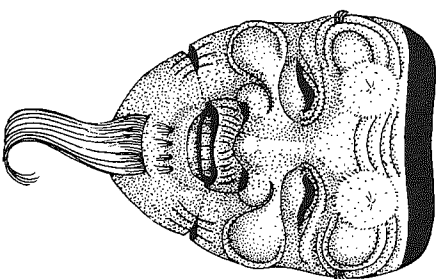


Zeami's Style

The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo

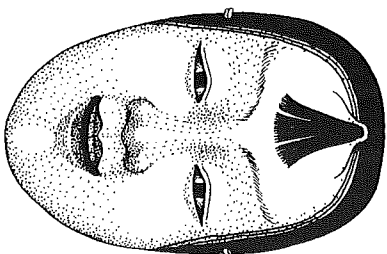


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CHAPTER 1

A Documentary Biography



THE PARADOXICAL fabric of documentary history most reveals Zeami a hidden man, deeply shrouded in the last extant threads of the material of his life. There is no portrait, not even the sort done long after its subject's death by an artist who never saw him. There are a few personal artifacts, a mask he may have worn on stage, some letters, ten playscripts in his hand, three holograph copies of dramatic treatises, even a set of artistic memoirs of a sort, but these pieces are scant in biographical detail. The circumstances of his personal life seem to have occupied him infrequently in his writing. He is concerned, rather, with practical matters—the actor's training, the troupe member's responsibilities, the satisfaction of a fickle patron—or sometimes with dauntingly abstract aesthetic (and perhaps ethical) principles.

We can speculate about the contours of Zeami's life in a general way, assuming that particular experiences lie behind his remarks, but we find little indication of the day-by-day texture of his time. A handful of specific events from his eighty-odd years, a few enticing images, animate the mystery of Zeami's biography. They seem at times to fit together, to delineate a man of yet palpable substance, but as we try to move closer, to regard him in greater detail, the substance dissolves into a shadow, cast by the light of our speculation on the body of Zeami's artistic and intellectual accomplishment.

One can say certain things with confidence:

He wrote some thirty-odd plays.

He met his first major patron in 1374.

He viewed his art as his vocation.

His intellectual environment was eclectic.

He was a formalist: first he chose his topic; then he erected a structure for it; finally he set his lyrics down on the page.

He beget an artistic tradition and fathered several children.

After the death of his favorite son, he sailed in exile to Sado Island.

One can make various judgments about his accomplishments:

He was the foremost playwright of the *noh* theater.

His tradition represents the classical epitome of *noh*.

He effected a synthesis of classical poetics with popular song, dance, and drama, thereby revitalizing the classical tradition and broadening its appeal.

He made free and sometimes rather loose use of his intellectual environment.

His treatises on performance represent the first pragmatically centered work on aesthetics in Japanese intellectual history.

One can speculate . . . or fantasize:

He may have turned his back on his own artistic lineage.

He may have been a spy.

He may have owed his earliest successes, in part at least, to the homoerotic interests of his patrons.

He may have been the quintessential "Zen artist."

He may have been a *Ji* sect priest.

His son may have been murdered, and he himself exiled, for restorationist activities.

In this chapter we will focus primarily on what can be confidently asserted about Zeami's life. At times we will generalize about circumstances that may lie behind the facts. And we will, on occasion, touch on some of the speculation, which is often intriguing if not always well substantiated. Our tools will be the few extant documents of biographical relevance, general remarks from Zeami's treatises, tentative genealogical investigation, and miscellaneous information about the performing arts in Japan in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

We make our beginning in 1374. This is not the year of Zeami's birth, but in respect to the *noh* theater, it is every bit as significant. By this time, his father, Kannami, had attained broad popularity in the provinces around Kyoto and could count to his credit certain successes in the capital itself as well. Not until 1374 did his troupe play for the first time before the seventeen-year-old shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408). Zeami was twelve.¹ How Yoshimitsu came to attend this performance is unknown, but one of his advisers, a certain Ebina no Naami, seems to have been instrumental in directing the young shogun's attention to Kannami's troupe.² In Zeami's words: "The role of Okina used to be played by the oldest member of the troupe, but on the occasion of the Imagumano performance, this custom was changed. Ebina no Naami suggested that the head of the troupe should play the role himself, since this was the first number the shogun would see. Kannami therefore took the part; this was the first time the play was done in such a manner."³

This performance is often cited as a turning point in Japanese dramatic history; it not only marks the beginning of shogunal patronage for Kannami's troupe, but also signals a change in the orientation of *sarugaku*: with this performance, its ostensibly religious purpose was clearly subordinated to that of entertainment.⁴ This may not in fact have been the first time such a shift had taken place, but this is the first documented reference to it. The performance is important for yet another reason: it also marks the beginning of a radical transformation in the aesthetic direction of *sarugaku*. From this point on, aristocratic taste and patronage were to grow increasingly important, and the popular and courtified origins of the art were to exercise their influence from the shadows of the past.⁵

The first documents of direct bearing on Zeami's beginnings—both genealogical and aesthetic—concern the birth of his father, Kannami (1333-84), and the early history of the troupe. Of these, the most interesting—if not most reliable—comes from an inscription on the portrait of Kanze Kojirō Nobumitsu (1435-1516), Kannami's great-grandson:

Hattori had three fine sons. The god Kasuga Myōjin instructed the eldest saying, "Serve me with music." The boy's father would not obey, and the son soon died. A second son also died, so the parents took the youngest son and went into the province of Yamato and there made obsequence to Kannon at the Hase temple. They met a priest on the road and asked him to name their son, and he named him Kanze. Thereupon they made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Kasuga Myōjin and, following the instructions of the god, put their son in his service. So it happened that the son stayed in Yamato and changed his name to Yūzaki and performed at the shrine of the god.⁶

The connection of the name Yūzaki with Kannami is important; the Kanze troupe was originally known as the Yūzaki troupe (from a place name in Yamato) and is often mentioned as such in Zeami's treatises.⁷ Although the intriguing story of Kannami's naming cannot be confirmed in other sources, the mention of the Hattori clan coincides with Zeami's own, far drier report of his father's origins:

Yamato *sarugaku* has been handed down directly from Hata no Kōkatsu. Ōmi *sarugaku* descends from a certain Ki no Kami and is, therefore, of the Ki clan. The Takeda, Deai, and Hōshō troupes of Yamato are all closely interrelated. For generations, the Takeda troupe has possessed the Original Mask [carved by Prince Shōtoku and bestowed on Kōkatsu]. The Deai troupe was originally Yamada *sarugaku*. A certain Ōra no Naka adopted the son of one Suginoki, a man of Heike descent from Hattori in the province of Iga. The adopted son had a child by his mistress in Kyoto. This child was adopted by Mino Tayū of Yamada, and he in turn sired three sons: the eldest, Hōshō Tayū; the middle, Shōtchi; and the youngest, Kanze; all descended from this one man.⁸

The disconnected choppieness of this passage obscures some of the relationships it intends to explain, but certain important assertions are

made. Sarugaku, the direct ancestor of noh, is the general topic. The several independent troupes of Yamato sarugaku, Zeami's own tradition, are to be distinguished from Ōmi sarugaku, a rather different kind of sarugaku influential on Zeami later. Among the Yamato troupes mentioned, the Deai seems to have disbanded already by Zeami's time, but the Takeda (or Emai, later Konparu) and Hōshō troupes survive to this day.*

Kannami finds mention as "Kanze," and the interconnectedness of the Yamato troupes is clearly shown by the fact that Kannami's eldest brother was adopted into the Hōshō sarugaku troupe and later assumed its leadership. The other brother, Shōichi, seems to have become the leader of the Deai troupe, following in his father's footsteps. The identity of the rest of those mentioned is uncertain,⁹ so we turn to yet a third version of Kannami's origins.

A document known as the Kanze-Fukuda Genealogy, which first came to public attention in 1967, has given birth to some fascinating speculation about Kannami's line and the fate of Zeami and his sons. The document sets out Kannami's family tree as shown in Figure 4.¹⁰ This third account corresponds closely to Zeami's own. Zeami's "Ōra naka" can be identified as Nakashige of the Ōra clan. Hōshō Tayū and Shōichi are not mentioned by name, but might well be Lemitsu's two unnamed sons. Kannami's rise to popularity in the capital is recorded as having occurred in 1374, just as we saw above. Most intriguing of all, the genealogy identifies Kannami's mother as the sister of Kusunoki Masashige, a major supporter of the southern court against the Ashikaga shōgunate. Though no other extant documents confirm this, the possibility of such a connection is of great interest because of the ultimate sad fate of Zeami and his sons.

Figure 5 sums up Kannami's origins according to all three accounts. The genealogy and the other documents do not reveal the date of Kannami's birth, but Zeami writes that his father died at the age of fifty-two, and an entry in the death register *Jōrakuki* (Record of Long-Lasting Ease) notes his passing in 1384.¹¹ Counting backward and making allowances for the traditional way of reckoning age, one arrives at the year 1333.

Little more is known about Zeami's birth than his father's. The actual date has been the subject of some controversy, but it seems fairly certain that he was born in 1363.¹² The Kanze-Fukuda Genealogy identifies him (under the name Motokiyo) as follows:¹³ "Childhood name, Kiyomoto. Born in the eighteenth year of Shōhei [1363] at the Kamijima residence

* There are five schools of shite acting today. The four Yamato troupes—the Takeda (or Emai, or Enmai), Hōshō, Yūzaki, and Sakato—are the direct ancestors of four of these (the Konparu, Hōshō, Kanze, and Kongō, respectively). The fifth is the Kita school, established in the 17th century.

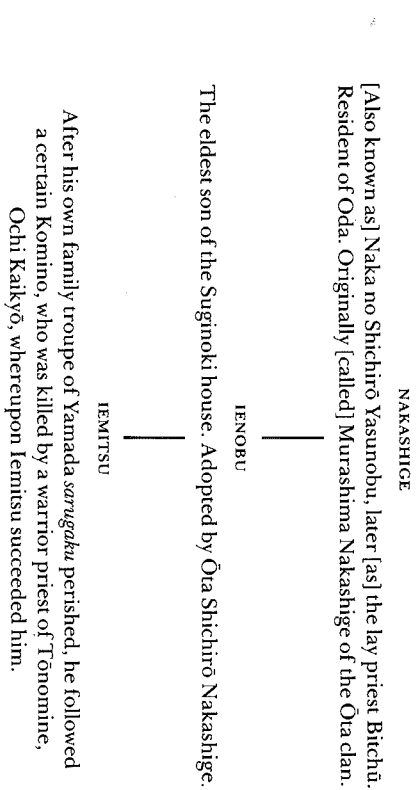


Fig. 4 One account of the family tree of Zeami's father, Kannami. Based on Kubo Fumio, "'Kanze-Fukuda keizu' o meguru shomondai," *Kōkugo to kokubun gaku*, 434 (May 1960): 57-65.

in Nagaoka. Mother, the daughter of the priest Takehara Daikaku, lord of the fief of Obata. First entrusted to Konparu Yasaburō Katsukiyo consequently known as Yasaburō Ujikiyo.*

There are no other documents relating directly to Zeami's first years but we can perhaps see a picture of him in his general comments on the training of a child:

In training at this age [six], there is always something a child does on his own that shows where his talents lie, and he should be allowed to follow such natural inclinations whether they be toward dance (either elegant or vigorous), song, or even the direct display of energy. You should not be too quick to say what is good and what is bad, because if you demand too much, the child will lose interest in noh and weary of it, and make no progress. You should not have the child

* The possibility that Zeami was for some time entrusted to a member of the Konparu troupe is worth noting because it helps to explain his close ties to Konparu Zenchiku late on. Zeami did, on occasion, use the surname Hata, traditionally associated with the Konparu troupe (e.g., the colophon to the first three sections of *Fushikaden*; tsxu, p. 37).

do things other than song and elegant or vigorous dance, though. Even if he is capable of dramatic imitation, you should not teach him such techniques in any detail, nor should he be allowed to play in the first piece of a formal production. You should let him display his talents in the third or fourth piece, as seems appropriate.¹⁴

In the 1360's or early 1370's, the popularity of Kannami's troupe began to increase. Father and son performed with great success at Daigoji and gained a substantial following in the capital.¹⁵ Then came the 1374 performance and the attentions of Yoshimitsu mentioned earlier.

The shogun was himself but an adolescent, and the most notable and controversial accomplishments of his reign—his solidification of Ashikaga power, his opening of trade with Ming China under the title King of Japan, his reunification of the northern and southern courts—were all years away in the future. He was already an important patron of the arts, but his interest in Zeami was not, it appears, exclusively aesthetic. His affection for the boy actor was openly apparent and disturbing to certain conservative imperial aristocrats, not because of its homoerotic implications, but because Zeami seemed to come from among the lowest classes in society. One of them, Go-oshikōji Kintada (1324-83), wrote disdainfully in his diary:

The shogun had stands erected at Shijō Tōdoin and watched from there. . . . The child from the Yamato *sarugaku* troupe. . . was called to join him, and he followed the proceedings from the shogun's box. The shogun has shown an extraordinary fondness for him ever since. He sat with the boy and shared drinks with him. *Sarugaku* like this is the occupation of beggars, and such favor for a *sarugaku* player indicates disorder in the nation. Those who give things to this boy find favor with the shogun, so the daimyo all compete with one another in making him presents, and they spend prodigious amounts.¹⁶

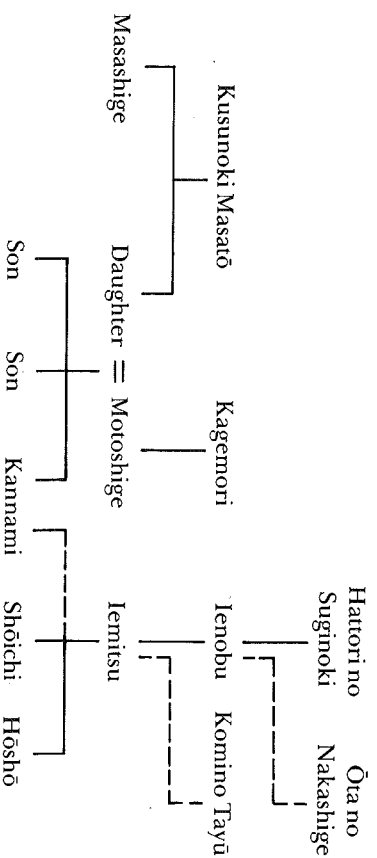


Fig. 5 A summary of Kannami's family tree based on the three existing accounts. A dashed line indicates adoption. The chart shows Kannami as the adopted son of Lemitsu, but by one account he was Lemitsu's natural son.

Kintada probably spoke for countless other aristocrats who had seen their own authority and power decay while the likes of Zeami were enriched by shogunal largesse. The overt patronage of individual actor seems to have been a relatively recent development,¹⁷ and the occasion on which this incident took place, the Gion Festival of 1378, must have been a galling and threatening reminder of Muromachi social change. The festival was a reliable annual event with a five-hundred-year pedigree, but in recent years it had become bigger and brighter and noisier than ever before. Elaborate floats wound about celebrating the city in a lusty and obstreperous parade; the shogun himself watched from stand among the fish markets and pawnshops and sake wholesalers near the intersection of Shijō and Higashi no Tōin avenues. The entire event was a testimony to the displacement of courtly culture and influence by the military class, the rich merchants and burgeoning guilds, and, perhaps worst of all, a band of provincial dramatic players.

This mixing of social classes was vital to the development of Zeami's style in *noh*, and it was not, in this case at least, so repugnant to all the old aristocrats as to Kintada. In fact, the senior court statesman and *renga* poet Nijō Yoshimoto himself took an active interest in the boy actor. He seems to have had a profound influence on Zeami's literary style and is credited with much of Zeami's education in the Japanese classics. A letter survives testifying to the extent of his regard for the boy (Zeami is referred to by the name Yoshimoto gave him, Fujiwaka):

Should Fujiwaka have time, please bring him over with you once again. The entire day was wonderful, and I quite lost my heart. A boy like this is rare—why, look at his *renga* and court kickball [*kemari*], not to mention his own particular art! Such a charming manner and such poise! I don't know where such a marvelous boy can have come from.

In *The Tale of Genji*, Lady Murasaki is described as "adorable with her misty, yet-unplucked eyebrows," and this boy is just as entrancing. I should compare him to a profusion of cherry or pear blossoms in the haze of a spring dawn; this is how he captivates, with this blossoming of his appearance.

In praising his *waka* and *renga*, I refer to his interesting manner of expression and his attention to the elegant beauty of *yūgen*. When he dances, the movements of his limbs and the flutter of his sleeves are, in truth, more graceful than a willow swaying in the gentle breeze of the second month, more beautiful than all the flowers of the seven autumn grasses soaked with the evening dew. . . . It's no surprise that the shogun is so taken with this boy.

They say the most difficult thing to meet with is an opportunity, and to have happened upon this opportunity in spite of such difficulty is indeed a miracle. "If an excellent horse doesn't meet up with trainer Bo Lo, he won't even be able to line up his hooves. It took three generations for the Bian-he gem to be recognized for its true value." If a person does not find someone capable of appreciating his talents, his true form stays hidden. I think it no trivial matter therefore that this opportunity has presented itself.

Please do arrange to bring the boy here again soon. In spite of myself, I feel

as if the flower of the heart still remains somewhere in this fossilized old body of mine.

Throw this note into the fire immediately after you've finished reading it.¹⁸

Such personal attention, from both Yoshimoto and Yoshimitsu, continues to raise eyebrows today,¹⁹ and to some, the great renga poet may look rather foolish writing a letter like this at nearly sixty years of age. His rhetorical excesses have led at least one scholar to question his motives in writing it, suggesting that the letter is less a sincere expression of admiration for Zeami than an attempt to flatter Yoshimitsu for his own appreciation of the young actor.²⁰ It would, in any case, be a mistake to assume that Yoshimitsu's and Yoshimoto's appreciation of the Yūzaki troupe was based solely on the sexual allure of one of the actors. The young Zeami seems to have had much precocious dramatic charm in addition to his beauty, and Kannami's genius was widely recognized. There are numerous references to his talent in Zeami's treatises, among them, the following instructive anecdote:

Kannami was a big man, but when playing a woman's role, he would comport himself with slender grace. When he played *jinmen Koji* [a play about a young Buddhist acolyte], he wore a boy's wig; and as he took his seat on the priest's dais, he looked as if he were no more than twelve or thirteen. From the part of the text reading "In the first generation of instruction . . ." he sang with such great variety that the shogun turned to Zeami and quipped, "My boy, you could do your best to fool the audience, but you'd never be able to carry something like this off."²¹

Zeami's talent on stage is mentioned here and there, but no concrete examples of what it was he did so well are given. Again, though, we find hints of what his performance may have offered at this time in his comments on the training of a twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy:

About this time, the child will begin to be able to carry a tune, and he will start to understand a bit about the *noh*, so he should be taught various sorts of *noh*. First of all, since he is a child, anything he does will be pretty [*yūgen*]. Furthermore, his childhood voice will be at its peak during this period. With these two advantages, his bad points will disappear and his good ones blossom.

For the most part, you should not have children do too much dramatic imitation. It neither looks good nor increases the child's ability. However, as the child becomes really skillful, he may be permitted to perform almost anything. A pretty little boy with a good voice who is talented besides can hardly go wrong.²²

Aware though he is of a child's natural advantages on stage, Zeami places little faith in them, and he goes on to say:

Such skill is not true skill. It is merely temporary. . . . Consequently, it does not provide any means by which to judge the boy's potential. At this stage, those things the child can do easily should be made the high points of his performance, and major emphasis should be given to his technique. His movements

should be exact and his singing understandable syllable by syllable. His basic gestures in the dance should be strictly correct, and he should be resolute in his training.

These passages point to certain aesthetic goals in the performance of *noh*. Some have gone so far as to say that the boyish "prettiness" (i.e., *yūgen*) Zeami speaks of here is the basis for all *yūgen* in the *noh*, and whether this is true or not, the importance of dance and song in the young actor's training is obvious from both passages.

Yoshimoto's letter had praised not only Zeami's acting, but also his court kickball and renga. There is no corroboration for the young Zeami's athletic prowess, but we find his skill at renga acclaimed in another source:²³

Sūkaku told me that the Kanze boy composed some excellent links at a *renga* gathering at Nijō Yoshimoto's residence the other day. When he was called upon to compose . . . his links were not just good, but inspired. The old gentleman praised them extravagantly.

Isao sutsumu wa One does not leave one's fame behind
Sutenu nochi no yo Until one leaves the world.

—YOSHIMOTO

Tsumi o shiru He who knows his sins
Hito wa mukui no Shall find ahead
Yo mo araji No world of retribution.

—THE BOY

The first link caused great admiration in the assembly, and Yoshimoto praised the second in the highest terms:

Kiku hito zo His mind's as empty as the sky,
Kokoro sora naru The one who listens
Horotogisu For the nightingale.

—YOSHIMOTO

Shigeru wakaba wa The flourishing young leaves
Tada matsu no iro Are just the shade of pine-ing.

—THE BOY

Ijichi Tetsuo, who has made a study of these renga, comments:

[In the first pair of renga], the first link means a person cannot fully cease being attached to his achievements and fame and pay them no attention until he has truly abandoned the world. Zeami has paired this with a link meaning that one who actually comprehends the depth and horror of his own vices will not meet with retribution for them. He has responded to "fame" with "sins," and to "does not leave behind" with "find . . . no . . . retribution." The first link sets "does not leave . . . behind" against "leave the world," using opposites for rhetorical effect, a novel device at the time. The second link says that ordinary men are all tormented with terrible retribution for their sins, while he who understands the true horror of his transgressions is not brought to retribution. Paradox, very

popular at the time, is put to use here. Both links deal with Confucian propositions. Usually, following an aphoristic and intellectual generalization of this sort one would compose a vividly descriptive link attesting to the truth of the first link. Whether aware of this practice or not, the sixteen-year-old Zeami instead boldly composed a link of very similar intellectual character. This must have been rather unconventional and consequently interesting. . . .

[In the second pair, the first link describes] the feeling of one who waits for the call of the *hototogisu* [a bird of the cuckoo family with poetic associations rather like those of the nightingale in the West]. This person stares intently into space in anticipation of the call of the bird that will cut across that space. . . .

The second link follows the expectant speaker's line of sight to find the brilliant green of the profuse young needles of a pine (with a pun on "to pine for") floating before him in the air.²⁴

Other scholars have found less to praise in these particular renga links, but whatever their literary value, they demonstrate a familiarity with the many and complicated rules and conventions that govern the art. Renga does not come naturally to anyone. It demands conscious dedication to learn, and a teacher is essential. There is little evidence aside from this diary entry to indicate where Zeami acquired his training in the art, but his connection to Yoshimoto is confirmed, and the old gentleman's role in Zeami's education, informal though it may have been, must be acknowledged. Moreover, this diary entry suggests that Zeami owed much credit for his general education (in addition to his knowledge of renga) to highly placed and sophisticated members of the imperial court. Such influence seems everywhere apparent in his plays, so it is encouraging to find external evidence for it. And again, the situation in which we find Zeami, a boy in his mid-teens and a commoner, exchanging poems with one of the ranking statesmen in the land points to a great deal of self-confidence and poise and a strong interest in the arts.

This interest in and sensitivity to the arts is demonstrated time and time again in his treatises. For instance, a full half-century after the event he could still recall a performance by the actor Kiami (a master of the performing art *dengaku*) that he had gone to see in Nara:

When I was twelve years old, I heard about a special costume-donation performance of *noh* at the Hoon-in in Nara and went to see how it would be. Kiami played the old man's role in a flaxen wig without a mask. When he sang the passage with the line, "Although I was once a dandy in the capital," he did not add any embellishments, but sang in a straightforward and simple manner. The more I thought about it later, the more interesting it became.²⁵

Zeami's memory fails him only in the matter of his age. The performance could not have taken place when he was twelve. It was probably in 1375, when he was thirteen.²⁶ But to be remembered so long at all, it must have made a very strong impression on him.

After this there is again a blank in documentary evidence relating to Zeami's life, and one must turn to his treatises for a glimpse of his training at age seventeen or eighteen:

This period is of such great importance that you must not practice too much. First, since your voice will be changing, you will have lost one of your dramatic charms. Your body will have gotten much taller, and you will have lost the charm of figure you had before. The time when you could, with your pretty voice, perform with effortless flair will have passed, and with this transformation, the essential strategy of performance will have changed, leaving you at a loss. You will find yourself in positions that the audience thinks comical, and you will be embarrassed. With one thing and another, all this can be quite disheartening.

In training at this time, even if people point and laugh, pay them no heed. Practice, instead, in private at a pitch your voice will allow and train hard, using your voice in a manner appropriate to the time of day. Be resolute and realize that this is the turning point; commit yourself to *noh* for life with complete devotion—no other means of training exists. If you give up at this point, your *noh* is finished.²⁷

The 1380's brought the deaths of Naami (1381), Yoshimoto (1388) and most important, Kannami (1384). "My father passed away on the nineteenth day of the fifth month when he was fifty-two years old," Zeami writes. "On the fourth of that month he had performed before the god of Sengen in the province of Suruga. His *noh* that day was particularly beautiful and was praised by exalted and humble alike."²⁸ Zeami appears to have assumed leadership of the troupe immediately, and although this cannot but have been a heavy responsibility for the twenty-two-year-old, it seems he shouldered it with great success. Once again from the treatises:

About this time a man's artistic potential for his entire life begins to be fixed. Consequently, this is an extremely important time for training. Your voice will have changed already, and your body will have reached maturity. This provides two advantages. . . . Performances worthy of a man in the prime of his youth are possible now. People will begin to take notice and say, "Ah, he's gotten quite good." On occasion you may even win in competitions against famous actors because of the novelty of your dramatic achievement at this particular time.²⁹

These are Zeami's comments about the training of the actor at age twenty-four to twenty-five. The change in tone from the comment about an actor at seventeen or eighteen is remarkable, and it seems likely that Zeami himself enjoyed the sort of success he describes. He also realized the dangers of such success. As he goes on to say:

People will be generous with praise, and you may come to think of yourself as a really accomplished actor. This is very dangerous. . . . Your achievement at this time is not true artistic excellence. It is born of youth and the novelty the spectators see in you. Anyone with a discriminating eye will recognize this fact.

Your achievement at this time is a beginner's achievement, and it is a great shame if you mistake it for true artistic excellence and give free rein to your personal eccentricities on stage, thinking yourself a great actor. Even though you are highly praised and win in competition with famous actors, you should realize this is merely temporary achievement born of novelty. You should work at mastering the traditional forms of dramatic imitation and train all the more diligently, inquiring very carefully of truly accomplished actors concerning the fine points. . . . Nearly everyone becomes enthralled with this temporary achievement and fails to realize it will disappear. . . . Ponder this long and hard. If you really have a grasp of your level of achievement at this stage, that achievement will not disappear throughout your life. If you overestimate your level of achievement, even the level once attained will fade away. Think this over carefully.³⁰

The actor at thirty-four or thirty-five is the subject of Zeami's next set of comments. Again they provide the most reliable source of information concerning Zeami himself at this age:

[An actor's] *noh* around this time is at its highest peak. He who fully understands and masters the various articles in this manuscript and attains true expertise in acting will most certainly gain fame and security in his position. He who does not gain sufficient fame and security, no matter how skillful he may be, should realize that he has not yet brought about the full flowering of his art. If you do not achieve this, your *noh* will decline after age forty. This will become obvious later. . . . Now is the time for you to take full account of what you have learned in the past to be fully aware of your direction in the future.³¹

To repeat, whether we can equate these generally intended comments with Zeami's personal experience is uncertain. But Zeami's fame, at least, is attested by the records of three important performances in which he led the troupe—one in 1394 and two others in 1399.³²

The first of these came in the midst of the festivities accompanying Yoshimitsu's pilgrimage to the Kasuga shrine in Nara. By this time, the shogun had come into the strongest years of his reign. A nearly sixty-year schism in the imperial court had finally, so it seemed, been healed. The northern and southern courts were reconciled, and the architect of the compromise, Yoshimitsu, now emerged unequivocally superior to the old imperial aristocracy, a feat that the Kamakura shogunate had never clearly accomplished.

On the thirteenth day of the third month of 1394, hard on the heels of this political success, Yoshimitsu set out for Nara to attend a religious festival. He stayed at the Ichijōin, one of two alternating administrative offices for the extremely wealthy and powerful temple, Kōfukuji. For several generations, the *monzeki*, or "princely abbot," at Ichijōin had been an imperial prince of the southern line, so Yoshimitsu's stay there might be seen as symbolic of his recent political triumphs.

Zeami figures in this event in only the smallest way. The record of Yo-

shimitsu's pilgrimage merely states, "A typical day, nothing particular to mention. But by order of the clerical magistrate, there was a *sarugaku* performance (Kanze Saburō)."³³ Kanze Saburō is Zeami; this is the first reference to any adult performance by him. There is no list of the plays performed, no evaluation of the performance, only the barest acknowledgment that the performance took place at all. But it must, all the same, have been an important performance, given the political significance of the excursion, and it is not surprising that scholars have taken this brief entry as evidence that Zeami had attained some considerable popularity in the dramatic world by this time.

We know little more about the other two performances—only that in the fourth month of 1399, the troupe presented ten plays for Yoshimitsu and other assembled dignitaries at the Sanbōin at Daigoji, and that a month later it held a three-day subscription performance (*kanyinnō*) at Ichijō Takegahana, in Kyoto.³⁴ Yoshimitsu attended this performance too, along with numerous other dignitaries.

This is scant evidence that Zeami had assured for himself the security he mentions alongside fame in the earlier quotation. Some scholars think, however, that there is support for such an assertion in the fact that in 1400 Zeami found enough time to reflect on his father's teachings and on his own experience to write his first treatise on drama, *Fushikaden* (The Transmission of the Flower Through [A Mastery of] the Forms).³⁵

Fushikaden, sometimes called *Kadenshō* (Treatise on the Transmission of the Flower), is certainly the most famous of all Zeami's treatises.³⁶ As the first of his works on drama—indeed, it is the first work of its kind in Japanese history—it provides the earliest formulation of his aesthetic of the theater, but it is more a reminiscence and outline of Kannami's teachings than anything else, and the ideas it contains are sometimes at surprising variance with those of the more mature Zeami. There are seven sections to the whole, and it was composed in several different stages.³⁶

The first three sections are of a relatively practical nature. Section 1 deals with the training of the actor at various stages of his life; we have relied on it above for clues about Zeami's youth and young adulthood. Section 2 deals with nine character types that appear in *sarugaku*. Sec-

* For example, Kobayashi, *Zeami*, p. 27. But one might also interpret the composition of *Fushikaden* in precisely the opposite way: that Zeami was insecure in his position and worried about the proper transmission of the art, and he put his ideas down in concrete form to give them some permanence and set his mind at ease. Indeed, the final entry in section 3 and the beginning of section 5 both contain statements to the effect that some actors were not taking their work seriously enough, and that the very vocation of *sarugaku* was in serious danger (fskd, pp. 37, 54). Zeami intended the title to mean the transmission (*den*) of the flower (*ka* or *hana*) from mind to mind by those who have mastered the forms (*fashi*) of the tradition. *Fushi* is an imprecise word, but suggests especially the visual form or appearance of a past master's performance. (See Omote's note, in zz, pp. 436-37.)

tion 3, written in question-and-answer form, concerns such matters as the proper time to begin a performance, the way to win in dramatic competitions, what makes a proficient actor, and what achieves the greatest dramatic success. In section 4 Zeami discusses various legends about the origins of *noh*. Section 5 begins with a short explanation of the differences in style between Ōmi sarugaku and Yamato sarugaku, then exhorts the actor to proficiency in all styles. Section 6 deals with the composition of *noh* and will be discussed in detail later. The final section, 7, is entitled "Confidential Instructions" and is of a slightly different nature from the rest of the work. It is probably the most interesting section for the nonspecialist because it deals with the aesthetic of *noh*. Thus far throughout the treatise, Zeami has been concerned with what makes a successful performance; this concern remains even here, but in contrast to the earlier sections, where he dealt mainly with technique, he now sets forth ideas about the abstract principles and ideals behind a successful performance.

According to *Fushikaden*, the *noh* depends for its existence on the creation of what Zeami terms "the flower" (*hana*). This effect is achieved through technical skill and intellectual understanding. Technical skill requires versatility, breadth in characterization, mastery of the techniques the actor acquires as he matures, and competence in dramatic representation as well as music and dance. Intellectual understanding requires a careful consideration of the psychology of the audience, an ability to gauge the potential of the moment, a feeling for the pace of a work and each of its components, and a respect for the taste of the common people as well as that of the elite. In considering the psychology of the audience, Zeami concludes that people appreciate the novel; therefore, the actor who can show ordinary things in a new light will succeed. For Zeami, the actor's central goal is to gratify the senses (especially sight), and he values highly the physical beauty of the actor himself. Music and dance are important as well,²⁷ but, as was traditionally the case with Yamato sarugaku, dramatic imitation (*monomane*) is most important of all.

In 1408, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu arranged for himself the unprecedented honor of a visit from the reigning Emperor at his villa in Kitayama. A record of the entertainments offered His Majesty was kept, and among the descriptions of poetry contests, renga gatherings, and *gagaku* (court music) concerts, we find the following item, dated the fifteenth day of the third month:

During the morning it rained, but the evening sky cleared for a period of entrancing spring haze. After night fell, His Majesty's party went to the Sūkenmon in Palace. The master there [Yoshimitsu] accompanied them and, following an informal concert, *sarugaku* was expressly requested. Since this was an im-

rial command performance, Dōjani's actors displayed their particular talents to the utmost. It was a truly extraordinary presentation.²⁸

Unfortunately, the text identifies only Dōami's sarugaku players. Many have been quick to conclude that Zeami also performed on this occasion, citing as evidence a letter he received from Jun'i Gonnokami (1353-1434), a Yamato sarugaku actor, sometime after 1428. The key passage reads: "In years past, when I prevailed upon you for instruction in my performance, you were so good as to oblige, and at Kitayama you taught me most kindly; I still have not forgotten this, and I remain most grateful to this day."²⁹

Most scholars have taken the mention of Kitayama as a reference to the occasion of the imperial visit, but as Omote Akira points out, Yoshimitsu moved to Kitayama about 1400, and Jun'i Gonnokami could be referring to any of many possible performances there.³⁰ The fact is, the passage resolves nothing: the clause beginning "In years past" can be taken to refer to general instruction received over a long period of time, whereas the one beginning "and at Kitayama" seems to single out a specific and rather important occasion.

Whether Zeami actually performed for the Emperor at Kitayama, then, remains an open question. In any case, the absence of any mention of Zeami in that connection and the scarcity of other records of his performance suggest that a reexamination of the relationship between Zeami and his supposedly long-term patron, Yoshimitsu, may be in order. We know that Yoshimitsu was fond of the boy Zeami and respected Kannami, and we know that he saw Zeami in performance at Daigoji and Takegahana. But what else can be surmised from extant documents about their relationship?

Zeami's references to Yoshimitsu, as recorded by his son Motoyoshi, suggest that the shogun was a difficult patron who had to be carefully catered to. Consider, for instance, this observation:

The purpose of our profession is to soften the human heart, and unless one is well versed in its workings, one's progress will be hindered at some time. Yoshimitsu's lady, Takayasu-dono (a courtesan from Higashi no Toji), was particularly sensitive to the workings of the heart; Yoshimitsu had a special fondness for her and throughout his life, she never once incurred his displeasure. She could keep him happy.

She knew when to offer him wine and when not to, and because of her sensitivity, she was a success. . . . Zeami, too, was particularly good at this and was praised by everyone.³¹

Perhaps this eagerness to please was merely common sense. Perhaps, on the other hand, we may read between the lines that the relationship between the young Zeami and his patron was not always smooth. An anecdote regarding Zeami's very name is pertinent here. It was apparently

Yoshimitsu who instructed Zeami to voice the first character in his name, saying “Zeami” rather than “Seami,” as one would normally expect.⁴² The shogun’s personal concern over such a matter was an indication of favor for Zeami. But the same anecdote goes on to tell that Yoshimitsu bestowed one of the characters of his own religious name, Dōgi, on the Ōmi sarugaku actor Inuō, calling him “Dōami.”

Snatches of information like these seem trivial, but as rare indications of relative position between two acting rivals, they must be given due consideration. These particular details, in fact, call into question a couple of long-standing assumptions about Zeami’s success: that Yoshimitsu was a constantly faithful patron, and that Zeami was his favorite throughout the shogun’s life. The anecdote reveals a greater favor for Dōami, which in turn sheds some light on the problem of Zeami’s reputed performance at Kitayama, for if the records of the imperial command performance at Kitayama fail to mention Zeami, they do not fail to mention Dōami.⁴³ It seems logical to conclude that however much Yoshimitsu favored Zeami, he favored Dōami more. This is more than a matter of merely historical interest: it seems to have had an important effect on the development of Zeami’s style.

In any case, Zeami soon lost his putative benefactor. Yoshimitsu died less than two months after the zenith of his glory, the Emperor’s visit to Kitayama in 1408. He fell ill on the twenty-seventh of the following month and expired before evening the next day. He had numerous sons, three of whom are of interest to us: Yoshimochi (1386-1428), Yoshitsugu (1393-1418), and Yoshinori (1394-1441). Yoshimochi, the eldest, had officially succeeded his father while still a boy, becoming shogun in 1394, but remained virtually powerless until Yoshimitsu’s death. Thereupon, he gained the support of Shiba Yoshinasa (1350-1410), an important vassal of his father’s, thus solidifying his position. His half-brother Yoshitsugu, however, had expectations of his own and was not satisfied to remain in Yoshimochi’s shadow. In 1416, he appealed to another powerful lord, Uesugi Zenshū, who was persuaded to take the field against Yoshimochi. Uesugi was defeated in Suruga and killed himself in Kamakura in 1417. Yoshitsugu was taken back to the capital, to be locked away in a temple. Monastic life disagreed with him, and he died by his own hand a year later.

Nonomura Kaizō tries to relate this story to Zeami’s life by speculating that since Yoshimitsu had favored Yoshitsugu over Yoshimochi, and since Zeami had been supported by Yoshimitsu and Yoshitsugu, Yoshimochi tended to dislike him.⁴⁴ There are no records of specific actions taken against Zeami by Yoshimochi, however, so what Nonomura sees as politically motivated neglect may be nothing more than a matter of taste. Yoshimochi’s patronage went instead to the dengaku actor Zōami, and it was very generous patronage indeed, but performance records for Zea-

mi’s troupe during Yoshimochi’s rule do not show any noticeable loss of popularity or any marked change for the worse from the days of Yoshimitsu’s reign. Consider the records of the Kanze troupe’s performances during Yoshimochi’s rule (1408-28):

Eleventh month, 1412: Zeami performed ten plays for various deities (and, one assumes, the assembled faithful) to effect the cure of the owner of the Tachibana Stores (an event to be discussed later).

Seventh month, 1413: The lord of Bungo issued an official proclamation, calling on Zeami to perform at the Kitano shrine in Kyoto: “Starting on the tenth of this month, the Kanze *tayū* [Zeami] is to perform at Kitano. Whoever wishes to attend, be he rich or poor, young or old, is invited to do so. In consideration of this, all arguments and disputes are to cease. / May it be so recorded.”⁴⁵

Fourth month, eighteenth day, 1415: “Festival *sarugaku* at the Kiyotaki no miya of Daigoji. Performance by Kanze Shirō.”⁴⁶

Fourth month, second day, 1417: “Kanze troupe performance at a Kiyotaki *kō* [devotional lecture] at Daigoji.”

Eight month, twenty-fifth day, 1417: “Competitive *sarugaku* by the four troupes at Kōfukuji. Yoshimochi attended.”

Eleventh month, eighteenth day, 1418: “Festival *sarugaku* by four troupes at the Wakamiya of Kasuga shrine.”⁴⁷

Fourth month, eighteenth day, 1422: “Festival *sarugaku* at the Kiyotaki no miya of Daigoji by Kanze Gorō and Kanze Saburō. A splendid performance. Lay priest Kanze [Zeami] and lay priest Ushi assisted.”⁴⁸

These records show little direct interest in Zeami on the part of Yoshimochi; he is mentioned only once. But then no systematic effort was made to record the regular performances of any troupe in this period; these few records have survived only because most of the performances were given under unusual circumstances (e.g., the first on the list) or in connection with some significant festival or ceremony. Actually, we have more Kanze performance records for this period than we have for the reign of Yoshimitsu.⁴⁹ Moreover, in 1424, during Yoshimochi’s administration, the *tayū* (head) of Zeami’s troupe was handed an important assignment:

I have appointed the Kanze *tayū* to the musical directorship of the Kiyotaki no miya [a shrine on the grounds of Daigoji], effective this year. The former director committed an offense last year. He was reprimanded and died immediately thereafter. . . . In past years, the Kanze *tayū* has been called in to perform on the recommendation of the former director. Because of his past efforts here, I have given him the position.⁵⁰

The speaker is Mansai (1378-1435), a high cleric of the Shingon sect at Daigoji, who recorded several of the performances referred to earlier in

his official diary. The Kanze tayū he mentions may be Zeami, but is more likely to have been his son Motomasa.⁵¹ In any case, the appointment was a great honor for the entire troupe, and although it was not made by Yoshimochi himself, it would probably have been blocked by him had he not approved.

These facts call into question the traditional interpretation of Zeami's position during Yoshimochi's rule. Many have assumed that the downward turn in Zeami's career began with the death of Yoshimitsu. It seems more likely, however, that there was not all that much of a change after Yoshimochi came to power. Yoshimochi certainly preferred dengaku to sarugaku and Zōami to Zeami,⁵² but as we saw earlier, Yoshimitsu himself, in his later years, came to prefer Ōmi sarugaku to Yamato sarugaku and Dōami to Zeami.

Moreover, whatever the shogun's attitude may have been, there is good reason to assume that Zeami's position was relatively secure in the 1410's and early 1420's. The Kanze tayū's appointment as musical director of the Kiyotaki shrine alone attests to the troupe's prestige among powerful Buddhist clerics, and the following anecdote hints that Zeami had considerable standing with the urban commercial class as well:

In the eleventh month of 1412 . . . the owner of the Tachibana Stores on Hojōji Avenue near the Fushimi Inari shrine was involved in an accident, and his condition was very grave. Just as he seemed close to death, the god of the Inari shrine manifested himself by taking possession of one of the serving women. He promised to cure the man on the condition that Kanze [Zeami] was called to perform. The god, speaking through the woman, said, "Ten pieces should be performed, three for the goddess of Ise, three for the god of Kasuga, three for the god of Yawata, and one for me." Zeami performed the ten plays. When he went to call on the family, . . . they made him a present of red silk.*

In short, by all evidence, the middle-aged Zeami was a well-respected public figure with access to varied patrons and diverse opportunities.

There is a blank space of about sixteen years between the last datable parts of *Fūshikaden* and the next work Zeami wrote. Thereafter, he produced something almost every year until 1425: 1418, *Kashū* (*no uchi mukigaki*) ([Extracts from] Learning the Flower); 1419, *Ongyōku kuden* (Special Instructions Regarding Music); 1420, *Shikadō* (The Way to the Attainment of the Flower); 1421, *Nikyōku santai ningyōzu* (Sketches of the

* *Dangi*, pp. 303-4. The Tachibana Stores (Tachibana kura) was probably one of the prosperous moneylending establishments, or pawnshops (*dosō*), of medieval Kyoto. Such establishments were already in evidence in the Kamakura period (1192-1333), and by the 15th century they occupied an important niche in Kyoto's economy. Though most flourished under the protection of court nobles and large temples in this period, the proprietors were commoners, the forerunners of a merchant class that was to become much more prominent in the next century. *Dangi* records a similar incident just after this anecdote. Zeami is called on by the god of Kitanō to judge a poetry contest offered to the god to heal a roofer's daughter.

Two Arts and the Three Modes); 1423, *Sanadō* (The Three Ways); 1424, *Kakuyō* (The Mirror of the Flower).⁵³

Kakuyō, probably the major work of this period in Zeami's life, concludes with the following postscript:

The various chapters of *Fūshikaden* . . . represent a secret treatise that discusses our art from the point of view of its flower. It is my record of my father's teachings as I mastered them throughout a period of over twenty years. This volume, *Kakuyō*, is a summary in six chapters and twelve articles of what I myself have learned about the art now and then, from the time I was about forty until my old age, and I leave it as a record of the art.

1 VI ŌEI 31 [1424]

WRITTEN BY ZĒA*

Kakuyō, then, by Zeami's own account, is a summary of his personal experience in *noh*, to be distinguished from *Fūshikaden*, which is as much his father's as his own. He had been compiling notes for it for some time, because he quotes it and mentions it by name in *Nikyōku santai ningyōzu*,⁵⁴ and because *Kashū*, the work he brought out in 1418, is actually an early draft of one of its chapters. He does not say whom the work was written for, but almost all of his treatises were written for confidential transmission to specific people, and a note by Zeami's younger son Motoyoshi elsewhere states that *Kakuyō* was transmitted to Motomasa.⁵⁵ Ōmote conjectures on this ground that Zeami formally entrusted the work to Motomasa when he retired as tayū in his older son's favor. This would make Motomasa the head of the Kanze troupe by 1424.

The difference between *Fūshikaden* and *Kakuyō* can be most immediately seen in a telling change in aesthetic vocabulary. Probably the most important single word in the former work is *hana* ("flower"). The word appears constantly (Konishi Jinichi counts 137 occurrences⁵⁶); even the *ka* of *Fūshikaden* is a Sino-Japanese reading for the same character. In *Kakuyō*, *hana* is used only once. The concept itself remains important throughout the treatises (the *ka* in *Kakuyō* still means *hana*, as it does in such other works as *Shūgyōku tokka*, *Shikadō*, and *Kyōkurarika*), but the visual beauty of the flower is replaced, or at least augmented, by other types of beauty. In addition to the *Fūshikaden*'s universally perceived beauty, Zeami here treats beauty of sound and beauty beyond both sight and sound, beauty created by the spirit.⁵⁷ The demands made on the audience become greater as one proceeds up this ladder of beauty; thus, paradoxically, as the range of effects available to the actor increases, the

* *Kakuyō*, p. 109. For a translation of the work, with extensive commentary, see Nearman. Zeami does not seem to have called himself Zeami. The closest he came to doing so is this "Zea." (The full form of his name, Zeamidabutsu, is an honorific form and would have been inappropriate for him to use himself.) He also on occasion called himself "Zeshi." The scholar Kanai Kiyomitsu insists that it is wrong to call him Zeami, but I see little reason to concur with his rather eccentric position.

audience at which he directs these effects decreases. This fact accounts for Zeami's increasing concern with the tastes of the elite and what some critics have called a neglect of the masses. Novelty is no longer important for its own sake; it is tied to the striving for a deeper artistic experience, the apprehension of a deeper beauty than was experienced before. This in itself is new, but it is not merely novel.

Much more attention is paid to music and its place in the *noh*. Where *Fushikaden* dealt with the voice only in passing, *Kakyo* devotes a number of articles to it. There is a similar, though slightly less obvious concern with dance. Conversely, the concern for dramatic imitation, monomane, lessens significantly. The nine character types of *Fushikaden* shrink to three modes of representation here.

The most striking new concern is for the spirit or mind (*kokoro*) of the actor. This spirit, not the visible action, imbues a performance with life. The true master can, in fact, totally captivate his audience with spirit alone, without even moving. Furthermore, whereas *yūgen* (elegant and mysterious beauty) was subordinated to monomane (dramatic representation or imitation) in *Fushikaden*, here it gains preeminence as an aesthetic ideal.

Various factors explain these differences. The influence of Dōami and Zeami, as suggested before, was very important. Zeami himself singles out Dōami as one of his artistic forefathers, and praises him as an actor of great sophistication and consistent elegance.⁵⁸ More telling remarks can be found in *Kabu zuanōki* (Notes on the Essence of Song and Dance), where Zeami's son-in-law Zenchiku (1405-68) discusses Zeami's evaluations of past masters:

Zeami said that Dōami was beautifully elegant and knew nothing whatsoever of the common. He had a whispering sort of radiance, ever so delicate yet enduring. His level of accomplishment might match this poem:

Miwataseba	When I gaze about,
Yanagi sakura o	Willow leaves and cherry blossoms
Kokimazete	Mix in bright profusion.
Miyako zo haru no	The capital, I see,
Nishiki narkeru	Is spring's brocade. ⁵⁹

Zōami seems to have been a man of many accomplishments. The *renga* poet Shinkei calls him a master of the *shakuhachi* (a type of flute), and Zeami corroborates this.⁶⁰ He also created a popular type of *noh* mask that retains his name to this day: *zō onna* ("Zōami's woman").⁶¹ Of great concern here, however, is his acting. Zeami says of him:

As for our contemporary Zōami, both his acting and his singing should probably be classed at the rank of the tranquil flower.* The one balances the other

* This is the third of the ranks Zeami outlines in his work *Kyūi shidai* (The System of Nine Ranks; ca. 1428).

quite well. . . . At the Tōbokuin in Nara I was moved almost to tears when he turned from east to west and stopped, his dance accompanied by the slight movement of the tip of his fan. If there were no one around to appreciate this, what a lonely profession this would be. . . . In the *noh* with *shakuhachi* flute, he played a short passage on the instrument, sang something, and in a way all his own, spirited himself off stage. It was chillingly beautiful.⁶²

Zeami was a keen observer of both these actors, and given his practical bent of mind and concern for the success of his own troupe, he must have learned whatever he could from their styles. It seems, in fact, that the movement away from monomane toward *yūgen* in his dramatic theory of the 1420's was in large part a response to Dōami's success with Yoshimitsu and Zōami's with Yoshimochi (a point that I shall come back to in the Conclusion). Some, however, prefer to see the change as a reflection of Zeami's purported interest in Zen.

Zeami's earliest work, *Fushikaden*, already contains references to a Zen hymn by the patriarch Hui Neng, as well as examples of Zen terminology, but as Kōsai Tsutomu has pointed out, these are used merely for illustration and are not intellectually indispensable.⁶³ By the time *Kakyo* was finished, however, several terms native to Zen had found their way into prominent positions in Zeami's thought. These words do not always retain their original Zen significance. Zeami, either through unknowing misapplication or purposeful reinterpretation and adjustment to his own needs, uses them in ways completely foreign to their original context. He also coins new words that seem to suggest Zen.⁶⁴ Beyond all this, some scholars take certain concepts expressed in *Kakyo* as evidence of Zen influence: that the present moment is the decisive factor in a performance; that emptiness has a positive aesthetic value. But such concepts are not the exclusive property of Zen—they are common to other types of Buddhism as well—and they alone do not suffice to demonstrate a strong Zen influence on Zeami's thought.

There is, however, quite concrete evidence of Zeami's association with certain Zen individuals and institutions. Morisue Yōshiaki, for instance, has unearthed a brief reference to Zeami in a late-fifteenth-century commentary by a Zen priest, Tōgen Zuisen. Zuisen records a bathhouse conversation with another old priest in which the old man recalled occasions at his teacher's place when Zeami would appear and exchange "humorous tales of Zen" with the teacher. The teacher has been identified as the prominent Rinzai Zen priest Kiyō Hōshū (d. 1424). The anecdote attests to Zeami's friendship with the man, if nothing else.* More important is the question of Zeami's connection with Sōtō Zen. The register that records his death some twenty years after he had been given

* Kiyō Hōshū held important positions at Tōfukujū, Nanzenji, and Tenryūji (all Rinzai temples). The anecdote also refers to Zeami as a small man of delicate, disciplined bearing and mentions a discussion of the origins of sarugaku.

the tonsure belongs to a temple of that sect, and barring the highly unlikely possibility that he was converted to Zen at some point after he became a lay priest, one can assume that the vows he took in 1422 were Sōtō Zen vows.⁶⁵ But registration in Zen temple records and a serious spiritual commitment to Zen are two different things, and it is important to keep in mind that Muromachi Japan was dominated by the language of Zen, just as nineteenth-century Europe was dominated by the language of Romanticism, so unless more specific evidence can be adduced, it seems a bit exaggerated to assume that Zeami's dramatic theories, not to mention his plays, have some privileged connection to Zen.⁶⁶

The artistic tastes and intellectual currents of Yoshimochi's administration wrought several changes in the life and thought of Zeami. One is tempted, in fact, to see all the changes as a result of Zen and Zōami and the unsteady course of patronage, but this is to forget the force of time alone. The Zeami of *Fūshikaden* was thirty-eight, still young, at the height of his physical potential. The Zeami of *Kakyo* was sixty-two, healthy, it seems, but aware of the limitations age had imposed on his physical being. The author of *Fūshikaden* thought a sixty-year-old actor could serve his own interests best by being as unobtrusive as possible: "From now on there is nothing to do but do nothing."⁶⁷ The author of *Kakyo* repeats exactly the same dictum, but he is not talking about being unobtrusive. He means that the truly accomplished sixty-year-old actor can do nothing and still captivate his audience absolutely.⁶⁸

Yoshimochi died in 1428. His younger brother had taken the tonsure and was at the time the official head of the Tendai sect on Mount Hiei, but he was quick to return to secular life as Yoshinori, the sixth shogun of the Ashikaga line.⁶⁹ It was not a happy change for Zeami. There is no doubt that he and his sons were poorly treated by Yoshinori; documents make this abundantly clear. In 1429 Zeami and Motomasa were forbidden to appear at the Senjō Imperial Palace.⁷⁰ In 1430 the musical directorship at the Kiyotaki shrine was taken away from Motomasa (or Zeami) and given to Zeami's nephew Onnami.⁷¹ Later that same year Zeami's second son, Motoyoshi, gave up his career as an actor and retired to the priesthood.⁷² Then, in 1432, Motomasa died—perhaps he was murdered—in Anō no tsu in the province of Ise.⁷³ Finally, in 1434, at the age of seventy-two, Zeami was banished to Sado Island.⁷⁴ Yoshinori's hand is clearly seen in the incidents of the Senjō Palace, the Kiyotaki shrine, and Zeami's exile; he may have played a part in the other events as well. His motives, however, remain obscure.

Some have clad Zeami and his sons in spies' cloaks, as partisans of the southern court in the cause of imperial restoration. Kannami's reputed relationship to Kusunoki Masashige (see Fig. 5) is woven into this argu-

ment, for Masashige was a key agent in the destruction of the Kamakura shogunate and had a concomitantly high position in Emperor GoDaigo's Kemmu Restoration. When GoDaigo rebelled against Ashikaga Takauji (Yoshimitsu's grandfather) in 1335, Masashige died defending him, becoming his own heroic legend. If Kannami was in fact Masashige's nephew, then he had good reason to "[keep] his family line secret from Yoshimitsu," as the Kanze-Fukuda Genealogy states. But these events took place a full century before the great reversals in Zeami's life, and little beyond speculation incites one to assume a direct connection to them.

Then again, circumstantial evidence surrounding Motomasa's retirement and death, four generations later, still pricks the imagination. For a start, Motomasa seems to have retired to Ochi soon after he lost his post at the Kiyotaki shrine in 1430.⁷⁵ The lord of Ochi was a partisan of the southern court and was involved in the continued struggle over the imperial succession. Motomasa *may* have chosen to retire to Ochi for political reasons, may even have been forced out of the capital because of ties with the politics of Ochi. Anyway, in 1430, he performed at the Ten-nokawa shrine near the southern court's traditional stronghold at Yoshino, then made a devotional petition and left the god a mask. One can only guess at the content of his prayer, but the mask can still be seen, and it seems to stare back in tacit acknowledgment of some connection between Motomasa and the southern court.⁷⁶ Apart from this, there is his death in suspicious circumstances in Ise, a province that was under the Kirabatake, who often found themselves at odds with the Muromachi *bakufu* (the shogun's administration). Here again, the smell of politics?

Another, wholly different line of conjecture suggests that Zeami, like Ovid, may have been exiled and subjected to all kinds of misfortunes because of his taste—or Yoshinori's lack thereof. This seems at first a rather overblown notion; a ruler does not normally exile a man because he does not like his acting. But Yoshinori was an eccentric and sometimes perverse ruler, and there is evidence to suggest that his animosity for Zeami resulted at least in part from a disagreement about the pleasures proper to the stage.

Long before he became shogun, Yoshinori had shown a taste for simpleminded, colorful nob. As early as 1420, he had supported the Enami tayū, a master of the lion dance, a descendant of which we see today in *Shakyo* (The Stone Bridge), *Mochizuki* (The Full Moon), and *Uchiko made* (The Pilgrimage).⁷⁷ When Enami died in 1424, Yoshinori turned his attention to Zeami's nephew Onnami.

Diary entries for the mid-1460's repeatedly mention Onnami's performances in a string of demonic plays.⁷⁸ Was he performing the same plays more than thirty years earlier for Yoshinori? There is no way to

tell, but one assumes that Onnami liked such plays even then, and Yoshinori, as his ardent patron, probably liked this sort of *noh* as well. All these plays show an interest in monomane harkening back to the more mimetic drama of Kannami's day. Was it, then, that Yoshinori had no taste for the delicacy and subtlety of *yūgen* and found the more obvious arts of monomane to his liking?⁷⁹ Was it a difference in taste that led to Zeami's exile and the host of misfortunes that preceded it?

This line of conjecture is tempting, but it is not without its weaknesses. The diary entries mentioned earlier do indeed attest to Onnami's interest in monomane and rather lively *noh*, but they also record his performances of other plays that provide more than sufficient proof that Onnami also had some interest in *yūgen*.⁸⁰ Even assuming Yoshinori did not share Onnami's catholicity of taste, it is still difficult to accept the theory that Zeami was exiled merely for promoting *yūgen* over monomane. A third line of conjecture combines political and aesthetic elements. Simply stated, it asserts that Yoshinori took a great liking to Onnami and exacted various penalties from Zeami when Zeami refused to make Onnami the head of the troupe and entrust him with certain treatises. For a fuller understanding of the basis for this conjecture, we need to look more carefully at the relations between nephew and uncle.

Onnami (Kanze Motochige) was the son of Zeami's younger brother Shirō. Not much is known of Shirō. He may have led his own troupe and played occasionally in the capital,⁸¹ but the troupe cannot have been large, and it is thought that Onnami was frequently given the chance to perform with Zeami's troupe. He may even have been adopted by Zeami for a time. He came to the attention of Yoshinori while the latter was still a Tendai priest, and his name comes to appear more frequently in the extant records after 1428 when Yoshinori became shōgun.

On the third day of the fifth month of 1429, the shōgunate sponsored a grand sarugaku performance; the Shingon cleric Mansai mentions the performance in his diary:

Both Kanze troupes competed against the Hōshō troupe and Jūnigorō's troupe today on Kasakake Riding Grounds at the shōgunal estate. The performance was in the style of Tōnomine: mounted characters actually rode horses and used real armor. The sight was startling to both eyes and ears. The Nijo Regent, abbots of Shōgoin, Nyōji, Jissōin, Hōchūin, Shōren'in, [and] Daitokujū, and I sat in the same stands. There were fifteen plays, and a donation of ten thousand bolts [of silk] from these stands.⁸²

This performance is puzzling in several ways. Most surprising is the style of presentation. The Tōnomine style with its use of horses and actual armor seems far removed from our modern sense of *noh*, and it must indeed have been an unusual spectacle even in its day. That "both Kanze troupes"—that is to say, Motomasa's (perhaps with Zeami in an advisory

capacity) and Onnami's—took part as well as two other troupes indicates the extraordinary nature of the occasion. Then, there is the question of just who performed what and with what degree of success. One suspects that something happened at this performance to displease Yoshinori, for exactly ten days later he took his first overt action against Zeami and Motomasa by ordering their exclusion from the Sentō Imperial Palace. From that time onward, every blow to fall on Zeami and his son seems to have been accompanied by some boon bestowed on Onnami. When Zeami and Motomasa were forbidden to play at the palace of the Retired Emperor, Onnami began to play there. When Motomasa lost the Kiyotaki post, Onnami gained it. When Motomasa died, Onnami became the head of the Kanze troupe. This cannot have made for good relations between Onnami and his uncle and cousin, but there is reason to suspect that in addition to these "family problems," Zeami did not approve of Onnami's acting style.

Onnami seems to have been best at demonic roles, and Yoshinori seems to have enjoyed watching him play such roles. The demon was one of the special roles of Yamato sarugaku in Kannami's time, but Zeami appears to have turned away from this sort of *noh* under the influence of Dōami and Zōami. By the end of his life, he had come to reject entirely the role of the true demon-hearted demon, and in a very late letter to Konparu Zenchiku, he says as much: "In your letter you inquired about demon *noh*. This is unknown in our school of *noh*."⁸³ The full significance of this statement can be understood only after a more detailed discussion of the evolution of Zeami's aesthetic ideals, and we will return to it in the final chapter. In the context of the present discussion, however, this rejection of the demon in *noh* might easily be interpreted as a rejection of Onnami's acting and defiance of Yoshinori's taste.

The exclusion from the Sentō Palace and the loss of the Kiyotaki post might have seemed merely temporary setbacks to Zeami. Even Motomasa, when he abandoned the *noh* for the priesthood, was not an irreplaceable loss as long as Motomasa maintained the family tradition and held the position of head of the Kanze troupe. Also, as long as Motomasa was alive, Yoshinori cannot have charged Zeami with unfairness to Onnami. After all, it was only proper that Motomasa retain the hereditary position as long as he remained in secular life; he was Zeami's eldest son. When Motomasa died, however, the position of the head of the Kanze school should logically have gone to Onnami. Eventually it did,⁸⁴ but the third line of conjecture holds that in resolutely resisting this move, Zeami so angered Yoshinori that he was exiled.

Documentary evidence clearly shows that Zeami did indeed oppose Onnami's becoming head of the Kanze school. On Motomasa's death, Zeami wrote a short piece entitled *Maseki issbi* (A Page on the Remnant

of a Dream), in which he stated that with Motomasa's passing, the art of his line had come to an end.⁸⁵ He is still more specific in his short treatise *Kyakuraika* (The Flower of Returning):

The deepest mysteries of our vocation, whatever I received from my father or garnered in my own life until this extremity of age—I have entrusted every last one of these to my heir Motomasa and have merely been waiting for the last event of life; but now without warning Motomasa is dead, our vocation thus brought to an end and our troupe already destroyed. Our heir is now but an infant, and so bound am I in aged attachment to this heirless vocation of my father's and mine, that my greatest spiritual aspirations are endangered. Were there anyone, even a stranger, to whom I might entrust my legacy, I would; but no such artist exists.⁸⁶

But Onnami, for his part, plainly considered himself to be the artistic successor of Kannami and Zeami. He even took their lead in choosing his name, using the third character of the bodhisattva Kanzeon's name where they had used the first and second. Under the circumstances, it seems quite possible that Yoshinori was deeply angered by Zeami's refusal to recognize his favorite, even angry enough to exile him. An exacerbating factor may have been his equally adamant refusal to surrender the rights to certain Kanze school treatises to Onnami, entrusting them instead to his son-in-law, Konparu Zenchiku.⁸⁷ For all these reasons, the third line of conjecture seems fairly strong.

Yet it too has its weak points. No matter how much Zeami resisted, Onnami did eventually become the head of the Kanze school. But Zeami was not exiled until two years later, so the resistance he made to Onnami's assumption of the post cannot have been the immediate cause of his banishment. One might look, then, to his decision to transmit the treatises to Konparu Zenchiku instead of to Onnami. But this practice had begun in 1428, so it cannot have been the immediate cause of banishment either.*

In spite of the unhappy events of his old age (in some cases, one might say because of them), Zeami continued to turn out new works at a prodigious rate. During 1428 he completed both *Rikugi* (Six Genres) and *Shūgyoku tokka* (Pick Up Jewels, Attain the Flower), and by this time or even earlier, he had finished *Kyūi shidai* (often called simply *Kyūi*).⁸⁸ These were followed by *Shūdōsho* (On Training in the Way) and *Sarugaku dangi* (Discussions of Sarugaku) in 1430, by *Museki isshi* in 1432, and by

* The traditional account of Zeami's banishment states that he was sent to Sado because "the favored Konparu Zenchiku more than his own son." Two lines of misinformation led to this misunderstanding. According to the first, Zeami is said to have ignored Motomasa in favor of Zenchiku. This loses all credence when one reads *Museki isshi* or *Kyūshuraika*. The second mistake Onnami for Zeami's son. If this were true, one might quite rightly say Zeami favored Zenchiku more than his own son. The Kanze-Fukuda Genealogy is one source of this misunderstanding. It lists Onnami as Zeami's eldest son.

Kyakuraika in 1433. *Go ongyoku no jōjō* (Articles Concerning the Five Sounds) was probably written about 1430. *Yugaku shūdō fūken* (Insights on Training in the Performer's Vocation) probably some time before 1432, and *Go on* (The Five Sounds) probably before 1432, certainly before 1434. Zeami's last work, produced after he was exiled in 1434, is *Kimtōsho* (Writings from the Isle of Gold); it dates from the second month of 1436. Finally, to complete the canon of Zeami's expository writings, there are two short letters written to Konparu Zenchiku, one from Kyoto and one from Sado.⁸⁹

Most but not all of these works are treatises on noh. *Museki isshi*, written about a month after Motomasa's death, we have examined; and *Kimtōsho* is a collection of songs in the style of noh.⁹⁰ *Sarugaku dangi*, though it may be the most valuable work in the entire canon, is not strictly speaking a treatise, but rather a compendium of Zeami's recollections and opinions relating to noh, copied down by his second son, Motoyoshi. *Shūgyoku tokka* is a digest of the theory developed from *Fūshikaden* onward, and was written for transmission to Zenchiku. *Kyūi* is a discussion of levels of artistic achievement marked by an abundant use of metaphor and Zen vocabulary. *Shūdōsho*, unlike the other treatises, was written for the entire Kanze troupe, perhaps to combat the confusion that Yoshinori's patronage of Onnami must have caused. *Go ongyoku no jōjō* and *Go on* are both concerned with the classification of song types and their dramatic effects. The first classifies the singing of noh into five different groups and discusses the characteristics of each group, and the second proceeds to identify particular plays with particular types of singing. *Go on* has proved to be a useful tool for the determination of the authorship of early noh plays and will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

It is difficult to characterize Zeami's thought in the last years of his life. None of his last works is so comprehensive or so representative of his thought at the time as *Fūshikaden* and *Kakyō* were for his youth and middle years. An increased use of Zen vocabulary is evident, particularly in *Kyūi*, and there seems to be an overall concern with the classification of types: types of artistic skill, types of song. This concern may indicate that Zeami was gaining a critical perspective on the noh as a whole and was more willing to deal with abstract matters than earlier. Yet he did not neglect specific, practical information either, as *Sarugaku dangi* generously demonstrates.⁹¹

Zeami's last days are less shrouded in mystery than most of the events of his life, for he left us a first-hand record of his exile on Sado in *Kimtōsho*. The work is a collection of eight pieces for recitation and singing in the noh style, and though the formal demands of these pieces keep the reader at some distance from Zeami's personal experience on the island,

they show a surprisingly fresh and at times even cheerful picture of the old master. It cannot have been easy for him at seventy-two to leave the capital and make the journey north to Wakasa and from there across the sea to the southern coast of Sado, but there is no hint of bitterness, even in the earliest parts of the work, and toward the end, the tone becomes surprisingly like that of a waki noh, auspicious and felicitous. Zeami displays his erudition unassisted by reference works—these he must have left in the capital—and he sees himself in the tradition of others who were exiled to Sado. He specifically mentions the Former Emperor Jun-toku (1197-1242) and the poet Kyōgoku Tamekane (1254-1332), and his own experience is shaped in part by what he has learned of theirs.

The final piece in the collection seems to be different from the rest. All the others have titles; it does not. It concerns a noh performed by firelight and mentions several shrines and temples in Kyoto and Yamato, all places that played a part in Zeami's life. This has led to speculation that Zeami may have returned to the mainland of Japan before his death. If so, had he returned already in 1436, the date of the *Kintōshō*, or after 1441, when Yoshinori was assassinated? We have no way of knowing, but there is an old tale that while Zeami was on the island, he composed seven (some versions say ten) plays and sent them to the Zen priest Ikkyū Sōjun (1394-1481) for editing. Ikkyū presented them to the emperor, as the story goes, and His Majesty was so impressed that he had Zeami pardoned.⁹² It may be that *Kintōshō* was mistaken for a group of plays, and it is not impossible that Zeami was pardoned by the Emperor himself.⁹³

Zeami died on the eighth day of the eighth month of 1443. His death is recorded in a burial-plot registration book from a temple named Fuganji in Yamato; not many pages later a similar entry tells of the death of his wife, known as Juchin by that time.⁹⁴ Zeami would have been eighty-one by the traditional Japanese count, about eighty by Western reckoning.

CHAPTER 2

Zeami the Playwright

