

The Moon-viewing Blind Man

On an evening in mid-Autumn when the moon is full, a blind man living in Shimogyo and another man living in Kamigyo meet on the bank of a river. They enjoy the autumnal charms of nature, and start exchanging *waka* poems which they have composed (actually cited well-known *waka* poems) over several cups of *sake*. As the *sake* takes effect and the time for friendship and elegant words is over, the Kamigyo man is tempted to make fun of the blind man, and, assuming the roll of a brute, he bumps into him and then accuses him of blocking the highway. He beats him until he falls down on to the highway ignoring his apologies. The blind man, when left alone, compares the outrageous man who has just departed with the refined man he had spent time with only a few moments ago, and weeps over the hard-heartedness of the world. He fails to notice that these two men are one and the same man. In contrasting the elegant and peaceful mood in the first half with the selfish violence of the second, this kyogen piece depicts the two sides of the human heart: the man with the benefit of eyesight may not in reality see the pureness and beauty of the moonlight.

Toru, the Noted Epicurean

On an evening in mid-Autumn when the moon is full, a travelling priest, having come up to Kyoto, walks around the Rokujo Kawara-no-in, the once gorgeous but now dilapidated villa of Minamoto Toru (822-895), son of Emperor Saga and noted Heian-period epicurean. Here he meets an old man who carries pails and draws salt-water. Finding it unaccountable to draw salt-water so far from the sea, he asks the old man why he does so. The old man explains how the great minister Minamoto Toru once built a magnificent villa here, with a huge garden and pond reproducing the view of Shiogama Bay in Michinoku (in the present-day Tohoku District), and daily had 3,000 labourers draw brine from the Sea of Naniwa, and carry it to his pond for the purpose of making salt. In the Heian period even small features of the Michinoku area were greatly romanticized and adored in the capital, and Toru, with a highly refined sense of taste, had his pleasure-boat afloat on this man-made sea dotted with islands, and lived the life of epicure. But after his death, no one inherited this villa, and it was deserted falling into a wind-swept, dilapidated state, even though at one time, the smoke of salt-making could always be seen trailing across the sky above the garden, as the old man nostalgically recalls. In answer to the priest's inquiry, the old man gives in answer the complete list of scenic places surrounding the site, and then disappears, once again drawing salt-water.

Later at night while the priest is dozing, Toru appears in his former splendour and rehearses the luxurious life at the great villa under the beautiful moon, offering a graceful, short dance—till the moon wanes and the clouds of dawn appear trailing across the eastern sky. He then returns, as if invited by the clouds, to the capital of the moon.

(Takao Saijo)