

Noh Nonomiya 野宮

(“The Shrine in the Field”)

This is based on a character from the 11th century novel, The Tale of Genji. In the novel, Lady Rokujō, the widow of a crown prince, becomes one of the many amours that Genji pursues, but then drifts away from. Jealous of his other relationships, Rokujō’s “living ghost,” unbeknownst to her, attacks and eventually kills Genji’s pregnant wife, Lady Aoi (see the noh Aoi-no-ue).

The noh recalls two incidents from the novel. The first is the visit of Genji to field shrine of Nonomiya. There, Rokujō is with her young daughter who is preparing to become an Ise Shrine priestess. She is intent on leaving with her daughter to escape the rumors about her “living ghost,” and Genji has come to ask her to stay behind. The second is an earlier incident at the annual Kamo Festival when nobles such as Genji paraded through the capital. Rokujō’s carriage was pushed aside to make room for the carriage damaged, but the discreet Rokujō was deeply embarrassed.

In the noh, a traveling priest visits the ancient site of the shrine in the field and there meets a young woman who reveals herself as the spirit of Rokujō. After she disappears, the priest prays for her and she returns again in her true form.

Author: Unknown. Most sources attribute it to Zeami (1363?-1443?), but recent scholarship also points to Komparu Zenchiku (1405-1470?).

Scene: Autumn, the Nonomiya shrine in the district of Saga, Yamashiro province, the present Ukyō-ku in Kyoto.

Category: Third category woman (true wig) play, phantasm noh two acts, without taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Current in all five shite schools. A common variant involves the use of a framework carriage in the second half.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): A traveling priest.
- Maejite (shite main actor in first half): A young woman. Actually, the ghost of Lady Rokujō (Rokujō of Miyasudokoro). Wears a young woman (ko-omote, waka-onna, or fukai) mask.
- Ai/Ai-kyōgen (interlude actor): A villager.
- Nochijite (shite in second half): The ghost of Lady Rokujō. Also wears a young woman mask as in the first half.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki Entrance: Stage assistances place a torii shrine gate at the center stage. A priest enters to solo nanori-bue flute music. He announces that he is traveling from province to province, has just been to the capital, and is now visiting Nonomiya shrine. He stops before the torii, salutes, and sings how the sacred shrine of Ise does not divide gods from Buddhas, and how here his heart finds peace.
2. Shite entrance: A young woman enters to shidai music carrying a green sakaki branch. She

sings of the flowerless Nonomiya shrine’s lonely autumn days whose fading colors remind of the passing of human life. She sings of her yearly visit to the shrine to sweep away the joys of the past, and of her sad confusion.

3. Waki and Shite exchange: The priest questions the woman who tells how a newly appointed Ise Shrine priestess would temporarily live in the Nonomiya shrine. This, she adds, is the day when long ago Genji visited and gave a sakaki branch to Rokujō who wrote a poem in reply implying she could not respond to his advances. The chorus sings of the withered grass and the neglected state of the shrine.
4. Shite’s narrative: The woman, in exchanges with the chorus, tells how Rokujō was married to a crown prince who passed away. Unable to weep for him forever, she was courted by Genji but they eventually drifted apart. Later Genji sought her at this shrine and again displayed his ardor for her which confused and saddened her, but she went off anyway with her daughter, the new Ise Shrine priestess.
5. Shite departure: Under the priest’s questioning, the woman reveals that she is Lady Rokujō herself. The chorus sings of the deepening twilight and how the woman disappears, melting into the torii.
6. Ai narration: The priest questions a villager who tells the background of the shrine including Genji’s visit. He urges the priest to remain and pray for Rokujō’s troubled spirit.
7. Waki’s wait: The priest sings of spreading his robe like moss beneath a tree and praying throughout the night for Rokujō’s spirit.
8. Nochijite entrance: Rokujō’s spirit enters to issei music, sings of her carriage decked in autumn flowers and her return in the past.
9. Waki and Shite exchange: The priest sings of seeing a carriage with curtains drawn in which is Lady Rokujō. He asks her to explain. She tells of the long ago Kamo Festival with carriages crowded together to see the parade. Lady Aoi’s carriage drew up behind her own small one and, unable to move, was roughly shoved out of the way by Aoi’s men. Though actions call forth retribution, she, still bitter, rides her carriage round a round. She asks how much longer?
10. Shite’s dance: Singing of her past remembrances and of the mournfully pale moon, she dances in remorse the slow jo-no-mai.
11. Shite’s dance, ending: In exchange with the chorus, she sings of her sad long ago stay in Nonomiya when Genji came after her. Wanting to return to her past, in reprise she dances the quicker ha-no-mai. The chorus sings of this sacred spot as she steps in and out of the torii, and then wonders if she will find her way out of Buddhism’s “burning house.” [Richard Emmert]