

THE MALE LADY ON THE EDGE OF TEARS:
YŪGEN, NON-DUALITY, AND CROSS-
GENDERING IN NOH

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1. Introduction

The primary goal of this study is to analyze the dynamics of cross-gendered performances in Noh by utilizing *yūgen* theory. I will be focusing on the plays and treatises of Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443) and Zenchiku Komparu (1405-1468) to explore cross-gendered performances with the aesthetic theories they created.¹ As creative theorists, affluent playwrights, and renowned actors, Zeami and Zenchiku produced the foundation for the aesthetics of the performing art of *sarugaku*, which later evolved into Noh theater. Zeami's and Zenchiku's plays are regularly performed in Noh, where many of the aesthetics delineated in their treatises are still evident. While both Zeami's and Zenchiku's treatises were pedagogical in nature, Zeami was often explicitly pragmatic, intent on supporting a successful troupe, whereas Zenchiku was often spiritual. Zeami tends to deal more directly with gendered performances than Zenchiku, who builds on Zeami's work, but both produced aesthetic and performance theories that can be utilized to better understand the gender dynamics of Noh/*sarugaku* performance. If we can look at gender through the theoretical lenses of Bakhtin, Brecht, Freud, Lacan, Kristeva, Butler, or Connell, why not Zeami and Zenchiku? Would it not be the most beneficial to understand it within its original framework, especially when we are looking at Noh and *sarugaku* as a performing art? With this in mind, I will be examining how Zeami and Zenchiku's *yūgen* theories can help decipher the gender dynamics occurring when the character is not the same sex/gender as the actor in Noh performance (e.g., when a female actor plays a male character, or a male actor plays a female character). Here I will be specifically dealing with the instance of the male actor playing a female character, as that was the standard practice during Zeami and Zenchiku's time. To analyze Noh's

¹ I will be using the word "*sarugaku*" when talking about the performance art during Zeami and Zenchiku's time and "Noh" for the performance art in the modern context. The history of the Noh Theater and its evolution from *sarugaku* is long and complex, but for the ease of discussion I will use these two terms to distinguish between these two related, similar, but distinct arts.

gender dynamics I will be examining Zeami and Zenchiku's treatises and plays on four levels: 1) the narrative focus of the plays, 2) the character type, 3) the performer, and 4) the effect on the audience.²

Yūgen as a concept in Noh and *sarugaku* can be viewed as a complex aesthetic sensation that, as defined by Zeami, is the sum of various parts: i.e. *yūgen* of song, *yūgen* of dance, *yūgen* of poetry, etc. The *yūgen* of character and of the text of the play are of crucial importance, as the specifics of the writing style and choice of characters were carefully delineated by Zeami. All of these elements culminate in a performance by the actor which produces the effect of *yūgen* in the minds of the audience. Thus, the site of *yūgen* was the actor on stage. Creating *yūgen* was extremely important to the performers during Zeami and Zenchiku's time. As *sarugaku* quickly began its association with the upper classes through the auspices of the Ashikaga Shoguns, *sarugaku* troupes tried (often in competition with one another) to secure the patronage of the elite, where the lines between military aristocracy and royal nobility were increasingly blurred. Steven Brown emphasizes the importance of *yūgen* as the prime social/cultural "symbolic capital" by which a troupe would be judged: if a troupe possessed this, then they could "enter the inner circles," so to speak.³ Brown explains that such symbolic capital is "relatively unstable, difficult to transmit, or quantify, and not easily convertible"; as symbolic capital, *yūgen* "appealed to the imaginations of those who were already culturally 'elite' (i.e., court aristocrats), as well as those upwardly mobile individuals who aspired to become culturally 'elite' (e.g., the shogun and his *daimyō*)."⁴

I am explicitly using *yūgen* as both a particular aesthetic, marked by transience, haziness in atmosphere, sadness in tone, darkness in color, gracefulness in disposition,

² I am borrowing these categories from the syllabus used by Ricardo D. Trimillos in his course 'Gender in Asian Performing Arts,' taught in the Spring of 2011

³ Steven T. Brown, Theatricalities of Power: The Cultural Politics of Noh (Stanford University Press, 2001). 30-33.

⁴ Brown, Theatricalities of Power: The Cultural Politics of Noh. 32.

and elegance in nature, as well as in Brown's sense as a marker of cultural value, of symbolic capital. *Yūgen* connotes a sense of class and a certain grade of ability. Zeami and Zenchiku constantly associate *yūgen* with courtly elegance; indeed, it was amongst the most appealing aesthetics of the upper classes, created and cultivated in the aristocratic culture of the time. By associating themselves with this aesthetic, they hoped to gain the favor of upper class patrons, a key to their survival as artists. Zeami and Zenchiku both created detailed typologies to grade the level of *yūgen*. On the level of character, *yūgen* is idealized and personified in the form of an aristocratic female in distress; in setting, often a lonely and desolate, dark, and wet natural landscape. But on the level of the actor's performance, *yūgen* is a show of elegance and skill in movement and song (the Two Arts) that results in the cultural value that was so sought after by *sarugaku* performers trying to sustain their troupes. Of course these two sides of the aesthetic often bled into each other. In Zeami and Zenchiku's day performers often wrote the plays they performed, so cultural value would be earned for a troupe performing an original play that possessed *yūgen*. That being said, an actor's practiced, elegant dance would produce the aesthetic sensation he desired and show off his skill as a performer. These are both inseparable aspects of the term *yūgen* in this context.

In this paper I focus on the Woman's Mode of acting because it is specifically singled out as the exemplary form of *yūgen* by Zeami, and this valorization is continued by Zenchiku. The emphasis on the female in *yūgen* can be traced back through traditional Japanese court poetry (*waka*) discourse. Still, it seems almost paradoxical to idealize a female form of beauty in an art that was performed exclusively by male actors. Analysis of this cross-gendered performance can be problematic, as the male actor has to play a female role convincingly, exuding a sense of elegance through the stylized expression of the performance art. As the site of *yūgen* in a cross-gendered performance

was a male actor playing a female character, by deciphering the moment of *yūgen*, we can better analyze the gender dynamics occurring. Besides an emphasis on character selection, Zeami's and Zenchiku's other theories on *yūgen* espouse a conception of non-duality in the sublime performance of *yūgen*. Utilizing Zeami and Zenchiku's theory of non-duality and *yūgen* we can see that the site of *yūgen* on stage in a cross-gendered performance is a non-dual gendered enigma, simultaneously being the male actor who performs the movements and songs, and the female character who expresses her distress through the narrative and poetry, but is neither wholly one nor the other. For the audience, the actor reaches a state of "bi-genderedness": the male actor who can perform the movements and chants they have learned from their training, and the female character who can elucidate the sadness of the aristocratic lady in distress, being both genders at the same time. I will begin this study by delineating the aesthetic theories of Zeami and Zenchiku in regards to the gendered aspects of *yūgen* and the process the actor goes through to reach *yūgen* as a non-dual state.

2. Attributes of Yūgen Theory

2.1 *The Woman's Mode as the Ideal of Yūgen*

2.1.1 A Gendered Ideal

In Noh performance, a traditional full day's performance begins with a God play, followed by a Warrior play, a Woman's play, a Mad-person or miscellaneous play, and finally a Demon play. The idea is that the God play starts out the day and brings the audience into a realm of *yūgen*, which reaches its ultimate depth at the Woman's play, and levels out as the program finishes with the final two plays. In this context, the Third Category Woman's plays are considered to be the highlight of the program. As Hare notes, many of the plays that are highly regarded in the repertoire are plays about women.⁵ There are also a vast number of plays that would fall under the Woman's Mode heading. Zeami regarded the Woman's Mode as an essence of *yūgen* itself, explicitly mentioning that "the elegant grace of *yūgen* comes forth as an adaptation of the Woman's Mode."⁶ In his treatise on the description of the Three Modes, *Nikyokusantai ningyōzu*, he writes of the Woman's Mode that it is "the foundational effect for *yūgen*," stating that "the elegant grace of *yūgen* emanates from here," and that "in the visual effects of the Two Arts, and among the Three Modes as well, the Woman's Mode is considered the highest ideal."⁷

In the Noh discourse (plays and treatises) of Zeami and Zenchiku, it is evident that one of the ideal subjects for a play that possesses *yūgen* is the aristocratic female character, explicitly singled out in conjunction to *yūgen*. Zeami objectifies (i.e. 'makes

⁵ T.B. Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo* (Stanford University Press, 1996).. 131.

⁶ Akira Omote and Shuichi Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*, Nihon Shiso-Taikai, vol. 24 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974). 113.

⁷ Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 126.

into an object') *yūgen* in this form to give pedagogical advice for more successful plays to be written; Zenchiku seems to have understood this, writing many plays with such a character in them (e.g., *Teika*, *Nonomiya*, *Yōkihi*). Given Zenchiku's statements that Buddha Nature is *yūgen*⁸ and that both playwrights wrote plays with other character types, it is clear that Zeami and Zenchiku believed other characters to be good vehicles for *yūgen* as well. Class and age also played a major role in character selection, with courtliness and advanced age as other important attributes, evidenced by the creation of the Aged Mode, and the class and demeanor of most of the characters in their plays. Aged courtly female characters in distress—such as those in *Higaki* and *Sotoba Komachi*, two of the most revered plays in the current repertoire—are amongst the highest regarded. But if all the actors were men, why specifically highlight a female character over others to embody the prized aesthetic? The singling out of an elegant lady in distress is, from a gender studies perspective, worthy of examination: why is it a female character; why is class so important; and why does she have to be disturbed, distressed, deranged, or possessed? Here we will focus on the aristocratic woman in distress as one of the basic character types for *yūgen* construction. It is important to note that this gendered association with *yūgen* goes beyond the discourse of Noh; it has a much longer history in the discourse of poetry.

2.1.2 The Aristocratic Woman in Distress

In the treatise that gives the greatest detail on play writing, *Sandō*, Zeami explains the importance of choosing an appropriate character, or Seed (*honzetsu*) on which to base the plays. Amongst the most suitable subjects, Zeami specifically cites certain types of women:

⁸ Zenchiku theorized that as all things have Buddha Nature, all things can have *yūgen*. See Arthur H. Thornhill, "Yugen after Zeami," *Nō and Kyōgen in the Contemporary World*, ed. James R. Brandon (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997). 47-48.

To begin, the foundation of *sarugaku*'s technique is dance and song. When the Seed is a person who does not sing or dance, there will be visual appeal in the performance no matter if it is a legendary person or famous star. Make sure you understand this thoroughly. For example, as character types for imitation, heavenly maidens, goddesses, and shrine priestesses, these are all capable of the dance and singing of *kagura*.⁹

The very first examples Zeami gives are of female characters, and further into the treatise he goes into more depth about writing plays in the Woman's Mode specifically:

One must write allowing for visual expression. This is where singing and dance have their primary effect. Among the plays in this category, one finds the highest level of expression. For example, when writing of empresses and royal consorts, Ladies Aoi, Yūgao, and Ukifune, and such, for women of exalted rank, the writer must remember that the noble appearance of these persons possess a grace and elegance not found in this world...A person of such rank should be beautiful and refined, of the highest level of *yūgen*...In such types of persons, one finds a jewel among jewels. Beyond the indescribable visual elegance of such noble persons, in Lady Aoi cursed by Rokujō, Yūgao taken by a malevolent spirit, the possession of Ukifune, and other such instances, is a rare, visual material, the highlight of elegance, a seed of a flower of mysterious beauty, a clandestine meeting of grace. It is the Seed for a flower more wonderful than that spoken of in the old poem, "Merging the scent of plum and the blossom of cherry, blooming on the branches of a willow." With that said, one could say that a performer who suitably performs with such a style is a master of wondrous sensations with no one above him.¹⁰

In this description, Zeami explicitly mentions a number of characters from *The Tale of Genji* that are prime subjects for portrayal in Noh. In fact, all of these women are protagonists in Noh plays (though not by Zeami). They are all elegant court ladies that come under supernatural duress. Besides their gender, courtliness is a crucial factor, implying elegant, graceful demeanor. This was clearly Zeami's ideal subject for a Noh play, one that would produce the most *yūgen* on stage. Later, in his treatise *Shūgyoku tokka*, he explicitly notes the appeal of a woman in distress:

When a woman is modest, avoiding public attention, there is not much of interest, but when she is set as deranged, entertaining by dancing and singing poetry, her elegant form, scattered with blossoms, creates a

⁹ Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 134.

¹⁰ Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 137-138.

beautiful image more interesting than anything else. When doing this, the actor who has achieved such a rank is of the top levels [of *yūgen*].¹¹

Here again we see that the woman in distress adds an air of mystery through her derangement, and allows for elegant display of dance and song. These aspects help create *yūgen* on stage, the Two Arts of song and dance. Though Zeami was originally from the Yamato tradition of *sarugaku* that emphasized *monomane* (imitation), he highly valued the *yūgen* dancing styles of the rival Ōmi *sarugaku*. He realized their appeal to patrons, and soon shifted the emphasis on *monomane* that he learned from his father, to dance and chant. Yet he insisted on keeping a balance of “realism” to allow for a story, character, and situations for poetry and dance to occur. This is evident in the first *Sandō* quote above, where he explicitly mentions that care be given when choosing the Seed (the main source for the play), emphasizing the importance of characters with a particular pretext to displays of song and/or dance. Woman plays create the most balance of such elements, with the dance as the center of the play, and the story as a tool for extolling poetry, forming ample opportunities to create *yūgen*.

Zenchiku also mentions the woman in distress in regards to *yūgen*, in his treatise *Kabu zuinōki*. He notes this in relation to Zeami’s play *Matsukaze*.¹² In this treatise, Zenchiku lists a number of plays, but leaves the most extensive commentary for *Matsukaze*:

These two roles are indeed the highest realization of the true meaning of *noh*. They are hovering visages that become drifting clouds in the morning and driving rain in the evening. The quality of *yūgen* deepens still more: an emotion of surpassing profundity. In sum, one could call it the appearance of women in tranquil repose, unable to rise. Thinking of

¹¹ Omote asserts that this is actually a reference to the top flower of the Nine Ranks, the hierarchal system Zeami devised to rate the level of *yūgen* in something. Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 194.

¹² The play was originally thought to be a revision by Zeami of Kan’ami’s work, but it seems that only the *sashi-sageuta-ageuta* were Kan’ami’s, and the *rongi* taken from some unknown source. The rest is Zeami’s. See Royall Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, trans. Royall Tyler, ed. Royall Tyler (New York: Penguin, 1994). 183.

the elegance of matchless palace women and gentlemen, [the two protagonists] themselves become elegant. What is more, they long for those days [of old], and so they also feel the impermanence of things. At the spring dawn, in the autumn evening, [the effect] is superlative.¹³

There is perhaps no more perfect statement to describe the *yūgen* of the female form in Noh. Zenchiku points to the melancholy, dark and dim, elegiac beauty of nature that Noh inherited from *waka*, and adds the physical manifestation of an elegant woman under duress, one that is explicitly courtly and noble. But what was the specific appeal of casting the character as a woman, and more often than not, a woman in distress?

Both Zeami and Zenchiku learned about poetic theory through contact with poetic treatises that explored *yūgen*. There are various descriptions of *yūgen* in poetic treatises that reflect an association of the image of a female in distress. The aesthetic appreciation of a grieving lady may be traced back to Ki no Tsurayuki's (872-945) critique of Ono no Komachi's (825-900) poetry in the *Kana Preface*. He compares her poetry to a beautiful woman suffering: "Ono no Komachi is of the old school of Sotōrihime. Her poems are moving, but they are not strong. That is to say, they resemble a woman of good bearing who is in distress."¹⁴ Although much debated,¹⁵ the image that is created is distinct, a courtly lady that is suffering internally. This image of pathos

¹³ Arthur H. Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop: The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).192.

¹⁴ In this particular translation I have rendered *nayameru* as "distress" taking the term literally. Eizo and Kojima, however, note that this is actually a suffering due to illness based on the corresponding text written with Chinese characters in the *Manajo*. This may not have been originally intended to be favorable, though Komachi's fame was vast and influential, her poetry well respected. See Arai Eizō and Noriyuki Kojima, eds., *Kokin Wakashū, Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989). 59. See note 13 regarding *nayameru*.

¹⁵ Note: LaMarre does not specifically label Tsurayuki's comments on Komachi a backhanded compliment, but his analysis implies that he thinks so. LaMarre dissects many of the critiques Tsurayuki gives to the Six Immortals in terms of his reading of the *Kokinshū*. Each of the Six has problems within the logic that LaMarre proposes. Komachi's poetry does not "balance and direct the movement between heart and words correctly." Though her songs are "full of pathos and weak...in women's songs a lack of strength is appropriate," and her use of pivot words that are seen as a weakness. One can interpret that, this "weakness" is symptomatic of her sex, according to Tsurayuki, and it might be the least scathing of his critiques. Thomas LaMarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription* (Durnham and London: Duke University Press, 2000). See chapter seven for his discussion on the *Kana Preface*. See pg 177 for Komachi.

hidden behind an elegant exterior—in sum, an aristocratic woman in distress—is one that resonates throughout traditional *waka* discourse and is particularly utilized in regards to *yūgen* in later years. We can see this in the treatise *Mumyōshō* by the esteemed poet, Kamo no Chōmei (1155-1216) who famously likens *yūgen* to the figure of a courtly woman under duress in his discussion on *yūgen*. The section is as follows:

[In the *yūgen* style] the importance should be in the overtones that do not appear in words alone, and the atmosphere that cannot be seen in the form [of the poem]. When the content has a deep underlying conception, and the diction is exceptionally elegant, these other virtues will be present naturally. For example, on an autumn evening, the sky has no color, nor sound. Although we cannot give a definitive reason for it, it is as if we are somehow moved to tears. Someone who has no sensitivity will not think this is anything particularly exceptional, and will only admire the autumn foliage and the cherry blossoms that they can see with their eyes. Or it is like a fine lady who, although she is grieved, does not express this in words, secretly suffering, only giving faint signs about her situation; pitying her sadness, this has a deeper effect on us than if she were to exhaustively express her grievances in words, making a show of herself wringing out her [tear drenched] sleeves.¹⁶

This passage is an influential source from which Zeami and Zenchiku derived their understanding of *yūgen*. There are a number of qualities here that are explored in later treatises: a muted natural landscape, containing clouds, rain, or autumn branches devoid of crimson leaves; the feeling of loneliness, and a monochromatic series of imagery; and the elegant, aristocratic woman grieving, in a subtle manner. Although Chōmei is clearly using this particular image of the female as a metaphor to represent suggestion and underlying pathos, it is significant that his specific examples include a court lady. His image is reminiscent of protagonists in many Noh/*sarugaku* plays. Although Chōmei lived two centuries prior to Zeami and Zenchiku, his writings were known to them. For

¹⁶ Translation mine. Sen Hisamatsu and Minoru Nishio, *Karonshū*, Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei 65 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1961).87.

example, Zeami quotes Chōmei's *Hōjōki* in his treatise *Fushizuke shidai*, and even cites this same *Mumyōshō* passage in his play *Yōrō*.¹⁷

Even during Zeami and Zenchiku's time there were direct references to the courtly female in distress in conjunction with *yūgen*, best exemplified by the last “great” classical *waka* poet, Shōtetsu (1381-1459). A close contemporary of Zeami, Shōtetsu is often considered the poetic mentor of Zeami's protégé Zenchiku. In his treatise *Shōtetsu monogatari*, Shōtetsu writes:

Thus it is that the styles of “drifting clouds” and “swirling snow”, the style of snow blowing away in the wind, or the mist hanging over blossoms, somehow have an interesting elegance and charm. A poem that has an ineffable indistinct, haziness to it is said to be a poem of the highest order. Like a physically beautiful lady who is grieving over something, but she is not saying anything of it; it is such a poem that exemplifies this. Although she does not say a thing, it is apparent that she is suffering.¹⁸

Though Shōtetsu does not explicitly mention *yūgen*, it is implied by his reference to the above quoted Chōmei.¹⁹ Shōtetsu makes note of how the beauty of *yūgen* is one that is of “ineffable charm and elegance,” a concept that is reminiscent of the Buddhist vision of Enlightenment, something that cannot be expressed in words, an indescribable state. While referencing the treatise *Guhishō*—a treatise falsely attributed to Teika—Shōtetsu makes a specific point of comparing *yūgen* with a beautiful woman in distress. Later in his treatise, Shōtetsu makes another, more straightforward reference to *yūgen* as embodied by a courtly female saying, “Shall we say that the *yūgen* style is a style of drifting, hanging, haziness? Or should we say that the *yūgen* style is the scene of four or five court ladies wearing silken robes, gazing at the disarray of flowers blooming at their

¹⁷ Tom Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes*, trans. Tom Hare (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).172-173.

¹⁸ Hisamatsu and Nishio, *Karonshū*. 172.

¹⁹ Regarding the reference to Chōmei, see Hisamatsu and Nishio, *Karonshū*. 172n7.

peak in the Southern Palace.”²⁰ In this description as well, Shōtetsu is directly linking the courtly female, suppressed sadness or anger, and *yūgen*.

The use of the female image to allude to the qualities of *yūgen*, specifically an elegant woman in distress, was part of the common discourse about *yūgen* during the Muromachi period. When compared to the statements that Zeami and Zenchiku made regarding Woman’s plays, it is evident this discourse resonates with that of the *sarugaku* world. Highly literate and exceptionally talented, they would have gathered their inspiration from a myriad of sources like these surrounding them. As Tsubaki points out, Zeami’s *yūgen* is “mostly a unique and original application of the common concept of *yūgen* at the time to the art of Nō,”²¹ and the aristocratic woman provides an excellent example of this. To take such associations of the female image so valued in the rhetoric of *yūgen* in poetry, and to utilize that in a literal manifestation on stage, employing the poetic techniques and imagery that were valued, combining that with elegant dance and singing styles—this was a very intrepid idea indeed, the results of which can still be seen on the Noh stage today.

Within the Noh repertoire there are a number of plays that feature an aristocratic female in distress; many are literally possessed by a demon, perhaps the most famous example being *Aoi no Ue*. There are many more still of courtly ladies who are spirits, such as *Teika*, *Nonomiya*, *Izutsu*, or those that exist in the present time within the narrative, such as *Yuya*. *Yuya*’s sadness builds as the play progresses dramatically. She is denied a trip to see her ailing mother, her final expression of sadness and beauty being her recitation of a poem, divulging her sorrow as the soft rain causes the cherry blossoms to fall around her. Here too, the highest point of beauty is the aristocratic female in

²⁰ Hisamatsu and Nishio, *Karonshū*. 233.

²¹ Andrew T. Tsubaki, "Zeami and the Transition of the Concept of Yūgen: A Note on Japanese Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 30.1 (1971). 61.

distress, her pathos expressed through the exposition of poetry and dance, not wild extravagant pleas and tears. This sadness is developed through the events of the play's miniscule, but still present, plot. There are other renowned plays that include aged ladies; *Higaki*, *Sotoba Komachi*, and *Sekidera Komachi* are some famous examples. Among the plays in the Woman's Mode, an excellent example is the play *Yōkihi* by Zenchiku. The focus is the pathos of the courtly lady in distress, with much less plot than in *Yuya*.

The source of *Yōkihi* was widely known: the famous Chinese poem *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, by Po Chu-i (772-846). The protagonist is the Chinese courtesan Yang Kuei-fei (719-756), "Yōkihi" in the Japanese reading. Hers is one of East Asia's most epic love stories, between the T'ang emperor Hsuan Tsung (685-762) and Yang Kuei-fei. Coming from a lower ranking family, she became one of the most powerful people in T'ang China, elevating her family and friends to high status positions as she rose in prominence. Renowned for her voluptuous beauty, tact, skill at dancing the Dance of the Robe of Feathers, and the influential power she wielded over the Emperor. Filled with intrigue, betrayal, rebellions and war, her story ended when the Emperor was caused to flee the capital by the mistake of kin, consequently forced to have Yang Kuei-fei killed to stop a mutiny and save the kingdom. With much remorse, the emperor left his beloved Yōkihi behind on the fields of Bagai, returning to the capital only after years of struggle when peace was restored. Po Chu-i's poem not only captures her glory days, her romance with the emperor, and her tragic end, it continues on past her death. The poem migrated to Japan where it received wide praise and was highly influential. In the poem, the remorseful emperor calls upon a Taoist magician to travel to the island paradise of *P'eng-lai* (*Hōrai* in Japanese). There he finds the maiden just as distraught as the emperor, longing to be reunited with her lover. But her untimely death and existence as a

spirit makes this impossible, and the sorcerer returns home without her. He requests a keepsake to show the desperate monarch, so she breaks her hairpin in two and hands him one half. Then, she tells him the secret vows she and the emperor once shared, “To fly together in the sky, two birds on the same wing, to grow together on the earth, two branches of one tree.”²² The poem ends, “Earth fades, Heaven fades, at the end of days. But Everlasting Sorrow endures always.”²³

This particular choice of a source for a *yūgen* play is very clearly marked by the aristocratic female’s central role, the major theme being her grief and misfortune. But it is telling not only for what it does include, but for what it does not. Despite this potent dramatic source, the play does not concentrate on the epic history of the tragic love affair, nor does it recreate the drama surrounding her death. The Noh play about Yōkihi focuses on the very end of Po Chu-i’s poem, when the Taoist magician finds Yōkihi in the Taoist paradise of *Hōrai*. The *waki*, in the character of the sorcerer travelling at the behest of the heartbroken Emperor, arrives at *Hōrai* and seeks out Yōkihi, describing the wonders of this magical realm. Finding the woman known as the Jade Princess in the Residence of Great Purity, he beseeches to speak with her and have her return to the capital in China. Her very name marks her as a noble woman. The sorcerer extols her beauty, stating “the clouds her hair, her face a flower,” but she is quickly moved to sadness as she knows she cannot return to her love: “tears float inside her lonely eyes, as a single branch of pear blossoms wearing drops of rain.”²⁴ From the very first moments, she is lauded as a royal beauty, but one that is already on the verge of tears. She is compared to an arrangement of beautiful objects from the natural world, but this beauty

²² Trans. A.S. Kline Po Chu-Yi, [The Song of Everlasting Sorrow](http://taleofgenji.org/sorrow.html), <http://taleofgenji.org/sorrow.html>.

²³ Po Chu-Yi, [The Song of Everlasting Sorrow](#).

²⁴ Masayoshi Ito, [Yokyokushu](#), vol. 3 (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1983). 408.

is in distress. In contrast to the lyrics, the figure on stage is serene and still—internally she is disturbed, but the physical, external expression is calm.

The sorcerer explains that even when Yōkihi was alive in the palace—another reminder of her courtly connections—the emperor was neglectful of his governmental duties, but now, in his despair for her loss he has gotten worse. Yōkihi responds only with sorrow: “To search so far for the whereabouts of a spirit like the fleeting dew that is neither here nor not; though such an act is close to compassion, my turmoil increases, growing grasses wither and scatter, as these tidings come on the winds, and conversely lead to bitterness; at this moment now, tears of tender attachment flow, as memories of the world I knew, efface my soul.”²⁵ It is clear that Zenchiku is constructing an image of a distraught female figure, one that is tormented by her loss of life and lover, unhappy in the decadent paradise that she is placed in; she is elegant but deeply disturbed, and this is her appeal. Her saddened demeanor is not presented as a disappointment; rather, this depiction of the great Yang Kuei-fei displays this elegant woman in distress as an expression of beauty. Yōkihi’s story is one of tragedy, of heartbreak and politics, the heavy weight of responsibility and the horrors of war. She has every reason to be as troubled as she is. But the audience knows this due to the intertext of the historical event and its mediation through the poem. The attraction here is her elegant and graceful visage as she divulges the sorrowful disruptions in her heart visually and aurally.

Yōkihi gives the sorcerer the hairpin the emperor gave her, but he advises that such a worldly item is not proof of his visit, moving her to reveal the vow that she made with the emperor on a fateful Tanabata night. This layers the classic Chinese (and Japanese) myth of two ill-fated lovers who are destined to be apart for eternity but allowed to meet only for a brief time every year on the Seventh night of the Seventh

²⁵ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 407, 408.

month. Yōkihi goes on to state that “in such a sad world, accustomed to the ever spinning wheel of life and death, my body was left in Bagai and my soul has come to the Palace of Immortals. The second bird longs for her companion, alone she lays out her single wing, two trees entwined, their branches wither, and swiftly their colors wane.”²⁶ The Buddhist phrase the “ever spinning wheel of life and death,” one of many examples of Buddhist rhetoric stand out in a tale dominated by Taoist motifs. These can be seen as Zenchiku’s Buddhist critique of Taoism and immortality, stressing the inevitable suffering of human life. But this is also an important device to express the duress that Yōkihi endure for all eternity. Yōkihi’s state of anguish cannot be escaped; only a Buddhist, *not* a Taoist path might allow an individual to avoid such a state of constant sorrow. Thus the suffering of the elegant female illustrates “the Truth” of the Buddhist worldview. The play emphasizes transience—a crucial element in *yūgen* aesthetics—as the short bliss of love pales in comparison to the turmoil that she must endure for eternity.

Receiving the hairpin back, and reciting the vow she made with the emperor directly, she dances the *kusemai*, extolling a poetic summary of her affair with the emperor. As she concludes, the chorus sings:

“Two birds on a single wing, two trees whose branches intertwined, the leaves of these words too, have withered away to whispers of a single pledge, even after only one such night a parting frequently leads to longing. How much more then, after years and months have passed together in this world? Were there no parting from death, I should have accompanied him for a thousand years, yet such a circumstance will never come to be. As it is said that ‘those who meet must part,’ we have met and we have parted.”²⁷

In her sadness she performs her famous Dance of the Robe of Feathers as a *jonomai*. Her despair moving her to dance, the *kusemai* and *jonomai* offer visual spectacles, a physical and elegant evocation of the emotions of the famous aristocratic female character, bringing her to life on stage before she vanishes to remain forever in

²⁶ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 410.

²⁷ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 412.

Hōrai. Removing her hairpin she gives it to the messenger magician before he leaves. Standing there as he parts, the chorus sings for her “I will never meet you in this world again, never in this paradise or on Shimatsu Island. Even in this floating world of beauty, I long for the days of old, this fleeting world of parting...on the floor of Heaven’s Tower, eye’s cast down, weeping, she falls, to remain forever.”²⁸ This is how the play ends.

The entire play of *Yōkihi* is built up to display how this eternal²⁹ beauty suffers from her loss and separation from her lover. What is particularly striking about this play is the lack of a desolate and bleak, often dew-filled, misty, or seaside setting—a common poetic setting for Noh plays, especially those noted for having *yūgen* such as *Tōru*, *Izutsu*, *Nonomiya* and *Matsukaze*. Except for the brief description of *Hōrai* in the *michiyuki*, it is her ill fate and subtle displays of her tragedy that are the central aspects of the poetry and narrative impetus of the play. Her character as a tragic aristocratic woman is the locus of the sensation of *yūgen* that is so evident throughout the play. It is precisely the graceful female under duress poetically and symbolically expressing her sadness with refined gestures and elegant dress, that is the source of the *yūgen*. As Peter Thornton explains, “while the *nō* theater involves representation with gestures at its physical level of *monomane* [imitation], at its primary physical level of *kokoro* [essence, content, heart] it involves the presentation of an unchanging essence and a reality that is understood to be more true than material reality. The ultimate goal of *nō* theater is not the dramatic representation of a plot or event but the presentation of essence.”³⁰ That essence is made female in this Noh play, the idealized form of a character that possesses *yūgen*.

²⁸ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 412-413.

²⁹ In the sense that she is a spirit and in the immortal paradise of *Hōrai*.

³⁰ Peter Thornton, "Monomane, Yūgen, and Gender in *Izutsu* and *Sotoba Komachi*," *Asian Theatre Journal* 20.2 (2003). 221.

2.1.3 A Heavenly Paradigm: The Legend of Wushan

There was another related paradigm for *yūgen* that began in poetry and was extrapolated to the *sarugaku* stage. We have already seen it referenced by Zenchiku in his treatise *Kabuzuinōki* in a comment on the play *Matsukaze* where he states, “these two roles are indeed the highest realization of the true meaning of *noh*. They are hovering visages that become drifting clouds in the morning and driving rain in the evening. The quality of *yūgen* deepens still more: an emotion of surpassing profundity. In sum, one could call it the appearance of women in tranquil repose, unable to rise.”³¹ Here Zenchiku compares the female image, *yūgen*, and “drifting clouds in the morning and driving rain in the evening,” an image that is a reference to the Chinese legend of Wushan, which correlates the scenery to the image of a goddess that temporarily descends from heaven. This legend was well known in the medieval artistic circles, one that Zenchiku was clearly aware of, and given its prevalence in the discourse at the time, its appearance in his plays such as *Hanjo*,³² and blatant connection to *Matsukaze*, we can presume that Zeami was familiar with it as well.

We can trace the prevalence of the legend of Wushan through many treatises available at the time. Though closer to Zenchiku than Zeami’s time, the poet Shinkei (1406-1475) was at the very least aware of Zeami as he has noted the performance abilities of Zeami, giving him the utmost praise.³³ Shinkei is most well-known for his aesthetic of “cold, slender beauty”, which he clearly associates with the female image, stating that “there is nothing of such deep emotion, of such cold purity as water. At the mention of the water of spring, the image of a woman’s faces hovers in the mind,

³¹ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*, 192.

³² Hanago starts a *sashi* off with the lines: “Evening storms and the morning clouds.” This play also references the Yang Kuei-fei legend. Royall Tyler. *Japanese Nō Dramas*. Trans. Tyler, Royall. Ed. Tyler, Royall. New York: Penguin, 1994. 116.

³³ Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes*. 472-473.

inexplicably moving.”³⁴ He then goes on to explain the coolness and charm of water and ice through the seasons. Thornhill notes how this quote on the chill aesthetic can be seen as a link to Zenchiku’s theory of Primal Water, the ubiquitous element that is the grounding factor of art, the essence of beauty; the chilled and cold expressions that Shinkei emphasizes are also represented in important aspects of the rest of his work.³⁵ Thus there is some visible effect of Shinkei’s influence on Zenchiku’s aesthetics as a whole. But in relation to *yūgen* itself Shinkei makes a more specific reference. When speaking on the subject of *yōon*, or *yūen*³⁶, a concept very similar to *yūgen*,³⁷ Shinkei relates the heavenly maiden of Wushan to *yōon* as an ineffable beauty. However, here he is directly referencing Shōtetsu.

The most complete recitation of the legend of Wushan can be found in Shōtetsu’s

Shōtetsu monogatari:

When one speaks of *yūgen*, what kind of thing would it be? It is not something where one could say “this is the style of *yūgen*,” thinking with certainty that this was it in either diction or content. As it is said that the *yūgen* style is drifting clouds and whirling snow, should one express that the *yūgen* style is the scene of clouds hanging in the sky or snow drifting in the wind? In the work written by Teika, called *Guhi[shō]* I believe, it states: “If one were to give an example of a ‘thing’ as *yūgen*--[then this example exists:] there was a king of China named Xiang [of Chu]. At one time, saying he would take a nap, he went to his sleeping chambers, and a goddess descended from heaven and made love to him in a state that was neither a dream nor reality. King Xiang did not want to part with her, and when he yearned for her to stay, the goddess said ‘I am a goddess of the upper realms. A bond from a previous life has brought me here now and I have made love to you. I am not a being that should be here on this earth.’ When she set off to fly away, the king greatly longed for her and said, ‘If

³⁴ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*.188.

³⁵ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*.188.

³⁶ Ramirez-Christensen translates *yōon* as “ineffable remoteness”, and notes that it is most commonly read as “*yūen*”. According to Ramirez-Christensen, “*yōon*” is written in hiragana in the NKBT text but written with the kanji for “dim, distant, hidden” and “distant” in the Kokemushiro SSG text. See Shinkei and Esperanza U. Ramirez-Christensen, *Murmured Conversations : A Treatise on Poetry and Buddhism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008).p. 288n1.

³⁷ Shinkei and Ramirez-Christensen, *Murmured Conversations : A Treatise on Poetry and Buddhism*.p 146, 288.

that is so, then please at least leave a memento behind.’ Upon saying this, the goddess replied, ‘As a memento of me, there is a mountain near the palace called Wushan. At Wushan, gaze at the hanging clouds in the morning and the falling rains in the evening,’ and then she vanished. From then on, longing for the goddess at Wushan, King Xiang would gaze at the hanging clouds in the morning and the falling rain in the evening as her memento. Gazing at the morning clouds and evening rain should be called the style of *yūgen*,’ writes Teika. As for the subject of where is the *yūgen* here, that must depend on the contents of the heart of each one. Moreover, it is not something that can be understood clearly in content, nor expressed in diction, is it? Shall we say that the *yūgen* style is a style of drifting, hanging, haziness? Or should we say that the *yūgen* style is the scene of four or five court ladies wearing silken robes, gazing at the disarray of flowers blooming at their peak in the Southern Palace? One may also ask, “where in this is *yūgen*,” but it is not something that one can say “This is *yūgen*” itself.³⁸

In this description, the image of the female is directly associated with *yūgen*. The very scenery of the morning clouds and evening rain are actually the memento of the goddess. Intertwined with this image of the heavenly maiden of Wushan is the lonely atmosphere of heartbreak, lingering on in the dim light of the morning clouds trailing away, and the moments at dusk, watching the solemn evening rain. The very images that are so valued in *yūgen*, in this case actual, natural, earth-bound manifestations of a heavenly goddess, are clearly marked as female. Transience is evident in this legend as well; the blissful love affair only lasting for the length of a dream. There is also a sense of eroticism involved as the (hetero) sexual relations of the male king and the female goddess are directly stated. In this passage, the legend of the goddess, whose memento for the lovelorn king is the clouds hanging in the morning and the rain falling in the evening by the mountain at Wushan, is correlated to the image of drifting clouds and whirling snow. But as Shōtetsu noted, this tale too, is a quote from yet another poetic treatise, *Guhishō*, which Shōtetsu attributed to Teika.

³⁸ Hisamatsu and Nishio, *Karonshū*. 232-233

Teika's authority on poetry was so prevalent at the time that treatises on poetry were forged in his name to give other poet's conceptions credibility. *Guhishō* was one such document. Despite the fact that this was a forgery, the important aspect is that Shōtetsu and some of his contemporaries believed that this was a Teika treatise, giving it weight and the power to influence, as can be seen. The specific quote that Shōtetsu is referring to is as follows:

The *yūgen* mode is not only one; among collections of *yūgen* poems there are those that have the form of drifting clouds and whirling snow. *Yūgen* is the general term for this, and moving clouds and whirling snow are particular configurations of it. Drifting clouds and whirling snow are comparative terms for an alluring woman. Taking this into account, the poem that gives the sensation of being gentle and refined, as thin clouds hiding the moon, is what is called as "drifting clouds." Again, the poem that gives the sense of being gentle, suggestive, and unusual, as of tiny bits of flying snow scattering in disarray in a wind that is not excessively strong, is what could be called "whirling snow."³⁹

The quote then goes on to explain the story of Wushan in a similar fashion as stated above by Shōtetsu. Again, the image of the female is intimately tied to *yūgen*, with gentle, suggestive overtones and elegant images of nature. Once again we see a particular conflation of the "drifting clouds and whirling snow" and imagery from the tale of Wushan, where the goddess's memento is the "morning clouds and evening rain." What is more, the author directly states that "*yūgen* is the comprehensive name, and moving clouds and whirling snow are particular modes of it. Moving clouds and whirling snow are illustrative terms for an alluring woman." In *Guhishō*, an "alluring woman" is *yūgen*. This is very similar to what Zenchiku describes when praising Zeami's play *Matsukaze*, shown above in the quote from *Kabu zuinōki*⁴⁰, comparing *yūgen* to "the appearance of women in tranquil repose."

³⁹ Hisamatsu and Nishio, *Karonshū*. 284n35.

⁴⁰ This could also be a reference to the *Guhishō* quote shown here.

This particular treatise may have also been referenced by Zeami in his treatise *Shikadō*, relating to the matter of skin, flesh, and bones in performance. This was a metaphor that Zeami used to describe the specific aspects of a particular performance, and in conjunction to this writes that “according to tradition, for that matter, it’s only in the writing of Kūkai that all three come together, even in calligraphy.”⁴¹ As Hare notes, this very same assertion is made in *Guhishō*, stating that the skin, meat, and bones of calligraphy are only found together in the work of Kūkai. Assuming this as proof that Zeami had seen *Guhishō*, we can presume that he would have seen the same description of *yūgen* that Shōtetsu did, with its various associations to the female, the elegant visions of natural imagery, the subtle sense of loneliness, transience of experience, and the connections to the aristocracy of China. Furthermore, Zeami consciously plays with the images of “morning clouds and evening rain” in his play *Matsukaze*; Matsuoka Shinpei even posits that the characters become an embodiment of the landscape itself in the play.⁴²

These images of “whirling snow and drifting clouds” in connection to *yūgen* seem ubiquitous in the period in which Zeami and Zenchiku lived. *Sangoki* references “whirling snow and drifting clouds” in conjunction to *yūgen*⁴³, as does *Gukenshō*⁴⁴, which then goes on to recount the tale of Wushan. A variant of the above quoted *Guhishō* goes as far as explicitly saying that the “countenance of a woman who is beautiful like no other must be the style of *yūgen*”,⁴⁵ directly correlating and connecting the female to *yūgen*. Considering the Taoist origins of the legend of Wushan and that within the graphs of the word *yūgen* itself there lies a heavy connotation of darkness, one that

⁴¹ See Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes*.135.

⁴² Shinpei Matsuoka, "Yūgen Ga Enjaku Suru Toki—Ikkyū, Zenchiku No Sekai.," *Bungaku* 1996.33.

⁴³ Nobutsuna Sasaki, *Nihon Kagaku Taikei*, 6-han. ed., vol. 4, 10 vols. (Tōkyō: Kazama Shobō, 1983). 316.

⁴⁴ Sasaki, *Nihon Kagaku Taikei*. 355-356.

⁴⁵ Sasaki, *Nihon Kagaku Taikei*. 293.

contains Taoist aspects alluding to the *yin* (J: *in*), darkness, the cold, the wet, the night, the moon, and in human form, the female, such a connection is not surprising.

Matsuoka explains the image of “morning clouds and evening rain” as resonant with *yūgen* in that it involves seeing through something not commonly thought to be aesthetically appealing, penetrating to the beauty beneath. He declares this as embodying *yūgen* in the medieval period, and directly connects it to influencing Zeami and Zenchiku’s work. In terms of gender, however, this is particularly telling as, according to the legend the image derives from, the rain and clouds, the contents of the scene of *yūgen* are, on the inside, in the truest deepest reality, actually the remnants of an elegant, mysterious, and lovelorn goddess from Heaven.⁴⁶

This legend and its associations with *yūgen* are reinterpreted in *sarugaku* theory, fitting in nicely with the notion of the courtly female in distress as a character that embodies *yūgen*. In the treatise *Goon sangyokushū* Zenchiku directly associates such euphemisms for the style of *yūgen*:

In one treatise on poetry it is said that in drifting clouds and whirling snow is the suggestiveness (*yojyō*) of *yūgen*, a highly superior style, the sensation of flying snow drifting in the wind, the appearance of light clouds as they enshroud the moon and it is as if beyond the diction and contents there could be a floating shadow attached.⁴⁷

This passage is not a direct quotation from the treatise *Sangoki*, but is rather what appears to be a paraphrasing of it. It should be noted that this follows a large excerpt from *Matsukaze*, the same Zeami play Zenchiku quoted in *Kabuzinōki* with a reference to “morning clouds and evening rain”, a play which constantly utilizes these images from the two sisters’ names to the poetry around them.⁴⁸ Here Zenchiku mentions “passing clouds and whirling snow”, clearly direct relations to the same Chinese legend of Wushan

⁴⁶ Matsuoka, "Yūgen Ga Enjaku Suru Toki—Ikkyū, Zenchiku No Sekai.."33-34.

⁴⁷ Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 358.

⁴⁸ See Matsuoka, "Yūgen Ga Enjaku Suru Toki—Ikkyū, Zenchiku No Sekai.." 32-34.

that was frequently named in connection to the effect of *yūgen*, creating a specific correlation between *yūgen*, the female and the legend of Wushan in *sarugaku* theory as well. Even if not directly, the legend of Wushan creates a model of simple dramatic events that can be frequently seen in Noh: an unspectacular, desolate and wet landscape, (that represents) the beauty of an aristocratic woman and the underlying melancholy of a lost love, with tinges of fleeting fulfilled desires involved—common themes in many Noh plays, especially those of the Woman’s Mode written by Zeami and Zenchiku. Examples include the above-mentioned *Nonomiya*, *Yōkihi*, *Higaki*, *Sotoba Komachi*, *Teika*, *Izutsu*, and most explicitly *Matsukaze*.

In terms of this paradigm, *Yōkihi* explores a different side of the original Wushan legend, the focus now on the female spirit who is forced to part with her royal lover, leaving a keepsake for him behind; *Yōkihi*’s narrative can thus be seen in relation to the aspect of *yūgen* theory connected to the Wushan legend. The play *Matsukaze*, however, provides an even more explicit example of how the legend of Wushan is (re)interpreted to embody *yūgen* on the *sarugaku* and Noh stage. *Matsukaze* has long been heralded as a prime example of *yūgen*, both by Zeami and Zenchiku, the latter specifically citing it in conjunction to *yūgen* in both *Kabuzuinōki* and *Goonsankyokushū* (examples cited above). It is also one of the most popular and well known plays in the Noh repertoire, Royall Tyler noting that it is/was the Noh/*sarugaku* actor’s “bread and butter.”⁴⁹

In the play a lone monk (*waki*) travels from Miyako to the West, ultimately arriving at Suma Bay. Noticing a particularly striking pine tree, he inquires with a local who replies that it marks the grave of *Matsukaze* and *Murasame*. As the local leaves, two fisherwomen appear, drawing carts to fill with brine. The two young women describe their surroundings and inner sadness: “It’s so pleasing, yet so familiar, Dusk at Suma,

⁴⁹ Royall Tyler, *Pining Wind : A Cycle of Nō Plays*, Cornell University East Asia Papers No. 17-18, 2 vols. (Ithaca, N.Y.: China-Japan Program, Cornell University, 1978). 88.

the fishers' cries, so faint in the offing, small fishing boats, the reflection of the dim moon's face, the silhouette of geese, the flocks of plover, wintry blasts of salted winds; indeed, all such things, in such a place as this, are those of fall. In our heart's desolation we bide through the night."⁵⁰ The landscape is dark and desolate, a hazy scene as they carry out their lonely work, filling their buckets and wetting their sleeves with the salty water.

Seeking a place to stay, the monk is allowed lodging in their hut and asks who they are. Revealing themselves to be Matsukaze and Murasame they explain, "Now, Yukihiro, for the length of three years, filled his idle hours with the pleasures of boating and the moon to clear his heart at Suma Bay. From the fisher maidens who draw the brine at night he chose us two sisters and consigned us names that suit the season, "Pining Wind" and "Passing Rain", from when he summoned us to his side. As intimate as the fisherfolk are with the moon at Suma, so did we become with Yukihiro."⁵¹ Though these were previously just simple fishing maidens, Yukihiro's affections brought them into the realms of nobility, and their keen sensitivities kept them there: "Our salt burned clothes of fisherfolk colors were changed for sultry silks, finely woven robes with the scent of incense. In this manner the three years passed, then Yukihiro returned to the capital."⁵² In this particular instance we see how these lower class women became elevated to higher aristocratic status through the gifts and favors of Yukihiro. There is also a slight tinge of eroticism as the *iro* (colors/sultry) here implies a sexual connotation, along with the image of them "exchanging clothes." They continue, explaining that "Longing, Matsukaze and Murasame, their sleeves only wet with tears, for a love beyond their standing; the fisher maidens at Suma, beyond their sins so

⁵⁰ Masayoshi Ito, Yokyokushu, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1983). 242.

⁵¹ Ito, Yokyokushu. 246.

⁵² Ito, Yokyokushu. 246.

deep.”⁵³ I believe the implied sexual relations of an affluent young man from the capital with two sisters by the sea would have been recognized by Muromachi period audiences. Even in the events of the story that involve the monk, the eroticism of a lone male figure taking up lodging with two beautiful ladies is at least vaguely apparent.

Expressing the depth and range of their love for Yukihiro, Matsukaze and Murasame grieve over his unfortunate death, only shortly after he left them to return to the capital, their three-year love affair coming to a sad and permanent end. As they continue to be devoted to him, longing for him deeply, their speech begins to hint at the fringes of madness: “In love’s thick grasses, dew and longing grow rampant and confused. In love’s thick grasses, dew and longing grow rampant and confused. Our hearts deranged as our clothes unravel.”⁵⁴ It is soon revealed that before his departure Yukihiro left them a memento: a hunting robe and cap, treasured keepsakes of him that they hold dear. Matsukaze divulges her anguished heart, and explains how she dons the cap and robe before she sleeps, ever yearning to be closer to her deceased lover. Putting on these clothes, she begins to slip into insanity, “As the River of Three Rapids, endless tears of anguish flow, that lead to pools of broken love’s madness.”⁵⁵ Fully indulged in her dreams and desires, she sees Yukihiro, moving toward him in the darkness, toward the pine that she mistakes as his figure. Murasame cautions her, trying to hold her back. But consumed with madness and longing, Matsukaze recites the poem Yukihiro wrote, promising his return. Holding back her tears, she begins dancing in her frenzied state, wearing the robes of her lost lover. The play ends as the dawn breaks, her delusions sinking back as her visage fades into the landscape, “The winds blow through the pines, as winds of madness, the towering waves of Suma, raging through the night, in a dream

⁵³ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 246.

⁵⁴ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 246. I would like to express my thanks to Professor Robert Huey for help with this translation.

⁵⁵ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 247.

of delusion, where they have appeared. ‘For our remaining vestiges, for your prayers we plead,’ they say as they pass away; the sound of the waves retreating across the Suma bay, blowing down behind the mountains at the border pass, the birds’ cries resound, as the dream departs without a trace. The night fades to dawn, though he heard the passing rain, when he glances at this morning, all that remains are the wind in the pines.”⁵⁶

In this ending the play of the words simultaneously signify the “*matsukaze*” of “wind in the pines” as well as “Matsukaze” the character’s name. The same is true of “*murasame*” as “passing rain” and the other sister’s name “Murasame”. Just as the characters vanish with the coming dawn, they linguistically and literally fade back into the landscape from which they came. As Matsuoka notes, the names of both Matsukaze (Pine Wind) and Murasame (Passing Rain) resemble the aspects of “morning clouds and evening rain” and can be further interpreted as the literal embodiment of the landscape of the Suma Bay appearing in the traveling monk’ (*waki*) dream.⁵⁷ In fact, they literally transform into “morning rain” with the passing rain receding as dawn approaches and the monk awakens. The landscape for the majority of the play is a lonely, dreary place, bathed in moonlight and the sound of the desolate ocean, containing much of the same resonance as the wet, dark scene of “morning clouds and evening rain,” both quintessential *yūgen*-esque landscapes: nothing in particular is obviously appealing about them, but there is an underlying sadness to the whole, unadorned scene. The melancholy of the scene is literally embodied in the characters of Matsukaze and Murasame—they are the manifestation of the sadness that is part of the *yūgen* definition.

Matsuoka explains that this narrative of *Matsukaze* is actually not part of a longer Japanese *setsuwa* genealogy, but rather is one that Zeami (and/or Kan’ami)

⁵⁶ Ito, *Yokyokushū*. 249.

⁵⁷ Matsuoka, "Yūgen Ga Enjaku Suru Toki—Ikkyū, Zenchiku No Sekai.." 34.

created, based on the Wushan legend.⁵⁸ Indeed, in *Matsukaze* the paradigm of the legend of Wushan is shifted, reversed along gender lines: the man comes for a brief time, returns to the court, leaving behind his memento—one that becomes crucial in the play’s dramatic and visual climax. To follow Matsuoka’s assertion of the deep connection and influence of the legend of Wushan on *Matsukaze*, then *Matsukaze* and *Murasame* are both, quite literally, the embodiment of *yūgen* as it appears in poetic discourse in conjunction to the legend of Wushan. Zenchiku notes this directly in the passage from *Kabuzuinōki*,⁵⁹ and in his treatise *Goonsankyokushū* where he quotes the treatise *Sangoki*, classifying an excerpt from a large section (*sashi*, *sageuta*, and *ageuta*) of the play *Matsukaze* as being part of the *yūgen* style of “drifting clouds and whirling snow,” the term for the style of *yūgen* that was intrinsically associated with the legend of Wushan.⁶⁰

Throughout the play, the fisherwomen are elevated to the status of aristocratic ladies through their love affair with Yukihiro, and their pathos is adequately expressed throughout the script in elegant poetry. They are driven to the brink of madness and express it through their verse, elevating their speech to song, and moving *Matsukaze* to dance as she falls for the ethereal and imaginary image of her deceased love. These characteristics match what was idealized in a *yūgen* character and play, something that has proven itself for centuries as it is amongst the most popular and well-regarded plays, if not the most often performed. In terms of the text we can see that the characters and narrative are deeply intertwined with *yūgen*, the literal embodiment of the poetic discourse in concrete form for the actor to portray on stage.

⁵⁸ Matsuoka, "Yūgen Ga Enjaku Suru Toki—Ikkyū, Zenchiku No Sekai.."34.

⁵⁹ Matsuoka, "Yūgen Ga Enjaku Suru Toki—Ikkyū, Zenchiku No Sekai.." 33.

⁶⁰ Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 359.

Thomas Hare, when describing *yūgen*, explains: “In the poetics of the *Shinkokin*⁶¹ period, *yūgen* means ‘mystery and depth,’ and indicates a kind of veiled, deep, melancholy beauty, full of unstated overtones and richness...[Zeami] seems to mean by the term an elegant, romantic, feminine, and, in large degree, visual beauty.”⁶² As Hare notes, Zeami’s ideal of *yūgen* is slightly different from that of the poetic theory exemplified by poems such as those above. I suggest that in Zeami’s *yūgen*, in the *yūgen* of *sarugaku*, we find that this aesthetic has come to acquire not just an aspect of femininity, but has literally become female in its manifestation as a character. While Zeami, most definitely explores the “mystery and depth” and “veiled, deep, melancholy beauty” of the earlier era’s *yūgen* in his plays, he adds the character of a female to the description of the ideal. In conjunction with the various poetic theories on *yūgen*, Zeami and Zenchiku produced a specific vision of *yūgen*, personifying the associations of the female already inherent in *yūgen*, creating a literal realization of such imagery, culminating in the image of the female in distress as the foundational expression of *yūgen* on the *sarugaku* stage, evident in their many plays of courtly women. But besides the female gendering in Zeami and Zenchiku’s treatises and the contemporary discourse on poetry of their time, there are other practical reasons behind selecting the aristocratic female gender⁶³ as the embodiment of *yūgen* for male actors to play on the *sarugaku* stage.

⁶¹ The *Shinkokinshū* was compiled by Teika and others and is one of the most famous and respected Imperial Poetic Compilations.

⁶² Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. 300.

⁶³ I use the phrase “aristocratic female gender” as it is my opinion that issues of class deeply affect this definition of gender.

2.1.4 Some Pragmatic Considerations on the Representation of *Yūgen*

In Noh/*sarugaku*, poems and poetry are included, but other elements are also involved. When it comes to creating *yūgen*, the Noh actor faces a more complex situation than the poet.” Firstly, the Noh is a performing art, made up of music, song, dance, costume, set, props, stage, spatial design, and masks. These aspects make up the external display of the narrative of the script, the poetry, and characters within it. Many of these elements have some gendered aspect, but in the following discussion we will only be focusing on the levels of character and narrative. This is not to discount poetry or insinuate that it is a lesser form of expression, but merely to highlight the fact that Noh and poetry are very different arts, and thus the problems their respective artists face when seeking to create *yūgen* are different. These additional elements create more variables for the Noh or *sarugaku* actor when trying to generate *yūgen*. While *yūgen* in poetry comes about with the reading/recitation of the poem, in Noh and *sarugaku* it is when it is acted, danced, sung, when it is performed on stage. Zeami and Zenchiku constantly make reference to *yūgen* in regards to the actor’s state of mind, in terms of the body, of movements, of singing—in terms of performance. Beyond a personified extrapolation of an already established aesthetic design from poetry, there are also other pragmatic reasons for considering the female form as an appropriate source of *yūgen*. These include: the need for a dramatic subject for a narrative, an emphasis on exposition of dance, the performance of upper class values, and the need of the actors to entice potential patrons with their skill as performers.

Zeami, an intrepid “businessman” and talented performer, knew that to win the crowd he needed to please the aristocracy. Zeami was an artist, but in his secret treatises was frequently focused on appealing to the audience and in so doing gaining important patronage. By creating a theater with plays that were dominated by the *yūgen* aesthetic

the upper classes enjoyed, he could help bring prosperity to the next generation of his troupe. The tradition of adjusting the art form by introducing outside elements from other popular sources was passed from Kan'ami to his son Zeami. Kan'ami was known as a performer with a variety of talents, especially *monomane* (imitation). This was the artistic legacy that Kan'ami left to Zeami. In Zeami's early treatises, he stresses the importance of *monomane* and the selection of the object for imitation. Given this emphasis on the object of imitation (that is, on the character to be portrayed), and given that in the poetic discourse at that time *yūgen* was often associated with women, a character representing a "female in distress" seems a reasonable choice. First, the courtly female in distress is graceful, as *yūgen* is supposed to be. Second, the character would be difficult for a man to portray on stage, making it all the more impressive if the male actor could successfully persuade his audience. Third, it would be a literal display of *yūgen* as Chōmei and other poets described it. Thus, Zeami objectified *yūgen* as the deep imitation of an aristocratic female in distress, a recurring character in his plays as well as those of his protégé Zenchiku.

Yet, after his father's death, influences from other actors and dancers came to his attention, and he began to value the aspects of *buka* (song and dance) as the basis of his art. Zeami started to seek a more elegant style of dance and song, incorporating new aspects into his theories on beauty and performance as he aged. While Tsubaki explains the importance of *buka* (song and dance) for *yūgen*, Zeami and Zenchiku, along with other playwrights, knew that it was not only in the dance forms and styles that they needed to possess *yūgen*, but the subject of the narratives needed to possess it as well. After all, while Noh is essentially made up of dance and song, the other major aspect is, in Zeami's own terms, the Three Modes with which a character is portrayed. Character and setting, as well as how they were expressed in the lyric poetry were other essential

elements of Zeami's conception of *yūgen*. But as Zeami began to conclude that song and dance are intangible aspects to the elucidation of *yūgen*, he realized that they must also be intricately tied to the part of the character being displayed. For this reason Zeami explains in his later treatise *Sandō* the importance of utilizing a character that would be able to believably sing and dance. The song and dance had to be meshed into the narrative and the character in it. With the focus on dance and song as the other source of *yūgen* in form, the female character still supplied the most abundant material for creating such a circumstance for song and dance.⁶⁴ As Zeami notes in *Sandō*, there are ample resources of women who compose poetry in the past and in literature, as well as women who are *shirabyōshi* or *kusemai* dancers that provide believable characters.⁶⁵ I would argue that with a large selection of material to choose from as the source, as well as the fact that she lends herself more naturally to exposition through dance, the female character again seems to fit nicely as an ideal for beauty on stage. By having the woman character possess some sort of grievance it adds a complex mixture to her psyche, made further elusive by her position as a possessed being—either by madness or a spirit—creating an aura of mystery to her and an added level of depth; two other elements that were also valued in the discourse on *yūgen*, embodied most specifically in the actual ideographs of the word “*yūgen*” itself (幽玄). The courtly female creates a focal point for drama and helps to explain the necessity of distress in character, allowing for the physical reenactment of the pathos described in poetry to be expressed on stage through song or in dance.

The *chūnomai* and *jonomai*, are among the most common dances in Noh, found in some of the most highly regarded plays, and are often termed as dances that have

⁶⁴ It should be noted that the word “song” could also mean “poetry” as they are written with the same word, *uta* (歌).

⁶⁵ Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes*. 157.

elegant characteristics.⁶⁶ As these are the main visual focuses of *yūgen* plays, one could deduce that these elegant dances are *yūgen* dances. Such *yūgen* dances are overwhelmingly included in almost the entire Woman's Category (Third Category) plays, further connecting *yūgen* to the Woman's role in dance as well.⁶⁷ This is not to say that only the female creates *yūgen* but that the female role is highlighting, or a highlight of *yūgen*. When male characters perform this they are reserved for characters that are spirits or deities: male character plays that utilize such *yūgen* devices are exemplified by *Atsumori* and *Saigyōzakura*—the character Atsumori being the spirit of a court noble and the dignified *shite* of *Saigyōzakura* being the spirit of an old cherry tree.⁶⁸ Courtliness and the element of non-human in the deity come into play here, and align with the elegance of the *jonomai* and the *chūnomai*. Interestingly, despite *Saigyōzakura* being about the spirit of a cherry blossom tree, and the cast being all male characters, it is currently labeled as a third category play, the same class as a woman's play.

But if this elegance can be applied to male characters as well, why was the female form so valued by Zeami and Zenchiku over the “easier” choice of idealizing a male? Valorizing the Warrior Mode would be a simple way to placate the ruling class of powerful warriors. But was that necessarily what the audience wanted? In many poems cited as examples of *yūgen*, it is depth and darkness, allusions to natural beauty and suggestions of loneliness that are emphasized. These could easily be added to a play with a non-female form and exhibit grace. The same can be said of Zeami and Zenchiku's emphasis on courtliness. In fact, in the Martial Mode, warrior plays exhibit distressed noble warriors, exclaiming the beauty of nature and tragedy (*makemono*) or success (*kachimono*) of their battles. The source of these is almost exclusively the *Tale of the*

⁶⁶ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. 291, 294.

⁶⁷ Chifumi Shimazaki, *Woman Noh: In Parallel Translations with an Introduction and Running Commentaries* (Tokyo: Hinoki Shoten, 1976). 192-194.

⁶⁸ Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*. See respective plays .

Heike, so these warriors are at least associated with the aristocratic court of the past. The Warrior's Mode sense of *yūgen*, which includes courtliness, allows for the actor to show to the non-warrior nobility (and to the military men themselves) that warriors can be courtly, thus playing to the ruling warrior elite. However, these are stories of soldiers and should, as Zeami explains, exude some sense of force in their figure and their dance to be believable. For the Martial Mode, Zeami instructs that the beauty in dance/movement comes from "making the foundation force, making the mind intricate,"⁶⁹ but explains that for the Woman's Mode the premise is "making the foundation the mind, casting force aside," and this is what creates the effect of *yūgen* in dance for the Woman's Mode.⁷⁰ It seems the lack of force for the Woman's Mode is what helps create *yūgen* and this is in opposition to the Martial Mode's beauty which is founded on force. On the other hand, Zeami's play *Tōru* is a perfect example of an elegiac play, on the gentle and graceful spirit of the Minister Tōru lamenting the loss of his glory days, long since passed. He is not a warrior but a high-ranking noble. The element of courtliness also becomes important here, as this allows the "lowly" actor to imitate courtliness and thus show that he has the right to participate in aristocratic culture. The Woman's mode also allows for a covert transgression of the common actor to literally play the part of a "true" (i.e. non-military) noble person.

As we have seen in the legend of Wushan, there is a subtle eroticism that is included in *yūgen*, as the sexual relations of the goddess and king are an essential part of the legend. Such elements of eroticism may have also been utilized in performance for the troupe's benefit. This can be seen in the male plays as well. To take an example from the Warrior Mode, there is the Zeami play *Atsumori* which features a very refined, young

⁶⁹Here I have used Tom Hare's wording of "making the mind intricate" as I believe it is the most accurate for 砕心 (part of 体力砕心、*tairikisaishin*). See Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes*, 218. I am thankful to Arthur Thornhill for helping me with a more precise translation.

⁷⁰Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*, 126.

Taira warrior who dances the *jonomai* dance which is associated with, but not confined to, female characters. William MacDuff explains that the tradition of *shudō*—the homosexual activities between young boys and older men—was part of the reason why the young Astumori's tragedy, in the eyes of his slayer (and the audience at the time) was so moving.⁷¹ In *Atsumori*, a defining aspect of the play's production is that the *shite*, playing the young male aristocratic warrior, does not wear a mask. Zeami notes that this was done in certain plays where the character is a young male to show off the young actor's (male) beauty. This was presumably to attract the (sexual) attention and the favor of interested patrons as had occurred with Zeami and the shogun Yoshimitsu. It was a typical medieval practice for the male gender at the time, part of omni-normative male behavior that promoted a relationship between the actor and a high-ranking patron. Zeami even states that a young boy exudes *yūgen*,⁷² just as does the aristocratic female does. We can contend then, that the young male and female forms would be enticing to an audience.

Yet, as explained above, the legend of Wushan was deeply tied to the notion of *yūgen* in both *sarugaku* and poetic theory. The impetus of the story is the sexual relationship between the male king and the female goddess. Thus, one reading of the image of morning rain and evening clouds (or drifting clouds and whirling snow) points to a sexually active female who seduces a king. This does acknowledge an eroticism that is directly focused on the female as well—the female character initiating the sexual act. Furthermore, in Muromachi and in previous periods of Japanese history, courting between men and women generally focused on something other than the physical attributes of the pair, attractiveness being judged instead on the quality of the poetry, the

⁷¹ William MacDuff, "Beautiful Boys in Nō Drama: The Idealization of Homoerotic Desire," *Asian Theatre Journal* 13.2 (1996).254-255.

⁷² Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes*. 27.

style of the calligraphy, the paper it was written on, the hints of clothing that were exposed through a carriage or a screen, and the scents that they burned. These were what generated sexual attraction. These practices still occurred in both the literature that is quoted in many Noh plays (e.g. *Genji*, *Ise*), and in the courtship of the upper classes. When the actors put on their costume and sing the refined poetry, they are putting on the same airs of elegance and grace that would have attracted a male patron in any other circumstance.

Given the connection of *yūgen* with an underlying (hetero)sexuality from the legend of Wushan, the display of external female beauty in costume, and the nature of the (homo)sexual practice of *shudō* that was linked to the *sarugaku* stage practices, we can imagine that the concept of *yūgen* in *sarugaku* during the Muromachi period was one that did include sexual connotations, but one where the object of eroticization included both the male and female sex. The young boys exhibited a beauty that was parallel to the aristocratic female in distress, making them both objects that could be admired, sexualized, and idealized. This is why Zeami explicitly states that a boy should perform without a mask and depict characters that are of appropriate age to root himself in *yūgen*.⁷³ But this is just a fleeting stage in an actor's life; cover the face with a mask of a female character and the body with robes, and an actor of any age can play this role convincingly. While Zeami equated the young boy to *yūgen* as he did the Woman's Mode, he noted that the young boy's attractiveness was temporary and that the Woman's Mode was a reliable and reusable method to create *yūgen* and thus more congenial to sustaining a troupe's popularity. As the male actors refine their skills, they can perform better, gaining experience and ability, allowing them to portray *yūgen* in the Woman's Mode for longer than they exist as a young actor—their physical body hidden behind the

⁷³ Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes*. 130.

robe and mask of the female character. The notation of the ephemeral aspects of the young boy's physicality highlights the importance of transience as part of the *yūgen* aesthetic. In playing the female character—a role that is sustainable for the actor--the transience is focused on the limited time the actor performs the character on stage before switching to another role. It is quite impressive to see an actor portray a warrior's ghost, projecting their might and force, then afterwards seeing them project the image of an elegant lady, then changing roles again for the next play.

Given the practical necessity to impress and entice male aristocratic patrons to support the *sarugaku* actors, the Woman's Mode becomes a prime point to align with the prized cultural capital of *yūgen*. As explored in the aristocratic aesthetic discourse, it was already deeply tied to the female and there were abundant sources for dramatic characters that would allow the actor to show off his skill in dance and elucidation of another sex, and an erotic display of beauty in a manner the aristocratic audience would accept, find attractive and in line with the tastes of their class. Ultimately, the expression of *yūgen* had to be subtly conceived and not overly emotional, as the definitions of *yūgen* clearly express. But Zeami frequently warns of straying too far into frailty and explains that proper *yūgen* has "strength," a concept which Zenchiku takes up in his own treatises. Furthermore, the subject in the play had to focus on dance and song in a "believable" way. Thus, the most pragmatic selection for an objectified form of beauty would be an elegant female character, which, through some grievance evokes a mysterious and lonely air, allowing her to sing poetry and dance gracefully. This is also an important and crucial exposition of skill, as well as a constant source of *yūgen* for the actor. Performances of the aristocratic female in distress would produce the aesthetic *yūgen*, one of the most refined tastes of the aristocratic audiences they were seeking to impress, gaining Zeami and Zenchiku steady patronage. Other characters can be *yūgen*

characters, but the courtly female in distress holds a special, privileged place in the aesthetics of *yūgen* and *sarugaku*/Noh. Yet, besides this gendered element to the ideal of *yūgen*, there are more transcendental aspects to *yūgen* aesthetic theory that Zeami and Zenchiku put forth that can help us better understand the gender dynamics at play in Noh/*sarugaku* performance. This larger, more encompassing description of *yūgen* explains how an actor playing any role regardless of the gender can create *yūgen* in performance. Understanding this system can provide us with better methodological and theoretical tools for analyzing gender dynamics in performances that feature cross-gendering.

2.2 Non-Duality and Yūgen

2.2.1 From Dualisms to Non-Duality

Yūgen's associations with Buddhism are often discussed in contemporary scholarship on the matter, an element that I will highlight when discussing Zeami and Zenchiku's aesthetic theories on *yūgen* and its connection to non-duality. If an actor were to have written plays in accordance with Zeami's aesthetic rules and methodology (as Zenchiku may well have done, as his play structure and style are similar to Zeami's⁷⁴), been trained in the Two Arts and Three Modes sufficiently and in the proper order, and adequately understood performance dynamics as delineated by Zeami and Zenchiku, then this would be the (theoretical) ideal actor who could reach to the top levels of *yūgen* in Zeami's *Nine Levels*, or reach the final Circles of Zenchiku's *Six Circles, One Dewdrop*. It is this ideal, hypothetical situation, as expressed in the treatises that will be discussed here. Such an actor would be able produce a moment of beauty that was of such depth and grace that it would be indescribable, an ineffable sensation of sadness and elegance

⁷⁴ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. 182.

unparalleled; he would be able to produce the much valued and elusive *yūgen*. It is this ephemeral moment of beauty that is described as being non-dual by Zeami and Zenchiku.

If non-duality was part of *yūgen*, then it is duality that needs to be transcended, and in much of Noh/*sarugaku*—in performance and script—there is a wide array of “paradoxical elements” leading Yamazaki Masakazu to go so far as to call it an “aesthetics of paradox.”⁷⁵ Royall Tyler notes in his introduction to the Noh play *Yamamba*, that “Medieval Japanese Buddhism was intensely concerned with the lay of paired opposites (such as delusion and enlightenment) and constantly affirming their non-duality,” explaining the importance of this standpoint when analyzing the play.⁷⁶ These dualisms were created with the ideal of transcending them, of producing an element of interdependence between the two.

In regards to dualisms we can see examples of rough warriors with courtly demeanors; dead heroines as living spirits, bygone youthful beauty contrasted with graceful age in appearance; in relation to the legend of Wushan there is the landscape that is in reality a memento of a goddess, from a dream that was actually real. In performance there is the stable *waki* and the vibrant *shite*; the grandeur of the costumes but the austerity of the stage; in the poetry in *Yōkihi*, the forlorn courtesan is brought to tears in the extravagance of *Hōrai*; the evocative love of Matsukaze and Murasame against the desperate reality of their long lost love—the characters lower-class fisherfolk that become a nobleman’s courtesans, beautiful animations of the deceased, apparitions of a desolate landscape. Amongst these juxtaposed dualities, there is a source of *yūgen* cited by Zeami and Zenchiku: a female character played in the Woman’s Mode, by a male

⁷⁵ Zeami, J.T. Rimer and M. Yamazaki, On the Art of the Nō Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami ; Translated by J. Thomas Rimer, Yamazaki Masakazu (Princeton University Press, 1984). Xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁷⁶ Tyler, Japanese Nō Dramas. 311.

actor. But how does one account for such dualisms other than their intended transcendence? To further examine this, we must turn to Zeami and Zenchiku's thoughts on the Three Stages of Truth to the Middle Way and its connection to *yūgen* in more detail.

2.2.2 *Yūgen* and the Three Stages of Truth to the Middle Way

In regards to the mention of the Tendai Buddhist *santai* (the Three Stages of Truth to the Middle Way, i.e. Enlightenment) in the poet Shunzei's (1114-1204) treatise *Korai fūteishō*, William LaFleur explains that these three stages can be applied to poetry (and Noh drama) in general, and in their ultimate form (the third step) the effect of *yūgen* is accomplished. The Middle Way (*chūdō*) follows three steps or stages (*santai*): (1) the first is the understanding that all phenomena are void of existence; however, that very understanding of the emptiness of all things must itself be emptied ("a negation of a negation"⁷⁷), and (2) one comes to understand that things exist provisionally; the third step is (3) to understand that things are simultaneously void of existence and exist provisionally, thus the Middle Way between the previous two steps. In the Middle Way we find a three-fold process, whereby the ultimate revelation is the eradication of dualism, a complete non-duality. This process can only be understood and executed through the dedication and training in the constant practice of meditation.

Regarding Shunzei's poetry, LaFleur states that, "in accordance with the movement through the three stages of truth (*santai*) in Tendai, in Shunzei's view the depth of poetry is not a place but a process."⁷⁸ He continues to explain that this can often be seen when "what had been the locus of the observed now becomes that of the

⁷⁷ W.R. LaFleur, The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan (University of California Press, 1983), 224.

⁷⁸ LaFleur, The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan, 94.

observer, and the original subject becomes an object.”⁷⁹ The first step of the process is the observer’s view, then the image switches to the observer becoming the observed, the final step is “a complete collapse of what Konishi calls the view of observer and observed as in a ‘confrontational relationship’...because the poem has disclosed the fundamental *interdependence* of the two.”⁸⁰ Through such a process of bringing together two specific aspects of the poem, and in doing so showing the inter-connectedness of these two aspects, one has, in effect, produced a poem possessing *yūgen*. This development of *yūgen* occurs “not on some secondary philosophical level but in and through the mechanics of the poem as a poem.”⁸¹

Zeami continues this association of the Middle Way with *yūgen* in *sarugaku* aesthetic theory, stating in his treatise where he ranks levels of *yūgen* for performers, *The Nine Levels (kyūi)*, that “there is the Style of Flower that Cherishes Depth, a form of the ultimate *yūgen*, a performance style of visual effect that is the Middle Way between being and non-being.”⁸² Shelley Fenno Quinn attributes Zeami’s use of the “wondrous” (妙) in regards to the highest level of *yūgen* in the treatise, to influences from Mahayana Buddhism, specifically to the concept of the Middle Way, explicitly mentioned in relation to the Style of the Flower that Cherishes Depth.⁸³ The Middle Way balances precisely on the foundation of the outer two levels of understanding reality. In doing so, it creates an effect that enters into non-duality and thus creates the sensation of *yūgen*.

This can be applied to the division in training for *sarugaku* that Zeami devised: the fledgling actor begins with the Two Arts of song and dance, and then moves to learn

⁷⁹ Ibid, 104.

⁸⁰ LaFleur 105. He is quoting Jinichi Konishi’s article “Shunzei no yūgenfū to shikan,” *Bungaku*. Vol. 20, No. 2 (Feb. 1952) See pages 111-112.

⁸¹ LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan*, 101.

⁸² Translation mine. Zeami; *Zenchiku*, *Zeami, Zenchiku*, ed. Akira; Kato Omote, Shuichi (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974). 176.

⁸³ S.F. Quinn, *Developing Zeami: The Noh Actor's Attunement in Practice* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).222.

the Three Modes of Aged Mode, Warrior Mode, and Woman Mode to learn character roles. For Zeami, when the Two Arts and the Three Modes come together in perfect harmony, when they are completely united in performance, this is when the premier level of beauty occurs. He notes this in his commentary of *The Nine Levels*. In regards to the highest levels Zeami writes:

When you have utilized your full ability, all the training you have received thus far, travelling this path far and wide, you arrive at the effect of the correct flower. This is the rank where you arrive at the Three Modes through the Two Arts. This is the border when the level of various artistic effects is effectively reached—that of moving audiences through the effects of the Flower, where it is apparent to others whether one has achieved the Flower of the Way or not. This is the Style of the Tranquil Flower; when one looks back at your artistic achievements until now and have securely reached a rank at the upper levels of achievement. Above this there is the Style of Flower that Cherishes Depth, a form of the ultimate *yūgen*, a performance style of visual effect that is the Middle Way between being and non-being. Over this is the Style of the Wondrous Flower that is beyond language, which appears where intention and the expressed appearance fuse into one wondrous form of non-duality. With this, the path to the ultimate accomplishment comes to an end.⁸⁴

As the Two Arts and Three Modes are mastered, the actor begins to blossom. Upon leaving this rank, the actor should improve going beyond being and non-being, and finally arriving at a state of complete non-duality. Due to the pragmatic and pedagogical nature of many of Zeami's treatises, one can interpret this in terms of an actor's training: upon complete understanding of the Two Arts and proficiency in the Three Modes, when the actor has reached a level of proficiency where the essence of the character (Three Modes) and the elegance of their song and dance (Two Arts) are expressed with the finest degree of delicacy, then the actor has reached a non-dual state, the highest blossoming of the Flower and the exposition of *yūgen*. In other words, an actor that has successfully

⁸⁴ Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 176.

internalized and dance (Two Arts) and is able to express the role (Three Modes) fluidly through those Two Arts, has reached a non-dual state in terms of *sarugaku* practice.

One may additionally read this as a fusion of mind and body: the Two Arts involve a strict training of the voice and physical body, and the Three Modes pertain to the mind. Mental adroitness is needed *in addition* to bodily command to master the dance-acting and speech-song that is involved in playing each of the three different roles.⁸⁵ We know that even in Zeami and Zenchiku's day, performance was considered a mental and spiritual act, one that involved intense concentration and training. The body needed to be trained thoroughly in the Two Arts and Three Modes until they were properly ingrained; the mind able to fluidly enter the Three Modes, allowing the actor to express the character's emotions through the codified forms. Moving this along similar lines, once the properly trained body and the fully practiced mind could be united in a non-dual state, the body reacting with movement that is considered polished, restrained and graceful, expressing the mind of the character with no distance between the two, in a completely interlocked and indivisible condition, then this is the height of beauty. In terms of pragmatics and pedagogy, this makes perfect sense for a performing art that is not just based on mimicry, but involves particular formal aesthetic qualities of movement and sound. When the Two Arts are completely internalized the actor can begin to take on the more challenging mental and bodily movements of the Three Modes. Once the Two Arts are properly at the command of the actor, they can move with greatest ease and no longer need to concentrate on the perfection of their movements. Thus the mental realm of the actor can focus on the psychic faculties of the character as needed. Having mastered the basics of this through the practice of the Three Modes and Two

⁸⁵ This is all, of course, divided along gender (Woman's, Aged, and Martial Modes) and age lines. In *Fushikaden*, Zeami separates training and estimated level depending on the age of the student/actor in question. See Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 13-66.

Arts, the actor can truly unite the mind and body with grace and subtlety, and perform with *yūgen* on stage.

The connection between *yūgen*, performance, and the non-dual is emphasized by Zenchiku as well, who refers to the *The Nine Levels* in his treatise *Kabu zuinōki*, as well as in his other general theories on *sarugaku*. Thornhill explains that *yūgen* for Zenchiku is not so much a style as it is a mental state that must be cultivated by the performer.⁸⁶ In *Hichū*, Zenchiku explains that the actor must concentrate “upon embodying the appearance (*sugata*) of the role, ‘become the thing itself,’” and entering into the “inner form of the role”, in so doing producing the “*yūgen* of non-duality of mind and matter.”⁸⁷ While Zenchiku is directly talking about a psychological state, in practice the event would incur not only a non-dual mental state of “mind and matter,” but one where the actor’s mental intent (for the exposition of the character) would be effortlessly expressed through the heavily trained body. In theory, this would create a non-dual state between mind and body in the performance. This is presumed to be after mastering the ability to project elegance and grace on an external level.

There is also a direct connection to the Three Stages of Truth and the non-dual in Zenchiku’s *Six Circles, One Dew Drop* (*rokurin ichiro*) typology, the most developed of his theories on *sarugaku* and *yūgen*. In this theoretical structure Zenchiku places a firm importance on the first three circles as the basis of *yūgen*: the Circle of Longevity (*jurin*), Circle of Height (*shurin*), and the Circle of Abiding (*jūrin*).⁸⁸ These comprise of bodily movements (Circle of Longevity), speech (Circle of Height), and mind (Circle of Abiding). They are often taken as a group by Zenchiku as the Three Circles of *Yūgen* (*jōsanrin*).⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*. 74.

⁸⁷ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*. 75; Akira Omote and Masayoshi Ito, *Komparu Kodensho Shusei* (Tokyo: Wan, 1969). 250-251.

⁸⁸ I am using the translations of the Circles from Arthur Thornhill’s translation. See Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*. 24-52.

⁸⁹ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*. 74.

The fourth circle is the Circle of Forms (*zōrin*), one that deals with the Three Modes of Aged, Warrior, and Woman from the foundation of the first Three Circles.⁹⁰ In Zeami's pedagogical terms, the first Three Circles would be his training in the Two Arts,⁹¹ and the Circle of Forms would be the Three Modes. Thornhill notes that the Circle of Forms "represents both the *underlying* tranquility of the *yūgen* of the first three circles and the *surface* grace and beauty of the Three Roles [Three Modes]."⁹² The next step in this process is the Circle of Breaking (*harin*), which is when roles of "more vulgar" types (such as demons) are performed. As the previous Circle of Forms contains both the underlying *yūgen* of the first three circles and of the layer of the Three Modes, the "break" allows for the actor to perform in any style that suits them,⁹³ but maintains the skill and grace of the foundation the first Three Circles of body, speech, and mind provides.⁹⁴ The final step in this system is the Circle of Emptiness (*kūrin*), a supreme beauty with "no discernible characteristic, the highest of all art."⁹⁵ Here he makes a curious connection to *kyakurai*, a "Zen term that signifies the act of returning to the secular world upon attaining enlightenment and consequently realizing that Nirvana and samsara are one."⁹⁶ This is important just to note that this last stage is connected with enlightenment in some manner, similar to the end result of the Three Stages of Truth.

In accordance to Zenchiku's theories, Thornhill explains that the final three circles (Circle of Forms, Circle of Breaking, and Circle of Emptiness) resemble the Three

⁹⁰ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*. 59.

⁹¹ For Zeami, the basis of his art is the Two Arts, the first step of training, and then the Three Modes, which one would learn afterwards.

⁹² Thornhill, "Yugen after Zeami." 49.

⁹³ Zenchiku is directly referring to Zeami's *Nine Levels*, where Zeami instructs that once a performer has reached the top levels of performance and *yūgen*, the actor may occasionally descend to lower levels and styles. As they are proficient in the correct manner of performance, even such crude styles will have a pleasing effect. See Zeami, *Nine Levels*; Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*. 51.

⁹⁴ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*. 51.

⁹⁵ Thornhill, "Yugen after Zeami." 49.

⁹⁶ Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop : The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu Zenchiku*. 62.

Stages of Truth to the Middle Way as it relates to *yūgen*.⁹⁷ Each of these circles represents a different effect of *yūgen* but they are all part of a larger, ongoing system. This process involves: “1) the conventional clarity of differentiating consciousness, 2) semantic/imagistic obscurity, and 3) penetration, leading to nonduality. In the context of performance, these stages can become 1) the mastery of external technique, and/or ‘strong’ roles, 2) the depiction of graceful beauty, and/or vexation and weakness, and 3) inner mastery, the style of ‘penetration.’”⁹⁸ Zenchiku emphasizes that ‘strong roles’ can contain demon roles among other character types, allowing him to justify the use of demon roles to express *yūgen* under the umbrella of *yūgen* theory, and thus creates his own aesthetic theory.⁹⁹ Here, the Three Stages of Truth can be directly applied to the production of *yūgen* in Noh. In other words, the actor can attain proficiency of the Two Arts and/or the Three Modes, utilizing them successfully on stage as step one; the actor as the character can then exude an image of elegance, as step two; and finally when this is completely internalized, when the actor no longer is imitating, but is so proficient in his mastery of movement and sound, role and exhibition of grace, in a complete fusion of mind (e.g. Three Modes) and body (e.g. Two Arts)—then this is the ultimate form of *yūgen*. Thornhill notes that this process is different from that of the *santai*, and that “the religious paradigm *begins*, with the absolute experience of emptiness, and only then proceeds to affirm the provisionally real aspect of phenomena. The aesthetic experience of *yūgen*, however, begins with the appreciation of the natural world as conventionally experienced.”¹⁰⁰ Thornhill explains that at times the process does not follow through to the third step, stating that “the important point is that *yūgen*, as defined by its most

⁹⁷ Thornhill, "Yugen after Zeami." 50.

⁹⁸ Thornhill, "Yugen after Zeami." 53.

⁹⁹ Zeami explicitly notes in his treatises his distaste for demon roles, though they were popular and were a specialty of Zenchiku's troupe. As Zeami's artistic protégé, this theoretical backing would allow him to justify his use of the demon role and explain it as possessing *yūgen*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 62.

convincing proponents, is a dynamic experience. If a sense of movement from stage 1 to stage 2 is present, the effect is achieved.¹⁰¹” But this process too, is one that can only be achieved through effective training. Zeami and Zenchiku rigidly express the importance of training and practice that is necessary for an actor to become accomplished. It is only effective understanding and refinement of *nikyoku santai*—the Two Arts of Song and Dance and the Three Modes of acting, or the first Three Circles of *Yūgen*—which allows the actor to convey an image of gracefulness, that successfully creates *yūgen*.¹⁰² If this training is accomplished, then any actor (male or female) can play any character (male or female) and imbue the performance with *yūgen*.

Thus, in both poetry (according to LaFluer’s analysis of Shunzei) and in Noh that produces *yūgen*, the creation of a non-dualistic element is crucial in its construction. Indeed, “the Buddhist duality of illusion-reality is to be assumed as a necessary premise,” one that is essential for understanding Zeami and Zenchiku’s theories, where the conceptions of beauty and Buddhistic thinking seek to transcend illusion and reach the underlying truth.¹⁰³ This concept of seeing through the haze to the clarity, to non-duality, of negation and the middle path between two poles, is important even in the examples of *yūgen* we have seen. Matsukaze cannot deal with reality so she creates illusions—to her it is real, but to the audience it is not reality, and it is our understanding of it as such that creates the sadness that surrounds the character. That is the highest point of tension in the play. To take this further to Noh performance itself, the lack of stage setting reinforces the fact that all *sarugaku*/Noh plays are illusions, figurative events on stage occurring in an aestheticized dream world. Yōkihi is not really on stage; in reality Yōkihi is not grieving as she dances with her broken hair pin in Hōrai. This is a transient reality

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 53.

¹⁰² Hare, *Zeami: Performance Notes*. 130.

¹⁰³ Benito Ortolani, *Zenchiku's Aesthetics of the Nō Theatre*, Riverdale Studies Study No. 3 (New York: Riverdale Center for Religious Research, 1976). 10.

that the performance produces. After all, a Noh performance, as a live event, can never be repeated again. The question that I would like to pose is, how can the model of the Three Stages of Truth be useful in deciphering the gender dynamics of a *yūgen* performance where the sex of the actor and the character are different?

3. Non-Duality, Gender Play and Yūgen

3.1 Analysis of the Moment of Yūgen

While we can examine *sarugaku*/Noh in theory, by the masks and the scripts, by the dances and music, ultimately *sarugaku*/Noh is performance. It is on the stage, acted, danced, sung and orchestrated in front of an audience that *sarugaku*/Noh and *yūgen* come to full bloom. It is a fleeting, transitory, and non-material performance. Noh in particular is an evanescent act as a Noh play does not have period of repeated showings, but is only performed once, and further exemplified by the lack of rehearsals in the performance art. The performance is transient, and the beauty is expressed only momentarily, but all the more precious because of it. This sits well with the heavy Buddhist influence and backdrop that it derives from.¹⁰⁴

Thus far we have examined two theories on *yūgen* in its idealized form on two levels: 1) the aristocratic female in distress (the levels of character and narrative); 2) a non-dualistic state for the actor during performance (the level of actor). Here we will focus on the audience when the actor gives a *yūgen* performance, analyzing the gender dynamics of the aesthetic moment when the body is male and the mind state and movements that are needed (from the Woman's Mode) are female. If the actors are to be successful, they must create *yūgen* by enacting roles such as *Yōkihi* and *Matsukaze* and perform them skillfully and effectively. In order to do so, Zeami and Zenchiku advise to “become the very thing itself.” As we have seen, that “thing” that produces *yūgen* can be female. What happens then, to the male actor as he becomes the role (the “thing itself”) of the aristocratic female in distress to produce *yūgen*? To analyze this, I propose using

¹⁰⁴ I am thankful to Ricardo D. Trimillos for this perceptive connection of fleeting performance to Buddhist principles.

the non-duality theory of *yūgen* to decipher the moment when the male actor becomes *yūgen* in personified form as the aristocratic female in distress.

3.2 *The Ever-Present Actor*

Zeami has left us some intriguing details on cross-gendered performances. Zenchiku was not as specific in his work on imitation, and presumably he had access to all of Zeami's works, so looking exclusively at Zeami's information is sufficient for our purposes. Zeami notes the difficulty of cross-gendering and that successful performances are within certain aesthetic bounds that will create *yūgen* for the audience. From the audience's perspective, the difficult but impressive qualities of such a performance lie in the fact that elements of both genders are present in these cross-gendered performances. These two points will be addressed in this section.

Zeami's most illuminating passage on the depiction of the Woman's Mode in performance can be found in his treatise *Shūgyoku tokka*. In explaining the manner in which the Three Modes should be performed, he mentions the Woman's Mode in detail:

When in the state of “making the foundation force, making the mind intricate” of the Martial Mode at the time one performs the Woman's Mode, when one does not adhere to “making the foundation the mind, relinquishing force,” thinking that if one just assumes the form of a woman it will be beautiful to the extent that they will suddenly resemble a woman, their dressed up stage persona will wither, and as it is noncommittal it will be a manner of expression that is incoherent. The audience will admonish you for this, saying things like “It has withered away,” “It is so weak,” and to the extent that you return to the body and mind of the Martial Mode the performance will become coarse. How could such a practice be called the essence of the role in the Woman's Mode? A typical woman of this world would not imitate a woman. She was born a woman from the start—a lady of high bearing has the behavior of her status, and a lower class woman acts as her own; it is the performance of the various respective behaviors that should be the essence of the role, depending on the behavior suitable for the social station of the individual role. To consciously craft a beautiful figure, attempting to achieve *yūgen* will never succeed. (*Yūgen* is a most difficult concept to grasp) When such

an actor is told “It is so coarse,” there is nothing that can be done. When told “Do something for it,” he becomes rough. It turns out that there will be criticism strong and weak, as well as right and wrong when performing in the way it should be (these are the borders of the essence of the role). That is why to imitate the appearance of a woman when you have the body of a man is the most difficult; by setting your basis as “making the foundation mind, relinquishing force,” you will give the expressive effect that transforms both mind and body—this is the essence of the role in the Woman’s Mode. Not achieving this and always just imitating a woman you will never realize the essence of the role in the Woman’s mode. Consciously imitating a woman one will not transform into a woman.¹⁰⁵

Zeami’s lines that “to consciously craft a beautiful figure, attempting to achieve *yūgen* will never succeed” implies that it was common to simply imitate a beautiful woman—presumably of high bearing (i.e. having courtliness)—but that this sense of mere surface imitation is worthless and does not produce *yūgen*. Surface acting is not beautiful and it is clear from the passage that Zeami is gauging this by the audience’s reaction. The actor must go deeper, into the mind and body of the character itself, to “transform the mind and body” and internalize a specific aesthetic in the process by “making the foundation mind, relinquishing force.” In doing so, by “relinquishing force,” the actor would presumably create a softer, elegant movement and sound that the audience would appreciate. Perhaps influences of Tsurayuki’s statement of Komachi’s poetry’s not being strong can be found here—a reinterpretation of this as a positive comment, at least in the context of performance technique. More assuredly, for Zeami the construction of elegance was not a matter of force, as endorsed by his adage of “making the foundation mind, relinquishing force.” Certainly the Martial Mode’s foundation in force is different in valence from the elegance of *yūgen* in the Woman’s Mode. Yet Zeami clearly and explicitly notes all of this because of the difficulties of creating “the appearance of a woman when you have the body of a man.” It is only when the mind and body are transformed—of “making the foundation mind, relinquishing force” presumably in the

¹⁰⁵ Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 193-194.

role of an aristocratic lady—that the appropriate effect is achieved. In the same treatise, different adages apply to each of the modes. I am singling out this example as it is the “opposite sex” of the male actor, whereas the Martial and Aged Modes do not necessarily have to be a different sex than the male actor’s. This effect is difficult to attain for male actors when he plays female roles, and thus the skill of the performer is revealed.

For Zeami and Zenchiku, cross-dressing as female was not an act of intended transgression but rather a means to an end: women roles are considered to have *yūgen*, so actors would dress up in the clothes of *yūgen*. The male actors played multiple roles (male and female), clearly delineated along age and class lines, and when offstage, they took on male gender roles appropriate to their social status. They were husbands, fathers, and heads of their troupe. They lived “normative” gendered lives appropriate to their social standing. If they engaged in homosexual sex, as Zeami did with Yoshimitsu, they were probably not identified as a “homosexual.” As William MacDuff asserts, at the time, the gender role of male normative activity (husband, father, troupe head) was separate from sexual activity. As these would be distinct, it was possible to take on another gender role without hazard to one’s perceived sexuality and gender off stage. This was common throughout Asia at that time.¹⁰⁶ Thus, such acts of cross-gendering were not taboo; instead, they were considered expressions of beauty.

Sarugaku shows just the suggestion, just the basic composition of the female form: it projects an aura, a symbol of the female. If *yūgen* was objectified as an aristocratic female in distress, an actor who portrayed an aristocratic female in distress would be imitating (as *monomane*) *yūgen*. This was the aim, to become not just female, but an idealized *figure* of feminine beauty. I would argue that the performers did not become women on stage as much as they became objects of beauty that are gendered as

¹⁰⁶ Michael G. Peletz, *Gender, Sexuality, and Body Politics in Modern Asia* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2007). See section on sexuality in China, 54-55.

female and yet retain male elements in order to create a balance between the two genders. In script, costume, and movement, the actor's character is female, but it is understood that the actor's body beneath is male. This adds an element of restraint. The image stops short of becoming too feminine, reminding us that the underlying individual is in reality a man, and for those few moments on stage, he is set free of his sex, conveying the plight of a woman as an act of beauty. By holding back the total illusion the actor suggests that *she* is really a *he*, and conversely, the audience marvels at how *he* can so serenely produce a *she* onstage.

But what exactly is occurring if the male body suggests a female form through stylized movement, lyrics, narrative and costume in performance? Raewyn Connell explains one theory of gender as "body-as-canvas," describing it as when one regards the body "as a kind of canvas on which culture paints images of gender."¹⁰⁷ In this case the concept is quite literal, and the body is adorned and stylized in every possible way. Signifiers of singing style, costume, mask, and movement, along with the narrative itself all create the appearance of the sex of the character on stage. Zeami clearly adds an extra mental element, emphasizing that the mind and body are both transformed in the process. The actor himself becomes the site upon which the act of (gendered) beauty is literally acted out on, or through. This is, in turn experienced by the audience. But the difficulty with Connell's conception lies in the fact that in *Noh*, while the body is "adorned like a canvas" there are still very clear signifiers of the (male) body underneath. If the actor can convincingly convey that the (female) character is on stage, despite these constant signifiers of the (male) actor, the performance will be viewed as a success by the audience.

¹⁰⁷ Raewynn Connell, *Gender* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity, 2009). 53.

In terms of expressing the female character, the actions, sounds, and movements that provide the female character with life are found in the physical act of performance on stage. We cannot know exactly how they acted or danced in the Muromachi period, but we do know they used masks. As a mask cannot show the accurate imitation of human sentiments that a face can, displaying expressions of emotion such as crying becomes difficult—a mask cannot cry. The subtlety and breadth of expression that a mask can display is breathtaking, but it is necessarily something that *cannot* be displayed in a realistic manner; there will always be room for suggestion and free interpretation as a Noh mask is far more ambiguous and mysterious than a human face; it is a stylized, inanimate, consciously constructed aesthetic object. Thus the mask forces the actor to stop short of intense, flailing, and bawling emotion in the expression of sadness, and they must rely on other ways to display this emotion. While we do not know what the exact method of showing a character was crying in the Muromachi period, it would be safe to assume that it was done in a stylized manner; perhaps similar, perhaps different to the present *shiori* gesture. It was probably a subtle display that codified the action of the emotive response the mask could not display, and was part of a visual vocabulary based on bodily movements to display certain emotions and actions.

Through the visual language of stylized body movements and use of the mask, a sense of suggestion and subtlety is displayed as the words overlay the visual actions in the context of the events in the narrative. The words provide the situation and direct emotion of the characters, and the body and mask express them in the nuanced and elegant manner, completing the artistic expression of that emotion; at other times the words directly give meaning to the actions displayed. Ideally lyrics and actions overlap, resulting in a moving effect for the audience. This means that in external, visual expression, the actor was suggestive of a physical surrogate for the female character—

externally they appear as women, but the mask and elegance of the codified movement creates a distance from a total, inclusive illusion of reality and/or mimesis to a stylized form of the female, just like the idealization of the specific character of a courtly woman in distress. This is the aestheticised object of imitation for the actor to portray in a stylized manner.

Yet this is still on the surface, and as we have seen, surface imitation is not *yūgen*. Zeami advises the actor, “Once you have brought dramatic imitation to its limits and have truly entered into the object of imitation, you have no intention of imitating,”¹⁰⁸ explaining in a later treatise that one must “become ‘the very thing.’”¹⁰⁹ The actor becomes the object of imitation itself and he as an entity would ideally merge with the role. Thus, if the ideal form of *yūgen* was personified as the female in distress in poetic and *sarugaku* discourse, then in terms of *monomane*, the male sexed actor would theoretically try to embody the personification of *yūgen* as the courtly female in distress. By becoming one with the role, the actor gives off the impression that the character in the narrative is moving on stage. It is this highly stylized and idealized image of beauty that is seen gliding on stage in elegant cloth, making graceful gestures, displaying the pristine face of the mask and the elegant robes. These clue the audience in to the character’s sex as the *shite* moves through the dramatic events of the play.

While those elements signify the female character, there are other markers cuing the audience into the physical presence of the male actor. In the visual appearance of the *shite*, the male actor’s jowls protrude from the small mask and give off an uncanny contrast to the size of the mask, cluing the audience in that there is a male underneath. As we still possess many of the masks that were used during this time, we can see that the mask sizes have not changed. Margaret Coldiron has observed this incongruous

¹⁰⁸ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. 66.

¹⁰⁹ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. 132.

nature in the visual image of the “masculine jowls behind the face of the Heavenly Maiden,” but recounts that he “is able to create a performance of extraordinary feminine grace and lightness that is especially impressive in such a large man.”¹¹⁰ Besides the jowls, the reproductive organs and most other bodily contours that would ordinarily cue the observer to the sex of an individual are hidden, making the underlying actor’s gender primarily what we are exposed to on the stylized outside. But because of the protruding jowls, there is an incongruity between the gendered signs of the costume and mask of the character and the physical body of the actor. It is clear from Coldiron’s account that she is conscious of the male body underneath, but impressed by his ability to produce a feminine presence on stage despite the “incongruity” of the visual presence some of the male bodily features. Yet she interprets the actions of the character as those of a female character wrapped in female-gendered costume, moving with elegant, female gendered movements.

Beyond this, there are also aural elements that mark the physical presence of the male actor: in Noh, the voice of a male actor is never hidden. Coldiron notes this other incongruity between the male voice and female-gendered garb and movements in her study on trance in Noh.¹¹¹ This may have been the case in *sarugaku* as well. Hare asserts that research has revealed just how similar Noh and *sarugaku* are.¹¹² Though they were only *similar* and as we do not have any recordings, we cannot know for sure. I utilize the presumption that the voice was similar for a number of reasons: lower sounds resonate better through masks; the same masks are still used today; and the rigid adherence to

¹¹⁰ Margaret Coldiron, Trance and Transformation of the Actor in Japanese Noh and Balinese Masked Dance-Drama, *Studies in Theatre Arts* V. 30 (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2004). 266.

¹¹¹ Coldiron, Trance and Transformation of the Actor in Japanese Noh and Balinese Masked Dance-Drama. 266, 267.

¹¹² Hare, Zeami: Performance Notes. 437-438.

tradition in the Noh world that could sustain such a convention through the centuries. However, I would like the reader to understand that this cannot be confirmed.

If the male voice remained, though it was stylized, it was a deep and bellowing sound and song, more indicative of a male tonality than a woman's. The underlying tone is distinctly male, especially when contrasted with the *onnagata* voice in Kabuki—also a male speaking as a female, or rather, a non-male. Roland Barthes writes on the ability to retain notions of the body that lie beneath the sound, labeling this phenomenon as being 'the grain of the voice.' He states, in regards to Russian bass that:

Something is there, manifest and stubborn (one hears only *that*), beyond (or before) the meaning of the words, their form (the litany), the melisma, and even the style of execution: something which is directly the cantor's body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages, and from deep down in the Slavonic language, as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings. The voice is not personal: it expresses nothing of the cantor, of his soul; it is not original (all Russian cantors have roughly the same voice), and at the same time it is individual: it has us hear a body which has no civil identity, no 'personality', but which is nevertheless a separate body. Above all, this voice bears along *directly* the symbolic, over the intelligible, the expressive: here, thrown in front of us like a packet, is the Father, his phallic stature. The 'grain' is that: the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue; perhaps the letter, almost certainly *significance*.¹¹³

Such a statement could be very easily applied to Noh as well. In Noh song, in the Noh actor's voice we feel the constant energy and suggestion of the Noh actor's male body. At the level of Barthes's geno-song, we feel the unrelenting truth of the illusion on stage: that the lady on stage is actually male. Though low tones pass through masks the easiest, I do not believe that alone accounts for the use of a masculine voice. The fact is, these male-signifying voices alter the aesthetics to include male aspects despite the female mask and robes. The actor engages with the character, evoking a graceful and elegant

¹¹³ R. Barthes and S. Heath, Image, Music, Text (Hill and Wang, 1978).181-182.

female character in distress, but the grain of the male actor's voice constantly reminds the audience of the male actor's presence. We are never completely lost in the illusion of the female image on stage and are cognizant of the male actor below, forced to view the act only as a suggestion of the female form. The audience is made cognizant of the male body beneath through the grain of the voice and the jowls of the actor, even while the actor is dressed and playing the part of the courtly female in distress.

Thus the male actor's physicality in parts of the body and the grain of the voice persist even when playing a female role, acting and performing within specific bounds of elegance. The sounds from the body still exude "maleness," along with the jowls that contrast the gender the mask evokes. This allows the audience to always know that the male body is implicitly there. The actor's sex does not change throughout, only the sex of the character does between roles in different performances. As the site of *yūgen*, what do we make of the ever-present male actor who is clothed with female-gendered aspects on the level of character? How can we analyze exactly "what" the actor is if the suggestion of the female is achieved but it is implicitly understood that the actor is male?

Through physical and aural signifiers, the actor's body stands as a constant reminder of the human, sexed and gendered elements of the actor and work as dualistic elements that contrast with the ghostly, spirit, and (differently) sexed and gendered element of the characters that the actor (he or she) must portray. In the case here, it is a human man's body always present and contrasting with the female spirit character. This gender play could be considered as part of the audience's expectation for the performance, knowing that it is always a man, and marveling at how a male actor can create such a sad and beautiful lady on stage. The male actor produces an aestheticised image, and in all cases, whether god, demon, warrior or woman, the actor was male. Physically (externally) the actor appears as a female (or warrior, demon, etc) but the

body underneath does not physiologically change from being a human, male sexed actor. In such a situation, what gender can we call the actor? Do we even have the vocabulary for it? Often we resort to the linguistic labeling of “she/he” or “he/she” and in theory this may actually be the most accurate. Noh essentially produces an array of (gendered) contrasts that simultaneously exist on multiple different levels: in the female sexed and gendered character (whose femaleness is made clear by the costume and the narrative), and in the actor understood to be a human male, whose physical body draws attention to the fact that it is a male actor. If we take the all-male chorus into account, which will often switch from third to first person in the narrative scripts, there is another aspect of gender layering, as other male voices besides the actor’s would speak the thoughts of the female character.

In regards to cross-gendering in Asian theater in general, it is often the case that the audience can distinguish between the character’s gender and sex and the actor’s gender and sex.¹¹⁴ The audience is cognizant of this difference and it is part of the expectations of the performance. This was probably true in Zeami’s time as well, based on his statement of the difficulties of a male actor playing a female character. If we are to take the “dichotomy” binary of female and male as the two opposing destinations on a gender spectrum,¹¹⁵ then a male playing a woman or a woman playing a man would be the two furthest distances to cross. The “dichotomy”—the binary of male-female—is utilized to generate an effect that works off of this “distance” between “opposites.” I put these words in quotations as they are clearly constructed, but the aesthetic effect that is produced by crossing the boundaries of these constructions works off of the

¹¹⁴ I am indebted to Yuan Yu Kuan for this observation. Cross-dressing also occurs and did occur in the West.

¹¹⁵ Connell explains the “bourgeois dichotomy” of male and female gender as the current most dominant world culture, however, at this point in time in Japan, gender was split between the two sexes, though contemporary norms of hetero and homosexuality were different. See MacDuff, “Beautiful Boys in Nō Drama: The Idealization of Homoerotic Desire.” For the “bourgeois dichotomy” see Connell, *Gender*. 105.

constructions themselves. The robes, the mask, the demeanor of the characters are constructed around established gender norms for (in this case) an aristocratic lady, as Zeami points out in the quote above. The aristocratic lady in distress was “supposed to” react to her grievances by dancing or reciting poetry, thus her appeal for personification on stage, providing ample opportunities for artistic expositions that would create *yūgen*.

A successful actor would ideally be able to cross the two genders convincingly to produce such a female image, but at the same time the audience would know that the body beneath was actually sexed male. Connell remarks that the “body-as-canvas” approach to gender “emphasizes the signifier to the point where the signified practically vanishes.”¹¹⁶ In other words, in terms of cross-gendering, if a man¹¹⁷ puts on clothing gendered as female (signifiers), the displacement of their normative position (female gendered clothing on a female), would not result in emphasizing the “female” but rather the “female-ness” of the object itself that is emphasized. The clothing (mask, etc.) itself is the highlight and the illusion of the signified (the female) and part of the spectacle of the performance. But underneath we know it is really a man. This is why Zeami explains that “to imitate the appearance of a woman when you have the body of a man is the most difficult.” A convincing portrayal of a female character is impressive to the audience because they know it is a man. Even if “mind and body” are transformed for the actor to the female persona on a metaphysical level and in the impression the bodily actions present, the reality of it is that the male actor’s body remains. Zeami may have been cognizant of this based on his figure drawings (See Fig.1). The Martial and Aged Modes are represented by male figures in loin clothes, their bodies exposed, their genitalia covered but their sex clear. The female figure however, lacks a loin cloth, though the genitalia are blocked by the hands. The face and long hair are female, but the body is

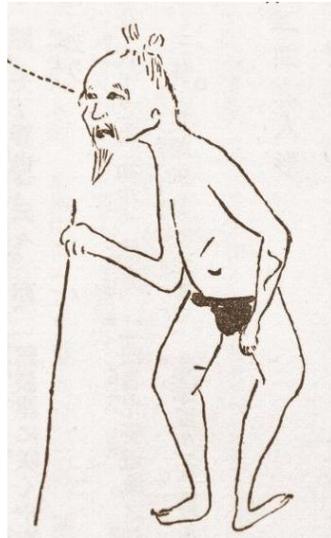
¹¹⁶ Connell, *Gender*. 56.

¹¹⁷ I am only using this example as it pertains to the context at hand.

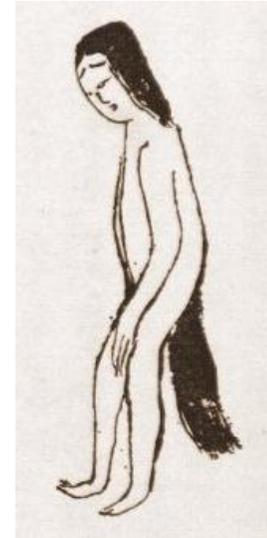
distinctly missing female breasts—the image is androgynous, if not bi-gendered. The body remains male elements, but the suggestion of the female form is produced effectively.



Fig. 1: Martial Mode



Aged Mode



Woman's Mode¹¹⁸

But, the goal is to evoke the image of the female on stage for the audience, despite the physicality of the male body. I would like to stress here that Zeami is not expecting to perform a gender *per se* but to produce beauty. It is just that this particular evocation of beauty involves a character differently gendered than the actor. How can one account for this in terms of our current critical language on gender? It is clear that in Zeami and Zenchiku's time this was celebrated as beautiful on stage. How could an individual exist as two different genders at the same time, especially as the goal is not just to imitate a woman (or a warrior, or aged character etc) but a particular type of woman; one that is courtly and deranged, whose performance is within specific aesthetic boundaries for acting, song, and dance? For this we must turn to the more abstract and transcendental aspects of Zeami and Zenchiku's theories on *yūgen*.

¹¹⁸ Omote and Kato, *Zeami, Zenchiku*. 124-127.

3.3 Cross-Gendering and The Three Stages of *Yūgen*

In cross-gendered *yūgen* performance, the male actor is producing a female image through a complete internalization of the physical movements (Two Arts, Three Modes) and a mental ability (Three Modes: Woman's Mode—character in the narrative) that allows the audience to see through the male-gendered elements that are still present to the female character that lies behind/within them. However, what is beneath those robes is *still* a man; the mask and clothing is female-gendered but the body beneath will always be male, signified by the jowls and the grain of the voice. These “dichotomous” gendered elements are in constant, contrasting juxtaposition, perhaps opposition, or even negation. If a male actor is playing a female character successfully the female character would be simultaneously displayed as the male actor produces it, being male and female gendered at the same time—or rather, female sexed and gendered in character and male sexed and gendered as an actor at the same moment. This simultaneous evocation of the two extremes of the gender spectrum would then produce an uncanny aesthetic tone and atmosphere. It is an engaging, trance-like effect of possession of the actor by a character that is from the “opposite” side of the spectrum. By maintaining certain male characteristics, the actor allows the audience to understand that this is an illusion, highlighting the skill of the actor, but at the same time producing an effect that straddles both genders at once. The effect is not of androgyny. It is clear the character is female and the actor playing her is male. Applying the Three Stage paradigm, we can see that what is created is a site of non-duality: the duality of gender has been transcended, but keeping elements of both genders firmly in place, signifying both at the same time.

As we have seen, non-duality is highly regarded in *yūgen* aesthetics, both by Zeami and Zenchiku. Such a creation of non-duality has been previously explained in a

three-step process that would then evoke the aesthetic of *yūgen*. For the audience, the male actor “becomes the thing itself” as female in the narrative, but the training of the male actor allows for the retention of the stylized techniques (e.g. movements) for display on stage. If we apply the three step process of the Middle Way for the audience watching the actor producing *yūgen* in Noh, the first step (1) would be the understanding that all of the parts on stage are played by biological males understood to be sexed and gendered masculine. This is made further evident by the male jowls and voice of the actor. This male body is what has mastered the Two Arts and Three Modes that allow the actor to perform within the art form’s stylized bounds and the audience is cognizant of this. The second (2) would be the actor’s expression of the graceful beauty, the embodiment of *yūgen*, the elegant lady in distress. The audience would recognize that the character moving through the narrative is female. Finally, (3) with the male body of the actor constant, the illusion of the female image on stage is overlapped (or straddled) and they exist on both levels simultaneously in the instant of the performance. Thus, the image on stage is simultaneously male and female sexed and gendered, completely both at the same time—the male actor performing his gender role as male actor, and the female character performing her role within the play. However, they are consequently neither wholly one nor the other at that moment as the impressiveness of the skill is built on the foundation that the actor is male, but the elegant effect is created through the character and movement that is perceived as done by a female, necessarily making the two dependent on each other.¹¹⁹ This process thus creates the non-dual state that would elicit *yūgen*.

¹¹⁹ Thornton notes this however, only on the level of character in the narrative, stating that they “become simultaneously both man and woman or, conversely neither man nor woman.” See Thornton, “Monomane, Yūgen, and Gender in Izutsu and Sotoba Komachi.” 224.

By taking the two “extremes” of gender and sex and layering them on top of each other, the actor is creating a momentary site where the two can exist at the same time, essentially creating a non-dual element that is the site of *yūgen*. In Buddhism, a truly non-dualistic element would literally be an indescribable sensation that would liberate one from the very fabric of reality. *Yūgen* being considered to have this element, it would theoretically be something so beautiful that it alters your perception of the universe. It is for this reason that it is often dubbed, “ineffable depth.”¹²⁰ It is a sensation that cannot be expressed truly in words, or linguistic concepts. The moment of performance occurs in the simultaneous evocation of the two separate genders and sexes at the same time, a concept that we cannot pin down because according to our gender logic, we must choose one at a time. Indeed, much of the scholarship on Noh focuses on the gender implicit only in the narratives. In performance of plays in the Woman’s Mode, we have a bi-gendered occurrence that can be understood in terms of a non-dualistic structure. The male actor has crossed the gender/sex border effectively, but is still retaining the male body (the training in the Two Arts) that allows *him* to perform *her* within the stylized bounds of the dance and song. They exist on multiple levels at once; the female character’s beauty is entirely dependent on the male actor’s skill to execute it.¹²¹ Paradoxically, as much as it goes across gender boundaries, it is also dependent on them. In order to be non-dual, there must be a duality present, and that duality is seen in the male-female dichotomy of the time. Indeed, this is specifically stressed by Zeami in his statements on the difficulty a man has portraying a woman, and *yūgen* as being embodied in the Woman’s Mode.

¹²⁰ Ramirze-Christensen labels the Style of *Yūgen*, as the Style of Ineffable Depth. See Shinkei and Ramirez-Christensen, Murmured Conversations : A Treatise on Poetry and Buddhism. 27.

¹²¹ This is the same with any role. The effectiveness of the role is only as good as the actor playing it, regardless of the gender of the character or actor.

This highlights the skill of the rare actor able to execute such a display. Such a performance is extremely difficult and both Zeami and Zenchiku seem to acknowledge this. Thus an actor who can effectively do this, cross the (gender) border and exists on two levels simultaneously, was sure to be successful and sought after. If *yūgen* can be considered cultural capital, then an actor who had such a skill must have possessed it. This state of “crossing the border, but existing on both sides simultaneously” is not isolated to the Woman’s Mode alone. Such a paradigm can be applied to the effectiveness of all the roles—the actors are/were not warriors, aristocrats, deities, spirits, or demons. An actor playing a god or a demon reveals such non-duality between a human and a divine being. It is often that female characters in Noh are ethereal spirits as well.

The highly practiced movements of the *shite* are always by a human actor and thus the actor’s ability to produce the visual effect of a character whether through impressive mimicry/imitation or through abstract song and dance, is a show of skill precisely because the actor is not the character he is depicting but a human, crossing over to give the impression of the demon, warrior, deity, woman, or aged character. Few, but noticeable parts of the body are visible, the actor’s body executing the stylized movements that have been ingrained in them from heavy training, their voice resounding behind the character’s costume—all of this cues the audience into the actor’s presence. Yet at the same time, the words of the voice and the actions of the character all carry the audience through the narrative and create the character on stage. In this way the figure on stage, for the audience, is simultaneously the actor and the character in all of the Noh plays, neither one nor the other at the same time. However, when the character becomes female and the actor male (or vice versa) then they straddle between genders as well, with the character female sexed and gendered, and the actor male sexed and gendered concurrently.

In her article “Woman as Serpent: The Demonic Feminine in the Noh Play Dōjōji,” Susan Klein discusses the lack of ability to address Noh properly with various western binaries.¹²² This may be attributed to the heavy Buddhist influences, specifically in the (non)dualistic elements that proliferate throughout Noh. In the performance context discussed here, one dualistic element is the human male actor playing all the characters despite the characters usually being on the “other side” of the spectrum: demons, ghosts, spirits, and/or women. As Etsuko Terasaki explains for the play *Sotoba Komachi*, where the female character Komachi dresses as the man Fukakusa:

The dramatic representation of the possession scene, Komachi’s dual figure as herself and Fukakusa, is extraordinary. It is a complex type of concealment; their doubled-up image is a text in which the outside and inside have become indistinguishable. The zone of difference between the opposition is “folded,” that is, incorporated, into one another. It is similar to what Derrida theorizes as the “double chiasmatic invagination of the edges,” in which the outside is also an inside and the edges are neither closed nor opened, a text in which cognition and performance have become blurred. This makes the Komachi figure undecidable within a binary logic because it includes binary terms—woman and man, destroyer and victim, self and other, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, and so on. Yet the figure exceeds both his/her human capability; Komachi is both herself and Fukakusa simultaneous and yet actually is neither.¹²³

Could this not be said of all Noh/*sarugaku* plays with female characters? While she is analyzing this in terms of the character in the script, in actual practice there is a male-sexed actor playing a female-sexed character. This simultaneous “being” of both “female” and “male” binaries is in all performances of Noh plays featuring a female character played by a male actor, and vice versa for female actors. By adding a cross-gendering¹²⁴

¹²² See Susan Blakeley Klein, “Women as Serpent: The Demonic Feminine in the Noh Play Dojoji,” *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, ed. J.M. Law (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). 126.

¹²³ Etsuko Terasaki, *Figures of Desire : Wordplay, Spirit Possession, Fantasy, Madness, and Mourning in Japanese Noh Plays*, Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies, No. 38 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002).135.

¹²⁴ This is Terasaki’s term: cross-gendering *not* cross-dressing. See Terasaki, *Figures of Desire : Wordplay, Spirit Possession, Fantasy, Madness, and Mourning in Japanese Noh Plays*.107.

female character in male garb, this just further accentuates the layering. In common societal discourse, then and now, it can appear that there are rigid gendered boundaries. Although gender roles were defined differently in Muromachi Japan, the roles for each sex, according to its class, were defined in a particular “normative” way. Cultural and aesthetic value was placed on the ability to cross these boundaries within certain stylized limits. In Noh, the skillful evocation of the two binaries at once, questions gender constructs as it literally produces an enigma which our gendered systems cannot define, while at the same time utilizing them in their enactment on stage. This “bi-gendered”, “bi-classed”, “human-spirit”, non-binary figure, and the sensation it produces in conjunction with the emotions in the script, was the site of the “ineffable depth” that was labeled in Medieval Japan as *yūgen* in *sarugaku* performance.

3.4 Yūgen in the Complex Layering of Cross-Dressing in Noh

In a number of Noh plays involving women, the female characters will often wear male clothing; examples include *Dōjōji*, *Matsukaze*, *Sotoba Komachi* and *Izutsu*. While a cross-dressing character is not a dominant trait in Woman’s Plays, there are enough of them to constitute a trope, and with the notable exception of *Dōjōji*, they are all amongst the most greatly revered plays. When such events occur, the mask remains female, but a hat and cloak of a man are worn by the character, further compounding the gender lines as the actor below is male. The cross-dressing figure on stage adds an even more complex layer to the equation. In *Matsukaze* her desire for her lost lover causes her to wear his old clothes to feel closer to him and her delusions cause her to chase after a mirage of Yukihiro she creates in her mind. In *Sotoba Komachi* and *Izutsu* the female characters become possessed by the spirit of their lost male lover. A successful actor would be able to make this possession by a male spirit subtly known, but at the same

time elaborate on the female character's delusion and deranged state. In the narrative, the figure on stage would be simultaneously a female in distress and the male that possesses her. This is signified by the male-gendered hat and cloak, and the continued use of the female mask, creating a non-dualistic gendered state on the level of the character in the narrative. Perhaps it is this complex system of layering on the level of character on top of the level of actor persona that further stimulates the creation of *yūgen* on stage for the audience. Certainly the effect of layering characters and their genders would be extremely difficult to produce successfully and would be impressive to behold. In such performances, *yūgen* would be created through an actor who could constantly straddle two sexes and genders of three separate entities: the male sexed and gendered actor, the female sexed and gendered character, and the male character that possesses her. By doing this, a non-dual gendered object of beauty is expressed in performance with further levels of gender crossing. This is an extremely difficult effect to display (the possession of a possession that crosses gender boundaries) and having the physical and mental capabilities to do so effectively is a truly monumental feat.¹²⁵

Thornton explains that it is this very cross-dressing on the level of character that produces *yūgen* in *Izutsu* and *Sotoba Komachi*, stating that such moments are the climax of *yūgen* in these plays as the character becomes "simultaneously both man and woman or, conversely neither man nor woman."¹²⁶ But this can be said of all cross-gendered Noh performances. Adding another stratum of cross-gendering on the level of character compounds this complexity, providing an extra layer of depth and mystery to both the character and performance. Ultimately, it is always a male actor that provides the movements and sounds for the female character, and whether she is possessed or

¹²⁵ As a side note, when the male actor is playing a female character that then gets possessed by a male character, it is actually a return to the gender of the actor. Might this be an instance of Zeami's *kyaku-rai* (doubling back) in gendered terms?

¹²⁶ Thornton, "Monomane, Yūgen, and Gender in *Izutsu* and *Sotoba Komachi*." 224.

not, the physicality of the male body beneath is never fully hidden from the audience. While the idealized persona of *yūgen* is female, elements of the male are kept in the expression, keeping the balance from going too far over to a hyper-feminized image. This, as Chōmei explains, would be too much—it is only the suggestion of distress in the female, that is necessary for beauty; too many tears and it is exhausting. It is the Middle Way between pathos and restraint, male and female, a tension that lies beneath the surface as we know the elegant female exterior is really a skilled male actor.

4. A Contemporary Case Study

4.1 A Living Past

While *sarugaku*'s heyday is unfortunately long past, Noh lives on today. While we may never know the particulars of *sarugaku* in Zeami and Zenchiku's time, we can see its progeny in the Noh as it is currently performed. Many elements have changed, while others have stayed the same. Among the most stable are the scripts themselves. However, Noh is not just a textual art, it is also a visual, aural, and most importantly, performance art. Vestiges of the Muromachi aesthetic traditions can still be found in contemporary performances: ancient masks, scripts, ritual, spiritual connotations and the emphasis on elegance and refinement.¹²⁷ If one may pardon some anachronism, I would like to take the conclusions and observations made above about the Muromachi art, and bring them forward in time to analyze both the aesthetics and the gender dynamics that occur in contemporary performance. Doing so provides a case study that shows how such gender dynamics are presently at work today. This analysis will deal with a hypothetical performance where the actor would ideally reach an ideal, non-dualistic state.

4.2 A Model Example: Izutsu

Often admired as “a model of the *yūgen* (depth and grace) that was Zeami's own ideal and that the modern schools of *nō* proudly uphold,”¹²⁸ the play *Izutsu* exhibits a “standard” understanding of *yūgen* in general, specifically in conjunction with the female form. It is considered a paradigmatic play of Zeami's, specifically a woman's play,

¹²⁷ Though much of the strict formalization of Noh occurred during the Edo period, there was a strong ritualistic and spiritual element in *sarugaku* during the Muromachi period, readily apparent in both the scripts and treatises examined here.

¹²⁸ Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*. 120.

and Zeami himself viewed it as one of his finest works, stating that it was a “straightforward noh...of the highest flower.”¹²⁹ Due to its “straightforward” nature, it can best be used as a “typical” example of both a Noh play in general, and in particular one of the Woman’s Mode. As such, we can infer that in terms of its musical and narrative structure, subject matter, use of intertext and dance, *Izutsu* was close to the model Zeami held for a play. In *Izutsu*, we can see the concepts of *yūgen* and gender play being put into practice in the performance, producing what could be called the most classic example of beauty on the Noh stage.

The source of *Izutsu* is the famous *Ise Monogatari* (Episodes 17, 23, and 24), utilizing the story of Ki no Arisune’s daughter and the love she had with Ariwara no Narihira, the illustrious lover and presumed protagonist of *Ise*. Driven to the edges of madness by an ill fated love affair with a promiscuous courtier, Ki no Arisune’s daughter is a prototypical character for *yūgen* and the Woman’s Mode. The play begins with a monk stating he is at a temple for the famous poet Ariwara no Narihira, reciting a well-known poem that was once composed there. Except for the usual chorus, drummers, and flute player, the stage has but one prop: a simple skeleton of a well with some plumes of grass rising from one corner. Out of the darkness the actor (the *shite*) dressed as a woman comes in from the bridge on stage right, wearing an elegant costume, a smooth black wig, and the mask of a young woman.¹³⁰ Her very image evokes the sense of grace that the ideal aristocratic woman would exude. Walking across the stage, she shows us her loneliness in the beautiful imagery she describes: “Dawn after dawn, blessed water,

¹²⁹ Hare, *Zeami’s Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*.134.

¹³⁰ There are unfortunately no records of how the play was actually performed during Zeami’s time, however, Royall Tyler suggests that it was performed close to the way it is today, though there was a variant in the sixteenth century. See Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*.121-123. The specific costuming and masks used differ between schools of Noh and the actors playing the roles, however the type of costume and age of the female image of the mask used is generally the same. The actor can choose to express differences in the character portrayed by using different masks or different patterns, designs, and colors of the clothing, but as a whole the costume does not change.

could clear both heart and moon.¹³¹ All the while, these forsaken autumn nights, ¹³² the sight of another is so rare in this old temple, the wind blowing through its garden pines. The moon sinks low against the low temple eaves' grass;¹³³ though long forgot, secretly yearning for him, for how long must I endure with all hope gone. Truly, all things in this world linger on in memory of him."¹³⁴ From the recitation of these very first lines by the deep and resonant sounds of the male actor's voice, the audience is immediately reminded once more that there is a male body beneath the robes. With the tone set by the monk and the elegant woman's remarks, the lady begins to hint at her relationship with Narihira, and the monk asks her to explain more. The courtly grace of the woman's appearance, and the words and movements of the actor exhibit a sense of elegance contrasted with the sadness of her being, longing for a departed love, a loneliness that is reflected in the desolate landscape described.¹³⁵

Sitting, facing the stage in *iguse*, she explains that though she and Narihira loved each other, Narihira was unfaithful. At times, the male chorus takes over for her and they expound in melancholy song: "then courted he Ki no Aritsune's daughter, the lover's hearts surely were not shallow: and yet, in the land of Kawachi, at Takayasu, he had a dear one, so that two roads it was he stole down."¹³⁶ Despite knowing that Narihira had another, Ki no Aritsune's daughter writes a poem expressing her commitment to him: "As the wind blows, offshore the white waves rise, to Mount Tatsuta in the middle of the night, could my love be going alone?"¹³⁷ This is a famous poem from *Ise Monogatari*, the third poem of episode 23. Through the intertextual reference to *Ise*, the audience learns that Narihira leaves his mistress and returns to Ki no Aritsune's Daughter. The chorus

¹³¹ Translation mine. Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 104.

¹³² Tyler, *Granny Mountains : A Cycle of Nō Plays (the Second of Two Volumes)*. 66.

¹³³ Ito, *Yokyokushu*.104.

¹³⁴ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 104.

¹³⁵ Tyler, *Granny Mountains : A Cycle of Nō Plays (the Second of Two Volumes)*. 68.

¹³⁶ Tyler, *Granny Mountains : A Cycle of Nō Plays (the Second of Two Volumes)*. 68.

¹³⁷ Translation mine. Ito, *Yokyokushu*.

and *shite* go on to describe the rest of episode 23, with poems one and two included. These explain that the two were childhood friends, making promises of romance by the well curb when they were children. As they matured their attraction grew and the boy sent a poem to her when they were older. This is the first explanation and first poem of episode 23: “Well curb, on the well curb, on the well curb once we marked our height, but I’ve grown taller since I saw you last, well past those marks we left upon the well.”¹³⁸ The second poem in the episode is her response, and also recited by her on stage: “Side by side we stood, comparing our locks then, but now my hair hangs far below my shoulders. If not for you, for whom shall I tie it up one day?”¹³⁹

As this *sashi* and *kuse* section is performed while seated, the lack of physical movement allows the audience to focus on the poetry that is sung and its intertext, punctuated by the increasing tempo of the music. As this segment is reaching the *kyū* segment of this *dan*, the increased musical intensity helps to increase the tension of the scene. In terms of spatial design, the actor is placed in center stage,¹⁴⁰ sitting still as the male chorus explains Ki no Arisune’s daughter’s troubled romantic history. This presents a still and serene image against the emotional back and forth of their love affair. The feelings of this long past tryst still are palpable for her, and the actor is forced to project this while sitting. With the increase in the tempo of the music, the tension of the scene rises and is juxtaposed against the elegant image of the (largely) silent and still *shite*. The unmoving mask conceals the torment of the character beneath until she finally reveals her identity to be Ki no Arisune’s daughter. She confesses that she is still bound to Narihira’s love, and with the musical intensity around her, the chorus singing and narrating her movements, she vanishes into the shadows of the well curb. The elegance

¹³⁸ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. 144. Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 107.

¹³⁹ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. 144. Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 107.

¹⁴⁰ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 106.

of the restrained aristocratic woman amidst the emotional backdrop, the grace of her movement and eloquence of the poetry culminate in the moment when she overflows with emotion—without wild tears—and reveals her true identity before leaving in shame.

¹⁴¹ This is a high point of the *yūgen* in the first half of the performance.

Throughout this entire sequence, the voice that is carrying the narrative resonates as male (Stage 1 of the Three Stages to Non-Duality in regards to the audience). In a successful performance the actor would imbue their character with a sense of grace having mastered this with the Two Arts and Three Modes, producing an elegant effect. If the actor has truly mastered his art, then his training has allowed him to “become the thing itself.” By now, the actor has shown off his skill to effectively create the suggestion of a female figure (Stage 2), and the audience is drawn into the narrative, moved by their intertextual knowledge of the events being played out on stage, how they are reminisced, and the intensity of the music.¹⁴² All the movements and sounds of the *shite* come from the entity of the character but through the ever-present body of the actor. This produces a non-dual state where the actor and character become interdependent for the audience and they believe that Ki no Arisune’s daughter is participating in the narrative, just as much as they understand that the actor is portraying her (Stage 3). For the audience her clothing and mask point to female, yet the voice and jowls keep restraint. With the sense of sadness for a time long past, the signs of the grieving female are expressed visually in gesture and image, but the pathos is directly explained through the male grained voice—the evocation of the aristocratic female has become synonymous with the male beneath. While we see her as courtly, elegant, and upset, we have yet to see her dance and see the extent to which she is delusional. This is part of the build-up to the ultimate sense of *yūgen* that is to follow.

¹⁴¹ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 107.

¹⁴² Presuming the audience is familiar with the famous *Ise* stories or have researched the script.

Following the *shite*'s exit there is an *aikyōgen* where a townspeople comes on stage and meets the monk. They exchange a few words and the townspeople recapitulates the original story from *Ise* in the correct order this time. The monk agrees to comfort the phantom spirit of Ki no Arisune's daughter at the request of the townspeople and falls to sleep, soon to be visited in his dreams by the apparition. The *shite* returns to the stage, this time dressed in a splendid purple brocade and hat, the clothing left to her by Narihira. This visual heavily connotes the female, keeping a woman's mask and adding just a male hat and a male hunting robe. Like *Matsukaze*, the elements of the legend of Wushan are reversed along gender lines: the male character leaving the female character lonely, providing a keepsake for her. Upon entering she recites her own poem, from *Ise* episode 17, recalling a time when he had returned to her again, only to leave once more: "A capricious name they've made, the cherry blossoms, as they scatter; for one that is so rare through the year, I wait for them, as I do you."¹⁴³ Almost immediately after, she recites a line of a poem from *Ise* 24, emphasizing how true she has been to him in her heart. Yet, in both of these instances, she had also had affairs due to his negligence of her affections;¹⁴⁴ hers is a story of a love that can never be. Wearing his hat and hunting robe, she becomes almost possessed by his spirit and it is clear that she is on the very edge of hallucination. But, having heard her plight, the audience identifies with her. The tragedy is now completely understood—her once golden love is now nothing but a long lost memory. In the variant of the play in the sixteenth century, where the mask is of a woman in her forties (*Fukai*), there is a further dualistic element of lost youth and graceful but distressed age involved as well. In her state of delusion, she is moved to begin a slow and graceful dance.

¹⁴³ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 110.

¹⁴⁴ Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*.122.

Engrossed in her memory, Ki no Arisune's daughter pleads, "Embarrassed though I am, I am transformed into the man from long ago, in dance; and wave my flowered sleeves through swirling snow."¹⁴⁵ Here she explains in her words that she has "transformed into the man from long ago," a reference to the famous lines of *Ise* describing Narihira. In this possessed state, she begins to dance. This is one of the visual highlights of the play, her long *jonomai* dance, perfectly blended into the fabric of the story. The dance can be interpreted as sad due to its place in the narrative: she is the tormented spirit of lovelorn aristocrat, hopelessly longing for a love long past to the point where she believes she will turn into him. The *jonomai* is a slower paced dance where the actor would be "making the foundation the mind, relinquishing force." The movements accentuate her delusions as Ki no Arisune's daughter dances in her dead lover's clothing. In addition to the lyrics having declared her fusion with the male character of Narihira, the visual of the hat and cloak on the female figure helps to layer the gender lines and emphasize the male element in the female, even during these moments of the voice's silence. Deranged and deluded in her longing and lust, she momentarily lapses into the edges of insanity and believes herself possessed by her ex-lovers spirit.

As Thornton explains, the "climactic reappearance of the ghostly daughter, dressed now as a man (under the moon, appropriately, a Buddhist symbol for enlightenment), is the deepest moment of *yūgen* in the play. And it is achieved through the cross-dressing transformation of the ghost from a woman to a man." It is in this moment when the ultimate production of *yūgen* in the play is partly accentuated through the active manipulation of gender and overlapping of multiple dualities (human-spirit, male-female, sane-mad). The male-sexed actor is enshrouded in the female-sexed

¹⁴⁵ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. 151. Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 110.

character who is then taken by a male character. The audience has been carefully led through the narrative to both sympathize and pity the female character, allowing them to view this lady in distress as an object of beauty, but one played by a male actor. When the actor sings, the grain of the voice continues to signal the male actor beneath the layers. In doing so the actor creates an uncanny balance of gendered elements: we are cognizant of the male actor, but he wears a mask that explicitly signifies female, allowing for the continued evocation of the personification of *yūgen* in the aristocratic female that is in distress; the clothing strongly expresses the female gender, but with the accents of the male-gendered hat and cloak. These gendered elements exist simultaneously, accentuating and balancing each other concurrently, consequently creating a non-dualistic enigma on stage. The result of these layers of gendered elements leaves the audience with an image of a non-dual melding of gendered elegance and the site of the production of *yūgen*. Such a subtle balancing act—marked especially by the fact that it is not a full possession as in *Sotoba Komachi* but only partial—is an incredibly difficult feat to execute, one that, if exhibited successfully is of high cultural value and a skilful expression of a specific, stylized beauty.

As her dance ends, she begins to sing again, “Once come hither, back I bring the old days of Ariwara Temple well; roundly clear brilliant the moon shines.¹⁴⁶ ‘Is this not the moon of the past, the spring of old?’ I wonder when he said [these words].”¹⁴⁷ These are the famous lines of Narihira’s poem from *Ise* episode 4, lamenting another love that ended tragically. As it has no connection to the episodes of *Ise* that she is involved with, the audience familiar with *Ise* was able to understand that she is on the brink of madness, remark on its clever (dis)placement, and/or embrace the emotional resonance

¹⁴⁶ Tyler, *Granny Mountains : A Cycle of Nō Plays (the Second of Two Volumes)*. 71. Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 110.

¹⁴⁷ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 110.

of the poetry itself. Though the poem is not hers, nor does it originally apply to her, it does apply to Narihira, and the knowledge that it was his would help the audience recognize that she may actually be possessed by her male ex-lover. This accentuates the cross-gendering in the performance occurring on multiple levels.

Moving towards the well she goes to its edge and repeats the poem she received from Narihira when they were children. In accordance with the *jo-ha-kyū* structure of the play, as the play enters its final *kyū* segment, the tempo of the music increases, and the scene climaxes as the chorus sings for her, “My reflection in his clothes, looks like the ‘Man from Long Ago.’ Courtier’s hat and palace robes, make me look no longer like myself, no longer woman, now I am a man, Narihira’s image.”¹⁴⁸ The character’s delusion is complete and she (and the actor) balances between possession by Narihira and the madness of Ki no Arisune’s daughter. In this moment of high musical and dramatic tension, in both visual (cloak and cap that is male-gendered, mask and robes that are female-gendered, body that is male sex and gendered) and aural explanation (in the lyrics), there is a fusion between these characters, their genders and sexes, and those of the actor’s. At this moment, the chanting stops, allowing the relative silence to hold the tension of the scene as she parts the pampas grass and looks into the well.¹⁴⁹

Longing for her old lover’s reflection, she sees him but for a moment, before she realizes it is all in vain, and it is just her own reflection in her lost love’s clothes. When she looks into the well her mirage is broken and she weeps before backing away from the well. These moments are extremely complex and will be examined here in parts. First, as *he*, the actor, makes the *shiori* gesture to weep, *she* does so in the context of the play. She realizes that it is actually herself and not Narihira, as she will soon explain. This

¹⁴⁸ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*.152. Ito, *Yokyokushū*. 110.

¹⁴⁹ Karen Brazell, *Traditional Japanese Theater : An Anthology of Plays* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998). 156.

realization causes her to weep, and the character returns to the female aspect to display grief as the aristocratic lady in distress when the stylized, conventionalized gesture is made. Due to the mask, she cannot tear; though her face appears static, always beautiful and refined, the actor consciously manipulates the shadows on the mask to produce a myriad of subtle emotions. The actor's mastery of the Woman's Mode allows him to project the female character's aura as disturbed, lonely and heartbroken. Longing for her golden past, she lifts her brocade sleeves before her eyes, evoking the image of her crying. But it is just a symbol, an image and allusion to the act of weeping. As stated prior, in Noh the performance convention developed with signs and symbolic movements to express certain emotions. The exterior image produced by this is elegant, and tranquil while conveying the meaning of crying that would in reality be less refined. The actor catches the tears of the character; simultaneously being the male actor who has repeated this movement countless times, and the character who is crying tears in that instance and circumstance of the "simple" plot. This act is not followed by mournful wailing and sobbing, but by an air of sadness. Those moments that compelled her to dance—the illusion of her lost lover—are now shattered.

Backing away, she sits down in the back by the drums, only to stand once more immediately. Dejected she explains, "Reflected there, his image reawakens all my love, I see myself, his image reawakens all my love."¹⁵⁰ In these lines as in the actual performance, there is an oscillation between the characters: Ki no Arisune's daughter confused as to whether she is herself or Narihira. But this is fused with the male actor performing this as Ki no Arisune's daughter. For the character and actor, it fluctuates between both Ki no Arisune's daughter and Narihira possessing her; for the audience, at times it is all three at once, or just the actor and Ki no Arisune's daughter. This

¹⁵⁰ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*.153. Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 111.

movement back and forth between the two accentuates the madness and distress of the aristocratic lady and exposes the skill of the actor able to show this, evoking *yūgen*. However, there is never a deviation from the underlying bi-gendering of the male actor and female character, just varying degrees of complexity when the third element of the male Narihira is involved.

The chorus continues: “the spirit dressed in robes her lover wore fades from sight, the wilted flower’s color gone, its fragrance linger[s] on.”¹⁵¹ Ki no Arisune’s daughter is all that’s left, returning back to her form, only wearing the clothes of Narihira. During these moments, the final evocation of the aristocratic female character’s derangement is displayed to and understood by the audience. The play has crafted a portrait of this *yūgen* character and the actor has brought her to life on stage. But this is done through stylized expressions, movements, and sounds that highlight the extensive training of the male actor. In a softer style (*hiranori*) the chanting continues as the play concludes:¹⁵² “The temple bell tolls, night fades with the dawn, the morning wind plays around rustling pines here before the ancient cloister, ripped like plantain leaves;¹⁵³ dreams break to waking, dreams break to dawn.”¹⁵⁴ With those lines, the play comes to a close, leaving only this lonely vision to linger for us as the actor leaves the stage; the *yūgen* of the momentary performance just as transient as the broken love affair of Ki no Arisune’s daughter and Narihira.

In *Izutsu*, the poetry of lonesome natural landscapes and elegant episodes of dance of the grieving lady accentuate the lyric exposition of Ki no Arisune’s daughter’s futile attempt to regain a distant past. The sadness of her situation is in her delusion that the past is not lost. The situation is moving as she tries to fight against the transient

¹⁵¹ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*.153. Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 111.

¹⁵² Brazell, *Traditional Japanese Theater : An Anthology of Plays*. 156.

¹⁵³ Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*.153. Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 111.

¹⁵⁴ Ito, *Yokyokushu*. 111.

nature of this world while she looks into the well. The audience's response is predicated on the actor's mastery of movement and song, projecting an outwardly calm image as the turbulent and emotional past of Ki no Arisune's daughter is exposed and confronted in expressive form. In the final segments of the play, as the musical tension builds, these elements convalesce to produce the *yūgen* on stage through the male actor as the female character, who is possessed.

The restriction of the masks and robes allows the underlying tension, the sadness beneath, to only be expressed in a stylized manner, forcing the "actual" emotion (as expressed by the actor/character or as perceived by the audience) to a level below the surface. The external signifiers are of an elegant woman in regal attire, but these are all acted out by the male actor. The deeper, below-the-surface emotion is possessed and expressed by the male body; whose voice (and the eventual male possession of the character) is a frequent reminder for the audience that they are watching a male actor, keeping the image of the female to a suggestion. In actuality the figure on stage is a male-lady: a bi-gendered figure that is at once the elegant grace of the aristocratic female gender and the skillful male actor but neither wholly one nor the other.

The narrative is organized in such a way that it creates the effect of *yūgen*. In other words, the narrative itself is less elocution of drama, and more of an exposition of *yūgen* character. Thus, the character is female, she is aristocratic and deeply disturbed, and the structure of the play, utilizing the *Ise monogatari* quotes, is organized in such a way that it emphasizes this fact, constructing her sorrow for the audience. The actual order of events mediated by the *Ise* poetry references is fragmented, going from future to past to later past. By rearranging this order, all of this is expressed in the dramatic present, separating her loss in time, allows her story to become sad, but not overwhelming. While the story of the narrative is not complex, the poetry that is spoken

and sung, the dances that are presented, and the austere spatial design that is created on stage with the character in his/her elegant outfit against the static and simple backdrop of the pine—all of these are the essential focus of the play and these are the individual aspects that come together to exude *yūgen*. This is all centered on a female character, played by a male actor who has trained sufficiently (Stage 1 for the audience). When performed, this would be the penetration into the second stage to create *yūgen*, the display of grace and *yūgen* personified in the character (Stage 2). The actor creates elegant bodily movements with his highly trained male body, but dressed in clothing that signifies a female aristocrat. The underlying male body is signified to us by the grain of the male voice (Stage 3). If skillfully performed, this would be the complete production of *yūgen* when the male actor performs in a non-dual state as a female character. By extending this gender play further with the cross-dressing scene, an even more compounded sense of gender is achieved, penetrating into the depths of a non-dual gender at the emotionally climactic moments in both narrative and dance. An actor who could achieve such an effect successfully would be rare and prized indeed. In doing so, the actor as male-gendered is simultaneously the character as female-gendered, and is overlaid with a clearly female form blending with her male ex-lover, as he/she begins to dance, this male-lady becomes the decisive site of the production of *yūgen*.

5. Conclusion

Much ink was spent by both Zeami and Zenchiku in finding theoretical and pragmatic paradigms to explain how to attain the ideal of *yūgen*. In so doing, they appropriated the notion of *yūgen* from poetry discourse and embodied it in a character for stage performance: the aristocratic lady in distress. In *Yōkihi*, *Matsukaze*, and *Izutsu* among others, the focus is on this character model as the realization of the personification of *yūgen*, moving, dancing and singing on stage. But, this was entirely dependent on the male actor whose training allowed him to effectively produce this effect onstage through *his* body. In the very mechanics of *yūgen* production in performance, it is not only the female gender, but the male actor which provides the physical and mental elements to create a non-dualistic sensation with the gender play on stage. In this context it is in the male actor portraying feminine beauty that the effect of “crossing the border, but existing on both sides simultaneously” is achieved. With such an impressive ability, the valuable cultural capital of creating *yūgen* occurs due to the difficulty of the gender crossing within certain aesthetic bounds. It is through a Three Stage process towards the Middle Way that we can analyze the gender dynamics of the moment of the cross-gendered *yūgen* performance as existing as male and female at the same time, and yet neither. It is this bi-gendered enigma that that is the site of the aesthetic of *yūgen* experienced by the audience.

This is not to say that the female character is the only means to producing *yūgen*. Zeami and Zenchiku’s non-duality theory is developed later as a wider and more universal theory of *yūgen*, especially as it pertains to bodily and mental training. Indeed, the non-dual theory extrapolated from Zeami and Zenchiku can apply to all characters and actors regardless of gender, as long as the training sufficiently internalizes mind and

body. This process begins with the thoroughly trained actor, the foundation for Stage 1 built on their ability to perfect their bodily and mental abilities for acting (Two Arts, Three Modes). With this in place they can effectively create the desired elegant effect as Stage 2. However, the truly transcendent effect is when the fully trained actor creates the elegant effect, and goes to Stage 3, breaking the boundaries of mind and body. For the audience, certain visual (e.g. jowls) and aural (grain of the voice) elements would allow them to see the actor as his “original” sex (Stage 1). The actor’s abilities allow the audience to experience an elegant entity different from the actor on stage, the character in the narrative (Stage 2). Finally, the original elements of the actor’s features that are constant (e.g. physical body, grain of the voice) and the character (e.g. costume, narrative events) merge into one entity as Stage 3. When character and actor’s genders are the same, there can be non-duality but there is no gender crossing. The non-dual concept and the Three Stages paradigm can provide a method to view performances, but becomes particularly useful as an analytical tool to dissect the mechanics and aesthetics of a performance when the gender of the actor and character are not the same.

This study was an experiment to determine the gender construction in relation to *yūgen* in Noh/*sarugaku* performances that deal with cross-gendering, and for the majority of Noh’s history male actors played female characters. In the contemporary context there are a large number of extremely talented professional Noh practitioners that are women, and I believe that the gender analysis paradigm set forth here could apply to female actors as well. In terms of non-duality for the audience, if there is a fusion of character and actor, the effect is achieved. In terms of crossing genders, if there is an actress who would play a male character, the same layering of gendered elements would occur as they would exist as two genders at once. A deeper look into performances such as this could shed more light on the study of *yūgen*, in traditions both new and old.

Yet regardless of the gender and sex of the actor beneath, it is clear that cross-gendering in Noh (and other performing arts) is one that is enjoyed by both spectator and actor alike through the beauty they create on stage. Connell notes that our gender constructions do provide a source of pleasure for us, a source of creativity and cultural treasures—in fact, she even explicitly mentions Noh in this context.¹⁵⁵ Learning gender (even within stylized bounds) is a source of pleasure for many, and as we have seen, is a source of beauty as well. I hope that the gender conclusions I have made and the aesthetic analytic paradigm of Zeami and Zenchiku that I have proposed take this into account for deciphering gender dynamics in Noh and perhaps other performing arts.

Performance can allow us to go beyond the limitations of language, to reach a sense of truth and beauty that is indescribable in words, providing a medium to convey concepts and ideas that cannot be expressed in any other manner. Judith Butler asserts that though it is constructed as such, gender in actuality is not a binary.¹⁵⁶ Though gender seems to be approached as binary in Zeami's time, in the moment of a sublime performance utilizing elements of both genders by a skilled actor, an uncanny effect was achieved. In our own time we can still see this on stage. Perhaps the performance of a truth that is inexpressible otherwise is not necessarily agendered, but is in fact "bi-gendered."¹⁵⁷ Certainly in Noh the inexpressible truth being bi-gendered takes a very literal form in the male actor playing a female character, consciously manipulating various tropes and styles, with signifiers of both genders operating on multiple levels at the same time.

¹⁵⁵ Connell, *Gender*. 143.

¹⁵⁶ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

¹⁵⁷ I am grateful to RaeAnn Dietlin for bringing this to my attention.

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