

Noh Ôeyama 大江山

(“The demon of Ôeyama”)

The great warrior Minamoto no Yorimitsu leaves the capital with many other warriors to subdue the demon Shuten dôji who lives on Mt. Ôeyama. Disguised as mountain ascetic priests they reach the mountain and seek lodgings at the demon’s residence. Since the demon has vowed never to harm priest he, in his form as a young “wine-drinking lad,” accepts the disguised warriors and rinks wine with them. When the demon has become quite inebriated, he retires to his bedchamber. The warriors in turn attack him there, and after a frightful battle, vanquish him.

Author: Unknown. Though commonly attributed to Miyamasu (15th c.), there as yet is no clear evidence for this.

Scene: Autumn, the early Heian period (9th c.), Ôeyama, a mountain in Tanba Province, in the present Kyoto-fu.

Category: Fifth category ending (demon-destroying) play, phantasm (mugen) noh in two acts, mai-bataraki (danced action) piece, with taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools. The kokata do not always appear in performances.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): the warrior Minamoto no Yorimitsu.
- Wakizure (accompanying waki actors): several of Yorimitsu’s cohorts and retainers including Yasumasa, Sadamitsu, Suetake, Tsuna, Kintoki, and the “peerless warrior” Hitori-musha.
- Omo-ai/Ai-kyôgen (main interlude actor) : Yorimitsu’s servant.
- Ado-ai/Ai-kyôgen (secondary interlude actor) : a laundry woman abducted by Shuten Dôji.
- Maejite (first half shite main actor): Shuten dôji. Mask: boy (dôji).
- Kokata (child actors) : two servant girls.
- Nochijite (second half shite) : Demon. Mask: demon (shikami”grimace”).

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki/Wakizure entrance: Yorimitsu and his Retainers enter to issei music and sing of making their way to Ôeyama. Yorimitsu announces himself and tells how he and Yasumasa have been bidden to subdue a demon that dwells on Mt. Ôeyama, and that to do so, they have along with 50 men disguised themselves as mountain priests. They sing a travel song describing their departure from the capital secure in the thought that none can evade the emperor’s will, and their arrival at Ôeyama. They decide to ask for lodgings.
2. Omo-ai/Ado-ai exchange: Yorimitsu orders his servant to ask where the dôji dwells and find lodgings. The servant meet a woman washing blood-soaked clothes who tells him that she had been abducted by Shuten dôji three years earlier. The servant tells her that if she helps them find lodgings they will take her back to the capital.

3. Shite entrance: The woman calls to the Dôji who enters with two servant girls. She tells him that the mountain ascetics have requested lodgings. The Dôji tells how he had vowed to leave priests alone, so tells the woman to show them in. This news is relayed to Yorimitsu.
4. Waki/shite exchange: Under Shuten Dôji’s questioning, Yorimitsu says that they became lost on this mountain and need lodgings. The Dôji tells why he is called Shuten Dôji, “the wine-drinking las,” and asks the priests to join him in wine. He tells how he had lived on Mt. Hiei but was driven out by the Buddhas when Enryakuji temple was built. They discuss various mountains and his eventual arrival at Ôeyama, and the Dôji, now that he has revealed himself and his mystical powers are weakened by drink, asks the priests to treat him kindly. The latter promise to do so. The chorus for the Dôji remarks that priests are known to treat temple boys dearer than the god themselves, a reference to monastic sexual proclivities, then sings of the demon of Adachigahara which is different from the Dôji who even has the ascetic-like tengu as friends.
5. Shite’s narrative dance, exit: As they drink wine, the chorus sings of mountain plants including the “demon weed,” of the Dôji becoming quite flush with drink, of his saying that he should not thought of as a demon but rather an entertaining friend, his drinking of round after round, and finally his entering his bedchamber.
6. Omo-ai/Ado-ai exchange: Yorimitsu orders his servant to get a key to the Dôji’s bedchamber, then exits with his men. The servant speaks to the laundry woman and gets the key, then leaves with her to return to the capital. Enroute, he tells her that her husband in the capital has since taken a new wife and suggests that they instead become husband wife. She agrees.
7. Waki/Wakizure entrance, Nochihite appearance: Yorimitsu and his men enter again to ashirai music dressed for battle. They sing of peering inside the pitch black demon’s lair with their torches, seeing the daunting figure of the sleeping demon, but being resolved to fight for the sake of the emperor. As each of the warriors names are called, they enter the stage as the chorus describes the flash swords and lightning and the roar of thunder.
8. The Battle, Conclusion: The demon appears saying that he is righteous, but the Peerless Warrior points out his deceptions in fomenting chaos in the emperor’s realm. The chorus describes the attack, how the grasses and trees tremble in demon’s flashing eye. The fight to mai-bataraki “danced action” music. The chorus describes the final grappling with the demon, running it through with a sword, striking off his angry head, and their triumphant return to the capital. [Richard Emmert].