

## Buddhism in Noh

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It is common knowledge that both Shinto and Buddhism may be found in Noh. Some plays present Japanese deities and some evoke thoughts of shamanistic ritual, while a great many are permeated with obviously Buddhist language. This paper will analyze the themes of the plays in terms of certain key ideas about the world, in order to describe the Buddhism which is characteristic of Noh.

### Earlier Definitions

In the past the Buddhism of Noh has been defined in two ways: as Amidism and as Zen. Arthur Waley distinguished the Buddhism of educated people and artists from that of the common people when he wrote: "It was in a style tinged with Zen that Seami wrote of his own art. But the religion of the Nō plays is predominantly Amidist; it is the common, average Buddhism of medieval Japan" (1957, p. 59). Waley included devotion to the *Lotus Sutra* in "Amidism," and it is hard to know whether Sir George Sansom subscribed to this nonstandard definition in his own summary of the subject:

There is no trace whatever of direct Zen influence upon the language or the sentiment of the Nō texts, whereas they abound in the ideas and terminology of the popular Amidism of the day. . . . The indirect influence of Zen, however, cannot be exaggerated. The producers and the actors worked primarily for an audience whose aesthetic standards were those of Zen, and whatever may be said of the literary content of the plays, their structure, the method and the atmosphere of their presentation were in full accordance with the canons of Zen taste (1962, p. 388).

Thus Sansom acknowledged the absence of recognizably Zen doctrine from the plays, and concurred with Waley's appraisal of the Buddhism of Noh as Amidism; but at the same time he stressed the importance of Zen for the whole art of Noh. Waley's and especially Sansom's distinction between Zen doctrine and Zen taste is useful, and raises problems that this paper cannot address. It would be difficult to define what is necessarily Zen about the aesthetics of Noh, but it would also be difficult to prove that Sansom overstated the case.

In the meantime, however, D. T. Suzuki left an overwhelming impression that the Buddhism of Noh is Zen through and through. He wrote, for example:

During [the Kamakura and Ashikaga periods, 1185-1333 and 1333-1568], the Zen monks were active in bringing Chinese culture into Japan and in preparing the way for its assimilation later on. Indeed, what we now regard as peculiarly Japanese was in the process of hatching during those periods. In them we may trace the beginnings of *haiku*, *nō-gaku*, theater, landscape gardening, flower arrangement, and the art of tea (1970, p. 39).

Therefore Suzuki could write of the play *Yamamba* ("Granny Mountains"): " 'Yama-uba' is one of the Buddhist plays thoroughly saturated with deep thought, especially of Zen. It was probably written by a Buddhist priest to propagate the teaching of Zen" (1970, p. 419). Suzuki must have had in mind the legend that *Yamamba* was written by the Zen master Ikkyū (1394-1481). But even if it was, the didactic writings by Ikkyū, or plausibly attributed to him, still reveal little about unmistakably Zen doctrine; and the same can be said of *Yamamba*, although the play undoubtedly says nothing with which Zen in a broad sense need disagree.

Both definitions of the Buddhism of Noh, as Amidism and as Zen, refer to schools of Buddhism which are prominently active in modern times. The essential teachings of Zen and of the popular Amidist sects founded by Hōnen (1133-1212) and Shinran (1173-1262) are current, easily available, quite easily learned, and undeniably important. It is no wonder that they should have been invoked to explain aspects of Japanese culture. But while devotion to Amida does appear in Noh, Amidism as a concerted faith has not struck the imagination of the West, and the statements about Amidism by Waley and Sansom seem largely to have been forgotten. Zen, on the other hand, has been wonderfully publicized by Suzuki and many others, and has drawn fascinated attention. Consequently most people who know about Noh do not distinguish between doctrine and taste as Sansom did, but take it for granted that the Buddhism of Noh is simply Zen.

Most Buddhist statements and expressions scattered through the texts of Noh support neither Amidism nor Zen. Moreover there are two particular difficulties with these schools. The first is that while Shinto deities are prominent in Noh, neither Zen nor the Amidist sects are concerned with the Japanese gods. A passage in the play *Yōrō* says, "Gods and Buddhas only differ as do water and waves."<sup>1</sup> This is not a Zen or an Amidist position, though it is typical of Noh.

The second difficulty is that while the content of Noh, whether religious or literary, is conservative, Zen and the Amidist sects were relatively recent in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the time when Noh was new. Noh in those days was a widely popular art, not normally a vehicle for religious innovation. Any religious position common in Noh was probably noncontroversial, and founded upon centuries of general acceptance. If so, then the Buddhism of Noh is to be sought not in schools that were barely emerging early in the middle ages (1185–1568), but in the Buddhism which was completely respectable when the middle ages began. This Buddhism is diverse, difficult of access, and withdrawn from the modern world. There are few apologists for it, and none at all for its old understanding with the Shinto gods.

### The Importance of Place

All Noh plays are precisely situated. Classical verse is full of the poetry of places and of place names, and strong interest in place may be found in much other writing of the centuries which precede the time of Noh; but it is remarkable that practically every Noh play contains a journey to a specific, named spot.

Most of the principal figures in Noh can be met only where they reside. The glad vision of the god of Sumiyoshi in *Takasago*, the melancholy dream of the girls of Suma in *Matsukaze* ("The Wind in the Pine"), and the horrifying recital by the lovers of Sano in *Funabashi* ("The Boat Bridge") are all elaborate evocations of places known in poetry. Other places are distinguished by their association with the death of a warrior. Still others, popular pilgrimage centers whose legends were famous, customarily advertised themselves with these legends. Thus *Chikubushima* celebrates the pilgrimage center of that name, a sacred islet in Lake Biwa; and *Ama* ("The Diver") promotes a temple named Shidoji on Shikoku.

The significance of place in Noh is heightened by the journey to the scene of the play. The recent arrival of the play's traveler ensures that one's own impressions will be fresh and strong. In *Nishikigi* ("The Brocade Trees"), for example, one tastes with the traveler the true flavor of the

village of Kefu and of the “narrow cloth” that is woven there. This flavor is conveyed by the man and woman whom the traveler meets there, two lovers who are forever together yet apart. If the traveler did not roam one would never visit Kefu; and one would know these lovers, if at all, only as figures in an old tale.

Often the traveler’s wayfaring follows naturally from the story of the play, as in *Ama* in which the minister Fujiwara no Fusasaki (681–737) goes down to Shikoku in search of his mother. In such cases one sees the key figure of the play through the eyes of a person whose karma has drawn him to the place.

However in many plays the traveler has no link with the place or with the person. If such a play presents a Shinto deity the traveler will normally be a Shinto priest, but in other plays of the sort he will typically be a Buddhist monk. The monk has no name, and the scene of the play is not his destination. He is simply passing through. In medieval Japan such religious rovers were normally attached to a home temple, and traveled far and wide either on personal pilgrimage to other holy sites, or to spread the fame and promote the fortune of their own establishment. Many engaged in ascetic practices either on their home mountain or on the mountains they visited; and these practices themselves constituted full acknowledgement of the power of place. One thing such religious wayfarers did was to pray wherever they went for the enlightenment of *muen-botoke* 無縁仏: the spirits of the dead who otherwise have no one in the world to pray for them. The dead absolutely required such prayers, as many Noh plays and medieval stories show, and the wayfarers did *muen-botoke* an essential kindness. Therefore it is natural that Noh associates these travelers with the appearance and the comforting of spirits attached to particular spots in the landscape of Japan.

### Elements of the Buddhism of Noh

The monks in Noh do not on the whole make an issue of sect, nor do any of the other figures in the plays. A few travelers specify that they belong to the Jishū, for example, a popular Amidist sect which began in the Kamakura period; but their sect affiliation, and their sharp consciousness of it, are atypical.

The two great Buddhist schools of Heian and Kamakura times were Shingon, whose chief center was Mt. Kōya, and Tendai, whose chief center was Mt. Hiei; and to these should perhaps be added the older Kegon (Hua-yen) and Hossō (Yogācāra) schools based respectively at Tōdaiji and Kōfukuji temples in Nara. In principle these schools disagreed sharply on one doctrinal issue or another, and political rivalry among them could be

fierce. It is not that the identity of a monk's home temple made no difference. However the "school" affiliation of a figure in Noh cannot usually be deduced from what we learn of his religious life. This is because a monk from almost anywhere could be doing almost any of the practices then common. Therefore the following summary will be about modes of faith or practice, but not about sects.

The Buddhism of Noh is composed of devotion to Amida (Amitābha), of faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, and of elements of esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教). By the Kamakura period Amida had been widely adored for centuries in Japan, both at Court and among the common people. Calling Amida's name was a practice anyone might do. There were communities of Amida devotees associated with many great temples, including Kōfukuji and Mt. Kōya. Most of their members were of modest rank in the religious life, and one may imagine some of the travelers of Noh as being from among them. There were also great lay gatherings to invoke Amida, like the one which is the setting for the play *Hyakuman*. On Mt. Hiei, devotion to Amida was linked in the daily liturgy to chanting the *Lotus Sutra*: Amida was invoked in the morning, and the *Lotus* chanted in the evening.

Faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, like devotion to Amida, had been prominent in Japanese Buddhism for centuries. The Tendai school considered that its teaching was founded upon the *Lotus*, but the *Lotus Sutra* was not at all confined to Tendai. Reciting the *Lotus* was an essential practice for a great many ascetics. En no Gyōja (fl. late 7th c.), the half-legendary founder of the mountain ascetic tradition known as Shugendō (修験道: "the way of cultivation of spiritual power"), is invariably depicted sitting under a bird-shaped crag which is Vulture Peak (Gṛdhrakūṭa, near modern Rajgir in north India), where the Buddha preached the *Lotus Sutra*. The Bodhisattva Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), who was venerated at a great many sacred mountain sites, is prominent in the *Lotus Sutra*. So is the Bodhisattva Fugen (Samantabhadra) who appears in the play *Eguchi*.

Many of the travelers in Noh seem to have been "upholders of the (*Lotus*) Sutra" (*jikyōsha* 持經者). When a spirit begs to hear "the Sutra," or declares its joy upon hearing "the Sutra," it is the *Lotus Sutra* which is meant. One could comfort a spirit also by invoking Amida, but there was a particularly intimate connection between the *Lotus Sutra* and the spirits of the dead as they hovered about the places where they were bound to earth. The Sutra promised release to the lowliest and most lost of beings, and it affirmed at the same time the sacredness of the place where it was spoken, whether by the Buddha or one of his followers, and whether upon Vulture Peak or elsewhere. It was the *Lotus*, more than any other sutra, which was ceremonially copied and buried on sacred mountains, or offered at the

shrines of Shinto deities.

Esoteric Buddhism was everywhere in Heian and Kamakura Japan. A monk in a Noh play may say he is from Mt. Kōya, but this does not necessarily make him more of an esoteric practitioner than if he came from elsewhere. Esotericism flavors Noh so thoroughly that few specific instances of its presence stand out. One finds a clear intuition that all things, animate or inanimate, are alive;<sup>2</sup> and that the seer and the world are not only of the same stuff, but thoroughly linked by correspondences of body, speech and mind (*sanmitsu* 三密, the “three mysteries”). Shugendo practices were deeply colored by esotericism. The traveler in *Nomori* (“The Watchman of the Plain”) is a mountain ascetic (*yamabushi* 山伏), hence a Shugendo practitioner, who encounters a magic mirror. The sight of what the mirror shows can be borne only by one with divine power, and the traveler therefore invokes the esoteric deity Fudō (Acala, “The Unmoving”). When he gazes into the mirror, his eyes are the eyes of Fudō. This is the Esoteric Buddhist principle of *sanmitsu kaji* 三密加持 in action:<sup>3</sup> by invoking the deity with body (*mudrā*), speech (*mantra*), and mind (contemplation) the traveler has become one with the deity.

An Esoteric Buddhist motif which stands out in Noh is that of the twin maṇḍalas, the *kongōkai* 金剛界 (Vajradhātu, “Diamond Realm”) and the *taizōkai* 胎藏界 (Garbhadhātu, “Womb Realm”). Although the iconography of this pair is exceedingly complex, the two describe complementary aspects of the cosmos and thus come to stand quite simply for wholeness: an apparent duality which is non-dual. Thus these maṇḍalas may be evoked, as at the end of the play *Fujisan* (“Mt. Fuji”), to describe the perfection of a sacred mountain; or they may even ornament, as in *Kin'satsu* (“The Golden Tablet”), the beneficent action of a god.

Shugendo and related matters deserve special note because mountain ascetics are so common among the travelers of Noh. If the traveler describes himself as a *kyakusō* 客僧 (“guest monk”) or speaks, for example, of Haguro, Kazuraki or Ōmine, one knows that he is a *yamabushi* for whom these sacred mountains are especially important. Such a man knows the *Lotus Sutra*, and various esoteric practices and rites. The abbot of his home temple will probably be a monk of high rank appointed from Mt. Kōya, Mt. Hiei or elsewhere, but the temple will be more directly run by a senior Shugendo adept who may be married.

Practitioners of this sort were often healers who worked, through a woman medium, with helping spirits (*gohō* 護法, “protectors”) and with ghosts of the living or the dead. By no means all were permanently identified with Shugendo as an institutionalized tradition, and a successful healer, in particular, could rise high in the formal Shingon or Tendai hierarchy.

Zōyo (1032–1116), for example, became abbot of Mt. Hiei. Spirits, ghosts, and divine visitations were recognized then as normal, if never as routine, and religious persons of all sorts encountered them. Myōe Shōnin (Kōben, 1173–1232), the traveler in *Kasuga ryūjin* (“The Dragon God of Kasuga”), was an eminent monk who attempted a revival of the Kegon school. However he was also a healer and visionary in touch with supernatural powers. One of these was the Kasuga deity, the Dragon God of the play.

### Elements of Landscape

Japan is a mountainous country, and the typical sacred place in the Japanese middle ages was a temple or shrine associated with a mountain. Therefore a mountain is the central element in the landscape of Noh. The other elements are the full moon, water, the water’s edge, and a pine tree. These appear in a great many plays.

The mountain need not be heroic or distinctive. It may be only a hill or a hillock, or a range of hills. *Yama* (“mountain”) in Japanese refers more to shape than to size, and it does not distinguish between singular and plural. The hills behind the beach at Suma serve in several plays just as well as Mt. Fuji in *Fujisan*; and so does the modest altitude of the island in *Chikubushima*.

Mountains in Japan were inhabited first by ancestral spirits who merged into a collective, divine presence, and this presence was worshipped by the living. In time, the concern with the afterlife characteristic of Buddhism led to the recognition of these mountains as the paradises of popular Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In fact one mountain could easily support more than one Buddhist paradise. The most popular general model of a magic mountain was neither Shinto nor Buddhist, however, but an item of Chinese myth. This was P’eng-lai (Jpn. Hōrai), the mountain island of the immortals. P’eng-lai is not a particularly common motif in Noh, but it was prominent in Japanese lore.

The full moon is a well-known emblem of enlightenment in Buddhism, but it had other associations too. The angel in *Hagoromo* (“The Feather Mantle”) is from the moon, and linked in the play with the Bodhisattva Seishi (Mahāsthāmaprāpta); but when she dances in the climactic scene she also

rains riches:  
prayers fulfilled,  
the realm replete,  
the seven treasures  
overflowing,

and so dispenses not only spiritual illumination but material plenty. Plenty was the object of countless prayers to all the gods, whose presence is here summed up by the moon. Moreover the Capital, the seat of the Sovereign, was also associated with the moon. The “moon-Capital” (*tsuki no miyako* 月の京) seems to have been imagined poetically either as the moon itself, or as a moon-illuminated mountain where the courtiers were “dwellers above the clouds” (*kumo no ue-bito* 雲の上人). The final scenes of most plays are danced under the moon.

The mountain of this landscape is bound to have streams running down it, and mountain streams certainly may occur in Noh. But more is made of the water below the mountain, which is ideally the sea. P’eng-lai rises from the ocean like a stone from an expanse of raked gravel, and even though it is not mentioned in *Chikubushima*, the rocky islet, rising from the broad waters of Lake Biwa, makes an unmistakable image of P’eng-lai. Mt. Fuji was called “the P’eng-lai of Japan,” and one has the impression that in this guise it somehow summed up all of Japan itself as a magic island in the sea. However the water below the mountain did not have to be so vast or encircling. The sea is present in many plays, but a stream (*Yōrō*), a small pond (*Nomori*), a well (*Izutsu*, “The Well-Curb”), a bucket of brine (*Matsukaze*) or even a wine cup (*Shōjō*, “The Wine Genie”) may all serve. What matters is that they should loom large in the mind’s eye, and that they should reflect the moon.

Many plays unfold beside this water under the hill. That is because the edge of the water is where human life is lived. The beings on high are not exactly human, nor are those in the deep. Though the reflected moon which shines up from the depths alludes to our inborn enlightenment, we do not usually consider that enlightenment attained, and, being aware of our own weakness, we do not usually consider those who have attained it to be quite like us.

In the world of Noh the typical dwellers both on the heights and in the depths are dragon or serpent beings. A dragon can live in an astonishingly small pool, and conventional language even for the Emperor is full of dragon imagery. The drama of *Hagoromo* is that the angel comes down from the moon to the beach below Mt. Fuji, and there has her feather mantle (her wings) stolen by a fisherman named White Dragon. To get it back she has to dance. Her experience is a summary of the human condition. A still more schematic account of this condition appears in the medieval *Chikubushima engi* (“History of Chikubushima”) where a huge “catfish” (*namazu*) is said to coil seven times around the island at the bottom of the lake. From the summit of the island a white snake descends to the water’s edge and lowers its head to drink. At that instant the “catfish” lifts its head to the



surface, takes the snake's head in its mouth, and pulls upon it (Hanawa 1928, *Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 2, p. 311). This is what happens at the margin of the water, where human beings suffer from the simultaneous pull of the heights and the depths.

The pine tree of the landscape of Noh stands at the water's edge. The angel first hung her mantle on a pine, whence the fisherman took it. Likewise the white snake of the island coils around a pine before it lowers its head to drink. The pine is well attested in Japan as a link between the heights and the zone where humans live. There are many such pines in Noh, but the most famous one is painted on the wall at the back of the stage. It is called "the pine of the appearance of the god" (*yōgō no matsu* 影向の松), and is traditionally identified with one at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara. A monk is reported to have seen the Kasuga deity dancing under the pine in the guise of an old man.<sup>4</sup> Pines like this link the planes of the world. The sound of the wind in their branches (*matsukaze* 松風) is a model of poetry and of communication, and a pine in Noh may in fact be treated as human. In *Jinen Kōji* ("Layman Selfsame"), for example, a young man dancing to secure release from his wicked captors likens himself to the pine of Karasaki which stands on the shore of Lake Biwa.

### Happy Affirmations of Non-duality

This dual world and man's correspondingly dual nature, with their heights and depths, are at once beautiful and painful. It is just because the problem is so absorbing that affirmations of non-duality are fundamental in Noh. There are so many of them, made in so many ways, that they are countless. Some are philosophical, others playful. Some are happy, and some are marked with suffering.

When the awesome old woman in *Yamamba* reflects that "form is emptiness," the hearer recognizes a phrase from the *Heart Sutra* and completes it himself: "and emptiness is form." This perfectly balanced statement sums up Buddhist *prajñāpāramitā* ("perfection of wisdom") thought, and its philosophical nature is obvious. But mute objects in Noh may convey a similar message, though their import is not obvious at all. What should one make of a forked staff?

The traveler in *Chikubushima* is a courtier who arrives at the island-shrine eager to worship there. A shrine attendant then comes forth and displays to the courtier, with great pride, the island's sacred treasures. One of these is a length of forked bamboo. The attendant does not comment on it, and the courtier does not ask about it. One might well wonder what makes it special.

There actually is a length of forked bamboo in a glass case in the present Chikubushima museum. It is labeled, "The staff of En no Gyōja." Therefore it is a kind of *mataburi*: the forked staff carried, fork downward, by mountain ascetics and even by mountain goblins (*tengu* 天狗). At sacred places frequented of old by beings of this sort, and where shrines and temples still flourish today, one may easily run across *mataburi*-shaped objects of greater size. These are twin-trunked evergreens which are visibly honored. A tree of this kind is described in Japanese as *aioi* 相生, "growing in co-dependence."

The most famous *aioi* pair in the classical tradition is celebrated in the play *Takasago*. This pair is a further elaboration of the single forked tree, for it consists of two distinct trees, widely separated. These are the "pine of Sumiyoshi" and the "pine of Takasago." Both grow by the sea. A complex of non-dual opposites is sustained by the material image of these two trees. The play shows that the Sumiyoshi pine is male and represents the present ("His Majesty of Engi, who dwells in the present age"); while the Takasago pine is female and the past ("the ancient time of the *Man'yōshū*"). Although the trees are "a whole province apart," the communication between them is nonetheless everlasting and complete, so that separation in space is mere appearance, and the gap between past and present likewise. As for their sex, the trees demonstrate the essential meeting of male and female. The Sumiyoshi pine turns out to be the god of Sumiyoshi who represents the idealized Sovereign himself; and the Takasago pine, who does not appear in the second half of the play, dissolves into the people and the land. Thus *Takasago* alludes to the sacred marriage of the Sovereign and his realm, who flourish forever in indivisible co-dependence.

*Chikubushima* presents for the courtier, and for us, the goddess Benzaiten (originally the Indian Goddess Sarasvatī) who resides high on the rocky island, and the Dragon God of Lake Biwa who lives in the water's depths. (A medieval painting of Benzaiten, also in the Chikubushima museum, shows the goddess beautifully adorned, and seated on a coiled white snake.) The play's theme is the conjunction of these two. The courtier himself announces it by singing as he approaches the island:

Reflections of green trees sink down,  
and fishes climb their branches;  
the moon dives beneath the lake,  
and the rabbit [of the moon] sports upon the waves.

This Chinese-style verse recalls the passage in the play *Kantan* where a young wanderer, miraculously become Emperor of Cathay, finds himself between a silver mountain in the east, over which hangs the sun, and a

golden mountain in the west, over which hangs the moon. The courtier in *Chikubushima* too, from the surface of the lake, sees two domains at once, each of which is the other's looking-glass world.

Moreover once the shrine attendant has displayed the forked staff, he next offers to show the courtier the "mystery of the island." This "mystery" turns out to consist of the attendant jumping off a high rock into the lake, whence he emerges sneezing. It is a puzzling moment. But when the Dragon God has risen from the lake and Benzaiten has come down from the summit, and both have danced, Benzaiten flies off again skyward, and the Dragon God leaps back from the same rock into the deep. Thus the "mystery of the island" is not someone jumping inexplicably off a rock, it is the best demonstration one man can make that above and below are non-dual.

Using an analogous play of reflections, *Nomori* demonstrates the non-duality of subject and object with marvelous ingenuity. The traveler, a *yamabushi*, meets an old man beside a pond known as *nomori no kagami* 野守の鏡, the "mirror of the watchman of the plain." The pond is located on Kasuga Plain, below the mountain of the Kasuga deity, and the old man is the watchman.

The watchman tells the *yamabushi* a story. Long ago, the Emperor was out hunting nearby when he lost his hawk. He then wandered until he came across the old man himself, then young. "Have you seen my hawk?" the Emperor asked. "Certainly," the watchman replied, "just look in the pond." The Emperor was perplexed but he looked in, and there the hawk was, deep in the water, perched on the high branch of a tree. As he recalls the moment the old man weeps, for then he was vigorous and, although humble, could exchange words man to man with the exalted Sovereign himself.

But the old man has meanwhile let it slip that the pond is not actually the "real" mirror of the watchman of the plain. The real mirror, it appears, belongs to a certain demon. The *yamabushi* immediately burns to get at that mirror and to look into it for himself. By-and-by the old man reveals himself, inevitably, as the demon in question, and holds the mirror forth. The *yamabushi*, lately so eager, recoils and averts his eyes, for he sees in the mirror more than he can face. However he gathers himself, calls on Fudō, and looks again. He now sees the universe before him, heaven and hell, in all six directions and to its outermost confines. His face is all the worlds.

At Murōji, a lovely temple whose history is deeply linked with Shingon Buddhism and with Shugendō, there is a twin-trunked evergreen with a sign in front of it that reads, "Two yet not two." What can one do but smile? Such a tree is like the worshipper's handclap at a Shinto shrine. It says nothing, but creates open space. A forked tree, two as one, shows the world whole; and in an undivided world the space is boundless.

### Bafflement

A forked tree would open no space, and evoke no smile, if the difference between good and bad, etc., were not so obvious. No one would stress that form is emptiness if form and emptiness were visibly the same. One whom duality baffles is Sakagami, in the play *Semimaru*. Sakagami is mad, and although she is an imperial princess, she roams the world restlessly as a profoundly philosophical outcast. In the play she visits her brother, Semimaru, who plays the *biwa* ("lute") in a hut at the top of a mountain pass. Semimaru cannot travel at all because he is blind.

Sakagami's name means at once "Upside-Down Hair" and "God of the Slope." Both are perfectly suitable. Instead of falling normally her hair grows straight up; and her life is a procession of quite material ups and downs. She says:

How extraordinary it is that so much before our eyes is upside down. Flower seeds buried in the ground rise up to grace the branches of a thousand trees. The moon hangs high in the heavens, but its light sinks to the bottom of the countless waters. I wonder which of these should be said to go in the proper direction, and which is upside down?

I am a princess, yet I have fallen,  
 And mingle with the mass of common men;  
 My hair, rising upward from my body,  
 Turns white with the touch of stars and frost:  
 The natural order or upside down?  
 How amazing that both should be within me!  
 (Transl. by Susan Matisoff in Keene 1970, p. 107)

Sakagami's flowers "which rise up to grace the branches of a thousand trees" are described in other plays as manifesting the "upward aspiration to enlightenment" (*jōgu bodai* 上求菩提). Thus their upward aspiration is a counterpart to the descent of moonlight deep into the waters. Moreover since the flowers are conventionally of spring, and the moon of fall, the pair also allude to the seasons and to time. Pretty as all this is, however, Sakagami is still very confused.

There is a passage in an esoteric *yamabushi* text which also starts from a question about duality. Like Sakagami's answers to her own question, the answer the passage gives is unlikely to produce much beside further bemusement. It puts the whole problem in terms of *yin* and *yang*, but otherwise the structure of its thought is strikingly like Sakagami's own.

The passage is from *Buchū kanjō honki* 峰中灌頂本軌 (“Treatise on initiations in the Ōmine mountains”), written in 1254. The rhetorical questioner asks, “Regarding the truth that the potential and the produced [for example, seed and fruit] are non-dual, does one bring them into non-duality, or are they non-dual already?” To this the writer replies:

Regarding cold and heat, what we call “cold” is cold endowed with maleness. “Heat” is heat endowed with femaleness. By means of female heat, male cold rises, and thus the two produce a child. The nature of fire is to rise, the nature of water is to fall. What is called the male thought-power (*nenriki* 念力) is *yin* and water; it is cold. . . . Further, female thought-power is *yang* and fire; it is heat. . . .

When heaven and earth parted, the male water was heaven, cold and *yin*; the female fire was earth, heat and *yang*. . . . The male cold turns to ice, and becomes bone. The female heat, the *yang* breath, conjoins with this and thus becomes flesh. . . . Therefore the white bones are concealed (*yin*) within; and the red flesh stands forth (*yang*) without, and its color appears. . . .

Furthermore there is the deep mystery of male *yang* and female *yin*. It is the profound question of the reversed distinction between *yin* and *yang*. . . . According to the secret oral transmission, the female organ enters, in a counterpart manner, into the male organ. When man and woman conjoin they insert the male organ into the female organ. At this time there is likewise something which enters the male from the female organ. When the male enters the female, the female organ is *yin* and the male is *yang*. Hence this [moment] is the beginning of the reversal of *yin* and *yang*. Those who do not know this profound truth cannot achieve the contemplation which is the identity of subject and object (*nyūga ganyū kan* 入我我入觀).<sup>5</sup>

The identity of subject and object—of the seer and the seen—is just what the *yamabushi* grasps in *Nomori*, and although he does not do so by any method to be avoided in polite conversation, he would recognize the theme of this text very well. The play of opposites is dizzying. Cold and heat, male and female, red and white, heaven and earth seem to reflect each other into infinity, and with a startling physicality. Since canonical Buddhist texts, Chinese rhetoric, and classical Japanese discourse all play with polarities in various ways, it is impossible to tell whether the tradition of this text in particular might have had any direct influence on Noh. However the passage

is not much more uncouth, though it is less grand, than Granny Mountains, the old woman of *Yamamba*.

### The Thirst to Rise and the Descent of Grace

Granny Mountains,

... whose hair  
sprouts as snowy weeds,  
whose pupils  
shine like stars,

is incomprehensibly diverse, and easily terrifying. She lives deep in the mountain wilderness. According to one theory explained in the play she is made of acorns, walnuts, toadstools, vines, balls of pine resin, indescribable trash, and a temple gong. Her existence recalls that of Sakagami, for she roams endlessly from peak to peak, riding the "clouds and waters."

The traveler of the play is a dancer from the Capital whose sobriquet is also "Granny Mountains." She is on a pilgrimage, and her way lies across the high mountains. The dancer is told that there are three ways over these mountains: "High Road, Low Road, and the Upward Trail." "The Upward Trail," she is particularly informed, "was made by the Buddha himself, and traveling it puts one in touch with the Buddha's own inner illumination." Therefore despite the difficulty of this path the dancer decides to take it. On the way she meets Granny Mountains, who in a magnificent sermon on her own nature answers Sakagami, and no doubt the dancer, far better than *Buchū kanjō honki*. She says:

Lift of dharma-nature peaks  
displays the upward urge  
to perfect knowledge;  
plunge of gorges without light  
shows downward saving grace  
that touches the golden disk,  
the ground of all.

Thus she affirms that nothing is permanently potential or produced, right side up or upside down. Instead the abyss reaches upward while heaven graciously descends. The play of these two is the world, and it is there for anyone to see in the mountains which are the form of the world. And Granny Mountains continues:

Yes, see me once  
as other than human,

and I who am cloud  
 screening here from yonder  
 shift my form:  
 the true nature of things  
 changes a while,  
 and as one thought  
 transmutes existence,  
 I turn demon,  
 come to fill your gaze.  
 Yet when you see  
 that true and false are one,  
 then "Form is emptiness"  
 is obvious.  
 For once there is  
 a Buddha's Law,  
 there is a world's law;  
 once suffering,  
 supreme knowledge;  
 once Buddha,  
 then all beings;  
 and once all beings,  
 Granny Mountains.  
 Willows are green,  
 flowers red, you know . . .

So things are simply as they are, however one may puzzle about them, and  
 Granny Mountains herself follows from the Buddha's eternal enlighten-  
 ment. But however true this may be, it does not necessarily ease the mind.  
 Sakagami is still confused, the dancer's pilgrimage is still a hard road, and  
 Granny Mountains still sings,

Well then an ill way,  
 Granny Mountain's  
 rounds of the mountains, made in pain!

### The Non-Duality of Suffering

The moon in Noh is often comforting, reminding the viewer as it does of a  
 loftiness and profundity far beyond his commonplace preoccupations. In its  
 nightly course westward, to sink behind the mountains' rim, it may recall the  
 Buddha Amida whose paradise is in the west, and whose saving grace is  
 infinite.

Ki no Tsurayuki (868?–945?) may have had Amida in mind when he wrote this verse “on seeing the moon reflected in a pond”:

One without second  
 I had thought it,  
 yet in the watery deep—  
 no mountain rim—  
 rises now the moon.  
 (*Kokinshū* no. 881; Saeki 1958, p. 279)

The motif, so common in Noh, is developed elaborately in the play *Ama*.

*Ama* first intimates that the moon is the traveler himself, who has come down to a remote shore from the exalted Capital; then it likens the moon’s reflection to the priceless pearl that the Dragon Girl of the cosmic ocean offers to the Buddha in the “Devadatta” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. The play leaves no doubt that the woman diver (*ama* 海女) who brought up the play’s magic jewel sacrificed her life to do so. For the diver, as for Sakagami and the mountain ascetic, these matters may require physical as well as spiritual abandonment of self.

In *Ama* Fujiwara no Fusasaki goes in search of his *ama* mother. When he gets to the shore where he has heard she lives, he meets an *ama* to whom he immediately addresses a peculiar request: he asks her to dive down and remove the seaweed which offends his gaze by obscuring the reflected image of the moon. She does not protest. On the contrary, she answers that long ago a woman like herself did indeed dive to the bottom of the sea to rescue a magic jewel. This jewel had been a gift to Japan from the Emperor of Cathay. It was clear and round, and no matter how one turned it, one saw in it the Buddha’s face. This jewel had fallen into the sea dragon’s clutches. To rescue it the woman had to dive into the deep, cut open her breast, and hide the jewel at her heart as she fled upward from the dragon. No wonder the Dragon Girl of the *Lotus Sutra* died as soon as her offering was made, to pass instantly through a male rebirth into enlightenment. Her gift was her life. Moreover the diver’s jewel and the Dragon Girl’s pearl are to the great Stupa of the *Lotus Sutra* vision as the moon’s reflection to the moon.

So dramatic a story has great power, but one might still hope for a more expansive thoughtfulness in the telling. The images are strong, and the diver’s suffering heroic. But could they not be more amply set forth? Nowhere does a suffering being caught between height and abyss speak more beautifully or more wisely than the harlot in the play *Eguchi*.

This harlot keeps a brothel in the port town of Eguchi. She appears to the traveler with her fellow singing girls, making music in a boat which rides on the moonlit waters of an estuary. In her song she laments their estate:



Oh, it hurts to ponder  
this our reward for lives gone by!

Yet she delivers from her boat a sermon on the human condition which she knows so well, and notes that despite our best efforts at philosophy, we still go astray:

Yes, plants and trees  
that have no heart,  
human beings  
gifted with feeling:  
which of these  
shall evade sorrow?  
So we reflect,  
yet are at times,  
stained with love's hue . . .  
The heart's fond pangs,  
the mouth's own words,  
turn to links  
with wrongful clinging . . .  
for all things seen,  
all things heard,  
turn to the heart's confusion.

Yet the harlot continues as one who sees all this whole:

Wonderful!  
On the great sea  
of truth perfectly contained,  
winds of the five dusts  
and the six desires  
never blow;  
yet waves of the real,  
linked in sequence,  
rise each and every day.

The "great sea of truth perfectly contained" (*jissō muro no taikai* 実相無漏の大海) may be imagined as a shining ocean of indeterminate expanse. One would expect it to be quite smooth, but on the contrary it is furrowed with waves. These waves have to do with the chain of causation which creates the sensible world, the world of the passions. It is remarkable that the great sea is tossing and heaving, because it cannot be touched by any turbulence associated with the impure senses. If it were so touched, it would not be

“perfectly contained.” Since it is “perfectly contained,” the waves do not rise because of any impurity. Hence they are waves of *shinnyo*, of the real. The moon in Noh is often “the moon of the real” (*shinnyo no tsuki* 真如の月), and these waves, as the harlot speaks, are of the moon, or moon-illuminated. They rise in consequence of their *en* 縁, or cause, which cannot be impure either because the great sea is “perfectly contained.” Therefore the waves are wholly enlightenment.

However the harlot goes on to say:

And the waves rise  
for what reason, pray?  
We set our heart  
on passing shelter;  
if we did not,  
there would be no sad world,  
no lovers to yearn. . . .

Thus the waves are caused by desire after all: desire for the things of the world and of the flesh, which are summed up in *Eguchi* by the image of “passing shelter.” The “passing shelter” particularly in question is the harlot’s own brothel. Such a woman riding the water under the “moon of the real” is herself a “wave of the real.” The play makes clear that as she inspires desire, so she suffers thereby in equal measure; yet her sermon shows that all the waves on the sea are enlightenment, even the most distraught and the most blind. At the very end of *Eguchi* she rises into the heavens, revealed as the all-wise Bodhisattva Fugen.<sup>6</sup>

Alas, not all suffering beings have present to mind the truth which the harlot speaks. Among them is the old gardener in *Aya no tsuzumi* (“The Damask Drum”). It was this gardener’s misfortune to fall in love with a young and highborn lady. In answer to his entreaties, the lady told him to beat a drum which she had hung in the tree by the garden pond; and she promised that when she heard that drum she would come down to him. The drum was damask, however, and refused to sound; and the maddened gardener drowned himself in the pond. Then his phantom rose up to possess the lady:

On the face of the evening pool  
A wave stirred.  
And out of the wave  
A voice spoke (Waley 1957, p. 176).

The voice spoke of rage and malediction. Yet gardener and harlot are equally waves, and no different in nature. The water of the pond is the water

on which the harlot rides. There is no doubt of this because the tree by the pond, with the round, white, treacherous drum in its branches, was a *katsura* ("cinnamon") tree: the tree that grows in the moon.

### Salvation

However non-dual the moon show suffering and enlightenment to be, and however convincingly this non-duality be demonstrated, beings who are subject to the passions (*bonnō* 煩惱) still suffer. Therefore they long for a realm free from pain, where all delusion is dispelled; and they thirst for release from the agonies which evoke visions of hell. Many of the phantoms who appear in Noh are in hell, and convey terrible anguish. The yearning for rebirth (*ōjō* 往生 or *jōshō* 上生) in paradise was essential to the religious life of most people, cleric or lay. Hope for salvation, so often expressed in Noh, is probably the main reason why the Buddhism of Noh has been defined as Amidism, for in modern Japan "salvation" is almost synonymous with *ōjō* in the Western Paradise of Amida, as defined by the followers of the Pure Land sects.

Buddhist texts describe the multiple realms of hell in variously complicated ways, and some of these realms were common topics in stories and in art. The hells were located in principle under Mt. Sumeru, the central mountain of the Buddhist universe. There were hells of searing cold as well as of heat, but on the whole they were of fire. The cries of sinners and the yells of hell-fiends are often mentioned in Noh, as are the rods with which the sinners are shattered.

Hell in Noh is a realm of fearful confinement where communication is only barely imaginable, and almost impossible to achieve. Just as the gardener in *Aya no tsuzumi* is imprisoned into lonely rage by his passion for a lady who could hardly be expected to respond, so the bizarre monster in *Nue* ("The Nightbird") is stuck in the dark and cannot move. When alive, this monster had immobilized the Emperor by tormenting him mercilessly; indeed the monster's ghost boasts as he reenacts his crime, "I fill all space about the Sovereign's stronghold!" When the monster was killed, his corpse was sealed into a hollow log and thrown into the river. Thus his ghost received fitting retribution. In hell there is no space at all.

The damask drum is typical of hell because in hell nothing gives back sound. In *Kinuta* ("The Block") a wife who believes herself abandoned is cut off by her own despair, and dies insane. Then she is in hell, where she is given the same fulling block that her madness drove her to beat in life. She beats the block in hell too, but it makes no sound, and her shrieks are silent. Her tears as they touch the block turn to flame.

If there were forked staffs in hell, their meaning would be impenetrable. Subject and object have no contact at all, and duality appears final. One horrifying demonstration of duality occurs in *Motomezuka* ("The Maiden's Grave"). The play is about a young woman who was courted by two fine youths, and who liked both so well that she could not choose between them. In the trials her father proposed, the suitors always came out perfectly even, till at last the maiden drowned herself in despair. In hell she is made to embrace the red-hot central pillar of her own grave-mound, while the two suitors, in the form of iron birds, dive at her from either side and rend her flesh with their beaks.

Paradise, on the other hand, is perfectly open, light, and free. A forked tree in paradise has no special meaning because there is no duality to reconcile. Buddhist paradises are associated with different Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and these too, like the hells, are often shown in painting. Each has canonically described features of its own, but all are lovely, and in all the timeless Teaching is eternally and directly heard. Beings in such a paradise are forever in the presence of the divinity they adore, and whose love has made this perfect realm.

Phantoms in Noh do not speak from paradise as they do from hell, since one in paradise needs nothing from the living. Nor do any plays take place in a Buddhist paradise, although *Obasute* ("The Abandoned Crone") presents an old woman abandoned on a mountaintop, singing of Amida's Pure Land under a full moon. Instead Noh presents places on the earth as paradisaal.

This is done in plays like *Takasago* and *Chikubushima*. Suffering men and women longed for salvation, but Noh allows for those moments when everything is perfect, just as it is, and when earth can hardly be distinguished from heaven. Such plays present a visit to a sacred place, made under ideal conditions, and at the traveler's own unconstrained wish. The season is spring, the air is mild, and the breeze just enough to stir the leaves. The traveler is perfectly happy and at ease, whether or not a god appears. But then a god does appear, also unconstrained, and confirms impressively what was already clear: that there is nothing wrong anywhere. All things are in boundless harmony, in an idealized version of the temporal order that theoretically prevailed in Japan. Thus the dance of the gods in *Chikubushima* is a happy tribute to the Sovereign whose representative witnesses it; and *Takasago* lauds the Sovereign thus:

So wise His rule  
that plants and trees,  
land that this is  
of our great Lord,

aspire under His sovereign reign  
to live on and on. . . .

The Sovereign is the one who presides over this perfected harmony. No wonder the courtier in *Chikubushima* did not ask about the forked staff. He already knew.

### Where to Find the Buddhism of Noh

The patterns of thought just described can be found in a large number of plays, and they convey the Buddhist ideas to be found in Noh. But being relatively clear, they do not yet convey the fancy of the plays or of their religion. The plays are not exactly untidy, but they do not really yield their patterns easily. That is because they are not religious rites or treatises, but art; and their goal is not to set forth ideas. They can at least be read or seen, however. The religion, on the other hand, is spread through all sorts of texts and artifacts, and is indeed untidy as soon as one descends past a certain level of generalization. A fair account of it should convey its lack of rigor.

The Buddhism of Noh is a Buddhism which admits stones, plants, trees, humans, spirits, gods, and Buddhas into an open brotherhood of the numinous. The philosophical problems posed by this brotherhood are no doubt insoluble, and in fact related doctrinal questions were sometimes debated in the Buddhist schools. But it is this Buddhism which is Waley's "common, average Buddhism of medieval Japan."

To convey its flavor one has to describe the religion of a particular place. Many sacred sites resembled each other in general, but each had its idiosyncrasies and each, in its way, gave chance its due. The description is bound to be a little difficult to follow since it must mention names and factors which, in that configuration, are important only at that site. Perhaps it can be said that the religion of a place makes no sense without the site itself, and its mountain or hill.

A fine and highly relevant example of such a place is provided by the medieval cult of Kasuga. The Kasuga Shrine in Nara is the ancestral shrine of the Fujiwara clan; and Kōfukuji, with which it formed an intimately linked pair, is the senior ancestral temple of the Fujiwara. Both are well known to have played a key role in the early development of Noh.

### "The Path of My Mountain"

Abe no Nakamaro (701–770) lived in China for many years but still missed Japan. This verse of his is cited by the old man in *Nomori*:

Now I lift my gaze  
to the high plain of heaven  
I see the moon  
that rose at Kasuga,  
over Mount Mikasa!

The same moon can be seen over Mikasa-yama in the devotional paintings (*kasuga mandara*) of the Kasuga cult. Upon its disk may float images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.<sup>7</sup>

Mikasa-yama is 283 meters high. When seen from the west, the direction of Nara, its regular, conical form stands free against a dark background of higher hills. Even today Mikasa-yama may not be trodden except by priests of the Kasuga Shrine, which is immediately below the mountain. There is a small sanctuary at the summit, and the traces of a much older, open ritual site.

All accounts relate that the god Takemikazuchi reached the top of Mikasa-yama, from Kashima in the Kantō area, early in A.D. 768, and that the Kasuga Shrine was first erected later that same year. With Takemikazuchi, or shortly after him, came the three other deities of the main shrine: Futsunushi from Katori in the Kantō area; Amenokoyane, the Fujiwara clan deity, from Hiraoka, south of modern Osaka; and Hime-gami ("Lady Deity"). Hime-gami too probably came from Hiraoka, but in medieval writing about Kasuga she is a manifestation of Ise, and continuous with the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. The fifth principal Kasuga deity is the Wakamiya ("Young Prince") who is understood to be the son of Hime-gami and Amenokoyane. The Wakamiya's origins are obscure, but he acquired an independent sanctuary building about 1135.

These deities were singly or collectively known as Kasuga Daimyōjin ("Great Resplendent Kasuga Deity"), of whom it is impossible to say whether he was singular or plural. In 937 Kasuga Daimyōjin announced, in an oracle, that he wished to assume the name "Bodhisattva Complete in Mercy's Works" (Jihi Mangyō Bosatsu). Thus the divine presence at Kasuga claimed, as other gods had already done, the standing of Bodhisattva.<sup>8</sup>

It is unclear when the Kasuga deities were first identified with canonical Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; and the identifications, once made, wavered through the centuries. In Kasuga art (late Heian through Muromachi) they vary particularly widely, but the main written sources are a little steadier.

The single most prominent *honji* (本地 "original ground") Buddha at Kasuga is Fukūenjaku Kannon (Amoghapāśā), whose *suijaku* (垂迹 "trace shown below") is Takemikazuchi. Fukūenjaku Kannon is identified as the *honji* of Takemikazuchi in an influential record of the Kasuga *honji*, with their *suijaku* forms, attributed to the Regent Fujiwara no Motomichi

(1160–1233).<sup>9</sup> The other *honji* in the list are Yakushi (Bhaiṣajyaguru) for Futsunushi, Jizō (Kṣitigarbha) for Amenokoyane, Jūichimen Kannon (Ekādaśamukha) for Hime-gami, and Monju (Mañjuśrī) for the Wakamiya.

Motomichi's list agrees in all but one respect with another made by the great Kōfukuji monk Gedatsu Shōnin (Jōkei, 1155–1213). Gedatsu Shōnin identified Takemikazuchi with Shaka (Śākyamuni).<sup>10</sup> Thus a Kamakura-period *Kasuga mandara* in the Tokyo National Museum shows all six of the *honji*, including the two for Takemikazuchi, painted against a great moon-disk which floats over Mikasa-yama. It was from such a height that the Buddhist divinities showed their familiar, localized forms in their *suijaku* which are the Kasuga gods. This pattern was typical for a sacred mountain.

Mikasa-yama is clearly an ancient *kamunabi* 神奈備, a mountain where the spirits of the ancestors were contained and enshrined. The date of 768 for the founding of the shrine, which has been official at Kasuga since at least the tenth century, is nonetheless suspect (Nishida 1978). As a sacred hill Mikasa-yama must be much older. Like Mt. Sumeru, such mountains may be associated with hell. The hells of Fuji, among others, were famous, but Mikasa-yama too had a hell. It was below a spot just south of the main shrine, and was the home of the demon in *Nomori*. A Kōfukuji monk described from this hell, through a medium, how Kasuga Daimyōjin descended thither every day in the form of Jizō (Amenokoyane's *honji*), and blessed the sinners there with holy water and with the Buddhist Teaching, until they gradually "rise and pass out of Hell" (*Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 2, p. 47).

The summit of Mikasa-yama was assimilated to paradise, and first of all to the Tosotsu (Tuṣita) Heaven of Miroku (Maitreya). It was not uncommon for a mountaintop to be understood as the Tosotsu Heaven and since the Hossō teaching had originally been given to the Hossō founder Mujaku (Asaṅga) directly by Miroku, the tie between Kōfukuji and Miroku was particularly close. No paintings seem to show the Tosotsu Heaven over Mikasa-yama, but written records suggest that thoughts of this paradise must often have been associated with Kasuga Daimyōjin's mountain. Miroku was an alternate *honji* for Futsunushi and for the Wakamiya.

Gedatsu Shōnin is reported to have declared, when possessed by Kasuga Daimyōjin: "Shaka and Miroku are one in substance. . . . Vulture Peak and Chisoku [the Tosotsu Heaven] are one." And once Gedatsu Shōnin heard Kasuga Daimyōjin say:

Know me as I am!  
The Buddha Shakamuni  
came into this life,  
and lo! the bright moon

now illumines the world!  
 (*Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 2, pp. 44-5)

This moon, which would be painted rising over Mikasa-yama, may allude especially to the Buddha preaching the *Lotus Sutra* on Vulture Peak.

The play *Kasuga Ryūjin* dramatically presents Mikasa-yama as Vulture Peak. The play's traveler, Myōe Shōnin, has been planning a pilgrimage to India. Kasuga Daimyōjin, however, does not want him to go, and when Myōe visits Kasuga to say good-by, the deity detains him with an oracle which explains his concern, and which promises to "make visible upon Mikasa-yama the five regions of India, the Buddha's birth from Māyā, His enlightenment at Bodhagaya, His preaching upon Vulture Peak, and His passing in the Sāla Grove." Suddenly,

the divine oracle,  
 mightily voiced,  
 yields to a burst of light:  
 Kasuga, plain and mountain,  
 turns to a realm of gold.  
 The plants, the trees,  
 are the body of enlightenment,  
 a wonder to behold!

The Eight Great Dragon Kings of the *Lotus Sutra* then arrive,

attended by their entourage,  
 an entourage of millions,  
 like waves on the plain

to hear the Buddha preach the *Lotus Sutra*. When all are in place the Buddha no doubt begins his great discourse, but that is not directly mentioned. Instead the Dragon Girl of the *Lotus Sutra* rises and begins to dance.

Mikasa-yama is nowhere near the sea, or indeed near any substantial body of water at all. But since the water of the landscape of Noh need not be large, Sarusawa Pond at the south gate of Kōfukuji, and the brook called Saho-gawa that runs down from behind Mikasa-yama, do quite well for the cosmic ocean:

The Dragon Girl is up to dance,  
 her billowing sleeves  
 gleam a pristine white  
 across the boundless main  
 they sweep: a spray  
 of shining drops



rises from the blue  
 color of the sky  
 cast on the ocean abyss!  
 Hither she treads the deep:  
 the ship of the moon  
 rises on the waters  
 of the Saho River. . . .

At last,

The Dragon Girl  
 mounts the gale-driven clouds  
 and vanishes airborne  
 toward the south;  
 the Dragon God  
 with lusty tread  
 churns Sarusawa Pond  
 and its cerulean waves  
 till He towers a thousand fathoms,  
 a mighty Serpent,  
 swarming in the mid-heaven,  
 writhing upon the earth,  
 He tosses the pond waters high  
 and is lost to view.

The point of all this is to persuade Myōe that he has no need to go anywhere at all, and Myōe is convinced. He gives up his journey. The play is an extensively revised version of actual events, for whereas Myōe Shōnin really did plan to go to India, Kasuga Daimyōjin dissuaded him from doing so in a series of oracles and dreams delivered in the first months of 1202. In some of the dreams Myōe went to Vulture Peak, as Kasuga Daimyōjin himself did whenever he wished.<sup>11</sup>

Such delightful grandiloquence is in tune with the fortunate character of Myōe's vision, but the principle of it should not be dismissed as mere theater. Once in the early thirteenth century a monk of nearby Tōdaiji dreamed he saw many "precious ships" in the rivulet which runs under the main avenue toward the Kasuga Shrine, at a spot called Rokudō, or "Six Realms [of Reincarnation]." These boats then flew off toward the summit of Mikasa-yama, full of people. The dreamer was told that the lead boat carried Myōe Shōnin, and that the other passengers were those who had entrusted themselves to Myōe's guidance. Myōe was leading them over the Six Realms, the ocean of suffering, directly to paradise (*Kōzanji shiryō sōsho* 1971, vol. 1, p. 248).

A mid-fourteenth century history of Kōfukuji contains the following entry: “Chōhō 3 [1001], eighth month, second day. Gatō Shōnin boarded a boat and sailed to Mt. Fudaraku (*Kōfukuji ryaku nendaiki* in Hanawa 1931, *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, vol. 298, p. 135). Fudaraku (Potalaka) is the paradise of Kannon, reputed to be a mountain at the southern tip of India. In art it looks very like P’eng-lai. Gatō Shōnin actually sailed from Cape Muroto in Shikoku, and it is remarkable that his departure should have been reported in a history of Kōfukuji. The reason is probably that Mikasa-yama too was Fudaraku. Like Chikubushima, Fudaraku can only be reached by boat, but as the Tōdaiji monk’s dream shows, the absence of sea around Mikasa-yama was not a problem. A beautiful Kamakura period *Kasuga mandara* in the Nezu Museum shows Mikasa-yama with a detailed vision of Fudaraku floating above it. The holy mountain is surrounded by tossing waves, over which boats are sailing from the near shore; and at its summit the Blessed Bodhi-sattva shines like a welcoming star.

Faith like this is essential to the Buddhism of Noh. Granny Mountains and the harlot of *Eguchi* said all that inspired reason can say, but the quiet of the following story is eloquent. Fujiwara no Toshimori (1120–?) never neglected his monthly visit to the Kasuga Shrine.

Once when he had come to the Shrine the night rain was falling softly, and dripped pleasingly from the pines. He felt unusually at peace. Soon he began to reflect on the vanity of making his pilgrimages in quest of worldly gain. Then he heard an awe-inspiring voice speaking from toward the [Four] Sanctuaries and saying, “The path of Enlightenment is the path of my Mountain.” Toshimori shed tears of joy, and would wet his sleeves again long afterward, remembering (*Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 3, pp. 14-5).

### The Red Leaves of Fall

Westward across the Yamato Plain from Mikasa-yama is a hill explicitly known in classical poetry as a *kamunabi*. This is Tatsuta-yama, a place celebrated for the beauty of its autumn leaves. The Tatsuta-gawa flows past Tatsuta-yama, and below the mountain stands the Tatsuta Shrine.

The traveler in the play *Tatsuta* is a monk who first meets Tatsutahime (the Lady of Tatsuta) by the river, in the guise of a shrine maiden. As the season and poetry demand, the river is covered with a leafy, red brocade. The Tatsuta deity is presented in the play as the guardian of the “August Spear, Protector of the Realm”; and from what the shrine maiden says, the summit of Tatsuta-yama is occupied by an “Ascetic, Holder of the Sword.”<sup>12</sup> Both spear and sword allude to centrality, eminence and power. A spring

welling up at the seat of such power would cascade on down the mountain and nourish the regions below. In *Tatsuta* the river is evoked as flowing down from such a spring.

The traveler has arrived just in time to see music and dance (*kagura*) offered splendidly that night, by the light of torches, to the presence on the mountain. This is the *taki-matsuri* ("waterfall festival") of *Tatsuta*, which the play links intimately to Ise.<sup>13</sup> The poetry of the scene suggests the following vision. As the music begins, the light of the full moon touches the crest of the hill, and from the lip of the moon, as it were, tumbles the pure water of the stream. The fall at first is white, and whiter in the moonlight. Then lower down it leaves the zone of rock and evergreen, and passes beneath the autumn trees. Thus it takes on the color of the leaves, and flows away to the sea clothed in the red of the world of time and desire. This red is the Lady of *Tatsuta* herself, who is the red leaves of fall.

It is a commonplace in poetry that tears shed high in the sky by geese as they depart in autumn are red when they fall to earth, and that autumn leaves turn color when touched by the season's cold rains. *Tatsuta* amplifies both thoughts in perfect consonance with the fully stated Buddhist significance of the play, which is first given in the words of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai (Tendai) patriarch Chih-i (538-597): "The tempering of the light and the merging with the dust initiate the link to enlightenment; the achieving the Way through all eight phases finishes accomplishing all creatures' weal."<sup>14</sup>

According to Chih-i, the Buddha tempers his light and merges with the dust so as not to blind and confuse ordinary beings with the full radiance of enlightenment. Thus the Buddha dims his light and enters completely into the ordinary world. In this way he manifests enlightenment in various familiar forms, and so makes the thought of enlightenment accessible to anyone. Chih-i cannot have intended this passage to be used as in *Tatsuta*, for the play makes it a complete summary of Buddhist-Shinto syncretic (*honji-suijaku*) thought, and of the Buddhism of Noh.

The familiar forms which make enlightenment accessible are those of the mountains, rivers, trees, gods and holy persons of Japan. The "merging with the dust initiates the link to enlightenment" because the presence of these forms makes enlightenment available to all. *Kechien*, the "link to enlightenment" was the goal of pilgrimage, and it was to be found in such sacred presence. Thus *Tatsuta* develops this first part of Chih-i's statement in verse:

The red leaves low on the trees  
are the divine intention [*kami-gokoro*]  
mingling with the dust

as the tempered light  
deepens in hue. . . .

In poetry the cold rains color the top leaves first, but by-and-by red descends to the lowest branches, thus showing in the present context that no place is too humble to speak of enlightenment, and no person too lost to be touched by grace.

The second part of Chih-i's statement, about "achieving the Way through all eight phases," alludes to the traditional eight phases of the Buddha's career, from his descent into his mother's womb to his enlightenment, teaching, and final extinction. During this career the Buddha rose from ignorance to the knowledge which "finishes accomplishing all creatures' weal." In other words, the Buddha's enlightenment accomplished the enlightenment of the world. This thought is expressed in a verse which occurs several times in Noh:<sup>15</sup>

As the One Buddha achieves the Way,  
he looks down upon the world [*hokkai*],  
and plants, trees, soil and land  
all grow to Buddhahood.

A painting of the scene would show mountains under the moon, with perhaps a dark pine wood along a stretch of shore.

### Conclusion

This beautiful view of the world had deep roots in the past of Noh, and its motifs remained alive into modern times in literature and art. What can one call it? That is, what is the name of the Buddhism of Noh? The customary sect or school names will not do. No scholar of Mt. Hiei would have acknowledged the Buddhism of Noh as "Tendai," nor would a scholar of Mt. Kōya have identified it as "Shingon," though neither would have wished to disown it. Still less would a scholar of Kōfukuji (perhaps a Kasuga devotee and as much of an esoteric practitioner as anyone from Kōya or Hiei) have called it Hossō. "Amidism" does not help. In a word, the Buddhism of Noh has as little school identity as doctrinal consistency.

But if this Buddhism is to be named, then "syncretism" is the word to use. The Buddhism of Noh is the common Buddhism of the time when *horiji-suijaku* ("Shinto-Buddhist syncretic") faith was, in religion, the simple air that people breathed. Continuity between the Gods and Buddhas was then taken for granted; and given the localized nature of the Japanese *kami* as opposed to the universal nature of the Buddhist deities, this continuity naturally expressed, and shaped as well, the poetic and religious interest in

landscape which this paper has evoked. *Honji-suijaku* thought and Shugendō matured roughly together. An admittedly speculative suggestion for the period when they were at the height of their vigor is about 1100–1300, a time when the Kasuga cult took the form just described, and when even Kōfukuji became a Shugendō center.<sup>16</sup> By about the fourteenth century the court had lost its importance, the older religious forms were taken for granted, and newer trends were gathering strength elsewhere in the Japanese religious world. That is why syncretism is so basic to the conservative Buddhism of Noh.

Later on, after the major Buddhist innovations of the Kamakura period had become thoroughly established in their turn, and the major seventeenth-century thinkers had absorbed themselves instead in Confucian ideals and ethics, the Buddhist content of Noh gradually ceased to be understood, or passed into the twilight of “folk religion.” Buddhist sects were codified and organized as a matter of government policy in the Edo period (1600–1868), and the newer ones (Zen, Pure Land Amidist and Nichiren) came, in their turn, to represent “Japanese Buddhism.” Moreover Buddhism as a whole came under attack from Confucianists and others who pointed out its pernicious influence. At last in the first years of Meiji (1868–1912) Shinto and Buddhism were separated by edict, and the activities of *yamabushi*, mediums, and other relics of the past were declared illegal.

One can find right at the start of the Edo period, in the writings of a Buddhist moralist, clear evidence of a new way of seeing. Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655) was a Zen teacher and writer who loved Noh. He had studied Noh singing himself, and like other writers of his time he took from Noh many ornaments to his style. However he seems not to have seen, or to have wished to see, in Noh what this paper has sought to show. Paradox did not please him, and aesthetic excellence was not his main concern. He cultivated instead a sort of protestant severity.

Shōsan was particularly interested in the famous and paradoxical play *Sotoba Komachi* (“Komachi on the Gravepost”), in which the poetess Komachi passes from broken, old beggar outcast to triumphant winner of a doctrinal debate, to mad crone possessed by a long-dead suitor, to humble aspirant to enlightenment. The play is as baffling as Sakagami’s musings or as the discourse of *Buchu kanjō honki*, but precisely that aspect of it made no sense, or bad sense, to Shōsan. Shōsan did not subscribe to the all but universal medieval opinion that “the passions are enlightenment.” He preferred to make quite clear the difference between wisdom and delusion or sin. He therefore rewrote *Sotoba Komachi* into *Omokage Komachi* (“Komachi in Dignity”; Suzuki 1962, pp. 217-20). Shōsan’s own Komachi is

unwaveringly positive, and as right-thinking as a tough old nun whose youth is too remote to move her seriously any longer. She is an unexceptionable moral lesson. Judging from Shōsan's other work that is obviously what Shōsan intended, but his Komachi for a righteous age has lost a great deal. Alas, she does not touch us and she is not beautiful.

#### NOTES

1. All translations are the author's, unless otherwise noted.
2. For example: "In Exoteric Buddhist teachings, the four great elements [earth, water, fire and wind] are considered to be nonsentient beings, but in Esoteric Buddhist teachings they are regarded as the *samaya*-body of the Tathāgata" (Kūkai, *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*, trans. in Hakeda 1972, p. 229).
3. *Kaji* 加持 is the Sanskrit *adhiṣṭhāna*. According to Yoshito Hakeda: "The three mysteries inborn in men . . . are united with the Three Mysteries of Mahāvairocana. In other words, it is the basic homogeneity of man with Mahāvairocana which makes faith possible. Because of Kūkai's emphasis on the grace of the Three Mysteries, his religion has also been identified as the religion of 'the three mysteries and grace (*sanmitsu kaji* 三密加持)'" (Hakeda 1972, p. 92).
4. The earliest occurrence of this story is in *Gōdanshō* ("Discourses of Ōe no Masafusa"), written in the early twelfth century (*Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 27, p. 17); it is then picked up by the musician Koma no Chikazane in his *Kyōkunshō* ("Instruction and Admonishments"), 1233 (*Zoku gunsho ruijū*, vol. 2a, p. 295); and by later writers. It also occurs in *Kasuga Gongen genki* 10 ("Record of wonders worked by the deity of Kasuga"; *Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 2, p. 28).
5. This passage is translated from the longer extract quoted by Moriyama 1965, pp. 134-5. *Buchū kanjō honki* was written by Kyokuren, the head of a Shingon-affiliated Shugendō temple in the Ōmine mountains. The sexual imagery of its discourse marks it as linked to the so-called *Tachikawa-ryū* 立川流, a "left-handed tantric" Shingon heresy which seems to have originated at the aristocratic Shingon temple and Shugendō center of Daigoji near Kyoto. The *Tachikawa-ryū* teaching was carried to the provinces in 1113 by Ninkan, a younger brother of Shōkaku, the founder of the famous Sanbōin at Daigoji temple. The father of both was Minamoto no Toshifusa (1035-1121), a Minister of the Left (Moriyama 1965, pp. 14-66).

6. Regarding the enlightenment of Fugen, the *Bodhicitta s̄āstra* (Jpn. *Bodaishinron* 菩提心論, “Treatise on the mind of enlightenment”) says: “Because of this meditation, he (the practitioner) sees his true state of mind [*bodhicitta*], which is tranquil and pure like the light of a full moon covering space without discrimination. [This state of mind] is called complete enlightenment [i.e., the perfection of the cognizer]; it is also called pure *dharmadhātu* [i.e., the perfection of the cognized]; and it is also called the sea of the perfection of wisdom [i.e., the perfection of the identity of the cognizer and the cognized]. Its ability—in *samādhi*—to contain a variety of immeasurable precious jewels is like the moon’s [ability to contain] its pureness and brilliance. Why [is this so]? Because all beings are endowed with the mind of Samantabhadra: one sees one’s own mind like the disc of the moon” (Kiyota 1982, 87).
7. The *Kasuga mandara* cited below are all published in Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan (Nara National Museum), ed., *Suijaku bijutsu* (“*Suijaku Art*”). Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1964.
8. The first deity to do so was Hachiman, who claimed the title of Dai-bosatsu (“Great Bodhisattva”) in 783. Kasuga Daimyōjin’s oracle of 937 is recorded in *Kasuga Gongen genki* 1 (*Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 2, p. 4) and in earlier shrine records.
9. *Kasuga-sha shiki* [A Personal Account of the Kasuga Shrine, 1275] and *Shun’ya shinki* [A Divine Record of Spring Night, not later than 1437] in *Shintō taikai*, vol. 13.
10. *Kasuga-sha shiki* specifies that it was Gedatsu Shōnin who made this identification on the basis of the verse quoted below, which Gedatsu heard “in a dream.” The identification of Takemikazuchi with Shaka was adopted by the compilers of *Kasuga Gongen genki*.
11. According to *Kasuga Gongen genki* 16 (p. 416), Kasuga Daimyōjin told Gedatsu: “I often go to the Tosotsu Heaven and worship there the Lord of Compassion [Miroku]. Even my eyes cannot encompass the sixteen *yojanas* of his marvelous form.” The story of the oracles of 1202, written down in 1233, is published under the title *Myōe Shōnin jingon denki* [Record of the divine visitations granted the venerable Myōe] in *Kōzanji shiryō sōsho*, vol. 1; and under the title *Kasuga Daimyōjin go-takusenki* [Record of the oracles of the Kasuga deity] in *Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 2, and *Dainihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 123. Tanabe (1983, ch. 2) discusses it in the context of Myōe’s life. *Kasuga ryūjin* has been translated by Morrell (1982).
12. This “Ascetic” is *tsurugi no gensō*. An appellation with the same meaning is applied in the “*Mongaku no aragyō*” (“Mongaku’s Penances”) chapter of *Heike monogatari* (“The Tale of the Heike”) to the

- famous ascetic Mongaku Shōnin. The spear guarded by the Tatsuta Deity is further celebrated in the Tatsuta Noh play *Sakahoko*.
13. The *taki-matsuri* is still observed at the Tatsuta Shrine (Tatsuta Taisha) each year on April 3. There is no waterfall, however. Instead fish are taken from the Tatsuta-gawa (which in modern times is called the Yamato-gawa, the modern Tatsuta-gawa being a different stream), and offered to the Tatsuta Deity. There is also a spot at the Inner Shrine (Naikū) of Ise called *taki-matsuri*: it is at the bottom of the Isuzu-gawa. The matter is puzzling.
  14. *Mo-ho-chih-kuan* 6a (Jpn. *Makashikan* 摩訶止觀; *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, Takakusu Junjirō et al., eds., Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-1934, vol. 46, p. 80a). The text, in the Japanized version cited in *Tatsuta*, is *wakō dōjin wa kechien no hajime, hassō jōdō wa rimotsu no owari nari*.
  15. The verse occurs for example in *Nue*. It has been studied by Miyamoto (1961).
  16. The date 1100, suggested by the contents of *Kasuga Gongen genki*, agrees with the much broader evidence presented by Tsuji (1944, pp. 436-89). In Shugendo, 1090 is the year when Zōyo of Miidera became the first Kengyō of Kumano; Zōyo later founded Shōgoin. The terminal date of 1300 is only a rough suggestion; the twelfth century encompasses the lives of Myōe Shōnin (an outstanding representative of syncretic faith) and of the founders of the “new Buddhism.” The role of Kōfukuji in Shugendo has been acknowledged by Miyake Hitoshi (1985, p. 8, and earlier works).

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