

Noh Yashima 八島 (屋島)

(“Yashima Bay”)

Several priests come to Yashima Bay, the sight of a famous Genpei battle in which the Minamoto, led by general Yoshitsune, routed the Taira. Two fishermen appear and tell the priests in detail of that battle. When asked their names, the fishermen promise to return in the priest's dream. Later the ghost of Yoshitsune appears and tells of the battle, in particular how he retrieved his dropped bow from among the enemy ships. He mimes the battles between asuras in warrior hell, and then disappears.

Author: Zeami (1363?-1443?).

Scene: Spring, the bay of Yashima in Sanuki Province, the present Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture, Shikoku.

Category: Second category warrior (brave warrior) play, phantom noh in two acts, kakeri (anguish dance) piece, without taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools. Kanze only writes the title as 屋島.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): a travelling priest.
- Wakitsure (accompanying Waki actor): two or three companion priests.
- Tsure (accompanying Shite main actor): a young fisherman. Without mask.
- Maejite (first half shite main actor): an old fisherman. Wears an old man (warai-jô, asakura-jô, sankô-jô) mask..
- Ai / Ai-kyogen (interlude actor): a local villager.
- Nochijite (second half shite): ghost of general Minamoto no Yoshitsune. Wear a young man (heita “warrior” or imawaka “now young”) mask.
-

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki and Wakitsure entrance: Travelling priests enter to shidai music and sing of the moon over the ocean as they make a pilgrimage to Yashima Bay in Shikoku. Their travel song tells of the spring mists, the rise and fall of the sea waves, the sunset clouds, and the sea lanes through which they pass headed for Yashima. They arrive and decide to spend the night at a nearby salt-house.
2. Shite and Tsure entrance: Two fishermen, young and old, enter to issei music and sing of the moonlit sea, the shadowy boats plying shore. They further sing of the pinewoods mirrored in the seashore, the small boats with billowing sails dimly seen in the twilight, and the balmy winds which entice the spring and men's hearts. They decide to go to the salt-house and rest.
3. Waki, Tsure and Shite exchange: The main priest asks the fishermen for a night's lodging in the salt-house and is at first refused because the house is so poor. But the fishermen relent when they are told that the priests have come from the far away capital. For the old fisherman, the

chorus sings of flocks of cranes which return to their cloud dwellings (poetically, “the capital”) and describe the fishermen in tears as they remember the capital of long ago.

4. Shite's narrative: The priest asks about the battle fought here. The old man tells of the Taira fleet offshore and the Minamoto forces on the beach led by Yoshitsune. Both Fishermen tell of the struggle between the Taira's Kagekiyo and Mionoya of the Minamoto. The chorus describes how Satô Tsuginobu took an arrow in place of Yoshitsune and the Lord of Noto's page was in turn struck down. Both sides fell silent in sorrow.
5. Shite/Tsure departure: For the priest, the chorus expressing surprise at the details the fishermen know, ask who they are. The fishermen say they will reveal themselves that spring night near dawn during the hour of the Asuras. Urging the priests not to awake from their dream, they exit.
6. Ai's narrative: A villager finds the priests and is also asked by them to tell about the Genpei battle. He relates further details about the encounter between Mionaya and Kagekiyo and suggests that the man who appeared must have been Yoshitsune's ghost.
7. Waki's wait: The priest comments on the strangeness of the fishermen request not to awake. The priests sing of the whispering in the pines and waiting patiently to dream again.
8. Nochijite entrance: Yoshitsune's ghost in battle armor enters to issei music and sings of the earthly obsession which brings him back to this field of carnage and warrior's hell demon.
9. Waki/Shite exchange: The priest questions Yoshitsune who reveals himself saying that he has foundered in the sea of birth and death. For Yoshitsune, the chorus sings of his clinging and bitterness and tells of telling the tale in the priest's dream.
10. Shite's narration: With the chorus, the ghost tells how he will show the Asura realm of warrior hell. Again details of the battle are revealed; how Yoshitsune, the chorus dropped his bow in the waters and swam out on horseback at danger to his life to retrieve it. When the warrior Kanefusa reproached Yoshitsune for this, the latter claimed his glory hung in balance since his small bow have been laughed at if it had fallen into enemy hands. This action brought tears to the eyes of the others. As the brave know no fear, Yoshitsune had not clung to life, but to honor.
11. Shite's action dance: The ghost performs a vigorous kakeri anguish dance, and then mimes the battle of Asura hell recalling the final Minamoto-Taira battle at Dan-no-Ura. The ghost, along with the cries and clash of war vanish in the rushing winds. [Richard Emmert]