

ZATŌ PLAYS IN KYŌGEN: SATIRE AND SYMBOLISM

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Overview

Zatō plays are of the Kyōgen repertoire in which protagonists are portrayed as blind men. These plays have been the subject of controversy due to the ethical problem of ridiculing the blind. The purpose of this study is to reexamine the satirical and symbolic meaning of blindness within the plays. Blindness is the essence of the Kyōgen play and is a common feature of this repertoire.

The satirical nature of Kyōgen humor is directed at the misconduct of the ruling class. The Zatō plays are analyzed here from historical perspectives as well. Historical facts concerning the blind in the medieval era are presented to show their unique position in society. Understanding the hierarchy within the *Todoza*, an association of blind singers in *The Tale of Heike*, is key to understanding the satire which is directed towards the high-ranking blind characters in Zatō plays.

The symbolic use of blind characters is crucial for understanding the play's humor. Physical blindness can be interpreted as a metaphor for mental blindness, referring to the state of mind which is unaware of or refuses to accept reality. The goal of the humor is to strip away the masks of mental blindness and disclose the ultimate reality that allows no room for vanity, blind belief, or gullibility.

Introduction

Differences in opinion exist as to how to interpret Zatō, or "blind character" plays. In fact, Zatō plays have been controversial because of the commonly shared view that it is unethical and cruel that blind characters within the texts are ridiculed or harassed due to their condition of blindness.¹ More recently, however, Yamamoto Tojiro, a Kyōgen performer of the Ōokura school, has challenged this viewpoint and claims

¹ Koyama Hiroshi, et. al., *Kyōgenshū*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1961), p. 165; Toida Michizō, *Chūsei no engeki* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1958); and Satake Akikhiro, *Gekokuujō no bunka* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1967).

that “the focus is on the handicapped mind of people, by showing the physical blindness on stage.”²

Koyama Hiroshi asserts that blind characters in Kyōgen are *naburi*, “the object of ridicule,” and are being harassed; others echo this view and claim that Zatō plays are “cruel.”³ Some claim that the theme in a Zatō play is not very different from any other Kyōgen repertoire.⁴ Jacqueline Golay suggests that the portrayal of blind characters as “dumb, silly, deceitful, joyful and lyrical” is commonly shared with any Kyōgen repertoire whose theme is to ridicule human foibles.⁵

Assuming that Zatō plays represent the core essence of Kyōgen comedy in their richness of satire and symbolism, this paper aims at discussing how the Zatō repertoire can be a significant representation of the Kyōgen play. The satire is directed towards the high-ranking blind characters within the Todoza, a nationwide guild of blind-priest singers in the *Tale of Heike*. Hashimoto Chosei suggests that the blind characters who are members of the Todoza are class-conscious, and at the end of Zatō plays, portraying harassment towards the higher ranked blind characters is designed to ridicule these blind men in Todoza.

William LaFleur suggests that the symbolic use of blindness (i.e., physical blindness) can be interpreted as blindness of the mind.⁶ The

² Yamamoto Tojiro’s claim is based on the premises that having sympathy towards handicapped people is in itself prejudice since the sympathy emerges from the viewpoint of a person without a handicap and is superior to handicapped people. Yamamoto warns that this kind of hypocritical sympathy is a by-product of conceited intellectual views shared among those in the ruling class who take advantage of social hierarchy, in Yamamoto, *Kyōgen no susume* (Tokyo: Tamagawa Daigaku shuppan, 1993), p. 95.

³ Koyama, *Kyōgenshū*; Omote Akira, “Tenshō Kyōgen bon ni tsuite,” *Bungaku* (1972), pp. 24-27; Toida, *Chūsei no engeki*; and Satake, *Gekokujyō no bunka*.

⁴ Yokoi Kiyoshi, *Chūsei minshū no seikatsu bunka* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku shuppan, 1975), p. 317; and Jacqueline Golay, “Pathos and Farce: Zatō Plays of the Kyōgen,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 28 (1973), p. 142.

⁵ Golay, “Pathos and Farce,” p. 142.

⁶ William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), p. 142.

symbolism of blindness, therefore, refers to a level of consciousness that is oblivious to reality in a way that reflects a person's underlying vanity or hypocrisy. While pursuing an understanding of ultimate reality, Kyōgen seems to allow no room for individual vanity, hypocrisy, and gullibility, which are created and/or represented by mental blindness. Yokoi Kiyoshi also acknowledges that Zatō plays include the fundamental laughter of Kyōgen plays and suggests that it is not “handicapped” people that the Kyōgen ridicule, but it is rather the inner distortion of the human mind about which Zatō plays are concerned.⁷

While admitting that the satire is directed towards the upper social rank in Todoza hierarchy, Koyama Hiroshi criticizes the plays that deal with the blind wanderers outside of the Todoza hierarchy who are cruelly harassed by the non-handicapped.⁸ I would like to argue, however, that satire towards the higher-ranking blind is more predominant among Zatō plays, which include high ranking blind people of Todoza, whereas the plays about blind wanderers can be richer in the symbolic meaning of blindness. Thus, in this paper, the main discussion will be on how sarcasm and the symbolism of blindness are expressed in different categories of Kyōgen plays.

History of the Blind in the Japanese Medieval Era

Before a further analysis of Zatō plays, I will present a brief historical overview of blind people during the Muromachi (1334-1573) and Edo (1600-1867) periods when Kyōgen plays were first established in the form of written texts.

Some blind people of the Muromachi and Edo periods enjoyed special privileges as singers of *The Tale of Heike*. *Heike* singers formed their own association called Todoza, which was established in the Muromachi period and abolished after the Meiji period.⁹ There was a hierarchy of five ranks in this association (from highest to lowest): Kengyō, Betto, Koto, Zatō, and Shomo. This ranking is an important key to understanding Zatō plays.

⁷ Yokoi, *Chūsei minshū*, pp. 317, 322.

⁸ Koyama, *Kyōgenshū*, p. 135.

⁹ Henchōsha Bunkkyō Minzoku Gakkai, ed., *Bukkyō minzoku jiten* (Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu ōraisha, 1993), pp. 144-145.

In the Edo period, under the auspices of the Tokugawa shogunate, high-ranking members of *Todoza* were given the privilege to loan money, *Zatō* kin, to the public. Golay believes that this privilege suggests a concerned view towards the blind because “the blind people’s inability to see the world around them did not prevent them from finding a legitimate place and function in society.”¹⁰

This positive interpretation also derives from the supernatural power of blindness, as based on esoteric Shinto belief. Hyodo Hiromi refers to the eminent Japanese folklore scholar Yanagita Kunio, who presumes that “there is an ancient custom of damaging one eye and breaking one leg of the *yorimashi*, a Shinto priest who is sacrificed to a god.” Due to this religious custom, it is believed that those who blind their eyes have supernatural powers...some people were even willing to damage their eyes in order to attain this supernatural power.”¹¹ Another positive example of blindness can be observed in the Noh play where the legendary figure of Kagekiyo blinds his own eyes in an act of defiance as a defeated warrior so that he would not have to see his enemy.

These positive depictions of blind people and their special status does not necessarily mean that they are free of prejudice from society. In fact, the other side of the coin is also true in terms of a religious interpretation of blindness that is represented by the Buddhist view. According to Buddhism, blindness is considered the consequence of a sin (*hibo daijyo no tsumi*), which the blind person committed during his/her former life.¹²

¹⁰ Golay, “Pathos and Farce,” p. 141.

¹¹ Hyodo Hiromi, *Heike mogatari: Katari no gentai* (Tokyo: Yuseidō shuppan, 1987), p. 115 (Translation is mine).

¹² Examples of Buddhist interpretations of blind characters are in the Noh plays *Semimaru* and *Yorobōshi*. In both plays, the *Shite*, or “lead character,” accepts his/her blindness as the consequence of a sin committed in a former life. The *Shite* tries to endure his/her misfortune as a way to regain good karma in the next life. Yokoi points out the irony of this situation. Though Buddhism seeks to save unfortunate people in the name of Buddha, the physically handicapped are inadvertently discriminated against, in Yokoi, *Chūsei minshū*, p. 315. The Buddhist *rokudō* system of transmigration through six realms according to the law of karma seems to be incorporated within social mobility, *gekokujō*, “below conquerors

Instead of the gloomy view of the Buddhists' interpretation of blindness as a different form of retribution, however, it seems that Kyōgen accepts the reality of blindness as it is, and instead ridicules the high-ranking blind within the Todoza system or makes fun of mental blindness.

Major Themes in Zatō Plays

This paper analyzes thirteen Zatō plays based on two major themes of satire and symbolism. The first eight involve the confrontation between two differently ranked blind characters and are discussed in terms of satirical themes. In the satirical plays, the Shite, or lead character, is most likely a high-ranking blind person who is the target of ridicule by Ado, a blind person of lower status. The other five plays are classified as symbolic. The plays are further categorized by whether or not they include a confrontation with or without a third person as an instigator, except for Futari Zatō, in which two blind men compete by reciting the *Tale of Heike*. In *Nunokai*, *Umkakari*, and *Hakuyo*, two blind men fight over an object without the instigation of a third party, but in *Dobukacchiri*, *Chakagi*, and *Mari*, the fighting is triggered by a third party. The symbolic plays deal with the hypocrisy of high-ranking aristocrats in Kyoto, as in *Tsukimi*, *Kawakami*, *Saru*, and *Inukai Zatō*, or with the theme of marital love in which the husband is a blind man, as in *Kawakami*, *Kiyomizu*, *Goze Zatō* and *Saru Zatō*. Furthermore, the major themes of marital love can be classified as: 1) appreciation of love and acceptance of physical blindness, as in *Kawawakami*, or 2) deluded love, as illustrated by the extra-marital love affair in *Saru Zatō*.

Satirical Meaning of Blindness

above.” This unity of religious belief and social instability accounts for the underlying hope of blind persons to attain good karma in the next life. In *Semimaru*, both Semimaru and his sister Sakagami are descendents of the royal family of the emperor. Sakagami is ridiculed by the commoners for her physical deformities and laments that “everything is upside-down in this world,” in Sanari Kentaro, *Yōkyoku taikan*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1964), p. 1680. However, the tragic element of the play is given reprieve with the underlying belief and suggestion of salvation for both Sakagami and Semimaru in their next lives, in Yokoi, *Chūsei minshū*, p. 313.

In the plays where the Todoza hierarchy is evident, the underlying theme is satire of the higher-ranking blind person, similar to the way that Taro and Jiro Kajhya outwit their lord in the Shomyo repertoire of Kyōgen. In order to understand the satire that is targeted towards the high-ranking blind people in Todoza hierarchy, it is crucial to see the social rank of all characters in Zatō plays. Again, the rank in Todoza varies from Kengyō, Betto, Koto, Zatō and Shomo (highest to lowest). It should be noted that Shomo is a servant below the official ranking of titles and he serves all the different ranks in Todoza. Table 1 shows the rank of blind characters that are in the category of satire as I discussed earlier. The Tenshō text is the oldest written Kyōgen text that recorded the original form of Kyōgen plays during the Muromachi period.¹³ Among all the schools listed in Table 1, the Ōokura school (Busei 10) is one of the oldest and appeared before the early Edo period, whereas the Sagi and Izumi schools appeared later.

Table 1: Ranking of Status in Todoza Hierarchy Among Zatō Plays

Plays	Text	Shite	Ado
Dachin Zatō	TNS	Zatō	Shomo
Umakari Zatō	TNS	Zatō	Shomo
Nunokai Zatō	TNS	Koto	Zatō
Mari Zatō	TNS	Kengyō	Shomo
Mari Zatō	IZM	Koto	Kikuchi (Zatō)
Hakuyo	IZM / SGI	Koto	Zatō
Futari Zatō	OKR	Kengyō	Koto
Dobu Kacchiri	IZM / SGI	Koto	Zatō
Chakagi Zatō	SGI	So-Kengyō	Kengyō, Koto, Zatō

Note: Shite: (Leading character)

Ado: (Supporting character)

Izumi school: IZM

Sagi school: SGI

¹³ Ōsone Akinosuke, et. al., *Kenkyūsha koten bugaku gekibungaku* (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1975), p. 37.

Tenshō school: TNS

Ōokura school: OKR

Among the plays dealing with the direct confrontation between two rankings of the blind Todoza members, four out of nine plays listed above are in the Tenshō text. The theme of a satire directed towards the higher rank seems to be predominant in the Tenshō text. In the development of dramatic sophistication in Kyōgen from farce to full-fledged comedy, the main technique of slapstick in Tenshō expresses satire through the sophistication of the plot. Plays under this category will be analyzed according to the level of plot sophistication, from the least sophisticated plays in Tenshō to the utmost sophisticated plays in later texts that provided a basis for the ridicule or use of the third-person device.

The typical plot ends with the high-ranking blind character being kicked or harassed by a low-ranking blind character, as in *Nunokai Zatō*, *Umakai Zatō*, *Hakuyo*, *Mari Zatō*, *Chakagi Zatō*, *Futari Zatō*, *Dachin Zatō*, and *Dobu Kacchiri*. *Futari Zatō* is the exception, in which two blind characters compete to prove their skill in *Heike*. The fights between two blind characters of different ranks were all triggered within the simple plot based on an argument over an object.

The three plays, *Nunokai Zatō* (Taiso), *Umakari Zatō* (Taisho) and *Hakuyo* (Izumi and Sagi), share a similar plot about fighting over an object, e.g. a piece of cloth in *Nunokai Zatō*, a horse in *Umakai Zatō*, and a biwa mandarin in *Hakuyo*. The objects which the two blind characters fight over are used to provoke a simple, childish dispute. In these plays, the Ado assaults the Shite, who is of a higher rank. Hashimoto points out that “Zatō plays seem not to end without having the Kengyō and Koto thrown down by the Zatō or the Shomo.”¹⁴ The development of the characters or their legitimate reasons for these fights seems to be of least concern in Tenshō texts. The first texts of Kyōgen simply aim to elicit laughter from the audience by inverting the target to be attacked within the Todoza hierarchy.

While sharing the identical plot and the same wordplay as a *renga* poem, *Hakuyo* (Sagi) shows more sophistication as a drama than its original model play, *Umakari* in the Tenshō text, by providing a good reason for the Koto to be ridiculed. The Koto is described as an obnoxious person who misuses his authority by insisting on borrowing a biwa mandarin from the

¹⁴ Hashimoto Chōsei, “Tensei kyōgenhon no shukka zatō kyōgen,” *Kokugo to kokubungaku* (1974), p. 34.

owner regardless of the fact that Hakuyo (the name of the Zatō) is the first to request it. When arguing his point, the Koto scorns the Zatō by saying, “Hakuyo zure ga Kotode gozzareba, ozashiki de deruto mōshitemo kouta ka hayamonogaatari de sumu Kotode gozaru. Arewa biwa irimasennu (Biwa is not needed when Hakuyo and the like are expected to sing popular songs or requested to perform the shorter version at the drinking table).”¹⁵

In fact, a biwa, which is used as an accompaniment for singing the *Tale of Heike*, is considered a status symbol because only those ranked above the Koto are allowed to sing *Heike*. Therefore, the Zatō’s insistence on his right to borrow a biwa is a protest against authority, which offends the Koto. Compared to its Tenshō counterpart, in which a horse is fought over, the Sagi text shows more elaboration in using a biwa as a symbolic status symbol. When both characters are told to compete with each other by composing a *renga* poem for Hakuyo (the owner of the biwa), the Zatō ridicules the Koto: “Sakamorino Sakamorino / Zashikie hitono yobazareba / yobasuzareba kasu Koto wa mon ni tatazumi (Since Koto, who is as bad as ‘sake kasu,’ is not invited to the drinking party, sake lees stay at the gate).”¹⁶ The implication here is that if Hakuyo is not allowed to sing *Heike* at the drinking party, the Koto is even worse for he is not even invited to the party just like the useless sake lees (Koto). In reply, the Koto composes the poem saying, “Niwanaka e Niwanake / Hakakkeno geta nugisutete, nugisutete / Hakuyo nakuwa tanie hokase. (In the garden, in the garden / there is a worn-out pair of wooden clogs / They should be thrown into the valley, since there is no use for wearing them, ‘Hakuyo nakuba’).”¹⁷

In this poem, the pun is on “Hakuyo” as in “Hakuyo nakuwa” meaning both “no use of wearing them” and the name of Zatō, “Hakuyo.” Both the Koto and Hakuyo make an insulting pun with their competitor’s name and the result is a tie, which shows Hakuyo is no less witty than the Koto.

There are four plays, *Dobukacchiri* (IZM, SGI), *Chakagi Zatō* (SGI), *Mari Zatō* (IZM), and *Dachin Zatō* (TNS), in which the direct interference of the third person or a non-blind passerby causes a fight with the blind character. The passerby triggers the fight with childish, practical

¹⁵ Fujikawa Hisashi, *Kyōgenshū* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun, 1954), p. 270.

¹⁶ Furukawa Hisashi, *Kyōgen zenshū: hyochu* (Tokyo: Murasaki no kokyosha, 1950), p. 271.

¹⁷ Furukawa, *Kyōgen zenshū*, p. 271.

jokes, such as drinking sake from sake cups waiting to be served, as in *Dobukachiri*; putting pepper in a tea cup, as in *Chakagi Zatō*; moving a ball with small bells causing the blind characters to collide (*Mari Zatō*); or by simply joining in on the harassment of the non-blind person (*Dachin Zatō*). Particularly in *Mari Zatō* and *Dachin Zatō*, the Shites know that the third party is harassing them, but the Ados of the lower ranks are still able to take advantage of the situation by attacking the Shite and pretending that it was done by the third party.

The focal point of contention arises from the different interpretation of the non-blind passerby. Koyama and Yokoi denounce the humor employed in Zatō plays on the grounds that the non-blind passerby harasses the blind character. Since these plays do not appear in the old Tenshō texts, the technique of using a passerby is considered a device to enhance the sophistication of the dramatic plot. His role is not developed as a full character but is treated as a mechanism for the play. The fact that the passerby is the only person who can physically see provides the third-eye from the viewpoint of the audience. He further acts as an instigator of a fight between the two main characters. For example, in *Dobukacchiri*, the passerby sneaks in and empties out a sake cup which Kikuchi was serving to Koto. The fight between the two blind characters was instigated by the passerby's practical joke of stealing sake; therefore, Koto believes that Kikuchi stole his sake, since neither blind character can see the passerby. Thus, the passerby should be considered a device for the sake of the sophistication of the dramatic plot rather than as a controversial and unethical way of ridiculing handicapped people.

The Symbolic Meaning of Blindness

In this category of Zatō plays, the Shite or the leading character, who is the target of ridicule, is mostly the blind person who is either the Zatō, the lowest rank in the Todoza system, or even the one without a title, except for *Kawakami* of the Sagi text.

LaFleur takes an insightful look into the meaning of satire rendered in the Zatō plays: “physical blindness becomes in Kyōgen a vantage point from which satire is directed at all forms of faith in ‘the existence of the things not seen.’”¹⁸ Based on LaFleur's claim, physical blindness can be interpreted as a metaphor of the blindness of the mind.

¹⁸ LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*, p. 142.

The symbolic use of blindness in *Zatō* plays aims to ridicule either people's ignorance or the denial of the realities of daily life. Unlike the Buddhist connotation of blindness of the mind as an obstacle for attaining enlightenment, *Kyōgen's* connotation of blindness is strictly limited to things that are down to earth. The symbolic meaning of blindness of the mind includes vanity and the hypocrisy of non-blind people with high status, as in *Tsukimi*, or the gullibility of those who believe in conventional ideas and values. Another dominant symbolic theme is the delusion of either the refusal of the acceptance of physical blindness in favor of mental blindness, as in *Kawakami*, or the external infatuation and possessive love between a married couple, also seen in *Kawakami* and *Saru Zatō*. The theme of love between married couples is especially emphasized when it is depicted as a pun, as in the appreciation of an affectionate, devoted wife (妻) as opposed to physical eyes (目), which are both pronounced "me."

In *Tsukimi* (SGI), an interesting contrast is set between the Shite, the Koto who is from Shimogyo, an area of Kyoto occupied by merchants and lower-class people, and the Ado, a man from Kamigyō, an upper-class area of Kyoto. This contrast is used effectively when the Koto and Upper Kyoto men meet and share their mutual interest in moon-viewing. The Koto says to the Upper Kyoto man that "Konata niwa Jokyo jya to ooseraruru hodoni sazo asobasu de gozaimasho (Since you told me that you are from Upper Kyoto, I assume you would compose a good poem)."¹⁹ Flattered, the Upper Kyoto man brags about himself, saying it is easy to compose a verse or two. However, both of them recite standard poems and end up laughing at each other. The Upper Kyoto man seems no more educated than the Koto from Shimogyo. They share sake, sing, dance and enjoy the night. When they decide to go their separate ways, the Upper Kyoto Man is struck by an urge to harass the Koto. He turns around and assaults him. After being attacked, the Koto is chased by a fierce-looking dog.

The end of the play seems to add insult to the Koto's injury. The theme of satire attached to social rank seems to be reminiscent of earlier themes in *Zatō* plays. However, the sophistication of the play provides more reason for the Koto to be ridiculed: the Koto frequently flatters the Upper Kyoto man, which shows the Koto's propensity towards vanity. Even after it becomes evident that the Upper Kyoto man is not capable of

¹⁹ Furukawa, *Kyōgen zenshū*, p. 294.

composing a poem, the Koto tries to complement the man when he sings a popular song. The Koto says, “Jokyo to uketamaareba utai made ga kakubetsu ni kikoemasuru (Knowing that you are from Upper Kyoto, even the popular song chanting sounds special when you sing).”²⁰ The Koto’s repetition of “Upper Kyoto” when describing the man shows the Koto’s appreciation of conventional cosmetic value that anyone from that area of noble taste and culture would have. By flattery, the Koto himself becomes a mirrored vanity image of the Upper Kyoto man. Kyōgen lampoons the vanity of people with high status.

Comparing the same play in two different texts, the Shite is the Koto in the Sagi text. In the Ōokura text the Shite receives less harassment simply because he is the Zatō. The focus of satire in the Ōokura text shifts from the blind character to the Upper Kyoto man.

The shift of ridicule is done through a sympathetic tone with pathos towards the Zatō who is innocently deceived by the mischievous and hypercritical Upper Kyoto man. The Shite is simply described as an innocent victim and his naiveté shows when he cannot recognize that the man he shared a good time with is also the man who assaults him. “Omoeta omoeba ima no yatsuwa saizen no hito hikikae nasake mo nai yatsura de gozaru (Thinking of the man I just encountered, he is so different from the man I met a while ago).”²¹ Zatō’s gullibility may elicit laughter from the audience, but the laughter is not purely due to the satirical nature of the scene. There is also sympathy for Zatō because of his innocence, which adds pathos to the play.

Regardless of whether the scene represents an exceptional event or the real nature of the Upper Kyoto man, Kyōgen aims to reveal the reality of the people. It becomes a satire when the humor is directed towards people of higher rank (who are revealed to be no different from the people of the lower class). The satire rendered in the Ōokura version of *Tsukimi* is a psychological drama in which vanity symbolizes blindness of the mind, making it a sophisticated drama.

Another remarkable symbolic meaning of blindness in Kyōgen plays deals with the love between a blind man and his wife, who is not blind. Among these plays, some express sympathy and affection towards blind people by having blind characters that accept their physical blindness

²⁰ Furukawa, *Kyōgen zenshū*, p. 296.

²¹ Koyama, *Kyōgenshū*, p. 335.

and refuse to be mentally blinded through the rejection of reality. Significantly, the Shites in both *Kiyomizu Zatō* and *Kawakami* are the *Zatō* and a blind person with no title, respectively. Both plays end with happy couples that show sympathy and affection towards blind characters and low-ranking people, with no satire suggested.

In *Kiyomizu Zatō* (IZM) and *Goze Zatō* (TNS), a blind man and woman, who are both looking for a spouse, are happily matched with the blessing of Kiyomizu Kannon Boddhisatva. The play's setting is almost identical to the *Moshizuma* (Seeking wife) plays in Onna Kyōgen's women category, like *Tsuribari*, *Nikuyuhachi*, and others. However, unlike other similar plays in which the Shite, who is given an ugly bride by a god and subsequently tries to run away from her, both the blind man and woman end up happily together.

Tagani ni me mienau nakanaredo mo
 chigirito nareba ureshisayo
 chitsuka tatenuru nishikigimo
 aawade kuchinishi narainaru nani
 tokimo utssazuashite
 fufuto narazo ureshiki.²²

(Translation)

Although we are both blind,
 We are so happy to have a marriage vow.
 Even one thousand brocade trees for appealing love
 rot before meeting the love.
 We became a married couple
 without waiting for the time to come.

In *Goze Zatō* (TNS), which has a plot identical to *Kiyomizu*, the blind man sings at the beginning of the play:

“Waga yononakawa makkuroni, waga yononaka wa makuroni me
 no naki Kotokoso kanashiki (My world is so dark, my world is so
 dark. It is a pity that I do not have my eyes and wife).”

²² Nonomura Kaizō, *Kyōgen shūsei* (Tokyo: Nogaku shorin, 1974), p. 123.

In the annotated text of Tenshō Kyōgen Bon, Kanai explains that the word “me” means both “eye” and “wife.”²³ Although the blind character has no “me 目 (eye),” he is given another “me 妻 (wife)” at the end of the play. If physical blindness or the lack of physical eyes helps people see into the substance of love, the fact that the latter “me 妻 (wife)” is given at the end of the play shows that the blind man is given the mind’s “me 目 (eye)” as the result of attaining the substance of love or life.

In the play *Kawakami* (Sagi), the wife shares common traits with those of a typical *wawashi onna* (shrewish wife) of Onna (women) Kyōgen.²⁴ The *wawashi onna* is a domineering wife who nags at her husband, yet demonstrates deep affection underneath. In *Kawakami*, the husband’s wish to regain sight comes true through a divine revelation of the Boddhisattva Jizō, under the condition that he divorce his wife. When the wife is told that her husband must divorce her, she becomes furious:

MaKoto ojizo no ojigen naraba
 nakayo soetokoso oseraremashoni
 konaka made naitamono o ribetsu seito
 aruyo no doyokuna ojizo naraba
 korekara maitate tsukami saite shirizoko
 satemo satemo harano tatsuKoto²⁵

(Translation)

Since it is a revelation of the Jizō,
 they should tell us to get along well.
 If they told you to divorce your wife,
 Jizō has no mercy.
 I will go and rip it off
 I am mad, I am so mad.

²³ Kiyojimitsu Kanai, *Tenshō kyōgenbon zenshū* (Tokyo: Kazama shobō, 1990), p. 575.

²⁴ Carolyn Marley, “The Tender-hearted Shrews: The Women Character in Kyōgen,” *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 22 (1988), p. 46.

²⁵ Furukawa, *Kyōgen zenshū*, p. 102.

Historically, Jizō is considered to be one of the most benevolent and popular Japanese folk gods. The wife finds it unthinkable that Jizō would give unreasonable conditions. In the Izumi text,²⁶ the wife clearly states that it is god's and Buddha's responsibility to make a good match between a couple, but not to destroy it. The underlying affection of the wife and the acceptance of reality is a dominant theme in this play. The anger displayed by the wife in the above example demonstrates her strong attachment and love towards her husband. Breaking his promise, the husband chooses to give up his newly gained eyesight to Jizō and remains blind and married to his wife. The play ends with warm love and concern exchanged between the couple in the Izumi text:

Wife: No itoshii hito Kohira e gozare.
 Husband: Te o hiite kuresashime.
 Wife: Kokoro e mashita.²⁷

(Translation)

Wife: Oh my dearest one, please come here.
 Husband: Please hold my hand.
 Wife: Certainly.

In both the Izumi and the Sagi text, the caring wife guides her husband in the right direction, realizing her ability to serve as his eyes. The theme is parallel to the use of the word “me,” as discussed above, as a pun meaning both eyes and wife in *Goze Zatō*. If the blind man has a “wife 妻” who serves as his eyes, he no longer needs his physical “目 eyes.” In this context, the condition Jizō gives to the blind man is legitimate and the implication is that the blind husband should be aware of reality when choosing between his wife and his eyesight. If this reinterpretation of the hidden message of Jizō is valid, *Kyōgen* attaches the meaning of acceptance of reality as an alternative interpretation to the conventional Buddhist belief of blindness as retribution for sins committed in a former life. In other words, *Kyōgen* is simply “delighted in bringing the object down to earth and to an everyday diminution,” as Golay suggests.²⁸

²⁶ Nonomura, *Kyōgen shūsei*, p. 100.

²⁷ Nonomura, *Kyōgen shūsei*, p. 102.

²⁸ Golay, “Pathos and Farce,” p. 140.

In a way, *Kawakami* is a tragedy because the blind man loses his sight again. This is the only play in *Kyōgen* that refers to the Buddhist connotation of blindness as an indication of a sin from a previous life: “Kore kaya Kotonō tātōe nimo shkuju ni menō tsubururutowa. Iwa no minoue ni shiraretari (Is this what they mean when blindness is due to your karma from a previous life?)”²⁹ “Your destiny is revealed in this life.”³⁰ Nevertheless, in the last scene, in which the husband and wife leave the stage to live happily ever after, they weep together over the misery of blindness, assuring the audience that the couple cares for each other and making us believe that the couple will be happy just as they were before. Thus, the common theme shared by *Kawakami* and *Kiyomizu* seems to be the acceptance of reality and finding happiness in things as they are.

While the wife in *Kawakami* finds happiness despite her husband’s physical blindness, wives in other plays abandon their blind husbands because their minds are blurred by the seduction of another man. In *Saru Zatō*, the wife shows hesitation as she is tempted to run away with a monkey trainer. The wife says to the monkey trainer, “Osana najmimi o sutete kodo e ikuzo. So noyna Koto wa iutemo kuresashimasu na. (How can I leave my husband who I have known since I was a child? Do not tell me such things).” Nevertheless, she succumbs to temptation in the end.

It is significant to note that the wife tells her blind husband, “Matt men mieru mono wa mitonai mono mo mieneba narimasezu. Yuenaimono o miidashi tewa warui kokoromo demasuru (Those who can see are forced to see something undesired and are tempted to do the wrong things),” in reply to her husband’s envy of people who can see.³¹ The wife succumbs to the temptation of running away with the monkey trainer due to the fact that she can see and her mind is blinded as a result. The wife’s dialogue is the key to understanding the symbolic meaning of this play. Ironically, the fact that the wife is able to see causes her mental blindness, and as a result, she leaves her husband.

Symbolism is also evident in the string that the blind husband uses to tie himself to his wife under the suspicion that she will leave him at the flower-viewing site. Ironically, the blind husband finds that his wife is substituted by a monkey at the end of the string in the climax of the story.

²⁹ Furukawa, *Kyōgen zenshū*, p. 102.

³⁰ Nonomura, *Kyōgen shūsei*, p. 102.

³¹ Nonomura, *Kyōgen shūsei*, p. 190.

Although these wives may be criticized due to their adultery, the blind husbands are also not without fault because of their possessiveness. Yamamoto finds that the string is a symbol of possessive love that is observed among many men in general:

Many men tie their women with various kinds of strings. It can be financial, habit, social status, beauty, violence, intellect, attraction, etc. Although they tie their women with the invisible string, they may be blind to see what is deep in the heart of the woman.³²

In this sense, the possessive love of men in general is not any different from the blind husbands of the Kyōgen plays.

Conclusion

The significance of these plays can be summarized on two levels: 1) the satire of the high-ranking blind as a common theme of Kyōgen plays, and 2) the symbolic meaning of blindness. These two features can be best seen as expressions of the realistic approach found in Kyōgen plays, as opposed to the idealistic and didactic approach of Noh plays.

Further observation indicates that the satire of *Zatō Kyōgen* also derives from the basic attitude of Kyōgen to reveal reality while ridiculing the blind belief towards the cosmetic value of high-ranking people. It is clear that the satirical meaning targeted towards the high-ranking blind person is predominant in plays in which two blind characters with different ranks ridicule each other through wordplay, whereas symbolic meaning is more explicit in the *Zatō* plays in which the lead characters are either blind persons with low rank, *Zatō*, or have no title at all.

It can be concluded that plays in Kyōgen are neither immoral nor a manifestation of discrimination, but have a literary significance of their own in terms of reflecting the dynamics of satire in the medieval era of *gekokuujyō*, when commoners strove to gain power over the ruling samurai class. This element adds to the symbolic meaning of unmasking physical blindness as a vehicle for the major theme of Kyōgen realism. Thus, it is the utmost realism of Kyōgen, which strips away hypocritical delusion through satire by ridiculing people of higher social class or rank, that epitomizes the major themes of *Zatō* plays.

³² Yamamoto, *Kyōgen no susume*, pp. 112-113 (Translation is mine).