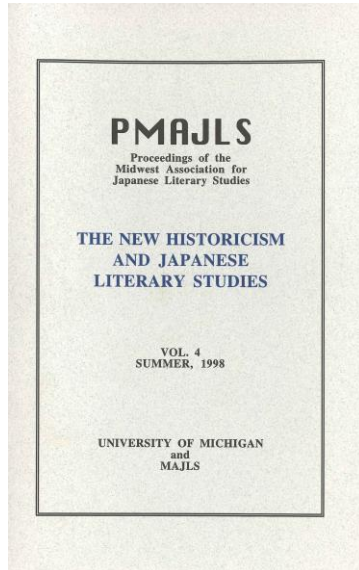


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Historicist Readings of Power and Gender in the  
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*Proceedings of the Midwest Association for  
Japanese Literary Studies* 4 (1998): 120–137.



*PMAJLS* 4:  
*The New Historicism and Japanese Literary Studies*.  
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

**Staging Female Suicide on Otokoyama:  
New Historicist Readings of Power and Gender  
in the Noh Theater<sup>1</sup>**

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Among the dozen or so plays in the noh repertoire dealing with representations of female suicide, *Ominameshi* 女郎花 stands out from the rest not only because extant performance records indicate that it was more popular than any other play of that genre performed during the Muromachi (1392-1573) and Azuchi-Momoyama periods (1573-1603),<sup>2</sup> but also because it is the only female suicide play in the current repertoire in which the shite is not the suicide herself, but rather her widowed husband.

An even more striking aspect of *Ominameshi* is the peculiar way in which its narrative of female suicide is both inscribed and displaced by ideologically charged tropes linked to Iwashimizu Hachimangū 石清水八幡宮 on Otokoyama 男山.<sup>3</sup> Three Hachiman

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<sup>1</sup> This is part of a larger study in progress entitled *Theatricalities of Power: The Cultural Politics of Noh Drama*. Special thanks to all the participants of the *Ominameshi* colloquium (University of Pittsburgh, October 2-5, 1997) who commented on my work, especially Mae Smethurst. Thanks also to Brett de Bary and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen for their thought-provoking questions at "The New Historicism and Japanese Literary Studies" conference (University of Michigan, October 24-26, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Twenty-four performance records exist for *Ominameshi* between the years 1429 and 1602. This makes it as popular as *Izutsu*, one of the most frequently performed plays in the noh repertoire during the premodern period. See Nose Asaji 能勢朝次, *Nōgaku genryūkō* (Iwanami Shoten, 1938), 1301-02.

<sup>3</sup> Here I am not interested in determining the "causes" of the discourse of "Otokoyama," so much as I am in describing its complex correlations and

intertexts--each one exemplifying a religio-politics of subjection--enframe the performance of *Ominameshi*. The first intertext alludes to the foundationalist metanarrative of Iwashimizu Hachimangū's institutional genealogy. The second intertext reinscribes the Otokoyama of *Yumi Yawata* 弓八幡 with its appropriation of imperial symbolic capital in the service of shogunal politics. Finally, the third intertext juxtaposes the woman's suicide with the *Hōjōe* 放生会, or Life-Releasing Ritual, performed at both Usa 宇佐 and Iwashimizu Hachimangū. Before proceeding to an analysis of these intertexts, a brief overview of *Ominameshi* is probably in order.

*Ominameshi* is structured as a relatively conventional fourth-category, double-entry *mugen nō* 夢幻能. On his way to visit the capital in early autumn, the waki--an itinerant priest from Matsura 松浦 in Kyūshū--stops at Otokoyama. While gazing at the pale yellow *ominameshi*<sup>4</sup> flowers blooming in great profusion, the priest considers plucking one to take home as a souvenir. But just as he reaches out to pick one with his hand, the shite--an old man--enters and stops him. The two discuss the propriety of picking the flower, trading poetic citations by Sugawara no Michizane and Henjō. The old man then guides the

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collocations with other discursive formations. As Foucault has argued, the discourse of causality drastically oversimplifies the multifarious relations of dependence and dominance--whether intradiscursive, interdiscursive, or extradiscursive--emerging from a given discourse network. See Michel Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 58-9.

<sup>4</sup>Although often translated as "maidenflower," *ominameshi* in Muromachi-period usage suggests not a maiden or virgin *per se*, but rather an attractive, sexually active young lady. "Damsel flower" may be a more apt translation, if one understands the connotations implied by its French etymology: "*damoiselle*" as a young lady of quality and erotic charms.

priest to Iwashimizu Hachimangū, where he recounts its history and an exchange concerning the etymology of the word "*ominameshi*" ensues. In the context of this discussion, the old man shows the priest the gravesites of Ono no Yorikaze and his wife, who are entombed at the foot of Otokoyama. Finally, the old man requests that the priest pray for their restless spirits, and disappears like a dream behind the shadow of a tree.

In the second part of the play, the priest performs sutra-chanting to mourn their deaths. The *nohijite* and *tsure* make their entrance as the ghosts of Yorikaze and his wife, respectively, and proceed to tell the story of the wife's suicide committed in response to her husband's infidelity, and the strange appearance of a single *ominameshi* flower upon her burial mound. Yorikaze recounts how, after the burial of his wife, in a fit of depression and self-recrimination, he threw himself into the river in order to follow his wife to the world of the dead. Since then, Yorikaze's restless spirit has suffered innumerable tortures in the hell for adulterers. In the play's final scene, Yorikaze desperately prays for the transformation of the *ominameshi* into a lotus flower pedestal, upon which he hopes to float away from such hellish tortures to rebirth in Amida's Pure Land. Let us turn now to an analysis of the three Hachiman intertexts enframing the story.

### Genealogies of Otokoyama

In an *ageuta shōdan* 上歌小段 sung by the chorus just before the shite discloses the site of the two tombs and their link to the history of the *ominameshi* flower, the foundation myth of Iwashimizu Hachimangū is intimated in the following gender-specific terms:

In the clear light of the celestial orb,  
lunar *katsura* trees and the Man in the Moon shine brightly

over Man Mountain [ . . . ]

this clean, manly image is the spirit of the place,  
 along with the colors of autumn shining in the moon's light,  
 Iwashimizu Shrine, where pure water shimmers in the  
 sunlight,  
 where the priest's fine robe of moss  
 has hallowed images traced onto its three sleeves,  
 where the sacred box containing the imperial seal is stored,  
 where Kami and Buddhas, shrines and temples, coexist  
     according to the Buddhist Dharma,  
 how blessed is this sacred place!

久方の  
 月の桂の男山 [ . . . ]  
 さやけき影は所から  
 紅葉も照り添ひて  
 日もかけろふの石清水  
 苔の衣も妙なれや  
 三つの袂に影うつる  
 壺の箱を納むなる  
 法の神宮寺  
 ありがたかりし靈地かな<sup>5</sup>

As is made abundantly evident here and elsewhere in *Ominameshi*, Iwashimizu Hachimangū is gender-marked as masculine. The "clean, manly image [which] is the spirit of the place [*sayakeki kage wa tokorokara* さやけき影は所から]" is a reflection of the parallel between a terrestrial masculinity, figured in terms of Otokoyama, and a celestial masculinity, figured in terms of Katsura no Otoko 桂の男. To complicate matters further, the terrestrial-celestial gender politics of Iwashimizu Hachimangū are intertwined with the religious politics of its foundation myth.

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<sup>5</sup> Itō Masayoshi, ed., *Yōkyōkushū*, in *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei*, vols. 57-59 (Shinchōsha, 1983), 57:251. All translations of *Ominameshi* are my own.

The entire song, especially the description of the "the priest's fine robe of moss" with "hallowed images traced onto its three sleeves [*mitsu no tamoto ni kage utsuru* 三つの袂に影うつる]," invokes the metanarrative of the founding of Iwashimizu Hachimangū on Otokoyama in the year 859<sup>6</sup> by Gyōkyō Oshō 行教和尚, head priest of Daianji Temple 大安寺 in Nara. After receiving special oracular instructions during a pilgrimage to Usa Hachimangū in Kyūshū, Gyōkyō returned to the capital to establish a new shrine complex for Hachiman on Otokoyama.<sup>7</sup> The legitimacy of this mandate was reportedly demonstrated by the fact that Hachiman Daibosatsu 大菩薩 became manifest and traced the images of the "three revered ones" (*sanzon* 三尊)—viz., Amida 阿弥陀 Buddha and his two attendant bodhisattvas, Kannon 観音 and Seishi 勢至—onto the sleeves of Gyōkyō. Given such an illustrious genealogy, it is no surprise that, upon seeing Iwashimizu Hachimangū for the very first time, the waki feels compelled to remark upon the originary connection between this shrine complex and Usa Hachimangū back in Kyūshū.<sup>8</sup>

A significant political subtext to the founding of Iwashimizu Hachimangū, which is not explicitly cited in *Ominameshi* but which is historically associated with that foundational moment nonetheless, is the fact that its construction was authorized by the powerful *sekkan* 摂関 politician Fujiwara no Yoshifusa 藤原良房 (804-872) soon after the accession of Emperor Seiwa 清和天皇 (850-880; r. 858-876) in 858.<sup>9</sup> The first child-emperor in

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<sup>6</sup> Jōgan 貞観 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Yamada Yoshio 山田孝雄 et al., eds., *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 5 vols. (Iwanami Shoten, 1961), 3:142-43.

<sup>8</sup> 「わが国の宇佐の宮とご一体にてござ候ふ。」 (Itō, 57:247).

<sup>9</sup> Tenan 天安 2.

Japanese history, Seiwa's reign was administered by his maternal grandfather Yoshifusa in the role of *sesshō* 摂政, or regent. Later, during the reign of Emperor Kōkō 光孝天皇 (830-887; r. 884-887), Yoshifusa introduced a differentiation between the regent (or *sesshō*), who advised an emperor before coming of age, and the chancellor (or *kanpaku* 関白), who advised him as an adult. This subjection of imperial power by the Northern branch (*hokke* 北家) of the Fujiwara clan after the enthronement of Seiwa thus marked the birth of *sekkan* politics.

Viewed against the backdrop of this dispossession of imperial power by the Fujiwara clan, the founding of Iwashimizu Hachimangū as a "*gokoku*" 護国,<sup>10</sup> or "state-protecting," institution suggests that it not only served as "the special guardian of imperial legitimacy," as Christine Guth Kanda has noted,<sup>11</sup> but also as a silent monument to Fujiwara politics and the *sekkan* reterritorialization of Heian power relations.

Almost six hundred years later, under the protective eye of Hachiman, another subjection of imperial prerogatives and symbolic capital--this time for shogunal purposes--was undertaken by the distant descendants of Emperor Seiwa via the Seiwa branch of the Minamoto 源 lineage: viz., the Ashikaga 足利 rulers Yoshimitsu 義満 (1358-1408) and Yoshinori 義教 (1394-1441). This brings us to the second religio-political intertext linking *Ominameshi* to Iwashimizu Hachimangū, this one channeled through the performative filters of the *waki nō* 脇能 *Yumi Yawata*.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Takeda Yūkichi 武田祐吉 and Satō Kenzō 佐藤謙三, trs., *Sandai jitsuroku* (Rinsen Shoten, 1986), 696 (Jōgan 18.5.28).

<sup>11</sup> Christine Guth Kanda, *Shinzō: Hachiman Imagery and Its Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1985), 41.

### Shogunal Politics in *Yumi Yawata*

The only other play in the noh repertoire besides *Ominameshi* to contain as many inscriptions of the topograph "Otokoyama" is the god play *Yumi Yawata*, considered by Zeami to be a model play of its genre.<sup>12</sup> These two plays contain more inscriptions of Otokoyama (and its synonym Yawatayama) than any other plays in the repertoire, with *Ominameshi* containing eleven references total and *Yumi Yawata* seven.<sup>13</sup> Given the complementarity of their settings, it comes as no surprise that the two plays were often performed together on the same program. According to extant performance records covering the years 1429 to 1602,<sup>14</sup> *Yumi Yawata* was performed on the same program as *Ominameshi* approximately twenty-one percent of the time. Taking into consideration both the significant statistical and tropological associations between the two plays, it seems highly likely that the ideological connotations associated with the topograph Otokoyama in *Yumi Yawata* would have resonated intertextually with the Otokoyama of *Ominameshi*.

Although *Yumi Yawata* has often been read as a straightforward "paean to imperial rule and to the peace that it

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<sup>12</sup>See Omote Akira 表章 and Katō Shūichi 加藤周一, eds. *Zeami, Zenchiku*, in *Nihon shisō taikēi*, vol. 24 (Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 286.

<sup>13</sup> Otokoyama and Yawatayama 八幡山 are alternate names for the same place, each implying the other in the context of their usage in noh. The distribution of Otokoyama/Yawatayama inscriptions is most concentrated in three plays from the current repertoire: 1. *Ominameshi*: 10 (Otokoyama) + 1 (Yawatayama) = 11; 2. *Yumi Yawata*: 3 + 4 = 7; and 3. *Hōjōgawa*: 3 + 2 = 5. See Nonomura Kaizō 野々村戒三, ed. *Yōkyoku nihyakugojūbanshū sakuin* (Akaoshōbundō, 1978), 237, 1318.

<sup>14</sup> Nose Asaji, *Nōgaku genryūkō* (Iwanami Shoten, 1938), 1302, 1314.



has brought to the land,"<sup>15</sup> its politics are greatly complicated by the circumstances surrounding its production. In the context of his discussion of the "straightforward style" (*sugu narutei* 直成体) of congratulatory noh plays (*shūgen nō* 祝言能), Zeami singles out *Yumi Yawata* for praise in *Sarugaku dangi* 申楽談儀 and adds a tantalizing note regarding its inception: "Since it is a noh play that I wrote in honor of the inaugural celebration for the reign of the present shogun, there are no special secrets to performing it [*tōgodai no hajime no tame ni kakitaru nō nareba, hiji mo nashi* 当御代の初めのために書きたる能なれば、秘事もなし]."<sup>16</sup> Although most scholars agree that *Yumi Yawata* was written as a congratulatory piece to celebrate the reign of a new Ashikaga shogun, the exact date of the play and the shogun for whom it was intended remain uncertain. However, circumstantial evidence seems to favor Yoshinori.<sup>17</sup>

Following the practice of their ancestors the Seiwa Genji 清和源氏, the Ashikaga clan regarded Hachiman as the "*ujigami*" 氏神, or "tutelary deity," of their lineage.<sup>18</sup> Thus, it is not

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Blenman Hare, *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986), 104.

<sup>16</sup> Omote and Katō, 286 (translation mine).

<sup>17</sup> Omote and Katō, 286, 498 n. 167. Given that Yoshinori was the shogun at the time *Sarugaku dangi* was written--i.e., in the eleventh month of 1430 (Eikyō 永享 2.11)--it seems highly likely that "the reign of the present shogun" (*tōgodai* 当御代) refers to Yoshinori. Moreover, the fact that Yoshinori was selected as shogun by a lottery drawn at Iwashimizu Hachimangū in 1428 (Shōchō 正長 1) lends further credence to the view that *Yumi Yawata* was written in honor of Yoshinori's ascension. See Imaizumi Atsuo 今泉篤男 et al., eds., *Kinsei no taidō*, in *Kyoto no rekishi*, 8 vols. (Gakugei Shorin, 1968-75), 3:169.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the following poem by the founder of the Ashikaga shogunate, Ashikaga Takauji 足利尊氏 (1305-1358), included in the *Shingoshūishū* 新後拾遺集 (1383): "More upright than he/who prays for himself/is he who asks for the

surprising that the Ashikaga rulers made countless visits<sup>19</sup> to Iwashimizu Hachimangū, both to pay respects and to pray for continued protection. But given the unique role played by Hachiman in selecting Ashikaga Yoshinori as the next shogun following the death of his brother Yoshimochi 義持 (1386-1428)--effectively legitimizing the reign of Yoshinori by means of divine favor in the context of a lottery drawing--it must be said that Yoshinori's regime had a special association with Hachiman.

Given the nature of Yoshinori's association with Hachiman and the context of shogunal investiture enframing the production and inaugural performance of *Yumi Yawata*, one might expect shogunal ideology to enter the play in some fashion, but scholars have traditionally insisted upon reading *Yumi Yawata* as pro-imperial and anti-shogunal in its rhetoric. Take the following *sashi shōdan*<sup>20</sup> 差小段 sung by the shite, the god of Kawara 高良 disguised as an old man:

May the emperor's reign [*kimi ga yo* 君が代] endure  
 For a thousand years [. . .]  
 The azure sky is calm,  
 The emperor secure [*kimi ansen ni* 君安全に],  
 The people are kind-hearted,

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protection/of his uprightness/at Man Mountain [*mi o inoru/hito yori mo nao/Otokoyama/sunao naru zo/mamori to wa kiku*  
 身を祈る／人よりも猶／をとこ山／すなほなるをぞ／まもりとは聞く]" (#1507).  
 That a poem by the founder of the Ashikaga bakufu, praying at Otokoyama for protection, would be included in an imperial collection of *waka* suggests the importance of the Hachiman deity and shrines to the descendants of the Seiwa Genji.

<sup>19</sup> Imaizumi, 3: 167.

<sup>20</sup> Sung with minimal inflection in the higher register and without strong underlying rhythm, *sashi shōdan* are typically used to highlight important passages by rendering the text as accessible as possible. See Hare, 299.

Passes have not been closed.<sup>21</sup>

The crux of the matter is how to translate and interpret the ideologically charged terms "*kimi ga yo*" 君が代 (or "*miyo*" 御代) and "*kimi*" 君, which are repeated throughout the play and translated above as "emperor's reign" and "emperor," respectively. There is no denying that this is the most common interpretation of these terms, but as Wakita Haruko has argued, the Muromachi usage of such designations was far from unambiguous. More specifically, Wakita suggests that the usage of "*kimi*" in *waki noh* was not limited to the emperor, but was also used to refer to the shogun.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, as Zeami's own usage in *Sarugaku dangi* of "*godai*" 御代 (an alternative reading of the same characters composing "*miyo*") attests, a similar ambiguity applied to honorific designations referring to the reigns of both emperors and shogun. When one takes into consideration the shogunal context of its production, as well as the undecidability of its most crucial ideological signifiers, it seems just as plausible to read *Yumi Yawata* as a celebration of shogunal rule and a prayer for continued peace as it does to read it as "a paean to imperial rule and to the peace that it has brought to the land."<sup>23</sup>

What *Yumi Yawata* stages is not merely a blurring of boundaries between the figure of the emperor and that of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ross Bender, "Metamorphosis of a Deity: The Image of Hachiman in *Yumi Yawata*," *Monumenta Nipponica* 33.2 (1978): 171-72 (trans. altered). Japanese text from Sanari Kentarō 差成謙太郎, ed., *Yōkyoku taikan*, 7 vols. (Meiji Shoin, 1985), 5:3224-25.

<sup>22</sup> Wakita Haruko 脇田晴子, "Nōgaku to tennō shintō," in *Tennōsei: rekishi oken daijōsai*, ed. Irokawa Daikichi (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1990), 132.

<sup>23</sup> Hare, 104.

shogun, but a performative appropriation of imperial prerogatives and symbolic capital on the stage of the inaugural celebration for the new shogun. As Stephen Greenblatt has shown, theatrical representations are often "partial, fragmentary, conflictual," with elements that are "crossed, torn apart, recombined, set against each other"; as a result, some social practices are "magnified" or "exalted" by the stage, while others are "diminished" or "evacuated."<sup>24</sup> To ignore this constitutive reciprocity by reducing the performative text to a mere product of historical influence or the ideological reflection of economic infrastructure is to efface the text's active, constructive force. It is for this reason that I would argue that more than simply mirroring the sociopolitical context in which it was produced, *Yumi Yawata* performatively contributed to the subjection of imperial symbolic capital aspired to by Yoshinori.<sup>25</sup> Just as the Northern branch of the Fujiwara clan had subjected imperial power to non-imperial purposes, so too, Ashikaga rulers, such as Yoshimitsu and Yoshinori, subjected imperial prerogatives and symbolic capital to shogunal purposes.

Taking Ashikaga Yoshimitsu as precedent, the shogun became resubjectivized yet again under Yoshinori's regime in the

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<sup>24</sup>Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley, 1988), 19. On the historicity of the text and the textuality of history, see Louis A. Montrose, "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York, 1989), 20. Also see Robert Weimann, *Structure and Society in Literary History* (Baltimore, 1984), 267-323.

<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that such ideological expediency necessarily ensured long-term patronage for Zeami's troupe. Despite the success of *Yumi Yawata*, Zeami's troupe quickly fell out of Yoshinori's favor. A successful performance was obviously no guarantee of continued patronage.

figure of the "*Nihon kokuō*" 日本国王, or "King of Japan."<sup>26</sup> By officially legitimizing the shogun with this title, the Tally Trade Agreement with the Ming Dynasty both usurped the emperor's control over foreign affairs and repositioned the shogun as monarch.<sup>27</sup>

### Hōjōe and the Subjection of the Hayato

The third and last ideological intertext I shall consider juxtaposes the woman's suicide in *Ominameshi* with the *Hōjōe*, or Life-Releasing Ritual, performed at both Usa and Iwashimizu Hachimangū. The first inscription of the *Hōjōe* appears in part one, where the shite and waki celebrate the auspicious syncretism associated with that ceremony of liberation:

Even as the dust mingles with the divine light of Buddhas and  
Bodhisattvas,  
in the flow of the muddied inlet, fish float to the surface of the  
water

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<sup>26</sup> In sharp contrast, Yoshimochi rejected this title and discontinued trade with China. On the politics of "*Nihon kokuō*," see Sasaki Ginya 佐々木銀彌, *Muromachi bakufu*, in *Nihon no Rekishi*, vol. 13 (Shōgakukan, 1975), 51-3. Also see Grossberg, 34, 36, 49; John W. Hall, "The Muromachi Bakufu," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 3, ed. Kozo Yamamura (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 192-93.

<sup>27</sup> As John Whitney Hall has remarked: "Whether or not Yoshimitsu intended to displace the emperor, he and his successors as shogun did preside over the demise of the tradition of imperial rule as it had been up to that point." See Hall, "The Muromachi Bakufu," 192. As a footnote to this discussion, it is surely one of the great historical ironies of Yoshinori's regime and his association with noh that both his ascension to shogun and the closure of his reign were enframed by noh performances. Yoshinori was assassinated in 1441 (Kakitsu 嘉吉 1.6.24) while viewing a performance by his favorite noh actor Onnami 音阿弥 (Kanze Motoshige 観世元重, 1398-1467) at the residence of Akamatsu Mitsusuke (赤松満祐, 1381-1441). For a fuller account of Yoshinori's assassination and its aftermath, see Imaizumi, 3:305-06.

--certainly, to liberate living beings such as these shows that the profound vow of Buddhas and Kami has become miraculously manifest.

Such benevolence!

Flourishing as I climb up luxuriant Man Mountain--how blessed!

和光の塵も濁り江  
 河水に浮かむ鱗類は  
 げにも生けるを放つかと深き誓ひもあらたにて  
 恵みぞ茂き男山  
 さかゆく道のありがたさよ<sup>28</sup>

Another inscription appears in the second part of the play in one of the very few passages actually sung by the *tsure* herself:

The fragility of a woman's heart:

it is because I left the capital yearning for one man alone  
 that my resentful thoughts are even more profound  
 as I hurl myself into the depths of the Life-Releasing River.

女心のはかなさは  
 都を独りあくがれ出でて  
 なほも恨みの思ひ深き  
 放生川に身を投ぐる<sup>29</sup>

For the wife of Yorikaze to commit suicide by throwing herself into the Hōjōgawa, the river into which one released life, is not only ironic it may also have been potentially subversive. Such an act of suicide would have polluted the Hōjōgawa's pure waters of liberation, suggesting a darker subtext haunting the ritual of the *Hōjōe* with connotations of subjection and death as opposed to emancipation and life. Moreover, as various *engi* 縁起

<sup>28</sup> Itō, 57: 250.

<sup>29</sup> Itō, 57: 253.

dealing with the genealogy of the *Hōjōe* attest, the ritual appeasement of victims of political subjection was central to its performative function.

According to accounts in *Hachiman Usagū Hōjōe Engi* 八幡宇佐宮放生会縁起 and *Rokugō Kaizan Nimmon Daibosatsu Hongi* 六郷開山仁開大菩薩本紀,<sup>30</sup> the establishment of the *Hōjōe* derives from political incidents that occurred in southern Kyūshū in the early eighth century. In the year 719<sup>31</sup> the Hayato 隼人 people of Ōsumi 大隅 and Hyūga 日向 provinces launched an organized rebellion against the hegemony of the centralized Yamato government. Acts of rebellion by the Hayato had occurred previously, but 719 marked the first time that an all out assault was waged with the intent of conquering Japan.

Fighting escalated in 720 when the governor of Ōsumi province was assassinated. In response to these events, the Yamato court issued an imperial petition requesting assistance from the Hachiman cult at Usa Hachimangū. Hachiman responded with an oracle that ordered the subjugation of the Hayato and offered to lead the government's army in that endeavor. After two years of fighting, the Hayato rebels were finally suppressed.

In order to appease the malevolent spirits of fallen Hayato

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<sup>30</sup>On *Hachiman Usagū Hōjōe Engi*, see Jane Marie Law, "Violence, Ritual Reenactment, and Ideology: The *Hōjō-e* (Rite for Release of Sentient Beings) of the Usa Hachiman Shrine in Japan," *History of Religions* 33.4 (1994): 325-57. On *Rokugō Kaizan Nimmon Daibosatsu Hongi*, see Allan G. Grapard, "Lotus in Mountain, Mountain in Lotus: *Rokugō Kaizan Nimmon Daibosatsu Hongi*," *Monumenta Nipponica* 41.1 (1986): 21-50. The present discussion of the ideological implications of *Hōjō-e* is largely indebted to these studies.

<sup>31</sup> Yōrō 養老 3. Other accounts record the year as Yōrō 4 (720): see Edward Kamens, tr., *The Three Jewels: A Study and Translation of Minamoto Tamenori's Sanboe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1988), 345-48.

and provide ideological closure to the violence authorized by Hachiman, the god issued an oracular command in the year 724<sup>32</sup> to establish the *Hōjōe*. Greatly complicating the performative force of that appeasement is a statement included in *Hachiman Usagū Hōjoōe Engi*, in which the subjugation of the Hayato is legitimized by means of Buddhist rhetorical sophistry:

The rite began with the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman. Even though he kills, because he has an enlightened status and does good there is a lot of merit in his killing. The internal proof is that there is no hiding the bright light, and the rays cross each other. As a result of this rite at Usa, they began to perform the *Hōjō-e* in all the provinces.<sup>33</sup>

Notice that in the metaphors of Hachiman's meritorious killing, which shines forth with the bright light of his divinity, the trope of the "*wakō no chiri*" 和光の塵, or dust which mingles with the divine light of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, is translated into murder ideologically justified for religio-political purposes. Such a politically charged subtext for the *Hōjōe* casts into a radically different light the ritual release of birds and fish performed on the fifteenth day of the eighth month to celebrate Buddhist compassion for all sentient beings and honor the prohibition against taking life.

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<sup>32</sup> Jinki 神龜 1. The earliest recorded performance of the *Hōjōe* at Usa Hachimangū is 745 (Tenpyō 天平 17). At Iwashimizu Hachimangū, the earliest record is for 939 (Tengyō 天慶 2), but it may have been performed as early as 863 (Jōgan 5).

<sup>33</sup> Law, 345. A similar ideological justification for religio-political violence is included in Rokugō Kaizan Nimmon Daibosatsu Hongi: "Because I set my mind on governing the world from generation to generation by means of forced conversion and all-embracing compassion, I have taken many lives. In order to bring these spirits to salvation, a ceremony to return living beings to freedom shall be performed" (Grapard, 45).



### Subjecting *Ominameshi*

Perhaps the most difficult question facing any New Historicist reading of *Ominameshi* is what the ideologically charged tropes of Iwashimizu Hachimangū and its related intertexts have to do with the narrative of female suicide: All of the Hachiman intertexts considered--the genealogy of Iwashimizu Hachimangū, the shogunal politics inscribing Otokoyama in *Yumi Yawata*, and the political subtexts of *Hōjōe*--share a politics of subjection. Indeed, I would suggest that what *Ominameshi* offers through such juxtapositions is a performative analogue between the religio-politics of subjection and the gender politics of subjection.

It may be objected that there is no *essential* connection between the Hachiman intertexts and the staging (or upstaging) of the woman's suicide. But that is precisely the point. What I find interesting is the *contingency* of their interdiscursive encounter on the noh stage. As a tapestry of heterogenous elements, the noh theatricalizes such interdiscursive linkages. The performance text of noh is not merely a space for the free play of poetic signifiers, but a site of contestation enframed by the mechanisms of patronage within which poetic, aesthetic, religious, political, social, economic, and military discourses are brought together in complex ways. To insist on the separation of such intertexts circulating on the stage of *Ominameshi* would be to perpetuate the most obtuse sort of formalism in the name of aesthetic autonomy.

Just as the Hayato are not permitted to tell their own story, but function only as mute signifiers of political subjection and objects of appeasement in the performance of the *Hōjōe*, so too, the woman in *Ominameshi* is not allowed to tell her own story, since it has been displaced by the narrative constructed for her

by her husband Yorikaze. In other words, the political subjections implied by the Hachiman intertexts are paralleled by the gendered subjection of Yorikaze's nameless wife. Even as Yorikaze, disguised as an old man in the first half, preached against plucking the *ominameshi*, against taking the life of any being, whether sentient or nonsentient, he has already taken the life out of the *ominameshi*'s story by appropriating her voice for himself. The woman behind the *ominameshi* is quite literally reduced to a mere botanical trope.

Translating the plight of Yorikaze's wife into the botanical *ominameshi* is clearly a reinscription of the Buddhist doctrine of *sōmoku jōbutsu* 草木成佛 and the debate over whether or not nonsentient beings are capable of attaining or have already attained buddhahood.<sup>34</sup> But it is also symptomatic of Buddhist patriarchal discourse, which objectifies the female body--in this case, literally turning the female body into a botanical "thing," an *ominameshi*--as a rhetorical strategy in the service of Buddhist soteriology--in this case, the salvation of the *ominameshi*'s husband Yorikaze. At the end of the play, the gender politics of subjection come to the fore as the *ominameshi* is translated into yet another sort of flower--a lotus flower--the vehicle by which Yorikaze hopes to gain entrance into Pure Land Paradise:

Damsel flower,  
upon your dewy calyx tied to the lotus flower pedestal,  
I beseech you: let me float up to Pure Land Paradise,  
send my sins to the surface and deliver me from them!

女郎花  
露の台や花の縁に

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<sup>34</sup> For an excellent discussion of the *sōmoku jōbutsu* debate, see William R. LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," *History of Religions* 13.2 (1973): 93-126.

浮かめて賜ひ給へ  
罪を浮かめて賜ひ給へ<sup>35</sup>

It is no accident that the alternate title for the play is *Yorikaze*, since it is the proper name of Yorikaze that provides the measure of subjectivity, just as Otokoyama provides the gender-marked, religio-political space in which both the woman's subjection and the man's subjectivity emerge. Told from the perspective of the man whose infidelity precipitated the woman's tragic end, the staging of female suicide on Otokoyama is upstaged by the man's own suicide, thus making the subject of *Ominameshi* that of subjection itself.

Although female suicide sometimes functioned in the medieval cultural imaginary as an act of resistance against the unchecked circulation of masculine desire and the patriarchal exchange of female bodies, in *Ominameshi* such an act of resistance is co-opted by the very fact that it is Yorikaze who tells the story of his wife's suicide, it is Yorikaze whose narrative of his wife's suicide ends up displacing her own. In the end, the woman's suicide becomes simply another emotionally charged moment in the karmic history of the man.

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<sup>35</sup> Itō, 255.