or could be like, is validated and intensified by the performance."³⁰ Two important but distinct kinds of transformation seem to be indicated here, and both might be said to be the result of a "remembering" by which mythos and ethos merge and/or mutually infuse each other.

In the first place the infusion of mythos, as the sacred and enduring values and meaning narratives of a culture, certainly 'validates and intensifies' a sense of what life is and could be like. As such, noh—like many rituals—revalidates and resanctifies specific meanings and cultural orderings—socially, religiously, etc. Noh certainly resanctifies and perpetuates, for example, much of what it means to be Japanese, if not human more generally. Insofar as the first three mythoi discussed above live for contemporary Japanese audiences, for example, they infuse, resanctify and reinvigorate a general Japanese sense of what life is and could be like.

In the second place, but more subtly perhaps, the remembering of mythos and ethos in noh, especially through the vehicle of its poetic reality and presentational power, brings one to a still point in between (*ma*) mythos/ethos where, even after the performance is over, something is "still happening." This is an effect of what Joanne Waghorne calls the "poetic gods":

The gods of the poets are not eternally changeless in form. They move within time by being themselves mutable and changing. Their image lives in the moment, not in a transcendent reality . . . These gods live in a world of sight, sound, and taste . . . in fleeting moments of temporal existence. The gods of the poets are gods of polytheism: an ancient

³⁰ Ernest, "The Noh," pp. 8, 10.

JAPANESE NOH DRAMA

multiplicity of forms, the overwhelming variety of divine presences.³¹

That is, noh may resanctify mythological/ethological orders, but more immediately in experience it directly invokes the poetic gods as divine presences brought before one with poetic and presentational power. Here, noh "works" much as Heidegger suggests for art in general:

The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this deconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the art work, the truth of what is has set itself to work . . . There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings. This open center is therefore not surrounded by what is, rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know.³²

That which is "still happening" even after the event is over is a moment or instance of *ma* ("betweenness") or *fudosei* ("mediance"):

The Japanese propensity for fusing the subject with its environment has been clearly expressed in religion, aesthetics, and thought . . . What is privileged . . . is the direct feeling of reality beneath and before its verbal/logical representation. Words should render this feeling rather than impose upon it (and thus upon reality) the subject's unified (egocentric/logocentric) representational world. There should be no gap between things and words, nature and man . . . This inclination obviously favors a poetical rather than a rational attitude toward the world.³³

³¹ Joanne Waghorne, "A Body for God: An Interpretation of the Nature of Myth Beyond Structuralism," *History of Religions*, (Vol. 21, No. 1, 1981), pp. 46f.

³² Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 39, 53.

³³ Augustin Berque, "Some Traits of Japanese *Fudosei*," in *Japan Foundation Newsletter* XIV/5 (Feb. 1987), pp. 3f.

PILGRIM

This lighting, this “working,” this *ma* and *fūdosei* is a heightened moment of poetic reality within a distinctively Japanese context of religio-aesthetic form and sensitivity. It is a moment of “coalescence”³⁴ in which things “come together” in immediate, presentational, “ontological” experience; and a vague but distinct content is delivered. It is a pause that re-freshes.

Noh opens up worlds, transforms them, and delivers a content. As ritual, noh is a paradigmatic gesture in a culture of poetic gestural paradigms.

³⁴ See Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 150–170; and Thomas Martland, *Religion as Art* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1981), pp. 87–108.