

Noh Kiyotsune 清経

("The Nobleman Kiyotsune")

This play is built around a brief mention in The Tales of the Heike of the Heike Lieutenant-General Kiyotsune who, having given up all hope of victory, took his own life by jumping into the sea rather than lose his life at the hands of an unknown enemy.

Here, Kiyotsune's retainer, Awazu no Saburô, takes as a keepsake a lock of Kiyotsune's hair back to Kiyotsune's wife in the capital. As she grieves, Kiyotsune's ghost appears to her in dream and tells of the battles in which the Heike were defeated and then of the torments he suffers in warrior hell.

Author: Zeami (1363?-1443?)

Scene: Autumn, 1183-84, Kiyotsune's home in the capital, in the present Kyoto.

Category: Second category warrior (young nobleman) play, phantasm (mugen) noh in one act, without taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): Awazu no Saburô, Kiyotsune's retainer.
- Tsure (accompanying shite actor): Kiyotsune's wife. Wears a young woman (ko-omote/tsure) mask.
- Shite (main actor): the ghost of Kiyotsune. Wears a lieutenant (chûjô) mask.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

Tsure enters in silence and sits.

1. Waki entrance: Awazu no Saburô enters to shidai music and sings of returning by boat to the capital. He announces himself as the retainer of the late Lieutenant-General Kiyotsune who, having been defeated in the battles in Kyushu, had taken his own life by jumping of his boat into the sea. He tells how he found a lock of Kiyotsune's hair left behind as a keepsake which he is now taking to his wife in the capital. He sings a travel song in which he mentions his sadness at having to return to the capital, not during the glorious spring, but in the mournful autumn, and of the wintry rain which together with his tears, drench his sleeves. He tells of arriving in haste back at the capital.
2. Waki/Tsure exchange: Saburô announces himself at Kiyotsune's home and Kiyotsune's wife answers and invites him in asking if he has a message from Kiyotsune. Saburô weeps and then informs the wife that Kiyotsune has taken his own life rather than lose it at the hand of some nameless soldier. The wife sings that she could forgive him if he died in battle or of illness, but he had promised to return and this proves he was lying. The chorus sings for her of their joys of marriage despite the years of war when she had to hide herself in the capital, and now she can grieve openly.
3. Tsure's wait: Saburô gives the wife a lock of Kiyotsune's hair as a keepsake and she sings of her

yearning and deep grief as she takes it in her hand. Then puts it down as the chorus sings of her in tears trying to go to sleep so that he may appear to her in dream.

4. Shite entrance: Kiyotsune's ghost enters during the last song and sings questioning life as reality, how the world of the mind is vast, how past grieves are illusions and present sadness a dream, and of seeing his lover in a dream.
5. Shite/Tsure exchange: Kiyotsune announces himself to his lover of old. The wife sings of seeing Kiyotsune in dream and being thankful to see him, then of her resentment toward him for taking his own life. He in turn reproaches her for putting down the keepsake but she insists that she was moved greatly by it. He thinks she didn't truly love him, but she insists he mistakes her reasons and they continue to reproach each other. The chorus sings of a couple lying side by side in each other arms yet their anger making them seem to sleep alone.
6. Shite's narrative: Kiyotsune with the chorus tells what happened to him, how the Heike had to escape from the enemy and how a sacred oracle of the Usa Hachiman Shrine declared their future hopeless. Kiyotsune thus heard that there was no hope even though the Emperor was still with them and they were still marching. The chorus sings of them setting out in spring but the appearance of autumn made their troops scatter like autumn leaves falling. In this situation Kiyotsune again recalled the oracle, and while on boat, the distant herons flying looked like the flags of the Genji enemy. Thus he decide to end his life, and on one night, he stood on the deck, played his flute and sang imayô songs and rôei ballads to calm himself, under the autumn moon he leaped overboard and sunk down to the muck at the bottom of the sea.
7. Shite's action dance: The wife sobs at hearing his story, then Kiyotsune tells of his life in the afterworld of warrior hell where whenever he turns the trees are enemies and falling rain is arrows. Sharp swords litter the ground and enemies thrust their blades with hate flashing in their eyes. Anger, lust, greed, and ignorance all strive against the holy path of Buddha as foes endlessly battle. But the torments cease as Kiyotsune utters the ten invocations, and the pure-hearted Kiyotsune enters paradise. [Richard Emmert]