

Owls

(Comic interlude)

Coming home from playing together in the mountains, Brother finds his Elder Brother utterly distracted and unresponsive, and asks a mountain priest, living nearby, to offer prayers for his recovery. When the priest comes, the Elder Brother, looking ill and deranged to all appearances, suddenly starts hooting. He might have been possessed by owls as he raided their nests for eggs in the mountains. The priest recites healing prayers, optimistic as to what his venerable nonsense will bring about.

Benkei in the Boat

(The 2nd part of the play, performed to the accompaniment of flute and drum)

Yoshitsune and his retainers, driven out of the capital for provoking discord by his brother Yoritomo, hastened by boat to Daimotsu Bay (present-day Amagasaki, Osaka) down the Yodo River. Ready at the bay to embark towards the West, they saw weird-looking clouds covering the Mount Muko, and, in a moment, a violent wind blew down from the summit. In the turmoil of the stormy wind and towering waves, the ghosts of the drowned Taira-no-Tomomori and his navy, rose up to the surface and attacked Yoshitsune and his naval force in revenge for their last defeat. In a dramatic sea fight, Benkei, with Buddha's help, succeeded in driving evil spirits away.

Sotoba Komachi

("Komachi on the stupa")

A number of monks from Mt. Koya, who were on their way to the capital, met a very old woman at Matsubara in the province of Settsu (present-day Osaka Prefecture). She was clad in rags, with her hair dishevelled, and appeared to be exhausted; but to their astonishment she was taking rest on a timber stupa*—a deed of absolute sacrilege which they could not overlook. They remonstrated with her to get off it and rest somewhere else. But she refused, refuting their request by saying that although they asserted it was a sacred symbol of Buddha's body, it was simply a decaying piece of wood with no words or carved images visible on it; that Buddha and Man do not differ, as in reality all is void, according to the teaching of Buddha. While exchanging questions and answers, they were so struck with her deep understanding of life, death and enlightenment, that they knelt down before her and asked who she was. She introduced herself as Ono-no-Komachi, once an idol of courtiers with her beauty and her distinguished court culture, but now a shadow of the former beauty in the winter of her life. In her younger days, Major General Fukakusa, who loved her deeply, had wanted to win her with the promise that he would pay her, without seeing her, a hundred nightly visits, leaving home in the early evening and coming home in the early morning. While she was lost in reminiscence, the ghost of Fukakusa-no-Shōshō possessed her and she started narrating how he had visited her by moonlight or in darkness, in rain or snow, till the day before he would have fulfilled his promise, when his health suddenly failed and he died. For a while she was almost driven mad by his deep-seated grudge her ill-natured arrangement had caused. When freed from madness, she resolved she would pray for salvation in the life to come, and follow the Way of Truth.

* *sotoba*, or timber stupa is a tablet with its upper part notched into 5 sections, representing five elements of the universe: earth, water, fire, wind, and void. It is used for Buddhist ceremonies for the repose of the departed.

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