The Thread of Life in the Rhetoric of Noh

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> But the triumph of *Mimesis*, as well as its inevitable tragic flaw, is that the human mind studying literary representations of the historical world can only do so as all authors do—from the limited perspective of their own time and their own work. No more scientific a method or less subjective a gaze is possible, except that the great scholar can always buttress his [*sic*] vision with learning, dedication, and moral purpose. It is this combination, this mingling of styles out of which *Mimesis* emerges. And to my way of thinking, its humanistic example remains an unforgettable one, fifty years after its first appearance in English.——*Edward Said, Introduction to the Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition of Mimesis by Erich Auerbach (xxxii)*

1. Introduction

The subtitle of Auerbach's study is *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, and so it might seem an odd choice of sources for an epigraph to a study of classical Japanese drama. I choose it in order to foreground the issue of the risk of uncritically applying terminology from Western literary theory to non-Western literature. My work on noh has heretofore more often focused on image and symbol, conceptual metaphors such as THE MIND IS A CONTAINER. But it is precisely because this is also the centennial season for commemorating Ezra Pound's publication of his adaptations of the Fenollosa-Hirata translations (*Certain Noble Plays of Japan* and *"Noh" or Accomplishment*, both in 1916) that I feel compelled to revisit and clarify the issue of mimetic and nonmimetic representation as it applies to noh, considering the influence of these translations on the average Westerner's perception of the art as a whole. And a consideration of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A THREAD has proven to be a fortuitous choice for renewed examination of this and other related binary pairs, and renewed consideration of the spectrum in between.

Although noh drama is largely perceived both in Japan and abroad as a highly poetic, symbolic, and imagistic art, it is important to remember that the Yamato troupe represented by Kan'ami and his son Zeami was actually originally renowned for its mimetic style. (We should perhaps consider the possibility that an excessive emphasis on imagism to the neglect of mimesis is a result of the orientalist attitude of early interpreters of noh to the Western world.) It was only after his encounter with Inuō of the Ōmi troupe that Zeami began to develop his hybrid style combining *monomane* with the more poetically suggestive *yūgen*, as he recounts in his treatise *Fūshikaden* and his dictated memoir *Sarugaku Dangi*.

From the earliest years of the formative period of the art of noh, there has been a strong core of plays featuring the mimetic representation of manual labor. In *Sarugaku Dangi*, for example, Zeami mentions *Sumiyaki*, a play about a charcoal burner, a portion of which he later incorporated into his now noncanonical *Akoyanomatsu*; and according to *Sandō* (*Nōsakusho*), the original title of the classic *Matsukaze* was *Shiokumi*, "The Saltmakers."

The rhetorical use of the image of the thread is also closely affiliated with this tradition of depicting manual labor. This is no doubt largely due to the fact that noh performances were often given as expressions of thanks for robes bestowed on the actors by temple patrons, hence the ubiquitous appearance in noh texts of the expression *tabigoromo*, which has the homonymous meaning of either "traveling robe" or "bestowed robe." At first glance, this connection may seem to reinforce the feudal coloring of this medieval art, which does include a considerable number of dramatizations of scenes of paying tribute to rulers, including many featuring the image of the thread. But I would argue that the fact that this was the age of *gekokujō*, the low overturning the high, also leaves ample room for an ironic reading of the subversive potential of such scenes, without leaving the interpreter too vulnerable to accusations of anachronism or romanticism.

While the concept of life as a thread (or string) has a long history in waka poetics, the metaphor was not developed as systematically as it was, for example, in the classical Greek myths of the Fates or Moirea, the three sisters who are often depicted spinning, weaving, and cutting, with these three arts symbolizing conception or birth, life, and death. In the waka tradition, the rhetoric of spinning is generally separate from

the rhetoric of weaving, as it is in noh, and the act of cutting is generally replaced by breaking. Indeed, waka rhetoric in this sense would be more accurately translated LIFE IS A STRING, as the dominant images there are *tama no o*, a string of jewels or beads, and *toshi no o*, a string of years. But one significant difference between the rhetoric of waka and the rhetoric of noh in this connection is that it is thread, *ito*, rather than string, *o*, which comes to dominate in noh. What might this signify, and what other distinctive characteristics might be found?

In this essay, I chart the process by which I came to confirm my intuition that the fifth-category play *Adachigahara* holds a crucial key for understanding the significance of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A THREAD in noh. (I refer to the play using the name by which it is known in the Kanze School and referred to in my primary text, the *Yōkyokushū* edited by Ito Masayoshi in the series Shinchō Koten Bungaku Senshū; the play is known as *Kurozuka* in the other four schools.) I do so by beginning with a survey of the rhetoric of *ito* and *o* in the 21 imperial anthologies of waka as a preliminary index, then comparing those results with a survey of their rhetorical usage in noh, and then demonstrating the particular significance of *Adachigahara* in the cluster of plays employing this device.

2. *Ito* and *O* in the Rhetoric of Waka and Noh

Ito was found to occur over 180 times in the online database of the 21 imperial anthologies of waka on the website of the National Institute of Japanese Literature, mostly in kanji but also in kana. The most common collocations were *aoyagi no ito* (threads of green willow), which occurred over 40 times, and *shiraito* (white thread), often in connection with a waterfall, also occurring over 40 times. *O* was found to occur over 130 times; the most common collocations were *tama no o* (string of jewels or beads), which occurred over 90 times, and *toshi no o* (string of years), which occurred 30 times.

The balance is quite different in noh. *Ito* occurs over 100 times in the online database of texts from Nonomura Keizō's *Yōkyoku 350banshū* maintained by Takahashi Akihiro at Kanazawa College of Art. But *o* occurs only 22 times. While it may be futile to speculate about any conscious or unconscious intention in shaping the canon of noh this way, I do believe this is a statistically significant enough difference to warrant speculation about the effect if not the intention, that is to say the impression created by the resulting canon. Certainly one qualitative difference is that *o* is a high culture image; indeed, for the purposes of this study it would probably best be translated as cord, as it most often suggests a decorative necklace, even when being used figuratively to describe natural phenomena. *Ito*, on the other hand, suggests a much humbler natural material, or low culture; depending on context it might be translated either as string or thread, the primary difference being in the quality of thickness to be conveyed. I postulate two likely reasons for this shift.

One is the change in the constitution of the dominant audience for the respective genres. Waka was primarily a product of aristocratic court culture, while noh had its roots in more common culture and came to be patronized by and dependent upon the daimyō class. I have already referred to the practice of patrons bestowing robes upon performers of noh. But in this study I focus on the smaller unit of the textile arts, thread rather than cloth or robes, because of its more radical symbolism.

But the main reason, I surmise, is the multimodality of the art of noh. Waka was certainly recited aloud and illustrated. But the addition of the elements of instrumental music, dance, the stage and its properties, the masks and the chorus mean that the language is just one of multiple elements in the performance. For this reason, a statistical search of a database can never yield definitive results about trends. There are too many variables in the equation. But it can provide a starting point. In this study, I will take a small corpus of figures of speech related to images of thread as a starting point for a reconsideration of the significance of the combination of mimetic and nonmimetic or figurative representation in noh, with an eye especially toward the limitations of the quantitative method.

Table 1 lists all plays in the standard canon of noh including the word *ito*. The 106 iterations were found to occur in 50 plays, organized here according to the classification system employed by Komparu Kunio in *The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives*.

Table 1. Canonical noh plays including *ito*

Category	Title (Total number of plays)
1 (Deities)	*Ema, Gendayū, Kureha, Nezame, Saoyama, Seiōbo, Shirahige, Shironushi, Tōbōsaku, Ukon* (10)
2 (Warrior ghosts)	*Sanemori, Tamura, Tsunemasa* (3)
3 (Women)	*Bashō, Giō, Izutsu, Obasute, Ohara Gokō, Saigyōzakura, Sekidera Komachi, Sōshiarai, Yoshino Tennin, Yugyōyanagi* (10)
4 (Miscellaneous)	*Aridōshi, Asukagawa, Hachinoki, Kan'yōkyū, Kashiwazaki, Kogō, Makiginu, Miwa, Nishikigi, Sakuragawa, Semimaru, Sotoba Komachi, Takenoyuki, Tenko, Tōei* (15)
5 (Demons)	*Adachigahara, Chōbuku Soga, Genzai Shichimen, Kurama Tengu, Kurumazō, Kuzu, Sagi, Shakkyō, Shōkun, Taema, Tsuchigumo, Yamanba* (12)

As one possible index of trends in rhetorical tradition, I next calculated the ratio of appearances within each category, as the categories differ considerably by size: the second category of warrior ghost plays, for example, contains only 16 plays, while the fourth miscellaneous category contains 75. However, the ratio within each category was found to vary no more than 7 per cent, from 19 per cent of warrior ghost plays to 26 per cent of the deity plays. Possibly significant factors such as gender were considered. Gender was certainly a factor in the low ratio for the second category in comparison with other categories, and that group certainly contains a very low proportion of female characters: only one woman warrior (*Tomoe*) and two companion characters (*Kiyotsune* and *Michimori*). But considering that the main character type in this group is the ghost of a warrior who died in battle, the social status of the characters, primarily members of the Taira elite, is judged to be the primary factor tending to discourage association with mimetic images of the common labor of spinning and weaving, though of course this would not preclude metaphorical usage. For the record, where *ito* did appear in the second category, it was not in connection with any woman.

The fourth category also manifests a relatively low ratio of 20 per cent. My hypothesis is that this might be due to the social class of the main characters. Although this study will ultimately be focusing on the few plays that actually feature mimetic actions of spinning and weaving, none of them are in the fourth miscellaneous category, although one (*Nishikigi*) contains extensive narrative description including onomatopoeic mimesis without the use of the elaborate stage properties found in the more visually mimetic plays in the other three categories. Usage of *ito* in the fourth category is nearly always metaphorical, with the few exceptions being descriptions of rituals or entertainment where the metaphorical connection with strings is a musical one. (This study does not include references to the physical strings of a stringed instrument, which are called *gen*, not *ito*, nor have I indexed references to the strings of a bow, which are also called *gen* or *tsuru*. I have, however, indexed incidences of the expression *itotake*, meaning court music in general, literally strings and bamboo.) My hypothesis is that, in the absence of references to physical strings in connection with mimetic representations of the actual arts of spinning and weaving, the reason for the low ratio of figurative usage of *ito* probably correlates to the higher ratio of mimetic drama in the fourth category, which tends to employ less poetic language.

The first, third, and fifth categories exhibit little variation in frequency, from 24 to 26 per cent. I was nonetheless compelled to consider the reason for the slightly higher ratio in the first and fifth categories, 26 and 25 per cent respectively. Other than the one deity play featuring the mimetic act of weaving using an elaborate stage property (*Kureha*), my main intuition at the time I began this study was that a higher incidence may be due to the prominent depiction of rituals of celebration and praise including stringed music.

But considering that the first and fifth categories (plays of gods and demons) exhibited the highest *concentrations* of the figure (as opposed to *number* of plays regardless of concentration of figure), I also hypothesized that the figure may be significant as a boundary crossing trickster. I thus judge it appropriate to delimit this study to the plays listed in Table 2. These are the plays where the figure appears more than once, suggesting a greater potential for saturated literal and metaphorical significance which should be taken as a primary index of rhetorical trends (while not neglecting the potential significance of single iterations).

Table 2. Noh plays with multiple incidences of *ito*

Category	Title (Incidence)
1 (Deities)	*Kureha* (6), *Saoyama* (3)
2 (Warrior ghosts)	*Tsunemasa* (2)
3 (Women)	*Bashō* (3), *Sekidera Komachi* (5), *Yoshino Tennin* (2)
4 (Miscellaneous)	*Miwa* (3), *Tenko* (2)
5 (Demons)	*Adachigahara* (6), *Taema* (4), *Tsuchigumo* (4), *Yamanba* (4)

Now that we have a sense of the broad generic trends of each group, let us proceed to analyze the precise images utilized, see if any significant trends can be discerned. As calculations have already confirmed there to be no significant difference according to category, rather than surveying these 12 plays in order, I propose to focus on one prominent play and introduce significant connections with the others in relation to it. Both *Kureha* and *Adachigahara* feature six iterations. But whereas *Kureha* has been translated into English and published in a popular Penguin edition with extensive commentary, *Adachigahara* has received far less treatment in English, and so for the purposes of this study I will take *Adachigahara* as my point of departure. The papers Ezra Pound received of Ernest Fenollosa's collaborative work with Hirata Kiichi contain a rough translation of the play, but it was not one of those which Pound chose to finish in either of his published collections.

3. *Adachigahara*: Synopsis

The following synopsis is organized so as to illustrate the musical structure of the play as it is edited by Itō Masayoshi in the first of the three volumes of the Shinchō Nihon Koten Shūsei collection, *Yōkyokushū*.

1. A priest named Yūkei enters with two companions. He is traveling from Tōkōbō, priestly quarters of Nachi. (Nachi is one of the Three Kumano Shrines, together with Hongū and Shingū.) He describes the route he has taken before arriving at Adachigahara in Michinoku, but does not explain precisely the purpose of his journey, saying only that he has some prayer, wish or desire rising in his heart (*kokoro ni tatsuru negai*).
2. The priests hear a woman's voice coming from within a humble hut, complaining of her weariness, the cold of autumn, and the unsettled nature of her life.
3. After lengthy negotiations conducted through the door of the hut, Yūkei finally persuades the woman to offer the priests lodging for the night.
4. The priest notices the woman's spindle and spinning wheel and asks her about them. She reluctantly accedes to his request for a demonstration of their use.
5. As she spins, the woman laments her miserable state. The priest exhorts her to have faith in the possibility of salvation, but she only continues to tell tales of woe.
6. The woman announces that she will go out to gather firewood and exits, asking that they not look in her inner chamber.
7. In the comic interlude, the priest's servant tries but ultimately fails this test of his will power. He peeks into the woman's room and sees it filled with piles of bloody corpses.
8. Confirming the servant's report, Yūkei recalls an old poem about a demon said to live in the area, and decides they should escape.
9. But just as they try to leave, the woman returns, transformed into demonic form, raging at their violation of her injunction.
10. The priests call upon the guardian spirits of their faith to battle the demon, who eventually weakens and disappears into the stormy night.

4. *Adachigahara*: Literary and Dramatic Features

In this section, I will explore significant literary and dramatic features of the play, focusing on four aspects in the context of the art as a whole: topos, characterization, intertextuality, and multimodality. I will then proceed to analyze the specific figure of the thread, with reference to other plays in Table 2 which prominently feature the same rhetoric.

4.1 Topos

Yūkei's announcement at the end of the opening scene, that he has arrived at Adachigahara in Michinoku, would have been an immediate tipoff to the audience in Zeami's time as much as it would still be to the average fan of noh today, that if this is the last play on the program for the day, a demon is likely to appear. The simple source waka, explained at length in my 2012 essay on the Michinoku topos ("Topos, Tradition, Translatability"), opens with a triple bang:

> *michinoku no adachigahara no kurozuka ni oni komoreru to iu wa makoto ka*
> (In Michinoku, at Adachigahara, in a black mound, a demon is said to live. Is it true?)

This poem, by Taira no Kanemori, is from the *Shūishū*, the third imperial anthology of poetry, completed during the first decade of the eleventh century. It is not a particularly illustrious poem. According to the preface, it was sent to an acquaintance upon hearing that the man had many sisters. It is a joke with sexual innuendo, and as such is contained in the "Miscellaneous" book of the anthology.

There are 17 plays in the standard canon employing the Michinoku topos, six in the third category, five in the fourth category, and six in the fifth category, and this poem is explicitly cited in four of the fifth-category plays: *Ōeyama*, *Rashōmon*, *Genzai Shichimen*, and *Adachigahara*. The first two are spectacular battles by warriors with monsters; the last two leave openings more like plays featuring the topos in the other two categories where it appears (third and fourth), to take the isolated (or exotic) ambience as space to ponder the suggestion that the demon is a symbol of spiritual or psychological warfare. In *Genzai Shichimen*, the historical priest Nichiren (known as an egalitarian who preached that men and women are equally capable of enlightenment) facilitates a woman's liberation from demonic possession. The portrayal of Yūkei in *Adachigahara* will be explicated in the section on characterization below by way of contrast with the depiction of Nichiren in *Genzai Shichimen*. For the moment let it suffice to say that the Michinoku topos also functions in the other 13 plays in this group, *sans* Adachigahara and Kurozuka, to suggest the exploration of spiritual depths, as Michinoku is etymologically a contraction of *michi no oku*, and my hypothesis is that it is equipoised to evoke both associations in *Adachigahara*, as opposed to its tendency to pull in one way more than the other in the others.

Other topological features of note include the mention of passage through Nishiki no Hama (Brocade Beach) at the end of Scene 1, where the phrase *oriori* is used to amplify the theme of the textile arts, with its implications of weaving and folding as well as seasonal time. This figurative language should be noted as an indication of the reservation I raised about the limitations of a corpus approach to the rhetoric of noh. It would be extremely difficult to gather all related figures of speech, and yet focus only on a single term such as *ito* is obviously too limiting, despite the radicality of its place in the manufacturing process. It can only be a rudimentary radical at most.

4.2 Characterization

Scholarly opinion varies as to whether Yūkei can be identified with a historical personage. Given that limitation, we can still imagine the effect of the very specific style of naming, especially in contrast with the nameless woman. Yūkei's vague statement about the purpose of his journey provokes the spectator to imagine various possibilities. Is he on a religious mission to expand the Kumano network? There is at least one other noncanonical noh play that dramatizes such a mission: *Go'ō*, also known as *Natori no Onna*, revived on the noh stage in 1993 (Yokota 1997:224). It is also set in Michinoku. But why would Yūkei not explicitly state his mission? This sort of ambiguity is what often leads the literary-minded to imagine the possibility of some personal quest, perhaps some private problem that renders him a little less pious and a little more human, a little closer to the nameless woman in spirit, and the classical canon is replete with a finely nuanced spectrum of such degrees of revelation. Personal quests are not unknown in noh; not all encounters between travelers and supernatural spirits are pure coincidence. Perhaps the most famous and extreme example is the priest Rensei in the second-category play *Atsumori*, who before entering the priesthood had been known as the Kumagai Naozane, the warrior who killed Taira no Atsumori in battle and entered the priesthood on a quest

to pray for the salvation of Atsumori's soul and expiate his sin. Yūkei might well fit in any number of places along the spectrum in between.

Characterization of the woman will be treated below in the sections on intertextuality and multimodality.

4.3 Intertextuality

In addition to the matter of the waka topos, the two major intertextual issues in *Adachigahara* are raised in the *shidai* at the end of Scene 4 and the *rongi* at the end of Scene 5.

In the *shidai* at the end of Scene 4, as the woman demonstrates the use of the spindle and spinning wheel, she says,

> *maso-o no ito o kurikaeshi, maso-o no ito o kurikaeshi, mukashi o ima ni nasabaya,*
> *shizu ga tsumiso no yoru mademo, yowataru waza koso monoukere.*
> (Spinning this thread of hemp, spinning this thread of hemp, if only I could loop back the past.
> Plying the thread spun by a humble woman into the night, passing the days this way in this world is so miserable.)

Although it is fragmentary, the literate spectator could be expected to recognize this allusion to the legend of Shizuka Gozen, mistress of Minamoto Yoshitsune. According to legend, after Yoshitsune's death, Shizuka was captured and forced to perform before the Shogun Yoritomo, who had hounded his half-brother Yoshitsune to death. In her defiant performance, Shizuka sings a song which is a clear declaration of her undying love for Yoshitsune even as it repeatedly impresses the ear with echoes of her name. In the third-category play *Futari Shizuka*, for example, her ghost possesses a woman picking herbs in a field and relives the scene.

> *shizu ya shizu, shizu no odamaki, kurikaeshi, mukashi o ima ni nasu yoshi mogana*
> (Hush, be humble, like the shizu cloth [woven from thread from] a humble woman's spool,
> Just as it loops around, so I too wish I could bring back the past.)

This allusion serves as another reminder of the limitations of quantitative corpus manipulation in the study of the rhetoric of noh. *Odamaki* (spool) is another image that would need to be added to the search terms for an exhaustive study of the rhetoric of textile arts in noh, and it could be alluded to as it is here without being explicitly named in any number of other passages.

The next section important for our discussion of intertextuality is the *rongi* at the end of Scene 5 of *Adachigahara*, a poetic catalog full not only of images of thread but also of allusions to *The Tale of Genji*.

> *somosomo gojō atari nite yūgao no yado o tazuneshi wa*
> *hikage no ito no kanmuri kishi, sore wa nadakaki hito ya ran.*
> *kamo no miare ni kazarishi wa, itoke no kuruma to koso kike.*
> *itozakura, iro mo sakarini saku koro wa, kuru hito oki haru no kure.*
> *ho ni izuru aki no itosusuki, tsukinoyo oya machinu ran.*
> *ima hatashizu ga kuru ito no*
> *nagaki inochi no tsurenasa o, nagaki inochi no tsurenasa o,*
> *omoi akashi no urachidori, ne o nomi hitori nakiakasu, ne o nomi hitori nakiakasu.*
> (The one who visited Yūgao's lodgings in the area of Fifth Avenue
> Wore a fringed hat to shade his face from the sun, he must have been a famous man.
> The decorations used at the Kamo Festival were carriage fringes, one hears.
> The fine strands of the blossoming cherry, just when its allure was at its height,
> That was when people came around, an evening in spring.
> The fine strands of plumegrass in autumn come to a head, as if waiting for a moonlit night.
> And here, a humble weaver spins her thread.
> Oh, the misery of this long life, the misery of this long life.
> Like the plovers on the beach at Akashi, I spend my nights in thought.

Sleeping alone, I cry the night away; sleeping alone, I cry the night away.)

Leaving analysis of the thread imagery for the section on rhetoric below, here let us confirm the multiple allusions to *The Tale of Genji*. Yūgao, one of Genji's first loves, is the main character of Chapter 4. The Kamo Festival refers to the famous carriage fight in Chapter 9 where another of Genji's loves, Rokujō, widow of the Crown Prince, was humiliated by the retinue of her rival, Genji's principal wife Aoi. And Akashi refers to the lover Genji took when he was in exile at Suma (Chapter 13), who went on to become his principal wife after Aoi's death.

We are thus presented with a question: if this woman is truly only a humble local spinster, where would she have acquired this knowledge? Or if the voice is not hers, whose is it? We are reminded that the Japanese term for the chorus is *jiutai*, ground singing. As in English, *ji* or ground refers not only to the earth below our feet but the ground for literary figures (*mon*), like the relation between warp and woof in weaving. And why these particular episodes? The characterization of this nameless woman is a complex product of topos, intertextuality, and multimodality, and so let us carry the observations we have accumulated thus far to the next section.

4.4 Multimodality

Many noh plays are open to interpretation as to whether a mysterious character is "really" a god or demon in their "true" form, or a medium or innocent bystander possessed by a god or demon, or whether the possessing spirit has no "true" form but simply materializes as it pleases. Klein (1991) offers a particularly helpful discussion of this issue. Even if there is no one definitive interpretation, even if the ambiguity is intentional for aesthetic effect, it can still enhance that effect to know not only the complex intertextual clues, but be attuned to multimodal clues as well. One such multimodal clue is the mask.

The mask used for the demon of *Adachigahara* is the Hannya mask. This is the mask that is also used in *Aoi no Ue* and *Dōjōji*. This may be significant for geopolitical as well as intertextual and multimodal reasons. Although authorship of *Adachigahara* is uncertain, it has traditionally been considered a play in the Ōmi sarugaku lineage, and Itō Masayoshi considers this theory conceivable (398). *Adachigahara* would thus be connected to *Aoi no Ue*, which is also known to have been performed by the Ōmi sarugaku actor Inuō, in two ways. This is potentially significant for the interpretation of the woman in *Adachigahara* because, although commentators tend to treat her as a demon through and through, it is eminently clear that no one considered Rokujō to be a simple demon. Murasaki Shikibu creates exquisitely ambiguous touches in *The Tale of Genji* such as the scent of poppy seeds that Rokujō's spirit carried back home to her after the possession scene dramatized in the noh play. Was she the possessor? Was she herself possessed? A famous poem in Murasaki Shikibu's diary suggests yet another alternative view. The given context is a painting depicting a woman possessed. As a priest performs a rite of exorcism on her, the woman's husband sits to the side reading a sutra. The poem reads as follows.

naki hito ni, kagoto o kakete, wazurau mo, ono ga kokoro no, oni ni ya wa aranu
(The one who blames the deceased for their torments might have a demon in their own heart.)

It is a sophisticated view of the idea of projecting one's guilt and complexes onto others which would seem to be supremely applicable to the scenes in *The Tale of Genji* both of the death of Yūgao and the death of Aoi, treated extensively in Bargen (1997). And it is now my turn to take this millennial poem as a venerable precedent that makes me sufficiently emboldened to submit that the poetic catalog in *Adachigahara* may suggest that it might not be all that anachronistic to consider the possibility that the room full of corpses in the depths of the black mound is a projection of the traveler's own fears.

With this foundation of knowledge about the history of this particular play, let us next examine the rhetoric related to the image of the thread in *Adachigahara*, as we found it concentrated all in one scene, by way of juxtaposition with a small set of the most closely affiliated plays. But before we proceed, just one more note about the method of quantification I have employed. In addition to the one incidence of *ito* in the line which alluded to Shizuka's song in Scene 4 of *Adachigahara* (which is actually amplified by a repetition of the line, for a total of seven), and the five incidences in the poetic catalog in Scene 5, there are three additional echoes.

Two of these, both in Scene 4, are the use of the verb *itonamu*, meaning to make a living. This has nothing to do with thread etymologically, coming rather from *itoma nashi*, meaning no time to pause for a rest. But the echo should be noted. The other echo is the use of the verb *itou* in the *kuse* before the poetic catalog in Scene 5; this is also unrelated etymologically, meaning to loathe or shun. In compiling this data, I have followed this same rule for calculating incidence. If a line was repeated, the repetition was counted as an amplification rather than a discrete incident. Homophonic amplifications such as *itonami* and *itou* were also not counted when ranking plays for concentration, but are only noted as supplementary.

5. *Ito* in *Adachigahara* and Related Plays

In Table 2 above, I compiled a list of 12 plays with the highest concentrations of figurative expressions including *ito*. I next considered the degree to which *Adachigahara* is representative of that group and of the canon as a whole, comparing its configurations of *ito* with those in the 100+ incidences in the 50 plays I identified. Limitations of space prevent me from presenting all that data here, but my conclusion was that, while awareness of those 12 constellations can serve as a useful point of entry, high concentration of a particular set of figurative language does not correlate with status as representative or characteristic rhetoric for the art as a whole; it rather indicates the greater importance of focusing on idiosyncratic or unique configurations and clarifying what these signify about the position of the work under consideration in the canon as a whole. This shift in focus I find more productive in order to clarify the criteria which have made certain plays more or less open to various readings, thus modulating their openness or accessibility to readers and spectators today and their potential to subvert dominant interpretations, as I have found this to be a particularly tough point of contention in the resistance to subversive readings of *Adachigahara*. And so I now return to the criterion of mimesis, and present in Table 3 four clusters of configurations of *ito* in four plays from Table 2, those with the highest degree of mimetic representation, in order by category.

Table 3. Configurations of *ito* in *Kureha*, *Miwa*, *Taema*, and *Adachigahara*

Kureha	
tachiyoru nami no shiraito	white threads of waves rise and approach [the shore]
hitori wa ito o torihiki	one draws the thread
ito o torihiku takumi	the artisan who draws the thread
ito o hiku ki o ba kureha	the wood for drawing the thread is called the shuttle
furuki tameshi o hiku ito	the thread drawing on ancient precedent
Miwa	
mada aoyagi no ito nagaku	still young, long were the strands of green willow
musubu ya hayatama no ono chikara	will we ever be united? like a string of beads, by the power of Hayatama if not my own
sasagani no ito kurikaeshi yuku hodo ni	looping the spidery thread as she followed along
sono ito no miwake nokorishi yori	as three loops of the thread remained
Taema	
shiraito no tada hitosuji zo *isshin furan*	like a single strand of white thread, may I be singleminded and unperturbed
are koso hasu no ito o somete *kakete hosareshi sakuragi*	the blossoming cherry tree where the lotus threads are hung after they are dyed
nigori ni shimanu hasu no ito o *susugite kiyomeshi hito no kokoro*	the lotus threads unsullied by the mud are rinsed and purified—so may the human heart
mayoi o hosu wa hizakura no *iro haete kakeshi hasu no itozakura*	to be drained of delusion, the lotus threads are hung on the brilliant crimson cherry tree with strands just as fine
Adachigahara	
maso-o no ito o kurikaeshi	spinning the hemp thread over and over
hikage no ito no kanmuri	a hat fringed to shade against the sun
itoke no kuruma	a fringed carriage
itozakura	fine strands of blossoming cherry
itosusuki	fine strands of plumegrass
ima hatashizu ga kuru ito no, *nagaki inochi no tsurenasa*	the misery of a life as long as the thread spun by this humble weaver

Note the complex patterning of literal and figurative expressions. These may be helpfully organized as follows.

The five examples from the first-category play *Kureha* exhibit a regular pattern. The literal description of the act of weaving including three explicit references to thread is enclosed between two metaphorical descriptions: an introduction featuring a metaphorical image of waves compared to white threads, and a conclusion featuring the metaphorical use of the image of the thread to symbolize the preservation of tradition.

In the first line from the fourth-category play *Miwa*, the image of a long strand of willow is used to metaphorically express the desire for a long-lasting relationship. I have cheated a bit here by including one line (the second) including *o* rather than *ito*, but justify my decision by the dense proximity of the first three lines, which are presented here in their totality with no ellipses; it would have been odd to omit it. Only the fourth line is separated, and even that only by a few lines. The second line featuring *o* rather than *ito* contains an extremely complex allusion. This immediately segues into *musubu ya* (will we ever be united?) *hayatama*, the names of a pair of deities (feminine and masculine, traditionally identified with Izanami and Izanagi) enshrined at Kumano, although the play otherwise would seem to have nothing to do with Kumano, being set at Miwa Shrine in Yamato (Nara). *Tama no o* (string of beads or jewels) is embedded in the longer phrase *hayatama no ono chikara* (by the power of Hayatama), *o* being a homophone for string and man, and *ono* meaning self, hence raising the question of whether the consummation of the relationship can be accomplished by the woman's power alone or only with divine aid. This immediately merges with *sasagani no ito*, where the spider is figurative but the thread is literal. The final fourth reference is a literal one, as the spool of thread she had attached to the hem of her lover's robe led her to his abode with only three loops to spare.

Both *Miwa* and the fifth-category *Taema* are deeply religious plays, but *Miwa* depicts a syncretic relationship between Shinto and Buddhism, with a Buddhist priest expressing reverence and awe for a Shinto deity (in striking contrast to the attitude of Yūkei in *Adachigahara*), in a world where Shinto deities were far more often treated as subsidiary. *Taema* is more strongly Buddhist, concluding with the transformation of the spirit of Chūjōhime into a bodhisattva. While the image of the lotus threads, dyed to be woven into a mandala, is a strongly sustained one, the focus on threads rather than the flower enables a more complex treatment than an attempt at unity of a more conventional poetic image would have. Interestingly, the four lines follow a pattern similar to *Kureha*, with two mimetic descriptions of hanging threads to dry enclosed between two metaphorical descriptions: an introduction again featuring white thread as a symbol of pure singlemindedness, and a more colorfully intriguing conclusion featuring a pivot, *hasu no itozakura*, with *ito* (thread) doubling between *hasu no ito* (lotus thread) and *itozakura* (fine strands of blossoming cherry). The juxtaposition of white and red, and the idea of being drained of delusion even as the threads are dyed a brilliant crimson, are particularly noteworthy.

To summarize: As opposed to the pattern in *Kureha* and *Taema* whereby mimetic action is encased in metaphors, the metaphorical and mimetic figures in *Miwa* rather split into two parts in that order, while *Adachigahara* strikingly reverses the pattern of *Kureha* and *Taema*: the poetic catalog of a fringed hat, fringed carriage, fine strands of blossoming cherry, and fine strands of plumegrass is enclosed between narrative descriptions of the woman's mimetic actions.

Viewed as a group, the simplicity of the rhetoric of *Kureha* and *Adachigahara*, as represented by those two clusters of figurative expressions, stands in stark contrast to the complexity of *Miwa* and *Taema*, despite the affinities between the two pairs, and it may be easy to unconsciously assume that rhetorical simplicity is an inevitable result of the emphasis in the former two plays on mimesis over metaphor. But there is one more element of performance that complicates the perception of simplicity or complexity when considering the nature of noh as total theater rather than as armchair literature, and that is the elaborate stage properties used in *Kureha* and *Adachigahara*. *Kureha* features a full-size loom, and *Adachigahara* features a full-size spindle and spinning wheel. *Miwa* and *Taema* feature more abstract properties representing a mountain and a well, respectively. Stage photos may be found online at sites such as <the-noh.com>.

The following illustration from *Nōga Taikan*, a collection of paintings of scenes from noh plays by Tsukioka Kōgyo (1869-1927), is an essentially accurate representations of the relative size of the properties used in *Adachigahara*. I next present the illustration of the woman spinning together with the poetic catalog, and invite the reader to reconsider the effect of the combination of the mimesis and metaphor.

The one who visited Yūgao's lodgings in the area of Fifth Avenue
wore a fringed hat that shades the face from the sun; he must have been a famous man.
The decorations used at the Kamo Festival were carriage fringes, one hears.
The fine strands of the blossoming cherry, just when its allure was at its height,
that was when people came around, an evening in spring.
The fine strands of plumegrass in autumn come to a head, as if waiting for a moonlit night.
And here, a humble weaver spins her thread.
Oh, the misery of this long life, the misery of this long life.
Like the plovers on the beach at Akashi, I spend my nights in thought.
Sleeping alone, I cry the night away; sleeping alone, I cry the night away.

6. The Patterning of the Canon

At the beginning of Section 5, I stated my intent to reverse my usual approach of seeking to identify major trends through quantitative analysis, to focus rather on idiosyncratic configurations and seek to clarify what these signify about the nature of the canon as a whole. The process of gradually zooming in to focus on this small group of four plays has indeed confirmed my sense that generic rhetorical trends are difficult to define precisely because the current canon was formed by a process of reduction, choosing the best plays from thousands and positioning them much as figure and ground poems were placed in the imperial anthologies of waka, with an editorial eye toward aiming for variety within convention. The three plays that came to form the group of three female demons (*sankijo*)—*Adachigahara*, *Aoi no Ue*, and *Dōjōji*—coalesced as a group precisely because of mutual differences. They are set in three types of locations: distant province, capital, nearby province. They feature three types of deuteragonists: traveling priest, local priest, resident priest. They feature three types of women; these are more difficult to type due to variations in source texts and ambiguities in stated identity, further complicated by the various staging options available: shades of costuming, complexions of masks, and especially colors of wigs, from black to red to white. And perhaps the most important pattern is the variety of conclusions. Is the demon conquered or does she escape? Aoi appears to have been rescued at the end of the noh play, but readers of *The Tale of Genji* know she did not survive the night. Who knows where the demon who jumped into the Hidaka River at the end of *Dōjōji* swam off to, or when she might reappear? Likewise for the demon of *Adachigahara*, who was weakened but escaped,

disappearing into the stormy night—if she ever even existed outside the men's imaginations (an interpretation supported by the language shifting from *koe*, voice, to *oto*, sound).

The same patterning principle can be observed in *Kureha*, *Taema*, and *Adachigahara*. (I exclude *Miwa* not only because four's a crowd but because, while its narrative included a spool of thread, it did not feature the mimetic action of a textile art like the weaving, dying, and spinning of these three.) Here I will focus on the main characters, as they are more clearly defined than the *sankijo*: from foreign weavers offering tribute to their ruler, to a noblewoman who chose religious devotion over submission to a political marriage, to an anonymous woman in a remote province who is somehow conversant in *The Tale of Genji* and also suggests in the *kuse* in Scene 5 (which was not treated above because it contains no references to thread), between the *shidai* alluding to Shizuka and the poetic catalog in the *rongi*, that she might have been up to a debate with Yūkei on par with Komachi's verbal sparring with the priests from Mount Kōya in *Sotoba Komachi*—if only he had.

The *kuse* in *Adachigahara* offers a lesson in the greatest limitation of quantitative corpus analysis: the risk of overlooking significant absences. After Yūkei admonishes the woman for her shallowness in complaining of her misery (*hakana no hito no kotonoha ya*), with repeated references to the physical body, the woman counters with references to the mind. She also refers to the four elements and five and six levels of existence—and while many characters in noh plays refer to the five and six levels of existence, Komachi in *Sotoba Komachi* is the only other character in the canon to refer to the four elements.

In her understated references to binary opposites such as past and present, light and dark, mind and body, human and nonhuman, young and old, could the woman of *Adachigahara* in this scene be suggesting that it is the missing thread that transforms such binary pairs into a spectrum that enables the four elements to somehow adhere and take form, if only to be trapped in the cycle of life and death?

7. Conclusion: The Relevance of Noh Today

But how is any of this relevant today? Rather than searching for expressions that fit the preconceived idea that LIFE IS A THREAD, I began by simply gathering threads. Many wise things have been written about spiders and networks and webs, from Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) to Patricia Klindienst on Philomela in "The Voice of the Shuttle Is Ours" (1984) to Nancy K. Miller on Arachne in "Arachnologies" (1986), but I still wanted to see if I could possibly add anything useful from a different direction. What gradually became apparent in the process of collection was that the most outstanding examples of employment of the image of the thread in noh, both mimetic and metaphorical, indeed share the qualities of many of the essential conceptual metaphors identified by cognitive linguists such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in works such as their classic *Metaphors We Live By*. The bloody chamber of the black mound of Adachigahara is one example of the conceptual metaphor THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, and the entire Michinoku region functions similarly as a marginal container for all that the Center wishes to repress and project onto the Other. Expressions of this concept in English literature have been thoroughly examined by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1984), and that legacy continues to be challenged and refined thanks to contributions by Gayatri Spivak ("Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," 1986) and others. Michinoku is also strongly linked with the theme of the taboo against peeking and the violation of privacy. It is invoked in the noncanonical play *Unoha* in connection with the myth of Hohodemi breaking his promise and violating Toyotama's privacy, peeking into her chamber when she was in the middle of giving birth, the connection being the local Michinoku craft of weaving with feathers, which is how Toyotama's birth chamber was thatched.

The subtly powerful expression in noh of this sort of perennial wisdom is the primary reason I argue for the relevance of noh today. There is good reason it continues to inspire writers of both classical kabuki (*Ōshū Adachigahara* by Chikamatsu Hanji, 1762) and modern kabuki dance (*Kurozuka* by Kimura Tomiko, Kineya Sakichi IV and Hanayagi Jusuke II, 1939), as well as the author Yumemakura Baku of *Onmyōji* fame, who merges the woman of *Adachigahara* with Shizuka in his novel *Kurozuka*, and whose work has proceeded to inspire the manga artist Noguchi Takashi and the anime director Araki Tetsurō. The late Tada Tomio explored related issues in two of his new noh plays: the mind-body connection in *Mumyō no I* (The Well of Ignorance;

cf. Yokota 1991) and spiders in *Kumozoku no Gyakushū* (The Spider Clan Strikes Back). *Ito* has come to appear to me to represent desire for connection, not only between individuals but between body and mind.

In *Kakyō*, Zeami cites this verse by a Rinzai priest.

> *shōji korai, hōtō kairai, issen tayuru toki, rakuraku rairai*
> Life and death, come and go: marionettes in a puppet show.
> If a single string should snap, tumble, tumble, down they go. (115)

Certainly it should be acknowledged that excessive emphasis on traditional arts such as calligraphy, the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and noh might carry the risk of perpetuating an orientalistic perception of Japan. It is hoped that this study will not simply perpetuate such biases, but rather contribute to the global endeavor to promote respect for multicultural diversity beyond simplistic binaries such as masculine and feminine and East and West, by consciously contextualizing the representation of traditional culture with awareness of such risks. The results of this focus on the figure of the thread with a distinction between metaphor and mimesis fulfilled my expectation that it would lead to some enlightening discoveries that I hope may make a modest contribution to that endeavor.

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