

O NOH GYAKU

SUMIDAGAWA

BY
JURO MOTOMASA

From
The Noh Drama - Ten Plays From the Japanese
Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai
Japanese Classics Translation Committee
Tuttle, VT. & Tokyo, 1955.

SUMIDAGAWA

PERSONS

Ferryman of Sumida River	<i>Waki</i>
Traveler From Miyako	<i>Waki-zure</i>
Mother, a Mad Woman	<i>Shite</i>
Ghost of Umewaka-Marū, her child	<i>Kokata</i>

PLACE

Sumida River, Musashi Province

SEASON

Spring

SUMIDAGAWA

Stage-attendants place a framework mound covered with willow branches in front of the Orchestra, inside which the ghost-child is hidden.

1

While the entrance music NANORIBUE is being played, THE FERRYMAN OF THE SUMIDA RIVER enters the stage and stands at the SHITE seat. He wears a striped kimono, SUO robe and trailing divided skirt.

FERRYMAN

I am he who rows the ferry across the Sumida in the province of Musashi. Today I must quickly ferry people across the water because we are holding a solemn memorial service for someone at the village on the other side of the river where both priest and laymen are gathering in great numbers. Mark this well, all of you!

He sits down in front of the CHORUS.

2

While the entrance music SHIDAI is being played, THE TRAVELER FROM MIYAKO enters with a mushroom hat on. He wears a striped kimono, KAKESUO robe and white broad divided skirt.

TRAVELER

To the far Eastland I am bound,
To the far Eastland I am bound;
Tedious days of travel lie before me.

CHORUS

To the far Eastland I am bound;
Tedious days of travel lie before me.

TRAVELER

Removes his hat.

I come from Miyako. I have a friend in the Eastland and now I am going there to visit him.

Puts it on again.

Behind me wrapt in clouds and mists
Lie the mountains I have crossed,
Lie the mountains I have crossed.
Many a barrier have I passed through,
Many a province have I traversed.
Here lies the far-famed Sumida,
And now I have reached the ferry,

And now I have reached the ferry.

Removes hat.

Traveling in haste, here I am at the Sumida ferry and over there I see a ferry-boat about to leave. I will make haste and board it. Hi Boatman! I want to get in your boat.

FERRYMAN

Rises.

All right sir! Get in. But first may I ask you what is the meaning of that unusual noise from where you have just come?

TRAVELER

It is a crazy woman from Miyako and people are amused by her mad dancing.

FERRYMAN

Sits on the WAKI Seat to the right of the TRAVELER.

Then I will delay the ferry-boat for a while and wait for the mad creature.

3

While the entrance music ISSEI is being played, the MOTHER appears and stops on the HASHIGAKARI by the FIRST PINE. She wears a FUKAI mask, wig, painted gold-patterned under-kimono, embroidered KOSHIMAKI outer-kimono, broad-sleeved robe. She has on a mushroom hat, and carries a spray of bamboo.

MOTHER

“Although a mother’s mind
May be unclouded,
She may well lose her way
Through love of her child.”
Where does my darling stray?
Shall I ask these travelers?
Does he know his mother’s grief?
“Does not the skyey wind

(fr. poem from GOSENSHU.)

CHORUS

Whisper to the waiting pines?”

(fr. poem from SHIN KOKINSHU.)

The MOTHER advances on to the stage and performs a KAKERI dance.

MOTHER

In this world fleeting like the dews
Upon Makuzu Field,

CHORUS

Should I thus pass my days
Complaining of my bitter day?

MOTHER

For many years I lived
In Miyako, at Kita-Shirakawa;
Then suddenly I lost my only child,
Kidnapped by a slaver.
They told me he was taken
Beyond the Osaka Barrier
Eastwards, to far-off Azuma,
Since when with mind distraught
I wander on my desperate quest,
Torn by longing for my boy.

Weeps.

CHORUS

“Though he be a thousand miles away
— ’tis said — a mother ne’er forgets her child.”

(fr. poem by PO-CHU-I.)

And yet the bond of parenthood
Cannot survive the grave,
Cannot survive the grave.

Ah! Woe is me

That even in this world I must be parted from him

Like “the four young birds that left their nest.”

(fr. WORDS & DEEDS OF CONFUCIUS.)

Will my weary quest end here?

Now I have reached the Sumida,

Now I have reached the Sumida

That flows between Musashi and Shimoso.

MOTHER

Pray, boatman. Let me get into the boat.

FERRYMAN

Where are you from and where are you going?

MOTHER

From Miyako I have come in search of someone.

FERRYMAN

Since you are a woman of Miyako and mad to boot, I will not take you aboard unless you amuse us with one of your crazy dances.

MOTHER

What a clumsy way of speaking! Since you are the Sumida ferryman, you should have answered, “Come on board, for the day is spent,”

(fr. ISE MONOGATARI)

Yet you refuse passage

To me, a city lady.

How ill-becoming a Sumida boatman

To speak so rudely!

FERRYMAN

How like a woman of Miyako to use such elegant language!

MOTHER

Your words remind me of the poem Narihira once composed at this very spot.

“O birds of Miyako,
If you are worthy of your name,
Tell me does my love still live?”

Turns towards the right.

O boatman, yonder is a white bird not found in Miyako. What is its name?

FERRYMAN

It is a sea-gull.

MOTHER

How unpoetical! By the sea you may call it a gull or a plover or whatever you will, but here by the Sumida river why not “Miyako-bird”?

FERRYMAN

Truly I was in the wrong!
Living in this famous place
'Twas thoughtless of me,
Instead of Miyako-bird,

MOTHER

To call it a sea-gull.

FERRYMAN

So Narihira long ago

MOTHER

Asked, “Is she still alive?”

FERRYMAN

Remembering his lady in Miyako.

MOTHER

Moved by like yearning,
I am seeking my lost child
In the Eastland.

FERRYMAN

To long for a sweetheart,

MOTHER

To seek after a lost child,

FERRYMAN

Both spring

MOTHER

From love.

CHORUS

O Miyako-bird, I too will ask you,
O Miyako-bird, I too will ask you,
Is my dear child still living
Somewhere in the Eastland?
I ask and ask, but it will not answer.

MOTHER turns towards the WAKI front.

Oh, rude Miyako-bird!
I'll call you 'rustic-bird'.

"By the River Horie

Where boats hurry past each other,

Miyako-birds utter their cries": *(fr. MANYOSHU.)*

She goes to the FIRST PINE and touching the brim of her hat gazes into the distance.

There at Naniwa in the West,
Here by the Sumida in the East —
How far I have come from home!

Returning from the HASHIGAKARI, she goes up to the FERRYMAN and dropping the spray of bamboo, joins her hands in supplication.

But pray, O boatman,
Let me come on board.
Though crowded be your boat,
O, let me too on board, I pray!

FERRYMAN

Slips his right arm out of his kimono and picks up his pole.

So sensible a mad woman I never saw. Be quick and come aboard. This is a dangerous crossing; please take care and sit still. You too, traveler, get in.

The MOTHER removes her hat and holding it in her left hand, steps forward as if getting into a boat and sits down. The TRAVELER sits sideways behind the MOTHER while the FERRYMAN stands at the back and plies his pole.

4

TRAVELER

Why are all those people gathered together over there, under that willow tree?

FERRYMAN

They are holding a solemn memorial service connected with a sad tale which I shall tell you while the boat is crossing to the other side.

It happened last year, on the fifteenth of the third month; yes, and this is the very day on which it happened. A slave-trader was on his way to the Northeast, taking along with him a boy he had bought – a tender lad some twelve years old. Wearied out by the unaccustomed hardships of the road, the boy was seized with a mortal illness. He was so weak, he said he could not drag himself a step farther, and lay down on the bank. What heartless men there are in this world! The slaver abandoned the boy by the roadside and went on his way.

But the people of this neighborhood, judging from his appearance that the lad was of gentle birth, nursed and tended him as best they could. But perhaps because of his *karma*, he grew worse and worse. When he was at the point of death, we asked him, “Where were you born, who are you?” “I was born in Miyako – he replied – at Kita-Shirakawa, the only child of Lord Yoshida. My father being dead, mother and I lived alone. Then I was kidnapped and now am brought to this pass. Please bury me here by the roadside, so that passers-by coming from Miyako may at least cast their shadow over my grave: and plant a willow-tree in memory of me.” He said these words, calmly, like a man; invoked Amida Buddha several times, and died. What a piteous happening!

The MOTHER weeps.

There may be some people from Miyako in this boat. Let them offer prayers for the repose of this poor soul, even if they are not relations of the dead lad. Look! While you were listening to my long and tedious tale, the ferry has reached the bank. Make haste and land!

TRAVELER

Going to the WAKI Seat, addresses the FERRYMAN and then sits down.

I will surely remain here to-day and though I had nothing to do with the lad, I will offer up a prayer for him.

FERRYMAN

Turns and looks at the weeping MOTHER.

Come, my mad creature there! Why not get out of my boat? Hurry! How tenderhearted of you to shed tears over such a story. Please get out of the boat quickly!

MOTHER

Turns to the FERRYMAN.

Boatman, when did the event you have just told us take place?

FERRYMAN

It took place last year, in the third month, on this very day.

MOTHER

What was the lad’s age?

FERRYMAN

Twelve.

MOTHER

His name?

Umewaka-maru. FERRYMAN

And his father's name? MOTHER

Lord Yoshida. FERRYMAN

Since then have neither of his parents been here? MOTHER

Nor any of his kin. FERRYMAN

Much less his mother! MOTHER

No, that would have been out of the question. FERRYMAN

No wonder, neither kin nor parent came. MOTHER
He was the child
This mad woman is seeking.
Is this a dream?
O cruel fate!

Lets fall her hat and weeps.

Who on earth could have dreamt of such a thing? Until now I thought it was none of our business. The boy was your child. You are to be pitied! Now let me show you where the boy is buried. Please come with me. FERRYMAN

Puts away his pole and standing behind her, helps her out of the boat, then takes a few steps towards the mound.

5

This is the grave of your dead child. Pray for his soul's repose, as only you can do. FERRYMAN

Goes to the WAKI Seat and sits down.

MOTHER
Moves to the left, half facing the mound and sits gazing at it.
I had hoped against hope

To find my child
And now I have reached strange Azuma,
He is no more upon this earth;
Naught but this mound remains.
O, how cruel!
Was it for this that he was born,
To be taken from his native land,
To the remotest part of Azuma,
Only to become dust by the roadside?
Half rises and fixes her eyes on the mound.
Does my dear child truly lie beneath this grass?

CHORUS

The MOTHER turns towards the FERRYMAN and moves her hand as if to dig, then subsides onto the stage and weeps.

O you people there,
Dig up the sod
So that I may once again
Gaze on his mortal form.
He whose life was full of promise is gone,
He whose life was full of promise is gone,
And she whose life is worthless left behind.
Before the mother's eyes the son appears
And fades away
As does the phantom-broom tree.
In this grief laden world
Such is the course of human life.
The winds of death
Scatter the spring-time flowers of life;
The clouds of mutability
O'ercast the shining moon
That should light up the endless night of night and death.
Now my eyes see how fleeting is this life,
Now my eyes see how fleeting is this life.

6

FERRYMAN

Stands up, holding a disc-like gong and a wooden hammer.
Your tears no longer serve; chant but your prayers for his repose in the other world.
The moon has risen,
The river breeze is blowing,
The night is at its height,
'Tis time we began our night prayers.
Asking her to join them
They start to beat their gongs.

Striking his gong, turns towards the MOTHER.

MOTHER

O'erwhelmed by grief
The mother cannot say her prayer,
But prostrate weeps upon the ground.

FERRYMAN

This is not as it should be. However many people may gather together, it is a mother's prayers that will rejoice her dead child.
So saying, he hands the gong to the mother.

After giving her the gong and hammer, he takes his place in front of the CHORUS.

MOTHER

You say true –
I'll take the gong
For my child's sake.
Rises and faces the mound.

FERRYMAN

Ceasing her moan, in a clear voice

MOTHER

She prays with them under the shining moon.

FERRYMAN

Her thoughts wing straight
To the Western Land of Bliss.

FERRYMAN & MOTHER

Turning towards the mound, join their hands in prayer.
Adoration to countless million Buddhas –
Each one Amida
In the Western Paradise,
The world of supreme bliss!

CHORUS

The MOTHER beats the gong, accompanying the invocation.
Namu Amida! Namu Amida!
Namu Amida! Namu Amida!

MOTHER

From the Sumida
Join in the voices
Of the breeze and waves.

CHORUS

Namu Amida! Namu Amida!
Namu Amida!

MOTHER

True to their name
Miyako-birds join the choir.
Faces the Front audience.

GHOST & CHORUS

The voice of the GHOST of Ume-waka-maru is heard from inside the mound.
Namu amida! Namu amida!
Namu Amida!

MOTHER

Ceases to beat her gong.
Surely just now among them I heard my child's voice. He seems to be praying inside this mound.

FERRYMAN

We, too, have heard your child. We shall keep silent; say your prayer alone.

MOTHER

Turns towards the mound and strikes the gong.
O that I might hear his voice but once again!
Namu Amida!

GHOST

Namu Amida! Namu Amida!

CHORUS

See, his voice and shape!

The GHOST OF UMEWAKA-MARU comes out of the mound and stands in front of the WAKI Seat. He wears a flowing black-hair wig, white broad-sleeved robe and white twill kimono.

MOTHER

Is it you, my child?

GHOST

Turns towards the MOTHER.
Is it you, my mother?

The MOTHER drops the gong and hammer and runs up to the GHOST, who retreats and re-enters the mound. Dazed and weeping, she looks up and moves two or three steps towards the SHITE pillar. The GHOST reappears and stands at the SHITE Seat. With stretched arms the

MOTHER runs towards it, and attempts to embrace it, but as the GHOST retreats again into the mound, the MOTHER falls, clasping the empty air. Rising again she approaches the mound, gazing at the willow-branches, then, disconsolate, retreats slowly to the SHITE Pillar, and remains there weeping.

CHORUS

And as she seeks to grasp it by the hand,
The shape begins to fade away;
The vision fades and reappears
And stronger grows her yearning.
Day breaks in the eastern sky.
The ghost has vanished;
What seemed her boy
Is but a grassy mound
Lost on the wide, desolate moor.
Sadness and tender pity fill all hearts,
Sadness and tender pity fill all hearts!