

VISUAL DISABILITY IN *KYŌGEN ZATŌ MONO* VIEWED IN A SOCIOHISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

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Abstract

In Noh's sibling art of Kyōgen, a theatrical form employing many of the same conventions as the former but treating its subjects with levity rather than gravitas, one subcategory of plays which has fallen out of favor with contemporary audiences is *zatōmono*, i.e., plays in which the *shite* (primary character) is a blind person. Today, researchers of Japanese theaters are left with the question of whether these plays are supposed to make fun of the sightless characters' disability, or whether playwrights and audiences during the Sengoku and early Edo periods saw social and/or political context in the sufferings of the blind.

This study seeks to explore the above question by providing a historical overview of the historical periods during which Kyōgen developed and flourished, and by analyzing the plots and original libretti of three plays: *Chakagi zatō* (茶嗅座頭, *The Tea-Sniffing Blind Men*), *Tsukimi zatō* (月見座頭, *Moon-Viewing Blind Man*); this play is present in literature collections in two diverging versions, and both have been considered for the purposes of this paper), and *Kawakami zatō*, (川上座頭, *The Blind Man at Kawakami*). It will show that, inasmuch as intent is discernible in textual as opposed to performed versions of these works, the

respective *shite's* blindness does indeed seem to serve as an adjunctive property to other factors the playwright and audiences would have found worthy of ridicule.

Kyōgen, the classical Japanese theater form inextricably linked to the "poetic, quasi-religious musical drama" of Noh, is primarily known as short, humorous interludes that provide comic relief between the serious plays of the Noh repertoire, which usually do not feature "dramatic conflict" (Serper 307). However, it would be erroneous to see the former as a mere vehicle of one-note, lighthearted comedy; rather, the relationship of these two intertwined arts, performed on the same stage, is considered to have been influenced by the Chinese concept of the yin/yang (*in/yō*) harmony of contrasts, the importance of this dichotomy being evident in theoretical treatises on Noh and Kyōgen such as Zeami Motokiyo's *Fūshi kaden* (*The Transmission of the Flower through the Forms*) and the Ōkura school's *Waranbe-gusa* (*To My [Young] Followers*) (Serper 308-9). The formative contrasts inherent in this juxtaposition, such as dark/light, quiescent/mobile, feminine/masculine, weak/strong and so forth, gain an

additional dimension in these two stage arts, namely that of fiction vis-à-vis reality (Serper 308). Zvika Serper quotes Ōkura Toraakira (1597-1662), the thirteenth master of the Ōkura school of Kyōgen, on the dichotomous/complementary nature of his art as follows: “Noh turns fiction into reality. Kyōgen turns reality into fiction. Noh is in front. Kyōgen is backward” (309). The complementary nature can also be discerned in another assertion found in the *Waranbe-gusa*: “*Sewa ni, shimote no nō wa kyōgen ni nari, shimote no kyōgen wa nō ni naru to*” (“In the world, the underside/lower part of Noh becomes Kyōgen, and the underside/lower part of Kyōgen becomes Noh”) (Kitagawa 301). Kyōgen, then, while ostensibly mirroring Noh, is implicitly capable of evoking more than laughter in its fictionalized depiction of real people. This is particularly visible in the plays classed as *shukke zatō kyōgen* (“priest/blind people plays”) in the Ōkura school, and *zatōmono* in the Izumi school (Cavaye et al. 185).

These plays at first glance are hardly comical in their frequently depicted cruelty towards the disabled. Nowadays rarely performed, they fictionalize societal and religious thought towards the blind in the farcical yet acutely socially aware manner typical of the art form, and may provide an interesting glimpse at the complex interactions of Kyōgen performers and itinerant blind entertainers at the time the plays were first performed. As Kyōgen was an improvisational art prior to the Edo period, it is difficult to date the pieces analyzed with precision; additionally,

textual variations are common, which complicates pinpointing the exact social milieu in which these plays were composed. However, by providing a short historical overview of the blind performers who often occupy the *shite*, or primary, role in them, it is possible to place the dramatic depiction of these entertainers into a general social context and thereby propose a basic exegetical framework.

In this paper, the author takes a look at the sociohistorical and religious backdrop against which Kyōgen *zatōmono* came into being, and offers an interpretation of the treatment of blind characters in three plays, namely *Chakagi zatō* (*The Tea-Sniffing Blind Men*), *Tsukimi zatō* (*The Moon-Viewing Blind Man*), and *Kawakami zatō*, sometimes only known by the title *Kawakami* (literally *The Blind Man at Kawakami*, entitled by Don Kenny as *Sight Gained and Lost* in his anthology of play translations, *The Kyogen Book* [212]). The former two plays showcase visually disabled characters contextualized within the formal ranking system of the guild for the blind (*Tōdō-za*), with *Chakagi zatō* including multiple blind characters, and *Tsukimi zatō* featuring a single blind person interacting with a sighted man. No guild classification is mentioned in the final play.

According to the *Nōgaku daijiten*, two of these plays fall somewhat outside of the standard *zatōmono* plays, whereas the third, *Chakagi zatō*, as a *bangaiyoku* (“out-of-repertoire play”), is not mentioned at all in the entry for *zatō kyōgen*. *Kawakami* is the only

play in which the *shite* is not introduced as a *zatō* or *kōtō*, and the play is also classified as “couple play” (*fūfumono*) due to its plot (392). *Tsukimi zatō*, on the other hand, was composed at some point during the later Edo period, and therefore is “removed from the restraints of Buddhist thought” (*bukkyō shisō no sokubaku kara hanare*), instead directly showcasing the pathos of the blind man being subjected to cruelty by an able-bodied person (392). However, these three plays showcase the breadth of the *zatōmono* category precisely because they differ slightly from the other plays of the category.

First of all, aside from *Chakagi zatō*, no other plays show a group-internal hierarchy modeled after that of the Tōdō-za according to Morley (50), enabling an analysis of how this ranking structure is treated within the work. Secondly, in avoiding Buddhist overtones, *Tsukimi zatō* allows for isolation of potential societal considerations within its plot. Finally, in *Kawakami*, the sociocultural factor is minimized due to a lack of guild classification, and due to the married couple being the only people on stage, which makes it possible to concentrate on the religious implications of the piece. The author will analyze the different portrayals of the sight-impaired with consideration given to these distinctions. In doing so, the perception of blindness as representative of a social institution, vis-à-vis sightlessness as an individual phenomenon within the historical and religious contexts given below, will become clear.

The connection between blindness and the performing arts has a long tradition in the history of Japan. After the introduction of the *biwa* from China to Japan via Kyūshū during the Nara period, blind performers in the guise of monks began traveling the land, chanting syncretic *jishinkyō* (literally “regional god sutra”) narratives and healing prayers to its accompaniment and functioning as Buddhist missionaries among the general populace (Kana 75). In the Heian period, a contingent of these blind monks arrived in the capital, forming an association with the Buddhist temples of the area and taking up the performance of sutras and hymns as a full-time profession (Kana 75). As the era came to a close, the blind performers proceeded from exclusively working in and around temples to adding performances in private residences, acquiring the public moniker of *biwa hōshi* (“lute priests”) (Kana 75). After the proliferation of the *Heike monogatari*, which, according to the *Tsurezuregusa*, was first given to the blind priest Shōbutsu for recitation by the former court noble Yukinaga in the mid-thirteenth century (Morley 51), many *biwa hōshi* in the capital devoted themselves to the performance of sections of this tale (Kana 75-6). Contingents in more rural areas also sang *imayō*-like popular songs and recounted legends and interesting tales from the surrounding villages (Kana 75-6). The initial organization of blind performers in a guild named Tōdō-za (“guild of the right way”) began between the end of the Kamakura period and the initial decades of the

Muromachi period, providing the visually impaired in its fold with a measure of societal standing and representation (Kana 7; Golay 141). Although initially providing stability as well as the exclusive right to recite the *Heike* under the auspices of the Ashikaga shogunate, the Tōdō-za lost political and economic support in the period of societal upheaval caused by the Ōnin Wars (1467-1477), forcing guild members into an itinerant lifestyle until the beginning of the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) (Morley 51).

Carolyn Anne Morley considers this time period, referred to as *gekokujō* (“the bottom overturning the top”), to have provided a “ripe source of humor” for Kyōgen actors, who would have considered would-be members of the guild of *biwa hōshi* as exhibiting pomposity or arrogance due to the popular esteem they enjoyed (51-2). Such pomposity would have made them equally deserving of satiric treatment in Kyōgen as landowners and other authoritative figures (Morley 51-2). Additionally, as they frequented the same venues for displaying their arts, i.e. temple grounds and the private residences of important families, practitioners of what was then still known collectively as *sarugaku* and *biwa hōshi* likely frequently performed in close proximity to each other (Kana 77). Both Kana Ranju and Jacqueline Golay indicate a possibility that the *zatōmono* in the *kyōgen* repertoire came into being due to the prolonged contact and potential overlap of the two groups. Kana speculates that *sarugaku* performers may have

overheard the confessional tales of blind performers near temples. Such tales would have been motivated by the collective bias against blind performers, who were considered in medieval Japanese religious thought to have defied the teachings of the Buddha, and to have been struck down with blindness as a result (76-8). Golay, meanwhile, tells of an unspecified record of *monogatari-sō*, “who may have been blind,” having been invited to perform *kyōgen* at a private gathering in 1416, and speculates that some of these plays may have been composed by a blind person (139, 141). Kitagawa Tadahiko, finally, emphasizes that the origin of *zatōmono* is not well understood, although both the satire of “blind bureaucrats” (i.e. the upper echelons of the Tōdō-za), who held special rights, and the composition of these plays from humorous stories and *hayamonogatari* (fast-paced tales) by blind persons themselves, are considered potential explanations (98).

According to Gerald Groemer’s article, “The Guild of the Blind in Tokugawa Japan,” not all sightless performers enrolled in the Tōdō-za after its formation, and “lowly *Heike*-performing blindmen of the crossroads and boulevards” were spoken of derisively by guild members, indicating a stratification within the community of the visually impaired depending on whether they held guild membership or not (350). Within the guild, a ranking system likely modeled after clergy classification existed as well. While it “may originally have reflected the skill with which a blind man recited the *Heike*,” it eventually

came to be based on monetary contributions to the guild, with the highest ranks being *kōtō*, *kengyō*, and the “general director” position of *sōkengyō* held by only one man per district, and later only by the individual in charge of the guild as a whole (Morley 52; Groemer 355-6, 359). *Zatō*, although literally translating to “head of the guild,” was, in fact, not the highest rank and, due to its comparatively easy accessibility, eventually came to be the designation for all guild members in the popular vernacular (Golay 141).

The sociocultural position of the blind, both within and outside of the context of the guild, was a complex matter. As mentioned above, the sightless were considered to be sinners in the religious sense, but if sufficiently pious, they were also believed to be capable of gaining healing powers, causing wealthy families, including those of the daimyo and shogun, to frequently retain blind acupuncturists, masseurs, and doctors (Groemer 349-50). While *biwa hōshi* commanded a measure of respect among the populace and enjoyed patronage by powerful clans, including the ruling family of the Ashikaga shogunate, the government on occasion sought to ban their activities, as the example of a Kamakura *bakufu* edict from 1240 outlawing “blind mendicants” (*mōjin hōshi*) on the streets of Kamakura proves (Morley 51; Groemer 350). After the *shi-nō-kō-shō* system prescribing social order was formalized at the beginning of the Edo period, the sightless ran the risk of being associated with the *hinin* (“un-people”) outcaste, given their long

history as street performers, prompting the guild to dissociate itself from this underclass by requiring its members to shun members of “some thirty-five ‘vile’ occupations,” among them *sarugaku* performers (Groemer 354-5). Incidentally, it was also during this time period that the *kyōgen* repertoire transitioned from oral traditions and improvisation to standardized texts and performative *kata* (Ortolani 151). While this chronological correlation by itself does not prove existing animosity between members of the two professions, it does invite speculation as to whether it could be a factor in some *zatōmono* engaging in what appears to be gratuitous cruelty towards the sightless character for humorous purposes.

Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei considers this type of *zatōmono*, i.e. that of cruel behavior of sighted characters towards the blind, to be one category within her proposed tripartite division among this classification of *Kyōgen* plays, the others featuring plots in which the disabled torment each other, and those in which supernatural forces intervene in the lives of the blind (86). Two of the plays that will be discussed below feature interactions of the sightless and sighted as described in the first category, whereas the third, *Kawakami zatō*, belongs to the final category. Plays of the second category have been disregarded for the purpose of this analysis, as they are least likely to feature sociocultural or religious implications, focusing instead on slapstick (e.g. *Kikazu zatō*, in which a blind servant is ordered by his master to tap a deaf servant on his knee if he hears a burglar enter the house; the

blind man eventually grows bored and gives the signal without reason, leading to the two characters exchanging pranks [Sorgenfrei 91]).

Chakagi zatō belongs to the first category and is unique among *zatōmono* in that it presents a formal community of the blind instead of merely one sightless character or two to three blind men interacting (Morley 50). In this play, a gathering of blind men of the *Myōon-kō*, a group honoring the Bodhisattva Myōon by performing musical offerings, is interrupted by the actions of a sighted person (Morley 52-3). Eight of the nine characters appearing on stage are sightless and “at the very least attempt to pass themselves off as part of the official Tōdō Za,” as is evidenced by the humorous rendition of a *Heike monogatari* passage, although, according to Morley, they might not be (52-3). This play is one of a small number of pieces featuring *biwa hōshi* holding (or claiming to hold) the highest ranks of the Tōdō-za hierarchical system; the *shite* is a *sōkengyō* (translated by Morley as “Patriarch,” the highest rank), and among the seven blind secondary characters, three are *kengyō* (“Elders” in Morley’s version) and three are *kōtō* (“Brothers”) (52). The final sightless character is only referred to by his name, Kikuichi, and appears to be a servant. The version of the text introduced here appears in volume two of a three-volume collection of Kyōgen plays titled *Kyōgen shū*, in the *Nihon koten zensho* compilation, published in 1954. The text is taken from the *Sagi kentsū bon*, which dates to 1855; it is listed as a *bangaiyoku* in

the records of the Sagi and Izumi schools (Morley 58). Morley states that the play was listed in the *Tadasugawara kanjin sarugaku nikki* as having been staged in Tadasugawara at a subscription performance in 1464, although it does not appear in the *Tenshō bon*, the earliest compilation of Kyōgen plot summaries composed in 1570 (53, 58).

Chakagi zatō begins with the *shite* introducing himself as a *sōkengyō* and explaining that, since today is the gathering of the *Myōon-kō*, he will order a cleaning; he tells Kikuichi to do so (282). This part of the text already features a play on the blindness of the characters in that after the *shite* calls for his servant (“*Kikuichi iru ka yai*”) and Kikuichi answers, the following exchange occurs: *Shite*: “*Aru ka*” (“Are you here?”). *Kikuichi*: “*Omae ni*” (“In front of you”). *Shite*: “*Nanji o yobi idasu wa betsu no koto de mo nai*” (“I was merely summoning you, nothing else”) (282). After Kikuichi indicates his understanding, two *kengyō* and a *kōtō* begin to assemble and identify themselves to each other with frequent questioning of “*Nani-dono gozaru ka*” (“Who are you?”) (283). Kikuichi announces the guests to the *shite*, who bids them to be at ease since they are early and others have yet to arrive (284). This happens soon thereafter, with the introduction routine being repeated, and the *shite* wonders what kind of rare merrymaking they should engage in (“*Kyō wa mezurashū yūkyō o moyoosō to zonzuru ga, nan to gozarō zo*”) (285). However, first, the *sōkengyō* decides that they should partake of *sake*, and the cup is passed

around to small talk and song; Morley suggests that the formal passing of the *sakazuki* in this scene resembles court banquets, establishing the hierarchy within the group, with the *sōkengyō* occupying the position of the Emperor (NKZ 35:286-7; Morley 58-9). The *shite* is finally asked very politely to recite a section of the *Heike monogatari*, to which he agrees (287-8). What follows is a parody of the *Ichinotani* section of the *Heike*, translated by Morley in the following manner:

Now then, after the defeat at
the Battle of Ichi no Tani,
They ran about wildly, each
trying to make a name for
himself,
With cries of “Me too! Me too!”
Some fled and heels were
sliced off from behind,
Others were struck head on and
jaws were hacked off.
In the chaos of battle,
Some grabbed heels and stuck
them on their chins,
Others grabbed chins and stuck
them on their heels.
As they began to grow,
Beards sprouted from heels,
While chins began to chap,
pop-pop-pop-
Into two, three hundred cracks.
(56)

The others praise him (“*Oshorashii koto de gozaru*”), which the *shite* graciously accepts (“*Izuremono sayō ni shōbi shite homesaserarerureba, besshite taikai ni zonjimasuru*” – “Being valued and praised in that manner brings me great

pleasure above all”) (288). They pass the *sakazuki* around again for a while and begin talking about how the tea ceremony is very popular with all segments of society lately (“*Takai mo hikui mo oita wakai ni yorazu, chanoyū no wa yaru koto de gozaru*”), which leads to the *shite* suggesting a tea-sniffing instead, as a tea ceremony is not very diverting if one cannot sort out the various tools (“*Sore mo itashitō wa gozaredomo, are mo sorezore no dōgu o miwakeide wa, omoshirō gozaranu...*”) (289).

The *sōkengyō* orders Kikuichi to prepare the tea, at which point the sighted passer-by appears; he has heard of the gathering and looks in on the group of blind men (289-90). Remarking that this is a most unusual tea ceremony and that “these people called *zatō*” appear very conceited (“*Satemo satemo, zatō to mōsu mono wa, kozakashii mono de gozaru*”), he concludes that he wants to inconvenience them (“*Nanitozo shite zatōdomo o komarasete yaritai mono ja ga*”) and decides to drop something into the pot of tea (290). Soon thereafter, Kikuichi presents the tea to the others, none of whom approve of the aroma (“*gatten no ikanu*”), figuring out that pepper has been put into it (290). The *sōkengyō* takes Kikuichi to task, calling him a hateful rascal after the servant claims that he prepared the tea his master received this morning just as he was told, and beating him with his cane (291). The sighted passer-by finds this very amusing and decides to cause an argument between the blind men, hitting first the *shite* and then the others with his fan (291). The guests

believe the *sōkengyō* beat them after first hearing his outcry of pain, asking very politely why he is hitting them since they have committed no sin (“*Nō sōkengyō. Nani tote toga mo nai mono o chōchaku mesaruru;*” cf. the *shite*’s initial complaint ending in the much blunter “*otataki yatta zo*”) (291). The *sōkengyō* and the main *kengyō* tell each other that they did not raise a hand, realizing that it is an outsider who is beating them; losing patience with repeatedly being beaten and having their noses pinched, the blind men attempt to catch him, but instead beat each other (292). As the passer-by escapes, all lower-ranked blind men begin beating the *sōkengyō*, believing him to be the outsider, and the *shite* yells for the man who would beat him like that to be caught (292).

The fact that the passer-by identifies the blind men as “people called *zatō*” here, as well as the rather unorthodox passage of the “*Heike*” recited by the *sōkengyō*, lends credence to the fact that this group may well be composed of upstarts, rather than actual members of the official *Tōdō-za*, as Morley surmises (51). Furthermore, while their visual disability obviously plays a role in the prank visited upon them by the passer-by, the impetus for deciding to do so in the first place seems to be their pomposity rather than the fact that they are blind, and thus may be grounded in their pretending to be above their actual societal station. This is also corroborated by the fact that the prankster torments the *sōkengyō* first, notably right after the leader of the group is chastising and beating Kikuichi, who occupies the lowest

position, and that this highest-ranked person receives most of the beatings towards the end of the play. Mentions of blindness are pervasive in this play, and it provides the most farcical elements of the three *Kyōgen* pieces discussed within this paper, making it one of the less acceptable ones in a contemporary context within the *zatōmono* category. However, it is possible to surmise based on the above observations that the societal aspirations displayed by the *shite* and his associates, and the notions implicit in *gekokujō*, namely the disruption of the rigid social structure of the *Myōon-kō*, so painstakingly established by way of the elaborate greetings and the drinking ritual beforehand, provide the primary drive in amusing prospective audiences. While the visual disability of the *Myōon-kō* members is obviously utilized for comical purposes in the closing section of the play, it can be regarded as an adjunctive factor.

Two versions of *Tsukimi zatō* featuring slightly different dialogue, as well as widely divergent endings, have been published in anthologies of *Kyōgen* plays; the plot of the version appearing in the second *Kyōgen shū* volume of the *NKZ* published in 1954, and originally taken from the Sagi school’s *Ban’ō* dating to 1918, progresses along the following lines: The *shite*, a blind man holding the rank of *kōtō* from Lower Kyoto, decides to enjoy the sound of insects in the fields during the night of the full moon of the eighth month, a date popular for moon viewing, as “people like himself” are wont to enjoy in lieu of being able to look at the sky (“*Tokaku warera gotoki no mono wa*

nobe e idete, mushi no oto o kiku ga nani yori no nagusami de gozaru hodo ni...) (293). As he takes pleasure in the song of the various insects, a man from Upper Kyoto, the *ado*, enters the scene, spotting the blind man and being curious about why a sightless person would engage in moon viewing (“*Iya are ni zatō ga iru. Are wa me mo mienu ni tsuki o miru koto ka shiranu*”) (294). After calling out to the blind man, the two characters introduce themselves, including mention of their respective residential areas, and the *kōtō* is embarrassed at conversing with someone of higher social standing (“*Kamigyō to ōserarureba kokoro hazukashū gozaru.*”) (294). The difference in societal status seems to be reinforced from the beginning of their conversation, as the uptown dweller utilizes *oryaru* (a contraction of *o-iri aru*) to refer to himself; for example, after the *shite* asks him very politely from where he hails (“*Konata wa dore kara oide nasarete gozaru*”), he answers “*Midomo wa kamigyō no mono de oryaru*” (294). *Oryaru* seems to have been employed both in the polite *teineigo* register and as an honorific expression. In conjunction with the use of *midomo*, which is a self-referential pronoun used when talking to those of lower status, an assumption of a higher social position by the *ado* seems to be indicated here. Furthermore, for comparison, his self-introduction upon appearing on stage prior to his encountering the blind man features the customary *de gozaru* (294).

Thereafter, politeness modalities frequently switch, with both occasionally employing *–masu* as well

as plain forms as they decide to spend some time together, reciting poetry and sharing the *sasae* (bamboo flask) of *sake* the uptown man has brought along (295). Eventually, they part from each other with both men performing a *komai*, the blind man now consistently appending *–masu* while the *ado* once more uses plain forms (296-7). Right after they go their separate ways, the uptown dweller, while acknowledging that this meeting was very enjoyable, decides to make sport of the blind man without a stated reason (“*Iya, yoi omoi ideita. Zatō o chito nabutte asobō*”) (297). He deliberately walks into the way of the blind man, who accuses him of being a drunk, only to be called a “hateful rascal” (*nikui yatsu*) and addressed as *onore* (which, at this point, had developed from a pronoun to a term of abuse according to a headnote) (297). The uptown dweller continues to use abusive language and spins the sightless man around, saying to himself afterwards that this was very amusing, delighting in the fact that the other man seems so disoriented that he might not be able to return home, and decides to depart for his own residence in a hurry (“*Satemo satemo okashii koto kana. Kore dewa tōzai mo shirei de kaeru koto wa naru mai. Ashimoto* [here: “face” according to the headnote] *no akai uchi, isoide makari kaerō*”) (298). The blind man is left alone in the path, having to orient himself on a nearby stream and locate his cane to find his way back to Lower Kyoto while hearing the ruckus caused by vicious dogs from afar, only to then be attacked by the dogs; the play ends with him proclaiming “How sad, how

sad” (“*Kanashi ya no kanashi ya no*”) (298).

While this version of the play is no longer performed according to Jacqueline Golay (144), it is of interest in this context in light of the textual differences when compared to another version which still saw the occasional performance when her article was published. Taguchi Kazuo explains that it has long been believed that the former version developed into the latter, with the ending merely having been shortened (333). However, the *Kurimoto jikkan shū*, a Sagi school compilation which is textually close to the *Kentsū bon* of the same school, sheds light on the fact that these versions were written at about the same time, and that the Ōkura school, which performs the version below, passed it down in their records (333). The version appearing in the *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* published by Shōgakukan was taken from the Ōkura *Shigeyama shin'ichi bon*, the composition of which dates to between the closing days of the Tokugawa regime (*bakumatsu*, 1853-1867) and more recent years (*kindai*) (*NKBZ* 35:16). In this textual variant, the blind man does not introduce himself as a *kōtō*, although the role description mentioned that he is often costumed as one, depending on the performing school (472). The uptown man respectfully addresses him as *gobō*, “honorable priest,” an appellation completely absent from the other version of the play; likewise missing are the references to the blind as a separate group (“people like me”), as well as the sighted man’s mention of his higher station in his introduction

and the blind man’s subsequent deference (474). Furthermore, the uptown dweller is consistently polite to his vision-impaired impromptu companion prior to their parting, using *oryaru* in referring to the blind man rather than himself (see pp. 474-5). The moon-viewing activities and subsequent sudden decision by the sighted man to make sport of the blind man progress much along the same lines as in the version mentioned above, although the text in the *Nihon koten zensho* makes no mention of the sighted man falsifying his voice. Finally, after the uptown dweller runs away, the *zatō* remarks on how different the first man he encountered was from the second one, who showed him no sympathy (“*Omoeba omoeba ima no yatsu wa, saizen no hito to wa hitchigae, nasake mo nai yatsu de gozaru*”), a mistaking of the other’s identity not featured in the alternate text, and exits the stage with a song of lament, his left sleeve covering his face (480).

In comparing these two versions, it is immediately apparent that the first version not only features a more gratuitously cruel fate for the blind man at the end, but also that the contrast between blindness and sightedness is intertwined with the revealed difference in social standing: While high-ranking within the community of the blind as a *kōtō* and explicitly introducing himself with this title, the *shite* humbles himself before the man from Upper Kyoto, an area in which the rich and aristocratic tended to dwell due to its proximity to the Imperial Palace (Golay 143). In this, the *Nihon koten zensho* version can be

read as a commentary on societal station in its depicted exploitation of a man of lower standing by one of higher standing in the continued pursuit of amusement. The blindness, although mentioned as a demarcating quality, amounts to a mere adjunctive property facilitating the abuse. While the play is described as being removed from Buddhist constraints in the *Nōgaku daijiten* (see above), the final dog attack, adding injury to insult, could be interpreted as having been caused by the blind man's bad karma. This karmic debt, according to Buddhist thought, would have originally led to the *zatō*'s disability, although the fact that it could have also occurred to a sighted person removes the focus from the *shite*'s blindness after he finds his cane.

The *NKBZ* version, meanwhile, is more obviously dependent on sightlessness as a factor in the turning point of the action as well as the end, as the explicit reference to the uptown dweller falsifying his voice and the blind man comparing the two "different" men he encountered prove. Here, the *zatō* is allowed to depart in melancholy with a song referencing his sightlessness. The *yūgen* atmosphere, i.e. that of profundity and the sad beauty of the "truthful essence of humanity" inherent in the ending (Ortolani 125), invites the audience to commiseration while simultaneously allowing the focus to remain on the sudden cruelty visited upon him by the other man. Jacqueline Golay sees this version as expressive of contrasts, both in the play's mood, seguing from congenial to confrontational to

melancholy, and in the change occurring within the *ado*:

Here is one of the basic features of *kyōgen*: people are caught up in a moment of their lives when circumstances temporarily strip them of all their educated veneer and reveal their natural anomalies. This is unwittingly pointed out by the blind *zatō* when he says that the man who offered him *sake* and the man who knocked him down are so very different. They are different. Everybody is many different people. (144)

In the *NKZ* version, the uptown dweller, while initially behaving amenably towards the blind man despite the sighted man's apparent awareness of his own higher social position, appears to merely proceed from one amusement to the next, rather than explicitly displaying this proposed sudden change in attitude, signaled only by the interspersed *iya* ("hold on," "wait a moment") ("*Satemo satemo yoi nagusami omomuite gozaru. Iya, yoi koto o omoi ideita. Zatō o chito nabutte asobō*" [297]). Furthermore, the *zatō* does not comment on the "two men's" different natures. On the other hand, the personality change in the *ado* featured in the *NKBZ* text, after consistently being respectful towards the *shite* during their association, appears more abrupt, which is also evidenced in his slightly longer line referencing the enjoyment of their shared time and the initial intention to go home right away: "*Satemo satemo omoshiroi koto kana.*"

Zatō to tsukimi o omomuita. Saraba isoide modorō. [Ikikakete] Ga, ima hitoshio no nagusami ni, tsukurigoe o shite kyatsu ni kenka o shikakete miyō to zonzuru;” this utterance is accompanied by a note stating that, at this point, his change of mind could be seen as the emergence of drunkenness (479). Therefore, the sudden about-face of the *ado* could be interpreted as shedding light on the human condition as inhibitions are lowered, as Golay asserts, removing the comical focus from the blind man, who is allowed to display pathos in the end, and placing it on the impromptu boorishness of a man of presumably high standing. An interesting observation by Taguchi Kazuo should be mentioned in this context: According to him, the respective *komai* used in the divergent versions foreshadow the endings. In the Ōkura school version listed in the *NKBZ*, the *komai* of the blind man is called *jakubōshi* (“weak priest”), foreshadowing the pathos displayed during his exit (333). In the Sagi school version found in the *Kurimoto jikkan shū*, the *ado* dances a *komai* called *yamauba*, during which he sings, “*Yama mawari no tokoro, shita ni ite mane o shite, zatō no kao o naderu*” (“In a place around the mountain, sitting down and imitating, stroking the blind man’s face”) (333). Taguchi considers this an intertextual reference to the Kyōgen play *Kikazu zatō*, in which a deaf man strokes a blind man’s face with his foot in mischief, which in turn foreshadows that the *ado* is planning to make sport of his erstwhile companion (333). Notably, the blind man is the one foreshadowing his fate in the Ōkura

school version; while the events might be predetermined, and Taguchi asserts that the *zatō*’s use of *jakubōshi* renders the other man’s actions inevitable (333), the actions of the uptown dweller can still be read as spontaneous. However, if one takes the *ado*’s foreshadowing in the Sagi school’s version, as well as the shortened line of his announcing his intentions, into account, the transition from enjoying the blind man’s company to tormenting him for sport seems more willful.

Finally, in *Kawakami zatō* (also found in *NKZ* vol. 35, originally appearing in this form in the *Sagi kentsū bon* dating to 1855), the blind *shite* does not introduce himself with anything resembling a Tōdō-za rank; he is simply a “blind person” (*mōjin*) from Nara, who was not born disabled, but became blind, and who is visiting the upstream area of the Yoshino river, as the Jizō statue there is supposed to grant divine favors (96). He asks for the way, grateful for the graciousness of others, and finally arrives at the site, where he prays to the Bodhisattva to restore both of his eyes to clarity with divine favor (“*Nanitozo gorishō o mochimashite, ryōgan akiraka ni narimasu yō ni, negai tatematurimasuru*”) (97). Thereafter, he converses with other pilgrims (not present on the stage) from Izumi and Kawachi, and eventually decides to take a rest; while sleeping, he is stung by bees, and as he is crying out in pain, his eyes open (97-8). The *shite* gratefully prays once more to the Jizō, and he decides to immediately hurry home and tell his wife the good news so they can rejoice together (“*Mazu*

isoide makari kaeri, onnadomo ni kono yoshi o mōshite yorokobashō to zonzuru”) (98). At this juncture, the wife appears and introduces herself at the first pine position on the *hashigakari*, stating that she has been lonely as her husband has been gone on his pilgrimage to the upper reaches of the Yoshino River, and that she has gone to meet him (98). Then, she enters the stage and calls out to her husband (“*Moshi moshi, konata wa kochi no hito de wa gozaranu ka*”), having to identify herself as his wife thereafter (“*Waraha wa kana hōshi ga haha de gozaru*” [*hōshi* here is a euphemism for “baby,” lit. “I am the mother of your child”]), and noticing that his eyes are now open (98). The formerly blind man explains what has happened to him, stating that the bees that stung him were a manifestation of Jizō (“*Ojizō no ojigen no hachi de oryaru*”) (99). His wife has brought along *sake*, of which they begin to partake, and the man asks her to dance; after she does so, her husband dances a *komai*, as well (100). Eventually, they decide to stop, and the *shite* mentions that he wants to tell his wife something, but that he is certain that she will become angry if he does and so cannot say it (“*Sate wagoryo ni iitai koto ga aru ga, kono koto o iuta naraba, sadamete hara ga tatesashimasō to omoute, iikaneru yo*”) (101). After his wife repeatedly asks him to reveal what it is, promising that she will not get angry, he finally explains how Jizō revealed to him that if he remains by her side as he has until now, his eyesight will once again fail, which means that he cannot be with her anymore (101). She is

appalled that he would say something so cruel to her just after his eyesight has been restored, and states that she would like to go to Kawakami right now and split the Jizō apart (“*Kore kara Kawakami e maitte, Ojizō o tsukamisaite nokyō*”) (102). The *shite* tells her to get a hold of herself, repeating that it was truly a manifestation of Jizō that appeared to him, and commands her to resign herself to it, to which his wife responds that to order them to divorce is cruel, repeating her intention to destroy the statue (102). The man calls her a *wawashii hito* (“a loudmouth/quarrelsome person”) at this point, complaining that she is not keeping her promise; after another repetition of her intentions, he finally states that what she states has merit, but wonders what he should do, even if a separation would be cruel (102).

Eventually, he decides to defy the revelation of Jizō and remain with her as before (“*Ojizō no ojigen o somuki, ima made no tōri soi mo shiyō ka*”) (103). After his wife asks him whether this is the truth and he affirms that decision, he suddenly cries out in pain, stating that he is now the subject of divine retribution; his eyes are once again failing as they were before (“*Obatsu o kagahori, mata moto no gotoku me ga tsubureta wa*”) (103). His wife laments this state as “pitiable” (“*oitoshiya no*”); thereafter, they decide to return home, singing about how sad it is that the *shite*’s eyes have once again turned white, signifying his returning blindness, and how this must be bad karma from a previous life (103). The wife then proceeds to lead

her once again unseeing husband off the stage (103).

Slightly different textual versions of this play also exist, as the translation by Don Kenny in *The Kyōgen Book* shows; to name just one difference, the wife assures the formerly blind man after he has made the decision to stay with her, “The gods are compassionate. As they blessed you with sight, I am certain they will not strike you blind again,” to which her husband responds, “Oh, but I made a most solemn promise, so I am quite worried,” and she subsequently admonishes him, “You must not say such weak-hearted things,” exhorting him to hurry home with her quickly (217). Only then does the *shite*’s blindness return. However, the overall plot of the play remains the same.

This play, lacking the societal markers present in the aforementioned two *zatōmono* and depicting a religious experience after a pilgrimage, is primarily discussed utilizing a Buddhist hermeneutic in critical discourse. Unusually tragic in its ending for a Kyōgen play, the point at which the revelation of Jizō is proven true and the *shite* struck blind again is described by Jacqueline Golay as having “the effect of an anti-climax” and “profoundly disturbing” (147). She reads the deity in this play as capricious and arbitrary, and the renewed loss of the man’s eyesight as “sadistic punishment,” which is usually reserved for specific transgressions of the ethical code, not the disregard of an unreasonable bargain (148). Golay considers Jizō’s deeds in this play as perhaps being

representative of an exalted form of prank, and juxtaposes his willfulness with the dignified resignation of the couple (148). Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, meanwhile, does not read the deity as anything other than benevolent; the important aspect, according to her interpretation, is the willful decision of the couple to stay together, “offering each other only the grace of human love” (96). The short interpretation of the play given in the *Nōgaku daijiten* agrees with her view, as it states that the blind man in *Kawakami zatō* is able to feel the happiness of true love precisely because he is blind (392). Whereas restored sight would lead to the main character’s isolation, its rejection preserves human contact, enabling the *shite* to gain “a vision of eternity in the here and now” (Sorgenfrei 96).

Kana Ranju cites a critic named Izeki Yoshihisa coming to similar conclusions in regard to preserving the karmic bond of marriage; he proposes that this play features a primary theme of the human way of life, which progresses along the road to ruin without hesitation, with the absolute element (i.e. Jizō) being unable to prevent it (80). However, Kana disagrees with this interpretation, stating that *Kawakami zatō*’s comedy in humorously portraying a *wawashii onna*, her pressured husband, and their marital relationship is, in fact, aimed at making people laugh, and that the man vs. god conflict would be an exceedingly modern primary theme to be included in this piece (80). Kana mentions that Jizō was not fundamentally regarded as a deity to be feared, adding that, in Kyōgen,

gods often exhibit the same weaknesses as human beings, and are thereby given corporeal existence, as is evidenced by the wife's verbal abuse of the deity in this play (80-1). Ultimately, she proposes that, rather than being immeasurably tragic, the miraculous cure and renewed blindness of the *shite* amount to nothing more than a momentary "happening," and that the couple will likely return to the Kawakami Jizō to pray for other favors, as the populace lived in the peace of mind that ultimately, everyone could be saved (81).

Kana's assertion that casting a Bodhisattva known for his mercy as part of a man v. god conflict is unusual agrees with Golay's interpretation, as well as Sorgenfrei's reading of Jizō's lack of a malevolent motive. However, her reading of the couple's argument as humorous, even if viewed in a premodern context, may be overly strong, although the *wawashii onna* role is often employed for this purpose in Kyōgen. Perhaps Golay's ultimate conclusion regarding *Kawakami zatō*, i.e. that this play may depict "a deliberately distorted allusion to the Buddhist ideal of detachment from worldly affections," comes closest to Ōkura Toraakira's proposed notion that "Kyōgen is backward." In this case, the blindness factor, though obviously factoring into the plot, is once again adjunctive in nature, in that it merely provides a beginning condition as a background for the religious motif. As Golay puts it, "it is not as a blind man but as a human that the *zatō* is being victimized" (149).

Though profoundly problematic in the exploitation of disability for comedic purposes or religious commentary when viewed from a modern point of view, these three plays do not seem to overtly seek to denigrate blindness per se; rather, sightlessness is an adjunctive property which factors into the humorous element inherent in the play, if such an element exists (in *Kawakami zatō*, it seems arguably absent). The most problematic depiction of a blind person is probably given in the NKZ version of *Tsukimi zatō*, in which the *zatō* is victimized as a sightless man *and* a human being, first by the initially friendly uptown dweller and then by the vicious dogs. Considering the humbleness the blind *shite* displays immediately after learning of his impromptu companion's higher status, puncturing an inflated ego as in the case of *Chakagi zatō* cannot be the driving force behind this excessive cruelty, either. This play may show an animosity of the unknown creator towards the Tōdō-za as an organization by way of depicting the repeated humbling of a comparatively high-ranking member, although further corroborating evidence would be needed to make a firm assertion in this regard. Ultimately, it is challenging to provide a thorough exegesis of the differences between the two versions of *Tsukimi zatō* without comparing them in performance. Being able to witness the manner of delivery at the key point of the play, namely the sighted man's decision to torment the blind man, would facilitate any interpretive attempts significantly. However, according to Golay, the

version taken from the *Sagi ban'ō* is no longer performed (144); therefore, it may not be possible to offer a comparative interpretation based on performative aspects.

Chakagi zatō, meanwhile, seems concerned with attacking pomposity rather than blindness, although the chaotic ending in which the *Myōon-kō* members eventually give their leader a thorough beating would appear shocking to modern audiences. This play, which is listed as an out-of-repertoire play in the sources of the Izumi and Sagi schools, is described by Morley as “rarely performed,” particularly since a modern audience would lack the contextual framework, i.e., “the intricate social interactions of the *biwa hōshi* among themselves” (53). For that reason, providing a performative analysis of this piece is likewise difficult.

Kawakami-zatō, finally, even if its intended message ultimately remains unclear, deals with a dual conflict between man and wife, as well as spiritual salvation and worldly attachment; the blindness is an adjunct in that it could be replaced with any number of factors to provoke the same dichotomies, although its connection with bad karma in the popular belief system of the time renders it a logical inclusion in this context.

Kitagawa Tadahiko states that *zatōmono* do not simply make fun of the blind and the disabled, but that, through these characters, it becomes possible to see the prejudices and inferiority complexes every human being has, as not just this category of plays, but all *Kyōgen* pieces, aim at showing the weak points of all human

beings in a humorous way (99-100). Likewise, Jacqueline Golay points out, “There is no more reason to believe that the blind were commonly the object of mockery than to believe all servants were crafty and insolent, all country lords ignorant and stupid,” and that the societal observations in *kyōgen* are not of an external, but of a psychological nature (148-9). She adds,

Kyōgen took shape during a unique epoch of Japanese history when an exceptional sense of freedom allowed those of humble station to manifest their moods and criticize the established order. It was a time when the humble could hope to be elevated, when the guilds had real political and economic power, when the traditional rigidity of society could be challenged. *Kyōgen* reflects these moods and was certainly used as a vehicle of social protest. But one can query how deliberately and forcefully it was used in this way, for it should certainly not be regarded as politically conscious or didactic. (149)

However, while hardly didactic in nature, the observations above would indicate a certain amount of societal and religious consciousness inherent in the analyzed plays; after all, if such a consciousness did not exist, it would not have been necessary to establish the social standing, personal history, or religious inclinations of the blind characters prior to progressing to the farcical elements, indicating that,

without an incorporated protest against established norms and ranks by way of attempting to turn them on their ear, the intended comedy and/or pathos of a given piece likewise evaporates. *Kyōgen*, as an art depicting reality in a deliberately distorted manner for primarily comical purposes, obviously does not shy away from using visual disability for its own ends, but its exploitation for humorous or cruel-seeming dramatic plays generally appears to occur in an overarching societal or religious framework. In the end, without understanding this framework, appreciating *zatōmono* as more than mere lowbrow comedies which callously make fun of the disabled must remain impossible.

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