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The principal figure in the development of the Nō was Seami (or Zeami) Motokiyo (1363-1443). He was the author of most of the Nō plays which are still performed, including three of the four given in this volume. In addition to the plays, he wrote a number of critical works on the Nō in which he described the aesthetic principles underlying his art. The language he used, perhaps necessarily so, is at times obscure, and offers special problems in translation. This was due in part to the influence of Zen Buddhism, with its emphasis on intuitive understanding: this Zen influence is particularly apparent in the first selection given here. The word yūgen, with which the second selection is concerned, had a primary meaning of "mystery" and, however used, generally retains something of the sense of a mysterious power. Seami gave to this word the meaning of the chief aesthetic principle of the Nō.

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THE ONE MIND LINKING ALL POWERS

Sometimes spectators of the Nō say that the moments of "no action" are the most enjoyable. This is one of the actor's secret arts. Dancing and singing, movements on the stage, and the different types of miming are all acts performed by the body. Moments of "no action" occur in between. When we examine why such moments without action are enjoyable, we find that it is due to the underlying spiritual strength of the actor which unremittently holds the attention. He does not relax the tension when the dancing or singing comes to an

end or at intervals between the dialogue and the different types of miming, but maintains an unwavering inner strength. This feeling of inner strength will faintly reveal itself and bring enjoyment. However, it is undesirable for the actor to permit this inner strength to become obvious to the audience. If it is obvious, it becomes an act, and is no longer "no action." The actions before and after an interval of "no action" must be linked by entering the state of mindlessness IN WHICH the actor conceals even from himself his own intent. The ability to move audiences depends, thus, on linking all the artistic powers with one mind.

"Life and death, past and present—
Marionettes on a toy stage.
When the strings are broken,
Behold the broken pieces!"¹

This is a metaphor describing human life as it transmigrates between life and death. Marionettes on a stage appear to move in various ways, but in fact it is not they who really move—they are manipulated by strings. When these strings are broken, the marionettes fall and are dashed to pieces. In the art of the Nō too, the different types of miming are artificial things. What holds the parts together is the mind. This mind must not be disclosed to the audience. If it is seen, it is just as if a marionette's strings were visible. The mind must be made the strings which hold together all the powers of the art. If this is done the actor's talent will endure. This effort must not be confined to the times when the actor is appearing on the stage. day or night, wherever he may be, whatever he may be doing, he should not forget it, but should make it his constant guide, uniting all his powers. If he persistently strives to perfect this, his talent will steadily grow. This article is the most secret of the secret teachings.

¹ Poem by an unknown Zen master. The last two lines may mean, "When life comes to an end the illusions of this world also break into pieces."



ON ATTAINING THE STAGE OF YŪGEN

Yūgen is considered to be the mark of supreme attainment in all the arts and accomplishments. In the art of the *Nō* in particular, the manifestation of *yūgen* is of the first importance. When *yūgen* in the *Nō* is displayed, it is generally apparent to the eye, and it is the one thing which audiences most admire, but actors who possess *yūgen* are few and far between. This is because they do not know its true meaning and so do not reach that stage.

In what kind of place is the stage of *yūgen* to be found? Let us begin by examining the various classes of people on the basis of the appearance that they made in society. May we not say of the courtiers whose behavior is distinguished and whose appearance far surpasses that of other men, that they are at the stage of *yūgen*? From this we may see that the essence of *yūgen* is true beauty and gentleness. Tranquillity and elegance make for *yūgen* in personal appearance. In the same way, the *yūgen* of discourse lies in a grace of language and a complete mastery of the speech of the nobility and the gentry so that even the most casual utterance will be graceful. A musical performance may be said to possess *yūgen* when the melody flows beautifully and sounds smooth and sensitive. A dance will possess *yūgen* when the discipline has been thoroughly mastered and the audience is delighted by the performer's movements and by his serene appearance. Acting possesses *yūgen* when the performance of the Three Roles² is beautiful. If the characterization calls for a display of anger or for the representation of a devil, the actions may be somewhat forceful, but as long as the actor never loses sight of the beauty of the effect and bears in mind always the correct balance between his mental and physical actions and between the movements of his body and feet,³ his appearance will be so beautiful that it may be called the "*yūgen* of a devil."

² Seami considered the Three Basic Roles to be those of the old person, the woman, and the warrior.

³ Seami elsewhere discusses the relation between what the actor expresses with his body and what he knows but does not overtly express. At first an actor who has studied with

All these aspects of *yūgen* must be kept in mind and made a part of the actor's body, so that whatever part he may be playing *yūgen* will never be absent. Whether the character he portrays be of high or low birth, man or woman, priest, peasant, rustic, beggar, or outcast, he should think of each of them as crowned with a wreath of flowers. [Although their positions in society differ, the fact that they can all appreciate the beauty of flowers makes flowers of all of them.]⁴ Their particular flower is shown by their outward appearance. An actor, through the use of his intelligence, makes his presentation seem beautiful. It is his intelligence which permits him to grasp the above principles; to learn poetry so as to impart *yūgen* to his discourse; and to study the most elegant costuming so as to give *yūgen* to his bearing. Though the characterization varies according to the different parts, the actor should realize that the ability to appear beautiful is the seed of *yūgen*. It is all too apt to happen that an actor, believing that once he has mastered the characterization of the different parts he has attained the highest stage of excellence, forgets his appearance and is therefore unable to enter the realm of *yūgen*. Unless, however, he enters that realm he will not attain to the highest achievements, and will therefore not become a great master. That is why there are so few masters. The actor must consider *yūgen* as the most important aspect of his art, and study to perfect his understanding of it.

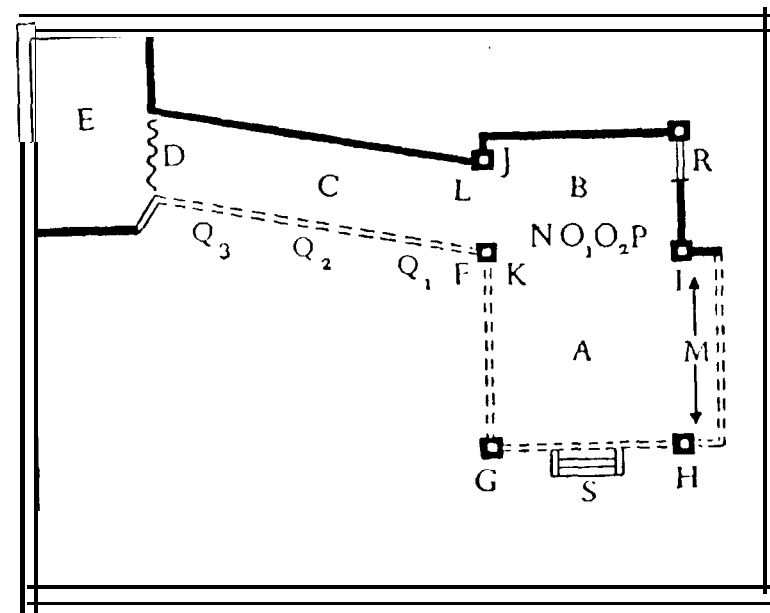
The "highest achievements" of which I have spoken are beauty of form and manner. The most careful attention must be given to the appearance presented. When the form is beautiful, whether in dancing, singing, or in any type of characterization, it may be called a "highest achievement." When the form is ugly, the performance

a master does not know any more than what he has learned and what he expresses, but as he himself acquires mastery there are things which he comes to understand beyond what he has been taught, and which he suggests rather than expresses. The relation between the movements of the body and feet refers to a theory of Seami's that if the body and the feet move in the same manner the effect will be crude. Thus, in an agitated passage when the feet are stamping wildly, the movements of the body should be gentle or a disorderly effect will be produced which will mar the spectator's enjoyment.

⁴ That is, their love of beauty makes them beautiful, irrespective of their station.

will be inferior. The actor should realize that *yūgen* is attained when all different forms of visual and aural expression are beautiful. It is when the actor himself has worked out these principles and made himself their master that he may be said to have entered the realm of *yūgen*. If he fails to work out these principles for himself, he will not master them, and however much he may aspire to attain *yūgen*, he will never in all his life do so.

TRANSLATED BY RYUSAKU TSUNODA AND DONALD KEENE



- A Main Stage (*Butai*)
- B Rear Stage (*Atoza*)
- C Bridge (*Hashigakari*)
- D Curtain (*Maku*)
- E **Mirror** Room (*Kagami-no-ma*)
- F Shite's Pillar (*Shite-bashira*)
- G Facing Pillar (*Metsuke-bashira*)
- H Waki's Pillar (*Waki-bashira*)
- I Flute Pillar (*Fue-bashira*)
- J Stage Attendant's Pillar (*Kōken-bashira*)
- K Name-Saying Sent (*Nanoriza*)
- L Kyōgen's Sent (*Kyōgen-za*)
- M Chorus (*Ji-utai*)
- N Drummer (*Taijō-kata*)
- O Drummers (*Tsuzumi-kata*)
- P Flute Player (*Fue-kata*)
- Q Pine Trees (*Matsu-no-ki*)
- R Hurry Door (*Kirido-guchi*)
- S Steps to Audience (*Shirasu-bashigo*)

Shite: the protagonist, who usually makes two appearances, often the second time as a ghost.

Waki: the deuteragonist, often an itinerant monk.

Tsure: a companion of either the *shite* or *waki*.