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Ataka

Translated by Anthony H. Chambers¹

The nō play *Ataka* draws from the legends about Yoshitsune (1159–1189), a son of the head family of the Genji clan. As a historical figure, Yoshitsune was victorious in successive battles against the Heike clan and helped his elder brother Yoritomo lay the foundations for the Kamakura shogunate. After this, however, he was abruptly accused of rebellion by Yoritomo, who soon became the first shogun. Yoshitsune and a few retainers fled the capital to seek refuge in the northern regions of Japan, where they were harbored by a local warrior clan, which, however, eventually betrayed them, forcing Yoshitsune to commit suicide in 1189.

Yoshitsune's tragic fate evoked widespread sympathy among the populace and gave rise to innumerable legends about his life, from his early childhood to his death and even beyond (according to one legend, he survived a final battle with the Fujiwara clan and secretly escaped to Mongolia, where he won still more renown under a new name: Genghis Khan!). Whereas *The Tales of the Heike* depicts him as a short, buck-toothed, cunning general, in later legends Yoshitsune is idealized as a tragic and noble youth, with a tender heart and almost feminine beauty.

Yoshitsune's imputed bravery and valor eventually were attributed instead to his retainers, and it was their unswerving allegiance to this innocent prince that gradually was emphasized. Among these retainers, Benkei, a former monk of Herculean strength and courage, underwent the most drastic transformation. In *Heike*, he is merely one of Yoshitsune's retainers, but in later legends, he is promoted to Yoshitsune's protector and confidant, is endowed with unequaled wisdom and superhuman physical strength, and, above all, has a fierce sense of loyalty. In legends depicting the group's escape from the capital, Benkei plays a more central role than even his master: he devises ways to evade their pursuers, issues orders to the others, consoles his depressed young master, and crosses swords with the enemy.

Ataka is loosely based on the early-Muromachi period (1336–1573) text *Gikeiki*, the most popular source of legends about Yoshitsune and his group. Faithfully preserving the fabled relationship between master and follower, the play makes Benkei its protagonist, presenting Yoshitsune as a delicate prince completely under the former's protection. On stage, in fact, the role of Yoshitsune is played by a child actor (*kokata*). In nō, child actors often play not only juvenile roles (like the ghost of a child in *Sumida River*) but also, as in this play, audience favorites and characters of especially high rank (for example, emperors) when they are not the main protagonist. There are several reasons for doing this. Having socially or culturally prominent figures played by child actors prevents them from upstaging the main character. But more important, in medieval Japan young boys were widely regarded as the embodiment of perfect beauty and elegance. This adoration of young boys was closely

¹ This translation of *Ataka* was originally published in *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600*, edited by Haruo Shirane, Columbia UP, pp. 1016–1036.

related to the cultural traditions surrounding temple acolytes (*chigo*), who typically received extensive training at Buddhist temples in a variety of artistic disciplines and served as companions to older monks in intellectual and artistic activities and often in male-male sexual relationships as well. Sometimes the beauty of young boys was even regarded as the incarnation of absolute purity and holiness, so in medieval Japanese sculpture and literature, the bodhisattva Kannon and other holy figures were frequently represented as young boys.

By portraying Yoshitsune as a young boy, the play maintains its focus on its protagonist, Benkei, while at the same time highlighting Yoshitsune's aristocratic bearing (his innocence and elegance). In real life, Yoshitsune is said to have been educated in the Kurama Temple as a *chigo*. When he first encountered Benkei, legend has it, he still was a *chigo*, before whom Benkei—a rough, gigantic monk—prostrated himself and pledged lifelong loyalty. Even at the time that the play depicts, when Yoshitsune is no longer a *chigo*, his relationship with Benkei still is that between an innocent boy and his loyal adult protector.

One late-Muromachi-period document attributes the authorship of this play to Kanze Kojirō Nobumitsu (1435–1516), the son of Zeami's nephew On'ami. Although the authenticity of this document is now widely doubted, the play was probably written approximately during Nobumitsu's lifetime—that is, during the late Muromachi period. The plays of this period, more visually oriented than those by Zeami, feature dramatic story lines and spectacularly staged scenes, such as battles among numerous warriors or astonishing miracles performed by deities. In plays composed in Zeami's style, crowd scenes are usually represented by only a few actors, whereas in *Ataka*, ten characters, in addition to Benkei himself, appear on stage as Yoshitsune's followers.² This unusually large number of actors, who move together in well-choreographed geometric patterns, creates an impressive visual effect and makes the confrontation between them and their opponents all the more dramatic.

Although it is a one-act play, *Ataka* can be roughly divided into three parts. In the first part, Yoshitsune and his retainers, thanks to Benkei's sagacity, succeed in getting past the Ataka Barrier (a military checkpoint set up in an effort to capture Yoshitsune) disguised as mountain ascetics (*yamabushi*). In the middle scene, while resting after having passed the barrier, Yoshitsune's retainers, following Benkei's lead, lament Yoshitsune's misfortune. In the last scene, the keeper of the barrier delivers saké to them in apology for having mistaken them for Yoshitsune and his group, in return for which Benkei performs a "longevity dance" to deflect the barrier keeper's suspicion about their identity and to invoke good fortune for his master in the future. These three scenes are closely linked by a common theme: Benkei's devotion to his master. All of Benkei's actions, and most affectingly his final dance, manifest the depth of his loyalty.

The modern viewer or reader may be inclined to wonder about the true intentions of the barrier keeper in the final scene. Does he deliver saké because, as he explains, he feels sorry for having suspected the innocent mountain ascetics? Or is he still trying, as Benkei suspects, to determine whether they might in fact be Yoshitsune and his group? Or is it that he realizes their true identity but has decided, out of sympathy, to let them escape after treating them to saké, as the actors interpreted this scene in the later kabuki version? As it is written, the play leaves the barrier keeper's motives open to question. Instead, its focus remains on the anxiety felt by Yoshitsune's retainers and on Benkei's vigilance in protecting his master.

Ataka was later reworked as a kabuki play, *The Contribution List* (Kanjinchō), based on a text very similar to the nō original. This adaptation, like the original nō play, also became very popular and is still among the most frequently performed plays in the kabuki repertoire.

² In *Sumidagawa*, for example, when the local villagers are supposed to be reciting the name of Amida Buddha together with the mother in front of her son's grave, there are only three actors (the mother, the boatman, and a merchant from the capital) on stage.

ATAKA

Characters in Order of Appearance:

LORD TOGASHI, keeper of the Ataka Barrier Station	<i>waki</i>
HIS SWORD-BEARER	<i>ai</i>
MINAMOTO NO YOSHITSUNE	<i>kokata</i>
MUSASHIBŌ BENKEI, his retainer	<i>shite</i>
OTHER RETAINERS of Yoshitsune	<i>tsure</i>
THEIR BAGGAGE-CARRIER	<i>ai</i>

Place: At and near the barrier station at Ataka, in Kaga Province (in the southern part of today's Ishikawa Prefecture)

Time: Second Month (midspring), 1187

To nanoribue music, Lord Togashi and his Sword-Bearer enter. Togashi stands at center stage, and his Sword-Bearer kneels behind him.

TOGASHI: (*nanori*) I am the lord of Togashi in the Province of Kaga. Since differences have arisen between Yoritomo and Yoshitsune, the Lieutenant³ and eleven of his retainers have disguised themselves as *yamabushi*⁴ and are on their way to the northern provinces. Learning of this, Yoritomo has established new barrier stations in various provinces and ordered that all *yamabushi* be detained. Accordingly, I have been appointed to this place and am stopping all *yamabushi*. Today, too, I will give strict orders to my men.

(*mondō*) Is anyone there?

SWORD-BEARER: I am before you, my lord.

TOGASHI: Tell me if any *yamabushi* come this way.

SWORD-BEARER: Yes, my lord.

³ *Hōgan* (lieutenant in the imperial police). After Yoshitsune was appointed to this position, in 1184, the title became almost synonymous with his name.

⁴ *Yamabushi* are ascetic, mountain-dwelling, Buddhist monks.

Togashi sits at the waki spot, his Bearer in left center.

Accompanied by shidai music, Yoshitsune, Benkei, and the Retainers, disguised as yamabushi, enter spiritedly, followed by the Carrier. Carrier wears a lacquered sedge hat, holds a thick staff, and bears a box on his back. They stand in two rows, facing each other.

BENKEI AND RETAINERS:

(shidai) Our travel robes of hemp,
our travel robes of hemp,
their sleeves hang limp with dew and tears.

CARRIER:

My robes too are made of hemp,
but torn, they are of little use.

BENKEI AND RETAINERS:

(sashi) The Hongmen shield torn,⁵
we depart the capital in travel robes,
and as the days stretch on
we thread our distant way through Koshiji,
its end too far to imagine.⁶

BENKEI:

Among your attendants today,

RETAINERS:

Ise no Saburō, Suruga no Jirō, Kataoka, Mashio, Hitachibō,

BENKEI:

and Benkei,⁷ dressed as their leader,

⁵ Hongmen shield. In 206 B.C.E. at Hongmen, in China's Shangxi Province, Fan Guai used a shield to protect his master Gaozi (founder of the Han dynasty). The implication is that Benkei's efforts to protect his master, Yoshitsune, have failed.

⁶ This passage is laced with words associated with clothing: *tate* (shield/warp), *yabure* (torn), *himo* (days/thread), *haru* (stretch/distant). Koshiji is another name for Hokurikudō, the provinces along the Japan Sea coast in central Honshu.

⁷ Ise no Saburō Yoshimori, Suruga no Jirō Kiyoshige, Kataoka no Hachirō Hirotsune, Mashio no Jūrō Gonnokami Kanefusa, Hitachibō Kaison, and Musashibō Benkei. All are mentioned in *Gikeiki* as having accompanied Yoshitsune on his flight to the north.

BENKEI AND RETAINERS:

Master and retainers, twelve in all,
 in unaccustomed travel garb,
 our hempen sleeves today begin to part the dew and frost.

How long our journey will last we cannot know
 as we hurry through the spring snows of Koshiji.

(*age-uta*) The time was the Second Month,
 the time was the Second Month,
 the tenth night of the Second Month,
 when we left the capital as the moon rose over it.

Here we are,
 where those who go and those returning part,
 those who go and those returning part,
 and friends and strangers both
 meet at Meeting Mountain,⁸

hidden now by haze of hateful spring,
 by haze of hateful spring.⁹

(*sage-uta*) On the distant wave path
 goes the boat,
 on the distant wave path
 goes the boat,
 arriving now at Kaizu Bay.¹⁰

⁸ Semimaru, *Gosenshū*, Miscellaneous 1, no. 1089: "Here we are, where those who go and those returning part, and friends and strangers both meet at Meeting Barrier." The "Meeting Barrier" (Ōsaka no seki), a reminder of the beloved capital, is now hidden from Yoshitsune and his retainers by spring haze.

⁹ Oto, *Kokin wakashū*, Travel, no. 413: "Composed on the road from Azuma to the capital: Hiding the mountains, the haze of spring is hateful. Where, I wonder, is the border of the capital?"

¹⁰ Kaizu Bay is a harbor on the north shore of Lake Biwa and the beginning of a road that led across Mount Arachi in Echizen Province (now Fukui Prefecture) to the port town of Tsuruga. *Gikeiki* relates that Yoshitsune's party had difficulty passing the barrier at Mount Arachi.

Clouds in the eastern sky
 brighten quickly as we travel
 to Mount Arachi,
 where the grasses color
 in the morning sun.¹¹
 (*age-uta*) To the Sea of Kei
 where the gods have long dwelt
 within sacred fences of pine,
 and across Mount Kinome
 we go and see before us
 Mount Soma woodcutters
 at Itadori, and shallow rapids
 at Asoozu, and at river's end,
 Mikuni Harbor
 with its reeds and grassy moors
 swaying in waves before the gale,
 the blossom's enemy,
 and now we have arrived at flowery Ataka,
 the blossoms enemy,
 now we have arrived at flowery Ataka.¹²

BENKEI: (*tsuki-zerifu*) Having traveled quickly, my lord, we have arrived already at the port of Ataka. (*Faces Yoshitsune.*) I suggest that we stop here for a rest.

¹¹ Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, *Shin kokin wakashū*, Winter, no. 657 (a variant of *Man'yōshū*, no. 2331): "On Yata Moor the grasses color. Mount Arachi: the light snow on the peak is surely cold."

¹² The places mentioned in this *age-uta* are in the modern prefectures of Fukui and Ishikawa, along the western route from Kyoto to the north. The Sea of Kei refers to Suruga Bay, site of the Kei Shrine. *Kinome* literally means "tree sprout" or "wood grain" and is associated with the "pine" of the shrine fences. *Itadori* literally means "plank cutter." The *ata* of Ataka is homophonous with the word for "enemy." The gale seems to stand for Yoritomo; the blossom, for Yoshitsune; and the bending reeds and grasses, for vassals who bowed to Yoritomo's authority.

Togashi and his Sword-Bearer move to beside the chorus. Benkei sits at the stage attendant position. Yoshitsune moves to the waki spot, followed by his retainers, who line up in the front of the chorus and the drums. They sit. Carrier, leaving his staff, hat, and box at the stage attendant position, sits at the kyōgen seat. Benkei rises, moves to center stage, and sits.

YOSHITSUNE: (*mondō*) Benkei.

BENKEI: I am before you, my lord.

YOSHITSUNE: Did you hear what those travellers said just now as they passed?

BENKEI: No, my lord.

YOSHITSUNE: They said that a new barrier station has been established at Ataka, where yamabushi are being closely questioned.

BENKEI: What an astonishing turn of events.

I suspect that they have erected the barrier because they heard of your journey. This is a very serious matter. The first thing is for you to confer with everyone here. (*Looks at Retainers.*) This is a very serious matter. You all must speak your minds without reservation.

ONE OF THE RETAINERS (*stands*): I doubt that we have much on our minds. Our lord should simply smash his way through the barrier.

BENKEI: Wait a moment.

It would be a simple matter for our lord to smash this one barrier and pass through, as you suggest, but more important is what lies beyond. (*Faces Yoshitsune.*) I think we should get past the barrier with as little fuss as possible.

YOSHITSUNE: Deal with it, Benkei, as you see fit.

BENKEI: Yes, my lord. I have just thought of a plan.

(*Looks at Retainers.*) I and all of you are uncouth yamabushi, but there is no hiding our lord's nobility. We should not proceed as we are. With much trepidation I suggest, my lord, that you remove your hempen robes, take the carrier's box on your shoulders, wear his hat low over your face, and follow us at a little distance as if you were exhausted. If you do this, I doubt that anyone will recognize you.

YOSHITSUNE: An excellent idea. Here, take my hempen robe.

BENKEI: Yes, my lord. Carrier!

CARRIER: I am before you, sir. (*Moves forward to the corner pillar and kneels.*)

BENKEI: Is it not an unexpected blessing for you to have your box rest on our lord's shoulders?

CARRIER: Truly, a greater blessing than I could ever have imagined.

BENKEI: Bring the box.

CARRIER: Yes, sir.

Carrier retrieves the box and hands it to Benkei, then withdraws to downstage right. Benkei places the box in front of Yoshitsune and returns to his seat. Yoshitsune, sitting with his back to the audience, begins to change, with help from the head retainer.

BENKEI (*to Carrier*): You go ahead of us and examine the barrier carefully, to learn whether or not yamabushi are really being singled out for questioning.

CARRIER: Yes, sir. (*Stands and moves to the shite spot.*)

(*unnamed*) This is an unhappy development. They say that word of our lord's journey to the north has spread rapidly from province to province and new barriers have been erected. The situation is serious for our lord. I will hurry to look at the barrier. (*Goes to stand at the first pine.*) Well, well. This is very extensive. Over there stands a whole row of temporary barrier structures. And what are those black things lined up like crows beside the barrier house? What? Yamabushi heads, you say? (*Points to his own head.*) What a pity, what a pity it is! I shall compose a poem before I go back.

The yamabushi

blew on their conch shells

as they ran away.

Who caught them and did this?

Abira unken.¹³

I will hurry back and report what I have learned.

Returning to the stage, he kneels in front of Benkei. In the meantime, Yoshitsune has finished disguising himself as the carrier.

(*mondō*) Reporting, sir. I have been to see the barrier.

The many temporary structures there will not be easy for our lord to pass through. Also, I saw something resembling a row of crows beside the barrier house. When I asked what they were, I was told they are yamabushi heads! Feeling pity for them, I composed a poem.

¹³ *Abira unken* (Skt. *A vi ra hum kham*) is an Esoteric Buddhist mantra used when praying to the Mahavairocana Buddha. Yamabushi signaled to one another by blowing on conch shells.

BENKEI: What did you compose?

CARRIER:

The yamabushi
blew on their conch shells
as they ran away.
Who caught them and did this?
Abira unken.

BENKEI: You are a clever fellow. Follow behind our lord.

CARRIER: Yes, sir. (*Sits at the kyōgen seat.*)

BENKEI: Let us be on our way. (*All stand.*)

(*kakeai*) As they say, you cannot hide (*Looks at Yoshitsune.*)
a safflower in a green garden.¹⁴

RETAINERS:

But surely their eyes will not
linger on a carrier,
and so shedding his hempen robes
and donning coarser hemp,

BENKEI:

taking up the carrier's box,

YOSHITSUNE:

Yoshitsune rests it on his shoulders,

RETAINERS:

and the box, rain gear, and other boxes.

YOSHITSUNE:

Face hidden by a sedge hat,

¹⁴ A proverb: Just as a bright red blossom stands out in green surroundings, Yoshitsune will be conspicuous unless carefully disguised.

RETAINERS:

leaning on a diamond staff,¹⁵

YOSHITSUNE:

as a weary carrier, (*Takes several steps.*)

CHORUS:

(*uta*) he totters forth, piteous indeed.

BENKEI: (*mondō*) (*quietly, to Yoshitsune*) Follow behind us, my lord. (*Forcefully, to Retainers*) Everyone. Now we shall pass through the barrier.

HEAD RETAINER: Yes, sir.

Benkei and Retainers line up, move to the bridgeway, then turn back to face the stage. Yoshitsune sits at the stage attendant position. Togashi and his Sword-Bearer move to the waki spot and sit.

SWORD-BEARER (*rises, looks at the bridgeway, then kneels in front of Togashi*): Reporting, my lord. A large group of yamabushi wish to pass.

TOGASHI: What did you say? A large group of yamabushi wish to pass? I see.

Togashi stands with Sword-Bearer. Benkei has entered the stage; Retainers remain in a line on the bridgeway.

TOGASHI: Traveling monks! This is a barrier station.

BENKEI (*stops at the shite spot*): Yes, my lord. Traveling monks have been dispatched to the provinces to solicit donations for the reconstruction of the Great Eastern Temple in the Southern Capital.¹⁶ We have been assigned to the Hokuriku provinces¹⁷ and so have come this way. Please make a contribution.

TOGASHI: I should like to make a contribution to this most unusual cause. This barrier station has been established, however, for the sole purpose of detaining yamabushi.

BENKEI: And what is the reason for that? (*Feigns surprise.*)

¹⁵ *Kongōzue*, octagonal staffs used by yamabushi.

¹⁶ Tōdai-ji, in Nara (south of Kyoto), was established by Emperor Shōmu in the mid-eighth century. Most of the buildings were burned in 1180 during a battle between the Taira clan and warrior-monks of nearby Kōfuku-ji.

¹⁷ The seven central provinces along the Japan Sea, corresponding to today's Fukui, Ishikawa, Toyama, and Niigata Prefectures.

TOGASHI: I shall explain. Since differences have arisen between Yoritomo and Yoshitsune, the Lieutenant and eleven of his retainers have disguised themselves as yamabushi and, having enlisted Hidehira's support,¹⁸ are on their way to the northern provinces. Learning of this, Yoritomo has established new barrier stations in various provinces and ordered that all yamabushi be detained. Accordingly, I have been appointed to this place and am stopping all yamabushi. Since you are a particularly large group, I shall not let even one of you pass.

BENKEI: I see. But he ordered you to stop false yamabushi, did he not? Surely he did not say that you should detain real yamabushi.

SWORD-BEARER (*hotly*): Yesterday we cut down three yamabushi!

BENKEI: And was the Lieutenant among the yamabushi you cut down?

TOGASHI: Your questions annoy me and serve no purpose. I have already decided not to let even one of you pass.

BENKEI: Then you plan to execute us, as well.

TOGASHI: Yes.

BENKEI (*calmly, faces the audience*): What an astonishing turn of events. We have come to a most inauspicious place. There is no help for it. (*To Togashi*) Let us begin our last services and go meekly to our execution.

TOGASHI: Very well.

BENKEI (*to retainers, who are still on the bridgeway*): All of you draw near.

To notto music, Benkei and Retainers take prayer beads from their sleeves as they prepare to perform their service. Retainers enter the stage and sit in a V formation behind Benkei.

BENKEI:

(*unnamed*) Now we begin our final service.

A yamabushi follows in the Way

of En the *upasaka*¹⁹

¹⁸ Fujiwara no Hidehira, who governed the northern province of Mutsu from Hiraizumi (in today's Iwate Prefecture), held out against Yoritomo's hegemony.

¹⁹ En no Ozuno, better known as En no Gyōja (En the Ascetic), was the eighth-century founder of the tradition of mountain asceticism practiced by yamabushi. An *upasaka* (J. *ubasoku*) is a layman who has accepted the five basic Buddhist prohibitions (against killing, stealing, licentiousness, prevarication, and alcohol) and entered the Buddhist Way.

RETAINERS:

and assumes the sacred form of Acala,²⁰

BENKEI:

his cap the Jeweled Crown of the Five Wisdoms,²¹

RETAINERS:

its pleats representing the Twelve Causes,²²

BENKEI:

his persimmon-color hempen robe the nine-part mandala,²³

RETAINERS:

his black leggings the Womb;²⁴

BENKEI:

and his eight-holed sandals

RETAINERS:

tread on the eight-petaled lotus.

BENKEI:

Breathing out and in he chants the two letters *A* and *Un*.²⁵

RETAINERS:

The yamabushi's body is the Buddha's body.

BENKEI:

If you strike him here,

²⁰ Acala (J. Fudō Myōō), regarded as an incarnation of the Mahavairocana Buddha (J. Dainichi Nyorai), is depicted with a fierce expression, grasping a sword, and wreathed in flames.

²¹ The crown worn by the Mahavairocana Buddha.

²² The Twelve Causes refers to the Buddhist doctrine of karmic cause and effect, which involves twelve causal links of "codependent origination" (*pratiya-samutpada*) leading to suffering and rebirth.

²³ The Diamond-World Mandala.

²⁴ The Womb-World, associated, like the Diamond World, with the Mahavairocana Buddha.

²⁵ The first and last letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (Skt. *a hum*). In Esoteric Buddhism, *a* (uttered as an in breath, with the mouth open) and *Un* (as an out breath, with the mouth closed) are regarded as embodying the fundamental cause and effect of all phenomena.

RETAINERS:

who knows how Acala might react?

BENKEI:

That the Yuya Avatar²⁶ will punish you

RETAINERS:

on the spot

BENKEI:

is beyond any doubt.

Benkei forms a mudra with his fingers while Retainers rub their beads in prayer.

CHORUS:

(*uta*) “*Om abira unken!*”

They rub their beads, making a rattling sound.

TOGASHI: (*mondō*) That was most praiseworthy. Earlier I heard you say that you are soliciting donations for the Great Eastern Temple in the Southern Capital. In that case you must have a contribution list.²⁷ Read the contribution list to me, let me hear it now.

BENKEI: You want me to read the contribution list? Certainly.

Handing his beads to a stage attendant at the shite spot, Benkei receives a scroll. Holding it in his right hand, he faces the audience. Retainers remain seated.

BENKEI: (*unnamed*) Naturally there is no contribution list.²⁸ Taking an everyday scroll from the box, he calls it a contribution list (*Unrolling the scroll and holding it up with both hands.*)

and reads it aloud

for all to hear.

²⁶ The Shinto god enshrined at Kumano, venerated by yamabushi.

²⁷ A contribution list (*kanjin-chō*) is a scroll that explains, in a declamatory rhetorical style, the purpose of soliciting donations; it is read aloud by monks to help them collect donations from an audience.

²⁸ The *shite* speaks in the third person here.

Below, during the reading, Togashi tries twice to peek at the scroll, but each time Benkei steps back.

BENKEI:

(yomimono) “Deeply deeply

BENKEI:²⁹

let us ponder:

The Great Benevolent Teacher,³⁰

the autumn moon,

now is hid behind the clouds of his nirvana,

and none remains to waken us from

the long dream of the long night of birth and death. (*Gradually picking up the tempo.*)

But some time ago

there was an emperor,

Shōmu by name.³¹

Losing his beloved wife,

unable to still his heart,

his eyes burning with tears

that fell like strings of jade,

he turned his thoughts to the Good Path³²

and built the Vairocana Buddha. (*Forcefully, at a faster tempo.*)

Lamenting that such a miraculous place

should cease to exist,³³

²⁹ In most modern performances, Benkei continues to “read” alone here.

³⁰ Gautama, the historical Buddha. In the following lines, his death is compared to the moon (a symbol of enlightenment) disappearing behind clouds.

³¹ Emperor Shōmu (J. 724–749) established Buddhist temples throughout Japan, with Tōdai-ji as their headquarters. The legend that he built Tōdai-ji to assuage his grief over his wife’s death is baseless: in fact, his wife outlived him.

³² The path of Buddhism. The giant bronze statue of the Vairocana Buddha (the *daibutsu*) at Tōdai-ji was dedicated in 749.

³³ Because of the fire of 1180.

Shunjōbō Chōgen³⁴

seeks donations from the provinces.

One slip of paper,

one half-coin—

he who offers just this much

in this world will enjoy

pleasure beyond compare,

and in future lives will surely sit

on countless lotus blooms.³⁵

Placing his faith in the Buddha,

bowing his head in worship,

humbly has Chōgen written this.”

So he reads,

as if to shake the skies. (*Lifts the scroll reverently.*)

TOGASHI:

(*uta*) The men of the barrier,

losing their courage and

overcome with awe,

let them all pass,

overcome with awe,

let them all pass.

Benkei rolls up the scroll and faces Togashi.

TOGASHI: (*mondō*) Pass through quickly!

BENKEI: Yes, my lord.

³⁴ The monk Chōgen was appointed by the emperor to take charge of reconstructing Tōdai-ji.

³⁵ That is, will be reborn in Amida Buddha’s Western Paradise.

He moves to the bridgeway, where the Retainers rise and follow him. Benkei goes as far as the third pine; the Retainers stand behind him in a line on the bridgeway. Sword-Bearer moves to center stage and looks at Yoshitsune, then kneels in front of Togashi.

SWORD-BEARER: Reporting, my lord. The Lieutenant is passing through.

TOGASHI: I see.

Yoshitsune has entered the stage and stands at center stage. Togashi rises with his hand on his sword and glares at Yoshitsune. Sword-Bearer also stands.

Stop that carrier!

Startled, Yoshitsune withdraws to the shite spot and kneels.

RETAINERS:

Oh! For our lord to be suspected

is a matter of life and death.

With this they all go back.

BENKEI: *(runs from the third pine back to the head of the line)*: Wait, do not spoil our plans in your haste. *(Angrily, to Yoshitsune)* Miserable carrier, why do you not pass? *(Reenters the stage.)*

TOGASHI: I have stopped him.

BENKEI: And why is that? *(Stands behind Yoshitsune.)*

TOGASHI: I have stopped the carrier because he bears a slight resemblance to someone.

BENKEI: It is not unusual for one person to resemble another. Whom does he resemble?

TOGASHI: One of my men says that he resembles the Lieutenant, and so I shall detain him until the matter is settled.

BENKEI: What? He says that this carrier resembles the Lieutenant?

TOGASHI: Yes.

BENKEI (*to Yoshitsune, roughly*): What an astonishing turn of events! For a lowly carrier like you to resemble the Lieutenant is the event of a lifetime! How infuriating! I hoped that we could reach the province of Noto before sundown, but you lag behind because of a little box and so bring suspicion on us. (*Approaches Yoshitsune.*) I had been thinking what a wretch you were, and now I will show you a thing or two. (*Seizing Yoshitsune's staff, he strikes him on the hat several times and pushes him back.*) I'll take this staff and beat you and beat you! Pass on through! (*Togashi follows Yoshitsune suspiciously. Benkei glares at him.*) You must be robbers, the way you eye his box.

Retainers rush onstage and form two lines, facing Togashi. During the following age-uta, Benkei, holding his staff horizontally, restrains Retainers as they press toward Togashi.

CHORUS:

(*age-uta*) "Why do these men
 why do these men
 draw their swords and daggers
 on a lowborn carrier?
 Are they bullies, are they cowards?"
 So said eleven yamabushi
 as they began to draw their swords,
 the sight of their brave demeanor
 enough to strike fear
 into any demon or ogre.

By this point, Benkei has succeeded in restraining Retainers.

TOGASHI: (*mondō*) I was mistaken. Please pass through quickly.

SWORD-BEARER: Pass through quickly, pass through quickly.

Togashi and Sword-Bearer withdraw behind the drums and sit facing each other. Retainers stand in a line in front of the chorus and drums. Benkei stands at the shite spot.

BENKEI: Since we have already come quite some distance from the barrier station (*to Yoshitsune*), let us rest here for a time. (*To Retainers*) All of you come near.

Yoshitsune sits at the waki spot, Retainers in back center, and Benkei in the center.

BENKEI (*to Yoshitsune*): My lord. Because the situation was so grave, I committed an outrageous act.

To think that my lord fell under the blows
of Benkei's staff because his luck ran out,
seems all the more bizarre and sorrowful.

YOSHITSUNE: Benkei. Your quick judgment a little while ago did not arise from any ordinary thinking. I can only believe that Heaven was protecting us.

When, suspected by the barrier men,
I thought I had reached the end of my life,
you did not hesitate to strike at me,
as though I were a real servant,
and so saved me. This was not your strategy,
Benkei, but Hachiman's³⁶

CHORUS:

(*sage-uta*) inspiration, it must have been,
and how grateful I feel.
(*kuri*) They say this world has reached its latter days,³⁷
but sun and moon have not yet fallen to Earth.³⁸
Even though you used expedient means,³⁹
can you avoid the punishment of Heaven
for striking at your master with a staff?

³⁶ The bodhisattva Hachiman, protector of the Genji clan.

³⁷ *Mappō*, the latter age of the Buddhist law, or the period of degenerate Buddhist law.

³⁸ A proverb signifying that morality has not died.

³⁹ *Hōben*, originally parables and other devices used by the Buddha to help people understand his teachings.

YOSHITSUNE:⁴⁰

(*sashi*) Truly, as they say, we can know the past
and future from the present consequence.

CHORUS:

I understand this now in my own person,
as sorrowful years and months have come to me,
and yet escaping the troubles of today
and of these last ten days of the Second Month
seems unbelievable to me.

BENKEI: Just like that, ten men and more

CHORUS:

feel they have awakened from a dream
and looking one another in the face
can only weep.
(*kuse*) Yoshitsune was born into a house
of bows and horses. Devoting his life to Yoritomo
he sent corpses beneath the waves of the western sea⁴¹
and, as a warrior does, lay down and rose
and spent his days in meadows and on seashores,
with hardly a moment to spread an armored sleeve
for a pillow above the waves, sometimes floating
on a boat, yielding to the windy billows,⁴²
sometimes on a mountain,⁴³ in snow that hid
the track of his horse's hooves, and by the sea

⁴⁰ In the *ennen takinagashi* variant, the *sashi* and *kuse* sections are not performed. The play resumes with the dialog between Togashi and the Sword-Bearer.

⁴¹ Many members of both the Genji and Heike clans drowned at the battle of Dan no ura.

⁴² At, for example, Yashima.

⁴³ At, for example, Ichi no tani.

the sound of evening waves drew near to Suma⁴⁴
 and Akashi, where in less than three years
 he quashed the enemy and pacified the world,
 but his loyal service was for naught. What bond from
 a former life has brought him to this state?

YOSHITSUNE:

Truly, as they say, a sad world
 it is in which we do not get our way.

CHORUS:

This I know, and yet when I reflect,
 a man as straight as a catalpa bow
 suffers, while a slanderous retainer⁴⁵
 flourishes ever more, and in the distant
 east and south I stirred up clouds,⁴⁶ and now
 am tormented and buried in snow and frost
 to the west and north⁴⁷—my sad fate
 should be fairly judged by the gods and buddhas,
 but do they now exist in this world?
 Hateful is this world of sadness,
 O hateful is this world of sadness!

Togashi goes to the bridgeway and stands at the second pine, with Sword-Bearer at the first pine.

⁴⁴ An allusion to the “Suma” chapter of *The Tale of Genji*: “At Suma, melancholy autumn winds were blowing. Genji’s house was some distance from the sea, but at night the wind that blew over the barriers ... seemed to bring the surf to his bedside ... One night when they were all asleep he raised his head from his pillow and listened to the roar of the wind and of the waves, as if at his ear.” “Akashi” in the next line refers to Genji’s residence in exile after he left Suma. “Three years” alludes to the time that Genji spent at Suma.

⁴⁵ A reference to Kajiwarano Kagetoki, who slandered Yoshitsune to Yoritomo.

⁴⁶ Perhaps a reference to Yoshitsune’s flight to Yoshino, south of the capital.

⁴⁷ Probably a reference to Yoshitsune’s present journey to the north.

TOGASHI: (*mondō*) Is anyone there?

SWORD-BEARER (*kneels*): I am before you, my lord.

TOGASHI: I feel ashamed of the way I spoke to those yamabushi. I hope to catch up with them and offer them some saké. You go ahead and ask them to stop.

SWORD-BEARER: Yes, my lord. (*Stands and turns toward the stage.*)

There they are. An invitation! (*Carrier goes to meet him.*) Because the keeper of the barrier station was so rude to you a little while ago, he wishes to offer you some saké. I have come to tell you this.

CARRIER: I understand. Please wait while I deliver your message. (*To Benkei*) Reporting, sir. Saying that he feels ashamed for having spoken rudely before, the keeper of the barrier station has had saké brought to us.

BENKEI: What an astonishing turn of events. Well then, I shall greet him.

CARRIER: Is the gentleman here?

SWORD-BEARER: He is here.

CARRIER: I delivered your message and was told that he is welcome.

SWORD-BEARER: I shall tell him. (*Kneels in front of Togashi.*) He asks that you come this way.

TOGASHI: Very well.

Enters the stage and sits at the waki spot. Sword-Bearer leaves the stage through the side door.

TOGASHI: Because I was so rude before, I have brought some local saké for you.

BENKEI: Please come this way.

(*unnamed*) I see, I see. He intends to float our spirits in a saké cup and put us in a good mood. On this occasion, too, everyone, do not let down your guard, (*Faces Retainers.*)

CHORUS:

(*dan-uta*) lest you be suspected. Each of them
 having been warned by Benkei, they sit in a circle
 in the mountain shadow, their home for now—
 Let us drink this chrysanthemum saké,⁴⁸
 here on the mountain path.

BENKEI:

How delightful! In mountain waters,

CHORUS:

How delightful! In mountain waters
 we float our saké cups and they are caught
 in the current, as in the Winding Waters.⁴⁹
 Waving my obstructing sleeves
 I shall dance a dance.
 Benkei was a monk at the Three Pagodas,⁵⁰
 accomplished in the arts. These are the verses sung
 at the longevity dance:⁵¹
 “This mountain water
 echoing on the rocks—

BENKEI:

(*waka*) the roar is a waterfall.” (*Sits in front of Togashi.*)
 (*unnamed*) I am quite drunk. Let me pour for you this time.

⁴⁸ That is, auspicious sake.

⁴⁹ “Winding Waters” (*kyokusui*) was a courtly event in which cups were floated on a winding stream. Each courtier in turn composed a Chinese verse before a cup reached him, then picked up the cup and drank. These lines allude to a line by Sugawara no Masanori, *Wakan rōeishū*, no. 42: “It catches in the current and rushes along, and so he obstructs it with his hand.” The line describes a courtier who has not thought of a verse before the cup reaches him.

⁵⁰ East Pagoda, West Pagoda, and Yokawa, the three parts of Enryaku-ji temple, on Mount Hiei. Benkei was said to have once lived at the West Pagoda.

⁵¹ *Ennen no mai*, an entertainment held at certain temples, such as Enryaku-ji, after major services. The following lines are from a popular song.

TOGASHI: I will have some, then. Even better, do a dance to accompany the saké.

BENKEI: Yes, my lord.

CHORUS:

(waka) “The roar is a waterfall.

(Dance: otoko-mai)

Benkei performs a vigorous otoko-mai dance. He continues dancing as the text resumes.

BENKEI:

(waka) “The roar is a waterfall.

CHORUS:

(nori-ji) “Even when the sun is shining,
it always roars, it always roars.”

Rise quickly, quickly *(Looks at Retainers.)*

and like your bowstrings

slacken not your guard.

Keepers of the barrier station, *(Kneels, facing Togashi.)*

we shall take our leave, farewell.

He picks up the carrier’s box *(Stands.)*

and throws it on his shoulders,

and feeling as though they had tread on the tiger’s tail

and escaped the serpent’s mouth,⁵²

they head onward, down to the Province of Mutsu.⁵³

⁵² Treading on the tiger’s tail represents a dangerous situation, and escaping the serpent’s mouth signifies getting away safely.

⁵³ That is, to Hidehira’s headquarters in Hiraizumi.

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