

Noh Momijigari 紅葉狩

(“Autumn Foliage Viewing”)

Taira no Koremochi is hunting deer deep in the mountains when he comes upon a beautiful woman viewing the autumn leaves. The woman invites Koremochi to join her and he becomes drunk when she pours saké for him. When she begins dancing an elegant dance, Koremochi falls asleep and the woman, seeing this, disappears. As he sleeps, Koremochi is warned in a dream by a shrine god that the woman is actually a demon, and the god gives him a sword with which to protect himself. When Koremochi awakes, the demon reappears and attacks him, but he defends himself with the divine sword and at last defeats it.

Author: Kanze Kojirô Nobumitsu (1435-1516).

Scene: Autumn, the late Heian period (10th-12th centuries), Mt. Togakushi in Shinano province, the present Nagano prefecture.

Category: Fifth category ending (demon-destroying) play, present time noh in two acts, chû-no-mai (medium dance) to kyû-no-mai (fast dance) piece (in Kanze/Hôshô) or jô-no-mai dance to kyû-no-mai dance (in Kita/Kongô/Komparu), also mai-bataraki “action dance” piece with taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Maejite (first half shite main actor): a noble woman. In fact the incarnation of a demon. Wears a young woman (waka-onna, zô, or ômi onna) mask.
- Tsure (accompanying Shite main actor): two or three young female attendants to the noble woman. Wear companion (tsure or ko-omote) masks.
- Omo-ai (main interlude actor): a servant woman.
- Waki (secondary actor): the military general, Taira no Koremochi.
- Wakizure (accompanying Waki actor): Koremochi’s attendants.
- Ado-ai (secondary interlude actor): a subordinate deity of the Otokoyama Hachiman shrine. Wears a deity (nobori-hige “rising whiskers”) mask.
- Nochijite (second half shite): a demon. Wears a demon (shikami “grimace” or hannya horned demoness) mask.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

Stage attendants bring out a platform, then a cloth-covering framework structure representing a mountain.

1. Shite/Tsure/Omo-ai entrance: A noble woman and attendants enter to shidai music and sing of going to view the autumn leaves in a rain shower. Announcing herself as a local woman, she sings with her attendants of her long years of loneliness, the mournful autumn which reminds her of her transient life, the hues of the mountain depths, the brocade of the fallen leaves on the

mountain stream, and their shopping to rest to contemplate the autumn glory. The servant woman says she will hang the curtains to form an enclosure from which to view the autumn colors.

2. Waki/Wakizure entrance: Koremochi and his party enter to issei music and sing of hunting deer on horseback deep in the crimson tinted mountains.
3. Waki/Wakizure/Omo-ai exchange: Koremochi asks one of his men to find out about the people in the enclosure. The man speaks to the servant who tells him only it is “a certain lady”. Koremochi decides it must be a lady of high birth so he must not pass on horseback. The chorus describes how he gets off his horse and takes off his shoes to scale another path, thus showing rare courtesy.
4. Shite/Waki exchange: The woman stops Koremochi, speaks of their chance meeting, and invites him to join her. Koremochi at first says he will pass on, but the woman declares him ungracious. The chorus sings for the woman of being fated from a former life, of offering him saké, and of enticing him to stay.
5. Shite narrative dance: The chorus sings of the cup of human friendship, the rocks carpeted with moss, the gentle lady whose cheeks reflect the colors of autumn, and the saké which loosens Koremochi’s resolve. The woman pours sake and then dances as the chorus sings of the sins of losing one’s senses with drinking, of the advances the woman makes, and her vow to join eternally with him..
6. Shite dance: The chorus sings of the approach of night and their vows to each other. The woman dances an elegant chû-no-mai (in Kanze/Hôshô) or a jô-no-mai (in Kita/Kongô/Komparu) which suddenly turns into a very quick kyû-no-mai as Koremochi falls asleep.
7. Shite exit: The woman casts a spell on Koremochi telling him not to awake and disappears into the mountain accompanied by raijo music.
8. Ado-ai interlude: A subordinate god of the Otokoyama Hachiman shrine enters to kyôgen raijo music, and tells how Koremochi had been sent to Mt. Togakushi to subdue its demon. He now looks for and finds Koremochi and tells him in dream that the woman he met was a demon in disguise. He gives him a sword to protect himself and tells him to wake up before it’s too late.
9. Waki’s wait: Koremochi awakes and tells how he fell asleep, drunk with illusions, but in dream a revelation came to him. The chorus describes the terror of lightning fklashes as the heavens resound.
10. Waki/Shite battle: The chorus describes how the woman who has just beside him has been transformed into rocks emitting flames. She now appears as a monster ten feet high with horns of burning trees and dances a mai-bataraki action dance. Praying calmly in his heart, Koremochi unsheathes the sword and fights the demon’s attack, finally stabbing and killing it. [Richard Emmert]