

THEATRE/ THEORY / THEATRE

**THE MAJOR CRITICAL TEXTS
from Aristotle and Zeami
to Soyinka and Havel**

**Edited with introductions by
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 **APPLAUSE** 
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ZEAMI

ZEAMI (1363-1443), the greatest Asian theorist, is a figure of mystery. A master of transformation, he was known at different times in his life as Oniyasha, Fujiwaka, Motokiyo, Kiyomoto, Shio, Zea, Zeshi, Zeamidabutsu, but never referred to himself as Zeami, an honorific name given him posthumously. No portrait of him exists, only a mask he may have worn on stage. He wrote a secret doctrine, concealed from the public and passed down by confidential transmission within the family, generation by generation, to a single individual. Like Craig and Artaud, the Japanese playwright-theorist feared having his ideas stolen.

By the nineteenth century he had fallen into obscurity. Only with the discovery and publication of all his treatises in the twentieth century did Zeami gain pre-eminent status as a theorist of Nō. European interest in his work contributed to his growing celebrity. Translated into French, his treatises were read aloud by Barrault and Vilar at the Odéon.

As a twelve-year-old child actor in his father Kan'ami's provincial troupe, Zeami's dramatic beauty and charm were such that the seventeen-year-old Shōgun Yoshimitsu fell in love with the boy on first seeing him perform and became his patron, making Nō a court entertainment subject to aristocratic taste. The Shōgun's infatuation scandalized the court because actors, who came from the lowest classes in society, were regarded as beggars and thieves. But to gain favor with the Shōgun, the aristocrats followed suit and gave Zeami expensive presents.

Zeami had begun appearing on stage when he was six; by the time he was twelve he was attending and commenting perceptively on performances by all the great actors from rival companies. When his father died, Zeami at twenty-two assumed the leadership of the Kanze troupe. In 1400 he wrote *Fūshikaden* (also called *Kadensho*)—"A Treatise on the Transmission of the Flower"—the first such work in Japan and more a reflection of his father Zan'ami's teachings on technique than his own mature theory. The aesthetics of the flower stressed the importance of novelty, consideration of the psychology of audience, and respect for the taste of both the elite and the common people. The "flower" was reflected in the spectators' gaze. Although

music and dance were constituent elements, imitation (*monomane*) or mimicry remained central to the early popular Nō.

In his later treatises summarizing his own personal experience as a writer and performer, Zeami introduced a new aesthetic vocabulary that indicated his movement away from mimesis to abstraction. As a writer and performer, Zeami specialized in the phantasmal (*mugen*) Nō with its obsessive ghosts and emotionally disoriented sensibilities.

In his old age Zeami fell from favor for a combination of political and aesthetic reasons, being first forbidden to perform at Imperial Palace, and then at the age of seventy-two banished to Sado Island. The new Shōgun Shimori preferred the lively, colorful, mimetic Nō that went back to his father's days. Zeami's nephew was appointed head of the troupe.

Adversity made Zeami lose his public and forced him to confront the abyss. He put his art above all and consecrated himself to his studies. The artist's task was, above all, to perfect his art and transmit it to future generations.

ON THE ART OF THE NŌ DRAMA (15th c.)

Teachings on Style and the Flower (Fūshikaden)

Chapter 7: A Separate Secret Teaching.

In this secret teaching, I wish to explain how to understand of what the Flower consists. First of all, one must understand the conception that, just as a flower can be observed blooming in nature, the flower can be used as well as a metaphor for all things in the *nō*.

When speaking of flowers, in all their myriad varieties, it can be said that they will bloom at their appointed time during the four seasons; and because they always seem fresh and novel when they bloom at that appointed season, they are highly appreciated. In performing *sarugaku* as well, when this art appears novel to the spectators, they will be moved to find it attractive. Flower, charm and novelty: all three of these partake of the same essence. There is no flower that remains and whose petals do not scatter. And just because the petals scatter, then, when the flower blooms again, it will seem fresh and novel. An understanding of the principle of the Flower explains why in the *nō* there does not exist that stagnation that results from the monotony of any single means of expression. As the *nō* does not always remain the same, various new aesthetic qualities can be emphasized, bringing a sense of novelty.

However, one note of caution is necessary. When one speaks of "novelty," the term does not necessarily refer to some means of artistic expression that never existed before. After thoroughly mastering all the various principles that have been set down in these *Teachings on Style and the Flower*, an actor, thinking to perform a play, can show as the occasion demands the various arts that he has mastered. To cite again the example of flowers, among all growing things, there are no special flowers that bloom out of their appointed seasons. In the same way, if an actor masters the various elements of *nō* that he has learned to remember, he can show his art, basing it on taste of the moment and the kind of plays that his audiences appreciate. His performance can thus be compared to looking at a flower that blooms at the proper time. The con-

From *On the Art of the Nō Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*,
trans. J. Thomas Rimer and Yamazaki Masakazu.

cept of a flower suggests a seed grown from a flower of years before. The *nō*, too, includes artistic elements seen before; but if all aspects of our art are practiced to the utmost, a considerable span of time will be required before they are exhausted. Seen after a lapse of time, elements of our art look fresh again. Then, too, the taste of audiences differs, and as interest in chanting, movement, and Role Playing varies, no artistic elements can be neglected. Thus an actor who has mastered every aspect of his art can be said to hold within him the seeds of flowers that bloom in all seasons, from the plum blossoms of early spring to the chrysanthemums of the fall. As he possesses all the Flowers, he can perform in response to any expectation on any occasion. Yet if an actor has not mastered various aspects of his art, there will be occasions when he will invariably lose his Flower. For example, suppose that the flowers of the spring are finished and the occasion has come when it seems appropriate to admire the summer grasses. If an actor can only show his audience the spring flowers, how can it be said that he matches himself to the flower of the season? From this example, my point should be clear.

A real flower is the one that seems novel to the imagination of the spectator. This is what I meant when I wrote earlier that only after an actor "will have practiced assiduously and mastered the various necessary techniques will he be able to grasp the principle of the Flower that does not fade." Indeed, the Flower is not something special unto itself. The Flower represents a mastery of technique and thorough practice, achieved in order to create a feeling of novelty. When I wrote "the flower blooms from the imagination; the seed represents merely the various skills of our art," I had the same principle in mind.

In the section on demon roles in the chapter on Role Playing, I also wrote that an actor who strives only to play demon roles will never come to understand what is really of interest about them. An actor who has mastered every technique and occasionally plays a demon role, will create the Flower, because his portrayal of the role will be unusual and so will be of interest to his audiences. On the other hand, an actor who thinks to play only demon roles and possesses no other art may appear to perform his part well, but there will be no sensation of novelty, and those who observe him will experience no Flower. I wrote that a good performance of a demon role was "like a flower blooming in the rocks," because the only appropriate style of acting for such roles calls for strength, fierceness, and a frightening manner. This particular art represents the rocks. And the Flower? It comes when an actor gifted with Grace and who can play in a variety of styles performs a demon role, contrary to the public's expectations, and so creates a real sense of novelty. This is the Flower. On the other hand, an actor who only thinks to play demon roles possesses merely the rock, but not the Flower.

A certain secret teaching on details of performance reveals the following: chanting, dance, gesture, expressive movements—all of these require

the same spirit of novelty. On an occasion when the audience believes that a performance will consist of the same movement and chanting as usual, they imagine that they know what to expect. An actor can carry out his performance in a different fashion, however, so that for example, even if the play being performed maintains fundamentally the same appearance, he will attempt to play his role in such a way that he infuses it with a more delicate level of feeling than before; or, in the case of his chanting, even though he changes nothing, he will use anew all his old arts, color the music and his voice in a skillful manner, using a level of concentration he has never felt before, and show exceptional care. If such a successful performance is achieved, those who see it and hear it will find it more novel than usual and they will praise it. This effect is surely what constitutes the feeling of novelty felt by the audience.

So it is that even when the usual play is chanted and the same gestures are involved, a fine actor will bring something novel to the performance. An unskilled performer, even if he does remember all the proper musical notations, will not approach them with any original conceptions. A gifted performer is one who will truly grasp the essence of the "inner music." This "inner music" is the Flower that lies behind the chant itself. Even for players of equally great ability, with the same Flower, the player who has studied his art to its furthest reaches will come to know the Flower that lies within the Flower. In general, the melody is fixed in the chant, but the "inner music" can only be captured by a gifted performer. In the dance as well, the various patterns can be learned, but the emotions engendered from them come from the performer.

In the art of Role Playing, there is a level at which imitation is no longer sought. When every technique of Role Playing is mastered and the actor has truly become the subject of his impersonation, then the reason for the desire to imitate can no longer exist. Then, if the actor seeks to enjoy his own performance to its fullest extent, how can the Flower not be present? For example, in imitating an old man, the psyche of a truly gifted player will become altogether like that of a real old man, who, perhaps, dresses himself up for some procession or temple entertainment, thinking to dance and make music himself. Now since the actor has already himself assumed the personality of an old man, he actually "becomes" the old man and can have no wish to imitate one. Rather, he will think only of the part he, the old man, will play in the entertainment.

According to the teaching about creating the Flower when playing the role of an old person, it is important, first of all, to make no attempt merely to imitate the external attributes of old persons. When speaking in general of dance and movement, it can be assumed that these will be performed in time to the rhythm of the music, and that the stamping of the feet, the motions of the hands, and the actor's gestures and movements will be attuned to that mutual rhythm. In the case of an old person, however, when the beat sounds

from the *taiko*, the chant, or the *tsutsumi*, his feet will be just a bit slow in responding, and his gestures and movements as well will follow an instant after. Such movements surely represent the best way to show the character of an old person. Keeping this concern in mind, the role must otherwise be performed with the kind of expansiveness that an old man would wish to show. It can be said that, above all else, an old person wants to appear young. Yet he can do nothing about the fact that his limbs are heavy and he is hard of hearing, so that, although he may still be quick of spirit, his physical movements cannot keep pace. Knowing this principle represents true Role Playing. One should basically play the role in a youthful manner such as that which an old person would wish to assume. In this way the actor can show through his performance the envy the old feel for the young. An elderly person, no matter how youthfully he wishes to dance, will not, in principle, be able to keep up with the beat of the music. Here, for the spectator, the sense of novelty comes from the fact that an old person dances like a young one. This is a flower blooming on an ancient tree.

An actor must absorb all styles of acting. An actor who can manage all styles of expression will require a certain time before he can perform them all, and he will thus be able to create a continuous impression of novelty. One who has truly grasped the various styles can summon up his art to color them and expand upon them a hundredfold. And actor should plan to repeat himself only once in a three- to five-year period, so as to create a sense of novelty for his audiences. This technique will give an actor a great sense of ease. In addition, during the course of the year, the actor must keep in mind the plays appropriate to each season. Also, in a sequential performance of *sarugaku* that extends over several days, the various styles of acting must be alternated and colored not only on each day but throughout the whole program. Thus if one concentrates naturally on all aspects of our art, from the most fundamental principles to the smallest details, there will be no danger of losing the Flower throughout one's career.

Then too it has been said that, more important than learning the myriad styles of expression, an actor must not forget the Flower that he has established at various phases of his career. These various Flowers, past and future, make up the various elements of one's acting style. By "past and future" I mean that the various styles that an actor has naturally mastered at various times, such as his presence as a child actor, his art as a young adult, and his elaborate skill as a mature actor, as well as his technique as an older performer, should all form a part of his art. Sometimes it should appear as though his performance were that of a child, sometimes of a youth; then again, on occasion like that of an actor at the height of his power, or again, like an actor who has in his maturity thoroughly mastered his art. In other words, the actor must perform so that it appears as though he were not the same person in each role. That is, he must hold to the idea that, within his accomplishment at any given

time, there must lie an art ranging from that of a child to that of an old man. So it is that one can speak of a Flower drawn from past and future.

However, no one has ever seen or heard of such a supremely gifted artist from the beginnings of our art down to the present day. Perhaps only my father Kan'ami, during the vigor of his youth, played in the kind of polished style capable of giving his spectators that kind of satisfaction, or so I have heard. I myself witnessed his performances when he was about forty, and I have no doubt about it. In performing the play *Jinen Koji*, when he played one particular scene on a dais, people who saw him at the time were convinced that he had the appearance of a youth of sixteen or seventeen: such was his reputation. As many said that this was true, and as I myself witnessed his performances, I can say that he really did achieve this level of excellence. Yet how rare is the actor who, in this way, can learn as a youth the styles of acting he would later use, and who, as a mature artist, never manages to forget the styles he mastered as a youth. I have never seen or heard of another.

Again, an actor must never forget the aspects of his art that he has learned from his beginnings as an actor, so that, in response to varying circumstances, he may make use of them. If a young artist studies the style appropriate for an older actor, and if a mature actor retains the art of his vigorous period, will each not be able to create a sensation of novelty in his spectators? So it is that, as a performer grows more skillful, he will surely lose the seed that produces the Flower if he should abandon the styles of acting that he has already mastered. If those various Flowers have not themselves produced seed, they will represent nothing more than a broken branch of flowers. But if there is a seed, then a flower will form in consonance with every season as it arises. To repeat again, an actor must never forget what he has learned as a young performer. Quite ordinarily he hears it said of a young actor that "he has quickly risen to high accomplishment," or, "he already seems mature," while it is said of an older actor that "he seems youthful." Such remarks illustrate the importance of novelty. If an actor embellishes the basic styles, he can color them a hundredfold. Then, if an actor can incorporate into his accomplishments at any given moment all the past and future aspects of his art, then what a flowering that would represent.

When performing *nō* there are endless matters that must be kept in mind. For example, when an actor plans to express the emotion of anger, he must not fail to retain a tender heart. Such is his only means to prevent his acting from developing roughness, no matter what sort of anger is expressed. To appear angry while possessing a tender heart gives rise to the principle of novelty. On the other hand, in a performance requiring Grace, an actor must not forget to remain strong. Thus all aspects of his performance—dance, movement, Role Playing—will be genuine and lifelike.

Then too, there are various concerns in connection with using the actor's body on the stage. When he moves himself about in a powerful way, he

must stamp his foot in a gentle way. And when he stamps his feet strongly, he must hold the upper part of his body quiet. This matter is difficult to describe in words. It is better to learn this directly from a teacher. (This technique is explained in more detail in a section of the *Kashū*.)

Over and above this, it is important to know that a Flower blooms by maintaining secrecy. It is said that "when there are secrets, the Flower exists; but without secrets, the Flower does not exist." Understanding this distinction is the most crucial aspect of the Flower. Indeed, concerning all things, and in any aspect of artistic endeavor, each family maintains its secrets, since those secrets are what make its art effective. However, when these so-called secret things are revealed openly, they often appear to be nothing special. Those who say that there is nothing to such secrets, however, have not yet grasped the principle of the efficacy of such teachings. For example, even in terms of what I have written here, should everyone come to know that the principle of novelty represents the nature of the Flower, then the spectators coming to watch a performance would expect just this quality. Before such an audience, even if the performance did contain something novel, those who watched could not be disposed to accept it as such. The Flower of the actor is possible precisely because the audience does not know where that Flower may be located. The spectators merely know that they are seeing something unexpected and quite skillfully performed, but they cannot recognize the Flower as such. Thus the technique can represent the Flower of the actor. The Flower provides the means to give rise to a sensation of the unexpected in the hearts of the audience.

To give an example from the military arts, a skillful commander will, through his plans and stratagems, find an unexpected means to conquer a powerful enemy. Indeed, in such a case, has not the loser been vanquished because he has been taken in by the use of this principle of novelty? In all things, in all arts, there is the element of achieving victory in a contest. As for the strategy itself, once the affair is over, and once the loser realizes the scheme that has been used against him, he will be more careful afterwards. After all, he lost because he did not know the means used against him at the time. Thus, I want to pass this matter along as one important secret teaching to our family. Knowing this, the following will be clear as well. It is not enough to keep from revealing a secret; an actor must not let others know that he is one who even knows a secret. For if others know his heart, then his opponents will not remain careless but will be circumspect and so will be on guard against their enemy. On the other hand, if their caution is not aroused, then he will easily win over them. And is it not by making use of this principle of novelty that he can put the others off their guard and so defeat them? Thus, in our house, by refusing to tell others of our secret teaching, we will be the lifelong possessors of the Flower. When there are secrets, the Flower exists; without secrets, the Flower does not exist.

You must also know the Law of Cause and Effect with respect to the Flower. This principle holds great significance for our art. Indeed, in all things, the Law of Cause and Effect is in operation. In the case of *nō*, the skills an actor has gained since his early days constitute the Cause. To master the *nō* and achieve distinction represent the Effect. Thus if an actor is negligent in practice, which is the Cause, the proper Effect will be difficult to bring about. This is a principle an actor must truly take to heart.

Then too, an actor must pay due heed to the movements of fortune. He must understand the idea that, if blossoms have been profuse in times past, there may be none this season. Time can be divided up into moments of good luck and bad luck. Thus with regard to the *nō* as well, when there is a period of good luck, then there must inevitably follow a period of bad. Such is the inevitable process of Cause and Effect.

If an actor really understands this principle, then when it comes to a performance that he feels is not such an important one, he need not commit himself so completely to winning the contest; therefore, he should not overextend his efforts. He will not be too concerned about losing and, holding back some of his skill, he will perform with a certain restraint. His audience, thinking that this is all he has to offer, may lose interest. Yet for a really important performance, he will summon up all his skills, and, choosing a play that shows off his special strengths, he will put forth all his energies and so move and surprise those who watch him. Thus, in a really important contest, he will doubtless gain a victory. Such is the vital efficacy of novelty. And so, after a bad period, the Law of Cause and Effect brings about good in the end.

For example, on the occasion of a three-day series of performances, an actor may be expected to perform perhaps three times. On the first day, he should not overextend his energies and should hold himself back; but, when he believes that he knows which is the crucial day for him, he should expend every effort to perform a good play that shows off his special talents. Even in the course of a single day's performance, when participating in a contest, the moment may come when the actor faces a period of bad luck. At this moment, he should perform with restraint, so that at the moment when the luck of the opposing troupe turns from good to bad, he can himself press forward with a fine play. On such an occasion, if his performance goes well, he will surely win the day.

In the matter of good luck and bad luck, in every contest there inevitably comes a time when the performance becomes more colorful and more relaxed, and so the situation improves. An actor should look on this moment as one of good luck. In the case of a contest that continues on for a considerable time, then luck will of its own accord change hands again and again from one side to the other. It is written that "both the god of victory and the god of defeat are always present to decide the outcome of any contest. Such is a crucial secret in the military arts." Therefore, in a contest of *nō*, if

the opponent is doing well, the actor must realize that the god of victory dwells on the enemy's side and be awed accordingly. However, these gods decide the Cause and Effect for only a short time, so that fortune switches again and again from one side to the other; thus, if an actor is convinced that his turn will come, he will be able to perform with confidence. Such is the Law of Cause and Effect in performance. An actor must never be remiss in pondering over this truth. Remember the expression "to him who believes accrues virtue."

If the matter is examined thoroughly, however, it can be said that, after all, the Law of Cause and Effect or a good or bad occasion can be reduced to the matter of novelty or a lack of novelty. If a spectator sees the same actor in the same play for two days in succession, what he found effective the day before will now seem uninteresting. This is because the spectator has a memory of something novel, which, since he does not find it again on the second day, makes him feel the performance is unsatisfactory. Later, however, on another occasion, he will go to the play with the memory of an unsatisfactory performance, and as he will now discover something new, he will find the performance successful.

Thus, when an artist masters our art to the highest degree, he finds that the Flower as such does not exist as a separate entity. When all the secret mysteries of the *nō* have been penetrated, it can be seen that Flower exists only to the extent that the actor has a firm self-understanding of the principle of novelty in all things. As the sutra says, "good and bad alike are undifferentiated; wickedness and righteousness are the same." It is not true that, fundamentally, there is nothing fixed concerning good or bad? Rather, depending on the occasion, what is useful is good, and what is not useful is bad. Our art depends on the taste of the audience at a particular time and place and will be produced in response to the general taste of the time. Such is the Flower that is truly useful. Here, one kind of performance is appreciated; there, another sort of acting is welcomed. The Flower thus must differ depending on the spirit of the audience. Which of those Flowers then represents the true one? The nature of the Flower truly depends on the occasion on which it will be employed.

This separate secret teaching concerning the art of the *nō* is crucial to our family and should be passed down to only one person in each generation. For example, even where the rightful heir is concerned, should he be without the proper abilities, this teaching must not be given to him. It is written that "a house does not mean merely lineage. Carrying on the line correctly defines a house. Succession is not a question of being born into a family, but of a real grasp of the art." This teaching can provide the means to come to truly master that exquisite Flower that permits the understanding of a myriad virtues.

I have previously passed along these teachings to my younger brother Shirō, and I have given them as well to Mototsugu, who is also a gifted player. They should only be passed on as an important secret.

Ōe 25 [1418] the first day of the 6th month.

(signed) Ze

*A Mirror Held to the Flower (Kakyō)**Chapter 14. Connecting All the Arts through One Intensity of Mind.*

It is often commented on by audiences that "many times a performance is effective when the actor does nothing." Such an accomplishment results from the actor's greatest, most secret skill. From the techniques involved in the Two Basic Arts down to all the gestures and the various kinds of Role Playing, all such skills are based on the abilities found in the actor's body. Thus to speak of an actor "doing nothing" actually signifies that interval which exists between two physical actions. When one examines why this interval "when nothing happens" may seem so fascinating, it is surely because of the fact that, at the bottom, the artist never relaxes his inner tension. At the moment when the dance has stopped, or the chant has ceased, or indeed at any of those intervals that can occur during a performance of a role, or, indeed, during any pause or interval, the actor must never abandon his concentration but must keep his consciousness of that inner tension. It is this sense of inner concentration that manifests itself to the audience and makes the moment enjoyable.

However, it is wrong to allow an audience to observe the actor's inner state of control directly. If the spectators manage to witness this, such concentration will merely become another ordinary skill or action, and the feeling in the audience that "nothing is happening" will disappear.

The actor must rise to a selfless level of art, imbued with a concentration that transcends his own consciousness, so that he can bind together the moments before and after that instant when "nothing happens." Such a process constitutes that inner force that can be termed "connecting all the arts through one intensity of mind."

"Indeed, when we come to face death, our life might be likened to a puppet on a cart [decorated for a great festival]. As soon as one string is cut, the creature crumbles and fades." Such is the image given of the existence of man, caught in the perpetual flow of life and death. This constructed puppet, on a cart, shows various aspects of himself but cannot come to life of itself. It represents a deed performed by moving strings. At the moment when the strings are cut, the figure falls and crumbles. *Sarugaku* too is an art that makes use of just such artifice. What supports these illusions and gives them life is the intensity of mind of the actor. Yet the existence of this intensity must not be shown directly to the audience. Should they see it, it would be as though they could see the strings of a puppet. Let me repeat again: the actor must make his spirit the strings, and without letting his audience become aware of them, he will draw together the forces of his art. In that way, true life will reside in his *nō*.

In general, such attitudes need not be limited to the moments involved in actual performance. Morning and night alike, and in all the activ-

ities of daily life, an actor must never abandon his concentration, and he must retain his resolve. Thus, if without ever slackening, he manages to increase his skill, his art of the *nō* will grow ever greater. This particular point represents one of the most secret of all the teachings concerning our art. However, in actual rehearsal, there must be within this concentration some variations of tension and relaxation.