

Noh Dai-e 大会

(“The Great Sermon”)

A monk from Mt. Hiei has retired to a hermitage and one day, a mountain priest appears before him. The mountain priest, actually a tengu (a half-hawk, half-man goblin), offers to give the monk any wish he can name, as the monk once saved his life. The monk does not desire anything of this world, but has always cherished the thought of seeing Sakyamuni’s great sermon on Mt. Ryôjû (Mt. Grdhrakûta in India). The tengu agrees but emphatically tells the monk he must not worship the vision he sees. The tengu leaves, then later reappears in his disguise as Sakyamuni, with a host of smaller tengu as the masses who listen to the sermon. The monk, overcome by the vision, forgets his promise and worships the false Sakyamuni. No sooner has he done this than the heavens open up and Indra descends in anger, destroying the illusion: Indra chases the tengu, chastising him for disguising himself as Sakyamuni, until the tengu escapes through a crack in the cliffs.

Author: Unknown.

Scene: Mt. Hiei near Kyoto.

Category: Fifth category ending (goblin) play, phantasm (mugen) noh in two acts, tachimawari (“stroll”) and uchi-ai hataraki (fight action) piece, with taiko.

Performance practice Performed by all five schools. In the Kita and Kongô schools, the nochijite wears two masks, the Sakyamuni mask over ôbeshimi mask.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): a monk from Mt. Hiei.
- Maejite (first half shite main actor): a tengu goblin disguised as a yamabushi mountain priest.
- Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actor): several tree-leaf tengu goblins from Mt. Atago. Mask: goblin (tengu).
- Nochijite (second half shite): the tengu dressed as sakyamuni, wearing ôbeshimi (large demon) mask and in some performances, the shaka (Sakyamuni) mask over this.
- Nochizure (second half accompanying shite actors): the god Indra. Mask god (tenjin).

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki entrance: A monk enters, sits, then sings praising the Buddhist path and prying gratefully. The chorus sings of the eagles which move among the mountains with Mt. Hiei as the jewel of them all.
2. Shite entrance: A tengu disguised as a mountain priest enters and sings of his desire for enlightenment.
3. Shite/waki exchange, Shite exit: The tengu tells the monk that the latter had once saved his life. Now, in repayment, the monk may have any wish granted. The monk replies that he’s always longed to see Sakyamuni (Buddha) deliver his sermon to the masses on Mt. Ryôjû. That, replies the tengu, can be granted but no matter what the circumstances, the monk must not worship the

vision he sees. With the chorus singing as moves about the stage, the tengu tells the priest to wait with his eyes closed until he hears the voice of Sakyamuni will descend from the mists and the monk will hear the drumming footsteps of the throngs who have come to hear the sermon. As the goblin waves his fan, the chorus describes the flutter of the leaves and how the goblin flies above the treetops, then down into the valley, and disappears. The goblin exits to raijo “procession” music.

4. Ai narration: The music changes to kyôgen raijo and a tree-leaf goblin enters and tells of a large goblin who disguised himself as a bird to fly to the capital. Once there, he changed into a spider and was captured by some children. A monk forced the children to free the spider, saving the goblin’s life. Now the goblin is repaying this kindness and he and other small goblins have been commanded to assist in creating an illusion. A second small goblin appears and they discuss the arrangements for the assembled goblins and as they exit, remark on the irony of a goblin impersonating Sakyamuni.

Stage assistants bring out a platform and place upon it a framework chair in which they place a stool.

5. Nochijite entrance: The tengu again enters to either deha or ôbeshi entrance music, this time dressed as Sakyamuni and carrying a sutra scroll. He sings of clumps of dirt, piled one on another to create tall mountains, and the flow of small streams which make the ocean deep. The monk hears the music from the skies, then the voice of Sakyamuni, and he opens his eyes. The chorus describes how flowers rain down from heaven as the goblin voices the words of the Buddha.
6. Shite’s action: Moved to the point of tears at the vision, the monk forgets the tengu’s warning and, his heart full of faith, worships the vision. The tengu becomes agitated knowing that the gods will not tolerate this breach. He moves about the stage in a tachimawari “stroll” dance, looking for signs of his impending doom.
7. Tsure entrance, Tsure/Shite battle: The music suddenly changes to haya-fue “fast flute” entrance music and the god Indra enters carrying a mallet for battle. Meanwhile the tengu sheds his disguise and takes on his true form. The other goblins disperse quickly. In a maibataraki “danced action” dance, Indra chases the tengu, beating him for his transgression. The chorus describes then as they battle in the air, Indra flying angrily at the tengu and sending his feathers scattering. But the clever tengu finds a crack in a rocky grotto and, slipping through, makes his escape. [Richard Emmert]