

Noh Sanemori 実盛

(“The warrior Sanemori”)

Sanemori was of the Genji Clan but sided with the losing Heike in 12th century Genji-Heike battles, dying at Shinowara at the age of 72. To hide his age, he dyed his white hair black and also obtained the privilege of wearing brocade robe in battle. Here, the ghost of Sanemori appears before a traveling priest two centuries later, tells how he met his death, and asks to be saved.

Author: Zeami (1363?-1443?).

Scene: Autumn, the 14th century, the village of Shinowara in Kaga province, the present Shinowara-chô, Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture.

Category: Second category warrior (old warrior) play, phantasm (mugen) noh in two acts, with taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): the traveling priest Tawami Yûgyô.
- Wakizure (accompanying waki actor): two attendant priest.
- Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actor): a local man.
- Maejite (first half shite main actor): an old man. Wears an old man (warai-jô, asakura-jô, sankô-jô) mask.
- Nochijie (second half shite): the ghost of the warrior Saitô Bettô Sanemori. Wears one of the same old man masks as above.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Ai speech: In silence, the priest Tawami Yûgyô and two attendant priests enter followed by a local man. The latter tells that he is from Shinowara where the great priest Tawami Yûgyô is giving daily sermons. Strangely, he says, the priest also daily begins talking to himself, and as it is the local man's duty to look after the priest, he is going to the priest today about his strange behavior.
2. Waki's exclamation: Priest Yûgyô with his attendants sings of the long distance a spirit treads until it is reborn, and how by believing in Amida and repeating his name, both the wise and foolish can be caught in Amida's net. This is the “easy path” to paradise.
3. Shite entrance: An old man enters to the final words of the priest's song and sings of the glory of the western sun which greets a departed soul, of his joy at being able to stand outside the temple listen to the sermon though he is too feeble to enter, of being unable to perceive the glory of Buddha's Law, and his repeating of the prayer “Namu Amida Butsu”..
4. Waki/Shite exchange: The Priest questions the old man saying that the latter is a devout worshipper who comes daily and that only the priest can see him. He asks him to reveal his name today. The old man says that he is not a person of importance, but talks of being fortunate

that the priest has come to save his soul which fills him with joy. He therefore does not wish to reveal his loathsome name. The priest says that confessing will help him be converted. The old man draws close and reveals that he is the Heike warrior Sanemori who was killed in battle here, whose severed head was washed in the pond before the temple, and who has been a ghost for nearly two hundred years still remaining unsaved. The chorus sings of how he doesn't wish to have himself seen in this shape, so to avoid rumor he goes to the pond and disappears from sight.

5. Ai's narration: The local man asks the priest to explain his strange words but the priest first asks the former to tell the story of Sanemori's last battle and death, which the local man does. The priest then informs him of the ghost and that he plans to conduct prayers for his salvation. The local man announces this to everyone and asks them to attend
6. Waki/Wakizure wait: The priest sing of invoking Buddha's name for the ghost's sake, of raising pure voices as the moon sinks westward, and of calling upon the name of Buddha throughout the night.
7. Nochijite entrance: The ghost of Sanemori enters to deha music and sings of the hope of gaining the land of bliss which has sprung up in him. With the chorus he sings of repeating Buddha's name and thus as a believer winning Amida's paradise.
8. Waki/Shite exchange: The priest sings of seeing the ghost appear and describe him clad in armor. The ghost of enduring terrible pain in warrior hell and asks to be saved. In exchange, they describe his gray locks and beard and splendid robes. The chorus describes his grand appearance which itself does not help him attain paradise, but how instead repeating the golden words will.
9. Shite's narrative: The ghost with chorus sings of making a confession in order to free himself from earthly attachments. The ghost narrates his end telling how Mitsumori of the Genji brought a severed head to Lord Kiso saying it must not have been a mere soldier as he was wearing a brocade robe. Kiso said it must be Sanemori but this man's hair is black. They summoned Higuchi who knew him well and who recognized the head as that of Sanemori who had dyed his hair in the pond and it turned to its original whiteness, how Sanemori has asked to wear a beautiful robe in battle though himself was not a general, and of his valour in battle.
10. Shite's narrative continued: With the chorus, the ghost tells of his last battle, how he attempted to fight Kiso but instead fought Mitsumori who after grappling stabbed him and then cut off his head. Thus at Shinowara he returned to dust. Sanemori asks once more that prayers be said for him, he disappears. [Richard Emmert]