

Noh Hyakuman 百万

(“Hyakuman the Dancer”)

A young boy is brought to the great nenbutsu (Amida invoking) festival of the Seiryōji temple in Saga by a priest who found him near Nara. At the temple, they see a crazed woman who dances while chanting the nenbutsu. She reveals that she has become mad due to the loss of her son, and that she dances in order to pray for her son’s safe return. She now dances narrating her story. Finally, the priest reveals that the child is her son, and the two are reunited.

Author: Revision by Zeami (1363?-1443?) of an earlier play, Saga monogurui, by Kan’Ami (1333-1384).

Scene: Spring, Saga in Yamashiro Province, the present Saga, Sakyō Ward, Kyoto City.

Category: Fourth category miscellaneous (mad woman) play, present-time (genzai) noh in one act, tachimawari (“stroll” dance) piece, with taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools. The Waki character is either portrayed as a priest from the capital or a man from Yoshino.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Kokata (child actor): the child of Hyakuman.
- Waki (secondary actor): a priest from the capital. In other versions, a man from Yoshino.
- Ai/Ai-kyōgen (interlude actors): A man at the temple gate.
- Shite (main actor): Hyakuman, a dancer. Wears a mature woman (fukai or shakumi) mask and carries a bamboo branch (sasa), a sign of her madness.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Kokata/Waki entrance: A young boy enters with a priest (or a man) to shidai music and sings about riding a child’s hobby horse along Buddha’s path to find a true friend. The priest says that he is from the capital (or: the man says he is from Yoshino) and had found this boy who was lost. He is now taking him to Saga to see the great nenbutsu (Amida invocation ceremony).
2. Waki/Ai exchange: The priest asks a man at the gate if there is anything interesting to see and is told that there is a crazy woman named Hyakuman who puts on a good show. If someone says the nenbutsu poorly, the crazy woman will appear and scold, then do an interesting dance. The priest asks the man at the gate to do it, and the latter, in exchange with the chorus, begins chanting a nenbutsu. The mad woman Hyakuman appears on the bridgeway, then enters the main stage and strikes the man with her bamboo branch. The man, surprised, says he has been stung by a bee.
3. Shite’s confused dance: The woman tells the man at the gate that his rhythm is wrong. The man asks her to do it the right way. He exits. The woman in exchange with the chorus begins chanting rhythmically the nenbutsu. They also sing of trusting Amida and questioning who could possibly not believe. They then sing of being crazed by spring, of love grasses filling Amida’s

wagons, and with Amida’s strength pulling together the heavy wagons.

4. Shite’s lamentation: With the chorus, the woman sings of being wrapped in the mother-child bond of past lives, of being clamped in the neck irons of the three Realms and of being pulled by an ox cart. In brief exchanges, the chorus and the woman describe Hyakuman as having long black hair snarled like weeds, a tall battered hat, and an ink-smear face; then they sing of her bare-thread clothing suggesting the thinning links she has with her missing son. Once more she invokes Shaka Nyorai in hopes of finding her son, righting her wits, and finding peace.
5. Waki/Waki/Shite exchange: The child tells the priest that he now recognizes that the crazy woman is his mother, but he asks the priest to pretend to know nothing and question the woman. The priest questions the woman and she reveals that her name is Hyakuman and she is from the old capital of Nara and that she became mad after her husband died and she was separated from her son. She now continually chants Amida’s name so that she may find him. The priest comforts her saying that surely fate should grant her prayers. She thanks him saying she will dance. With the chorus praying that her son will be well, she dances an iroe “color” dance.
6. Shite’s narrative dance: With the chorus, she sings of an empty world, sad years, and having counted on the link with her child to last two lifetimes. She dances as the chorus sings poetically of Nara, of her son disappearing, of her searching everywhere for him until arriving at Saga, of Buddha coming from India and China so that a temple can be made here, of Buddha’s love for his own mother, and of her own bitterness due to her longing for her son.
7. Shite’s action dance: Hyakuman sings of her longing, dances a tachimawari “stroll” dance, then sings wondering if her son could be here. The chorus describes how she begs Amida to return her son.
8. Shite/Kokata meeting: The priest, saying this is too painful to watch, shows the woman her son. She at first is angered that he didn’t tell her earlier but instead let her make a spectacle of herself. The chorus describes how at last flowers have bloomed as she wonders if it’s a dream or if it’s real.
9. Conclusion: The chorus sings saying that this lesson should be pondered as the Buddha of this temple, father to all beings, has here rejoined mother and son.
[Richard Emmert]