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How Handsome, How Infuriating: Onnagata Gender Performance on the Kabuki Stage

Thesis Chair: Dr. Cynthia Patton

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      This research presents a look at the gender performance of Japanese cross-dressing actors (known as *onnagata*) on the kabuki stage. It first provides a historical and societal context, then applies the theories of gender performativity of Judith Butler to not only the actors but finally the kabuki play *Kyoganoko Musume Dojoji.* The construction and portrayal of feminine imagery by male actors in the play is critically examined, and the thesis draws conclusions about Japanese culture based on its moral stance.

Keywords: Japanese culture, East Asian theater, kabuki theater, gender performance, gender theory, Tokugawa Japan

HOW HANDSOME, HOW INFURIATING:

ONNAGATA GENDER PERFORMANCE ON THE KABUKI STAGE

A Thesis

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by

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Preface

Any serious research in the field of kabuki theater–at least in English–must contend with the dearth of scholarship available on the subject. Any author, however, will be well rewarded, for its history is rich and dynamic, and the works of art that have been produced for the kabuki stage are deftly constructed, intricately layered, and rife with distinct features that are truly unique among performance art.

As one of the relatively late comers to Japanese theatrical art, kabuki builds on the rich traditions already set in place by its predecessors of noh and bunraku. Adding to its intrigue was its ability to bring together separate social classes, blurring prescribed societal lines that were otherwise inescapable, and in turn coming under intense government scrutiny that gave rise to one of its most distinct features: the *onnagata*.

Onnagata, from the Japanese words *onna*, meaning "woman", and *gata,* "manner", present a very literal example of gender performativity. In the simplest terms, an *onnagata* is a man who plays female parts on the kabuki stage, whose most notable features are the elaborate makeup he wears, his extravagant costuming, and his graceful economy of movement as he performs both dances and *kata* (poses and hand movements unique to kabuki). Far from simply being a Japanese equivalent to the occidental cross-dresser or drag queen, *onnagata* fill a curious role both onstage and off: on the stage, they presented an image of feminine ideal that both drew from and helped to create the template for the ideal female in classical Japan, acting as embodiments of the unattainable (and ultimately imagined) construct of femininity. In this study, the interplay among *onnagata* and their predecessors, the adolescent male *wakashu*, and ultimately how each of them contributed to the construction and upholding of gender roles, is

examined prior to the criticism of a major work of kabuki theater in order to provide a contextual understanding of both.

To completely appreciate the depth and nuance of the *onnagata*'s constructed feminine ideal, it is first necessary to overview the historical and social factors that necessitated their creation. After context is established, I borrow techniques from Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity and apply them to the *onnagata*'s construction and performance of femininity. In the final chapter, both historical and critical context are put to interpretive use in an examination of one of the most celebrated plays in the kabuki library: *Musume Dojoji.* This thesis aims to answer the questions of how *onnagata* construct gender both onstage and off: in performance, their construction of the feminine ideal, and more broadly, the way those performances reflect on Japanese culture.

Chapter 1: First Forms of Japanese Theater

Japanese theater has been filled with different forms since its inception more than a thousand years ago, and each of its forms are varied and distinct, from noh and kyōgen in its beginnings to the later expressions of *bunraku* puppet theater and *kabuki*. While the focus of this research is primarily on the kabuki theater–and more specifically, the *onnagata*–it is worthwhile to first explore the whole in order to better understand the part–that is, an examination of the history of kabuki theater as well as a closer look at the contemporary times in which the *onnagata* arose is worthwhile to the rest of the research.

Kabuki theater has its deepest roots in "sacred dances, religious ceremonials, and folk dances" of Japanese antiquity (Scott 33), which eventually separated into the separate forms discussed above. The oldest type of such ceremonial dance was called *kagura,* and it is from *kagura* that the earliest inspirations of the foundations of classical kabuki are found. These early *kagura* would eventually specialize into separate dance forms, each of which will be briefly discussed.

An examination of kabuki theater is similarly incomplete without an examination of its earliest roots, starting with various regional dance forms (those being the various – *gaku* forms mentioned above) as well as a look at the other branches of classical Japanese theater. Each of these branches of the greater body of Japanese theater is home to its own discourse, encoding, and distinguishing features, and each carries rich and storied traditions—some related to the other forms, some not. Indeed, the very act of considering all of "Japanese theater" or even "Japanese performance art" as a singular body is, relatively speaking, a contemporary grouping; each was considered its own art and only tenuously related to the others until–roughly–the 19th century; unifying all of them under

a single label is done "only in modern times" (Brazell 3). One may reasonably attribute this to the arrival of Americans in 1868, who would probably not have appreciated the differences between the forms and could be assumed to have grouped them together.

Through the history of Japanese performance art, these different forms have borrowed heavily from each other and adapted other branch's forms to better suit their own, often adding specific features to make other works distinctively their own. As a result, a singular breakthrough in one school could occasionally be felt throughout the entire medium. However, in order to give specialized adaptations panache and color them with the unique styles of each respective branch, the characteristic facets of each branch grew more and more specialized. Though the separate branches continued to share much among each other, it was the distinctive changes made to each baseline story that not only helped to characterize the different branches of Japanese performance art but also set each one of them apart and gave way to greater sophistication in each. It is this interconnectedness that makes an overview of several facets of Japanese performance art very much worth examining prior to a more narrowed focus on kabuki theater itself.

Such interconnectedness is ongoing today–indeed, in contemporary times, there is a great deal more exchange between fields of performance art than perhaps there ever was before. Notably, famed kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjuro XII, heir to the Danjuro name that proudly traces itself back to the 17th century, has made appearances both on kabuki stages abroad and, even more eclectically, in film. However, most performers tend not to drift too far from their initial specialties in their own area. As before, within each style of Japanese performance drama is ample room for further specialization. For example, the performers of *bunraku,* or puppet theater, progress through a series of apprenticeships,

with the lowest-ranking performers only able to operate the legs and feet of a typical

three-person puppet; as they proceed in their expertise–in intervals measured in decades–

a performer may move on to operating the left arm and hand before finally being able to

operate a puppet's head and right arm–to say nothing of the years of practice needed to

refine the craftsmanship required to construct such intricate and complex puppets in the

first place.

Both the sharing among different disciplines and the notable degrees of

specialization in each of them present a fascinating opportunity for the scholar, who now

has several avenues of deep-seated tradition to study and ample lore surrounding each. As

a result, great interest can be found in positions that may seem trivial or even mundane to

the casual observer–such as that of the *kyōgen kata* of kabuki theater. This attendant

stands slightly offstage and strikes clappers together to produce the characteristic sound

that many Westerners associate with the art form–but rather than a simple one-off

percussionist, this performer not only gives directions to the actors in the form of aural

cues but also signifies the opening and closing of the main curtain, marks scene changes,

and adds ambience to dramatic scenes. A similar but different role is seen in the *tsuke-uchi*, more prominent in bunraku than in kabuki, who uses similar clappers to produce

sound effects by hitting them against a wooden board. These seemingly insignificant

roles are in fact interwoven with centuries' worth of tradition and bound by remarkably

strict procedures regarding how their roles are carried out.

The depths of specialization and the intricacies of their performance are notable

for this research; a foundation of knowledge of what lies behind the obvious and onstage

stylings of performance can cast a better light on the nuances of its interpretation. In other

words, a brief historical overview is necessary in order to fully appreciate the final interpretation and examination of a kabuki play in Chapter 3. When one considers that even a role as minor (relative to the overall spectacle of a kabuki drama) as the kyōgen kata is still so carefully managed and ultimately significant to the performance at large, it follows that a role as pivotal as the central actor of a piece must therefore have even more nuance to examine and interpret.

Though distinct, the two genres of kabuki and bunraku have traditionally shared much with each other–both evolved in the 16th century, and in the century that followed, each was beset by strict governmental oversight, which in turn begat social restraints and hampered their authors' expressive abilities. Furthermore, both were in competition for the same audiences–urban socialites and other middle-class patrons. Brazell describes this relationship as a "rivalry" (303) and comments that the state of affairs led first to each subgenre borrowing extensively from the other, which would then adapt the borrowed material to its own needs.

This setting provided an interesting illustration of art imitating life and life, in turn, imitating art: as *bunraku* puppeteers replicated the poses of kabuki actors with dynamism and exaggeration to make the puppets appear more human, the human actors of the kabuki stage would retaliate by escalating their own expressiveness. Not to be left behind in this rivalry, the bunraku performers created dolls of increasing sophistication, culminating in the three-man puppets whose operating team is described above capable of a variety of dynamic and lifelike poses whose movements were, in turn, re-imitated by their kabuki counterparts, who would further escalate their own poses and movements.

This pattern of "create, adapt, and refine" has led to a great amount of music, texts and practices being shared between the two schools. Kabuki, however, placed a greater focus on its lead actor compared to the collaborative effort of bunraku, in which "the puppeteers and musicians work together to convey the text" (Brazell 309). By contrast, Brazell continues, "in kabuki the actor is central […] the musicians, stage effects, and even the text serve to highlight the actor and his art" (309). As already mentioned, when one considers the vast background of even the most obscure performer, the need to examine, critique and interpret a central figure becomes evident.

This focus on a singular figure is an interesting phenomenon in a culture that is as collectively-minded as Japan where individuals tend to shy away from the limelight whenever possible. Kabuki, particularly *aragoto* or "rough-styled" kabuki, places an intense and total focus on the lead stage actor—the props, stage directions, music, and dynamism of pose all draw the audience's attention to a single sole figure. While kabuki is not the only space where this occurs, it is not unreasonable to conclude that kabuki set the precedent for such happening on the tableau of Japanese entertainment—a precedent that would be revisited in plays throughout not only the theaters of the 16-17ᵗʰ century Tokugawa period but also cinemas of contemporary times.

My research, then, will adopt a similar stance and focus directly on a singular actor—or at least a singular archetype: the *onnagata*, a male actor who plays female roles. Some *onnagata* simply wore the role the way they would wear a costume or makeup, putting it on while performing and setting it aside afterwards. However, the most prolific practitioners would go so far as to adopt a female lifestyle both inside and outside the theater, occupying a unique niche both in Japanese society and within (or, perhaps,

outside of) the gender binary. However, before examining the *onnagata* specifically, it is necessary to first set the backdrop against which the *onnagata* as a role was created and refined.

Kabuki was not to come for some time yet, however; *kagura* dances were performed as part of religious divination practices (神懸, *kamigakari*) that centered around the Japanese legend of *Amaterasu*, the sun goddess. As the legend goes, the sun goddess Amaterasu hid herself in a cave, and the rest of the pantheon performed dances and ceremonies to coax her out, so that her light would again shine upon the world. Shrine maidens, diviners, and other religious figures would perform ceremonial dances to honor this legend, but these dances were yet a far cry from the future performances of kabuki, which were known–at least for part of the art form's history–to be ribald and bawdy affairs. *Kagura* dances were widely practiced as part of religious ceremonies up to the seventh century. They appear in some of the earliest written records of Japanese history, with dance forms most often accompanying religious ceremonies showing them to be an integral part of Japanese folk religion.
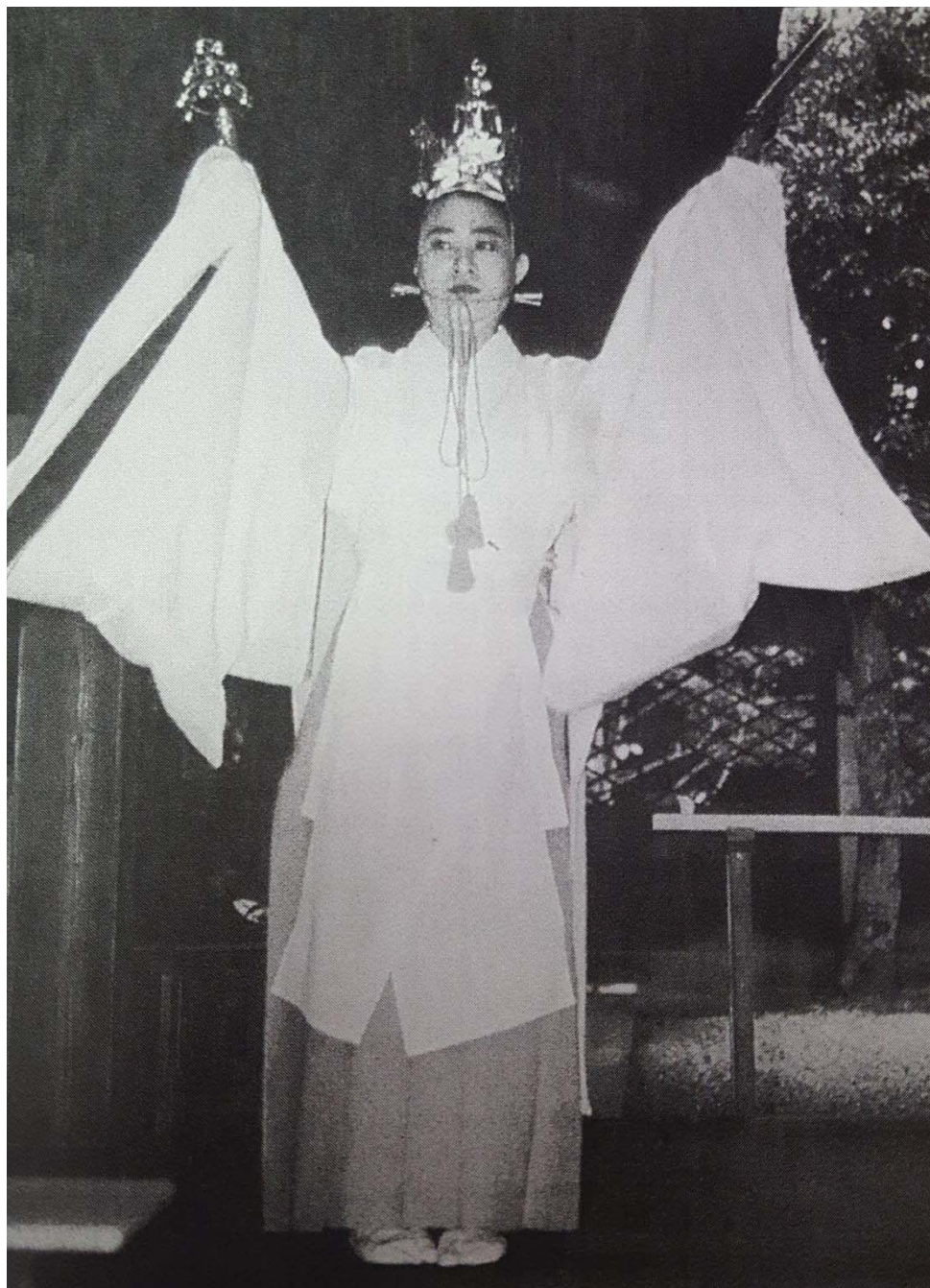
Fig. 1.1: A *kagura* dancer. She holds a sword in one hand and a mirror in the other; each

item is an important symbol in early Japanese folklore. Photo from Karen Brazell,

Traditional Japanese Theater 5.

Scott tells us that in the seventh century "there arrived from China a dance known as *gigaku*, in which masks were used [. . .] this was incorporated [alongside *kagura*] as part of the Buddhist services." *Gigaku,* characterized by its use of such masks, is notable for having normalized their use as a part of classical Japanese religious practice. *Gigaku* was brought to Japan from China along with Buddhism, which would soon find itself competing–favorably, in many places–with the extant folk religion of Shinto. Musical accompaniment was a more important aspect of *gigaku* compared to its predecessor; stronger narratives using established characters were also introduced. Aside from its avant-garde music, strange pantomime, and new musical stylings, different forms of dance were also introduced by *gigaku*—these would also quickly be incorporated into and performed alongside the already-described, already-established ceremonial dances.

After *gigaku* came *bugaku*, which reached its peak in the Heian era (794-1185) until it declined and was eventually superseded by the "simpler and more acrobatic" *dengaku* (Scott 33). *Bugaku* was notable in that only nobles were its intended audience; commoners were excluded from *bugaku* performances. It, too, was a part of Buddhist religious tradition, and like its predecessor *gigaku*, was characterized by masks. However, *bugaku* was much more precise, deliberate and regal than the revelry of the dance forms that came before it. *Bugaku* performances placed great value on economy of movement, precision of pose, and refinement of posture–traits that would later find themselves very much at home not only in Noh drama but also on the kabuki stage, which is known for if not characterized by such deliberateness in pose and gracefulness of motion.

Fig. 1.2: A *bugaku* performer. Notice the elaborate and multilayered clothing–this would carry through Japanese theatrical traditions into the time of kabuki in the early 1600s. Photo from Karen Brazell, *Traditional Japanese Theater* 6.

However, the exclusive haughtiness of *bugaku* left the commoners without a form of entertainment at a time when said commoners were first becoming economically powerful in Japan and gaining the time and money needed to enjoy leisure activities. Thus, *dengaku* made its appearance, which marked an important cultural shift in the meaning and significance of these dances: to wit, a shift from the no-nonsense religious narrative suitable only for noble eyes and minds toward a looser and more entertaining art form intended for the enjoyment of the common person. *Dengaku* arose from the planting and harvest songs performed by the common people as a utility rather than entertainment; though it was widely practiced across the countryside of Japan as far back as the Heian

era in the late 12th century, it would not see itself brought into urban spaces until the 14th century.

However, *dengaku* traditions became a crucial piece of the nascent art form of *sarugaku* (which, tellingly enough, translates to "monkey music"), which marked an important new chapter in pre-Kabuki entertainment. It was with *sarugaku* that dance, and by extension showmanship and performance entertainment, began to be seen as entertainment for the public, rather than an exclusively religious activity. After all, the basics of *dengaku* were already in widespread practice, as the art form was a formalization of already-extant planting and harvesting rituals and celebrations. *Sarugaku* took these celebrations and ran with them, exaggerating them for perhaps nothing so much as the sheer fun of it, making it an art form that was already much more rooted in the common people than *bugaku* or *gigaku*. Therefore, *sarugaku* was intended for (and was indeed a celebration of) the peasants, farmers, and commoners of the country, with performances in town squares, intersections of major roads, and other easily-accessible, widely-seen venues. Alongside dance, one could enjoy acrobatics, juggling, and pantomime, all of which turned their purpose towards a celebration of the indigenous rather than the courtesan way of life. This is particularly relevant to kabuki because the kabuki theater was also open to the public, and its roots in the common-folk performance art of *sarugaku* would set the precedent for cosmopolitan crowds in kabuki theater later on. This open-for-all aspect would eventually be one of the prime causes for government intervention in kabuki performance, which would in turn have great effects in the development of the art.
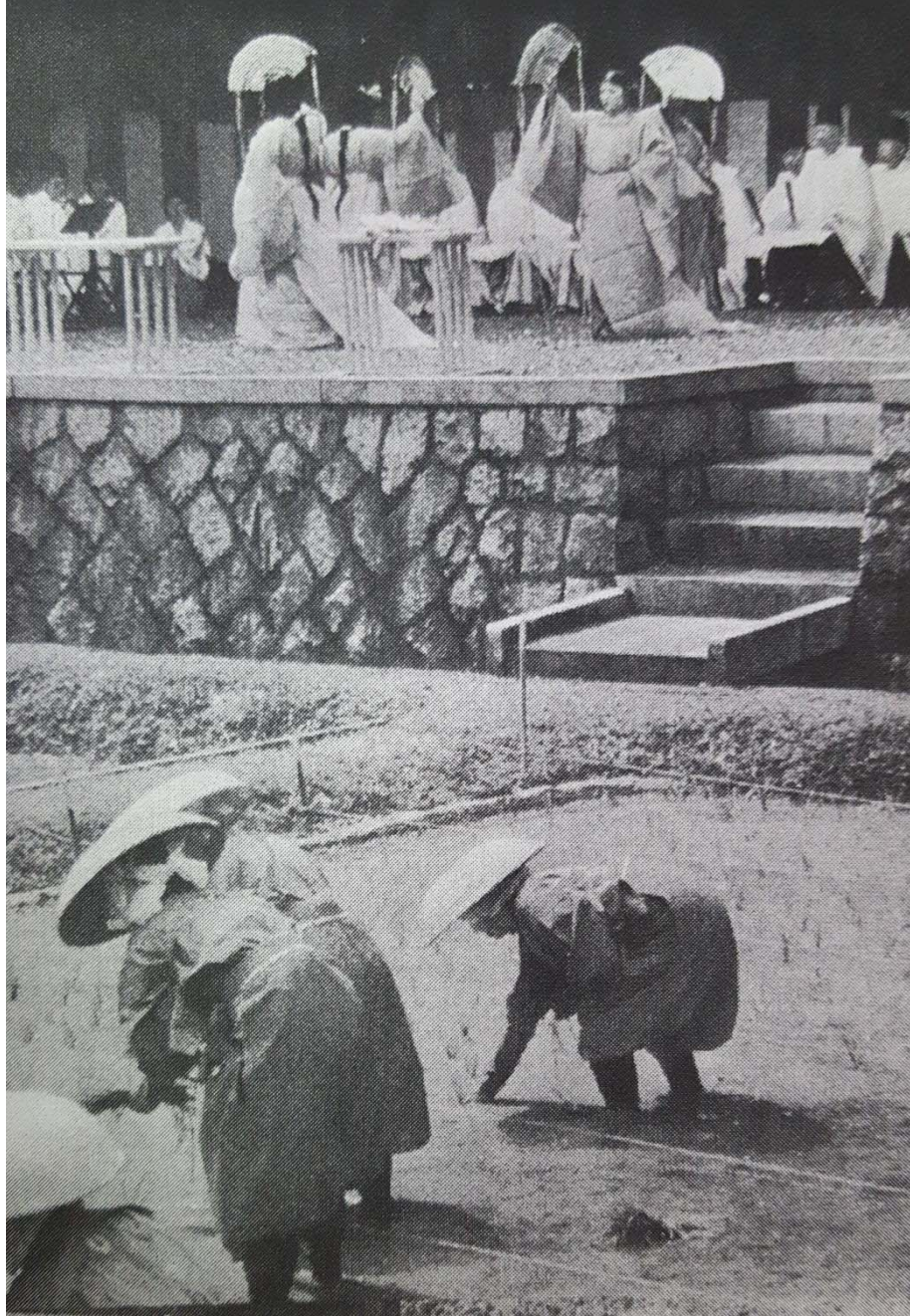
Figure 1.3: A recreation of a traditional *dengaku* scene: festively-clad dancers oversee the rice-field workers, with their songs keeping the repetitive planting work moving along at a steady pace. Photo from Karen Brazell, *Traditional Japanese Theater* 9.

Each of these dance forms contributed in some way to the foundation for noh theater, which owes much to the traditions of both *dengaku* and *sarugaku*. Over the course of the 14th century, the actor Kannami Kiyotsugu helped to bring the two together, refined and perfected the art, shaping the *sarugaku* traditions into a unique art that is now recognized as the first incarnation of noh.

Initially, Kannami was the founder of a theater group that practiced *sarugaku* in the town of Obata, in the Mie prefecture. However, upon moving to Yamato and establishing itself under a new name, the troupe changed its focus from performance to teaching due to the admiration of his audiences and a growing demand from the public to learn their art. As Kannami's popularity grew, he took to making ventures to Kyoto to give performances for even larger audiences.

In 1374, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the shogun at the time, was one of Kannami's audience members, and so moved was he by the artistry on display that he agreed to be Kannami's patron, thereby legitimizing this new style of *sarugaku* that was distinct enough to merit a new name: the Kanze school of noh. This brought public performance away from the roadside, intersection, and street corner, and gave it an ethos and legitimacy that it did not previously have: the blessing of royalty!

Kannami's style was unique in that it incorporated the harvesting songs and dances that were previously considered part of *dengaku.* Not only that, he brought the Kusemai song and dance style–which evolved as part of and was popularized by *sarugaku*—to his performances as well. In his later years, he educated his son, Motokiyo Zeami, in his art; after Kannami's death, Zeami succeeded his father and further refined the noh tradition, continuing to compose plays, stories, and epics as well as codifying the

structure of performance and formalizing certain aspects of the art such as stage design and construction.

While this research will focus more on kabuki than it will on noh theater, it is nonetheless important to recognize some of the features of noh, particularly their origins. After all, while the traditions of kabuki theater are rooted in noh theater, exploring the origins of noh can shed light on certain characteristics that survived from Japanese antiquity and were given new life on the kabuki stage. Because of the interconnectedness of all branches of Japanese performance art, what affected one branch (by which I mean noh, kabuki, kyogen, and bunraku) would eventually ripple to the others as well–notably, as said above, the eclectic audiences of kabuki would eventually be a prime cause for governmental intervention, and this precedent for public entertainment was laid down by *sarugaku* and later perpetuated by kabuki.

Initially, noh was open to all audiences much the same way, but it eventually followed in the footsteps of *gigaku* before it–that is, it became lofty and storied, neither fit nor designed for the common folk. Yet it is perhaps the influence of *sarugaku* that gave rise to an interesting and not-quite-separate form of Japanese theater: *kyogen*.

While one can say that kabuki and noh developed somewhat separately from each other, there is ample reason to provide attention to the development of noh when providing a historical context for the kabuki theater–after all, kabuki could not exist without its predecessor in noh. Yet the link between the wild, carefree early kabuki and the noh, graceful and refined even before kabuki's emergence, may not seem obvious at first.

Even if one did away with anachronism, it would be difficult to compare a 17th-century noh and kabuki performance side-by-side and conclude that the two have much, if anything, in common. The former is refined, graceful, and regal, with great homage paid to traditional literature, economy of motion, and hiding the actors' faces; the latter (particularly *aragoto)* puts great stock in forcing the audience's attention onto a singular actor and his dynamic poses, loud voice, striking makeup, bold movements and larger-than-life poses.

Where, then, is the connection? Certainly, kabuki draws from noh in certain subtle ways, such as the early kabuki troupes utilizing the available noh stages for their own performance. Yet lurking between the lines of the noh theater is a more obvious link between the wild and freespirited kabuki and the reserved, elegant noh. Kyogen (狂言, "mad words") drama emerged as a subset of noh and consists of short and generally humorous slice-of-life pieces that consist of either self-contained side plots or supplementary material to the noh play it accompanies. "Noh actors, however, have nothing to do with kyogen, a practice that reveals the perceived hierarchy. Noh, as the 'serious' art, has always considered itself, and has generally been considered, superior to the comic kyogen" (Brazell 115), but the presence of kyogen can be confirmed as far back as noh itself. Kyogen is also notable for being more plot-driven than its noh counterpart. While noh is not without its dialogue, it's also noteworthy that kyogen was almost completely driven by its spoken lines and exaggerated actions. More broadly, kyogen was an oral storytelling form with a focus on a singular actor (or, perhaps, two or three actors)–this aspect, more than perhaps any other, would be carried over to kabuki and, indeed, made one of kabuki's defining characteristics.

The typical kyogen play is as comical as it is brief, with performances often about ten minutes long, and the characters are frequently drawn from a pool of stock characters, such as the *Taro kaja* (main servant), *jiro kaja* (secondary servant) and *shujin* (main person or master). However, even the gods of the Japanese pantheon are not above being satirized in kyogen; in the kyogen piece *Kaminari*, "the awesome thunder god of noh is presented as a frightening thunderbolt, who is himself easily frightened." (Brazell 60). Demons are also present in a subgenre of kyogen (*oni kyogen*), but, like most characters in the subgenre, are played for humor rather than to inspire fear (notably, a play called *Kubihiki*, in which a demon tries to teach his daughter how to eat humans, yet her fascination with them foils all of his efforts).

The masks and props featured in kyogen are meant to be overt and stylized–while the later kabuki forms would do away with masks and (in most cases) props, we see in kyogen perhaps the first blush of the over-exaggerated trappings that would later help to define kabuki theater.

But more important than the physical accessories of kyogen are its spirit and style–kyogen is characterized by being overblown, exaggerated, and raucously comedic, with "many onomatopoeic words [. . . that] give the play the feel of a modern comic strip or animated film, which is perhaps an apt analogy for kyogen in the medieval period" (Brazell 60). Early kabuki was no less raucous, though perhaps more sexualized than its kyogen counterpart, and it is no stretch to assume that the inspiration and appreciation for these tropes of the kabuki stage were already codified in the Japanese consciousness by the presence and precedent set by kyogen.

It is an ironic reflection that kabuki, which owes at least some of its early incarnation's style and panache to the rough-housing of kyogen–which emerged as a comic-relief act for the stuffy and haughty noh theater–would, as the 1600s went on, gravitate towards the serious and refined, ultimately resembling noh in more ways than it did kyogen. Interesting, perhaps, but not necessarily surprising: the prejudice described above that places the comedic kyogen beneath the notice of the refined and regal noh actors is, as Brazell describes, "a prejudice against comedy that is certainly not uncommon in the history of world theater" (115).

Fig. 1.4: A scene from a *kyogen* play. The bold pose here would later be adapted to the kabuki stage–particularly the *aragoto* style–in a gesture known as *mie o kiru*, or "cutting a visual". Photo from Karen Brazell, *Traditional Japanese Theater* 27.

Each of the dance forms described above contributed something significant to the formation and characterization of noh theater–which, while a more established and

respected art form than those others that came before it, can still be thought of as a step on the way to the creation of kabuki theater. Noh made its contributions to what would ultimately become kabuki theater: it helped to establish traditions of Japanese theater such as stage setup and content expectation. With the backdrop of Kabuki's creation now painted, it is appropriate to focus more closely on kabuki itself–and, ultimately, the *onnagata*.

<div align="center">Kabuki's Emergence</div>

A priestess (巫女, *miko*) by the name of Okuni is generally credited as the founder of Kabuki as its own style. A ceremonial dancer for the Izumo shrine (in the modern-day Shimane prefecture in southwestern Japan), Okuni would regularly give performances in the dried-out Kamo riverbed in Kyoto during "the eighth year of the Keicho era (1596-1614)" (Scott 33). At one such performance–already notable for taking place outside of the temple—she danced what was called the *nembutsu-odori*, which was a traditional ceremonial Buddhist dance at the time. However, she "adapted it to variations of her own and became an immediate success" (Scott 33).

Because of the success at blending together music and dance, her ambitions grew. Flute and drum became staples of her performances, and Sanzaburo Nagoya, her lover, joined in the performances soon after. Before long, word of her art spread, and others wished to study and adapt her performances, to which she agreed. Soon, she had many pupils–male and female–coming from across the region to learn from her; afterward some stayed and joined in her performances, and some returned from whence they came to draw their own crowds. Thus formed the first incarnation of what could reasonably be called a kabuki troupe.

Drawing on the traditions of noh theater, a stage for performances was constructed–but new dances and musical styles were introduced that were vastly different from those of noh. Rather than the rigidly traditional stylings of its predecessor, the nascent kabuki stage was bedecked with shows and revelry that was "adopted to the needs of more popular entertainment" (Scott 34).

From these beginnings, it didn't take long for imitators to rise. However, the entertainment put on by these new performers gradually segued into advertisements for prostitution. As a result of the Okuni's dance arts being employed in this way, the nascent kabuki stage was soon to be largely populated by women. Therefore, this earliest form of Kabuki–whose ribald and salacious stylings only intensified after Okuni's death circa 1610–was called *onna Kabuki,* or women's kabuki.

Okuni's death happens to coincide with the earliest years of the period in Japanese history known as the Tokugawa era. This period was, broadly speaking, a time of peace after near-constant regional wars had saturated the country and dominated its political and social landscape. The peace brought with it a flourishing of art and culture; in fact, it is no stretch to say that it is this particular environment that allowed Kabuki theater to flourish as it did during the 1600s.

The Tokugawa shogunate, or ruling government, also imposed a class system on all Japanese people, which applied to both the noble classes and the lower social orders. The appellation of "class" may seem anachronistic; however, the strict social divisions between different social groups created distinct and separate orders to which the term can be readily applied. Urban life during the era was defined by "[c]lear notions about residence, function, and jurisdiction", and "residents became city people under the rule of

urban law and urban magistrates." (Berry 140) Therefore, to use the term "class" is not to impose a contemporary Western definition to a society that is so different from that of America today; it is instead the term that readily encompasses the divided nature of urban Tokugawa Japan: a "space of dominant ruling communities supported by subject commoners." (140)

Broadly speaking, the citizens (that is, those who weren't nobles) were divided into four such classes: Samurai, farmers, craftsmen and artisans, and merchants. Merchants were seen as an unproductive and usurious class of people and were subject to the heaviest government oversight and regulation; by contrast, the famers, despite being financially deprived, were respected, at least officially, as the providers of food to the rest of the country. Other castes did exist outside of this paradigm–for example, undertakers and sewer sanitation workers were considered *hinin*, or untouchable, and entertainers existed outside of this system as their own classless category.

This was representative of larger social movements in Japan at the time: first, the urbanization of the Japanese people, generally to one of the three major cities of Kyoto, Tokyo, and Osaka. This in turn led to a rise in power and influence among the commoners; the creation of the class system can be seen as a way to ensure that traditional divisions between gentry and commoner were maintained despite the sweeping changes to Japanese society.

Onna kabuki flourished across Kyoto and soon made its way to Edo. Where kabuki theaters cropped up, prostitution was to be found close by. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the *onna* kabuki theater facilities were one of the cornerstones of Edo's pleasure quarters during the 17th century–*onna* kabuki's ostensible status as an art

form offered convenient and plausible deniability in case any unwanted law enforcement came to call, and its more lascivious (and likely more satisfied) patrons were well-motivated not to spoil the deception.

However, the most curious feature of *onna* kabuki was not necessarily to be found on its stages but in its audiences–the budding theater was so popular that citizens from all walks of life could be found at its shows, a shocking development in the striated society of Tokugawa-era Japan. The cosmopolitan audiences of *onna* kabuki were indicative of a significant social change that Tokugawa Japan was going through–suddenly, the commoners had not only money to spend but leisure time in which to spend it. For all of the storied pomp and noble luxury of the Heian era, a commoner, whether he be urban or rural, was not half so fortunate as his Tokugawa peer; the latter citizen had a much higher degree of economic freedom and more time in which to enjoy it. There were few places where this change could be seen more strikingly than in the major cities' kabuki performance halls. The commoner and the merchant sat if not beside, at least closer than ever, to the nobleman–as good a representation as any for the threat that the cosmopolitan kabuki playhouse posed to otherwise-rigid class structures.

Naturally, the curious and condemning noble would soon sway more toward the latter than the former. For the noble, this dissolution of extant class lines couldn't be allowed to continue, and in 1629 the Shogunate decreed the prohibition of female actors, ostensibly because of their immoral and licentious influence, but perhaps also due to the kabuki theater's status as a place where all classes could be found together, making it "a hotbed of dangerous thought and popular freedom" (Lombard).

Men Only

In the wake of this prohibition, only males were allowed to perform on the kabuki stage–and it is here that the first, nascent incarnation of the *onnagata* can be seen. After the sudden disappearance of *onna kabuki* at the hands of the Shogunate's 1629 edict, attractive men–generally thought to be attractive on account of their youth—filled the roles that had once been held by the females. Thus was kabuki by young men–or *wakashu kabuki*—formed.

In the absence of actual women to display (as the early kabuki stage had been largely if not exclusively a vehicle for showing off prostitutes) more attention was given by performers and their troupes to what had previously been ancillary details, such as costuming and props. The appeal of young adolescent boys, who had already enjoyed a significant popularity in the days of *onna kabuki*, was fortified by the greater attention to detail, and the kabuki stage remained popular in spite of official disapproval.

This was perhaps the first step taken by the *onnagata*–budding as they were at this stage–towards the realm of subversion and what passed for rebellion in a society as strictly overseen as Tokugawa Japan. The young men were "as great a source of attraction as the women, until the Shogunate once more decided that the physical charms of the boys were an equal menace to the community" (Scott 34). A decree was passed in 1652 that forbade *wakashu kabuki* and further decreed that actors shave their front hair to diminish their attractiveness—a decree that has much more significance than may be immediately obvious, as I will explore later in this chapter and again in Chapter 2.

It is worth noting that the reasoning behind the prostitution prohibition–both as it applied to *onna* kabuki and to the *wakashu* flavor of the same - may seem clear to a Western reader. That is, it might seem self-explanatory that the logic behind the prohibition came from a view of promiscuity as immoral and of homosexual promiscuity as even more so. However, neither homosexuality nor prostitution were widely frowned upon in Tokugawa Japan; each had ample historical precedence and was a culturally-established norm. As Gary Leupp notes:

> Attitudes toward both heterosexual and homosexual anal erogeneity in early modern East Asia differed markedly from attitudes in Europe. In the Christian West, anal sex was in general viewed with a horror of feces and the anus itself grounded, in Arthur C. Gilberts' opinion, in a complex of values developed from antiquity out of Judeo-Christian tradition. The 'anal function [. . .] became a symbol of evil, darkness, death, and rebellion against moral order.' (113)

This simply was not the case in Japan, neither in the 17th century nor to any notable extent any time prior to it. There is a long history of homosexual traditions (interestingly, with more of a focus on male-male relations than female-female ones) dating back for almost as long as history has been recorded–at least to the 10th century. Thus, it is clear that male-male homosexuality (even reduced to a purely sexual expression, what has been seen in the West as its most base and carnal form) was not considered particularly scandalous or immoral among Tokugawa-era Japanese, when *onna* and *wakashu* kabuki reigned. Leupp confirms this: "[W]e find in [early Tokugawa] Japan [. . .that] two homosexual traditions [. . .] were practiced by respected elites and legitimated by the strength of [tradition]" (57). Leupp is not specifically talking about kabuki theater here,

but his research does point to the wealth of examples of homosexuality being common, legitimate, and respected.

Similarly, prostitution could not have been the driving force behind the governmental outcry. After all, Edo's pleasure district of Yoshiwara had, in fact, been sanctioned and cordoned off by the government in 1617–well before the aforementioned strictures began to come down onto the kabuki theater.

One can thereby conclude that the true reasoning for the decrees against first *onna* kabuki and then *wakashu* kabuki had little, if anything, to do with the supposed immorality of prostitution that was center-stage in *onna* kabuki. Nor can the homosexuality inherent in *wakashu* kabuki's sexualizing of its actors be reasonably thought of as cause for moral outcry from the government. Even reduced to a purely sexual expression, homosexuality was not only sanctioned, but celebrated. The very existence of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters in Edo, as well as similar areas in other cities, such as the Shinbara district in Kyoto or Osaka's Shinmachi quarter, is evidence that prostitution was, if not favored, deemed acceptable. In the interest of fair representation, however, these districts were created as a means of reining in the spread of prostitution throughout their respective cities–but the fact that the government decided to tacitly enable this behavior rather than pursuing a total ban speaks to the idea that there was something else behind the "hard and fast" prohibition of both *onna* and *wakashu* kabuki.

One possible explanation of the reasoning behind the prohibition is the tendency of the theaters' patrons to come to blows over actresses' affections and favor. "Because the performers engaged in prostitution, it was perhaps inevitable that quarrels over them

should lead to violence and hence to shogunate retaliation," Leupp writes. Additionally, even prior to official governmental edicts explicitly banning kabuki actresses on the national level, there was already a precedent for government disdain towards the art form; records indicate that as far back as 1608 Izuno Okuni —widely considered to be the founder of the art form—was "banned from performing at Ieyasu [Tokugawa][i]'s camp […] in 1608" (90). This, too, was attributed not to an excess of sexual expression but instead to fisticuffs among audience members (90). Therefore, even since its creation in the early 17th century, kabuki had been associated with violence and other such uncivilized behavior–if only in the eyes of government officials.

As has also been mentioned, pederasty was not uncommon during the time of these bans and had ample precedence even in storied pre-Tokugawa traditions, where "age-structured homosexuality flourished in [both] monastic and militaristic society" (Leupp 56). The presence of these traditions lends not only normalcy but even legitimacy to man-boy love, though a curious characteristic of these traditions was the very existence of the *wakashu*–a term that encompasses more meaning than simply "adolescent male."

Consider that the shogunate ban on *wakashu* kabuki brought with it a prohibition on kabuki performers wearing the *wakashu* hairstyle–that is, that it was further decreed that actors shaved the front of their heads. While it might seem like a simple attempt to curtail their sex appeal, the declaration that these boys adopt a particular hairstyle had great significance to not only the actors but also to their audiences–the full forelocks of the *wakashu* were "to a large extent the measure of feminine and adolescent male beauty; indeed, descriptions of characters in classical literature seldom allude to any physical attribute than their lovely hair. By denying [this hairstyle to youth [. . .] the authorities

intended to [. . .] 'make them unsightly to look at" (Leupp 130). The hairstyle that was decreed by the shogunate to put an end to *wakashu* kabuki was a specifically crafted blow designed to, at least symbolically, put an end to the boy-love that had so quickly become synonymous with *wakashu* kabuki, both by quashing their sex appeal and by forcing them into the role of an adult male–for the only other option for a hairstyle (and one that both Leupp and Scott describe) was the one that signified that its wearer was an adult man.

At the time of the ruling, a boy's hairstyle and clothing were signifiers of his status as either a youth (*wakashu*) or a man; that is, only a *wakashu* could have a full head of hair, and the declaration of a certain hairstyle not only forced them to renounce not only their status as male prostitutes but also to lose–at least in the eyes of their peers and society–what remained of their youth. Indeed, the term *wakashu* itself had changed from a signifier of a male who was neither child nor adult (analogous but not close enough to the term "adolescent" to justify using that instead) to suggest a young man "who excited a[n adult] man's sexual interest" (Leupp 90), and the decreed change in hairstyle meant that these adolescents were, so to speak, pushed through the threshold from childhood to adulthood.

Dictating a certain hairstyle was an even more brash move by the government, and spoke even more clearly of the nobles' disapproval of the kabuki stage and its adherents–additionally, the authorities "maintained a strict surveillance and made [kabuki] the object of many petty as well as major restrictions, which survived in one form or another through the Tokugawa era" (Scott 34). Scott seems to imply by omission that sexual deviance was the foundation for these edicts, Leupp purports that violence

resulting from a desire for actress' favor caused kabuki theaters to be viewed as undesirable by the government.

However, I propose a different explanation than the both Leupp and Scott: I theorize that in addition to the above, the gentry and noble class were uneasy about the societal intermingling that took place within the classless society inside kabuki halls. There is the obvious thought that the upper class simply felt disdainful towards the lower, and pined for a way to separate themselves from the merchant class (which was, as has been discussed, growing at a rate that would certainly worry the upper). Furthermore, the growth of the middle class would have given rise to a merchant class whose members may quickly have found themselves able to apply economic pressure to the nobles–who, in their resentment of the hitherto lower-rung merchant class, would have reasonably desired to separate themselves from such pressure as soon as possible. In doing so, they would have been able to protect their vested interest in maintaining an insurmountable class barrier between themselves and the upstart commoner and merchant classes.

Noble Disdain and Government Intervention

Though then noble class would reasonably have wanted to keep its distance, it was not only mere disdain for the peasants that might have motivated the nobles– "peasants" in this case referring to the commoners and the merchants both, i.e. anyone not of the noble class. The ideals of Tokugawa-era Neo-Confucianism, which was very much the dominant philosophy among the upper class during the period, are also likely to have come into play. Though Confucianism has little enough to say about sexual promiscuity (and, indeed, both homosexuality and sexual liberation were historically concurrent with early Japanese Buddhist texts), much of it deals with proper conduct

between noble and commoner, or, more broadly, superior and inferior. Nowhere was proper conduct as defined by Confucianism so hard to find as in a bawdy and raucous Kabuki theater, where "the men in the audience became utterly intoxicated with [the actors'] beauty and lost all hold on themselves" (Asai Ryoui, qtd. In Leupp 130).

Therefore, if there is an immorality angle to be pursued to explain the persistent governmental harassment of the kabuki practitioners, it stems from this breaking down of proper conduct–first by dissolution of class barriers and next by a total breakdown of reserved and evenhanded behavior, rather than from repressive views on either prostitution or homosexuality. The morality of sex in Japan looked much different than its occidental counterpart–sex was celebrated and encouraged, not denigrated and forbidden. Again, the main reasoning behind the bans was likely due to the class lines becoming uncomfortably blurry, whether by outright disorderly brawl or by unwanted mingling among the classes.

The decree banning *wakashu* kabuki might well have been the end of the art form altogether, and indeed, "for a period of about two years [. . .] the people were without a theater at all until the *Yaro* Kabuki came into being" (Scott 34). Showing a remarkable resilience in the face of repeated harassment from the government, the art form evolved once more. Post-1652 kabuki was now exclusively the realm of adult men and was known as *yaro kabuki*.

Yaro kabuki was "the beginning of profound changes in the actual form of the Kabuki drama itself" (Scott 35). With the prohibition of both women (*onna*) and young men—either preadolescent or in early adolescence (*wakashu*)—only the strong and robust men–the *yaro*–remained to perform. Naturally, both male and female roles were

filled by these adult men, meaning that the attention of the audience had to be captivated

not necessarily with sex appeal but "by dint of skill alone" (Scott 35). The need to

balance keeping the public's favor against the scrutiny of the government demanded

"new and interesting advances in the contents of the entertainment" (Scott 35).

The significance of the kabuki theater's willingness to persevere even in the face

of such governmental scrutiny–particularly the government of Tokugawa Japan, which

was known for being unforgivingly strict–is worth stopping to take note of. As mentioned

previously, the merchant and artisan classes were coming into their own during this point

in Japanese history; the favor of the public was–to the Kabuki theater managers at least–

preferable to the favor of the government. Similarly, the troupes' willingness (and,

indeed, their very ability) to spite the governmental disdain by continuing to perform in

the face of this continued harassment (as well as the government agents' lackluster

enforcement of their admonitions) illustrates quite well the cultural shift at hand: in short,

the public's opinion suddenly mattered. The *bakufu*–or government law enforcers–had

perhaps begun to realize that their hold on the commoners' pleasure time was not as

absolute as they had thought.

Indeed, the two-year drought of theater is a significant gap in Japanese

performance art–but more significant still is that kabuki was able to resurface at all in the

face of the overt government resistance. By the time of *yaro* kabuki, the art form had

gotten away with flouting the government officials–twice! Neither the performers nor

their adoring, numerous, middle-class public showed any signs of anything but tenacity

(to the point of coming as close to belligerence against the government as any civilian

institution could reasonably dare to in Tokugawa Japan) toward the lawmakers who would have liked nothing more than to see them bow their heads and fall silent.

However, because of the mounting strictures against it, *yaro* kabuki would have to refine itself and do so quickly. Consequently, during this period of development and refinement, "new methods of acting were invented, scenarios [. . .] began to take an orthodox pattern, and plays divided into acts became the custom" (Scott 35). One may conclude that these formalizing measures were a step taken by kabuki playwrights and performers towards making the art form feel more established and reputable, perhaps in response to the "petty as well as major restrictions" that Scott only mentions in passing.

The Genroku era, from 1688-1703, was where kabuki reached its "pinnacle of achievement as a mature art, the theater *of the common people*" (Scott 35, emphasis added). During this time, the theatre's forms were further developed into and ultimately established as the norms against which future productions would be measured. One simple example of this is the normalization of plays into acts where previously shows were simply intended to continue through an afternoon or even all-day performance. With the division of plays into separate parts, there were now opportunities for patrons to socialize, to mingle, to visit one of the so-very-conveniently-located nearby teahouses or food vendors. The Kabuki theater was further bolstered as an integral part of the pleasure quarters' economy, giving not only the theaters but also the local merchants further reason to want to dig in their heels against further prohibition. It was that the merchant class–whose heels would be dug in deepest–who was enjoying a meteoric rise in influence and social clout.

Though the Genroku era is considered to have ended in 1703, its influence on the art form of Kabuki is far-reaching, extending well past the last quarter of the 17ᵗʰ century and through the first quarter of the 18ᵗʰ, and it was during this crucial period of refinement and development that the role of *onnagata* (which had hitherto born only of necessity and utility) came into its own codified and established role, rather than being a mere stop-gap measure.

Three Notable Figures

Before proceeding chronologically with this examination of Kabuki history, I must describe three notable figures who emerged from these crucible decades whose experimentation within the genre and had far-reaching influence. Yoshizawa Ayame, the most pertinent of the three for this thesis, would make great strides in codifying and defining not only the *onnagata*'s art and grace on the stage but also how–at least in his mind–the *onnagata* should conduct himself offstage, thereby doing much to formalize the role. The other two–Ichikawa Danjuro and Tojuro Sakata–would also do much to carve out their own respective niches in the kabuki world.

Chronologically speaking, the first of these three was Tojuro Sakata, born in 1647, who was credited with pioneering one of the distinct styles of kabuki: the *wagoto* or "soft" style (和事). This style debuted in Tojuro's performance of *Yūgiri Nagori no Shōgatsu* and centers around a more realistic presentation of romantic emotion and lovers' dialogue than other kabuki forms. Most *wagoto* plays center around cross-class romance between a member of the merchant class and the noble class, which tend to resolve themselves either via elopement or tragic suicide. Tojuro was a known heartthrob on the stage, whose appeal captivated both male and female audiences–a significant

happenstance that helps to highlight the new niche of sex-appeal that he carved out for himself, apart from *onna* and *wakashu* both. More importantly still, Tojuro's innovation helped to give the other two major figures mentioned here room to define themselves.

By displaying that a male role could be played in what Japanese culture defined as a soft, gentle and almost feminine style, Tojuro not only helped to create a distinctive style all of his own (that being *wagoto*) but also helped to claim those "gentle" roles–despite their ostensibly feminine overtones–as distinctly masculine. In doing so, Tojuro helped to define the *onnagata* by showing what an *onnagata* was not. A softspoken, emotional, and lovestruck male need not be dismissed by audiences as a womanly poseur; the *onnagata* already filled the role of feminine male, and Tojuro's roles–in which he played men who were unquestionably men despite the ambiguity of their actions or overtones–helped to contrast the male-playing-female parts taken by the *onnagata*, thereby giving the latter role more of a space in which to define its own function and distinctions. In other words, Tojuro's portrayal of the romantic, softspoken, gentle and graceful male as still being definitively male (and, arguably, an extension of the prior appeal of the *wakashu*) went a long way to preempt critical interpretation of those roles as feminine; Tojuro was definitely male, and definitely soft, a distinction that gave the *onnagata* full rein over their own gender expression.

Ichikawa Danjuro, born in 1660, pioneered the art in the opposite direction. His innovations led to the foundation and refinement of the *aragoto* or "rough" style (荒事). In this style, much unlike *wagoto*, makeup is bold and bright, poses are exaggerated and dynamic, and speech is brash and reckless–in fact, the term itself is short for *aramushagoto*–roughly translated, "matters concerning the reckless warrior." It is from

the *aragoto* style that the well-known image of the lead actor crossing his eyes and striking a dramatic pose comes–Ichikawa himself pioneered this motion, called *mie o kiru* ("cutting a visual").

Figure 1.5: An example of *mie o kiru* performed in the *aragoto* style. The *kumadori* makeup, which accents the actor's features, was one of the defining characteristics of *aragoto. Photo from Karen Brazell, Traditional Japanese Theater* 40.

If Tojuro helped to give the *onnagata* a space to develop roles that were distinctly feminine-male without being male-as-female, then Danjuro's groundbreaking *aragoto*

style ensured that both Tojuro's *wagoto* roles as well as the *onnagata*'s role were made even more distinct–while also helping to give credence and believability to the idea that kabuki was something more than prostitutes-on-parade. While some patrons may have found a certain sex appeal inherent in the raw, bold masculinity of *aragoto*, the style was unique for many reasons–perhaps the most obvious of which was its position relative to the other major styles of the era: it was brash, dynamic, and larger-than-life, all the more so compared to the *wagoto* style that had emerged mere decades before.

The creation of *aragoto* also came at an interesting intersection of time and place. On top of the class/social issues discussed above, there was–particularly in Edo, the newly-declared capital city–a burgeoning sense of hometown pride. Urban Japanese began to take great pride in the places of their birth, and this was nowhere more apparent than among the citizens of Edo, whose haughtiness and vanity were known across the country. *Aragoto*, with its brusque and unapologetic stylings, is an emblematic embodiment of this attitude. This shift in attitude can be thought of as both symptom and cause of the rising craftsman class; additionally, Edo had, during this time, been recently named as the capital of the entire country, which also added to its citizens' pride (and likely the development of Danjuro's belligerent and rough style).

The final of these three notable figures is also most pertinent to this research. Yoshizawa Ayame was born in 1673 and is the figure on whom most of the founding and codifying of the *onnagata*'s practice depends. Even as far back as the days of *wakashu* kabuki, men were performing female roles, but this was largely (though not exclusively) done in order to allow the *wakashu* to either stand in for female prostitutes who were waiting in the wings–or, as the *wakashu* years went on, in order to prostitute the boys

themselves. While he did not completely pioneer a groundbreaking new style as did Ichikawa and Tojuro, Yoshizawa was instrumental in the development of female-impersonation that characterizes the *onnagata*. Notably, he advocated strongly for the *onnagata* performer to maintain what his culture defined as an effeminate presence both on- and off-stage and condemned those who didn't as lacking devotion to their art. His treatise also codified several facets of *onnagata* behavior and related them to popular movements in Japanese culture during his time, which will be discussed more in the next chapter.

As mentioned above, males impersonating or standing in as females on the kabuki stage was not new even before Yoshizawa's time–nor was the idea of male actors encapsulating sex appeal that was coded feminine in medieval Japanese society. However, Yoshizawa formalized the *onnagata*'s art, recording his thoughts in *Ayamegusa* (菖蒲草, "The Words of Ayame") for posterity (*Ayamegusa* was later added to a larger written work, *Yakusha Rongo*, published circa 1776). Notably, Yoshizawa believed that an *onnagata* should live as a woman both on and off the stage. Specifically, he notes in *Ayamegusa* that ""if [an actor] does not live his normal life as if he was a woman, it will not be possible for him to be called a skillful *onnagata*" (qtd. in Dunn 53). Many *onnagata* after him took his writings as "the Bible of the female impersonator" (Scott 35).

In the face of the prohibition brought to bear by the shogunate, the kabuki stage could no longer function as a dais on which women available for purchase could be displayed–it follows, then, that theaters couldn't advertise themselves as such; even subtle hints at their dual function as brothels would have been met with swift retribution

from a government that was already keeping a close eye on the kabuki theater (as noted previously). The prohibition on both *onna* and *wakashu* kabuki (and by extension the inception of *yaro* kabuki) necessitated a new direction for the nascent theater. As with much of the art's staples, this direction was born of necessity. In the early days of *yaro* kabuki, the lack of both woman and young boys was compensated for by simply adding more elaborate costumes and more obscuring makeup to the adult men in order to facilitate their imitation of the *wakashu* (who had been, in their day, costumed and made up in such a way as to imitate the women who preceded them on the stage). Audiences and actors alike were eventually more impressed by the artistry and complexity involved in the costuming and makeup, and standards for such were thus put into place. Yoshizawa's aforementioned book, *Ayamegusa*, is written proof of the formalization of the role. *Ayamegusa* not only spoke of onstage trappings such as costuming and makeup for the early *onnagata* but also contained Ayame's musings on how a performer ought to live off the stage in order to be more effective on it.

In essence, then, the Tokugawa-era kabuki theater can be seen as a place where performance was demonstrably adaptive; prohibitions from the government were met only with new innovations, and the theater was never to be kept down for long despite state efforts. With each innovation, the gender of some performers (specifically, those performers not playing *tachiyaku*, or male roles) was further deconstructed, first by the *wakashu* and later by the *onnagata*. As these innovations continued, curious and excited audiences continued to fill the playhouses, eager to see what new curiosity would unfold before them.

To conclude, there is an interesting parallel between two major Kyoto theaters, a parable that played out through the late 17th and early 18th centuries. One theater showed kabuki plays, and the other bunraku; the first theater was a hotbed of the aforementioned innovations, and the bunraku theater remained traditional and conservative in its performances. As the 1600s wore on, the former theater became more and more famous, and the latter, unmoving and traditional, eventually closed its doors as its audiences slowly moved to the new and exciting kabuki theater. While a relatively simplistic illustration, this example can be thought of as a representation-in-micro of the state of performance art in Tokugawa Japan: curiosity and innovation came be the most important factors of onstage performance. As innovation unfolded, so too would its formalization; for the *onnagata* specifically, one can examine what was prescribed to him in order to be a successful presence onstage. In the next chapter, I shall examine why simply imitating women was not the goal of the *onnagata*, and what the true undercurrents were that informed his performance of gender.

Chapter 2: Gendering the *Onnagata*

It is deceptively easy to look at an *onnagata* and conclude that they are simply men-playing-women, an Eastern parallel to the contemporary drag queen or even the Shakespearean crossdresser. One might also conclude, not unreasonably, that the *onnagata*'s crossdressing was a pragmatic solution to government intrusion on the kabuki stage (in the form of bans first on women and later on *wakashu*). Both of these are, to the casual observer, reasonable assumptions that could even be supported with surface logic. However, there is much going on behind the *onnagata*'s scenes that informs their true purpose and ideals–and, perhaps most importantly of all, their gender expression offstage and their gender construction on it. The above assumptions may appear sound, but in fact overlook or, worse, overwrite much of the actual nuance behind the *onnagata* and his onstage performance. Knowledge of both the history of the art and a deeper understanding of the *onnagata*'s relationship with his own gender performativity is necessary to fully appreciate the onstage spectacle.

Gender in kabuki has been defined by shades of gray even since the time of its credited founder, Izumo no Okuni. During her time, "both women and men frequently played different gender roles" (Mezur 1). Recalling the history of Okuni's predecessors, it is reasonable to assume that these, too, would also welcome both men and women to their stages–particularly *dengaku*, based as it was off of traditional rice-planting ceremonies, and *sarugaku*, that bucolic and raucous entertainment from which early kabuki drew much of its early inspiration. Curiously, onstage gender roles were not necessarily tied to the sex of their performers–making early kabuki an onstage example of a very literal gender performance as outlined by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* when

she explains the term like so: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (Butler 29). Alternately put, an expression of gender is only as valid and verifiable as its societal construction—which is to say that it's totally imagined. This applies to both society at large (as onnagata had a hand in constructing the feminine ideal of Tokugawa society by their portrayal of it) and the community of kabuki performers. Simply put, in the absence of sex-defined gender roles on the early kabuki stage, the lines between masculine and feminine portrayal existed only as much as their performers created them.

But even after women were forbidden from performance, female roles continued onstage, continuing this performance of gender. Ultimately, this comes as no surprise when taken in light of contemporary gender theory, which posits that all gender is performed–whether onstage or off the stage. More specifically, the performance of gender norms on the kabuki stage is a curious reflection-in-micro of Butler's idea (presented in *Gender Trouble*) that gender is constructed of a series of repeated, performed acts. In the specific case of kabuki's *onnagata*, what these constructive acts were and how they shaped the feminine image that was being portrayed is crucial to this research. Both the necessity of this constructed performance and the exaggeration that would eventually accompany it (and, ultimately, define it) plays out interestingly on the 17th-century kabuki stage. During this time, bans against first women and later *wakashu* (discussed below) turned the act of onstage gender construction on the kabuki stage onto its head. The gender performance inherent in everyday life became a caricature upon the kabuki stage as males developed and redeveloped their imagined feminine ideal, which

other men would, in turn, perform, project, and portray onstage, subtly adding their own practices to the construction and encoding of what was "feminine" in the Japanese cultural imagination.

Interestingly, the appeal of early kabuki–by which I mean the appeal that drew cosmopolitan crowds in the largest cities that Japan had to offer–was mostly rooted in the sex appeal of its leading performers, having generally (but, it must be said, not exclusively or even primarily) been used as a showcase for displaying sexual goods (such goods being female initially, and then *wakashu* after the initial ban on women performers in 1629). Therefore, it can be reasoned that with the advent of *yaro* kabuki and the subsequent encoding of *onnagata*'s standard practices that the end goal was to maximize the *onnagata*'s sex appeal to an audience that was not only accustomed to but expected to see performances that included some elements of what was constructed as feminine. This assumption, like the assumption that the government bans on *onna* and *wakashu* kabuki stemmed from a view of those styles' obvious sexuality as immoral, is worth taking the time to address and, ultimately, dispel.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Leupp points out in *Male Colors* that *wakashu* themselves had sex appeal that would have resonated with audiences even without them serving as stand-ins or replacements for women who were also available. The traditions of *wakashu* (or man-boy love) were codified and established enough in Japanese society at the time of *wakashu* kabuki that a term was applied specifically to the practice: *shudo*. It had its own set of established practices, guidelines, and strictures, and was, depending on the tastes of whichever nobility was in power at the time, widely accepted. Indeed, *shudo* was even glorified and seen as part of proper conduct, having

been codified in the vaunted and revered *bushido,* code of the samurai. Therefore, while *onna* kabuki and *wakashu* kabuki both had an ostensible focus on showcasing female sex appeal, the underlying male sex appeal of the *wakashu* would also have been a factor in drawing in–and exciting–crowds.

<div align="center">Gender in Transience</div>

With the advent of *yaro* kabuki as necessitated by the *wakashu* ban, however, the vestiges of *wakashu'*s sex appeal were cast from the stage, and the role of the *onnagata*– while not completely unheard of at this point in kabuki history–became a necessity. To have theater without romance would have gone very much against the grain of Japanese artistic expression, both as it was being practiced in the Tokugawa period and as had been established historically. Additionally, the romantic parts, perhaps driven in part by Tojuro's refinement of *wagoto* parts mentioned before, would have to evolve, adapt and improve further as time went on. With bans on not only women but also *wakashu*, much was expected of the *onnagata* in order for kabuki to continue to thrive as it had been.

The onstage division between male and female was never clearer than it was when women were allowed onstage beside men; with *wakashu* taking the place of women after the initial ban on female performers, there was still a clear delineation between the *wakashu* and *yaro* performers. In other words, onstage gender divisions were still immediately clear even after the ban on women. While the gender conventions of *onna* kabuki, which primarily featured women, are self-explanatory, and the *wakashu* were meant both to imitate women and capitalize on the inherent sex appeal of *wakashu* already extant in Japanese society, but *yaro* kabuki, which now had female roles being played by crossdressing men, presented a new challenge for showcasing sex

appeal, and these male performers, now thrust into the female role, were forced to construct their sex appeal from, as it were, the ground up.

However, these early *onnagata* pursued a much more complicated ideal than the simple imitation of female (or *wakashu*) sex appeal. *Yaro* actors in female roles didn't pursue an already-existing feminine ideal; they constructed and defined it based on their costuming, stage mannerisms, and roles. The ideal female was not imitated, then; she was built from the ground up by these early male performers, a fantasy proposed, prescribed, and approved by the "boys' club" of kabuki performers. While one might assume that *yaro* performers were emulating the historic performances of the women that came before them, the fact is that women had been offstage long enough–approximately 25 years before the *wakashu* ban went into effect—that the construction of the feminine was done without any input from women. Dressing rooms became echo chambers where men—and only men—would decide which traits would embody the Ideal Feminine. Indeed, no biological woman—fallible, human, and imperfect—could hope to measure up to the towering heights of cultural fantasy stacked upon cultural fantasy.

What is telling, then, is the techniques that were employed in enacting this towering fantasy –how did the *onnagata* view and model the idealized feminine? More simply, what gender role did the male-acting-female *onnagata* fill–both on the stage and, if applicable, in Tokugawa society at large? Were they accepted as male, or was the performance compelling enough to allow audiences and critics to forsake or overlook the *onnagata*'s masculine underpinnings?

The answer is more complex. *Onnagata* were not necessarily trying to "pass" as women; rather, they were taking cues from their predecessors the *wakashu* and building

on facets of *wakashu* performance rather than looking off the stage to the women in the world around them for behavioral examples. Therefore, a closer look at the *wakashu*, rather than at Japanese gender roles or their signifiers, becomes required in order to more fully understand the *onnagata* with greater precision.

Before writing my own contributions, it is worthwhile to note what others have said on the subject. In *Beautiful Boys / Outlaw Bodies,* Katherine Mezur addresses this issue by first drawing from A. C. Scott, whose scholarship has already contributed to much of this thesis' historical and cultural information. In his work, *The Kabuki Theatre of Japan,* Scott "portrays *onnagata* as a necessary feature of genuine kabuki, [and] introduces the art of the *onnagata* as the art of the female impersonator who must symbolize an ideal female" (Mezur 25). The passage from Scott that she refers to is as follows:

> The Kabuki is artificial [. . .] everything is exaggerated, conventionalized, and emphasized to make a pattern for the eye and ear. The *onnagata* is a major unit of this pattern and by his creation of a subtle convention for femininity provides the degree of formality which sets the standard for the whole. It is not simply a question of being effeminate, the good *onnagata* must symbolize feminine qualities in a way that no actress can do. He must idealize and emphasize where the actress can only fall back upon easier and more natural qualities with a loss of the power of expression dictated by a drama such as kabuki. While [female geisha] perform with great charm and grace, they never attain the power and vigor of the male actor.

Scott's claims here are equal parts prescriptive and essentialist, and there is much to examine. Before consulting Mezur's interpretation of this phenomenon of the *onnagata*'s gendering, I shall offer my own interpretation, starting with Scott's claim that "the good *onnagata* must symbolize feminine qualities in a way that no actress can do." When taken in historical context, the intention seems to be justification of the gendered exclusivity of the *onnagata* profession (that is, Scott is arguing in favor of a traditionalist view of kabuki that excludes women from its stage). Only in the early 20th century did women begin to make inroads onto the kabuki stage, though by that time the *onnagata* tradition was well-established to the point of these new arrivals, perversely, being seen as pale imitators.

More broadly still, Scott's use of the word "feminine" suggests a belief in an essentialist gender binary–a curious and almost contradictory position to take when discussing the *onnagata*, who simultaneously uphold (by performing certain actions, manners of dress, and characteristics as inherently "feminine") and weaken (by their gendered exclusivity and the position of *onnagata* stemming from *wakashu*, who were, in turn, a substitute for actual females) that same binary. However, it is worth bearing in mind that if Scott's position on the *onnagata*'s gender performance seems dated, that is an understandable flaw–after all, his source, *The Kabuki Theater of Japan*, was published in 1955.

Scott also suggests that the *onnagata* "must idealize and emphasize where the actress can only fall back," which–whether Scott realized it or not–points toward one of Mezur's more modern interpretations of the *onnagata*, in which she posits that the *onnagata*–as a male with female trappings to uphold his gender presentation–carved out

their own gender niche outside of the male-female binary. Continuing in *Beautiful Boys/Outlaw Bodies*, Katherine Mezur outlines this theory: she suggests that the performativity of gender–especially on the kabuki stage–is nowhere more clearly illuminated than when it is at the hands (or, indeed, using the entire bodies) of the *onnagata* performers. She quotes from Edward Seidensticker, who interpreted the *onnagata* thusly: "Because [*onnagata*] abstracted the essence of female characteristics, *onnagata* female-likeness arises from an extreme culmination of female-likeness which women cannot imitate" (qtd. In Mezur 34). *This* interpretation of the *onnagata* is even more of a departure from Scott's. Both Seidensticker and Mezur claim that having a male trained specifically to present himself as female had allowed the *onnagata* to create a third gender that is wholly their own, outside of the male/female binary. A cornerstone of their argument is that the *onnagata*'s appeal is dependent on the audience's knowledge that the underlying body beneath the constructed femininity is male (which is not completely alien to a Western audience, either; though the *onnagata* should not be thought of as a mere parallel to the American drag queen, this aspect of their performance and its underlying appeal is quite similar).

Mezur herself applies, as I do, "feminist theories of gender performance [to] shed a different light on this interpretation of the *onnagata fiction of female-likeness*" (Mezur 34, emphasis added). Her reading of the *onnagata*'s gender expression focuses on another aspect of the *onnagata*: that of the archetype or *yakugara*–these emerged in the decades following the forced change to *yaro kabuki* as part of the process of refinement and formalization that kabuki underwent as part of its attempts to legitimize itself, but were not explicitly prescribed. Instead, these *yakugara* gradually began to emerge to

characterize each *onnagata* role (Mezur 34). Broadly, each notable *onnagata* of their time

innovated in the art form in such a way as to give rise to these archetypes; as Mezur puts

it, "[e]very historical star *onnagata* had a detailed and individual strategy for performing

his *onnagata* gender roles." (35) By Mezur's interpretation and criticism, each of these

archetypes would eventually reflect a particular facet of the male-constructed feminine on

the kabuki stage: "Today, stylized gender acts, within a system of gendered aesthetics,

are subject to continuous revision and innovation by individual performers, resulting in

what, in feminist theories, would be called multiple Fictions of the Feminine." (34)

Like Seidensticker, Mezur contends that there is immanent in the *onnagata* a

gender role that exists outside of the constructed masculine-feminine binary–she

describes the *onnagata*'s position as a "disruption of [the] bipolar system of genders"

(35) and continuously describes the *onnagata*'s performance as "gender acts"–that is, as a

man acting out gender roles constructed by men in order to imitate a male idea of what

ideal femininity is. In other words, only an *onnagata* could act in a feminine way (let

alone act the part of an ideal female) because an actual woman–too flawed, too human, in

this paradigm–falls short of the male-constructed feminine ideal. So too, however, does

the *onnagata*; because of the peculiar and complex situation inherent in his position of

male-acting-female, his performance makes him a unique piece in the gender puzzle.

In short, while both Seidensticker and Mezur argue that the *onnagata* creates a

unique gender for himself, Seidensticker posits that this is based on the likeness that they

emulate visually and aesthetically, and Mezur's theory is that the *onnagata* gender arises

from performance, not appearance. Speaking to Scott's quote above, Mezur says, "I can

agree with Scott's hypothesis on the centrality of *onnagata* to kabuki, and that stylization

is the key to *onnagata* gender performance." (26) Because, as Scott says, the *onnagata* "set the degree of formality for the whole," the total gender performance would fall apart without the performativity that both Mezur and Scott point out.

I theorize that the *onnagata*'s gender expression (and, ultimately, appeal) stems not necessarily from his performativity of a "third gender" (though this interpretation of the *onnagata* does have merit) but instead from his channeling of several other factors of gender that were present in the *onnagata*'s heyday, the Tokugawa era.

Wakashu and *Ukiyo*

First, note that the *onnagata* was not intended to replace women on stage, but rather to replace the *wakashu* that had been banned in 1652—this is an important distinction whose significance I will discuss later. Furthermore, even the *wakashu* were not wholly dependent on imitating the sex appeal of the women that came before them; after all, the *wakashu* had, as previously discussed, ample presence in the Japanese erotic imagination (not to mention erotic literature, art, and tradition). Third, sex appeal alone was not the *raison d'etre* of the *onnagata*–after *yaro* kabuki became the norm, these performers had to draw in audiences not only with sex appeal (which was, at least in the early days of the *yaro* kabuki, before the *onnagata* had built a foundation and tradition from which to draw future sex appeal) but also with spectacles of impressive costuming, makeup, and artistry.

I posit that in the *onnagata*'s early days, it was the admiration of skill and craftsmanship that came first, and admiration of the performers' charm and allure that arose as a result of these then followed. Mezur's thinking is not totally incompatible with mine; later in *Beautiful Boys* she says that "I propose that *onnagata* completely replaced

women [onstage] with their own construction of female-likeness, a composite of physical appearances, gestures, and speech, to which [male actors playing males] responded. Imitation of real women was never the goal, but just the opposite: *onnagata* amplified their potential for the artificial." (35). In other words, though the *onnagata* had to rely on the memory of the sex appeal of his predecessors (women and *wakashu*) early on, it was the development of his techniques and refinement of his characteristics that earned him a more permanent spot on the kabuki stage (and, more broadly, in Japanese culture).

However, because the *onnagata* came directly after the *wakashu* on the kabuki stage, the question of his gendering and source of his appeal must also address, to an extent, that of the *wakashu* that preceded him. Indeed, to discuss only the gender of the *onnagata* without pausing to examine the *wakashu* is to baldly ignore many of the reasons that the *onnagata* were successful–and, more importantly, ignoring the *wakashu* behind them elides key points in the eventual construction of the *onnagata*'s performance of gender.

To the *wakashu*, then–to gender him might seem easy; he was unabashedly male, and the masculine-feminine binary in Japan did not exclude that transient adolescent state in which the *wakashu* was at the height of his appeal. In other words, while it was understood that an adolescent male would attract the attention of other, older males, and he may be expected to act in a more submissive or accommodating manner than an adult male would, the concept of masculinity in Japanese culture didn't exclude this stage or its characteristic behaviors. If anything, going through this stage of development was something of a rite of passage–the passage from androgynous child to definitively male adult. The fleetingness of that transient state was, perhaps, a large part of its appeal, and

while a Western eyebrow might raise at the idea of gender lines being blurred in this way, it was certainly a very normal part of male development in classical Japan.

Yet by the mid-18th century, the *onnagata* had established its own niche in this gender labyrinth. Maki Isaka posits that "[t]his trajectory was by no means linear," going on to say that "*onnagata* [initially] appeared to embody a practical continuity with their immediate predecessors, the *wakashu*, but this continuity concealed an insidious yet radical theoretical discontinuity" (23). While *onnagata* depended upon the *wakashu* to establish nascent standards that would later be codified into accepted (and, indeed, expected) practice, the *wakashu* possessed certain traits that Isaka argues that the *onnagata* could not have emulated.

The first of such traits was the *wakashu*'s transience–a facet of Tokugawa Japanese culture that is worthy of an aside. Transience was a key component of Japanese culture as far back as the Heian era (~9th-12th century), but the philosophical idea of beauty in transience underwent a cultural revival in the 17th century. The philosophical ideal of transience is embodied in the phrase *mono no aware* (物の哀れ) which, while difficult to translate, can be thought of as an appreciation for the impermanence of beauty, an admiration of its transience. More broadly, it can be translated to finding beauty in the fleetingness of life–which would be especially pertinent to the *wakashu*, whose glorified status as an androgynous beauty would last only as long as his adolescence did: a span of perhaps four or five years.

The *wakashu* ban, however, forced this transient state to an early conclusion for all *wakashu*, whether they were in the early or late stages of their transient *wakashu*

period. As noted above, part of the decree was the requirement that the *wakashu*'s

hairstyle be changed to reflect his sudden and forced transition into adulthood. Though

this may seem a frivolous and cursory thing for the government to decree, the hairstyle of

the *wakashu* was one of the prime signifiers of his status as such. To force a change of

hairstyle was the equivalent of forcing the young *wakashu* out of their transient

adolescent state and immediately into adulthood. Thus, whatever potential there may

have been to admire and appreciate the *wakashu*'s transition phase or to lament its loss

while appreciating its impermanence, as *mono no aware* philosophy would encourage,

was cut away as suddenly as was his hair.

Isaka argues that the *onnagata* "depended on the practices and aesthetic of

wakashu" in the years just after the *wakashu* ban, and that there is a "discontinuity"

between the *wakashu* aesthetic and the emergent *onnagata* aesthetic. She notes that

"*Onnagata* transformed their gender from military masculinity to the androgynous gender

and then to ideal femininity" (23). This theory is worth further examination, as it helps to

shed light on why the *wakashu* was so important to the gendering of the *onnagata*.

Her nod towards "military masculinity" points towards the historical origins of

wakashu–both the term and the aesthetic came from a facet of bushido, the moral code

followed by samurai of the time, wherein one was expected to take on an apprentice of

wakashu age and enter into a romantic (or at least sexual) relationship with them (this

being the *shudo* mentioned earlier). Isaka further contends that the "neither *onnagata* nor

wakashu modeled themselves on the purged female performers or, by extension, on

women in general". (23) She describes the androgynous appeal of the *wakashu* as having

been "emergent" and theorizes that the *wakashu* were not meant to replace the women

they proceeded but rather were an attempt to capture a different facet of what was considered sexually appealing in Tokugawa Japan: adolescent male androgyny." (26)[ii]

Wakashu existed in a brief state of intermediacy between male and female, which would have struck a chord with the middle-class, urban crowd that was their primary audience. Another philosophical and popular phenomenon would have added to this burgeoning appeal: *Ukiyo*. The term is perhaps best-known in the West as it appears in the phrase "*ukiyo*-e", or woodblock prints, but without the "-e" suffix (which denotes a picture), the term "*ukiyo*" is left, which is another difficult word to parse that can be translated sufficiently as "floating world". Interestingly the "floating world" that the term originally described was none other than the pleasure quarters of the three most prominent Japanese cities at the time: Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto, which just happened to be where the prime kabuki theaters were.

The floating *Ukiyo* world also referred to spaces in between states–most commonly, between fantasy and reality, where the border between the two becomes blurred. The *wakashu*, then, fits perfectly into the *ukiyo* world, for two reasons: one, he represented the brief intermediacy between male and female (or, to take a less gendered view, between innocent childhood and mature adulthood), and his transient state between the two was an embodiment of the liminal nature of *ukiyo*. Second, his beauty and appeal were mere fantasy–a brief glimpse into an intermediate state that could not last, but whose perpetuity could be fantasized by audiences. Simply put, while the *ukiyo* cultural phenomenon was a popular fad at the time, it would have been especially pertinent to the kabuki theaters–and the *wakashu* on their stages–located in the epicenters of the movement.

The *onnagata* would later put on the mantle of this in-between state, and in a way he still wears it even into contemporary times. However, his state of transience has less to do with the progression of maturity than it does with the state between fantasy and reality. One might be inclined to think that the *onnagata* exists between male and female; I would disagree and instead say that the *onnagata* stands on the border between fantastic and actual, much in the way that the *wakashu* before him acted as a visual metaphor for the bridge between boy and man.

Both *mono no aware* and *ukiyo* help to establish not only why the *wakashu* was so immediately attractive and popular but also helped to further that same celebrity. Both the renewed Tokugawa-period interest in literary history (expressed, in this case, as the revival of *mono no aware* in the cultural consciousness, when it had been first mentioned centures before) and the surge of *ukiyo*-centered popular culture created a perfect storm for the *wakashu*'s appeal to be maximized–a perfect storm made even more so by the kabuki theater already being in the limelight of Japanese popular culture.

Butler's theory of gender performance is particularly pertinent to both the *onnagata* and to the *wakashu*; if, as she theorizes, the body becomes its gender only "through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (Butler 19), then the *onnagata* and *wakashu* both are curious subversions. As mentioned before, the inner recesses of kabuki–its dressing rooms and playwrights and other such internal areas where nuances of performance and spectacle were devised and discussed– were populated only by males, as had been the case ever since the 1629 ban on women performers.

These men, including *tachiyaku*, *wakashu*, and *onnagata*, were able to use this space to construct a feminine image totally free from any female input. It is no surprise, then, that the constructed image of the feminine that they devised had little grounding in reality, instead being based in the ephemeral, *ukiyo* state in which the *wakashu*'s aesthetic was also grounded. Therefore, Butler's idea that tenets of gender performance must have an inscriber, a source from which these claims regarding performed gender are made, comes keenly into practice here–it was the kabuki actors themselves, in the early days of the *onnagata*, who began to lay down (and later to build upon) the foundation of the constructed feminine gender that the *onnagata* would, eventually, seek to emulate.

Therefore, as said above, it is simply too reductive to label the *wakashu* as male and be done with it–while he never pretended to be anything else, there is much more to his constructed maleness than a subscription to or filling of gender roles–male or female. I posit that the *wakashu*'s popularity was primarily a result of *mono no aware*, the extant popularity of kabuki theater, and *ukiyo* culture also making great strides in the greater tapestry of Japanese popular culture at the time.

Furthermore, while there was already a precedent for finding *wakashu*-aged boys sexually appealing that was set down historically (first by Buddhist religious tradition and later furthered by samurai), the *wakashu* took that appeal in a different direction rather than building on the historical precedents. They weren't attractive solely because of their youth or their ostensible femininity, fleeting or otherwise; they were popular because of their embodiment of other cultural movements that were sweeping Japan in the 17th century, though one must be careful not to overlook nor to deny that their sex appeal was also a significant factor in their success.

After the passing of the infamous *wakashu* ban, one might wonder why the kabuki theater suffered so; would it not have been just as simple to have all-male theater and be done with it? There are a couple of reasons that this didn't come to pass.

First, the male performer (or *tachiyaku)* cannot embody the liminal in the way that the *wakashu* or even the *onna* can. Even the softer *wagoto* style men were–at least relative to the *onnagata* and *wakashu*–static and established. *Tachiyaku* roles carried neither the transient appeal of the *wakashu* nor the more-accessible sex appeal of the female onna. Granted, Ichikawa Danjuro and his *aragoto* stylings lean more towards the explicitly and conventionally masculine than other kabuki forms. Consider, however, that Ichikawa's style only came about after Tojuro Sakata's aforementioned *wagoto*-style. The *onnagata*, nascent as they were, had already begun their practice alongside him on the stage, though their style wouldn't be properly formalized until Yoshizawa Ayame entered the scene some years later. That *wagoto* and *onnagata* sprang up both before and during the existence of *aragoto* suggests a need that can only be filled by feminine roles. Part of this need could very easily be explained away as the fulfillment of a desire for romance to fill theater seats. One might look at Japanese culture specifically and suggest that these roles were needed in order to fill a need for transience and the appreciation of it that would have otherwise left a noticeable gap in Japanese art at the time.

The Need for Desire

However, to think of the need for romance and transience onstage merely as a sign of the times (those times being Tokugawa Japan) is to inadvertently overlook the precedence of romance in Japanese art that had been established well before even Izumo no Okuni's day (that being the late 1500's). Romance, love, and sexual intrigue had been

a staple of much Japanese art even as far back as *Genji Monogatari* in the 11th century, which (as the resurgent popularity of the term *mono no aware* attests) would have been considered a widely-read (or at least well-known) classic even by the Tokugawa people.

Therefore, the *wakashu* not only embodied (and quite possibly helped to create) the Tokugawan obsession with transience, they (and the *onnagata* that followed them) were necessary features of the kabuki stage that eventually, some stand-in for love, romance, and especially male-female relations, sexual or otherwise, would have filled the vacuum even in the absence of *wakashu*. Without a romantic feature on the stage, the art may well have lost legitimacy and, thereafter, popularity. Indeed, this may have been the case for the aforementioned two years that the people "were without a theater." (Scott 34)

How, then, could the *onnagata* follow up the act? After the *wakashu* ban, there could be no promise of transience; that part of the *wakashu*'s appeal–which made up much of said appeal, as theorized above–was lost forever and could not be reclaimed. Nonetheless, as Isaka writes, the *onnagata* were still dependent on the *wakashu* methods that had been in practice at the time of their ban. Herein lies the discontinuity that she mentions: the inability of the *onnagata* to carry on the *wakashu* traditions with any of the credibility that the *wakashu* had. After all, with enough costuming and makeup, an actor could appear a certain way for as many years or decades as he wished; the appeal rooted in transience was lost in the face of this newly-crafted perpetuity. If we look at an actor-critique booklet presented by Isaka in her work, we find one from 1720 that appears to address this phenomenon:

> Nobody other than their [women's] mirrors, which they use day and night, knows
> their innate disgraceful features [. . .] This is also the case for the *onnagata* [. . .].

In the time of Ukon [Genzaemon], the *onnagata*'s appearance was vague and
confusing. They made themselves up roughly, placing only kerchiefs on their
heads. Audiences back then accepted [this rough-and-ready appearance], and
compared to what we have today, there were also weird things in plays' plots.
(Isaka 33)

Putting aside the talk about plot for a moment, the complaint in this paper is particularly
interesting when considered alongside everything above–the lack of refinement in the
early *onnagata*'s costuming and makeup compared to the later suggests even more
strongly that the *onnagata* were, early on, attempting to simply continue as the *wakashu*
had before them, relying less on costuming, makeup, and katas and perhaps hoping that
continuing to act as their predecessors had would be sufficient.

This was an initially successful move, as evidenced by the continued existence of
kabuki as an art form at all (after all, even the *onnagata*-imitating-*wakashu* were enough
to draw in audiences and hold cultural interest). However, it also suggests that the
onnagata performers came to realize that they were not *wakashu* and could not continue
in *wakashu* traditions if they were to refine and innovate their art.

It is worthwhile to pause for a moment to consider in whose hands the reins of
performance were. After all, the drivers of the theater industry during this time would
have been the ones who ultimately controlled the direction of the feminine construction
that the *wakashu* and *onnagata* were performing. There is little definitive material (at
least in English) on the subject of who was in control of which plays were shown at
which times. One can reasonably assume that theater directors drew up their plans, and
that performers followed directors' instructions, with possible exceptions in the cases of

notable actors having enough clout to make suggestions or demands as they wished. The concerns of the critic above may be addressing this phenomenon; one could easily interpret it as a lamentation that the new kabuki plays were too avant-garde, the performers' onstage experimentations too strange and new for his tastes (hence the "weird things in plays' plots" comment). One might even assume that theater managers were all too happy to give their performers a relatively large amount of creative freedom; the refinement and development of *onnagata* art was a likely draw for audiences who would have no doubt been curious to see just what new development would be onstage this time.

Playwrights are also not to be completely discounted; they too had a hand in this development as much as stage managers and the performers. As said in the last chapter, all of the different flavors of Japanese performance art (primarily noh, bunraku, kabuki and kyogen) borrowed from each other, adapting the well-known stories and adding enough unique panache to make a familiar tale distinct. This borrow-and-add model would be a reasonable explanation for the amount of innovation and experimentation that would have been happening onstage at the hands of performers; the stories would have been familiar enough (especially to seasoned audience members) to be recognizable while still allowing for a remarkable amount of flexibility for performers to experiment.

It is also perhaps telling that the writer's complaint has to do with the *onnagata* leaning more on material trappings than innate appeal, but the artificiality at play lends itself to an interesting and worthwhile interpretation of both his quote and assumptions about the development of the *onnagata*. Consider that the *onnagata* continued to establish and refine his own appeal (that being the appeal of the ideal feminine rather than the transient beauty of the *wakashu*)—it should then come as no surprise that such a

construction would have its groundings not in the beauty of the performer's body but rather in how he dresses and paints himself. It is a curious and nuanced example of the artificial being used to further scaffold further artificiality. Intended or otherwise, it adds credence to the idea of the *onnagata* promoting and constructing an artificial image that was almost completely separate from the physical body of its performer (and certainly separate from the physical body of the female that the cursory observer might assume was the target of the *onnagata*'s imitation).

Ayame's Words

Around the mid-18th century, after the *wakashu* ban had been in place for several decades, Yoshizawa Ayame entered the picture and spoke at length about his views on *onnagata* behavior and style. His success on stage and ability to capture the admiration and adoration of Japanese audiences not only are a testament to his success as an actor but also give great credibility to his advice; he was considered one of the premiere *onnagata* innovators who did much to codify the style, as discussed in Chapter 1.

It is unsurprising, then, that he alludes to transience in his book, *Ayamegusa*: "If a piece of acting comes off successfully three times in a row, [. . .] the actor loses his skill" (qtd. In Dunn 61). There is another suggestion here that repetition and establishment of patterns is something that an *onnagata* should avoid; it is instead better to be always moving, changing, and adapting rather than becoming static. One may also interpret this to mean that an *onnagata* must be willing to fulfill a variety of roles lest he become "typecast" and unable to perform anything else.

Either interpretation is valid, and neither one contradicts the idea that the *onnagata* did not necessarily eschew the *wakashu*'s transience once it became clear that they would not be able to embody it as well as the *wakashu* had; instead, this item from *Ayamegusa* is perhaps the most representative of how the transient aesthetic was adapted rather than discarded, and that the *onnagata* found other ways to capture and express the same appeal that had been immanent in the *wakashu* that came before them.

Furthermore, the position of the *onnagata* in the theater introduces an ironic demonstration of gender being performed. Certainly, the *onnagata* troubled the categories of gender in their performances; while the performance of gender (feminine or female) onstage is obvious and explicit, and furthermore intended to be so, Ayame's admonition that *onnagata* continue to perform their gender offstage is no less indicative of the performed nature of the *onnagata*'s particular brand of "feminine." One can conclude that the *onnagata* were inadvertent performers of not only gender mutability (being that they were males acting a feminine part, with demonstrable success) but gender construction (being that their object of imitation, the feminine ideal, was rooted in both the *wakashu*'s transient fantasy and the constructed feminine ideal devised by exclusively-male actors).

From the above examples, several conclusions come forward: One, that the *wakashu*— whose transient appeal the early *onnagata* drew heavily from—were not appealing based on sex appeal alone (though it would be inaccurate to say that sex appeal was no part of their charm at all). Instead, what appears to have been an even stronger force for *wakashu* fascination in Tokugawa Japan was the *wakashu*'s inherent transience and their embodiment of the *mono no aware* ideal that had been sweeping the country at the time.

Second, the *onnagata* can be seen to have initially tried to capitalize on that same aesthetic in the wake of the ban on *wakashu*, but a close reading of *Ayamegusa* and material from Tokugawa periodicals show that this met with only limited success, and the *onnagata* later turned towards more refined makeup, costuming, and katas in order to hold audience's attention and interest (as well as maintain cultural relevance).

Third, there is still evidence later in *Ayamegusa* that suggests that transience was still crucial to the *onnagata*'s art and repertoire; rather than doing away with the transience that propelled the *wakashu* to fame, it was instead subsumed and refitted as part of–but not necessarily the foundation of–the *onnagata* moving forward.

Other conclusions about the *onnagata* include the fact that, despite Yoshizawa's admonition that an *onnagata* should act his part on- and offstage, he never thought of himself as anything other than male. In other words, there is evidence that even Ayame– considered to not only be one of the great practitioners but also one of the primary founders–realized that to be an *onnagata* was to play a part, not to reassert or redefine one's gender. One could theorize that this is due to the aforementioned difference between what is feminine (the ideal) and female (the actual); *onnagata* were expected to strive for the former, though it was known to be an impossible achievement, rather than to settle for the latter, which, though perhaps easier to emulate onstage (putting aside, of course, the biological impossibility of a male perfectly emulating the female), was still too imperfect for both audience and performers' tastes. Indeed, women had so long been off the stage that to have sought to emulate them rather than the constructed feminine may well have been seen as ludicrous.

Fantastic Feminine

One could also conclude, as I have above, that the *wakashu*, and by extension the *onnagata*, built much of their appeal on transience. Maki Isaka follows this assumption in *Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater*. She argues that *onnagata* not only performed this feminine ideal but also constructed it–and I agree.

Through the confluence of the *wakashu* ban necessitating perpetual transience (a paradox in itself, of course) and the need for a female (or feminine) part to give theatrical productions verisimilitude and legitimacy, *onnagata* were forced not only to adapt the *wakashu*'s transience to different methods but also to redefine what the feminine ideal was. I theorize that the *onnagata* had a vested interest in redefining femininity, and that constructing it as an unattainable ideal allowed them to continue to hold audiences' attention and favor.

Yet it is not so strange or ironic as it may seem that the actual women could not hope to measure up to the constructed standards of "feminine" as laid down by the *onnagata* who preceded them. Indeed, the phenomenon of women being unable to establish themselves on the kabuki stage in fact does much to reinforce the idea that an *onnagata*'s art has less to do with presenting oneself as a female and more to do with performing a simulacrum of an idealized feminine. This gives strong credence to the difference between feminine and female–the former is an ideal, an image, and a concept; it is artificial and unattainable, in contrast to the latter, which is imperfect, not ideal, and far too rooted in reality to hold a candle to the idealization that the *onnagata* performs. Therefore, one can conclude that the *onnagata*, whose practice began as an imitation of the *wakashu* before them, eventually evolved into something different than replacing the

banned females (or the banned *wakashu*) on the kabuki stage–instead, the *onnagata* was charged with constructing, presenting, and upholding a vaunted ideal, rather than serving as a pragmatic replacement for what had been lost. This is reflected in the Seidensticker quote above–particularly when he notes that "*onnagata* female-likeness arises from an extreme culmination of female-likeness [what I am referring to as "feminine" or "femininity"] which *women cannot hope to imitate*" (qtd. In Mezur 34, emphasis added). It is therefore well-established that convincingly presenting oneself as a female (or "passing") was a secondary concern for the *onnagata*—if it was ever a concern at all.

It is worth looking at the <u>*Ayamegusa*</u> when discussing the <u>*onnagata;*</u> a look at the refinement of the part can reveal much about the implicit gender coding beneath. Additionally, the writings of Yoshizawa Ayame, considered to be the first great <u>*onnagata*</u> who pioneered much of the norms of the art as it existed during and after his time, codified much of those norms in this work. Much of the early writings of his have to do with the particularities of playing certain specialized roles. One particularly telling passage can be found in the transcription of a lecture that Ayame is giving regarding playing the samurai-wife role. "What should happen when a samurai's wife takes her short sword and lays about her? When she is surrounded by a large force, in a scene [. . .] the samurai's wife should, unlikely though this may seem, be able to handle her sword more skillfully than a man can." (qtd. In Dunn 52). Of particular note is Ayame's concession of "unlikely though this may seem"—Ayame himself appears to realize (or at least account for) the fantasy inherent in the *onnagata*'s actions, especially onstage.

There is another, subtler concession here that sheds further light on the *onnagata*'s gendering: the ending phrase "more skillfully than a man can." With this line, Ayame

both acknowledges the fantasy (that is, the lack of realism) inherent in kabuki performance as well as the transcendence of *onnagata* with regards to how realistically they perform the female gender (that is to say, not realistically at all) and the underlying masculinity of the performer himself. He continues: "When her loyal heart realizes the seriousness of the situation, it is then that above all she is a warrior's wife." (qtd. in Dunn 53) Here again Ayame is tipping his hand, so to speak–he recognizes in this passage that playing a role onstage is simply that: a role–or, in other words, a fantasy, not meant to represent reality.

If the *onnagata*, who is himself a role player, is expected to further change into different *onnagata* roles, each of which is exemplified in particular key moments such as the one described here, then it is no stretch to suppose that the *onnagata* themselves were not, at this point, supposing themselves to be anything other than performers of an ideal, rather than imitators of the actual.

It follows, then, that the performance and imitation should continue not only through their performance of a role onstage but also carry through to their performance of the feminine gender itself. And it is furthermore unsurprising that the *onnagata* should be performing an unattainable ideal when so much of the rest of their career already had its roots in the fantastic, the liminal, the *ukiyo,* as established by the *wakashu* that came before. My theory, in short, is that they were not. The *onnagata* were initially rooted in the traditions of the *wakashu*, who were, in turn, ostensibly imitators of the feminine but actually embodiments of the equally-unattainable ideal of transience.

Despite outward overtures towards playing the part of women, the quotes and information above all lend credence to the idea that the *onnagata* had long stopped acting

the part of the woman and, as established and perpetuated both in their traditional writing (*Ayamegusa*) and as a response to their audiences (the published remarks from the audience member about their artificiality), the actual *onnagata*'s gender was not an imitation but rather a construction. Though they may have initially attempted to perpetuate the *wakashu*'s transience (which is almost cruelly ironic in hindsight), this was quickly shown to be a hopeless errand; instead, these performers remade the female into an image that they could replicate for as long as they needed to.

Considered from another angle: The *wakashu*, though they replaced women onstage, were never considered to be images of women themselves. Instead, they had their own (very male) appeal and charm that had already been established through Japanese history. If they seemed feminine or female, that is perhaps the interference of Western gender constructions viewing the delicate adolescent boys, lusted after as they were by older adult males, as female-imitating and female-oriented, when in fact there was no such perception in the Japanese audiences.

The *onnagata* took up the slack that was left behind by the *wakashu* ban–and they, like the *wakashu*, were not meant to replace females as much as they were meant to present an ideal construction. However, because the *onnagata* could not capture the *wakashu*'s transient appeal, they instead developed the art towards constructing a feminine ideal. In essence, the *onnagata* utilized the successful appeal of the *wakashu* and turned it towards a completely new purpose: constructing a feminine ideal. This was perhaps the most logical step for them to take, as male roles–even ones that would appear soft and feminine—had long since been filled by Tojuro and his *wagoto* style.

For *wakashu* and *onnagata* to simply move on to playing only male roles would have left a grand vacuum on the kabuki stage that would have to be filled by feminine roles in order for the art to retain its legitimacy and interest–after all, there was a precedent and need for romance not only in kabuki but in all of Japanese art. A feminine role was needed in order to fill this gap.

Therein lies much of the reason for *Ayamegusa* being as influential and important as it is today–having done away with actual women to look towards and emulate in favor of presenting an ideal, the *onnagata* needed a guide to show them the image that they ought to instead be looking towards (that is, it was vital for an accomplished practitioner to outline precisely what that ideal was). Enter Yoshizawa Ayame—perhaps one of the prime creators of this ideal image that later generations would strive towards, though I theorize that he was not constructing something completely new as much as he was putting to paper what had already been established and discussed among his contemporaries.

The *onnagata*, then, is the imitator of the fantastic. He imitates the *wakashu*, who were in turn representations of an ideal of impossible transience. The *onnagata*, being unable to replicate the *wakashu*'s transience, instead turned towards fashioning himself after another impossibility–the feminine ideal. To have based this ideal on the actual females would have been to rob it of its fantasy, where much of its appeal is rooted. Instead, an unattainable ideal was needed, and the *onnagata*'s struggle to not only construct but reflect this image is one that continues onward even to contemporary times.

Chapter 3: *Musume Dojoji* in Context

With both a historical and theoretical context to frame the discussion, it is now

appropriate to put the previous chapters into practice by examining an actual kabuki play.

What notions are constructed as feminine on the kabuki stage, now that it has been

established that the stage was a space in which such constructions occurred at the hands

of the *onnagata*? How is the idealized and unattainable feminine portrayed, both

mimetically and dialogically? What instructions does the kabuki theater give with regards

to what is (or, perhaps, is not) "feminine"? *Musume Dojoji* is an example that answers all

of these questions. The main character portrays several feminine projections, or aspects,

each of which not only reinforces its central message of maintaining a stoic façade but

also demonstrates the particularities of doing so in a variety of situations before ending

with a warning (also by demonstration) of the fate that awaits those who fail to live up to

this feminine ideal.

The Maiden at Dojoji Shrine (京鹿子娘道成寺), *Kyoganoko Musume*

Dojoji, often shortened in Japanese to 娘道成寺, *Musume Dojoji,* which is translated

roughly as "Dojoji Maiden", is one of the many works that only found its way onto the

kabuki stage by way of adaptation and re-adaptation. It has its origins in the noh theater,

whose adaptation of it is, in turn, adapted from an earlier noh play

called *Kanemaki. Kanemaki* is traditionally attributed to Kan'nami and later revised

by Zeami, two figures from the very early stages of *noh*, predecessor to the kabuki form,

but "there is no hard evidence for this attribution and no indication of who was

responsible for converting [*Kanemaki*] to *Dojoji*"

(Brazell 193). Therefore, Musume Dojoji was already well-established in Japanese

performing arts even before its kabuki form came to light–after all, Zeami was one of the earliest figures of noh, which was in turn one of the earliest formalized flavors of Japanese theatric art.

As with aspects of the *onnagata*'s gendering and cultural context, it is also worthwhile to discuss the historical and cultural context of *Musume Dojoji*. Notably, I shall briefly examine the differences between Dojoji as it appeared on the 17th-century Tokugawa kabuki stage and the noh version of the same name that preceded it. Examining the history and mechanics of the noh version will help to underscore the specific mechanics of the kabuki adaptation–specifically, the changes that were needed in order to not only change the kabuki adaptation to resonate with its intended audiences as well as the ways in which these changes allowed the *onnagata* to demonstrate their performance of gender as it has been discussed in the previous chapter.

The prior noh version, *Kanemaki,* includes what Brazell describes as "a long discussion of religion by [the main character] and ends with her achieving release from her passionate attachment" (193). This was omitted from the play even before it debuted as *Dojoji* in the noh theater. In its kabuki adaptation, however, the introspective soliloquy of main character Hanako, wherein she passes through several dance forms (which in turn represent her different moods and the broodings of her internal monologue) can be seen as a re-insertion of this religious enlightenment. While this is a worthwhile reintroduction simply for the sake of character depth and development on the part of Hanako, it is not an unreasonable assumption that these lengthy dance scenes were revived in order to give the leading *onnagata* a chance to perform. By demonstrating grace and poise through a

variety of dances, the lead actor is able to present, from several varied angles, the feminine ideal that he is charged with emulating for his audience.

A brief overview of the plot is also appropriate at this stage; the noh and kabuki versions share more similarities than differences. Especially important differences will be noted, with explanations of each to come later in the chapter.

The play begins with local priests commenting among themselves that there is to be a new bell installed at their temple, which has been without one for many years following an incident that the monks do not yet divulge to the audience. As the monks raise the bell into position, the abbot of the temple appears in order to bless and dedicate the bell, but he mentions that it is crucially important that no women be on the temple grounds during this ceremony. The abbot goes on to explain that the reason for the temple having no bell was because of an incident in generations past: a vengeful woman, Kiyohime, had pursued her lover to the temple and, upon seeing him hiding beneath the bell, transformed into a serpentine monster, coiled around the bell, and burned him alive within it[iii].

The scene changes to the front gate, where monks are refusing entry to a wandering woman, main character Hanako, who has persuaded the monks to let her in if her song-and-dance performance is persuasive enough.

Hanako is allowed to enter and approaches the bell, which she begins to strike. However, in the kabuki version, she only curses at it and laments that it "dammed the river of [her] love and stopped the flow of [her] passion" (Brazell 510). As Hanako

approaches the bell, the other priests are mesmerized and unable to stop her from moving to stand beneath it.

The kabuki version of the play has two widely-accepted and widely-performed endings. In the more common ending, the bell falls onto her at this point, though not in a fatal or even injurious fashion; it is understood that Hanako is within the bell, alive and well, and no less furious for her predicament. As the bell rises, Hanako is revealed to be the vengeful spirit of Kiyohime, returned to Dojoji once more to spite the bell that kept her from the man she loved. This version also includes a "lively, rather comic musical version of the exorcism from the original noh play, [during which] the priests sing and dance a prayer to raise the bell. [. . . As the bell rises, Kiyohime] appears, her face hidden by a robe over her head, [crossing from stage left to the center.]" (Brazell 513). It is only when Kiyohime reaches center stage that she reveals her identity, wearing "florid *kumadori* makeup, a large, bushy wig, and divided skirts" to indicate her demonic nature (513).

Figure 3.1: *Kumadori* makeup (worn by the seated figure on the left). This is a more mild application of the technique than is usually used (see fig. 1.5). Note also the white makeup of the *onnagata* on the right, Nakamura Jakuemon IV. Photo from Rei Sasaguchi, *Nakamura Jakuemon IV–The Art of Onnagata Acting* 53.

In the other ending—which is not to be thought of as an "alternate" or secondary ending despite its comparative lack of spectacle, as Karen Brazell, author of *Traditional Japanese Theater,* offers no commentary as to which ending is more common or perceived to have more artistic merit—Hanako mounts the bell, which is lifted off the stage with her astride it as the curtain closes. In this version, too, she is understood to be revealed as the vengeful spirit of Kiyohime.

Because the play's history predates its kabuki incarnation, it isn't surprising that the work had several attempts at being adapted to the kabuki stage before the current version found theatrical success. The first kabuki adaptation of the play was written in

1731 by an *onnagata*, Segawa Kikunojo I. His first adaptation was entitled *Courtesan Dojoji* and debuted (with Kikunojo in its lead role) in Edo's Nakamura Theater in 1731.

Twenty years later, another *onnagata*, Nakamura Tomijuro I, would go on to combine Kikunojo's work with Sanakida Dojoji, another adaptation of the noh classic that was gaining popularity at the time. Thus, in 1753, the first version of *Musume Dojoji* as it is known now graced the stage. One of Tomijuro's primary changes from the noh original (and, presumably, the Sanakida and Courtesan adaptations) was the changing of the main character from "a dignified courtesan to a young girl" (Brazell 193); it is from this change that the word "*musume*" in the title comes. This change also brought a significant lightening of tone. Though Tomijuro's adaptation has undergone minor changes over the centuries, it has retained not only its popularity but also its status as a significant dance piece in the kabuki oeuvre, with Brazell calling it "the single most important dance piece in the kabuki repository" (193).

Even the change in title between noh and kabuki (from "Dojoji" to "Musume Dojoji") has weight. As above, there was a significant lightening of tone that came along with this adjustment–one part of which is particularly pertinent to the *onnagata*. Most apparent is the addition of a long marathon of dance pieces that makes up the bulk of the kabuki play. Kabuki itself is a very visual art, and the *onnagata*'s presentation of gender all the more so; the change to a primarily visual vehicle of storytelling underscores the importance of the central *onnagata* figure in the kabuki adaptation. Furthermore, the addition of "Musume" into the title carries with it the connotation of girlishness, naïveté, and youth; as above, the word can translate into "maiden" but also "daughter" or "young

girl", with an implication of sex appeal via innocence in some cases (with *Musume Dojoji* among them).

Aside from the above changes, *Musume Dojoji'*s adaptation from its noh origins brings with it a key change that is particularly illustrative of the notion explored in the previous chapter (specifically, that the *onnagata* portray an ideal femininity in favor of and at the expense of actual women). In the original noh play, a singular woman visits a shrine where women are not permitted; by singing and dancing, she is able to win over the guards and convince them to let her in. The kabuki version follows a similar structure, with main character Hanako entreating with shrine guards to gain entrance to a place where she would originally be forbidden, but over the course of her performance, several different "feminine aspects" are also performed by her. These aspects both display and perpetuate the image of the ideal feminine constructed by the *onnagata*, and present a literal example of gender performativity, as the male actors are not playing the parts of female characters as much as they are displaying and performing different facets of an imagined ideal feminine image. Props feature heavily in this play, especially compared to other kabuki plays, which is additionally notable because of the usual scarcity of props in Japanese theater (though this was more widespread in noh than in kabuki theaters). A particularly characteristic aspect of the performance is the distribution of white towels (replicas-in-miniature of one of the key props in the play) to audience members during the climax of the central dance. The props help to complete the construction of several feminine archetypes onto the lead actor, and underline the artificiality of the constructed feminine that he projects. Without them, the construction would be less effective; they are necessary in order to complete the modeled feminine image; the towels specifically

give a tactile verisimilitude to the performance at hand–the scene where they are distributed comes directly after the main character's emotional breakdown, and the towel itself is the last item that she uses to hide her face, a recurring action throughout the play.[iv]

As mentioned above, the most noticeable difference between the noh and the kabuki versions of *Musume Dojoji* is in the large dance segment that is present in the latter and not the former. I theorize that this was in order to make the play into a better opportunity for the *onnagata* to perform his dances and put forth his feminine image. However, one cannot discount the simpler explanation that the dance segment is included in the kabuki version of the play simply because kabuki relies more on dance and pose than does noh, which has a greater emphasis on music and singing. Therefore, the pertinent question becomes whether or not other kabuki plays of the mid-17th century (when the now-ubiquitous adaptation of *Musume Dojoji* debuted on the kabuki stage) consist of as much dancing and movement as *Dojoji* does.

In a word, the answer is no. *Musume Dojoji*, in its kabuki form, is specifically made to act as "a backdrop for a series of separate dances, each with a distinctive atmosphere conveyed by different musical accompaniments, costumes and movements" (Brazell 507). Furthermore, among kabuki classifications, *Musume Dojoji* is specifically labeled as a *shosagoto* or dance piece, meaning that the inclusion of copious amounts of dance, pose, and other visual display is there not as a coincidence or byproduct–the dances are there with intent and purpose.

Divining that intent and purpose is another matter altogether, but considering that *Musume Dojoji* was adapted for the kabuki stage by Segawa Kikunojo, an *onnagata*

himself, it is quite reasonable to conclude that Kikunojo included the lengthy, *onnagata*-centered dance pieces for the primary purpose of giving himself and later performers a space in which to display their art freely. Moreover, the commercial success and popularity of *Musume Dojoji*–such that it is still performed and written about today in both books and newspapers–demonstrates that this version of *Musume Dojoji* was is a testament to its lasting artistic appeal. For the *onnagata*, it gave them a chance to demonstrate their technical skill and flexibility by performing a variety of parts, to which critics and audiences responded positively.

As mentioned by Brazell above, each dance is distinct and conveys a particular mood, both by dint of its performer and by the musical arrangement behind it. She later adds that "many different characters emerge briefly–a young girl, courtesans from various parts of Japan, a woman in a boudoir, a fox, and a demon." (507). This, along with examination of the text, adds credence to the idea that these dance scenes are a tapestry on which the *onnagata* can project his constructed image of the feminine; moreover, allowing said image to be expressed in several different forms speaks to the ability of the ideal-feminine fantasy to be built up and expressed in a variety of different ways and methods.

The translation of the play being examined comes from Karen Brazell's *Traditional Japanese Theater,* and was translated by Mark Oshima. Brazell notes, as I do, the difficulty involved with performing a textual analysis over a dance-based piece; despite these hurdles, I believe that *Musume Dojoji*'s kabuki adaptation is nevertheless very much worth an examination in the light of the prior chapters of this thesis, particularly Chapter 2. *Musume Dojoji* is especially representative not only of gender

performativity as discussed there, but also displays the *onnagata*'s later attempts at recapturing the transient aesthetic that the *wakashu* had embodied as Hanako goes through her dances.

Regarding the translation, Brazell notes that "Oshima describes the nature of the dances and their importance. However, even his careful annotations still indicate only about half the movements performed. This translation is based on the text found in Gunji 1980. The descriptions of the dance movements are based on current performance practices." The scarcity of kabuki play texts in English translation is only one obstacle to scholarship in the field, but even the limited text available allows opportunity for analysis and interpretation.

The play opens with several priests (anywhere from eight in some shows up to two dozen in others) entering from offstage and talking among themselves. Based on the opening scene featuring them, one could suppose that they are meant as stand-ins for the audience members as they comment on the upcoming events of the play. Such lines as the "Have you heard, have you heard?" when the priests are filing in from offstage and "we shall [. . .] keep watch" (508) establish a rapport with the audience members, who are, of course, attending for the similar purpose of keeping watch. Despite not being central characters in the play, I find that establishing this role for the priests early on allows the playwright to subtly guide the audience's reaction, as well; spectators are drawn in and almost involuntarily go along with the priests' reactions to Hanako's performance.

Unlike the Western theater's ideal of immersion, the kabuki theater had always been self-aware; the fact that audience members are seated in a playhouse and attending a

spectacle for their own entertainment is an established trope of kabuki, and having a group of characters act as guides in the manner of the priests is not uncommon. Regarding the priests, I am arguing that they serve not as stand-ins for the audience but instead as guides for where attendees' attention and emotion should be focused; they perform a subtle act of narration, guiding the focus repeatedly back onto Hanako in segments where it might otherwise waver (specifically, the non-dance segments that frame the play). In doing so, they too play their part in constructing the feminine: always drawing attention back to Hanako highlights her construction and performance. They most often comment on her appearance, underlining that visual appearance is the most important and necessary part of the feminine ideal.

It is worth noting that this play also has a strong musical element to it. This is a feature that is a part of any kabuki performance but becomes especially salient in *Musume Dojoji*, as this is a play primarily concerned with song and dance. As the priests establish the scene, the stagehands do the same; during the opening dialogue among them, the set itself is assembled around them, with a temple gate being set out on stage right and the musicians' platform being pushed onstage as well. The positioning of the monks–at the rear of the stage, among the rest of the props, helps them to meld with the forming background almost seamlessly; their position at center stage keeps them at the forefront just enough for their commentary on Hanako, who is always between the priests and their audience. This further solidifies the role of both the former and the latter: Hanako is there to have all attention wholly focused on herself; the priests are there to ensure that this is maintained. The musical element–the song and dance–is another

element that serves a dual purpose in both placing Hanako at the forefront of attention and giving her actor ample opportunity to display his construction of the feminine.

Hanako's entry is punctuated by "[t]he sharp sound of the noh flute from the music room" (509). Her costume at this point is also particularly important; Brazell describes it as "a black kimono with a pattern of flowering cherry branches [,with] an obi sash that has circle designs, and [. . .] a white cap of the type worn by women to keep dust off their hair when they go outside." (509) Costuming is another element of this play that becomes especially central to Hanako's development and performance; as she segues from feminine archetype to feminine archetype, costume changes happen onstage.

Her cap, described above, is of particular importance from a more meta-analytical point of view and to act as a callback to the early days of the *onnagata*. Just after the *wakashu* ban, the short adult male hairstyle of the early *onnagata* was covered by several means. Among them was just such a cap, or occasionally a kerchief; either was intended to cover the forehead and crown of the wearer, as both would have been newly exposed by the former *wakashu*'s new hairstyle.

Though rooted in such practicality, at the time that *Musume Dojoji* debuted on the kabuki stage in 1753, the wig had already been established as a usable loophole to sidestep the *wakashu*-haircut decree. Though *wakashu* were still prohibited from the stage, the *onnagata* found ready use of such hairpieces to conceal their own hairstyles (which would have been the hairstyle that signified the adult male; many of these male performers were former *wakashu* themselves).

And so, we have here the first of Hanako's feminine portrayals–the innocent and maidenly traveler. Hanako's entry from offstage is done with swift, rushed steps, to demonstrate the haste with which she has made her journey, though she pauses at the end of the runway to comment that her journey has come to its end. The feminine imagery is in full force for Hanako's "first impression"; it is here that the actor must frontload as much femininity as possible in order to live up to the audience's expectations. Hanako's entrance doesn't disappoint; her daintily rushed steps necessitate an exaggerated sway of hip; her clothing is garish and exaggerated, with layer upon layer of black silk that all but obscures her form (and whose dark color is a contrast to the white face paint often worn by *onnagata*), and the first thing she does upon reaching the end of her flustered and hurried journey across the catwalk is to fuss over her appearance.

Unlike in Western theater, dialogue in kabuki is often performed not by the actors but by the musicians, with a head chanter lyrically presenting both spoken word and soliloquy during dance scenes or asides, such as the one being described here. Therefore, the line between internal monologue and spoken word can become less clear than it is in other theatric forms. The actor playing Hanako has no lines that he speaks on his own throughout these establishing introductory scenes; both Hanako's internal monologue and external dialogue are vicariously delivered by the *joruri* singers on the musician's stage.

This is an element of performance that isn't exclusive to *Musume Dojoji* and isn't even particularly uncommon in the kabuki theater. However, when viewed in light of the criticism presented in chapter two, Hanako's silence becomes telling; it speaks once again of the notion that Hanako (and, by extension, *onnagata* as a whole) are performers of an imagined ideal rather than representatives of reality. Put simply, Hanako is very

literally seen and not heard in these, her establishing moments–despite the fact that she is

the central figure, which is another nod to coded femininity (that is, the feminine ideal is

in looking pretty rather than being wordy). Again, delivering dialogue this way isn't

characteristic of *Musume Dojoji* alone; other kabuki plays employ this same technique,

and it has the backing and legitimacy of tradition behind it. Even so, *Musume Dojoji* is,

relatively speaking, a late comer to the kabuki stage, having been adapted for it well after

the playwriting boom of the Genroku era (1688-1704). Spoken dialogue had also been

established as a viable technique by the time this play was brought to the kabuki stage in

1753.

Therefore, I argue that the silence of whichever *onnagata* plays Hanako (as

opposed to Hanako's silence–she *does* have dialogue later on, as different images are

projected onto her) was an intentional stylistic move. Granted, there are practical reasons

behind such a choice–*Musume Dojoji*'s performance is meant to be primarily mimetic

rather than dialogic, with a greater emphasis on the performer's graceful dance abilities

rather than his faculty with delivering the spoken word. Additionally, lengthy spoken

parts for *onnagata* were somewhat uncommon; this may well have also been a pragmatic

solution to the timbre of a man's voice offsetting the feminine image that is constructed

all around him with his makeup and clothing (as well as in the implications of his mimed

actions).

This doesn't refute my broader claim, however, that *onnagata* were meant to

portray an imagined image of the feminine. Hanako's dearth of self-spoken dialogue is

only an extension of the rarity of such for *all onnagata*. Put differently, Hanako's silence

(or more specifically, the silence of the actor portraying her) is merely a symptom of a

cause. In this case, the construction and performance of an unreal ideal is the cause, and silence is the symptom. In turn, the silence of actors performing *onnagata* in the majority of plays that feature them constructs a silent woman as the ideal, "feminine" woman. Hanako's lack of a direct spoken part is further illustrative of this phenomenon; indeed, rather than vocally defining herself in her establishing scene, she relies on the background musicians –all men, as it happens–to voice not only her words but also her thoughts.

In *Musume Dojoji* specifically, Hanako serves two purposes: One, to be a *tabula rasa* on which feminine ideals can be projected; two, to construct and display these images by dint of her costuming, dance, and vicariously-spoken dialogue. Too much directly-spoken dialogue would weaken both of these functions; a backdrop that speaks draws attention to itself rather than the images being projected on it; a woman who speaks overmuch defies the seen-and-not-heard ideal of the demure, delicate, and (most importantly) silent feminine. Put differently, the relative drought of spoken words for Hanako (and, more broadly, *onnagata* in general) comes as no surprise; speech breaks the spell of fantasy projection that is at the very heart of *onnagata* performance.

Hanako's entrance and the behavior surrounding it comprises the first feminine image that is being portrayed: the frivolous, shallowly-introspective, and worried maiden (*musume)* who is concerned first and foremost with her appearance, and secondly with how it affects what others think of her. This image is conveyed not only by her clothing but also by several lines that she delivers (through the choir) as she stands at the edge of the runway. "My clothing is in disarray from the journey; / how embarrassed I am. / Perhaps people will guess at the turmoil in my heart." (Brazell 509) Despite having just

made a journey, Hanako remains fixated on her appearance and worried that her outer image will be transparent enough that others will be able to see to her inner turmoil. This is telling of a couple of particularities of this first presented image. Firstly, Hanako's first concern is her appearance; this could be read as frivolity or as self-consciousness. Later passages will lend themselves towards a reading of Hanako as frivolous and shallow in this initial appearance. Her dance during the delivery of these lines also suggests such: she busies herself with brushing fitfully at her chest and shoulders as if to clear them of dust and debris. A concern for presentation and appearance is thus shown to be the first of the traits that the ideally feminine person would concern herself with. Consider this also in the light of what was said previously about the importance of Hanako's first impression–not only is she meticulously obsessed with her appearance, her actions at this point take that obsession and express it both physically and verbally. Her preoccupation with a clean and tidy appearance is both a part of the construction of the feminine image that is at the heart of her character and a significant part of her establishing character moment.

Contributing just as much to the establishment of her character is an equal concern for internal equilibrium and a heart free of trouble, as evidenced by Hanako's being worried that others will be able to guess at the "turmoil in [her] heart." Hanako's expressed distress is not necessarily the trouble in her heart itself; it is that others may notice. Indeed, it isn't until after she comments that others might guess at her troubled heart that she, according to Oshima's stage notes, "hides behind her sleeve" (Brazell 509)[v]. This is a significant move on Hanako's part; after all, as mentioned above, Oshima's notations only account for "about half [of] the movements" that Hanako makes.

Again, the focus is not on Hanako's being troubled but rather on her concern that others will notice. From this example, emotional stability is shown to be as important as appearance; the constructed ideal can be extrapolated as one who is untroubled and carefree–or at least doesn't show her troubles to those around her, lest her composure be disturbed. Composure would have been no less vital to maintaining the well-presented appearance discussed above.

A Western critic might make the argument that Hanako's lines here are pointing towards the notion that an ideal woman should maintain perpetual cheerfulness and happiness, or at least positivity; she should be unburdened and untroubled (and by extension, perhaps too dull to let herself be troubled). However, the constructed image of the always-childishly-cheerful woman is largely a part of the Western construction of ideal feminine rather than a Japanese invention and so is not considered as a particularly noteworthy interpretation, though it may naturally come to the mind of a Western reader familiar with Western constructs of femininity. The feminine ideal in the Japanese cultural imagination is not so preoccupied with perpetual cheerfulness; the caricatures that Hanako constructs later in the play evidence this fact even more.

Figure 3.2–Hanako's entrance. Note the wide sleeves (a style known as *furisode*) and the large headpiece, as well as the impractically gaudy hairstyle, the extravagance of which accents the importance of her outward physical appearance. Photo from Rei Sasaguchi, *Nakamura Jakuemon IV–The Art of Onnagata Acting* 58.

From these two observations, a larger conclusion emerges: Appearance and composure, both externally (maintaining a particular outward appearance) and internally (keeping one's internal state in line) is tantamount to the feminine ideal. It is an unsurprising conclusion, however. First, the construction of an ideal female image must first and foremost be chiefly concerned with the *literal* appearance of its object. Secondly, because that same construction is shallow by its very nature, lacking the mental depth and emotional complexity of an actual female, even more consideration would be given to its appearance, and a certain mental shallowness would be an expected result. In other words, because a constructed image would naturally lack the emotional

capacity of a human, it should then be expected that the depth of its emotional complexity would be much less; rather than exploring causes behind and expressions of internal turmoil, Hanako is–at least initially–more concerned about others noticing her troubled heart than her outward appearance (though her outward appearance is also a high priority for her) and hopes that her outward appearance is opaque enough to hide her internal state behind (expressed with especial clarity by her hiding her face behind her sleeve).

Hanako is also more concerned about others' perception of her than she is about her own internal monologue. Her lines continue to reflect this, such as "Along the way, people laugh at my distraction; in the sky the seagulls laugh in derision as well–laugh on, laugh on!" Even from behind the protection of her kimono sleeve, Hanako has tipped her hand: her perception that even the passing seagulls are laughing at her speaks again to her self-conscious awareness of others' perception of her. Tellingly, Oshima notes another conciliatory gesture on her part: hiding behind her fan. This adds to the original observation and analysis of her character. Again, Oshima's translation and transcribing of the stage directions leaves out much of what actually happens onstage; the transcription of this action suggests its significance. I include it here because it furthers the imagery that Hanako is constructing: in short, the presentation of the ideal feminine as a dainty figure who is preoccupied with maintaining not only an external appearance but an internal stoicism. Hiding once behind her kimono sleeve was not enough; Hanako's timidity necessitates her doubling up on these defensive gestures. The apparent contradiction between stoicism and timidity is a first glimpse at the divide that is at the center of the play's conflict: Hanako's balancing of her acceptable and appropriate outward appearance against her internal anguish and heartbreak.

At this point, it is worth noting that Hanako's character is not human– if she was, one could argue that the above observations could be considered as nothing more than facets of the development of her character, or as characteristics of her personality that give her character depth and interest. However, central to this analysis is the idea that Hanako is meant to represent a singular person but instead functions as a tapestry in which different threads of the ideal feminine are woven. Hanako is a representation of a constructed ideal, which (as in the above paragraphs) would naturally (if not necessarily) lack humanizing depth of character and nuance of conflicting emotions that an actual person would have. However, a metatextual analysis of Hanako's character isn't required to assimilate this critical angle; even within framework of the play itself, Hanako is not a person; she is the disguised and vengeful spirit of Kiyohime, summoned by the dedication of a new bell at the temple. Since she is inhuman even within the play itself, it isn't unreasonable at all to think of her not as a human but instead as two simultaneous concepts: As a character, she is the backdrop against which the ideal feminine is projected, and he who performs her is the projector of the same.

Presenting the ideal feminine as nothing more than a vengeful spirit in disguise is also an interesting construction on the part of the playwrights. I interpret this detail as one that is ultimately misogynistic; by having the ostensibly lovely and all-too-perfect Hanako serving as what ultimately amounts to nothing more than a disguise for a terrifying monster, the play suggests that even the ultimate expression of femininity can– and does–hide an atrocious core within. This is actually germane to the constructed feminine that Hanako portrays; her fixation with keeping up her appearance further suggests the importance of maintaining this disguise. More broadly, it suggests that

women do (or ought to) have terrible secrets that they keep veiled from view, whether behind a kimono sleeve, a fan, or emotional neutrality.[vi]

As Hanako makes her way across the stage, progressing from the walkway to the stage proper (and fussing over her appearance all the while), the priests begin to notice Hanako's appearance not by seeing her but, curiously, by her scent. A single priest agrees to go and look and is immediately stricken by Hanako's beauty upon seeing her.

> PRIEST 1. Have you all noticed that nice smell?
>
> OTHERS: Yes, yes.
>
> PRIEST 2: I'll go take a look. [. . .] A beautiful woman is here.
>
> PRIEST 1: Where, where? [. . .] You're right, she certainly is beautiful. Who do you think she could be?
>
> PRIEST 2: I think she is a [dancer].
>
> PRIEST 3: No, she can't be a dancing girl, she looks like a sweet young thing.
>
> [. . .]
>
> PRIEST 1: It's no good arguing about it. I'll ask her myself. Hey there, you woman standing there. Are you a [dancer] . . .
>
> PRIEST 2: . . .or are you a sweet young thing?[VII]

Curiously, it is when directly confronted about precisely what she is that Hanako changes from the timid and flustering maiden to her next aspect: the dancer. This change is signified by the first of several onstage costume changes that the actor performs using a technique called *hikinuki*. This technique involves preparing a costume beforehand with thread that an onstage assistant pulls out in time with an actor's movements.

In this first change, Hanako transitions from the black kimono described previously to a red one embroidered with golden flowers as she replies: "I am a [dancer] living in this region. [. . .] I have heard that a new bell is to be dedicated and have traveled long and far to see it. Please allow me to dance for the dedication of the bell." (511) Additionally, Hanako's cap described above is switched for a more elaborate one, conical and gaudy rather than practical. The new appearance is almost as striking as Hanako's first; the change from black to red is visually surprising, and the change from soft-spoken and flustered traveler to assertive and bold visitor is equally so, and the change from a practical (if ostentatious) traveler's wear to the more practical (but no less showy) red kimono expresses this visually as much as her change in attitude expresses it verbally. Here, Hanako begins to speak rather than letting the chorus voice her thoughts and words. Furthermore, her responses become more straightforward than one would expect from the timid and flustered maiden that she had been embodying previously. The novelty of Hanako's image is further constructed as the priests challenge her to a battle of wits in order for her to earn a place at the dedication ceremony; in a tense exchange with the curious priests, Hanako is direct and straight-spoken, which is rather strange for a culture as steeped in nuance and verbal subtlety as is Japan's. This would be stranger still for a travelling maiden as soft-spoken and nervous as Hanako had been upon making her entrance. Therefore, it follows that we now see a new image projected onto Hanako and must revisit our examination in light of this new construction.

Of particular note is a significant difference between the Japanese image of the ideal feminine and its Western equivalent. While confrontation and violence are not considered to be feminine at all in the West, the Japanese construction leaves room for

their ideal to exercise both an acerbic demeanor and, if necessary, a sword arm (see the

quote from *Ayamegusa* in the previous chapter where Yoshizawa Ayame details scenes in

which the wife of a samurai "lays about her [with a sword]"). The potential for violence

(within certain boundaries) is not only an accepted part of the feminine in Japan, it is

even celebrated–assuming that violence is employed for the sake of those she cares about.

While the ideal feminine image would not be codified using the term "*yamato*

nadeshiko" (roughly, Japanese wildflower) for about a century after this play reached the

stage, Hanako in all of her aspects begins to assume parts of that constructed ideal,

especially in the form revealed when she's verbally sparring with the temple priests. A

large part of that ideal was the capacity of going to any means, up to and including

violence, for the sake of a woman's favored one. It is unsurprising, then, that Hanako

would be willing to, figuratively speaking, bare her teeth at the priests coming between

her and the bell that she desires so much to see. Some of Hanako's musings in her

entrance monologues deal with the notion of having had a lost love: "I remember being

parted from my love at daybreak, parted by the hateful tolling of the bell at dawn" (510).

Additionally, both the noh play that the kabuki version is adapted from and the folk tale

that both of them draw inspiration from are concerned with Kiyohime's love of one of the

temple priests, Anchin (though Anchin isn't mentioned specifically in the kabuki

adaptation). Therefore, while Hanako's sudden change into a sharp-tongued and

determined woman may seem at odds with the imagined feminine image in the Western

sphere, this too would not have seemed abnormal in the least by the Japanese audience.

Hanako insists on being admitted inside; the priests agree in unison that she

should be admitted because of how well she has engaged verbally with them ("After all

that you have said, we will allow you in" (512). However, one of them provides a dancer's hat for her, requesting that she dance for them in exchange for their allowance. This ushers in the next aspect of femininity that Hanako models, as she must exit stage right in order to change her costume once more. Oshima notes that the priests "murmur in appreciation of her beauty in a most unpriestlike manner" as she goes (512). I posit that this is done in order to remind the audience of Hanako's great beauty after a scene that had her physical appearance take secondary priority to her wit and dialogue, which further reinforces the constructed idea of physical beauty as the most important thing that Hanako, and by extension anyone who would seek to be feminine, possesses. The priests' commentary serves to reinforce their function as narrators for the audience, though rather than commenting on the plot or the setting as a Western narrator might, they instead keep the focus on Hanako even when she isn't physically there. Contrary to the worries that she had been expressing in her entrance, the priests aren't mulling over how troubled she must be or any problems with her appearance; instead, they fawn and laud her physical appearance in a reflection of what she herself had been doing earlier. This also brings attention away from her wit and intelligence and back to her appearance in preparation for her next entrance after the offstage costume change, furthering the construction of physical appearance as the primary concern of the feminine ideal.

Hanako's reappearance coincides with several changes in the stage: the priests move to be seated at either side of it, the backdrop is changed to "a landscape filled with cherry trees in full bloom" (Brazell 512), and the musicians reappear onstage, the backdrop against the upcoming dance scenes. Tellingly, despite the other stage changes all around, Hanako remains at center stage before them; the musicians, backdrop and

Hanako herself had been previously concealed behind a large curtain that had, until this

point, consisted of the backdrop. It is against this restructured background that the first of

Hanako's two dance scenes begins. Her wardrobe is the same as in the scene before,

except for the addition of the cap that the priests offered to her before she went offstage.

She also carries with her a fan, different from the one that she had in her introduction.

This new fan is larger and probably serves as a homage to the noh plays that *Musume*

Dojoji was adapted from, since fans of the size and make that is usually used as a prop

for this dance are seen much more often on the noh stage rather than the kabuki stage.

The fact that Hanako's first dance is very much in the style of noh plays (with

such features as a choir singing and Hanako reacting to it, the prominence of the

musicians on center stage, and the subtle religious musings of the lyrics that accompany

the dance) furthers this interpretation. The priests' song, which unlike Hanako's

introductory soliloquy is not meant to serve as a voice for Hanako's thoughts and words,

stresses the impermanence of worldly things (using the tolling of a bell and the cherry

blossoms in the backdrop as examples) and the joys of finding enlightenment outside of

them. These themes would be very much at home in a noh play, and the style of both

dance and lyric are much the same way (that is, styled with more of a noh slant than a

kabuki one). As Hanako's dance carries her across the stage, she gradually makes her

way towards the bell. Oshima's stage notes comment that "Hanako [approaches] the bell,

staring at it fixedly and moving faster and faster until she is directly under it" (Brazell

513). When she arrives beneath it, she discards her hat, and the second dance begins. This

dance is not especially different from the first, though Hanako begins to speak for herself

during this second sequence. Her dialogue discusses the temple's construction and

reflects on its existence, continuing in the homages to noh theater (she even quotes from the noh play *Miidera* in part of this sequence).

What do these dances have to do with the portrayal of the ideal feminine? In fact, the absence of such posturing is, I argue, more telling of the nature of this kabuki play than anything that has come before. Because these dance sequences are styled after noh theater rather than kabuki theater, there is little (outside of Hanako's costume and dancing in and of itself) that portrays or constructs an ideal feminine image; noh was not as concerned with doing so as was kabuki (especially the *onnagata*). By omitting such grand displays of the ideal in favor of a sequence that serves as a homage to noh, *Musume Dojoji* says much about the differences between the two art forms. In essence, the difference in style and content between the noh-themed sequence here and the kabuki sequences before do much to underline just how concerned kabuki was with constructing and projecting an ideal feminine. In these noh-themed sequences, one could say that the silence of the agents of feminine construction is deafening. In other words, because these dance scenes are meant to pay homage to noh theater, there is a notable lack of overt feminine gestures on the part of Hanako; instead, she is going through the traditional paces of a noh-themed dance upon a kabuki stage. The silence of her actor, as discussed before, does contribute to the ideal of a woman being a visual rather than an aural setpiece; whether taken in by eye or ear, she remains objectified as she goes through her dances during these scenes. Moreover, despite having answered the priests' questions to satisfaction, she is still required to perform dances in order to win their favor, and offers no protests when pressed into doing so. Both the length and the complexity of these dances point to an image of the ideal female being made to do as told without complaint;

this notion dovetails with the previously-discussed appearance of emotional stability that is tantamount to the feminine appearance.

The second of these dances makes this contrast all the more apparent. Here Hanako's actor again employs the *hikinuki* technique to change her costume. Her new attire is a light blue kimono that is embroidered with flowers and lacks any sort of headpiece except for the wig that was standard for any *onnagata* (though some performances do include a kerchief tied into the wig, research is inconclusive about what the standard prescribed costume is for this part). Hanako's costume change brings with it a change in her personality, as expressed in the lyrics of the songs that accompany her dances. Oshima's stage notes are helpful in describing the style of the next dance: "Unlike the previous sections, [this dance] is performed in pure kabuki style," and "The dance depicts an energetic young girl, and the only gestures directly related to the text suggest the tangles in her hair, an image for troublesome feelings of love." (Brazell 513).

What Oshima doesn't note is that Hanako's voice is again delivered by proxy for this next sequence. The choir of musicians who accompanied Hanako's noh pieces now deliver her lines much in the way that the priests did in her introductory scene. Yet Hanako's change in costume and the shift in the demeanor of her dances casts a new light on this phenomenon: now in the form of a young and carefree girl, Hanako again falls silent despite her being lovestruck by the man alluded to in the song (again, this would likely be understood by a Japanese audience to be the priest Anchin mentioned in the legend that the noh play is based on). Suffering in silence, then, is again presented as a feminine virtue; Hanako's pose for the duration of this song is lackadaisical and carefree though the song's lyrics discuss lovesickness, and again calls back to the primary ideal of

the feminine being the ability to keep her inner feelings concealed. The lyrics themselves also do much to construct the feminine image: "My heart does not speak, it does not tell tales, but the tangles in my hair and the pain in my heart all come from your faithlessness." Despite the heartache and sadness portrayed by these lyrics, Oshima's transcript describes a pose at odds with them: "She lies on her side, languidly holding one sleeve behind her" (Brazell 513).   Therefore, outward appearance is further reinforced as the chief feminine ideal; putting forth a neutral and untroubled appearance, regardless of its authenticity, is preferable to visibly suffering for the ideal feminine. In both this sequence and Hanako's introduction, her heartbreak is agonizing; in each, the audience is only privy to her inner thoughts because of the background chanters that deliver them– and as mentioned before, when the chorus is conveying her words, the line between thought and speech becomes less and less clear. The idea of maintaining an idealized outward appearance is not necessarily a new one in Japanese culture; however, the balance of *honne* and *tatemae* is a staple of it. As the anthropologist Joy Hendry explains, one's *honne*, or true feelings, are not generally expressed even under extreme circumstances; instead, *tatemae* is put forward. Expressing the *appropriate* emotion is preferable to expressing the true one (225).

The disconnect between the background lyrics and the joyous and carefree movements of dance, then, expresses Hanako's internal heartbreak, resentment, and desire and the extent to which it is at odds with her external expression–and considering that Hanako is merely the disguise used by the legendary and vengeful spirit of Kiyohime, the gap between what she expresses and what she feels is revealed to be even wider. Therefore, I argue that while the *honne/tatemae* binary is present in Japanese

culture already, *Musume Dojoji* expresses an unrealistically large gap between the two of them in Hanako, which adds to the construction of maintaining an appropriate (rather than a genuine) outward emotional appearance as the cornerstone of the ideal feminine in all aspects–whether maidenly traveler, acerbic local dancer, or young and carefree girl.

Throughout the length of this dance, she continues to discuss the beauty of several of Japan's major cities, with mimetic actions that imitate the subjects of her discussions (for example, she "mimes carrying a palanquin" (Brazell 516) when discussing travelling through Osaka). This, as well as the ball that I will discuss, all constructs the ideal feminine as a shallow and scatterbrained thinker, as mentioned above; Hanako's lyrics (still being delivered by the chanters behind her) never dwell long on a single subject, even when she mentions the bell that is the object of her entire journey. Yet this impression is also invalid; it is at odds with the previous discussion of the true depth of her feeling. Therefore, this dance establishes the boundaries, so to speak, of Hanako's depth of thought: she (and by extension, the perfect feminine person) has enough emotional depth to suffer, enough morality to conceal that suffering for the sake of the inherent virtue in doing so, but shallow enough not to dwell too often or too long on that same suffering.

The ball mentioned above dovetails with Hanako's portrayal of another aspect of the feminine. Oshima's notations expressly describe Hanako's dance as mimicking "the lively innocence of a young girl" (515), and this ball appears (mimetically) between Hanako's imitation of other subjects of the various cities she mentions. In some renditions, Hanako has an actual paper ball hidden within her sleeve to accompany this dance. That the ball of all things would warrant a physical object highlights its

importance to this dance; in a dance where most subjects are there only mimetically or by implication, an actual ball is literally present. This underscores the ball's centrality; through the dance (which is sometimes called the "bouncing ball dance" or *mari uta*), Hanako bounces it childishly between discussions of different cities or poetic imagery. Therefore, one can conclude that the ball is perhaps the most important part of the dance. This is no surprise when one considers that the ball is there to help construct the image of Hanako as a carefree and childish girl, still playing with a child's toy even as she laments and reflects on her lovesickness, which in turn reinforces the ideal of maintaining an outward appearance at the expense of proper introspection. However, this dance introduces a dimension of juvenile detachment from one's problems rather than willful ignorance of them or their effects. From this dance, the ideal of childishness is introduced as a part of the feminine ideal, but it remains in the background of the ideal of appearance. It also serves as a contrast between noh's focus on spiritual introspection and the *onnagata*'s less-introspective portrayal of femininity. The desire to maintain composure and appearance brings with it another piece of the ideal feminine image: the supposed virtue of feminine subservience. In order to maintain not only her composure but also for the sake of avoiding conflict, Hanako agrees to the dances that the priests requested almost as a flippant afterthought. Though Hanako has journeyed far to reach Dojoji, and despite her sharp-tongued insistence and verbal sparring with the priests, she is still quick to obey their requests to gain entrance to the temple. Hanako goes offstage at the end of this dance, signaling the completion of this projection of the childish aspect of the imagined feminine.

When she reappears, there has been another costume change, signifying the projection and display of another aspect of femininity. Hanako's new kimono is blue, and she carries three oversized hats, which she integrates into the dance she performs. Her new kimono is blue, and she now has three hats, both of which signify that this is a continuation of sorts from the prior dance (as both had a headpiece and a blue kimono as features). However, Hanako's new kimono is of a lighter color, with the colors of the kimono she had been wearing previously now adorning its lower half, suggesting perhaps that layers are being peeled away, or evoking the visual of a blossoming flower. I theorize that this costume change is foreshadowing of the next dance to come, wherein Hanako's true emotional turmoil is revealed beneath all the layers of composure and appearance that she has constructed around and about her true feelings. Oshima's stage notes and the translated lyrics of the choir's song both point to this interpretation, with lines such as "plum blossoms […] and cherry blossoms, which is the older brother, and which is the younger? They can't be told apart, the colors of the flowers" (Brazell 517). The notes describe the dance moves as "creating bewildering patterns" (517), further constructing the imagery of hidden emotions behind false facades. The interaction between Hanako and the hats, which occasionally involve her hiding behind them briefly as part of her dance, further suggests this interpretation. Additionally, the hats featured in this dance are not so different in construction from hats worn by those who would seek anonymity when visiting the pleasure quarters of Japan's major cities, adding credence to the aforementioned interpretation. Therefore, this dance is adding yet more to the ostensible virtue of maintaining *tatemae* at any cost.

While thematically similar to the previous dance, there is nonetheless another aspect being shown here; Hanako's new costume is more reminiscent of the matured and graceful woman than the casual and carefree girl, and the changed costume to the style of an older woman suggests the passage of age or time. Another interpretation, then, is that this dance represents the time that Hanako (and by extension Kiyohime) has spent repressing and masking her feelings of heartache and resentment. As a model of ideal feminine, then, Hanako is projecting an approval or even celebration of this sort of behavior; the dance praises the endurance of such suffering over the years, and the repetition of the motif of putting up a façade evidences such behavior as modeled and desirable. When one façade falls, another can be erected, and the veil over true feeling remains–this is expressed by having three wide hats instead of one. It also calls back to a similar exercise in Hanako's entrance and establishing scenes; after hiding behind her kimono sleeve, she hides behind her fan as well. So too does she hide behind each of her three hats in turn throughout the dance. The lyrics of the song also allude to replacing one façade with another; aside from the colors of flowers being indistinguishable, several pairs are brought up in the chants: "The lovely iris has two shades. Which is the older sister, which the younger?" (Brazell 517). Another passage from the chant adds even more to the interpretation of the song as discussing the value of an appropriate (and lovely) facade: "From the east and from the west, all come to gaze at the flowerlike face and so, and so. Each glance makes it seem more lovely, the face of the beautiful maiden" (Brazell 518). In other words, each glance at the face of the beautiful maiden (that is, the face that is being put on to cover the true internal strife) redoubles others' appreciation of it. This verse, too, serves a dual purpose: it also hearkens back to Hanako's establishing

scene, where she was worried about her physical appearance above all, and (by pointing out that it is the face of not only a maiden, but a *beautiful* maiden) both encourages and feminizes such prioritizing of one's outward appearance. Lastly, pairing this supposed virtue with the appearance of a wise and graceful full-grown woman rather than a girlish maiden connects this idea with maturation and experience. Had it appeared coupled with any of the prior aspects being shown, it might have had an undertone of juvenile fancy rather than the legitimization that this combination gives it.

To summarize, each of the dances to this point has constructed a slightly different variation of the central theme of *tatemae,* or maintaining a dignified and appropriate outward façade: First, maidenly traveler Hanako is concerned with not only her external appearance but also whether or not her internal turmoil will show through. Confrontational dancer Hanako expresses the value of her outer appearance by dint of gaudy, bold clothing and direct repartee with the monks who challenge her (and, at the end, agreeing to do unwanted and strenuous tasks–in this case, a lengthy dance number– in order to avoid confrontation and disturbing the peace, an extension of maintaining that same composure). Blue-clad and childish Hanako reinforced the idea of preserving poise by distracting oneself from one's troubles; there was an undertone of thinking deeply enough to be troubled but not deeply enough to dwell on one's troubles there as well. And mature-lady Hanako in the most recently-discussed dance serves to reinforce the idea of not one façade but multiple, switching them out as the situation requires. Her appearance as a mature woman adds the validity of age to the idea, where previously it had only been expressed by a Hanako that can have been reasonably assumed to have been more youthful than not. It is notable that any youth that Hanako expresses or

projects is but an extension of the recurring façade theme; Hanako herself is, after all, the disguised and vengeful spirit of Kiyohime from a legend that had long been antiquated when this play was first written for the noh theater (and thus is, by definition, not youthful at all). Lastly, all of the above projections are not intended as believable characters in and of themselves; instead, Hanako and the changes she goes through (both in terms of costume and personality) serve as demonstrations of the constructed ideal feminine in a variety of situations and projections. This evidences that Hanako (and by extension *Musume Dojoji*) is a play that is designed for *onnagata* to demonstrate, construct, and have projected onto themselves the feminine ideal as defined by Japanese culture, which is (as discussed in Chapter 2) the watchword of the *onnagata*'s entire trade. The varied female archetypes at work in the character of Hanako allows performers to demonstrate their familiarity with various fictitious feminine models, and the play is designed to give *onnagata* the chance to establish their faculty with all of them–a metatextual application of the play's central motif of not only presenting a façade but having multiples of them as the situation demands. Put differently, the play allows for the performativity of gender on the part of its lead actor in an interestingly literal way (though as discussed in the previous chapter, such performativity is the heart and soul of the *onnagata*'s trade).

Hanako's next dance is a departure from the prior positive-reinforcement model; rather than celebrating the necessity of having and maintaining a proper outward appearance, it ponders the disaster that lurks behind that appearance. Yet it is almost ironically regarded as the peak of the play's artistry; Brazell's commentary notes that it is "the emotional high point" of the production (518). Having gone offstage at the end of

the prior dance, Hanako returns as another projection of the feminine, with a lavender kimono and the white hand towel for which this play is famous. Aside from the ever-present chanters, only two priests and Hanako are present onstage, bringing much of the attention to her and also creating the scene that Brazell describes as an intimate atmosphere in which "the tension and relaxation created by the divergence and convergence of the music and dance build a richly varied rhythm that focuses the audience's attention on [. . .] the facial expressions of the actor, like a series of cinematic close-ups." Hanako's emotions, laid bare for the audience to see, are at the fore of this scene, both from the lyrics and dance but also from such scenes and moments as Brazell describes.

The first lyrical line from the chanters comments that "[Hanako] began learning about love from books, and ended up learning more than enough from experience" (Brazell 518). Like the entry scene that started the play, this singular line establishes the mood and direction of the rest of this lament. Notably, as this line is delivered, Hanako still has her face hidden behind the towel that is a part of her new costume, and when she lowers it, the scene proceeds. Other lines continue to travel the depths of Hanako's heartbreak while also reinforcing the idea of enduring one's suffering behind a brave face. Indeed, the physical face itself is referenced in the next line: "For whose sake did I redden my lips and blacken my teeth? [. . .] It was all to show my devotion to you" (Brazell 519). Both of these cosmetic features were performed by mature women (as opposed to young girls or teenage maidens) in Tokugawa Japan. In this case, Hanako's allusion to blackened teeth and reddened lips probably alludes more to marriage than simple maturity; she employs this imagery to illustrate the depths of her devotion to her

lover. It is reasonable to consider blackened teeth and reddened lips as the female's counterpart to the adult-male haircut that had been forced upon the *wakashu* as discussed in other chapters.

Here, we see Hanako's internal suffering, but I argue that the voice expressing it in fact belongs to long-suffering vengeful spirit Kiyohime (the lines are still being delivered by a background choir). Aside from the dramatic reveal of her true form at the conclusion of the play, this scene is perhaps the closest to Kiyohime speaking directly as can be found anywhere in the play. The fact that Hanako's internal, hidden feelings are presented as the musings of an angry and vengeful spirit also add to the notion of true feelings as undesirable; when those internal feelings are presented and explored, there is only a long lament and deep sadness waiting–indeed, these feelings are the sustenance of the furious and vengeful spirit of Kiyohime. Kiyohime is presented as an antagonistic figure, brooding over her own resentment and hurt feelings and descending further into depression and sadness the more she does. Hanako furthers this interpretation by equating her emotions with a broken promise: "Having vowed to never be jealous, I became accustomed to hiding my feelings" (Brazell 520). Indeed, Kiyohime could easily be interpreted as the personification of Hanako's internal monologue–Kiyohime is, after all, the vengeful spirit at the very core of Hanako's being. Therefore, during the lamentation scene that is the "high point" of the play, going against the maintenance of an external appearance is presented as a thing so forbidden that only an unrestful spirit would be able to do so. Therefore, the two main messages of the play are reinforced: Acting ideally feminine requires not only an array of appropriate facades (*tatemae*) but also a lack of

introspection and reflection, lest one be given over to despair (which would, in turn, endanger the façade so carefully constructed).

Hanako introduces another aspect of constructed feminine in this dance, however, which reinforces the ideal of subservience to others over concern for the self–the "other" in this case being the man she loved. She laments her lost love and refers to him as "husband, lord and master" (which is a translation of Japanese terms that don't necessarily imply marriage but are instead employed to underscore Hanako's devotion). This answers her prior question of "for whose sake did I redden my lips and blacken my teeth," and reinforces again the ideal of not only maintaining an appearance for others (in this case, a physical appearance) but also of devotion and deference to a man–devotion that is expressed both physically (in the reddening of the lips and the blackening of the teeth, which were both signs of a married woman in Tokugawa Japan. Hanako's dance also involves the actor covering his eyebrows with his white towel, making them disappear; married women in Japan shaved their eyebrows as well) and emotionally in this tragically one-sided devotion. Thus, devotion and subservience are constructed as additional parts of the imagined feminine ideal.

The tragedy of such devotion reaches the height of its expression when Hanako's façade finally breaks. Midway through this lamentation, Oshima's stage notes read: "[Hanako] mimes clapping her hands with joy at seeing her lover, leading him in, and making him sit and listen to her; her hands pushing back and forth delicately suggest a fight between them, which leads her to sit, looking soulful and teary-eyed" (Brazell 520). There are two overt expressions of clear emotion here: first, Hanako's joy, and last, the teary-eyed misery. That this mimesis precedes Hanako's saddest lament again suggests

the danger of letting one's façade down and compromising the stoicism previously discussed, even in the company of one's lover. This part of the dance is immediately followed by Hanako's expression to the audience of her resentment and despair. As the façade over Hanako's feelings is drawn away, the audience is treated to another look at her descent into further despair as more of her true form–Kiyohime–comes to the surface from beneath the Hanako facade.

I argue that both this dance and the one after it serve as a cautionary tale. When Hanako pauses to truly consider her feelings, rather than mentally glossing over them as she had done in the dances preceding these, she is able to maintain her carefree and maidenly composure, to the approval of the priests. By contrast, when she follows these emotions and truly considers them, she spirals out of control. This suggests that a woman (or an ideal feminine, at least) should not dwell on unhappy things, for the danger is that they will draw her into a downward spiral, which will start a disastrous chain reaction. The deep despair threatens her *tatemae* façade, the façade falls, and others around her will then notice the despair in her heart, costing her "face" and respect and ultimately leading to the displeasure of those around her (in Hanako's case, the priests of the temple, who just happen to all be men). A secondary interpretation that is no less valid would be that intelligence in women is undesirable, as it leads to self-reflection and, ultimately, the disastrous chain reaction described above. Instead, Hanako (and by extension the play itself) reinforces the supposed virtue of keeping one's feelings bottled up inside and instead having private outbursts–indeed, the play celebrates this by portraying such an outburst as a tragically beautiful occurrence. Because Hanako has portrayed the virtue of stoicism in several different feminine archetypes representing all walks of a woman's

life, and each of these caricatures has placed value on maintaining a stoic façade at one's own expense, it follows that *Musume Dojoji* portrays *tatemae* as the foundation on which femininity is constructed.

Hanako's next dance further portrays this spiral: here she appears in a yellow kimono with tambourines and drums, which are incorporated into the motions of the dance. Rather than portraying a caricature of the ideal feminine, this scene serves to develop and underline the consequences of Hanako's downward spiral. This dance, like those earlier in the play, acts as a homage to *noh* more than a narrative vehicle; even so, the primary message of the play continues to be conveyed. There is an ongoing musical accompaniment in which Hanako is now an active participant, but unlike prior dances there are no lyrics at all for most of the scene. Instead, Hanako expresses herself mimetically, with Oshima's notes describing such motions as "eerie" and "fox[like]" (Brazell 521). The choral accompaniment doesn't appear to be conveying dialogue at all for this scene; therefore, it can be reasoned that Hanako is silently going through these motions, which is a return to the silence-as-virtue stylings of the pre-lament dances. Yet the eerie movements and fox gestures speak for themselves; foxes have a place in Japanese mythology as not only supernatural but also feminine creatures, employing their magic for mischievous purpose. Hanako's silence combined with these gestures appears to convey that the façade is back, as it should be, but that her internal emotional equilibrium is in turmoil–while her ability to maintain silence is admirable and fitting for a feminine ideal, her lack of emotional control, which she had so carefully maintained earlier on the play, will lead to her ultimate downfall. While there is little in the way of

examples of an ideal feminine, the motif of vulpine imagery continues to suggest the performance femininity.

This continues in her next dance, as well, which is another mostly-silent sequence–here, Hanako's bold red costume from her second scene is back, though in this costume there are purple accents as well. This scene expresses Hanako's reconstructed façade; despite the despair and near-madness of the previous two dances, Oshima describes the dance as "light-spirited" and the music as "[suggestive of] an atmosphere of folk dance" (Brazell 521). Though the joyousness of this dance is apparently at odds with the ones before it, the music hints at the resentment that Hanako continues to hold and to nurture. Her lyrics allude to the liminal space-in-between, the floating world of the *ukiyo*, which is a fitting descriptor of her emotional state: resentment and sadness beneath a veneer of lighthearted jollity. The duplicity of her emotions is expressed more directly in the lyrics: "How handsome he is, how infuriating" (Brazell 521). Feminine construction and performance are expressed in this dance in the most literal way; Hanako comments, "How gentle [a woman] looks, how elegant her figure, so beautiful, so beautiful" (522). Since Hanako can no longer show the ideal feminine in the light of the compromising of her façade, she must instead talk about it in others instead. The failure of her *tatemae* is expressed once again as her gaze turns to the temple bell: "The flowerlike figure's hair falls in tangles. Each time I think of it, I recall how hateful it is" (522). From this line, with Hanako expressing disgust for the imagined feminine figures she had been commenting on, she forsakes her claim on being able to satisfactorily perform as one.

Fittingly, this is her last line in the play. She has eschewed her femininely constructed façade by both castigating the man whom she loved and was devoted to

("how handsome he is, how infuriating") and vilifying other women as well ("I recall how hateful it is"). With her *tatemae* lost, she climbs onto the bell as the priests gather around and the curtain closes. As mentioned early in the chapter, an exorcism scene at this point is also considered a canonical and acceptable way to end the play, and that ending only reinforces the central message that Hanako had been portraying throughout: Woe to you women who forsake the ideals of *tatemae*, delicacy, and loyalty. Woe to you women who react substantially to those wrongs inflicted upon you by men (rather than letting them pass you by). The ideal feminine construction at the heart of this play is ultimately one that invites repeated heartbreak while simultaneously delivering the message that such heartbreak is to be endured stoically rather than addressed. Lastly, her climbing onto the bell is the most overt and tangible of several references to the woodblock print that the original noh play was based on. In both the noh play and the legend it draws from, Kiyohime transformed into a monstrous serpent and incinerated the man who had spurned her within the great bell of Dojo Temple. By referencing this so directly, *Musume Dojoji* makes no question that Hanako's giving over to her despair and resentment made her, quite literally, into an inhuman monster.

Fig. 3.2: Hanako mounts the bell. Note the triangular pattern of her kimono, suggestive of serpentine scales, to reflect the legend from which *Musume Dojoji* draws its inspiration. Photo from Rei Sasaguchi, *Nakamura Jakuemon IV–The Art of Onnagata Acting* 56.

The ultimate construction in *Musume Dojoji* is therefore misogynistic at its foundation. The ideal feminine must both maintain a literal physical appearance that is pleasing to those men around her and project her emotions in a similarly pleasing way. She is encouraged to act childish and scatterbrained when faced with tribulation–acknowledging wrongdoing is fine, but enacting vengeance or expressing sadness in retaliation is not. One could read Hanako's childish ball dance as suggesting that femininity and a certain brand of stupidity go hand in hand; it is better for one to be too shallow-minded to consider the depths of the wrongs done to her than it is to be introspective. And if one is introspective, only disaster follows; better instead to be femininely, cutely ignorant, and ready to do as bidden on a moment's notice. This play instructs women to repress their negative emotions in favor of those around them and paradoxically both celebrates and warns against giving over to them in tragic outbursts. While one could read that this play as being less about women specifically and instead an example of the virtues of *tatemae* in Japanese culture, the priests–who have no reservations about expressing their inner thoughts openly, such as their "unpriestlike" murmuring about Hanako's appearance, and their unnervingly-personal questions as to whether Hanako is a "sweet young thing"–act as a rebuke for this reading. Tellingly, they are all men, and their behavior and dialogue shows that they need not have any façade despite their supposed clerical duties. Instead, this play places the burden of *tatemae* not just directly but also exclusively on the shoulders of women alone, and by the performance of its lead actor extols the virtue of silently bearing this burden as described above. In doing so, the play appears to celebrate women's ability to bear this burden, but

more subtly, it casts the shadow of shame and vitriol on those who cannot uphold this

unrealistic expectation.

The final conclusion of the interpretation of Musume Dojoji is, in brief, that those who would strive for the impossible feminine ideal would do well not to; the play's message is that maintaining an immovable façade at all times despite anguish and heartbreak will, even to the most feminine and delicate, inescapably end in tragedy. Yet the play recognizes the futility of trying to act in any other way, and instead offers the dubious message that being shallow and childish can help to stave off the inevitable breakdown of said façade. The *onnagata* fits into this paradigm by dint of his being a male beneath the feminine façade. A man, the play argues, may be able to portray and uphold this virtue of *tatemae* at any cost, and so is required to play the part of the woman who fails to do so; were a woman herself to try, she would be at risk of falling into the same fate as Hanako in reality, rather than in performance, thereby undermining the moral "lesson" of the play.

Therefore, *Musume Dojoji* simultaneously celebrates the attempt at following the model of *tatemae* in it and shames the failure that it portrays as inevitable, using Hanako's exaggerated fall from grace and descent into despair as a cautionary tale that doesn't suggest turning away from her path as much as it reminds audiences– or at least their female members–that they may share a similar fate in the end.

Notes

[I] Ieyasu Tokugawa is the namesake of the Tokugawa era and an important figure in Japanese history. It is from his name that the term "Tokugawa era" comes, as he was the first shogun of his eponymous shogunate, and his line maintained power approximately 200 years after his appointment (roughly 1600-1800). During this period, art flourished, and Japanese culture underwent many changes, The urbanization, creation of the class system, and the rise of a class of mercantile urban citizens all occurred during this period.

[II] The appreciation, sexual or otherwise, of androgyny in teenage boys remains a part of Japanese culture today; though the term *wakashu* has been retired, certain genres of manga (Japanese comics) prominently feature *bishonen*–which translates literally to "beautiful young man".

[III] This incident is based on a tale recorded on a wood print in the actual temple that Dojoji Temple is based on. As the (noh) play gained exposure and popularity, the story of wrathful-serpent Kiyohime became more and more well-known throughout Japan.

[IV] The towels also are each embroidered with the personal crest of whichever actor is playing the lead role, which presents a clever merchandising/branding opportunity as well.

[V] The gesture of hiding behind one's wide *kimono* sleeves (accomplished by lifting a hand just beneath the eyes and allowing the sleeve to obscure the lower half of

the face) is a common one in Japanese art, particularly from the Tokugawa era, and commonly seen in the *bijinga* prints mentioned in the prior chapter.

[VI] The idea that women hold lethal secrets that can be unleashed to disastrous effect is a recurring motif in Japanese art and literature; in later centuries this trope would branch off into its own subset of popular literature called *dokufu monogatari*, or "poison woman stories."

[VII] While research has been inconclusive, I posit that "sweet young thing" is a translation of nothing other than the Japanese word *musume*.

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