The Synthesis of *Yūgen* and *Monomane* in the Nō Aesthetic of Zeami:

The Growth of *Yūgen*’s Third Dimension

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Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443), the playwright, actor and theorist of Nō drama, is frequently characterized as the supreme advocate of the aesthetic ideal called *yūgen*, and the prime influence behind the incorporation of *yūgen* elements into the Nō form. From a historical standpoint, Zeami’s preoccupation with *yūgen* is readily understandable. As a standard for renga poetry, *yūgen* was unquestionably in vogue among the aesthetes of the Ashikaga coterie, and Zeami’s taste thus reflected that of his patrons, the shogunal elite. Literary scholar Kitagawa Tadahiko goes so far as to make a distinction between two major stylistic traditions in Nō performance which were the products of the respective milieux of the performers: Zeami’s *yūgen* strain, and the less lyrical, more action-packed style of playwrights such as Kanze Kojirō, Miyamasu, and even Zeami’s father, Kan’ami Kiyotsugu—all of whom catered primarily to popular rather than elite audiences.

The line that Kitagawa draws between the *yūgen* and non-*yūgen* styles ultimately traces to a distinction that Zeami himself makes between *yūgen* and the other major principle of contemporaneous Nō performance, *monomane*, or “Nō-imitation.” *Monomane* was the traditional basis of Nō (or sarugaku as it was then called) in the Yamato style—the style professed by all the above-mentioned performers. *Yūgen*, on the other hand, characterized performance in a rival style, that of the troupes based in Ōmi province. Kitagawa argues that, whereas Kan’ami, Kojirō and Miyamasu were squarely grounded in the Yamato tradition of *monomane*, Zeami’s *yūgen* leanings constituted an aberration from that standard. Indeed, in Zeami’s secret transmis-
sions postdating the *Fūshi kaden*, a marked decrease in usage of the term *monomane* coincides with an increase in usage of the term *yūgen*, and one is tempted to surmise that, in his enthusiasm for *yūgen*, Zeami had let *monomane* go by the wayside. But was that the case?

There is little doubt that Zeami was drawn to the *yūgen* style of performance, but does that mean that he abandoned the *monomane* tradition of his forefathers? Kitagawa's two categories, useful as they are for characterizing Zeami's art relative to that of other performers, do not shed much light on this question, which is predicated on Zeami's ideas on *yūgen* and *monomane* as those ideas evolved. Zeami's own words provide some hints, however:

Generally speaking, in this art there is a difference of style between [the troupes based] in Yamato and Ōmi provinces. In Ōmi they attach primary importance to the *yūgen* dimension, making *monomane* secondary, and making musical atmosphere the basis. In Yamato, we attach primary importance to *monomane*, expanding our repertoire to all types, yet aspiring to a *yūgen* style.

This passage, written early on in Zeami's career, reveals the direction which his innovations were to take. Far from abandoning *monomane*, Zeami was to ultimately arrive at a synthesis of *yūgen* and *monomane* so complete that allusion to *monomane* as an isolated acting technique would cease to have much meaning. Such a synthesis proved to be no easy task, for it necessitated both a deepened understanding of the mainsprings of *yūgen* beauty and a consequent redefinition of the inter-relation of *yūgen* and *monomane*. The purpose of this study is to trace the steps which led to that synthesis, and, ultimately, to the transformation of the *sarugaku* art.

The term *monomane* may be translated as "imitation" or "mimicry." Although the style of dramatic imitation that Zeami inherited from his predecessors was less formalistic than that style which his own innovations were to nurture, in its evolution *monomane* never approximated "realism" as it is understood in the western theatrical tradition. The motivating force behind *monomane* was and is to grasp the universal
within the individual: "Monomane means to imitate the essence, not the particulars, and to represent the individual under his general aspect."

That essence is portrayed by mastery of a set of conventionalized patterns of movement called kata that have been handed down through generations of No performers. Perhaps the most commonly cited example is the kata for expressing tears, in which the actor silently raises his hands to cover his eyes. There is nothing random about the kata. The premise underlying them is that such economical, chiseled movement shuns extraneous detail to more vividly express the essential characteristics of the protagonist's state of mind. It remains for the actor to master the kata to such a degree that he can manipulate them in ways that have novelty, interest, and specific application to the role he is playing.

Although these kata have developed and crystallized considerably since Zeami's day, there is ample evidence in Zeami's secret transmissions that the conception of the universal in the particular was fundamental to monomane at least as far back as Kan'ami. Zeami preserved that orientation. It was on the question of how the universal nature of a character could be captured that Zeami's ideas diverged from all precedent. Prior to Zeami, actors had concentrated on the imitation of the external attributes of the character in the belief that the representation of the identifying characteristics of the character's bearing was the key to the character's essence.

The second Chapter of the Fushiki kaden gives a vivid indication of the nature of dramatic imitation in Kan'ami's lifetime. From his predecessors in the Yamato style, Zeami inherited nine role types on which monomane was based. They were the woman, the old man, the unmasked player, the mad person, the priest, the warrior, the god, the demon, and the Chinese. Briefly he describes the type of monomane appropriate for each, primarily offering practical pointers on how best to mimic surface attributes. Regarding the woman, for instance: "Firstly, if the actor's costuming is ugly, there is nothing worth looking at. Sufficient enquiry must be made of the manner of representation of court ladies of the highest ranks, for it is not easy to observe their
manners." Of the old man he says, "You must study in detail the device of giving a Flowerful performance and at the same time the appearance of age."

Verisimilitude was not itself the ultimate standard, as is demonstrated in Zeami's remarks on the monomane of a Chinese person: "...in the case of Chinese style where generally you have no means of giving an exact representation, you should act in a manner different from that of ordinary people, and then this will seem to the audience to be vaguely Chinese." Moreover, poetic license is advocated in his remarks at the opening of the chapter: "Also you must imitate as minutely as possible the various types of people of high rank as well as artistic pursuits. But in regard to country people and rustics, their humble pursuits ought not to be imitated too minutely." This statement reveals an interesting correlation between yūgen and monomane, but to understand it, the nature of yūgen demands closer scrutiny.

Whereas Zeami inherited the concept of monomane from his own forefathers in the sarugaku tradition, the term yūgen first appears in Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras. The Chinese characters literally translate as "unfathomable limit," and the term denoted a truth too deep to be grasped in its entirety. It was in the medieval years that yūgen entered the aesthetic vocabulary, where it became a central concern of waka criticism. It was used to refer to a particular quality of beauty that evoked a sense of depth and mystery only suggested by the object imbued therewith. Although the concept of yūgen took on different nuances over time and from one critic to the next, it retained other basic attributes such as a supple gentleness and a courtly grace that was shorn of all vulgarity.

Yūgen was first consciously articulated as a poetic ideal by the thirteenth-century waka poet Fujiwara Shunzei, who equated it with an elegant atmosphere of a muted and lonely tonality. Shunzei's son Teika preserved the elegance and depth of his father's conception, but in his own aesthetic concept of ushintai, he substitutes a touch of luster for the austere overtones. In the Muromachi period, yūgen also became
an aesthetic standard in renga criticism such as that of Nijō Yoshimoto. Like Teika, Yoshimoto favored a delicate, lustrous beauty. Nose Asaji notes that by the Muromachi period, the word yūgen had come into general, popular usage, taking on more sensuous overtones that also influenced Yoshimoto's conception.

Not surprisingly, Zeami's brand of yūgen seems to draw most from Yoshimoto's idea. Zeami's version too is characterized by a refined but sensuous gentleness and a graceful composure; it too has luster and courtly elegance. In the secret transmission entitled the Kakyō (1424) he identifies yūgen with "simply a form that is beautiful and gentle." In the Shikadō (1420) he likens the yūgen quality to a swan holding a flower in its beak. Moreover, underlying these surface attributes is the characteristic sense of depth. For instance, in a later transmission called the Goon, he cites the following waka as an example of yūgen:

Mata ya min Would that I could see
Katano no mino no Once more the cherry viewing
Sakura gari On Katano field
Hana no yuki chiru With the scattering petal snow
Haru no akebono. In the dawning of the spring.

Not the harsh light of high noon but the softer hues of spring's dawning set the tone of this poem. The hazy light and the clouds of white blossoms create a graceful and gently sensuous setting for the human activity of cherry-viewing. However, as is characteristic of yūgen, beneath the surface serenity hides a deeper truth... that the petals are in the process of decay.

Yoshimoto held that for a renga poem to possess the yūgen tone it must have elegant subject matter, elegant diction and an elegant spirit. Zeami applied the same standards to a Nō play. In the Fūshi kaden he states: "The backbone of a play should be a personage having yūgen, and, what's more, you should take care to make your writing elegant in spirit and words." The elegant protagonist advocated by Zeami seems to be the Nō analogue to the elegant subject matter recommended by Yoshimoto.

Although Zeami insisted that all roles be performed in a yūgen style,
he found some more overtly endowed with yūgen than others. He believed the woman to possess more yūgen than other role types, and in the transmission entitled the Nikyoku santai ningyō zu (1421) he holds that the form of the child is the most basic manifestation of all. As a rule of thumb, he considered court aristocrats to be most generously endowed. Minamoto no Tōru, protagonist of the play entitled Tōru, is one example of a personage having the requisite grace and refinement of person. Moreover, as Zeami points out in the Sandō, still more promising are female aristocrats such as Lady Rokujō, Yūgao and Ukifune from the Tale of Genji.

The existence of a gradation of yūgen types brings us back to the relation between monomane and yūgen. Judging from Zeami's descriptions in the Fashi kaden, in Kan'amii's style of acting there existed a correlation between the degree of yūgen imbued in the person of the protagonist and the degree of verisimilitude that should characterize the monomane used to portray that protagonist. Those personages of high rank and sophistication were to be imitated more minutely than those of humble leanings precisely because they were taken to be more imbued with yūgen grace. For those protagonists not overtly blessed with yūgen, the actor needed to play down prosaic detail, suffusing his monomane with greater elegance than was evident in the original. As Zeami himself notes: "By and large, the basic principle is to imitate things completely. However, you should know what degree of minuteness is needed for each subject." The actor should preserve the basic identity of a humble subject such as a fisherman or a woodcutter, for instance, but strip it of mean detail.

This formula offered one effective means of heightening yūgen effects but it had its limitations. Even if detailed monomane were curtailed, how could demons of warriors, the two least gentle of the nine monomane role types, project the ideal yūgen atmosphere and still retain some semblance of their original identities? Furthermore, it was easy enough to eliminate denigrating detail in theory, but what was to replace it on stage?
To solve those problems it was necessary for Zeami to delve more deeply into the nature of the attribute most fundamental to yūgen, namely, the idea that yūgen suggests truth and beauty deeper and more lasting than the concrete object that is the vehicle for its expression. That idea has far-reaching implications. To take the example of a landscape painting, if that landscape should suggest a beauty beyond what is immediately visible, then whether it is done in monochrone or color is of secondary importance. Zeami's recognition that the yūgen quality resided less in the concrete object itself than in the atmosphere that object projected constituted a turning point in his ideas about Nō.

In the waka tradition there had long existed an aesthetic term for the atmosphere pervading a poem. That term is yojō, which roughly translates as "resonance." Hisamatsu Sen'ichi traces the budding of the yojō concept as far back in the tradition as Fujiwara no Kintō (966-1041) because he was one of the first waka aestheticians to draw a distinction between the emotive quality of a poem and its explicit content. Kintō's ideal poem possessed what he called amari no kokoro, or "more spirit than can be contained." Hisamatsu offers the following explanation of amari no kokoro: "On the one hand, it can be construed as the emotive quality of the words, something beyond the actual subject matter of the poem; it refers to the flavor of the emotive content springing from the heart of the poem."¹

Yojō from Kintō onward is premised on the idea that the spirit of a poem cannot be fully contained in the words themselves but, at the same time, makes itself felt through the words. It is the flavor of the poem that lingers after the words have ceased. Moreover, Shunzei, Teika and Yoshimoto all recognized yojō as the crucial means of eliciting the atmosphere of yūgen.

Even when the subject matter of a poem is distinctly lacking in the surface attributes of yūgen, the demon being the stock example, yūgen atmosphere can be evoked by means of poetic style. Teika remarks: "There are certain types of objects that inspire fear in real life, but
when worked into poems, they may seem imbued with elegant grace. In short, by use of the technique of yojō, the poet has the power to transform our impression of an object, not by altering the thing itself but by altering its tone.

Teika here voices a notion that was shared by other poets and men of letters of his time. His statement appears to be a citation from the Yakumomishō, a thirteenth-century work of waka criticism. Yoshida Kenkō also cites the passage in his fourteenth-century work, the Tsurezuregusa. Moreover, the idea was not alien to Zeami who in the Fashi kaden makes a strikingly similar statement, but in reference to elegant language in Nō: "When graceful language is matched to the movements, strangely the human form of the actor will of itself take on the air of yūgen." From this passage it is clear that graceful language is instrumental to the evocation of yūgen. By graceful language Zeami is of course referring to poetic usages hailing from the established waka precedents. He is drawing a crucial parallel between the waka and Nō genres: just as poetic language may transform the image of a demon in a waka, it has the potential to do so on the Nō stage.

There is no question that as a playwright Zeami pursued this insight, drawing from the techniques of both waka and renga. Whereas the language of his father Kan'ami's plays is generally characterized as abounding in witty dialogue but lacking in literary polish, Zeami is universally acclaimed as a master poet. Perhaps the best testimony to his poetic prowess is the fact that the language of more than half of the fifty plays credited to Zeami has come down to us today unrevised.

Yet Zeami's reference to the actor's movements is also a reminder that the playwright works in a genre that is very different from the poet's. For Zeami, poetry was fated to remain only one mode of expression within a composite of equally important visual, aural and dramatic elements. Moreover, the waka poet could draw on a corpus of canonized yojō techniques in eliciting the yūgen mood, whereas Zeami had no precedents to fall back on in the sarugaku tradition. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the structure of Nō was the techniques he developed for transferring the yojō resonance of yūgen.
from the lyric poem to the stage while still preserving the dramatic elements sustained by monomane.

The key to evoking the yügen resonance proved to be assigning the musical modes of dance and chant a more central position in the structure of the play. The importance of dance and chant is stressed in a later transmission, the Sarugaku dangi: “It can be said that all sarugaku consists of monomane, but sarugaku is after all sacred dance as well, and its basic style should be realized by means of dance and chant.”

Already in the transmissions of his middle years, however, the “two modes of dance and chant” had become a set phase used to describe the basis of yügen effects. In the Sandō, for instance, when Zeami speaks of the imitation of the form of the woman, a figure he believed to be highly endowed with yügen grace, he observes that dance and chant are particularly crucial to that style of performance. or, in the Nikyoku santai ningyō zu he states: “The image of the child is the foundation of the yügen style. The acting should consist of dance and chant.”

That the emotional overtones of yügen were linked to musical modes of expression was an idea that Zeami had readily acknowledged as early as the Fūshi kaden in the previously cited description of the style of Ōmi sarugaku. His awareness of the potential for nurturing yügen through music hails back to that work as well. For example, he notes: “Even when the words chanted by a personage having yügen are fearsome, if the musical atmosphere confirms [his identity], then there should be no hitch. You should in fact understand that such is the essential nature of Nō.”

Revealed in this quote is the conscious extension of the yojō concept to a dramatic context. Whereas in poetry elegant language may serve to give inelegant subject matter an atmosphere of yügen, in Nō elegant music may serve to transform inelegant language into one element contributing to an overall projection of the yügen quality on stage.

Zeami’s increased attention to musical elements appears on the surface to be merely a rapprochement with the preexisting Ōmi style, but there was a crucial difference. Whereas dance and chant were apparently ends in themselves in the Ōmi style, dramatic imitation being
peripheral, musical elements coexist with or, more precisely, underlie monomane in Zeami’s configuration. To understand that configuration, however, we must first understand the deepened conception of monomane that it entailed.

As the two modes of dance and chant grew increasingly central to Zeami’s style of Nō play, the nine role types of the old Yamato style of monomane became increasingly unsustainable. Whereas the nine roles were oriented to bringing out tangible attributes of the subject matter, the two modes made no pretext to the representation of externals. Toida Michizō describes the attempts by playwrights of Kan’ami’s generation to resolve the contradiction as follows:

It is difficult to harmonize the imitation of externals with the yūgen arising from dance and chant. Therefore, it was necessary to put personages known historically as professional entertainers on stage, as in Jinen kōji and Shizuka ga mai no nō, in order to establish credible conditions for performing dance and chant in the course of imitating a character.

For the protagonists of Jinen Koji and Shizuka ga mai no nō, both legendary personages widely renowned for their skill in musical entertainment, to dance and chant in the course of a play might seem credible enough, but how was a protagonist such as a warrior to do so? If the imitation of external semblance is taken as the norm, then a dancing warrior violates all vestiges of verisimilitude. Toida goes on to say that the only way to combine monomane and yūgen within a dramatic framework is for the monomane to be redefined.

For the warrior figure familiar to Kan’ami to evolve into the warrior style created by Zeami, what was called for was not the imitation of external condition but the imitation of the inward nature of the warrior, based on the human capacity for self-awareness.

Indeed, just such a shift in focus does occur, not only in the imitation of the warrior but in all types of imitation. The nine role types disappear from the transmissions of Zeami’s middle years. In the Sandō and other works of that period, they were replaced by what
Zeami calls the “three forms” of monomane: the old man, the woman and the warrior. The criterion that had differentiated the old nine categories had been the nature of the role of the protagonist. In Zeami’s time, for instance, men and women were equally popular in the role of the mad person. Furthermore, the unmasked player, the priest and the Chinese were all male figures, but it was their respective styles of performance which varied. In contrast, the three forms are mutually distinct prototypes, each imbued with its own spirit and essential features. The three forms are broad strokes, universals which are predicated on the human psyche and which subsume the earlier nine role types.

In the Nikyoku santai ningyō zu, Zeami encapsulates the spirit which moves each form. The old man should have “a serene heart and distant vision.” Zeami likens his stage presence to an ancient tree in bloom. The woman should “make her heart her form, abandoning all forcefulness”; the warrior, on the other hand, should “make forcefulness his form, allowing his heart to scatter.” When an actor engages in the imitation of a given subject, his first step must be to penetrate to the heart of that subject. The actor’s monomane presents the spirit of the subject; his outward semblance becomes an embodiment of that spirit.

Once monomane has been redefined as imitation of the internal landscape of a character, no amount of poetry, music or dance can violate credibility. Moreover, once the playwright has such a dramatic basis for exercising the arts of poetry, music and dance—the modes of yojō in Nō—any subject capable of emotion, no matter how humble or seemingly fierce of outward attribute, is a potential vehicle for the projection of yūgen resonance. The integral relation between the three forms and the two modes is aptly summarized by Yashima Masaharu. He notes that as long as the elaborate and detailed system of imitation inherent in the nine roles remained the standard for Nō action, imitation itself necessarily remained the end of a performance. By condensing the nine into the three forms, Zeami had hit upon the basis for expressing a kind of poetic mood that went beyond the imitation itself.

Yashima goes on to say:

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At the same time that this shift brought increased depth to the performance itself, it also provided a leading clue to how poetic structure could be realized which Zeami was to follow in writing the works of his middle years. The Nô plays of Kan'ami were indeed dramatic but they cannot be called poetic. By the incorporation of the element of musical atmosphere, the plays of Zeami's middle years succeeded in imbuing the flesh with the yojo resonance of language, realizing a form based on poetry.

When Yashima speaks of "imbuing the flesh with the yojo resonance of language," he means it quite literally, for the process of composing a play on the basis of the two modes and the three forms finds its corollary in the process of training the actor. In the realm of acting also the two are juxtaposed to produce one overall effect. In the Shikadô the learning process is delineated thus: "Study the form fitting for the old man, study the form fitting for the woman, study the form having bravado [the form of the warrior]. Then, after having mastered all three to the fullest, nothing remains but to infuse all the different types of monomane with the two modes of dance and chant learned from childhood." Until the child actor has reached adolescence, his training should be restricted to dance and chant. Only when dance and chant have become second nature should he embark on training in the three forms. Ultimately his performance will embody the composite of his training. What will be most apparent to the audience will be the monomane of the role, but that monomane will be supported by or suffused with dance and chant. Whether the monomane be that of a polished court aristocrat or a blustering warrior, the two modes will give it the grace of yûgen. In creating this configuration Zeami succeeds in giving yojo a third dimension.

Thus the juxtapositioning of the two modes and the three forms proved to be the key to the evocation of yojo. In turn, yojo provided the key to giving a yûgen tone to subjects not readily endowed with the surface attributes of yûgen. Zeami's adoption of yojo techniques into Nô signals a deepening conception of the integral nature of the relation between monomane and yûgen. The distinction that Fujiwara no Kintô and his successors in the poetic tradition perceived between

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the emotive quality of a thing and its explict content finds its Nō analogue in the distinction between the heart of a character and the substance. When the beauty of the heart is not readily manifest in the form, then minute imitation of that form is to no purpose. To preserve the bare bones of that form and then to alter its tonality by means of music and poetry is not to falsify the form but to get to the heart of it. Yūgen is the beauty of the heart.

NOTES

3 The Secret of Nō Plays: Zeami's 'Kadensho', tr. with a foreword by Sakurai Chūichi et al. (Kyoto: Sumiya-Shinobe Publishing Institute, 1968), 8.
5 Fūshi kaden: Shidehara and Whitehouse, 221; NST, 22.
6 Fūshi kaden: Shidehara and Whitehouse, 226; NST, 26–27.
7 Fūshi kaden: Shidehara and Whitehouse, 218; NST, 20.
8 For a discussion of Buddhist usages of the term yūgen, see Nose Asaji, Yūgen ron, in Nose Asaji chosaku shū, II (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1981), 218–222.
9 Nose, 304.
10 NST, 97. Hereafter all translations of Zeami's writings will be my own unless otherwise specified.
11 NST, 119.
13 NST, 51.
15 Fūshi kaden: NST, 20.
8. Ibid., n. 77.
9. Fūshi kaden: NST, 47.
10. See, for example, Nishino Haruo, "Zeami no sakugeki hō: nōsaku no nagare no naka de," *Kokubungaku* 25.1: 66 (1980).
11. For an excellent account of the adaptation of yojō techniques to Nō, see Yashima Masaharu, "Chūsei shijin to shite no Zeami," *Nō: kenkyū to hyōron*, No. 2: 1–9 (1973).
13. NST, 260.
14. NST, 137.
15. NST, 124.
19. NST, 124, 126, 127.
21. NST, 113.