

Noh Ataka 安宅

(“The Ataka Barrier”)

Genji general Yoshitsune, attempting to escape the wrath of his brother, Shogun Yoritomo, is travelling with followers disguised as mountain priests. Led by Yoshitsune’s chief retainer Benkei, the group reaches Ataka barrier where they are stopped by the warden Togashi. Benkei pretends to read a document describing their mission and even strikes his master Yoshitsune disguised as a lowly servant. Togashi lets them through the barrier, then follows them bringing saké. Benkei in turn dances in gratitude before they make a hurried departure.

Author: Unknown. Often attributed to Kanze Kojirô Nobumitsu (1435-1516), but there is no clear evidence for this.

Scene: The Second Month, 1187, the Ataka barrier in Kaga Province, the present Ataka-chô, Komatsu City, Ishikawa Prefecture.

Category: Fourth category miscellaneous (samurai) play, present time (genzai) noh in one act, otoko-mai (male dance) piece with taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): Lord Togashi, Warden of the Ataka barrier.
- Ado-ai/Ai-kyôgen: (secondary interlude actor): Servant of Togashi.
- Kokata (child actor): Minamoto no Yoshitsune
- Shite (main actor): Musashibô Benkei.
- Tsure/Tachishu (accompanying Shite main actor): Retainers of Yoshitsune.
- Omo-ai/Ai-kyôgen: (primary interlude actor): Porter

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki/Ado-ai entrance: Togashi and his servant enter to Nanori-bue solo flute. Togashi announces himself, tells how Yoritomo is displeased with his brother Yoshitsune who, with his retainers, is fleeing his brother’s wrath disguised as a yamabushi priest. Yoritomo has built new barriers and he, Togashi, is in charge of the one at Ataka. He tells his servant that any yamabushi should be sent to him for questioning. The servant in turn announces this to all.
2. Kokata/Shite/Tachishu/Omo-ai entrance: Yoshitsune, Benkei, the retainers and the porter enter to shidai music and sing of monks’ clothes and dew-drenched sleeves. The porter changes the words singing that his clothes are torn and worthless. Benkei and the retainers sing of endless days of fleeing, of unfamiliar robes, of traveling from the capital through forests, hills and towns to arrive at Ataka.
3. Kokata/Shite/Tachishu exchange: Yoshitsune says that travelers tell of a new barrier at Ataka and that all yamabushi will be strictly checked. One retainer suggests that they crash through

the barrier but Benkei instead suggests disguising Yoshitsune as a porter. Yoshitsune agrees. Benkei tells the porter to check the barrier.

4. Omo-Ai’s action, Omo-ai/Shite exchange: The porter checks the barrier from a distance and sees that the barricade is impossible to break through. He also sees the heads of three yamabushi and composes a short verse about them. He reports back to Benkei.
 5. Shite/Tachishu/Kokata exclamation: Benkei, the retainers and Yoshitsune describe putting the pack on Yoshitsune to disguise him. The chorus sings of his pitiful and touching appearance.
 6. Ado-ai/Waki/Shite exchange: The servant sees the yamabushi and Togashi stops them. Benkei explains that they are monks gathering money for Todaiji temple. Togashi says that it is rumored that Yoshitsune is fleeing disguised as a yamabushi. Benkei says that certainly real monks will not be stopped. The servant tells that they already beheaded three yamabushi. Benkei asks if Yoshitsune was among them. Togashi says his order stands. Benkei says that if they will be killed too, then they must do their last rites as monks.
 7. Shite /Tachishu action: To notto prayer chant music, Benkei and retainers sing telling the meaning of their ritual practices and that whoever beheads them will face dreadful punishment. The chorus describes their raucous rubbing of rosaries..
 8. Shite’s reading: Togashi asks if they have a subscription scroll describing their mission. Benkei recites about Emperor Shômu who built Todaiji, and about collecting money for its repair. Togashi comments that all who listen are in awe and tells them to pass.
 9. Waki/Shite/Tachishu exchange: the servant spots Yoshitsune and tells Togashi. The retainers sing of saving their master but Benkei tells them to wait. Benkei, saying that the “porter” is always lagging behind, strikes him, then tells him to pass. He turns to Togashi and asks him why he is so curious about the pack. The retainers come behind Benkei, and the chorus for them accuses the guards of drawing swords against a humble porter. Togashi tells them to pass.
 10. Kokata/Shite/Tachishu lament: Benkei apologizes to Yoshitsune who replies that Benkei’s quick thinking saved him. The chorus sings of Yoshitsune’s gratitude. They lament their state, then describe in detail Yoshitsune’s discord with Yoritomo, and his valiant fighting against the Heike foe which unfortunately has come to this end.
 11. Waki/Ado-ai/Omo-ai/Shite exchange: Togashi tells his servant to take saké to the yamabushi because he was rude to them. Benkei invites Togashi to join them. Togashi apologizes.
 12. Shite’s dance: Benkei cautions the men not to give themselves away but delightfully drinks the wine. The chorus for him suggests that they should dance telling how Benkei once danced the Ennen dance. After offering wine to Togashi, he dances an otoko-mai male dance.
 13. Conclusion: Benkei finishes his dance and the chorus describes he urges the retainers to leave and how they feel that they are escaping from the serpent’s jaws as they depart.
- [Richard Emmert]