

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater, Vol. 2

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2008.9.20

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第五十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 55

石谷秀との再会、そして.....

Reunion with Hide Ishitani, and then...

I met Hide Ishitani again.

This young, beautiful married woman is described in detail in issues 40 through 45 of the “Nureki Kinbaku Diary” series in SM Sniper.

The titles at that time were “The Beauty of Married Woman Hide Ishitani” and “Hide Ishitani's Top-Secret Footage.”

This text was later compiled and reprinted in the sixth volume of my paperback collection published by Kawade Shobo Shinsha, “Bondage: As Long as I Live.” If you are interested, I highly recommend you take a look.

I used to meet Hide Ishitani quite frequently for a period, but we had lost contact for about two years.

Hide-san is a married woman who values her private life (or so I respectfully surmise).

I don't know her real name, address, or phone number.

She didn't tell me, and I didn't try to find out.

Come to think of it, I never saw her with a cell phone. Of course, I'm also someone who doesn't carry a cell phone.

I know absolutely nothing about her past upbringing or background. I have no desire to know.

"I'm a married woman," she said at the beginning, so that's simply why I think of her as a married woman.

She might not actually be married at all. Whether she's a married woman or a single woman, I couldn't care less. Truly, I couldn't.

"Please call me only when you feel like it," I told her.

"When you feel like it," means, to put it plainly, when you feel like being bound by me.

Writing it out like this might make me seem like a terribly arrogant person.

But I take great care not to give that impression, speaking gently.

So she probably never thought of me as an arrogant man.

"I absolutely won't call you, so you don't need to give me your number," I also told her.

Depending on how you hear it, this too could be an arrogant thing to say.

Some people would probably take it as arrogant and haughty.

It can't be helped. I'm just that petty of a person.

If she doesn't call me, then that's the end of our relationship.

And so, two years passed.

Unless she called, the connection was severed, and completely blank days passed.

Oh, no.

I've gone and written a whole bunch of unnecessary stuff again.

There was no need to go on and on about her from two years ago.

I must hurry on.

Anyway, she suddenly called me out of the blue.

We met again at the coffee shop in Yokohama's Minato Mirai district where we used to often meet up.

We talked.

And then, after two years of silence, she agreed to film “Hide Ishitani’s Top Secret Footage,” the very thing she’d vehemently refused, shaking her head fiercely and saying “no” no matter how much I begged her.

I don’t want to know what happened to her during that time. I have no interest in such things.

Before me is Hide Ishitani, who has agreed to be filmed.

That’s all there is to it.

So I intended to write about that filming, starting from the very first line.

But, as is my usual habit, I ended up with an unnecessary, lengthy “preamble.”

I still talk too much, always veering off on tangents. That’s why it’s a “talking theater.”

Fuji Planning, the company I’d wanted to commission for filming “Hide Ishitani’s Top-Secret Footage,” had quietly ceased production activities.

The reason I chose Fuji Planning to film this “Top-Secret Footage,” where I bind and torment my partner with my entire being, is also detailed meticulously within the Kawade Bunko collection.

I wrote it down with passionate fervor.

In short, the filming consciousness, attitude, and methods of AV-style SM production companies have sunk to the depths of utter clichés.

Only mass-produced images far removed from the true desires and feelings of enthusiasts are churned out.

I didn’t want to entrust the crucial filming starring Hide Ishitani to staff accustomed to producing such images.

But I can no longer ask Fuji Planning, which has ceased production activities.

After thinking for a moment, I remembered the existence of Ako, a female editor I was acquainted with.

She is the Ako who appears in the “Reader-Submitted Top-Secret Footage” section of the Kawade Bunko.

This Ako understood my half-playful filming intent, which had occurred to me on a whim, and even volunteered to be the camerawoman.

Thanks to her, two years ago, I was able to create the “Top-Secret Footage” featuring [Hiromi Saotome](#) almost exactly as I’d envisioned it.

Enthusiasts treasure their preferred images as unique and irreplaceable.

This feeling is incredibly intense, to a degree ordinary people can’t believe. That’s why they’re enthusiasts.

I’m still grateful to Ako for shooting almost exactly as I envisioned, and I feel indebted to her.

If it were Ako, she would surely understand how I feel now.

She would undoubtedly film “Hide Ishitani’s Top-Secret Footage” exactly as I imagined it. No, not exactly as I imagined, but as close to my own vision as possible.

They say you should strike while the iron is hot. I immediately introduced Hide Ishitani to Ako.

And just between the three of us, myself, Hide Ishitani, and Ako, this project was set in motion.

And so, this explanation of how things unfolded might just have been another one of my usual detours.

I should have written down the specific scenario at the filming location of “Hide Ishitani’s Top-Secret Footage” much earlier.

No, not a formal script, but rather a memo.

This memo is what matters most. I pour my soul into this memo first.

First, the filming location.

That is, the place where Hide Ishitani would be bound and tormented.

I wish to avoid the pre-existing studios commonly used for AV-style SM productions.

Frankly, I’m utterly sick of that distinctly studio-like atmosphere inside those rooms.

My heart doesn't race in those kinds of studios that AV production crews tirelessly use over and over again.

My "bondage heart" doesn't leap.

It just makes me think, "not again."

In those studios, the positions for binding the female body, the placement of lighting on that body, and the camera angles, everything is predetermined.

Before filming even begins, the entire image of the work already forms in my mind.

The same tired, formulaic visuals I've seen countless times....

So, I'll start by writing here about the place where I want to bind and torment Hide Ishitani this time.

It's a small bar, quietly breathing life in a back alley off a Ginza side street.

The nostalgic flavor is good, this alley, where bars are stacked and densely packed, evokes the atmosphere of the early to mid-Showa era.

You could just call it retro, but the scenery of this alley itself is, first and foremost, dramatic.

The place where I want to secretly tie up Hide Ishitani and torment her relentlessly is on the second floor of that old building, reached by climbing its narrow, steep staircase.

Just opening the door and glancing around the interior instantly envelops you in the scent of the Showa era.

The narrow interior is packed to capacity with just five customers seated at the counter.

In one far corner, there's a tiny space, with a wooden bench. But even there, with just three or four customers seated, it becomes crammed full.

Behind the woman serving customers at the counter, bottles of various colors, all with somehow old-fashioned labels, are lined up, creating a great atmosphere.

Against this backdrop of tasteful liquor bottles, I'd love to stage the masochistic beauty of a bound female body.

Before a row of Western liquor bottles bearing labels of red, deep red, green, dark green, blue, navy, yellow, purple, orange and subdued brown (and all these colors are faded and dulled

by age), Hide Ishitani, tightly bound with her hands behind her back with my rope, would surely display such agonizing shame and dramatic sensual poses.

Truth be told, the reason I so desperately wanted to tie up a sensitive female body to my heart's content right here in this small bar wasn't just the dramatic atmosphere of the place, but the sight of that pillar standing straight and tall from the floor, through the counter, all the way up to the ceiling.

This is perfect.

Unbearably perfect.

For a man who loves bondage, it's the kind of pillar that makes you tingle with desire, making you want to tie a woman up with her hands behind her back.

The pillar itself has an aura.

Sitting at the very back counter seat, the moment I saw it, I couldn't help but call out internally, "Hey, pillar-kun," reaching out my hand to show my affection.

Then, the pillar itself greeted me with a nostalgic smile, "Hey, welcome. Did I catch your eye? You certainly have good taste."

To anyone else, it's probably just an ordinary pillar on the counter, more of a nuisance, really.

At first glance, it seems utterly unsuitable for bondage.

No one would ever think to tie a woman to such a half-hearted, cramped pillar.

But to my eyes, this pillar held immense potential.

Once a woman's body was bound to it, this pillar would transform in a thousand ways. To me, it could only be seen as a pillar of lust.

That's why the pillar itself, responding to my desire, said, "You certainly have a keen eye."

My mindset and consideration for her when photographing Hide Ishitani are largely the same as what I wrote in the Kawade Bunko editions, "The Beauty of Married Woman Hide Ishitani" and "Hide Ishitani's Top-Secret Footage."

However, compared to two years ago, her heart has become somewhat... no, quite more open.

This is because with the gag covering half her face, it became acceptable to show her eyes.

Compared to her previous strong wariness, this is a significant change.

Or perhaps, I wondered, she is no longer a “married woman?” But such speculation is pointless to begin with. If this footage is completed and deemed acceptable for viewing by fellow enthusiasts that would be most welcome.

Hide Ishitani has beautiful eyes. The eyes speak volumes.

A bound woman expressing her sorrow and joy through her eyes is a delight for enthusiasts.

Furthermore, she agreed to expose her breasts.

Her breasts are beautiful. And when ropes are applied there, they radiate an extremely erotic charm.

Her consent to breast exposure means consent to bondage while semi-naked.

At first, I will bind her while she is still clothed. She will wear the clothes and underwear she normally wears, of course.

For the climax, naturally, I will use the pillar. That pillar I fell in love with at first sight.

I'll strip her down to her underwear, wrap her wrists around the back of the pillar, and bind them tightly.

Her butt resting on the counter.

Because of this, her face is higher than my eyes as I tie her up.

In other words, she becomes a “displayed object,” bound to the counter.

Of course, I bind her legs too, changing the bindings into various shapes. The variations in foot binding alone are enough to delight fellow enthusiasts.

Using both the pillar and the counter simultaneously to showcase the subtleties of foot bondage is one of my aims.

As I write this now, I find myself getting excited all by myself.

I should be writing more detailed, specific notes for Ako, who is assisting with this shoot, but I'm so excited I keep forgetting.

Calm down.

Right, I should write this down before I forget.

A sign, about the size of a handbag, quietly jutting out into the sky from the window area of the second floor of one building in the maze-like back alleys behind Ginza, where old, small buildings are densely packed together.

The cluttered atmosphere surrounding this sign is also truly excellent.

I want this small sign, set against the backdrop of the narrow strip of sky between buildings, to be the symbolic first shot.

But will the owner allow me to show the shop's name?

Whether I can successfully capture "Hide Ishitani's Top-Secret Footage" remains uncertain. Still, I'll continue writing this rambling yet enjoyable text as Ako's shooting notes, even if it feels like nothing more than a pipe dream.

The following comments were submitted by Mika Suzume and are reproduced here with her permission.

Mika Suzume's Comment

Thoughts on the 55th Talking Theater

September 20, 2008, 02:51

Sensei, it's Mika.

After reading this installment of "Reunion with Hide Ishitani, and then..." considering how fascinating you are, I find myself becoming rather intrigued.

Hide Ishitani is discussed in detail in your Kawade Bunko book, "Bondage: As Long as I Live," specifically in the sections "The Beauty of Married Woman Hide Ishitani" and "Hide Ishitani's Top-Secret Footage."

To quote your own words, “One in a thousand, no, having bound five thousand women in my past, one in five thousand, her exquisite, delicate form writing in shame.” Indeed, Hide Ishitani is undoubtedly one of your irreplaceable partners. After two years of longing, you are now creating what could be considered the culmination of your work.

The task of compiling specific notes from the filming location of “Hide Ishitani’s Top-Secret Footage,” a task undertaken by you in this very situation, I imagine that this very task must be your moment of SM bliss.

Therefore, I believe you are now in a highly elated state, feeling as excited as an elementary school student before a field trip.

It’s a small bar, quietly breathing life in a back alley off Ginza.

The nostalgic charm of this alley, where bars are stacked and densely packed, evokes the atmosphere of the early to mid-Showa era.

You could call it retro, but the scenery of this alley itself is, first and foremost, dramatic.

That setting, yes, yes... I find myself nodding in agreement. It’s good.

It reminds me of the SM film “The Slave Contract” starring [Nami Matsukawa](#) that I saw long ago. There was a bar called “June” in Shinjuku or somewhere like that. I wonder if it has that kind of atmosphere? I find myself imagining such things.

If it weren’t a back alley, that sensual, SM-like scent wouldn’t come through. And in a big bar, the space feels too vast, like the shame would just dissipate.

Before rows of Western-style liquor bottles bearing labels in red, deep red, green, deep green, blue, navy, yellow, purple, orange, and brown (and all of these colors are faded and dulled by age), Hide Ishitani, hands bound tightly behind her back with my rope, will surely display agonizing shame.

This too is quite lovely.

I think this kind of atmosphere, with its real sense of everyday life, suits SM bondage much better than fashionable scenes or artistic ambience.

If I could, I'd like to turn myself into one of the bar's pillars or bottles and watch the scene unfold.

I know it's impossible for me to enter that space except in that way... because I'm certain that Hide Ishitani's M aura would be shattered if anyone other than you and Ako were allowed in. So, while it's absolutely impossible in reality, it's a scene I'd very much like to witness.

Reading your delightful plan, I ended up writing all sorts of things. But it's only because your joy infected me, and I got carried away. Please forgive me. I'm terribly excited to see how the next scene of this little "play" unfolds.

Thank you, Mika-san.

Please feel free to share your thoughts and impressions after reading it.

2008.9.22

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第五十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 56

「隠微」な照明こそ「淫靡」なのだ

Subtle Lighting is What Makes It Sensual

The place where I was convinced we had to film “The Secret Footage of Married Woman Hide Ishitani” was this bar tucked away in a back alley of Ginza. In terms of atmosphere and mood, it was absolutely perfect for an SM vibe, but the interior was cramped.

Cramped, yet it exuded a unique sense of being a closed room.

But precisely because it was cramped, no one would ever think to shoot footage here.

First, the number of staff needed for filming would be severely limited. There's simply no room for equipment.

Because it's cramped, you can't achieve the precise lighting typical of AV-style videos.

Because it's cramped, the angles the cameraman could aim for would be extremely restricted.

Basically, the cameraman couldn't move around busily here and there.

As a result, it is impossible to shoot with the formulaic, predetermined compositions seen in AV-style SM videos.

“I can't work in a place this cramped,” some cameramen would likely shake their heads from the start.

In any case, there are many technical constraints.

But that's where my advantage lies.

The viewers (the enthusiasts), have actually been thoroughly bored for years by the rigid, overly familiar angles, lighting, and the endless array of easy poses commanded of the models in those AV-style videos, which represent the very pinnacle of formulaic, hackneyed mannerism.

The producers are unaware of the feelings of these many enthusiasts.

They probably aren't completely unaware, but they don't grasp that enthusiasts have reached a state bordering on despair toward the existing footage.

They continue producing within their familiar shooting techniques and rigidly fixed, simplistic SM imagery.

For true enthusiasts, such footage no longer provides any stimulation. Of course, it offers no sense of novelty either.

For many enthusiasts, SM footage that has lost its true SM spirit is less than a fart when it comes to stimulation.

No matter how brightly or beautifully you film a naked woman bound, it fails to deliver any shock, stimulation, or emotion to the hearts of enthusiasts.

First off, trying to film a bound woman (or a woman being bound) with bright makeup and make her look pretty is fundamentally wrong.

It's only natural that AV-style SM videos, which persistently use the same unoriginal settings, make women strike the same unchanging poses, and shoot with the same lighting and angles, are turned away from by many enthusiasts.

And as I write this without mincing words, I can hear the applause of agreement from countless film enthusiasts ringing in my ears.

The creators probably can't hear it, but I can.

At the same time, I can hear the creators' mocking laughter directed at us.

"We don't care if we're ignored by the enthusiasts. We're not catering to a minority of enthusiasts anyway. We just need people other than enthusiasts to buy our stuff. We can't keep pandering to the minority all the time.

From a purely business perspective, this is probably sound reasoning. No, I can't say that's wrong.

They also say things like this.

"We're not making this just for the enthusiasts. Even people who aren't enthusiasts themselves might be interested in the reality of these particular fetishes. They buy this kind of

footage out of curiosity and voyeurism. We target those people, which is why it works commercially.”

This, too, is probably a valid point.

I have no words to counter it.

Oh, here we go again, before I knew it, I’d gone way off track.

What was I trying to say?

While chatting away, I’ve even forgotten what I was going to say.

Even for a “Talking Theater,” this is just too much.

I need to get back on track.

I was writing this piece addressed to Ako, the female editor.

This is a “shooting memo” for Ako, my collaborator on this project and someone who understands my intentions.

My plan is to have Ako handle the overall production of the “Secret Footage of Married Woman Hide Ishitani” shoot, and if possible, even get her to be the camerawoman.

To repeat, this Ako is the one who appeared in the Kawade Bunko “Reader-Submitted Secret Footage” and filmed Hiromi Saotome, whom I had tied up, with a video camera.

Her sense for filming bound female bodies has been proven.

At this stage, this project is still just a concept.

Whether it will materialize or not remains uncertain.

If we don’t make it happen soon, Hide Ishitani, who is currently willing to participate, might change her mind and say something like, “I’ve changed my mind. I don’t want to do something so embarrassing. I don’t want any footage of me left behind.”

If that happens, everything will be for naught. This is exactly what I meant when I wrote before, “strike while the iron is hot.”

Fantasizing about the moment it becomes reality, I excitedly write down my “dream” in this form, like a “shooting memo.”

Ako.

In this cramped bar where noses nearly bump together, wouldn't you like to see how fiercely and innovatively I bind Hide Ishitani, making the most of this confined space? Wouldn't you like to film it?

Let me show you. Let me film it.

Ako will have a hard time filming, bumping her head, shoulders, and hips against the counter and the corners of the liquor shelves, but the restricted movements of that camerawoman will surely create angles of unprecedented realism that will shock the enthusiasts.

There's no need for lights to cast clean shadows on a woman's body.

Even if you fill every gap with bright, perfect lighting, it just looks fake, doesn't it?

Lighting that illuminates every inch of the model's body has nothing to do with SM. It's just fake.

It's irrelevant and artificial, and it only detracts from the mood.

Even if there are many dark areas, that's perfectly fine.

Let the parts the enthusiasts want to see stay dark and hidden. If you deliberately shine a light there, the SM aura vanishes completely.

"Show me the rope marks on her wrists better!" Even if the enthusiasts scream for it, you don't show them.

Not showing it is more erotic. It's more stimulating. Eroticism is fantasy.

People incapable of fantasy aren't qualified to be bondage enthusiasts.

I've repeatedly written many times before, in various places, about how contrived and boring the formulaic lighting of self-proclaimed professional photographers, based on their fixed notions, truly is.

Ako.

"The Secret Footage of Married Woman Hide Ishitani" aims to eliminate as much as possible the hollow techniques of AV-savvy production staff, striving instead for the hidden, voyeuristic sensibility of an amateur's peeping.

The more you shoot a woman bound by Nureki Chimuo under “hidden” lighting, the more she emits an “lewd” color and scent.

I want to express, through real footage, the mind and body of a woman tightly bound with her hands behind her back, denying the “artistry” (which they probably arrogantly believe they possess) of professional photographers.

That is what is most stimulating for the viewer. It is raw and obscene.

If it's not obscene, it's not SM.

If it's not raw, it's not bondage footage.

But don't misunderstand what I mean by lewd.

I don't just spread a woman's legs recklessly. Doing something like that isn't lewd at all.

No, wait a minute.

If I tried to spread her legs by placing my hands on each one, Hide Ishitani, if it were her, would probably struggle violently in shame.

If she were to resist and writhe, I'd place my hands on both her knees. I want to see her body trembling with shame.

If she were like some AV actress, casually spreading her legs wide open, I'd stop that kind of torment immediately. It's pointless.

(Honestly, since there's a two-year gap with her, I'm not really sure about that sort of thing. Women change in a short time, after all.)

Spreading a woman's legs wide open vigorously, without any resistance or shyness (just the other day during a shoot, there was an actress like that), and then tying them up with all my might, that's neither SM nor eroticism.

For a bondage enthusiast, that's nothing but a truly meaningless, cold pose.

Spreading her crotch wide, exposing her genitals deep inside, yet if the woman shows no reaction whatsoever, there's nothing more pathetic than that.

If I did something like that, I'd just be laughed at by the enthusiasts.

(No, that was a slip of the tongue. If the director orders it, I'll do it. If I don't, the shoot won't progress. If it doesn't progress, the shoot won't wrap. I, the bondage specialist, won't get paid.)

To be honest, I don't really want to see a woman's genitals that much, and I don't feel they have the charm everyone makes such a fuss about.

Damn, I've gone off on a tangent again.

Ako, I'm sorry.

I drag Hide Ishitani, her wrists bound behind her with rope, up the stairs to the second floor of an old building's small bar, practically pushing her along.

For this scene, I cover only her eyes with a white cloth. This is the blindfold.

It evokes the image of a married woman being kidnapped. This part will be the first scene.

Ako, the staircase is narrow and steep, so be careful not to slip while holding the camera steady.

After dragging her into the bar, I'll lift up her skirt and pull down the panties she's wearing.

I ball up those panties and stuff them into her mouth.

I'll really put my strength into it, forcing them in with my fingers, twisting them in.

Pieces of the panties that won't all fit will peek out from the corners of her lips.

I'll cover her lips further with another white cloth (unbleached cotton.)

This is to prevent her from spitting out the panties I've forced in.

I drape a large white gag over half her face, up to her nose.

(Gag enthusiasts, please look forward to this. Here, I take my time, meticulously and relentlessly. In fact, I've received numerous requests and high expectations from enthusiasts dissatisfied with the shoddy depiction of gags in current SM videos.)

I'll let you hear plenty of Hide Ishitani's agonizing, muffled, tormented, gagged voice.

Here, I remove the blindfold.

Even with the blindfold off, her features remain hidden beneath the white gag draped over her face.

Only her eyes are visible.

(Since she's a married woman, her face must remain unrecognizable in the footage.)

She scans the suspicious bar with eyes filled with anxiety and terror.

Her tongue is bound by the panties stuffed tightly into her mouth, and through a muffled, sensual voice, the eyes of the married woman plead her fear.

Here, I once again tightly bind her upper body, securing her hands firmly behind her back.

This, of course, is one of the main showstopping moments, so I really want the camera to be set up properly and capture it well.

I'm sure Hide Ishitani will display a wonderful masochistically erotic reaction that will captivate and arouse all bondage fans.

Ahh, yes. Ako, you who are both the camerawoman and the producer.

Please. Whatever you do, don't make me wear that tacky work uniform.

Anyone who knows me knows how much I hate samue, so I'm sure Ako knows this too. But if a married woman kidnapper were to wear a samue with those thick sleeves, wouldn't it look unnatural to anyone who saw it?

I'm no grand "rope master," just a regular rigger. And this time, I'm doing it with the mindset of a married woman kidnapper. So please, no trying to look cool in a samue.

Wearing that thing really does make it impossible to handle the fine ropes properly.

Mentally too, it makes it hard to put any real power into the ropes.

(Though that's probably just my own inexperience, I suppose.)

And this time, it's "binding" inside a cramped bar.

It requires even more delicate rope movements than usual. And precisely because of that, it should become a powerful, stimulating, thoroughly sadistic bondage.

I'll have Hide Ishitani keep all her own clothes on, including her underwear. I'll also do it in my usual black shirt, my own clothes.

Please, please, hear my request.

In that suffocatingly cramped bar, if I were told, "Nureki-san, please change into this," and handed a samue, I'd surely run away.

No, I'm an adult, so I wouldn't do something so rude as to completely ruin the shoot.

I'd endure it, smiling politely on the surface, put on the given work clothes, and proceed to tie up Hide Ishitani without any obvious mistakes.

But even if it's Hide Ishitani, having her movements restricted, no, having her mood crushed before any movement, would mean I couldn't pour my soul into the ropes.

And the keen-eyed enthusiasts would surely see right through it.

It's precisely because they possess such keen senses that they are enthusiasts.

There are no insensitive people among enthusiasts.

2008.9.23

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第五十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 57

わかるわけない女の本心

There's no way you can understand a woman's true feelings

I've received messages from several readers who follow this "Talking Theater" series regularly, saying, "You should write about your reunion with Hide Ishitani more carefully and in greater detail. I want you to write about it."

This request is this; even though we met so frequently and shared such passionate moments back then, simply stating "we reunited" after two years feels far too cold and distant. As readers, we can't help but feel this is unsatisfactory.

You're absolutely right. If I hadn't written about that, the structure of this long novel, "The Talking Theater," wouldn't hold together (and last time, it exceeded 900 pages of 400 character manuscript paper.)

Looking up "structure" in the dictionary gives: "The overall composition or mechanism of a building, text, etc."

That's what it says.

Well, to put it simply, it's about "form." The form of a long novel.

However, the "Reunion with Hide Ishitani" I've been writing lately primarily consists of "shooting notes" addressed to Ako.

In this context, "notes" essentially refer to the practical arrangements and schedule at the actual filming location.

It's essentially a simple script.

I, that is, Nureki, appears, kidnaps a young, beautiful married woman, binds her in a locked room, and then subjects her to all sorts of lewd torment. I'm writing the specific schedule for this film production, which has just a hint of a story. Essentially, the concrete plan for how things will proceed.

This memo serves to help expand the imagination of Ako, who is both the producer and the camerawoman.

I personally hope Ako will be the camerawoman for this project, but realistically, it will likely be another male cameraman.

The role of producer-and-cameraman is something I rarely hear of (director-and-cameraman is common these days), and it would be physically and mentally overburdening. Unrealistic in practice.

There's a reason I keep writing "Ako, Ako" when referring to the cameraman.

When Ako holds the camera, she stays calm and quiet at crucial moments, carefully aiming at her without rushing or moving about frantically.

She concentrates her mind, stares intently, and captures the very best parts of the bound female body.

Professional photographers, when faced with a bound woman with large breasts, tend to aim solely at her breasts. If the woman writhes her lower body, they immediately change the angle to focus on her butt, or fixate excessively on her crotch, failing to properly capture the "rope" itself.

Well, it's their job, so I suppose it can't be helped. But when I take the trouble to apply "good rope" that sinks into the woman's smooth skin and soft flesh with exquisite precision, and they don't focus on that rope, instead concentrating all their attention on her breasts or lower abdomen, watching that happen right beside me makes me truly sad.

"Hey, could you film that part where her wrists are bound, twisted, and pulled up tight for a bit longer?" I can't help but blurt out, losing my patience.

Then the director says, "Focusing on the woman's crotch persistently boosts the product's value more than filming the ropes."

When he says that, I have no choice but to shut up and back down.

But the kind director senses my feelings and carefully films the "ropes" properly on set.

In return, during editing, the "rope" scenes get ruthlessly cut out.

Well, it is "rope," so getting "cut" is inevitable. This is my bittersweet pun.

Ako the camerawoman, though, gets it. She captures the painfully tender beauty of a woman's wrists tightly bound behind her back, and the masochistic eroticism that arises from it, with real passion.

She even shows consideration during the editing phase after filming.

So, it doesn't really matter if it's Ako or not. As long as the cameraman understands this is footage for rope bondage enthusiasts and carefully portrays the rope, I'm fine with anyone.

But there's still a significant difference in the final footage between a cameraman who understands rope and one who doesn't.

This isn't about logic, it's about sensation. So, really, it can't be helped.

When the photographer has little interest in rope, their passion for it inevitably fades, and the rope I place on the female body stops breathing.

It dies. Even rope can die, depending on how it's photographed.

Huh?

You mean, isn't the rope I tie dead from the start?

Ugh!

If you put it that way, I'm completely lost for words.

But it happens often. Rope that's lively, well-tied, and intense loses its vitality, loses its charm, and dies when you see it on film.

The "bondage artist" is the one who truly understands the life and death of rope.

If you don't understand this, you can't be a "bondage artist."

To be blunt, you can become a "rope master" without understanding the life and death of rope, but you can't become a "bondage artist."

(Ah, my pen slipped, R-san, if you think this part's too harsh, please delete it when you type it up.)

I've gone off on a tangent again.

Uhmmm....

I've forgotten what I was writing about.

Right, I was writing that Ako's camera work suits bondage footage.

I'm writing this text now specifically for Ako, to make her work easier on set.

Both Ako and I will proceed with the shoot while looking at this "memo" I'm writing right now.

So, then (and here I'll bring the conversation back), if I start explaining my psychological state during the "Reunion with Hide Ishitani" in detail right here, the theme becomes vague, and the mood to energize the shoot gets neglected.

By the way, I should mention that the video I'm planning to make next stars Hide Ishitani, but "Hide Ishitani" herself won't actually appear.

Hide-san will play the role of a married woman other than "Hide Ishitani." (It's a bit complicated. I should have written this part more clearly and earlier. My explanation was insufficient.)

I'll just note that the following conversation took place between her and me.

"Hide-san, please appear in the video this time. Not as the Yokohama noblewoman, Hide Ishitani, but as another married woman. I'll appear too, as a lecherous kidnapper and I'll tie you up tight."

"If it's you tying me up with your own hands, then playing another married woman is fine. Actually, that's even better. But can I do it? I can't say lines."

"You can. First of all, you'll be wearing a gag with a stuffing in your mouth from the start, so speaking lines is out of the question. You'll just be tightly bound in a closed room and subjected to various torments for the perpetrator's pleasure, so you absolutely can do it. This film focuses on the reactions of the tormented wife, so there's no way you can't do it. If your reactions seem dulled by awareness of the cameraman or others, I'll shake you loose. I'll torment you relentlessly, hard, deep, and with all my strength. I'll tie your nipples with fishing line and hoist them high."

"That's scary. But I understand. I'll do it."

But honestly, I still don't have confidence this project will actually happen.

I have a feeling something will come up and it'll get canceled, ending up as just my own dream after all.

(Just like two years ago, when I wrote such passionate “shooting” notes for Fuji Planning to film Hide Ishitani, but in the end, nothing came of it.)

For these reasons, I’ll write about the slight psychological exchange that occurred when I reunited with Hide Ishitani later.

Truthfully, it’s difficult to write about, but I simply cannot avoid writing it.

Huh?

You’re asking why it’s difficult to write?

Huh? Huh? Huh?

Don’t you understand?

This writing of mine is being read by Rakka-san, who lives along the Saikyo Line.

And of course, Hide Ishitani-san must also be reading this “Talking Theater.”

She must be reading it, yet Hide-san says nothing.

She doesn’t say, “I’m reading it, about this person named Rakka-san.”

Actually, when I timidly asked, “Are you reading it?” Hide-san just smiled faintly with her lips and tilted her head slightly to the side.

Even when I asked if she was reading it, she didn’t shake her head up or down, or side to side.

She just tilted her chin slightly to the side.

No, not really tilting it, not really nodding either, just a slight sway of the chin.

When her chin wobbled, I felt like her lips parted about three millimeters up and down, as if a smile had slipped out.

Men just don’t understand how women like this feel.

Not even I, who has bound five thousand women, could understand.

Though I'm now approaching six thousand, even having tied up six thousand women, it was just work, just doing that job. So there's no way I could understand a woman's true feelings.

Or... or perhaps, Hide-san, who learned about Rakka-san and me through this "Talking Theater" (and I'm sure, no, absolutely certain she knows), felt some kind of emotion stir within her, and that's why she agreed to this shoot. Couldn't that be it?

Ah, ah, ah....

No. My writing like this will instantly reach the eyes of Hide-san and Rakka-san on the Saikyo Line.

Terrifying.

Could anything be more terrifying than this?

I don't own a computer or a cell phone (I leave everything to R-san), so I can't truly grasp the horror of it, but it's terrifying.

The internet is truly a marvel of civilization.

A "tool" (利器: riki) refers to a sharp blade. A sharp weapon. Or, as the dictionary says, a convenient device.

Terrifying!

That's why I hate computers.

If it's terrifying, then I just shouldn't write.

That's right. That's why I won't write about the intricate psychological patterns when I reunited with Hide Ishitani. I'm too scared to write it.

"Well, it's been a while. How have you been?"

"It has indeed been some time. I trust you are well, Sensei..."

It was nothing like that.

If something like this were to cause me, say, to never be able to meet Rakka-san again, I'd be in trouble.

Haven't I confessed many times before that I'm a cowardly person?

But my true profession is writing, so even if I'm cowardly or a coward, I can't avoid writing about it someday.

Even if one of my arms were cut off, I couldn't avoid writing. It's like the fate of a writer.

Not writing, being unable to write, that would be the same as me already being dead.

"You're already dead!"

No, I'm still faintly alive. I'm trying to live.

Still, Mika Suzume is sharp, isn't she?

I can't hold a candle to Mika Suzume's sharp mind and rich vocabulary.

She occasionally pinpoints and clarifies the core of SM, something that's actually elusive and difficult to express.

"...the task of creating specific notes for the filming of 'Hide Ishitani's Top-Secret Footage' that Nureki Sensei undertakes, I imagine that this very task is precisely when the Sensei experiences his SM bliss. Therefore, I believe the sensei is now in a highly elevated state, feeling excited like an elementary school student before a field trip..."

That is precisely correct.

Exactly right, Mika Suzume-san.

My heart remains elated, dancing round and round.

Just now, sensing my unusual aura, R-san told me, "Write, write! Don't even eat. What you write in that excited state is the most interesting." That's exactly what she said.

Writing these "shooting notes" for Ako and stringing together these dreams right now is, just as Mika Suzume-san said, my time of "supreme bliss."

Is there any pleasure in this world greater than fantasy?

When this becomes reality, all sorts of mundane, foolish troubles come sludging up before my eyes, ruining the precious fantasy.

To find pleasure in SM, in the end, there's nothing left but fantasy.

Ako, I'm sorry.

For this reason, the continuation of the “shooting notes” has been postponed until next time.

The notes stopped right at the point where I forcibly stripped Hide Ishitani’s underwear, rolled it up, crammed it tightly into her mouth, and then tied a white cloth gag over it, fitting it snugly up to her nose.

Now, it’s time to get serious with the young married woman I kidnapped, not Hide-san, twisting both her arms painfully behind her back and binding her with rope so tightly it makes a sound!

I’ll show you the true power of Nureki Chimou’s rope!

2008.9.24

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第五十八回

Nureki Chimuo’s Talking Theater Chapter 58

苦痛があっても快樂縄

Pleasure in rope, despite the pain

To Hide Ishitani.

On the day of filming, I will remove the panties you’re wearing in the morning, roll them up, and stuff them into your mouth to use as a gag. Therefore, please be sure to bring a spare pair.

The large white cloth of unbleached cotton for the gag, which covers half your face, will of course be provided by us. We will also bring the blindfold cloth.

The panties twisted into your mouth will become soaked with your own saliva, so they will be unusable by the time you leave.

We will use everything you wore as your "costume" for this day, so please be sure to bring a change of clothes.

The “costume” will likely get dirty with lots of fine, hair-like fibers from the hemp rope, so please prepare a change of clothes.

You will likely have quite noticeable rope marks on your arms and chest area, so please bring a long-sleeved blouse or cardigan to cover them for your return trip.

The binding and untying process will continue for about three hours, so rope marks will inevitably appear on your body. (They’ll fade by the next day. Oh, you should know this well yourself.)

No hair or makeup staff will be used on the day.

After all, you are playing the role of a kidnapped married woman, so there’s no need for overly glamorous makeup like an AV actress would wear.

That would significantly undermine the realism.

Captured by the perpetrator, subjected to various torments, even the most beautiful woman’s face should gradually become fatigued and dirty as time passes. That dirty expression is itself masochistic and erotic (AV producers don’t understand such crucial things.)

AV-style SM videos take long breaks repeatedly during filming, where professional hair and makeup artists meticulously reapply makeup to the actress’s face, making it beautiful again.

There’s no act more unnatural, more devoid of sensuality, and more detrimental to realism.

The insensitive direction where the woman being tormented’s face remains oddly smooth and flawlessly beautiful from start to finish is something all enthusiasts secretly mock.

Unable to recognize this, SM videos that mechanically have hair and makeup retouched after every single scene are utterly lacking in realism, only serving to chill the hearts of enthusiasts.

For the upcoming film starring Hide Ishitani, “The Married Woman’s Kidnapping Bar” (this title just popped into my head, it’s obviously a working title), I want to avoid such mechanical, habitual, and lazy approaches as much as possible.

Hide-san, please do all your own makeup.

The married woman Hide-san plays, let’s provisionally call her Aoyama Teruko.

Well, the name doesn’t really matter. It’s just a convenient name. “Married Woman” alone would suffice.

A request for producer (or possibly camerawoman) Ako-san.

I've rambled on quite a bit about the upcoming shoot for "The Married Woman Kidnapping Bar." But please leave the specifics to me, how we'll proceed after tying up Aoyama Teruko, and how we'll make it look appealing and sensual.

In that uniquely SM-infused, enclosed space, watch as I position the bound and gagged married woman, Aoyama Teruko, her mouth tightly sealed with a gag, and use the pillar standing on the counter as a "torment pillar." Anticipate the sadistic scenes I will create.

Now, I just wrote "a closed room with an SM atmosphere," but frankly, I dislike rooms like that, where bundles of red, white, and blue ropes hang from the walls here and there, and dogcollars and whips are displayed in an overly dramatic, menacing way.

Rooms with iron cages or devices for horse training, in my view, only detract from the SM atmosphere for enthusiasts.

Bondage enthusiasts especially hate scenery decorated like that, as if it were a toy store.

For enthusiasts, it even feels like their sacred domain has been defiled.

To me, such places seem only to exist to amaze, shock, or impress "normal people" with nothing but ordinary sensibilities, those who aren't SM enthusiasts.

Enthusiasts inwardly despise such ostentatious displays.

Similarly, many enthusiasts dislike SM scenes where a woman dressed in black leather and rubber, looking every bit the queen, appears with a whip in hand.

Well, I suppose there are enthusiasts who do enjoy such stereotypical spectacles, but the people I associate with all sneer at them.

Come to think of it, my dislike for that "workwear" stems from the same reason.

I simply cannot bring myself to like things that are mere empty pretense, devoid of soul, mere stereotypes.

Well, I've gone off on a tangent again. But Ako-san (hmm, when did I start using honorifics? I was just calling her Ako, plain Ako, last time. Why is that?), once the camera starts rolling in the bar, please leave it all to this old fool, Nureki.

Rather than detailing or explaining the “rope” performance from here on out, I hope you, Ako-san, will also enjoy the unfolding events, the surging lust, the flashes of inspiration, the explosive desire for bondage, all within that confined space on the day itself.

Within that intimate, emotionally charged space with its subdued colors, we’ll present the body of Aoyama Teruko, a married woman bound savagely with her hands behind her back, in a novel, masochistic pose.

My only slight concern is whether there might be a change in Hide-san’s superb expression of ecstasy, intoxication, and shame (though she herself insists she isn’t “expressing” anything, that it’s simply her natural, unconscious reaction).

Please forgive me for such an impolite way of putting it.

For my part, having been given this unexpected opportunity to have Hide Ishitant-san appear, I want to achieve the most satisfying result possible.

Hide-san.

Recalling those intense months we shared two years ago, I feel a sense of unease, even though I know it’s rude.

You know what they say, right?

“A woman’s heart and autumn skies¹.”

They also say, “a man’s heart and autumn skies,” meaning all people’s hearts are fickle and change easily.

Consider the story “The Lovely Woman” by the 19th century Russian literary giant [Chekhov](#). It’s about a woman whose personality changes every time her environment or lover changes.

Two years ago, you kept your address and phone number secret and wouldn’t tell me (though I didn’t ask either).

Yet the other day, when the three of us, you, Ako-san from the publishing company, and I, were discussing things, you gave Ako-san your phone number without hesitation.

At that moment, my heart skipped a beat.

Giving Ako-san your address means I’ll inevitably find out too.

¹ Japanese proverb, meaning a woman’s heart is as fickle as autumn weather.

Why this change?

No, sorry. I was about to make a rude assumption.

I'll stop steering this conversation in such a personal direction now.

I should just engrave Hide-san's agonized reaction from two years ago firmly in my heart, become completely absorbed, and play the role of the kidnapper single-mindedly.

To tell you the truth, Hide-san. Before filming, I thought about meeting with you alone, just the two of us, once.

But I decided against it.

I thought I'd wait until filming to tie you up again after two years.

Because I thought your reaction to my ropes would be more intense and profound that way.

Of course, my ropes would have a more "fresh" power that way.

My hands, touching you again after so long, would surely tremble with both tension and emotion.

I absolutely want to recreate your agonizingly sensual reaction from two years ago, exactly as it was.

No matter how much you writhe in shame, you never become vulgar.

Your masochistic eroticism was always fresh and, moreover, pure.

Rather than a bound woman immediately spreading her legs in a pose ready to welcome a man, true bondage enthusiasts prefer a woman desperately closing her legs, twisting her thighs together in resistance.

If she spreads her legs, the bondage enthusiast instantly loses interest in her.

This is purely instinctive, unrelated to reason or intellect, there's simply no helping it.

(Just recently, I encountered such a model and fled in disappointment. R-san was there and knows this.)

Hide-san, you are the complete opposite of that kind of woman, you are a woman who loves ropes.

(That's it! I just thought of it. The kidnapper should repeatedly, relentlessly, and obsessively threaten the married woman with the verbal abuse, "Spread your legs and show me your crotch!" Then, we'll thoroughly film the pitiful yet noble sight of the married woman, Aoyama Teruko, who absolutely refuses to spread her legs!)

Ahhh, I'm getting excited again.

Hide-san, before filming, please reread the sections I wrote in the Kawade Bunko edition, "The Beauty of Married Woman Hide Ishitani" and "Hide Ishitani's Top-Secret Footage."

Please feel the mad passion I poured out on those pages.

That fiery flame still burns fiercely within my chest.

Two years ago, when I bound Hide-san, I actually used only the "caressing rope" (aibunawa).

When I bound Hide-san, it was always just the two of us, and we only ever used love hotels.

For this shoot, I'm thinking of trying "tormenting ropes" (semenawa).

But I know that might be confusing, so to put it simply and clearly, "caressing ropes" refer to a binding technique designed to make the woman feel only pleasure, both physically and mentally.

"Tormenting ropes," on the other hand, add a subtle harshness to those "caressing ropes," creating a binding technique that induces suffering.

Suffering, of course, means sweet suffering, and there are several levels of this depending on the partner.

It might seem abrupt to suddenly bring up Rakka-san here, but for reference, I only use "caressing ropes" on her.

"Tormenting ropes" are unnecessary for Rakka-san. Because she is the sort of person who faints just from "caressing ropes."

In other words, Rakka-san's sensitivity to ropes is even more acute than Hide-san's. It's frighteningly, uncontrollably acute. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say she has become acutely sensitive.

Whether it's "tormenting ropes" or "caressing ropes," pleasure and pain are separated by a paper-thin line, and there are subtle differences for each individual woman.

The role of the "bondage artist" is to detect those subtle differences in sensation as quickly as possible when dealing with a woman.

The reason I decided to incorporate "tormenting ropes" into the "caressing ropes" for Hide-san during this shoot was, of course, to observe her reactions.

Let me reiterate, even when I say "tormenting ropes" in my style of tying, it ultimately remains within the realm of "sweet pain." So, Hide-san, please don't worry. I have never harmed a woman's body in the past.

I've written quite a lot about the "Married Woman Kidnapping Bar" project, which may not even happen. The date is still undecided and it might remain just a concept.

This may come as a surprise, but I have a request for Director ZOU, who helped me out the other day.

As you know, Director ZOU, I'm just a lowly, day-to-day rigger. But even the smallest insect has its spirit, and even a lowly rigger like me understands that expression is a form of struggle.

Struggle requires preparation.

Like a monkey trainer telling a monkey, "Now jump and leap around however you like!" Even if ordered to do so suddenly, without some preparation and mental readiness, you cannot win the fight.

If you jump and leap around, you might show something resembling a trick, but it will never truly become the trick itself.

"Reunion with Hide Ishitani"

"Subtle Lighting is the Very Essence of Sensuality"

"The True Feelings of Women Are Impossible to Understand"

And this piece, "Pleasure in Rope, Despite the Pain," is my preparation for the fight.

To create images I can truly stand behind, this much preparation of the soul is necessary.

Even then, the outcome remains unknown.

Not knowing the result until you try to might be one of the interesting aspects of this work.

Hide Ishitani-san, I know nothing about your current feelings or other circumstances.

I will approach this shoot with the same heart I had for you two years ago. And I will bind you with sincerity. I am looking forward to it.

Ako-san.

If this project gets scrapped due to upper management's wishes, please inform me immediately. No need to hold back. Projects getting scrapped happens all the time.

No need to worry about me. When it's decided to scrap it, tell me quickly.

For my part, I want to first consider Hide-san's feelings, whether she feels "okay with appearing in photos or videos now."

After all, ten days from now, no, even five days from now, her heart might change again.

2008.10.3

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第五十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 59

「人妻監禁酒場」演出メモ

“Married Woman Kidnapping Bar” Directing Notes

Let's change the title “Married Woman Kidnapping Bar” to “Married Woman Confinement Bar.”

Yeah, this one's better. But this is still just a working title.

It might end up being a completely different title altogether. But for now, this is the title that fits the mood best.

Alright, I'll start jotting down some staging notes for “Married Woman Confinement Bar” as they come to me.

While I'm at it, since the name Aoyama Teruko doesn't quite fit the image, I'll go with “Rin” for the lead married woman.

“Married Woman Rin.” Yeah, that has a more modern, young-wife kind of ring to it. It feels mysterious too. Last night I watched a channel-12 period drama called “[The Drifter, Rin.](#)” Starring Aoyama Rinko. It had scenes with bondage and suspension torture (though it wasn't very interesting).

Two years ago, I recalled the image of Hide Ishitani, who reacted so wonderfully to my rope, while writing this. Really, I'm just writing whatever comes to mind, so the order is random.

I have Rin, the abducted married woman, tightly bound with her hands behind her back, then make her kneel properly with her knees together in seiza on the counter.

At first, she is still fully clothed.

I will set up the camera directly in front of her and take a long, careful shot of that seiza pose.

No shots from the left, right, above, or below of the married woman, Rin.

In other words, do not move the camera around needlessly.

At that moment, I crouch hidden beneath the counter behind Rin.

By “I,” I mean the kidnapper.

Hidden behind the counter, I sneakily lift the hem of the married woman’s skirt from behind. Then, staying hidden, I lewdly fondle various parts of her butt.

(Whether using something like a feather or brush, or just teasing with fingertips. In other words, the kidnapper is a man who enjoys doing such things.)

Naturally, the married woman, Rin, writhes in agony while forced to kneel upright on the counter.

She writhes her bound body, twisting and turning.

She tries to beg, but the gag prevents any sound from escaping.

“Ugh, ugh, ugh-ugh-ugh!...”

How sensual this muffled voice is!

Her white throat gasps and twitches, her eyes pleading desperately, filled with shame and humiliation.

The camera only aims at the front of her. It doesn’t film me lurking behind her.

So the man is doing something strange to her butt, but you can’t tell what it is.

Though it’s unclear, I want to capture the situation where the married woman’s body reacts violently, moaning in shame and humiliation while trembling and swaying.

I want viewers watching the footage to fantasize about what kind of perverted, strange things the perpetrator is doing. I want to make them frustrated.

AV directors and cameramen, when I act like that, immediately bring the camera lens close to my hands.

Then they focus on my fingertips and the woman’s anus, zooming in for close-ups.

But that’s just boring now.

Such footage is “explanation,” not “portrayal.”

It only explains the man’s actions and serves only to explain a single part of the woman’s body.

It’s “explanation,” not “portrayal” or “expression.”

They don’t realize that these productions (or edits in magazines), done with what they think is “kindness” or business zeal to cater to enthusiasts, actually wound the enthusiasts’ pride and make them feel disgust.

I repeat.

You are wounding the pride of enthusiasts with sharp, deep sensibilities, without even knowing it.

No matter how shockingly intense, how relentlessly “amazing” the images or photos you create may appear, they are merely “explanations,” not depictions or expressions. Please understand that this only grates on the nerves of enthusiasts.

Ah, I’ve gone off on another strange tangent.

No matter how much I plead this point, if I’m told, “We’re not just catering to enthusiasts. We need ordinary people to buy it too. Don’t meddle unnecessarily,” that’s the end of the discussion.

Ako-san, the producer. I intended to just jot down my “shooting notes” from the set as they came to mind, but somehow, halfway through, I ended up rambling on with this kind of complaint again.

I’ll stick to grasping the overall situation, observing the reactions of Rin, the married woman, and creating interesting scenes based on flashes of inspiration.

I trust my own flashes of inspiration. I’m not a theorist after all, I’m a flash of inspiration in the moment kind of person.

I’m a person of limited learning and talent, who has lived by such flashes of insight alone.

But there’s just one scene I want to create.

I’ll write it.

While being confined and tormented, Rin, the married woman, turns her face toward me. With her mouth sealed shut by a gag, she desperately mumbles, trying to plead something.

“.....!”

I respond to her with a spiteful smile.

“Huh? What? Need to use the restroom? Oh, right, you gotta pee. Wouldn’t want you wetting yourself in here, would we? Go ahead. The toilet’s right there. Your panties are already off, so just pull up your skirt and you’re good to go. Come on, hurry up and get in there. I’ll pull up your skirt for you.”

“.....!”

The married woman shakes her head sideways, pleading with sorrowful eyes.

“Huh? What’s that? You want me to untie your hands? No way. If I untie the ropes, you’ll run away. I can’t have you causing trouble. Just pee while you’re tied up. I’ll wipe you off when you’re done. Now, hurry up and go before you wet yourself.”

Saying this, I open the bathroom door for her.

The married woman, Rin, continues to shake her shoulders, crawling like a dog at the man’s feet, pleading pitifully.

“Hmm, you really want me to untie you? Well, I feel sorry for you. I’ll untie you just while you’re pissing. But in return, once you’re done, no struggling. You’ll let me tie you up again quietly. You’ll obediently put your hands behind your back, stack your wrists, bow your head, and say ‘Please tie me up.’ Then I might untie you. How about it? Can you promise that?”

Hearing the man’s cruel words, the married woman’s face looks like she is about to cry, yet she nods as if to say “Yes.”

Her white buttocks holding back her urine.

“Good girl, good girl. You promised.”

I slowly untie her ropes.

Please include all the scenes filmed here, including this part where the ropes are untied, without cutting it during editing.

In AV-style SM videos, scenes like this are deemed unnecessary during editing and get cut out completely. In the footage, the next moment shows the woman already free.

The complex, subtle expressions on a woman's face as her ropes are cut, and the delicate reactions of her body, are where the exquisite pleasure and true essence of masochistic eroticism lie hidden. Please, don't cut that part.

I'll free both her hands, but to prevent escape, I'll wrap a tight coil around her waist, that is, apply a "waist rope".

The man grips the rope's end firmly. Then, "Alright, go on." I lead the married woman into the bathroom.

I close the door. The waist rope extends outward through the door's crack.

I grip the rope, occasionally tugging it.

The sound of flushing water is heard, and eventually, the married woman emerges from the bathroom.

(A scene where the man touches the married woman's butt to wipe her could be lightly filmed. In reality, it's probably too cramped and awkward to film clearly. The atmosphere of a man and woman pressed tightly together, fumbling about in the dark, cramped space, might be subtly erotic and lewd.)

Outside the toilet door, the woman kneels in seiza, places both hands on the floor before the man, and pleads for him to stop tying her up.

Her mouth is still tightly gagged, so a muffled sound comes out, but it doesn't form words.

The man shakes his head with a cold expression.

Then, he lightly taps her neck, shoulders, and chest area with the bundle of rope as a threat.

The married woman gives up, her facing growing even more sorrowful and desperate, and turns her back to the man.

Then, oh my, she timidly reaches behind her back with both arms. That pitiful, pitiable air.

But the man snaps, "Stack your wrists higher and raise them!"

The woman, frightened, hangs her head dejectedly and, obeying the man's command, stacks her wrists behind her back.

“Raise your wrists higher!”

The man shouts as he slowly ties the ropes.

He’s licking his lips in his heart.

The ropes are tighter than before. So tight that the married woman, Rin, occasionally lets out a moan from within the gag.

...This scene I absolutely want filmed. I adore scenes with this kind of setup and this kind of movement.

If filming proceeds in this kind of mood, just imagine how intense and passionate the feelings woven into my ropes will become.

And just imagine the erotic reactions Rin will display, how deeply imbued with the sorrowful joys of masochism, how overflowing with passion.

In this drama, “The Married Woman Confinement Bar” (still a working title), Hide Ishitani plays the married woman, Rin.

After reading my words, how do you feel now?

Huh?

Nothing at all?

Well, that’s a bit of a problem, isn’t it?

Hmm... I suppose I really must meet with you, Hide-san, and talk before filming begins.

And to ensure good work, perhaps I should confirm Hide-san’s current reactions beforehand.

Or would it be more sensual to skip the confirmation, suddenly bind her tightly on set, and scream inside, “How does the taste of Nureki’s rope feel after two years?!”

Would that elicit a more sensual reaction?

Hmm. I’m torn about this...

Now, the story takes a complete turn.

I'd been writing diligently and felt rather tired, so I picked up [All Yomimono](#) magazine. There was a page featuring a conversation between [Fumi Saimon](#) and [Ira Ishida](#).

It's a serialized feature called "Fumi Saimon's 'Marriage Power' Lecture."

There was a part in it that made me go, "Hmm, I see." I'll share just that section.

Ishida:The real thrill of sex is having it a lot with someone you love. That's all there is to it.

Saimon: It's great when both people's fantasies align, right?

Ishida: With women, it's nice when they occasionally show you something that just "overflows." Like when a huge desire just bursts out, or when they do something incredibly devoted. For example, if you, Saimon-san, could show me that kind of energy, like being able to go three days without sleep when it comes to work, I'd think that's amazing. Also, women tend to like overly pure things, but maybe it's better to inject your own desires more honestly into that purity. It's fine to think, "I'm a bit of a pervert," and own it.

Saimon: Hehehe.

Ishida: About this, I really want to tell all married couples in Japan. Both men and women hide their sexual preferences and secret desires too much. You should get a little tipsy together and say something like, "I'm fifty now, but honestly, I want you to wear a competitive swimsuit" (laughs). Nowadays, you even see AVs with sixty-year-old mature women in sailor uniforms. They call passion without reason perversion, but if it brings you joy for a lifetime, isn't that just fine?

I've only shared a small part of our ten-page conversation here, but when I heard Ira Ishida say, "They call passion without reason perversion," I thought, "Hmm, yeah, that's a pretty good way to put it."

He truly is a Naoki Prize-winning author and a popular, trendsetting writer. I'm a big fan of his "Ikebukuro West Gate Park" series (thanks to that novel, I started exploring all over Ikebukuro).

"They call passion without reason perversion."

Hearing it put that way, it's absolutely true. It rings so true.

I was utterly baffled by how women bound by my hands (models and actresses, mostly) would get misty-eyed, go all dazed, and slip into this ecstatic state when their bodies were tightly laced with rope.

(Incidentally, I coined the term “rope intoxication” myself. That was fifty years ago.)

So I would ask these women earnestly, “Hey, hey, won’t you tell me? Why does being bound with rope feel so good? Please, tell me.”

To date, I’ve asked over five hundred women this question seriously.

Of course, I only asked women who seemed likely to answer seriously, right after I untied them.

They would usually tilt their heads and think for about thirty seconds to a minute (which feels like a long time), and then most would answer, “I don’t know.”

Rakka-san, who is neither a model nor an actress, but a woman with remarkable intellect working in a creative profession, even she would fall silent, her face flushed with embarrassment and confusion, when faced with my question.

This silence wasn’t about ignoring or rejecting my question. She seemed to be thinking it through in her own way.

But her answer still ended up being “I don’t know.”

Over the two years we’ve known each other, I’ve repeated this question about fifty times (not because I’m persistent, but because her rope-induced trance is so deep and long that I can’t help but ask). Yet the answer remains “silence.”

(Being shy, she sometimes blushes and falls silent just from saying words like these.)

Even Rakka-san, who seems like a bundle of intellect and reason, cannot give a clear, decisive answer to this question.

Yet, when someone bluntly states, “A pervert is someone with passion without reason,” I find myself impressed, thinking, “well said,” and strangely convinced.

Come to think of it, my desire to tie up women, and the fact that I’ve tied them up endlessly, countless times, “passion without reason,” if I think of it that way, it somehow feels settled.

Is the absence of reason, after all, simply instinct?

Is it an instinct granted only to chosen individuals? This instinct is bestowed upon only a handful of people.

I don't particularly think that people possessing this instinct are superior, just because God only grants it to a handful of people.

If passion has a reason, then it ceases to be perversion and becomes normal, doesn't it?

The perverted things created by normal people become boring, mundane, and dull, lacking any leap or surprise, because they try so hard to attach reasons or logic to them.

The following comments were submitted by Mika Suzume-san. We are reprinting them with her permission.

Comment from Mika Suzume

Thoughts on the 59th Talking Theater

October 5, 2008, 12:14

Sensei, this "Talking Theater" depicts the part of your dream about preparing for your upcoming performance with Hide-san, doesn't it?

Well, I'd rather not offer opinions like "Oh, that's H" or "I wonder about that," as I think it would be presumptuous of me. However, there is just one thing I'd like to interject.

And, in order to do a good job, should we perhaps confirm Hide-san's current reaction beforehand?

That's the part I'm talking about.

I know full well this is my meddling, but please hear me out for a moment.

Checking beforehand, that is to say, rehearsing, I suppose.

Well, Sensei, that might make for good work, but I don't think it would make for interesting SM.

When I think about SM, where so much can be imagined in advance, like if I were to play Hide-san's role, it makes the appeal half as much for me.

I prefer SM where you can't predict what will happen, rather than the SM I already understand. It's precisely because you don't know what will happen that it sends shivers down your spine.

Even if it ends up failing as a job, I don't think you should try to confirm Hide-san's reaction beforehand.

Sensei, don't you think it's more thrilling not knowing how Hide-san will react in that kind of situation?

Knowing her reaction beforehand versus seeing her M-side reaction for the first time during the actual session, I think it would change your S-side reaction, Sensei. It might also distort Hide-san's M-side reaction or make it weaker than it would have been the first time.

If you've already confirmed it beforehand, then both you and Hide-san are experiencing that particular thing for the second time. Even if the steps and procedures go smoothly, what about the emotional aspect?

To me, it seems like the emotional reaction is weaker the second time around compared to the first.

I want to see the sensei's "Married Woman Confinement Bar" filmed with the intention of capturing the heart. Even if it's full of awkward flaws, I want to see the real thing, filmed live in one take without rehearsal.

I believe the best SM play is closer to free jazz than classical music.

Free jazz lives on improvisation. That thrilling uncertainty, where neither player nor audience can predict what will happen, creates both tension and joy in the performance.

I feel that since you seem to recognize Hide-san's talent as an exceptional M performer, your ropes, guided by Hide-san's expression, could draw out realms you yourself haven't even imagined. And that this would be felt purely instinctively, without any calculation. I think you seem to believe that with Hide-san, this kind of chain reaction of improvisation, that's what I'd call it, could happen.

So, I don't find it interesting to try and confirm things beforehand.

“Perversion is passion without reason.”

A famous quote by Ira Ishida, isn't it? I nodded in agreement.

Using that phrase, what I want to see this time in your “Married Woman Confinement Bar” is the clash of S and M's “passion without reason,” you see.

When S and M, these passions without reason, clash, is it just my selfish view that the god of SM Eros descends then, carrying an innocent arrow?

In any case, I do hope “Married Woman Confinement Bar” gets finished.

I look forward to it.

Thank you Mika Suzume-san.

Please feel free to share your thoughts and impressions after reading it.

2008.10.8

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 60

「上上上」と「下下下」

“High High High” and “Low Low Low” ²

I had intended to conclude my writing about the “Married Woman Confinement Bar” last time, but Mika Suzume-san sent me another startlingly insightful opinion, so I've decided to write one more continuation.

² The characters 上 and 下 are used here, meaning up and down. Nureki is effectively using them as a rating system.

(Incidentally, as I write this now, filming for the “Married Woman Confinement Bar” hasn’t been finalized yet. For a company that must prioritize profit, dealing with such fan-driven fantasies is simply untenable, and this project could easily be scrapped. Well, that’s fine too. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my own “fantasy pleasure.” No, really. Somehow, I feel strangely refreshed right now. In my mind, the footage for “Married Woman Confinement Bar” is already complete. On an actual shoot, bothersome, realistic, annoying obstacles pop up, and in the end, things are rarely as fun and ideal as in the fantasy itself. In a fantasy, you can freely and unrestrainedly do whatever you want, one hundred percent. I’ve already thoroughly enjoyed “Married Woman Confinement Bar.”)

Just as I was thinking that, Mika Suzume-san quickly responded to my previous writing and gave me this advice.

This is Mika Suzume-san’s advice regarding my thought of meeting alone with Hide Ishitani-san before the upcoming “Married Woman Confinement Bar” shoot.

For my part, it stemmed from wanting to confirm her current reaction beforehand, whether it would be the same as two years ago or would it be different?

This feeling of mine is, well, common sense, wanting the upcoming “work” at the shoot location to go smoothly and well.

(No, no, to be honest, there was also a bit of lecherous intent involved.)

Mika Suzume-san said this,

“Checking beforehand, that’s essentially a rehearsal, isn’t it? Sensei, while that makes for good work, I don’t think it will make for interesting SM.”

Deep.

She really laid it on thick.

She’s absolutely right.

I, Nureki Chimuo, must above all else create interesting SM (after sixty years in this field, however petty I may be, I do have that much pride.)

For me, interesting SM is good work.

“I prefer SM where you can’t predict what will happen, rather than the SM I already understand. It’s precisely because you don’t know what will happen that it sends shivers down your spine.”

This applies perfectly, whether you substitute “SM” with “novel” or “play.”

It applies not only to novels, stories, or plays, but to every other field of art as well.

Predictability means a sense of déjà vu. In any art form, if there’s déjà vu, it lacks freshness and isn’t interesting. No one will appreciate it.

“Even if it ends up being a failure at work, I don’t think you should confirm her reaction beforehand. Sensei, don’t you think it’s more thrilling not knowing how she’ll react in that kind of situation?”

Yes, it’s thrilling.

The thrilling anticipation of seeing what kind of wonderful reaction she’ll show when she first appears in front of the camera.

And then, the heart-pounding anxiety over whether, during these past two years some circumstance or cause has affected her, leaving her completely unresponsive, what they call a “dead lay state³”, making her personality dull and uninteresting, both for me and the footage.

There are two kinds of heart-pounding excitement.

If her reaction is wonderful, I can just build on that reaction. But if it’s the opposite, I break out in a cold sweat, thinking about how the producer who shelled out a lot of money for this shoot must feel.

Then it becomes a lonely battle, just me and her body.

“Knowing her reaction beforehand versus seeing her M-side reaction for the first time during the actual session, I think it would change your S-side reaction, Sensei. It might also distort Hide-san’s M-side reaction or make it weaker than it would have been the first time.”

Two or three years ago, during the so-called “heyday of SM magazines,” I would sometimes tie up the same model three or four times within a single month (meaning that many different SM magazines were being published in large numbers).

Let’s call that model Mako.

During the first shoot when I tied Mako, since she was my first model, I tied her using the method I had memorized, which I’ll refer to as “A.”

³ The term in question here is マグロ: maguro, meaning tuna, but in slang, it refers to someone who is unresponsive during sex.

“A” is, well, the standard, very ordinary hands-behind-the-back binding.

With this “A” binding method, Mako reacted sufficiently, pleasing both the photographer and the editor. I recorded it in my personal “Kinbaku Diary” as follows.

*Month *Day, Shooting for ** Publishing. Model: Mako. Rating: “High.”

This “High” refers to the top tier of a three-tier rating system: High, Medium, Low. It signifies a good reaction.

Then, three days later, at another SM magazine shoot, I tied Mako again as the model.

This was my second time tying Mako.

And the rating was “Very High.”

Since it was the second time, I decided to change my binding from “A” to “B” and applied it a bit tighter.

Not only did I tighten it, but I also knew from the first shoot where the pressure points on Mako’s body responded well to the ropes. I applied ropes with pressure to those points, and her reactions were excellent, resulting in the “Very High” rating.

The rating for the third time I bound Mako was “Extremely High.”

My binding style this time was “C”.

Meaning, I discovered even more pressure points that elicited a reaction from Mako and intensified the restraint one more level.

After doing this kind of work for a long time, manipulating countless female bodies, you sometimes discover pressure points in places you’d never think to look.

It’s not my hands or fingers that find these points, it’s the rope that discovers them.

For example, there was a model who let out a gasp of pleasure and arched her back dramatically the instant I threaded a thin rope between her toes.

(Talking about these pressure points could go on forever, so I’ll write about various real examples another time.)

By the way, you can see my handwritten bondage diary from this “Golden Age of SM Magazines” at the Sex Industry Museum. It’s labeled “work notes,” with entries like, Model: Mako. Eighth shoot. “Incredible.”

One more thing while I’m at it. For bad models, meaning unmotivated, expressionless, unresponsive ones, I’d write something like this.

Photo by Company X. Model: Dameko⁴. Rating: “Terrible.” A woman I never want to see again.

For models like this, the editorial department usually only uses them once.

If there are three or four “Low” ratings, it’s because she’s fundamentally a woman with a bad personality.

“You, doing this kind of work, and you find every day enjoyable?” with a spiteful glare, twisting her lips like [Taro Aso](#), spewing outrageously venomous remarks.

There’s also a “Medium” rating.

Well, neither good nor bad, completely unresponsive to anything, not interesting to tie up at all, but the finished product at least looks like a bondage photo. That’s the kind of model this is.

Even with models like this, after using them two or three times, you might accidentally hit the right spot. They’ll suddenly awaken to the ropes, start shaking their butt like crazy, and show an amazing reaction.

So, say they were “average” during a shoot with Company A, but a few days later, when tied up by Company B, they suddenly become “High High High.”

My tying method for each model has about sixteen levels, arranged alphabetically from A to P.

This is my personal mnemonic. I don’t tell others. Even if I did, they wouldn’t understand.

When reaching P, I might use fifty ropes in the final scene.

Around level G, I might incorporate a takate kote midway. By level H, I might add a reverse prayer combined with shrimp torture.

⁴ The name Dameko is a bit of wordplay. Dame means “no good” in Japanese.

If I were to meticulously count the distinct types of binding, there are about 365 varieties. However, explaining them without photographs is impossible.

Just for binding the toes alone, there are about thirty different methods.

Huh?

Somehow, I've gone off on a tangent again.

Let's get back to the main point.

Let's return to the advice from Mika Suzume-san.

"I believe that even if 'Married Woman Confinement Bar' that you, the director, wish to capture the heart of, ends up with many awkward flaws, I want to see the real thing, the one shot, no rehearsal, live performance.

I believe the ultimate SM play is closer to free jazz than classical music.

Free jazz lives and dies by improvisation. That thrilling uncertainty, where neither player nor audience can predict what will happen, creates both tension and enjoyment in the performance. (Omitted) I find the idea of confirming things beforehand utterly boring."

After Mika Suzume said that, I thought about it. In my bondage shoots, I've never once done anything like rehearsal.

I've done bondage for filming five thousand five hundred times (how embarrassing, five thousand five hundred times! Tying up women means I did nothing else for five thousand five hundred days. No wonder my head's going to mush!). Yet not a single director ever said, "Let's do a rehearsal first."

Not a single one.

Besides, something like bondage isn't the kind of thing you can do with rehearsals.

It's a one-take job completed with momentum, flow, and rhythm.

Essentially, it can't work unless it's improvised.

The Kinbiken members total about three thousand people, and those people should have seen my tying style from start to finish.

I once bound and suspended five women between 1 PM and 7 PM, creating five videos. Six hours dedicated solely to kinbaku.

All five featured different binding techniques and methods of restraint. I improvised the binding style based on each woman's personality.

All Kinbiken members know that every Kinbiken video is created entirely through improvisation.

Because the members are present at the filming locations, improvisation is common sense.

(Wait, hold on. Or is there such a thing as "kinbaku" that requires rehearsal? I can't say for sure, as I only know the world I've been involved in. Perhaps there is such a rehearsal-based kinbaku. However, if I were asked to do that, I would refuse immediately.)

Just as I wrote this far, I received a fax from Ako at the editorial department.

"Shooting for the 'Married Woman Confinement Bar' has been confirmed. Accordingly, we would like to have a detailed meeting with the photographer present. Please let us know a date that is convenient for you."

I wrote back immediately, arranging to meet with Ako and the photographer in five days.

On another day, I thought, I should meet "Married Woman Rin" too. I must meet her.

But unfortunately, I was busy right now.

The performance date for the theater group I belonged to was approaching.

So lately, I've been rehearsing every day. Rehearsals heated up at night.

I thought I wouldn't have time to meet "Married Woman Rin" before the shoot.

But I still had lingering feelings. I really wanted to meet her at least once before the shoot.

That call from "Married Woman Rin" came late that night, after eleven, the same night I received Ako's message.

2008.10.21

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 61

縄を背負った直次郎

Naojiro with rope on his back

For the first time in two years, I bound the Yokohama noblewoman, Hide Ishitani-san.

(For details about this, Hide-san, please refer to my sixth paperback book, "Bondage: As Long as I Live," published by Kawade Shobo Shinsha. Those interested may find it informative.)

As I bound Hide-san's hands behind her back, I found myself unconsciously comparing the sensation to that of Rakka-san.

Two years ago, the sensations I received from both women were almost identical.

Though identical two years ago, they now felt quite different. I intend to write about that.

Writing about these two women, Hide-san and Rakka-san, now means writing about my own heart.

And for someone in my profession, I feel compelled to write this down.

Binding Hide-san this day was, so to speak, "work."

That is, it was a video shoot commissioned by Company A.

It was, of course, my first time interacting with Hide-san in the context of this filming job.

Binding Hide-san had become "work," but binding Rakka-san was not "work."

Therefore, comparing the feelings of binding the two women is fundamentally wrong.

Through this real experience, I clearly felt and recognized that day that binding for "work" and binding for personal pleasure are entirely different things.

It's rather foolish to only now realize such an obvious, straightforward truth.

It's an embarrassingly stupid story, the kind you wouldn't dare tell anyone.

But then, I've always been a fool at heart.

I'm a careless, shallow, illogical person who can only react on pure instinct, a thoroughly frivolous human being. That's why I never noticed something so simple until now.

It's a drama, so to speak, with the working title "Married Woman Confinement Bar." Or, to be a bit pretentious, let's call it a docudrama.

Hide-san plays the married woman who gets kidnapped and confined.

The man who kidnaps and confines the married woman, repeatedly binding and untying her to torment her, is played by me.

A drama for just the two of us. Only the situation is set. After that, the camera follows only my actions.

It is undoubtedly a documentary, but I move with the awareness that this footage is meant to be seen by others.

These are images designed to excite the viewer, arouse desire, and induce a pleasurable mood.

Providing pleasure to others as a job (that is, service work) often brings little pleasure to oneself.

Sometimes the pain outweighs the pleasure.

I feel like someone might scold me, "What's painful about doing what you love? Stop complaining!" I want to elaborate on that point, but I'm afraid I'm veering off course again, so I'll hastily steer the conversation back.

I kidnap Hide-san, bind her hands tightly behind her back, and wrap her in white cloth, layering it two, three, four times.

I lift her skirt, cut off the white panties she's wearing with scissors, strip them off, and stuff them into her mouth, rolled up. I make her bite the white cloth between her teeth, holding it so she can't spit it out, and tie a gag around her face.

Over that, I drape an even wider strip of white cloth over her mouth and nose, looping it around the back of her neck and tying it tightly.

Hide-san momentarily struggled for breath, her throat making gurgling sounds as she writhes, her shoulders twitching.

(After filming ended, Producer Ako told me she was present and felt her own heart constrict at the cruelty of my method of applying the gag, nearly fainting from the sight. She is a highly sensitive, kind-hearted young lady.)

Besides Ako, a young man named I-kun was present. He was the cameraman for this shoot.

New cameramen are most welcome.

I welcome fresh, sharp-sensed new cameramen over moldy, old-fashioned veteran cameramen, even if their camera skills are immature (though in reality, they weren't immature. They were modern young people, fully proficient with digital cameras).

Old professional photographers are overly confident and fail to notice their own sensibilities have become stale.

Ako, young cameraman I-kun, and then the performers, Hide-san and me.

Only these four people were present at the shoot.

It was the ideal number, exactly as I had hoped.

Adding more staff would inevitably result in the conventional AV video look.

When it's just me and Rakka-san alone for "pleasure bondage," I absolutely never use a gag.

Why?

The answer is simple and clear.

It's because if I were to do something like a gag, I wouldn't be able to kiss her lips.

With a single rope, I bind Rakka-san's hands behind her back in about thirty seconds.

The moment I finish tying her up, I kiss her lips. I kiss them fiercely.

I entwine my tongue with hers and kiss her violently, with great force.

I force my tongue into her mouth. The roof of my tongue stretches to its limit.

Next, I twist my tongue into her mouth. I push it in with such force that the tip of my tongue nearly blocks her throat.

It's pure pleasure.

At this moment, I am erect.

And she has fainted.

When she was sitting in the chair, her body slid down from it.

Using considerable strength to prevent injury, I support her body and make her land softly on the floor.

She is almost unconscious, and I think she would definitely be injured if I didn't support her body. Sometimes she slides down from the chair head-first with such force.

After falling from the chair, she lies motionless on the floor. She cannot get up on her own. She is in a kind of half-consciousness.

Therefore, Rakka-san is fundamentally unsuitable to be a model.

She cannot perform the "model act" of moving her body according to another's instructions.

However, Hide Ishitani-san can perform the model act.

If Hide-san were a woman like Rakka-san, who would immediately release all her tension and faint the moment she was bound with rope, I would not have written that kind of video script.

(The detailed script for this video is also published in "Bondage: As Long as I Live." However, it never actually came to filming.)

This was also the first time I placed a gag over Hide-san's mouth and nose.

Even during the dozen or so sessions of "bondage pleasure" I spent alone with her two years ago, I never used anything like a gag.

The reason for not doing so is largely the same as in Rakka-san's case.

Furthermore, I don't have a strong fixation on gags myself.

Therefore, this was the first time I ever gagged Hide-san.

I had no choice but to do it.

After all, the scenario was “Married Woman Confinement.”

I went to all the trouble to kidnap her, so it’d be a real problem if she started screaming for help.

After filming wrapped, I asked Hide-san.

“How was the gag? We did it pretty intensely and realistically, so it must’ve been tough, right?”

Then came her answer.

“I actually like having my mouth covered and struggling to breathe. So it was great!”

Ah, I thought.

I’d never known that. If she’d told me two years ago, I would have done her favorite gag during our private bondage play sessions back then.

(This is my fundamental stance when engaging in private bondage play. In my heart, there is always the desire to give the woman pleasure, to offer her ecstasy. This desire has almost become lust. Her joy becomes my sexual pleasure. I absolutely won’t do anything she dislikes. It’s impossible for me to force her to do something she refuses. What I do is commonly called “S” behavior, but I believe my true nature is actually very strongly “M.”)

After successfully kidnapping her, dragging her blindfolded up the narrow, steep stairs, and then securely binding her hands behind her back to prevent escape, I told Hide-san, “This is the opening scene of the drama, a crucial part, so please don’t just lie there quietly. Resist. Try to escape. To restrain you, the way I tie the ropes will be a bit rough, but I want to create an intensity not seen in previous bondage videos. I want to go all out with realism.”

She nodded.

She readily understood my aim and desire. She’s a smart woman.

And she resisted quite fiercely.

I used my strength to grab her left and right wrists, twist them up behind her back and apply the ropes, which was hard work. Her resistance was filled with genuine emotion.

Thanks to that, I believe we captured the scene exactly as I envisioned. It should be ten, or a hundred times more stimulating and erotic than inserting a foreign object into a woman's genitals (though only for bondage enthusiasts, of course).

The more fiercely she resisted and struggled, the rougher and more violent my binding technique must have become.

(I still haven't seen this footage.)

I can't recall many times in my memory when I'd cast aside the so-called "beauty of bondage" and tied up a woman with such seriousness, such force, such intensity.

"That first binding scene, did it hurt?"

"No," Hide-san replied.

"Even when resisting with all my strength, there's pleasure in surrendering to a man's power, in being futilely stripped of freedom and bound."

Her words were phrased slightly differently, but this was the essence of what she told me.

"Ah, I see," I thought.

The masochistic sensation made perfect sense.

Her response contained no coquetry or clinginess, it was calm and restrained. It had an intelligent resonance.

In that, I saw her sense of shame.

I saw a deep, heavy shame, though it didn't show on the surface.

The Hide Ishitani from two years ago was there.

It wasn't just a private game between two people in a love hotel. It was a drama with the camera's eye right there. Precisely because of that, I could see a different side of Hide-san, distinct from the one from two years ago.

The intense multiple gags by my hand, and this violent bondage too, were first-time experiences for her.

(Though I don't know if she'd experienced anything like this at the hands of someone other than me during these two years. I don't ask about such things. I have no desire to pry. Even if I did ask, I doubt an accurate answer would come from her mouth.)

Regarding that day's shoot, I still asked her a couple more hasty questions. Perhaps I was excited.

I somewhat rudely demanded she explain, in concrete terms, how she felt about the way I tied her today.

That was what I wanted to know. For instance, I had her wrap both arms around the back of a sturdy pillar and kept her bound there for quite a long time. At that moment, the pillar became a complete instrument of torment.

Normally, I would sink the rope five millimeters into her flesh, but this time I sank it over a centimeter.

The pillar between her tightly bound wrists and arms must have become a rigid shackle, inflicting unprecedented pain upon her body.

"I can't say how it felt to be bound by you just yet. I think tonight, when I get home, take a bath, and my mind settles, the events of today will gradually come back to me."

Hide-san answered in a low voice, her expression calm.

That was it.

Even if asked such a thing, she couldn't possibly answer.

I had asked a foolish question.

This shooting location was extremely cramped.

In front of her, besides me, are the producer, Ako, and the cameraman, I-kun.

It was bound to be embarrassing to voice her inner thoughts aloud.

Unless it was someone she felt completely comfortable with, she couldn't possibly answer such a question honestly.

I wanted to know her inner thoughts and had other questions I wanted to ask, but with Ako and I-kun nearby, I couldn't bring myself to ask them either.

My psychological state around this point is somewhat, no, quite delicate (the kind of delicacy you'd write as "bimyo"⁵ in katakana).

After finishing up for the day, the four of us left the bar we'd rented as the filming location together.

Wait, hold on. Right, I absolutely must write that Hide Ishitani-san had beautiful breasts, just like she did two years ago.

They were even more beautiful than two years ago. Compared to two years ago, there was an erotic glow to the breasts themselves.

There was a sweetly matured sex appeal seeping out from within her perfectly rounded, full breasts.

The moment I sensed it, I wondered if she had a man right now.

A man who wasn't her husband.

And I felt jealous.

I tormented those beautiful breasts. I tormented and teased them relentlessly, in ways I hadn't two years ago.

The four of us left the bar and walked slowly toward Ginza Street.

Then, only Hide-san got into a taxi.

I breathed a sigh of relief.

After all, I had finished the job.

Both Hide-san and I received our appearance fees from Ako's hand and signed the receipts.

The appearance fees were cash, what you'd call "too pay."

Watching the taxi carrying Hide-san drive away, my thoughts were with Rakka-san.

Just as I thought of Rakka-san, perhaps Hide-san, inside that taxi, was thinking of someone who had taught her the pleasure of the gag.

⁵ ビミョー: bimyo means delicate, but also doubtful or questionable.

Ako and I-kun said they'd take the JR Yamamoto Line back to the office. The camera and other filming equipment was light enough for I-kun to carry with one hand (which was also as I'd hoped. If surrounded by multiple lighting fixtures, recorders, monitors, and other filming apparatus, the bondage realism I aimed for would vanish).

I said I was heading to the Kabuki-za theater next, and to Ako and I-kun, "Thanks for your hard work. See you later." I said my goodbyes and turned my back on them.

It was precisely the time the evening performance at the Kabuki-za had just begun.

The first act featured Tamasaburo in "[Ten Kinds of Incense](#)" and "Fox Fire."

I planned to watch the second act, "[Naosamurai](#)." Naojiro was played by the contemporary Kikugoro.

The title was "[Snowy Evening on the Irrigated Path in Iriya](#)."

It's one of my favorite plays. I watch it two or three times a month.

Kikugoro's "Naosamurai" is a signature piece of his house, performed year-round, but I prefer the Naosamurai played by Nizaemon, with his long, slender legs.

The bleak, pitiful, and foolish love affair between the high-class courtesan Mitsuzo of Edo's Yoshiwara and the lowly rogue Naosamurai.

A tragic sentiment, with one foot already stepping into the world of death.

Walking toward the Kabuki-za, I found myself feeling like Naosuke.

Though I, a late-stage elderly man, short, with stubby legs, a round belly thrust forward, carrying a bag with a dozen ropes slung awkwardly over my shoulder, shuffling along, was no match for Naojiro, the epitome of a stylish late Edo-period man, my mood had completely become that of Naojiro.

The rain falling in the intensifying spring chill turned to snow as dusk fell. The sound of Ueno's bell echoed over the winding, thin stream, eventually flowing into the Tadagawa at Iriya Village.

Humming the jorui⁶ song, "[Secret Lovers in Spring Thaw](#)," I crossed Mihara Bridge on Harumi Street, heading toward the Kabuki-za.

⁶ Traditional form of Japanese recital music.

2008.10.29

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 62

瞳の奥の青い炎

The Blue Flame in the Depths of Her Eyes

I'm not particularly interested in models who act like models.

That's because with such women, you know their "reaction" even before you start tying them up.

(This may sound presumptuous and arrogant, but please forgive me. I've been in this world too long and have had far too many encounters with women.)

Tying up a woman whose reaction you already know won't bring any fresh excitement.

Women who've accumulated extensive experience on photo shoots have developed very model-like behavior. You could say they've mastered the act.

Films centered on bondage rely on the life-like reactions of a woman's mind and body to the ropes. If there's even a hint of "familiarity" in those reactions, it immediately diminishes the stimulation.

A lack of stimulation means viewers find it uninteresting.

If it's not interesting, viewers won't buy it. Whether it's a video, magazine, or photo collection.

It's clear.

To put it bluntly, freshness is what matters most.

(Thinking about it, this is obvious and not unique to bondage products, but it's especially pronounced in our case.)

However, both directors and photographers find models with extensive on-set experience easier to work with and less stressful, so they inevitably end up reusing familiar models.

And as a professional “bondage artist,” even when working with models I’ve bound repeatedly, I seek out new attractions to present before the camera.

(I wrote about this in some detail in the 60th chapter of this “Talking Theater” series, titled, “‘High High High’ and ‘Low Low Low’”).

When I encounter a woman who doesn’t seem like a typical model, yet possesses deep masochistic tendencies, I am intensely driven by the desire to use the shoot to confirm this woman’s masochism.

I accidentally wrote “deep” masochism instead of strong masochism, but “deep” here means possessing the rationality and intelligence to analyze one’s own masochism and express it.

“Strong” simply means that kind of sexual desire is intense, in my judgement.

I am captivated by women who are both deep and strong. Not just me, anyone would be drawn to them.

Superficial, worldly beauty that’s just for show? I couldn’t care less about that.

Even if she isn’t cute or beautiful, if she feels the “rope” and bares her mind and body to me, a woman becomes adorable. She becomes beautiful.

There have been a few women before who pretended to feel the “rope” and threw themselves into it, but that kind of thing just won’t do (laugh).

I know it’s presumptuous, but I have confidence that I can transform her beautifully with the rope.

If she truly feels the rope with all her heart, any woman can become beautiful, radiant, charming, and erotic.

The beauty in bondage isn’t just about the face. It’s about the body.

It’s the beauty and radiance of the entire body reacting to the rope. Even the fingertips and toes become sensual.

If she reacts to the ropes, regardless of age, every woman becomes beautiful, charming, and sexy.

I met a woman named Masako Kiyota.

I probably shouldn't write where we met here.

I'll just note it was a specific place where gentlemen and ladies who enjoy bondage gather.

In the depths of her eyes, there was an aura of "M."

(I strongly oppose using simplistic terms like "S" or "M," and now I even feel a visceral aversion to those words. I've repeatedly and persistently explained why I dislike them, writing and speaking about it everywhere. The moment you say "SM," the conversation becomes shallow and trivial. But there's no other suitable term, so it can't be helped. Partly because they're generally easy to understand, we end up using them for convenience. It's infuriating, but there's no choice.)

Not just the color of her eyes. She radiated an "M" aura from her entire body, giving off a distinct scent.

That was what first drew me in.

So, I talked with her a little.

I could glimpse fragments of "intellect" and "reason."

She never uttered the shallow words I despise.

She answered my questions honestly, modestly, yet precisely.

She showed restraint. Restraint, after all, is a sign of intelligence.

I found myself wondering, what would happen if I actually tied this woman up?

Was it interest, or perhaps desire?

No, it wasn't quite desire yet. It was still at the stage of interest.

"Shall I tie you up?" I asked.

"Yes, please," she replied.

I always keep rope ready.

In front of nearly twenty gentlemen and ladies, I bound her hands behind her back.

I tightly wrapped rope around her toes, below her knees, above her knees, and up her thighs, then hoisted her into the air in one swift motion.

She was now nearly upside down.

She relaxed her entire body, entrusting herself to my ropes.

The rhythm of the ropes matched the rhythm of her breath.

Her pleasure transmitted through my ropes.

After untying her ropes, we conversed until we reached a deeper place.

She answered my questions more readily than before.

For example, like this.

“Is there a connection between the sexual desire that arises around the time of your monthly period and the feeling of wanting to be tied up?”

To my question, “In my case, there’s no particular connection. I don’t feel there’s any special link between my period and heightened sexual desire,” she replied.

“I have a partner who engages in normal sex with me. However, he doesn’t share the bondage interest. I currently have no partner who ties me up. Therefore, I’m always seeking someone who can fulfill that role.”

Her phrasing was slightly different, but that was the gist of her answer.

She also mentioned that, to meet men who enjoy bondage, she sometimes goes to [swingers’ bars](#) alone.

When I asked her what a “swinger bar” was, she explained, “It’s a ‘happening bar’⁷.”

She also told me about the nature of such places.

She said that when you go to a swingers’ bar, people who like bondage are waiting there, and even if it’s your first meeting, they’ll tie you up right away. She mentioned there’s such a place in Shibuya.

⁷ ハプバー is the Japanese for swinger bar, romanized as “hap bar.”

Huh? I was surprised.

I had absolutely no idea about this kind of thing.

I was completely ignorant that the world was like that.

I've never been to such a place. I have no need to go.

Whether I need to go or not, given the work I do, I do think I should go and observe at least once.

I think I'd definitely be in trouble if I were asked to write something like "A History of SM Adult Entertainment" in the future.

But tying up a woman you've just met for the first time in such a place, isn't that like sealing a delivery box with tape?

If there isn't even a little connection between hearts, then whether you're the one tying or being tied up, it probably isn't very interesting or exciting, is it?

No, no, the other person is a living, breathing woman with breasts and a butt, so for a man, there's probably at least a little excitement or pleasure involved.

But isn't that just a tiny bit?

(I sometimes tie up models or women I've just met on a shoot. Even if I don't know them, they've been thoroughly briefed about me by the director and cameraman. Meaning, information about me is provided to the women involved. Some models have even read all six paperback books I've published with Kawade Shobo Shinsha.)

Maybe I'm just old-fashioned.

No, if I may say so, it's perhaps because I know too well the deep, sweet, and rich pleasure of "bondage" that I can say such things.

I've gone off on a tangent (as usual.)

Let's get back on track.

The conversation with Noriko Sakata⁸ became more specific.

⁸ I have no idea where this name comes from. The original text on this line refers to 坂田典子 out of the blue. 清田政子 is the name of the woman he mentioned earlier. I have no idea if this

(I asked if it was okay to use the name Masako Kiyota. She replied that since it wasn't her real name, it was fine to use it.)

Because she answered my questions so readily, I continued the conversation.

I jotted down her answers with a ballpoint pen on whatever paper was at hand.

That paper was the back of some advertising flyer, and if I wasn't careful, it might get lost somewhere.

Before I lost these precious notes, I had to transcribe them here.

So, in no particular order, I'll list them as I wrote them down.

She likes having her hands tied behind her back and being blindfolded.

(Is it because being blindfolded makes it easier to immerse herself in her own fantasies?)

She also likes gags and similar devices.

She likes being thoroughly blindfolded and gagged at the same time.

A state where both her eyes and mouth are forcibly covered.

In other words, she enjoys feeling a strong sense of being subjugated.

However, she doesn't like pain.

She likes feeling strongly restrained all over her body.

And she likes being left in that state.

At that moment, I recalled a confessional novel titled "Prison Garments: The Record of a Married Woman" written by someone named Yuko Furukawa, published long ago in "Kitan Club."

"I like being tied up and left alone," she repeated calmly, her voice steady. Left alone while tightly restrained. That state seems to be very much to her liking. Or perhaps it's just a fantasy she indulges in.

is a typo or not, or a slip, since Nureki handwrote all of these entries and submitted them to his manager, R-san. I think we can assume this is the same person, however.

She also said she likes having a man's foot press down on various parts of her immobilized, bound body. It seems she has various preferences for forms of masochism.

She also said she liked being tied in the agura position.

She liked being tied in the cross-legged position, then shifted into the shrimp-like position (ebi), and left like that.

She liked being forced to bend her upper body forward sharply, fixed in a position where she could lick the soles of her own feet.

She also said that because her body is flexible, she can do not only takate kote bondage, but also reverse prayer bondage.

She mentioned that she once went alone to see the [Artist Yoko Ozuma's](#) exhibition at the Sex Industry Museum.

At that time, she saw old SM magazines, books, and photo collections from thirty or forty years ago lined up behind the displayed painting.

She also said she wanted to read them, but since she wasn't a member of the Sex Industry Museum, she could only look at them.

"If it's Wednesday night, they'll let you read them," I told her.

"Wednesday night? Well then, next time, definitely," she said.

As she spoke, I saw a dark blue flame burning deep within her eyes.

It was almost at that very moment that I suddenly recalled Yuko Furukawa's confessional novel "Prison Garments: The Record of a Married Woman" from the Kitan Club, and the idea popped into my head.

"Ten days of Married Woman Confinement."

I should make a video like this, starring this Masako Kiyota.

2008.11.2

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 63

「凄惨美」をめざす

Aiming for “Gruesome Beauty”

To Director ZOU.

I've found an excellent model who could potentially appear in “Dream Rope.”

Her name is Masako Kiyota.

I won't mention her age, appearance, proportions, or other details here.

Please read the text I am about to write. If it piques your interest, Director, please arrange to meet her.

If you specify a location, I will bring her there.

What makes her wonderful? First, she doesn't look like a typical model.

(She hasn't appeared in AV or similar videos. That's precisely why she's perfect.)

Generally speaking, she's a woman with a plain, understated look.

There's absolutely nothing pushy about her.

She's plain, but an aura of “M” radiates from her entire being. This aura is the real deal.

Thanks to advanced makeup techniques today, girls appearing in adult videos are generally cute and beautiful. However, because their faces are altered and artificially enhanced, they all end up looking too stereotypical.

They're uniform and lack individuality.

To put it dramatically, they feel like dolls.

Heavily made up models may be superficially beautiful and cute, but you can't sense the raw, feminine aura.

Even their "hearts" seem coated in cosmetics, leaving no trace of human warmth.

Masako Kiyota possesses a sensual, erotic quality absent in generic models with merely voluptuous forms. Like a pale, burning frame within her petite body.

When I bind her hands behind her back, her masochistic eroticism glows with an even darker, more sinister radiance.

Not just on the surface, but a passion for masochistic pleasure burning from the very core of a woman's body. I want to bring that to life.

I believe the true form of sensual masochistic beauty, long awaited by genuine bondage enthusiasts, neither performance nor exaggeration, is here.

I'll persuade her to read this script (I'll write something like a script, or production notes, from here on) and get her to agree.

I have confidence in my ability to persuade her.

I want to create a bondage video drama featuring her performance, one that future generations of enthusiasts will whisper about.

Though I call it a drama, the story is extremely simple.

I want it to be straightforward and clear, free of extraneous elements.

That way, I can focus more on the bondage scenes.

I'll play the man who kidnaps the married woman she portrays and ties her up relentlessly.

The man says, "Become my woman!" and obsessively ties her up over and over, tormenting her relentlessly.

Unlike the previous "Dream Rope," this time it's a drama. So rope techniques take a backseat. I'll realistically portray a man driven mad by his twisted obsession with the married woman played by Masako.

While maintaining the spirit of the beauty of bondage, I'll show you brutal, harrowing intensity and violent rope work.

I will present something that will leave even my most devoted fans stunned and horrified. The very men who coined the term “beauty of bondage” and made it their banner will witness that Nureki Chimuo can perform such intense, gruesome bondage.

I will bind Masako, bind her, bind her, bind her relentlessly.

This time, I will make the bondage enthusiasts shudder in awe, and think “Amazing!”

Nureki Chimuo has this kind of rope too, watch closely!

It involves kidnapping a married woman and binding and tormenting her for ten straight days.

(Of course, filming will be completed in a single day.)

I'll outline the content next in a scenario-like format.

“Ten Days of Imprisonment: The Married Woman”

—Day One. (Text: Day One of Imprisonment)

A man (me, Nureki Chimuo) binding the hands of the married woman he kidnapped behind her back.

The married woman, already blindfolded with a hand towel and gagged with a tight ball gag, is too terrified to resist.

As you know, both the blindfold and the gag, when applied intensely and realistically, become forms of torture in themselves.

There is also the intention of not clearly showing Masako's face.

(She is an ordinary office lady working at a regular company in her daily life, so her face cannot be clearly shown.)

Not clearly showing her face on camera is by no means a disadvantage.

Forcing the model to constantly face the camera to show off her beauty or cuteness loses realism and actually kills the interest of enthusiasts.

Even if advertised with lines like, “Look at this beautiful woman tied up! How about that? Amazing, right?”

There are no fans that simple who would be surprised by such things nowadays.

(Masako Kiyota is beautiful. Director ZOU would recognize this instantly upon meeting her.)

On the first day, we film a man, licking his lips with sadistic delight, meticulously binding the confined married woman's hands behind her back.

Here, we check again to ensure the gag is tight, slowly reapply the white cloth.

We meticulously film scenes like stripping off the stockings the married woman is wearing, rolling them up, and forcefully stuffing them into her mouth.

Then, we kick the married woman down and lay her flat.

The man sadistically kicks, stomps, and lewdly rubs the soles of his feet over the defenseless body of the married woman lying on her side.

—Day Two

Binding and abandonment torture using a pillar.

Both hands and feet are bound behind the pillar in a rear embrace position, then left abandoned, a cruel torment.

The pillar itself becomes a brutal instrument of restraint and torture.

The married woman couldn't move an inch.

The man stood a short distance away, watching her while eating sandwiches and drinking milk.

—Day Three

From around this point, he gradually begins to strip the married woman's clothes off.

He ties her body down and secures it to the table.

He changes her position, forcing her into three or four gruesome poses.

The man sits in a chair, reading magazines or such.

Occasionally, he reaches out to torment her body in a perverse manner.

New methods of torment are employed at this time.

New methods of binding are also employed.

—Day Four

Tongue pinching with disposable chopsticks.

At the same time, perhaps add nostril torture as well.

In short, it's facial torment.

During this time, the blindfold remains on.

Only when the face changes significantly due to the gag or other restraints is the blindfold removed.

(At this moment, I believe the terror and pain in the married woman's eyes can be captured very effectively.)

—Day Five

Further stripping away clothing for brutal bondage.

Using several bamboo sticks for a visually intense torture.

For example, encircling the married woman's neck with four bamboo sticks, leaving her in a neck restraint torture.

At this time, the man is separated from the married woman, doing something else.

In other words, the atmosphere of abandonment torture.

For instance, with the married woman's grim figure behind him, the man is folding origami cranes.

It's more interesting when he's doing something completely different and interesting.

—Day Six

Wrapped head to toe in cotton yarn.

Origami cranes sit atop the abandoned married woman's body.

—Day Seven

Suspended torture. Several poses while suspended in midair.

Even now, the man lies sprawled with his back to the married woman, doing something else. In short, neglecting her.

—Day Eight

Cruel bondage using stiff, spiky black palm rope. By this point, the married woman is nearly naked.

The hard spikes of the palm rope pierce her soft skin.

And the married woman cries out, her whole body trembling as she begins to weep. At this time, she is only blindfolded.

She cries and even loses control of her bladder.

—Day Nine

A depiction of brutal torture bondage, progressing from the agura tie to ebi torture.

By this point, the married woman is nearly naked.

Suspended in midair in the ebi torture position.

The man strikes her buttocks with a specially made paddle.

—Day Ten

The man slowly lowers the married woman from her suspended position.

He then unties the ropes binding her in the ebi position.

Once all the ropes are removed and she is free, the married woman lies limp and motionless for about thirty seconds.

The man gathers the untied ropes, one by one, and tidies them up.

The married woman, who had been lying limp with her back to the man, suddenly turns around.

The woman stands up, then lunges at the man tidying the ropes and embraces him.

Then, she kisses him with fierce intensity.

Tears welled in the woman's eyes. Tears of gratitude. "Thank you! That felt so good, thank you!"

The married woman is the man's wife, and the punchline, the final scene, is that these past ten days were actually her husband devoting himself entirely to being intimate with his wife. However, I think this punchline is optional. It's up to Director ZOU's discretion.

Well, that's pretty much it, but when it comes to the actual shoot, I'll likely do more detailed, unusual, and daring things while watching her reactions.

It all depends on her reactions.

I intend to truly bring Masako to climax using only the power of the ropes.

In AV-style SM videos, after the woman is bound, the man always inserts into her genitals.

Or, using vibrators or other sex toys, the model or actress cries, screams, and exaggeratedly writhes and arches her back.

The power of rope and the power of bondage become hollow remnants, eventually pushed into some corner.

As the bondage specialist, I'm nothing more than a servant preparing the ground for the man to have a normal fuck.

(Well, being a servant had its own pleasures, I suppose.)

But I, who believe in the power of rope, want to demonstrate once more the fact that rope alone is sufficient, capable of delivering intense sexual pleasure to a woman.

"A sparrow never forgets its dance," or "The soul of a child remains unchanged."

Masako said she had never reached orgasm through rope.

I will tie Masako, tie, tie, tie her up relentlessly, and make her come over and over again using only my tying techniques.

Masako.

This is probably the first and last time I will bind and torment you in this way.

Neither of us will likely ever have such an opportunity again.

So, just as I wrote this script, something like “Ten Days of Married Woman Confinement,” I want Masako to freely give me her requests without holding back.

Tell me, “Do it like this,” or “Do it like that.”

I will fulfill those requests to the best of my ability.

However, I don’t want to do anything that might injure her.

I won’t leave marks on a woman’s skin.

I dislike that sort of thing.

I also dislike seeing blood.

To be honest, I dislike causing women pain.

Therefore, my “bondage” inevitably leans toward the “aesthetics of restraint.”

My theme this time is this. What happens if I add “the beauty of the gruesome” to this “beauty of bondage?”

Having discovered Masako, a woman with a strong masochistic streak who seems capable of expressing cruel beauty, I intend to tie her up to my heart’s content.

Director ZOU.

Do you understand?

Also, when it’s Masako as the partner, I don’t need a fee.

(Please give it to Masako.)

I received a lot last time. Too much, actually. So I don’t need anything this time.

I consider what I received last time to have covered this time’s payment as well. It’s true.

Please meet with Masako.

But no matter how enthusiastic I am, if the crucial person herself reads this script and says, “I hate this,” or “I don’t want to do this,” everything vanishes, my dream disappears.

(That possibility isn’t entirely out of the question.)

She isn’t a professional model. She’s just an ordinary office worker.

When push comes to shove, she might chicken out and say no.

If that happens, Director ZOU, I’m sorry.

But, well, I’m sure it’ll all work out fine.

I’ve been doing this kind of work for nearly fifty years; this is my gut feeling.

Below, we are reprinting the feedback provided by Maruki-san with his permission.

Maruki-san’s Comment

Thoughts on the 63rd Talking Theater

November 2, 2008 22:36

Nureki-san’s passion comes through loud and clear. This will surely be a work several levels above any previous video.

Each day will yield refined footage, devoid of waste. It will be footage where Nureki-san’s passion and Sakata-san’s passion probe each other, clash, and fuse together.

My hope is that the final resolution is essential. It’s not about a respectable lady awakening to masochism while enduring cruel torment, like in “Flower and Snake.” My preferred bondage is where a man who wants to dominate and a woman who wants to be dominated express their passions within that play and mutually accept each other. If the body dominates the spirit, there’s too little salvation. I believe both body and spirit are equal entities that need each other.

In that sense, the idea ending would reveal they are actually husband and wife, seeking each other.

I've written quite a bit about my preferences, but I have absolutely no intention of dictating how this work should be. Nureki-san's creation of these ten days struck such a chord with me that I couldn't help but write these extra thoughts.

Thank you Maruki-san.

Please feel free to share your thoughts and impressions after reading it.

2008.11.5

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 64

SM時代小説のネタの宝庫

A Treasure Trove of Ideas for SM Historical Fiction

You might think that I only write this kind of stuff, things like “The Blue Flame in the Depths of Her Eyes” or “Aiming for Gruesome Beauty,” but that’s not really the case.

Just the other day, I received a splendid new book from a distinguished scholar who specializes in researching the history of Japan’s popular classical performing arts and has achieved solid results.

I was astonished and deeply moved by the depth of its content and the purity of its author’s spirit. Without hesitation, I immediately composed a lengthy letter of thanks and mailed it.

Below is the full text of that letter of thanks.

Sensei!

Yoshizawa Sensei!

Thank you so much for sending me your wonderful book!

Holding the weighty, painstakingly crafted, monumental work, the “Encyclopedia of Kodan Works,” Volumes 1, 2 and 3, in both hands, I was moved and thrilled by the meticulous detail of the descriptions. Its sheer brilliance brought tears to my eyes as I read it.

To think that you wrote such a book in a room of your residence in Ageo City, Saitama Prefecture, I am deeply moved by the intensity of your spirit and your single-minded passion for traditional performing arts.

The entries collected in this “Encyclopedia of Kodan Works” extend far beyond the world of kodan alone.

They encompass Japan’s ancient theatrical traditions, from Kabuki, to Noh, kyogen, and even extending to shinpa and shinkokugeki.

It provides thorough, satisfying explanations even for characters appearing in plays and novels.

Open any page of the upper, middle, or lower volumes, and fascinating figures leap off the page, packed with invaluable material! Truly magnificent!

As you likely know, I’ve been a longtime enthusiast of popular theater and still visit such theaters nearly every month.

It’s no exaggeration to say that the prototype of those popular plays, performed by travelling theater troupes using improvised scripts, is almost entirely preserved within this volume.

(This also shows how many elements of rakugo stories are found within their plays.)

Before I turned twenty, I used to stick my nose into those kinds of troupes, and I prided myself on knowing almost all of the storylines and structural patterns of the plays performed in popular theater. But reading your book, I see there are still so many fascinating stories and plays out there. It’s truly eye-opening.

I adore this kind of popular theater, so deeply rooted in the sensibilities of the masses. When popular culture is taken to such an extreme, it seems to me it develops a flavor and character that could almost be called super-popular.

Just a few days ago, I went to see the Okawa Ryunosuke troupe at the Asakusa Kiba-kan theater. The play’s title was “The Story of Shimoda.”

When I heard “Shimoda,” I thought it must be about the Chinese girl Oki, but as soon as the curtain rose, I realized it was actually “Snow Migratory Bird” by Ginpei Koina, aka [Shin Hasegawa](#).

Indeed, Ginpei Koina is also a tale of the world of chivalrous vagabonds set in Shimoda, Izu.

Unlike Ginpei, who seemed like the embodiment of self-sacrifice, this protagonist had low aspirations and was somewhat vulgar. Yet, the packed audience loved it, the fans’ voices echoed throughout the venue, “Ryu-chan, you’re cool Ryu-chan!”

I realize it’s quite rude of me to say such things, but for a writer like myself, this new book by the professor is an encyclopedia of reference material, a treasure trove of resources.

It’s packed full of ideas for historical fiction.

No matter which page I open, after reading just a few lines, a whole image starts bubbling up inside me.

The raw human body odor and the fierce yet captivating way of life in the lower classes come vividly back to me.

I marvel at how the common people lead such eventful lives, filled with such intense joys and sorrows.

Through this book by the master, the images of the storytellers and other entertainers of each era, who vividly depicted and conveyed these fascinating, captivating human personalities to the common folks, come alive before my eyes.

Now, just for a moment, I’ll open the pages of Section A in the first volume.

There is an entry titled “Amagasa Kanji.”

(The name “Amagasa Kanji” itself is interesting. It sparks the imagination.)

Amagasa Kanji

*See the later entry * Nadare no Iwamatsu. From “Asakusa Pilgrimage - Gosui-ken” in Geino Gaho No. 33-6 (Showa 14/1939)*

Tanaka Keiji, a member of Fuji Yoko’s troupe, was well suited to the role in the white-painted three-shaku-play “Chivalrous May Skies,” which drew inspiration from the rakugo-style Tenpo Suikoden character Nadare no Iwamatsu.

Just reading these few lines, Professor, made me so overcome with nostalgia I nearly cried.

In the 1950s, at the Tokiwa-za in Asakusa, I had seen Fuji Yoko and Tanaka Keijo perform “Chivalrous May Skies.”

It says “Chivalrous May Skies, based on [Nadare no Iwamatsu](#),” but actually it wasn’t “based on” that at all. Calling it plagiarism would be more accurate.

Back in 1945, I was involved with a travelling troupe that commissioned me to churn out these kinds of plagiarized works by the dozen.

(That’s why I immediately recognized that “Shimoda Monogatari” was a “modified plot” from Shin Hasegawa’s “Snow Migratory Bird.”)

It truly is a profound, deeply meaningful, and wonderful book.

No matter which page I open, I cannot help but marvel, sigh, and rejoice. It is splendid and nostalgic.

Even now, as I write this letter of thanks to you, I find myself turning the pages of this substantial volume, each section three or four centimeters thick, and becoming so engrossed by the fascinating topics that I keep stopping to read.

Still, I find it puzzling that with so many lively, relevant, and interesting topics available today, why do today's performers (especially the younger ones) keep persisting in such dull material with shallow character portrayals on stage?

The new material is especially boring.

It's infuriating.

Has the ability to recognize interesting material as "interesting" simply vanished from people today?

Reading your passionate, substantial book, I find myself not only unable to complain about young performers, but rather ashamed of my own lazy daily routine.

This book feels like a rebuke for the laxness in my own work ethic.

I realized I must take my given tasks far more seriously, without cutting corners.

Combined, the three volumes measure a full ten centimeters thick. This magnificent labor of love, packed densely and meticulously with content, is a book I intend to open whenever my spirit falters, to draw courage from the professor.

I also wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Osada-san of [Magazine House](#), who introduced me to someone like you.

If there are any future events like a lecture by you, please do let me know.

I will ask Osada-san to take me along.

We've had clear skies lately, and suddenly autumn has arrived.

At nine o'clock this morning, there was a knock on my door. Yamato Transport's Takkyubin service delivered these three splendid volumes.

What a wonderful day today is.

Thank you very much.

I don't know how to express this feeling of gratitude.

I can only offer my deepest thanks.

That is all.

Upon reading my letter of thanks, the professor promptly replied by postcard.

It was a shy message, very much like him.

Thank you for your letter.

Please be gentle with me. I'm just doing a little bit here and there. The documents have piled up, and I haven't been able to organize them. It's unclear what's hidden where. I used to go in and out of the fifth-generation Hakuzan residence in Nishigahara, Kita Ward. That was when I was in my twenties. It all feels like a dream. I'm currently writing a sequel and have reached 200 characters times 1600 pages. I will present my own edition in two years. Please continue to guide me in the future. Once again, I deeply thank you for your kind and lengthy letter.

That's all.

I am currently writing a sequel, which is scheduled to be published in two years.

I hope to stay healthy until then. (Professor Yoshizawa is ten years younger than me.)

Though I couldn't write this in my letter of thanks to the author, the truth is that, within these volumes of the "Encyclopedia of Kodan Works," abundant material for what might be called "SM novels" is hidden, something I suspect the author himself has not noticed.

For example, among the famous ones, first is "Asao's Snake Torture."

That said, modern enthusiasts probably wouldn't know what that refers to (though old-school enthusiasts all know it). It's a story from the "[Kaga Disturbance](#)," introduced in this "Encyclopedia of Kodan Works" with nearly a thousand characters.

Asao was the chief concubine among the Otsuki Denzo faction who plotted to seize control of the million-koku⁹ domain of Kaga.

This rebellion was eventually exposed. The conspirators were captured.

Asao endured brutal torture. She was stripped naked, forced into a tub-like container, and then had a large number of live snakes thrown in with her. She writhed in agony until she died. This story was almost invariably featured in old "SM magazines," complete with illustrations.

While this story is extremely well-known, the book also vividly introduces lesser known figures, poisonous women, enchantresses, adulteresses, and wicked women, depicting them with dynamic, lifelike energy.

In each of their ways of life, I feel an irresistible scent of "SM." And it makes me want to write my own style of "SM historical fiction."

In other words, this encyclopedia is a treasure trove of material for me.

⁹ Koku is a unit of volume, such as measuring rice, approximately 180.4 liters.

2008.11.8

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 65

音羽屋安泰

Otowaya Yaushi

Good morning.

I went to see Kikunosuke's Masaoka.

Until just recently, he was appearing in TV commercials, a boy with droopy eyes and a sloppy face, who could only manage a lisping voice. Honestly, I was half worried whether he could pull off the role of Masaoka in "[The Late Hagi](#)."

More than worried, I was dismissive.

But after all, Kikunosuke is the son of the seventh [Kikugoro](#), the grandson of Baikyo, and tracing back, he is the scion of the sixth Kikugoro (I'm from the generation that saw the stage performances of the great sixth Kikugoro several times).

He commands a hefty 15,000 yen admission fee (though I'm always fortunate enough to be invited) and is a star of popular kabuki. Performing at a top-tier Tokyo theater, I expected he'd deliver a certain level of performance as Masaoka.

To cut to the chase, it lived up to that expectation. Kikunosuke's super-young Masaoka was actually quite good.

I felt bad for having secretly looked down on him.

(The previous month, I had seen this same Kikunosuke perform Mitsukoshi at the Kabuki-za. He lacked the decadent allure expected of a Yoshiwara courtesan, appearing more like a merchant's maiden bride-to-be. His attendant was Kikugoro.)

This time, he maintained the dignity and lofty bearing befitting Tsuruchiyo-ken's wet nurse from beginning to end.

Above all, his sheer beauty was truly delightful.

Kabuki, after all, absolutely must have visual beauty.

I was watching him through my opera glasses, stubbornly searching for any flaw in Masaoka's facial expressions.

There was no flaw, no lapse, not even a moment's relaxation.

Kikunosuke held Masaoka's unwaveringly loyal heart throughout.

He became the very embodiment of the fierce woman who, faced with the unjust death of her own child, Chisho, remained unflinching and unbroken.

Not a single moment of weakness was visible. (From the bamboo grove to the palace, it was a long, demanding role with no time to catch his breath. Kikunosuke must have been exhausted.)

Certainly, for the young Kikunosuke, the mindset of a samurai wife, prizing family above all, placing her lord first, was likely easier to grasp than the dark, twisted romantic feelings of a Yoshiwara courtesan whose lover was a criminal pursued by the police.

(Sukerokuemon's Mitsukoshi embodied a decadent eroticism born of sharing a pillow with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of men. But expecting Kikunosuke, seventy years his junior, to embody that was simply unreasonable.)

Kikunosuke's delivery was smooth, his phrasing precise, and there was nothing unnatural or awkward about him.

(There was just one instance, somewhere in a moment of heightened emotion, where he slipped into his natural voice.)

I believe his father firmly guided him, hand in hand, with meticulous instruction, and the son obediently and faithfully performed, adhering to his father's teachings.

I sensed the father Kikugoro's obsession, the determination to pass on the family art to his son, the necessity to do so.

"Well, this is good enough. Now, don't let your guard down. Pour your soul into it and become the role completely," the father must have told his son, though perhaps with a hint of lingering unease.

And now, at the Kabuki-za next door, at the entrance of the hanamichi¹⁰'s curtain, dressed as the spirit of Tomomori in "[Funabenkei](#)," he must be waiting for his entrance, his thoughts drifting to his son's performance as Masaoka.

To say now that Kikunosuke's Masaoka lacks gravitas or presence would be harsh indeed.

While it's natural he resembles his father in places, the moments when his features and expressions become the spitting image of his grandfather, Umesuke, are surely the work of "blood."

The Otowaya lineage is safe.

At the key moments, the young Masaoka received repeated applause from the audience.

This was not applause born of sympathy or encouragement for a star actor entrusted with a major role, but applause born of the emotion of being drawn into this tragedy.

Though many young women were in the audience, the old-fashioned [Gidayu](#) drama's themes of loyalty and mother-child love seemed to resonate completely within their hearts.

It's not about whether something is new or old; seeing this kind of performance, given with such wholehearted dedication, truly reaches the audience. It strengthened my resolve.

If young actors believe in their path and dedicate themselves to traditional arts with such pure spirit, kabuki will be secure and will continue to flourish.

Perhaps to speed up the drama's flow, the scene where the rice is cooked was cut.

I found it a bit lacking, but for today's audience, this might be preferable.

We should just create a separate group dedicated to performing authentic, full-length productions.

Ainosuke's Yashio, with a youthful vigor well-matched to the young Masaoka, was refreshing in places. While his detestable presence as the antagonist felt slightly lacking, he was refined, beautiful, and excellent.

Kichiyasu Uemura's Matsushima, Monnosuke's Oki no I, and Unosuke's Emi Gozen were all quite satisfactory.

¹⁰ A raised runway in Japanese Kabuki theater, extending from the back of the theater through the audience to the stage, used for dramatic entrances and exits

However, I wish Monnosuke would show a bit more distinct personality as the leader of the Takino-ya troupe. I preferred him during his Komai days when he was with the Ennosuke troupe. (I liked his father!)

Ebizo's Niki Danjo was good in that his makeup made him look like a proper sorcerer, eerie and unsettling, but he felt a bit too scary.

Still, it was a spirited Niki that thrilled the audience, and his tendency to act overly fierce was charmingly endearing.

He's currently the most popular young actor, and I like him. He definitely has the aura of a leading star.

Shido's Arajishi Oinosuke had a splendid appearance and makeup, but his mindset and spirit didn't quite seem to blend into the drama.

I've been a fan since his early days with the Sarunosuke troupe.

After he became an adult, his performance as Kanamachi's Hanjiro in "Mother's Eyelids" (performed at the Kabuki-za by the late Matsuya Kinnosuke) was superb.

Somehow, I saw a sense of unease and hesitation in the aura of Arashishio Oinosuke, a character who must be spirited, fiercely unyielding, and utterly devoted to loyalty.

The inner state of an actor on stage is surprisingly perceptible to the audience.

Even with the thick makeup and flashy costumes, you can sense what's in their heart.

After all, actors expose their entire bodies to the audience, project their voices loudly, revealing everything.

I'm in no position to criticize others. This is a reminder to myself.

This "Dragon and Tiger" dance is performed by Shido and Ainosuke as a duo.

It was clearly lacking in rehearsal.

(I believe this was probably my first time seeing this dance. Meaning it's a new choreography. The choreographer is Bando Mitsugoro.)

It was only the second day after opening night, so it's understandable the movements weren't perfectly synchronized. But the audience pays fifteen thousand yen and spends the entire day coming to see it.

They can't afford to say they weren't prepared enough.

Now then, R-ko.

Our troupe, too, will begin rehearsals tonight under the new script, won't we?

Just for fun, if we were to cast our troupe, would R-ko's role be Masaoka?

No, I'd let H-san take Masaoka. I want to see R-ko as Yashio.

I'm sure you'd show us a truly hateful Yashio, one with such weight she'd crush Masaoka underfoot.

I'd like to be Niki Danjo, but Niki has so many lines in the confrontation at the interrogation office. Since I'm bad at memorizing lines, I'll take Ara Shishionosuke instead.

When I was in elementary school, I used to play with the neighborhood kids, taking turns being Niki or Ononosuke.

"Ah, how suspicious! You sewer rat, creeping up on me? You're no ordinary rat either. Before you taste this iron fan, I'll send you packing! Vanish, vanish, vanish! Gone!"

Among my playmates, there was a bold, lively girl named Umeko. When she played Ononosuke, I'd wrap a large furoshiki cloth around my body and play the rat.

It was Niki Danjo transformed into a rat.

The rat would struggle as Umeko stomped hard on its feet.

As a child, it felt incredibly satisfying.

I was born and raised in that environment, in the lower-class neighborhoods of Tokyo.

Come to think of it, R-ko was also born and raised in Mukojima, wasn't she?

Asakusa and Mukojima, neighboring towns separated by the Sumida River.

I look forward to your continued kindness.

That concludes my thanks for inviting me to such a wonderful play and my report on seeing it.

2008.12.2

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 66

グロテスク芝居三昧(ざんまい)

Grotesque Theater Extravaganza

Good morning.

Thanks to R-ko's kindness once again this month, I was able to see many, many wonderful plays.

As always, I was able to fully experience the stage of the finest actors of our time from the best seats (also the best in terms of ticket price), seats that were easy to see from.

It was a month of pure bliss.

The expression of utter sorrow on Matsuhima-ya Matsuomaru's face, captured in close-up, remains deeply etched in my mind, refusing to fade.

The pale face of a man enduring the bitterness of life, his whole body trembling, clings to my mind, clings to my mind, refusing to leave.

I've seen Gen Nizaemon perform Matsuomaru in Terakoya several times since his Takao days, but this performance was his finest.

Compared to the Matsumaru portrayed by the previous Nizaemon, I felt Takao's artistry possessed a more formidable power in expressing humanity that transcended stylistic beauty (or perhaps it simply resonated more with my sensibilities).

Of course, I also loved the previous Nizaemon's Matsuomaru, imbued with the unfathomable classical grace and pervasive sense of sorrow.

The sorrow in the previous Nizaemon's Matsuomaru sometimes became a kind of pleasure, intoxicating the audience. But Gen Nizaemon's Matsuomaru is so profoundly sad it feels like it might crush your chest.

I know of no other Matsuomaru that has dug so relentlessly deep into the very core of my soul, a stubborn, moss-covered, terminal elderly human being like myself, as this one has.

(Indeed! Transcending conventional forms, surpassing traditional styles, and stirring the hearts of today's audience, this is the art of the Kamigata actor!)

Unlike Sakata Tojiro, Nizaemon may no longer be considered a Kamigata actor.

The late Kanzaburo's Matsuomaru, when his emotions ran high, would literally have snot running down his face, soaking his entire face, it was full of human warmth (though, viewed through opera glasses, it looked a bit unsightly. In Jirozaemon's Kago Tsurube, he'd also drench his face in snot. Well, but his passionate performances always had charm, and I loved them dearly). It was an art full of service. However, the current Nizaemon's Matsuomaru possessed a dignified psychological portrayal that stirred the souls of modern people, distinct from that kind of passionate performance.

It's an utterly inhumane story, a defenseless little boy of seven or eight, who's done nothing wrong, is killed by a group of supposedly sensible, affectionate adults, who even go so far as to behead him. Yet the actor's skill and the ingenuity of the staging make this shocking tale movingly convincing.

Despite being a story riddled with contradictions, it manages to draw you into the drama without making you feel those contradictions, sustaining tension right up to the end. That, I think, is truly remarkable playwriting.

Nizaemon's voice, once the clear, rhythmic cadence of Takao's era, has now subtly deepened and matured into a slightly huskier tone. This new timbre suits his portrayal of Matsuomaru in this scene perfectly. Indeed, it moved even someone like me, whose well of tears has long since run dry.

This profound "[Terakoya](#)" made me feel the very karma of humanity, the burden of having to live through this hellish 2008 reality.

I've seen nearly all the popular plays from the Kogyoku duo era nearly twenty years ago, starting with "[Sakura Hime Azuma Bunsho](#)." Watching this "Terakoya," I deeply felt, "Ah, so this is the actor's mature period. This is what it means for an art to have grown.")

One more thing I absolutely must write down.

That is how excellent Yamashiroya Sakata Tojiro was as Chiyo.

I saw Matsuo's wife like this for the first time, one who so accurately, subtly, and silently expressed such heart-wrenching emotion and inner psychology.

There she was, the samurai's wife, crushed by misfortune, sharing a sickbed with her husband, Matsuomaru, loving him, bearing their son Kotaro, raising him, and then being forced to kill him.

I was deeply moved, whether I wanted it or not.

Truthfully, like R-ko, I hadn't liked this actor since the days of Sensaku and Ganjiro (it was his poor diction that put me off. Yet I didn't dislike the previous Ganjiro, despite his terribly raspy voice. I loved him to the point of shivering). But this Chiyo was good.

Hidden small behind Matsumaru's large frame, she looked like a black mass of utter sorrow.

I was shown a fine Chiyo.

It was a truly superb Chiyo, one that could be called a masterpiece.

Yamashiroya is incredible!

(Ahh, she's the same age as me!)

The world of people three hundred years ago, and the world of people now, are both full of hardship, pain, and sorrow.

Yet this play taught me that we are still alive, and that we must go on living.

Ume-gyoku and Kaishun as the Genzo couple were also excellent.

I've never seen such a youthful Genzo couple.

Takabe Genzo even felt like a "young man." He showed us glimpses of a passionate warrior, fully aware of his own cruelty and ruthlessness, yet resolutely stepping deeper into that very cruelty.

Ah, I thought, so this is another side of Genzo.

The Genzos I'd seen before, Tomijuro Kichiemon, Mitsugoro, Uzaemon, Matsugoro (the previous generation), Nobuyoshi, Koshiro, Kanzaburo (the 17th), Danjuro, En'o, Hakucho, Bando Chikuwaka, Bando Tsuruzo, Jitsukawa Nobumatsu, Bando Takenosuke. All portrayed him as a thoughtful, discerning, rational warrior.

(You probably don't know actors like Takejaku, Tsurozo, Nobumatsu, or Takenosuke, but I'll explain them another time.)

The other day, when I met R-ko at our troupe gathering, I said, “Actually, I’ve seen Terakoya about three hundred times in the past.” I should have seen it.

In the 1950s, right after the war, when I was just shy of twenty, I played both the drooling boy and the drooling old man in this “Terakoya” with a certain troupe.

At first, even though I was still a child, I was made to play the old man’s role. Later, I was promoted and got to play the drooling boy.

(The cast at that time was Bando Takejaku as Matsuomaru, Ichikawa Fukunosuke as Chiyo, Bando Takenosuke as Genzo, and Onoe Otojo as Tonami. That was the kind of troupe it was.)

Of course, the drooling boy Yotaro was a fine role for a leading actor, while the old man was for a supporting actor.

So, moving from the old man to the drooling boy was a promotion.

I plan to write about this period in detail elsewhere and am currently preparing for that.

I recently told R-ko that I still have every line of dialogue for all the characters in “Terakoya,” even the Gidayu narration, memorized. A child’s memory is truly remarkable. Without even trying to memorize things, they somehow get etched into your brain.

And even now, over sixty years later, it remains vividly clear.

As R-ko well knows, nowadays I resort to sticking my own few lines onto the inside of a bucket, the inside of a Western style umbrella, or a bottle of Western liquor placed on the bar counter, and then sneak peeks at them during the performance.

Compared to that (well, comparing is wrong, really). Matsushima-ya, even though it was his first role, memorized the long, long, and incredibly complex Satsuma Gen’gohei’s lines for three acts and six scenes perfectly.

You could say it’s just his job, so it’s only natural, but it’s still nothing short of amazing.

This “[Kamikakate Sango Taietsu](#),” the Koman Gengo-bee by [Tsuruyanami](#), was being staged for the first time in ages.

I watched it with great, great excitement, feeling thrilled and thrilled all over.

The pairing of Nizaemon and Kikugoro in this sordid, intensely human drama of lust was truly the finest of our time. It was richly satisfying, exuding that characteristic Namboku-style atmosphere of grim pleasure.

Perhaps the reason this well-crafted play isn't staged more often is that its story is too grim and brutal, too grotesque, forcing us to confront the foolish and wicked depths humans are capable of.

For me, of course, that very aspect was wonderfully fascinating.

Gengobee, utterly, madly, hopelessly in love with the woman Koman (Tokizo), cuts off her head and places it on a wooden stand.

Then, the scene where that head slowly opens its eyes and smiles, even knowing what was coming, it still sent a chill down my spine. It must be because the staging before and after that moment is so masterfully done.

I remember seeing the late Onoe Tannosuke (father of the current Matsugoro) perform it long ago at the Shimbashi Enbujo Theater.

At that time, Takao (now Mizaemon) played Sango.

It was staged in Showa 60 (1985), so it was over twenty years ago now.

Over those twenty years, both Sangoro and Gengobe have gained experience. Has their portrayal of human frailty and the allure of villainy matured?

Kikugoro, I've watched him perform for decades, and honestly, I never quite knew if he was truly skilled or not. But watching his Sangoro this time, I finally understood, yes, he really is a masterful actor.

There was a fascinating flavor in the way he muttered his final line at the seven-three point on the hanamichi before retreating.

I have more I'd like to write, but I'll stop here, as I don't want to trouble busy R-ko with a lengthy letter.

The plays R-ko let me see this month alone number this many.

I'll just list the titles.

["Ise Ondo: The Lover's Blade"](#)

It was my first time seeing "Ise Ondo" performed in its entirety. Ebizo's beauty in his yukata was breathtaking. The agonizing, tragic beauty of that yukata, stained crimson with the blood of the woman he had slain.

Kabuki truly is a grotesque, bizarre spectacle of intense joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure.

[Uemura Yoshiya](#)'s portrayal of Manno was excellent. It was a dignified and splendid Manno.

Saruya of the Sannosuke troupe was selected for the role of Oshika. It truly was a selection. Lately, his notable performances outside the Sannosuke troupe have been gaining attention.

I've been a fan of Saruya-san since the days of the old "Hitoritabi Gojusan Tsugi" (Solo Journey: Fifty-Three Stations). A secret fan.

Saruya-san, congratulations. That's what I should say. It's true he's highly valued. Munenojo's Okon was fresh, beautiful, and charmingly innocent.

Old man Sawamura Munenori, in Daiei films, always played the hateful (yet endearing) antagonist opposite Hasegawa Kazue. I loved him.

Well, chatting like this could go on forever, so I'll just stick to the title after all.

["Yoshitune and the Thousand Cherry Trees: Mount Yoshino"](#)

["Meiboku Sendaihagi"](#)

This is also a full-length play. I wrote this to praise Kikunosuke's performance as Masaoka in this "Talking Theater."

It's the "Dragon and Tiger" dance. It was a strange, poorly executed dance.

["The Five Great Vows"](#) (Kami Kakete Sango Taisetsu). This is also a continuous piece.

["The Courtesan's Letter: Yoshida-ya"](#) Sakata Tojiro as Toya Izaemon. Yugiri was played by Kaishun. Yugiri's makeup looked like a monkey.

In November 1946, I saw "Yoshidaya" at Togekijo, with the sixth Kikuguru as Izaemon and the third Umegyoku as Yugiri. This is my secret pride. I went to see it alone as a boy.

"Terakoya" as mentioned earlier.

In ["Funabenkei,"](#) Shikan played Funosa. What incredibly flexible movements. I was mesmerized.

“Komochi Yamanba” (The Old Woman of the Mountain). A few days before seeing this play, I heard the “Kuruwabashira” segment of the narrated joruri “Komochi Yamanba” performed by Takemoto Hozako at Ueno Hirokoji-tei.

Takemoto Hozako is a jogi, a female joruri narrator. It was truly splendid.

In kabuki, the title is “Yaegiri Kuruwabashi.”

Genju the tobacco seller is actually Sakata Kuranosuke Tokiyuki (Umedama), and Hagiya Yaegiri (Tokizo). Here too, Kuranosuke stabs himself in the belly with a sword, cuts himself open, and feeds his entrails to his wife.

It’s a story, again tinged with grotesque taste, where Yaegiri, conceived from her husband’s single-minded resolve, becomes the mountain hag with the peerless great sword and fights.

Over the course of a month, you invited me to so many plays.

I would like to express my gratitude once again to R-ko.

Additionally, this month I invited R-san (R-ko and R-san, a bit confusing, but they’re different people. Both are beautiful.) to the National Theater to see a new kabuki play called “Edo Yami Ayashi no Kagizume” (Edo Twilight’s Mysterious Claw).

This play is based on a work by Edogawa Ranpo, so for me, there was no way I could miss it.

The cast featured Koshiro and Somegoro.

Also, Ichikawa Shunen from the Sannosuke troupe.

To cut to the chase, it was a truly pointless, boring play.

This is just my own speculation, but I feel the script (by Yuki Iwaho) was actually quite well-written.

It seems like Koshiro and his son just went off on their own tangents and ruined it.

Sorry for speaking based on speculation.

I imagine the scriptwriter, Yukiko Iwaho, must have felt incredibly frustrated. Koshiro himself directed it.

I couldn't help but feel they had some fundamental misunderstanding about what theater-making truly entails.

It was boring.

While it marketed itself on Edogawa Ranpo's grotesque sensibilities, there was absolutely no trace of that vibe.

"San Go Dai Tai" is far more grotesque. Tsuruyanami really is amazing.

Still, even in this botched, tedious play, there were some good scenes here and there.

The roughly fifteen-minute scene where Akechi Kogoro's wife, played by Ichikawa Shunsaro, is kidnapped by villains and bound, writing in agony inside a sinister cave.

The emotional intensity of this bondage scene is quite something. It felt like seeing a "bound woman" for the first time in ages.

On the National Theater stage, there was a woman's emotion and sentiment, a genuine eroticism that seemed to spill out, something you don't see in the "bondage photos" and "bondage videos" now being produced everywhere and used as sales gimmicks.

The allure of this bondage scene lies entirely in the allure and masochistic acting of the onnagata actor, Shunen.

With opera glasses pressed to my eyes, I kept staring intently at the onnagata's figure, writhing in the ropes with a hauntingly beautiful and erotic beauty.

Suddenly, I recalled a passage written somewhere by Itoh Seiu.

He said that binding a young, beautiful onnagata was far more evocative and exciting than binding a woman who wasn't into it.

I will write about the intense sensuality of the bound Shunen in this scene on another occasion.

R-San's Note

This "Talking Theater, Episode 66" was written on November 29, 2008. Therefore, references to "this month" or "over the course of a month" in the text refer to November 2008. Please be aware of this.

2008.12.3

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 67

寿劇場の筋書

The Theme of Kotobuki Theater

I carefully keep a thin program book.

I've had it since a time so long ago I can't even remember, since my childhood, in other words.

It's the "program" for the "Hanagata Kabuki Troupe" issued on May 1, 1944. In the world of Kabuki, programs are generally called "synopses¹¹."

On the cover of this program, "Hanagata Kabuki Troupe" is printed in white letters on a red background. Below that, in a smaller text, it reads, "Honjo Midoricho, Kotobuki Theater, Telephone: Honjo 2422."

Counting the cover, it is a program of just twelve pages.

The following text is printed on the inside back cover.

Greetings

As the Greater East Asia War grows ever more fierce and brutal, uniting one hundred million hearts into a blazing fireball, we stand at the decisive autumn hour when we must vanquish the demonic beasts of America and Britain or perish. We humbly pray for the continued good health of all our patrons everywhere. Consequently, in response to the demands of the times, our theatrical world has also undergone various changes. Fortunately, our troupe, whose fundamental purpose is popular theater, has been able to survive and continue our

¹¹ In modern theater, program is written as プログラム, while in kabuki, the word is 筋書, romanized as sujigaki.

performances thanks to your support. This is a matter of profound gratitude for all of us members, and we deeply thank you for your continued support.

By order of the authorities, starting April 1st, the performance time has been shortened to two hours and thirty minutes (including intermission). Consequently, our usual four or five-act programs will be reduced to three or even two acts. Performances will now be held three times daily, morning and evening, without intermission. To establish a wartime structure for the troupe, all members will cooperate wholeheartedly regardless of the roles assigned, whether good or evil. We will humbly and earnestly request your continued support and attendance.

Spring 1944 Performance Kotobuki-za Theater Company, respectfully submitted.

The above constitutes the theater's "Greetings," printed to fill the entire inside front cover.

If you would kindly take the time to read this text, I believe you will gain some sense of how unsettled and tense the times were.

Transcribing it, I noticed that the characters (written characters) from this era, unlike those of 2008, are full of unfamiliar, complex strokes.

(That said, I grew up in the generation that used these complex kanji and the older kana system.)

I transcribed the manuscript using the simplified characters in current use, but the original text contains characters with many strokes that seem quite difficult by today's standards.

For example, “壽座” (Juza), “劇團戰時體制” (Gekidan Senshiki Seisaku), and “繼續” (Zokushu).

I suspect only those of middle age or older could even read them.

Thankfully, R-san, who types this text for me on a computer word processor, has an extraordinary fondness for these troublesome old characters.

Despite being young, she finds sentiment and charm in the characters of the past.

She searches out these complex, multi-stroke characters with a hobbyist's interest and types them meticulously and accurately on the word processor.

I am truly grateful.

I always find R-san's attitude reassuring, how she is genuinely moved by and devoted to these old, beautiful things, created with such soul and dedication by people of the past.

In truth, it's not just her understanding of characters and typefaces. Her comprehension and profound knowledge of the "SM" world are so deep that even I, having lived in this melting pot for fifty years, am left speechless.

My knowledge is merely the accumulation of experience, but she possesses an innate sense, coupled with intelligence, reason and cool judgement.

When she challenges me to debate armed with such weapons, I simply cannot compete.

In fact, it was R-san who ordered me to write about Nureki Chimuo in 1944.

For over a year now, she's been saying, "Write it, write it."

Even when I tell her writing about my boyhood days would be dull and lacking in charm, she stubbornly keeps saying, "It's fine, write it. There will definitely be readers who find it interesting. Write it."

Eventually, somehow, the time felt right, and I began writing this.

No, not "somehow."

R-san deliberately ripened the "time" in my heart.

R-san, who spares no effort in shaking me up, sought out and informed me of the existence of Master Takemoto Yano Tayu, a precious witness and testimony of this bygone era.

I was overjoyed.

(I'll write more about this later.)

Enough about that.

(This is read as "kanwa kyu dai." It can also be read as "that being said.")

Even though it's an old word, not used much anymore, R-san can read it smoothly and understand its meaning, despite being young. I'm truly grateful for that.

She is an irreplaceable, dependable comrade. I place my complete trust in her.

“Fullest trust” (zenpuku) means to the utmost, completely, to the maximum extent.

No, calling her a comrade so casually is probably not quite right.

This “Talking Theater” of mine has already exceeded 1100 sheets of 400 character manuscript paper.

I wonder how many characters that adds up too.

I’m not good at math, so I can’t calculate it, but she records everything accurately and neatly on that computer.

It’s tremendous effort and hard work.

R-san, rather than calling her a comrade, if this were the Warring States period, I now feel like a samurai holding the reins of his lord’s horse.

Enough about that.

Anyway, moving on.

Opening the cover of the program for the prestigious Kabuki troupe, the Kotobuki Theater, the first page lists the performances. Above the margin, enclosed by two lines, “Let us build an impenetrable air defense line!” is printed horizontally.

It is arranged to be read from right to left. The opposite of how it is done today.

Nowadays, people might carelessly read it as “Build the Iron Wall” instead.

The characters for “iron wall” (鐵壁) were also printed as “鐵壁” in the program sixty years ago.

“Let us build an ironclad air defense system.” Would people today understand the meaning of the slogan?

Put simply, it’s a slogan urging us to defend and protect ourselves because the American Air Force was dropping bombs on our heads.

But even if the authorities tell us to defend and protect ourselves, where would powerless commoners, watching kabuki in a small wooden theater, find the strength to resist bombs dropped from high in the sky?

At that time, slogans of this kind were plastered everywhere throughout the streets of Tokyo.

The bombing had actually begun, little by little.

Even under these circumstances, the leading Kabuki troupe at the Kotobuki Theater was still raising the curtain.

And large crowds of patrons had gathered.

To put it dramatically, even facing the possibility of death from American air raids, the common people still wanted to see the play.

I too, taken by my father, went to see plays at this Kotobuki Theater every month.

Had the gears of fate turned just a little faster, my father and I would have been charred corpses in Honjo Midoricho.

Beneath the slogan printed on the first page of the program, "Let us build an impenetrable air defense line!" the words "May Grand Kabuki Performance," were printed.

This too was typeset horizontally from right to left. If someone today were to read it, they would see "Gita Kabuki Dai Gyo Ko Gatsu Go."

A single horizontal line was drawn, and below it, now in the usual vertical composition, "Opening Day: May 1 1944 (12:00 PM Start, Three Performances Day and Night, No Intermission)" was printed.

The performance began at twelve o'clock, meaning noon, and the same play was performed three times a day without changing audiences.

From the perspective of current theatrical conventions, this can only be described as bizarre.

Only two plays were performed. The plays were:

First: The Three Generations of Kamakura, The Scene of Silk River Village Hermitage. One Act.

Second: Amano-ya Rihei. From the Inner Chambers of Amano-ya to Exile on the Yodo River Embankment. Four Scenes.

I felt compelled to elaborate a bit more, with supporting materials, on the state of theater attendance at that time, as the Pacific War drew to its close.

The boy I was back then was undoubtedly there.

If you think, “What’s the point of knowing that now? It’s boring. I don’t want to read such tedious material,” then you should stop reading now.

For those uninterested, this is truly a dull piece of writing, one that makes you wonder, “What’s the point of bringing this up now?”

I will transcribe again the printed text appearing on the final page of the Kotobuki Theater program.

I don’t know if “copy” is the right word, or if “transcribe” is more accurate.

My gut tells me that “transcribe” is the way to go.

Instructions from the Air Defense Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs

Outline of Air Defense Measures at Wartime Entertainment Venues and Internal Regulations for Handling the Kotobuki Theater

Regarding the Handling of Admission Tickets When Performances at Each Entertainment Venue Are Suspended Due to the Issuance of Alert and Air Raid Warnings.

One. When an alert warning is issued during a performance, immediately suspend the performance and calmly notify the audience of this fact.

Two. When the alert warning is lifted, resume or continue the performance.

However, if resumption after the alert is lifted would prevent completion of the remaining program by the scheduled end time, do not resume. Also, if the alert has been in effect for an extended period, resume the performance by 1:00 PM on the day the alert is lifted.

Three. Admission fees for advance tickets sold before the performance begins shall, in principle, be refunded (in cash).

However, if the counterparty consents, refunds may be made for the next performance date or a specially designated performance date. The refunds mentioned in the preceding paragraph shall be made after the alert is lifted.

Four. Admission fees paid after the performance has commenced shall not be refunded.

Five. If the performance is suspended due to an alert during the performance, free admission tickets shall be issued if the suspension occurs within one hour after the start of the performance, and half-price tickets shall be issued if the suspension occurs within two hours after the start of the performance, allowing admission.

However, if the performance venue is damaged by an air raid or otherwise cannot resume the performance, the admission tickets shall be invalid.

Six. Re-entry tickets are valid only for the remaining portion of the same type of performance when it is held again (substitute programs are also acceptable).

Seven. Discounted admission fees shall be set at half or less of the regular ticket price, and shall entitle the holder to view the entire program of the next performance of the same type.

Any other orders or designations issued by the authorities shall be followed accordingly.

That is all.

The ominous foreboding that Tokyo's ordinary neighborhoods would soon be scorched by the indiscriminate bombing of the U.S. Air Force emanates from this clumsy, dry document produced by the Ministry of Home Affairs' Air Defense Bureau, a government agency.

To convey the eerie, unpleasant atmosphere of the time, I believe reading this high-handed directive from the authorities, rather than some clumsy social commentary, would give a more visceral sense of the reality. That's why I transcribed it exactly as it was written.

Even now, I feel a deep sense of gloom at the horror of an era that forced such ominous, tasteless, poorly written text into a theater program.

Yet despite this dark, eerie atmosphere pervading society, whenever my father took me to this theater as an elementary school student, it was always packed.

Entering at noon meant we could watch the same kyogen performance repeated three times.

“No seat changes” meant you paid once and could watch all day. My father liked “no seat changes.”

(The program doesn’t list the admission price, so I can’t know it now. Why didn’t they include the price in the program? Was it because prices fluctuated wildly back then?)

As an elementary school student, the only day I could watch all day was Sunday.

There must have been many patrons like me and my father back then, paying just one admission fee to watch the same play three times each day.

The shrill shouts calling out the stage names of the lead actors, Ichikawa Shinnosuke and Matsumoto Korainosuke, “Naritya!” “Koraiya!” still cling to my ears even now.

The term “shrill shouts” comes from the fact that this theater had many young female patrons.

My father explained to me cheerfully that girls working as live-in employees at small and medium-sized businesses throughout this downtown area would get together and come in groups.

My father affectionately called these women “factory girls.”

Both Shinnosuke and Korainosuke were handsome men with straight, well-defined noses.

(This Shinnosuke is a direct ancestor several generations back of the currently popular Ebizo Ichikawa. I expect I’ll write more about this later.)

Korainosuke was tall, well-built, spoke well, and had a charming appearance that seemed sure to make girls squeal with delight.

In the scene at the entrance of the Matsue family’s upper residence in “Kawachiyama,” when Korainosuke’s Kawachiyama Munetoshi reached the hanamichi and was called back by Kitamura Daizen, he froze in shock.

(At that time, Kitamura Daizen was played by the actor Sawamura Kisaburo. Even though no script remains, how is it that I, an elementary school student, remember something like this? I find it strange myself. Kisaburo always played despicable villains.)

Daizen: "Don't play dumb, Shosun. How could I possibly forget you? No matter how much you feign ignorance, I remember the proof that will never let you escape. A single mole on your left cheek..."

Kawachiyama: "Ah! So you knew, Daizen? Ha ha ha ha!"

That's the Kawachiyama from the so-called "Grand Kabuki," but on the stage of the Honjo Kotobuki Theater, it's like this:

Kawachiyama: "Well then, Daizen, you knew? Ha ha ha ha ha. Indeed, I am Kawachiyama... What a place for Kitamura Daizen to show up, facing such a clown. There's no helping it. Now listen... As the saying goes, 'What is strong against evil is also strong against good.'"

And there was the famous line in the [Mokuami](#) style. Korainosuke's delivery here was so smooth, so crisp. As a child, I was utterly entranced, listening in rapt attention.

It was precisely because I listened and watched in such rapt attention that, even today, more than sixty years later, I remember it as vividly as if it were yesterday.

Once I start reminiscing like this, there's no end to it.

Just as this ominous warning in the poorly written clause drafted by the authorities foretold, on the night of March 9th, the following year, the Kotobuki Theater was completely destroyed by fire during the U.S. Air Force's scorched-earth campaign.

Many of the people who loved this small theater were also burned to death.

Just like Shinnosuke and Korainosuke, there was a young onnagata named Nakamura Tsurutaro, who was popular with the female factory workers in the downtown area.

He had a plump build, a slightly round face, and a certain charm. He often played cute female roles.

I liked this Tsurutaro more than Ichikawa Fukinosuke, the troupe's leading onnagata, who possessed a more refined acting style.

When I saw Tsurutaro's Oshiro in "[Nozaki Village](#)," I, an elementary school student, felt sexually aroused.

Hearing that Tsurutaro had been burned to death in the March 9th night air raid, I wept with overwhelming grief.

I thought Tsurutaro had shared his fate with the Kotobuki Theater.

Years later, I became a disciple of Ichikawa Fukinosuke and was given the name Fukujiro.

2008.12.19

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 68

鶴亀劇場のこと

About the Tsurukame Theater

When I was fifteen, I saw many human corpses.

Not in pictures or photographs.

I saw them in reality, with my own eyes. Up close.

I even walked over corpses.

The road was completely covered with corpses piled on top of each other, overflowing. I couldn't move forward without stepping on them.

Searching for family members who had scattered and fled in all directions, I wandered through the scorched town center for about ten square kilometers.

Within that area alone, there were thousands of corpses.

They were all men, women, children, and infants who had been alive just moments before.

There were others like me, survivors wandering around searching for someone.

However, many people have written about these circumstances from that time.

Photographs and other records also remain.

There's probably no need for me to write about it here now.

Or rather, no matter how precisely I describe the reality of those few days, my ability is insufficient to fully convey it, and I could never possibly communicate that reality to someone who did not experience it.

I've given up.

Even if it's said that passing on the story is the duty of the living, I have no desire to convey it now.

I have resigned myself to the fact that even if I tried to convey it, it would never truly be understood.

I do not have faith in the next generation.

I know it is foolish, yet I believe in the human habit, or perhaps nature, that repeats this foolishness in the same way. I remain silent.

My family was fortunate to survive and had moved to a remote area far from the city center in Matsudo City, Chiba Prefecture.

And I worked at a small theater converted from a movie house called the Tsurukama Theater, near the Kameari Station on the Tokiwa Line.

October 1945. I was still only fifteen years old.

I carelessly wrote "worked," but can that really be called working?

I had become an apprentice to a kabuki actor named [Ichikawa Fukunosuke](#), who specialized in female roles.

It was only two months after the war had ended.

I didn't really feel like I was "working."

What were my days back then, I wonder?

What was I thinking about as I lived?

It seems I spent those days without thinking about anything, in a vague or even dazed state. Yet, in the end, it could be said that those experiences from that time continued to have a significant influence on my subsequent life and how I perceive things.

But, well, I don't really know. After all, I was only fifteen.

The school I attended was destroyed by American bombing raids (not burned to the ground, but destroyed. It was no wonder, considering they had installed five anti-aircraft guns on the roof to shoot down American planes). There was no prospect of rebuilding it.

It feels like a time when my mind was blank, yet conversely, I also feel like there were no other days in my life so full, so packed with so many things inside me.

During this period, as if to fill the void left by losing my school, I kept a remarkably detailed diary.

I still possess that diary today, never having discarded it or lost it.

"If you have such a diary, include it in the 'Talking Theater' too. I'm incredibly interested in what kind of thoughts and life you had as a teenager," R-san said.

"But come on," I replied. "I was just a fifteen-year-old kid. I had no life, no thoughts. It was an era of nothing but hunger and despair in a Tokyo full of burnt ruins, with nothing to eat."

"I'm still interested in what fifteen-year-old Nureki-san was doing in that Tokyo full of burnt ruins."

"You might be interested, but I doubt anyone else is."

"I think they would be. Write about that time. Didn't you say you wanted to write about it someday?" R-san repeated, speaking earnestly.

So that's how I started writing this. But personally, rather than recounting such old tales, I really want to write about my affair with Tsuruka Rakka-san.

(Even now, it continues passionately, more intensely and deeply than ever before. When I write about Rakka-san, youthful blood surges back into my body, my heart races, and I get aroused.)

Yet, for some reason, R-san keeps insisting I write about my younger days, nagging me to write, write.

She was so insistent that the other day, I showed her one of the dozen or so tattered old diaries I keep.

Then, "Wow, amazing, amazing! What is this diary? Showa 15 (1940), Imperial Era 2600, student diary... Wow, the text is printed horizontally, from right to left. This antiquity is incredible. I'm so moved!" she exclaimed, her eyes wide open.

I love seeing people get moved.

The moment I saw R-san's expression of astonishment, deep emotion, and pure joy, I resolved, no matter how embarrassing it might be, I must write.

Of course, I too had always wanted to write about this era at least once.

I wanted to write it before I died.

I felt that if I didn't write this, I wouldn't have truly lived in this world.

(Not that writing it will change anything...)

The Kotobuki Theater in Honjo Midoricho was destroyed by fire during an American air raid on the night of March 9, 1945 (Showa 20).

As a result, the "Hanagata Kabuki Troupe," which had been based at the Kotobuki Theater, lost their place of work.

Even actors caught in the catastrophic situation of the war's final days could not earn a living without work.

The relatively younger actors, excluding the theater's leading actors Ichikawa Shinnosuke and Matsumoto Korainosuke, banded together and formed a new troupe.

They named themselves the "New Hanagata Kabuki" and began performances at the Tsurukame Theater in Adachi Ward, which had escaped the air raid damage.

The leaders were Bando Tsuruzo and Bando Chikuwaka, both highly skilled and popular actors second only to Shinnosuke and Korainosuke.

For the onnagata (female roles), Ichikawa Fukunosuke, the leading onnagata of the Kotobuki Theater, joined the troupe.

Most other members were also actors with careers and popularity dating back to the Kotobuki Theater.

In essence, it was as if the actors whose Kotobuki Theater had been burned down had relocated to the Tsurukame Theater.

Naturally, fans who loved and supported the "Hanagata Kabuki Troupe" in Honjo Midoricho also became patrons of this theater, taking the Tokiwa train from Ueno and disembarking at Kameari Station.

At that time, to my fifteen-year-old eyes, only the actors' movements were visible.

In other words, I could only grasp the superficial changes.

As a child, I couldn't understand what the people managing the entire operation did on the business side during those turbulent postwar years.

All I could grasp was what directly met my eyes and touched my skin.

It was only much later that I learned about the powerful entertainment organization, Okawa Geinosha, which controlled the entire downtown area at the time. It was through the efforts of its president that the actors were able to make a return to the stage, however precarious, just over half a year after losing their base.

Okawa Geinosha owned not only the Tsurukame Theater but also a small theater called the Shirahige Theater on the east side of the Sumida River.

This theater, too, was originally a movie theater that had been remodeled.

The indiscriminate bombing by the American Air Force was particularly severe from Honjo to Fukagawa, causing many deaths, but this corner of Mukojima miraculously survived the flames.

They expanded the stage, extended a small hanamichi, and added a curtain to make it suitable for plays.

Okawa Geinosha divided its former "Hanagata Kabuki Troupe" into two parts, alternating performances between these two small theaters.

They separated the two leading actors, Bando Tsuruzo and Bando Takejaku, assigning actors to each to form separate troupes.

In other words, the "new" Hanagata Kabuki became two troupes, one led by Tsuruzo and one led by Takejaku.

They then staged performances at the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahige Theater, alternating weekly.

Ichikawa Fukunosuke was an onnagata in the [Bando Takejaku](#) troupe.

Consequently, as Fukunosuke's disciple, I naturally became a member of the Takejaku troupe.

Regarding Ichikawa Fukunosuke, the theater magazine "[Engekikai](#)" published the following entry in its "Kabuki Actor Directory" in 1980. It includes a photograph.

Real Name: Mizutori Haruo

Generation: Third Generation

Address: 2-15-3 Omori Honcho, Ota Ward

Stage Name: Naritaya

Constant Mark/Alternate Crest: Gourd and Foxglove Tree

Date of Birth: March 21, 1904

Birthplace: Dabioji-cho, Shimanouchi, Osaka

Father's Name/Occupation: Asai Hidematsu, Printing Business

Master's Name: Ichikawa Udanji II, Ichikawa Danjuro the 10th

Height: 1.54 meters

Weight: 48 kilograms

Career Highlights:

1920-1921: Debuted as the town maiden in "Rokuhara Monogatari" at Nakaza under the name Ichikawa Tsurunosuke.

1932-1933: Promoted to named actor for roles as O-san and Koharu in "Shigure no Kotatsu" at Miyadoza.

1935: Changed stage name to [Ichikawa Fukunosuke](#).

2008.12.20

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第六十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 69

泥絵の具のにおい

The Smell of Mud Paint

Adjacent to the Tsurukame Theater stood Katsushika-so, a dilapidated two-story wooden apartment building.

Ten rooms lined each floor, with each unit partitioned into a single six-mat room like a matchbox. Toilets, kitchens, and baths were shared.

Upon removing shoes at the first-floor entrance, a hallway ran straight through the center to the back, flanked by five rooms on each side.

The staircase to the second floor was immediately to the right beside the entrance.

At the top of those stairs stood a large wooden shoe rack used by all the residents.

The second floor similarly had five identical six-mat rooms on each side, separated by a central hallway.

It felt less like an apartment and more like a dormitory for single people. There was nothing superfluous or decorative about it.

At the end of the hallway were the shared kitchen and toilet. The bathhouse was only on the first floor.

Actors and stagehands performing at the Tsurukame Theater were permitted to use the entire first floor of this Katsushika-so, adjacent to the theater, as dressing rooms.

This was because the apartment building itself was also owned by the Okawa Entertainment Company.

The people renting the rooms on the second floor were ordinary individuals with no particular connection to the theater.

Only those whose homes had been burned down by American air raids lived in the ten rooms on the second floor.

Ichikawa Fukunosuke, a male actor playing female roles, was given the room with the best sunlight, closest to the theater's back entrance.

"Compared to the Kotobuki-za, the theater itself is a bit shabby, but the dressing rooms are surprisingly splendid, aren't they?" All of Fukunosuke's regular patrons who visited the dressing rooms for the first time remarked with admiration.

At the entrance to the room hung a splendid purple [noren](#) curtain, embroidered with the characters, "For the Honored Fukunosuke Ichikawa, His Beloved Yori."

Simply lowering this single noren transformed the bleak dormitory-like atmosphere into a vibrant, lively space.

All the regular patrons referred to the Kotobuki Theater as "Kotobuki-za."

This was likely because it had been called Kotobuki-za for so long. Even my father called it "Kotobuki-za."

Even now, over sixty years later, whenever I hear or say the word "Kotobuki-za," something warm and nostalgic, like tears, resonates deep within my chest, trembling and overflowing. Kotobuki-za might have been the place where I existed, in some insect-like form, before I was born into this world.

Thinking of "Kotobuki-za" plunges me into a mood filled with affection, lukewarm and sweet, impossibly soft and gentle, like being drawn in, body and soul.

Why does that little theater in Honjo Midoricho hold such charm and affection for me?

I've asked myself this question many times before, but I still don't know.

Fukunosuke had an attendant who was called "the head clerk."

She was a middle-aged woman named Nakajima, who had served as Fukunosuke's attendant for over ten years.

She dressed Fukunosuke in his stage costumes, undressed him, and handled all the other minute details of his personal care.

It was from Nakajima-san that I learned the customs of the actor's world, dressing room slang, and the essentials of being a disciple of an onnagata.

But even after a month, I was still not allowed on stage.

I didn't care if I didn't have any lines, I just wanted to put on makeup, wear a wig, don period costumes, and step onto the stage.

When I told Nakajima-san this, "Well now, it would be impossible to suddenly give you a speaking role as an onnagata. But since this is a small troupe without many members, I think you'll eventually get a minor role."

Her cheekbones were sharp, and a large gold tooth gleamed in her mouth, giving her a somewhat intimidating appearance at first glance. But Nakajima-san was a kind auntie.

"Oh my, you've been watching our master's plays since the Kotobuki-za days? How reliable of you. But when you say Kotobuki-za days, you were still in elementary school, weren't you? Huh, your father took you to see him. Your father liked our master too, didn't he?"

By "master," she meant Fukunosuke.

We were taught to call him "master" (oyakata), not "teacher" (sensei) or "master" (shisho)¹².

When a patron who had been loyal to Fukunosuke since the Kotobuki-za days came, Nakajima-san would step back slightly and always introduce me.

"This is Fukujiro, who has recently become my master's apprentice. With a theater like this, I believe he'll be able to take the stage soon. I humbly ask for your continued patronage."

She would then place both hands on the tatami mat and bow respectfully. I would do the same, pressing my forehead to the tatami and bowing.

Then, those patrons would say "study hard" and give both me and Nakajima-san a gift of money.

Such patrons were mostly middle-aged women, dressed in kimonos that looked of good quality.

I thought to myself, "They must be people whose homes weren't burned down in the war."

¹² In Japan, there are different ways to refer to a superior. Oyakata is master in the sense of a production or artisan. Shisho can mean master, teacher, or stable master of a sumo stable. Sensei is a well known word, but can mean teacher, master, doctor, etc.

Around this time, I was keeping a fairly detailed diary, intending to go to school, but I didn't write down how much money was in the gift envelope.

I think I had this feeling that writing down how much I received would be vulgar.

Yet I clearly remember how overjoyed I was when I received it.

It was the first gift money I'd ever received after entering the theater world.

Looking back now, I should have written down the amount.

In that immediate postwar situation (when many people in Tokyo were still living in hand-dug air-raid shelters underground), the amount in that gift envelope I received is undoubtedly precious information now, yet I have absolutely no memory of it.

Was it one yen? Five yen? Ten yen?

No, ten yen was a lot of money back then. It was probably closer to one yen, wasn't it?

The general prices of food and other items during that era called inflation can be roughly understood by looking at the charts in the reference books.

But when it comes to congratulatory money, there are no set rules, so it's impossible to guess.

It truly reflects the giver's genuine feelings toward the recipient.

In a small, quiet theater tucked away in a corner of Tokyo, still scarred by war, where a fifteen-year-old boy took his first steps toward becoming an onnagata, how much hope did those women place in him.

It was an era when all culture and performing arts were at the mercy of the American occupation forces.

Plays themed around revenge, like "Chushingura," were all banned.

It was the year of defeat, with no bright light visible for the future of kabuki theater.

By the way, I must write down the circumstances of why I became a disciple of Ichikawa Fukunosuke.

I had known of Fukunosuke's existence since elementary school, but only from watching his onnagata stage presence from the audience seats.

I wasn't particularly captivated by Fukunosuke alone.

I loved the overall atmosphere of the kabuki plays performed at Kotobuki-za.

Fukunosuke, of course, didn't know anything about me. He didn't know my father either. Both my father and I were just two members of the audience.

It was a kabuki actor named Kataoka Tobei who first brought me to the Tsurukame Theater.

I met this Tobei, believe it or not, inside the Hitachi Works Kameari Factory.

As the war drew to a close, I, my classmates, and our seniors were all taken out of the classrooms under a government directive called "[student mobilization](#)." We were made to assist with the work of manufacturing weapons inside the dozens of enormous buildings, alongside thousands of laborers.

Middle school back then was a five-year program. By the time we were upperclassmen, our physiques were already nearly adult.

Inside the factory with its absurdly high ceilings, heavy iron machinery roared incessantly from to night, from night to morning, twenty-four hours a day.

I absolutely hated that bleak view and the unappealing smell of machine oil.

We weren't told what weapons or military equipment we were making. It was supposedly a military secret (though there were rumors it was heavy-duty tanks), but I disliked such heavy labor and had absolutely no motivation to do it.

In the language of the time, I was a terrible "non-patriot."

I appealed directly to the teacher leading our group, "If this continues, I'll die. Dying won't serve the country. Please let me do work suited to me."

The teacher was an art instructor who had always been kind to me. Since elementary school, I'd excelled at drawing and composition.

Thanks to the art teacher's recommendation, I was transferred to the Public Relations Section of the Welfare Department, a place free from the oppressive sounds and smells of heavy black machinery.

The Public Relation Section was located on the second floor of a shabby barracks building, far removed from the massive factory complex where deafening noise echoed twenty-four hours a day.

I breathed a sigh of relief. That flimsy, wooden-plank shack looked like heaven to me.

There, every day, posters were created to encourage and admonish the workers, to destroy the US and Britain, to ensure the divine nation's immortality, to boost production, and to raise morale.

"Immortality of the divine nation" meant that Japan, being a divine nation, would never perish and could never lose the war. It was a shameless, foolish phrase.

It's hard to believe now, but every single poster was hand-drawn.

The completed posters were then sent out to Hitachi's various factories scattered throughout the Kanto region.

There were seven or eight members in the Public Relations Department.

Except for the department head, every single one of them had been conscripted.

The term "conscription" is almost a dead word now.

When I was a boy, I heard it daily and was forced to read it. It was commonplace language.

I looked it up in the dictionary just to check.

"Conscription. The act of the state summoning citizens and forcibly assigning them to specific work." It says. Student mobilization was also a form of conscription.

No one defied the government's orders.

It was an era where criticism or resistance meant being hauled off by the police immediately.

In the Public Relations Section, there was a Western-style painter affiliated with the [Pacific Art Association](#).

I had this person review my sketches every day. He evaluated my crude drawings sincerely, earnestly, and sometimes harshly.

It wasn't a workplace senior-junior relationship. With the mindset of master and apprentice, he taught me the heart and technique of painting.

I will never forget the name of this sincere and earnest painter for the rest of my life. His name was Ichiro Madokoro. He is my mentor.

Besides this painter, there were also two junior high school art teachers in the Public Relation Section.

There was also an artist who made living drawing pictures for [kamishibai](#).

There was a sign painter from town.

There was a teacher of composition.

Age-wise, they were all men who could no longer be soldiers.

That is, they were all over forty, unfit for physical labor. In other words, a gathering of intellectual types.

When I learned this, I cried out in my heart and rejoiced, "This is paradise! Heaven!"

Naturally, I was the youngest.

Why were those people so kind?

Why were they so kind when American forces bombed from the sky almost every day, destroying parts of Japanese cities, and though the numbers weren't made public, countless defenseless civilians died in each air raid?

How could those adults maintain such kindness while working in a corner of a massive weapons factory, knowing they might be killed tomorrow?

I learned the tasks assigned to me with a spring in my step.

Within less than a month, I had become accustomed to the work in the Public Relations Section and was drawing posters like a pro.

Because it was something I enjoyed, I picked it up quickly.

Happy days followed.

The seniors around me, well, more than seniors, everyone was like a teacher to me, answered any question I had without complaint and taught me everything.

They patiently showed me everything, from how to mix mud-based paints (since poster colors were now a luxury item, production had stopped) to how to boil animal glue.

The intense smell of mud paint mixed with animal glue made me feel the scent of art, and I almost cried.

No matter how poor the quality of the materials, paint carried no smell of war.

No matter the theme, the work of drawing pictures and writing characters with paint and brushes was enjoyable.

I drew a poster of Roosevelt with a Japanese Air Force bomb stuck in his head, dead and lying in a coffin.

Next to the coffin, I wrote, "The final victory is ours!"

Roosevelt was the President of the United States at the time.

The section chief praised this original poster I created, and I drew a hundred copies by myself, which were posted all over the vast factory.

Orders came in from other factories, and I drew another hundred.

Even as a child, I thought that drawing and posting hundreds of these posters would be unrealistic and, far from boosting morale, would only be a waste of paper. But I suppose they wanted to add a little color to the bleak factory interior.

I drew the blood flowing from Roosevelt's head in a somewhat poisonous color.

By the way, R-san.

Do you find my writing like this interesting to read?

I'm starting to feel anxious.

I don't think this era is something I'd get so absorbed in writing about, but now that I've started writing like this, it is still somewhat interesting to me.

Or rather, if I thought it was boring, I wouldn't feel like writing at all.

I started writing about this Public Relations Department because I wanted to tell the story of how Kataoka Tobei-san took me to the Tsurukame Theater.

But somehow, the stage shifted to the Public Relations Section of the weapons factory.

Since school was gone, I wrote earlier that I kept a meticulous diary every day during this period instead. I'm writing this now while rereading that diary.

It's filled with the emotions of a boy, so I find myself tempted to ramble on with unnecessary details, and I'm trying to restrain myself.

It was within this Public Relations Section that I met Tobei-san, the actor.

So, in terms of sequence, I explained the workplace for those unfit for factor labor, those unable to lift heavy objects, amongst all the conscripted workers. But I ended up going on too long.

Yet, I find myself wanting to write a little more about my time in this place.

Alongside training in drawing and design lettering, I also studied acting in this workplace.

I had always thought I would have to write about those things someday.

Taking advantage of the opportunity given by R-san, I'd like to write a bit more about the time between fifteen and sixteen. What do you think?

2009.1.7

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 70

シミキンと朝霧鏡子

Shimikin and Asagiri Kyoko

I was utterly hopeless at physical labor. More than just hopeless, the very idea of heavy work terrified me, and since I only enjoyed drawing pictures and writing, the moment I moved to the second-floor room in the barracks-style building that housed the Welfare Department's Public Relations Section, I suddenly found myself feeling alive and vibrant every single day.

For the thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of workers engaged in weapons production (then called "industrial warriors"), we displayed:

"The devilish Americans and British are our enemies!"

"Advance, one hundred million fireballs!"

"The decisive battle on the mainland draws near, we shall fight to the end!"

I happily spent my days from morning until night drawing posters bearing slogans like these, which now seem utterly hollow. When I grew tired of making posters from scripts ordered by my superiors, I'd come up with my own half-baked slogans and freely draw original posters.

I possessed almost no spirit of patriotism, but to the adults around me, I probably looked like a plucky, admirable patriotic youth.

I would fill white paper with the face of a sturdy man wearing a hinomaru ¹³ headband, savoring the colors and texture of the paint. Next to it, I'd scrawl defiant words cursing and despising America and Britain, declaring final victory belonged to the divine nation of Japan, all in bold red and black brushstrokes. That was how I earned recognition for working diligently.

For me, that workplace was a pleasurable, luxurious space.

I learned to sketch, was taught how to draw people, and savored the joy of manipulating color.

¹³ The rising sun, Japanese war symbol.

Ichiro Madoroko, a Western-style painter forcibly dragged into this massive munitions factory, always guided me kindly and sincerely.

“Hey kid, do you really think Japan could win a proper war against the Americans?” he would sometimes murmur near my ear, almost as if talking to himself.

Teaching me painting techniques might have been his pleasure in that era where tomorrow was uncertain. He was a painter and a calligrapher.

He was a man entirely devoid of self-interest or greed. He seemed almost too sincere, even a bit slow.

I think he was around fifty years old. I admired him, thinking this must be what a true artist is like.

The fifteen-year-old me, playing the clever little patriot, was far more vulgar.

The Public Relations Department had one more task.

It involved welcoming and entertaining the entertainment troupes that came to visit and perform for the “industrial warriors” making weapons in the factories.

Performers specializing in popular songs, manzai¹⁴ comedy, monologue, rakugo storytelling, nagauta¹⁵ ballads, and kodan storytelling were organized into entertainment groups that toured and performed for the weapon manufacturing factories.

Theaters, movie theaters, and [yose](#) comedy halls in Tokyo and its surrounding urban areas had been almost completely destroyed by American bombs.

The citizens who enjoyed these performances had simultaneously lost their homes to fire and were scattered far and wide.

The touring entertainment troupes were apparently formed into several groups under government orders and toured various locations, but I don’t know the details.

Thanks to my position in the Public Relations Department, I was able to meet famous entertainers who were active at the time.

Popular among the workers were the popular songs. Since this was an era without tapes, singers were accompanied by a band of three or four musicians, performing live.

¹⁴ A two person comedy act

¹⁵ “Long song” in Japanese, accompanied with the shamisen

(Though some singers only had one accordion player.)

The music emanating from the instruments was gentle, peaceful, and warm.

I believe songs and music had a greater effect than any other form of entertainment in soothing the weariness of people's hearts and bodies.

In front of the two-story wooden barracks housing the Welfare Department's Public Relations Office was a vacant lot overgrown with weeds. Beyond it stood the Hitachi Welfare Hall, a warehouse-like building that could hold three hundred people if packed tightly.

It was an unadorned structure, but it served the role of what we would now call a hall.

It had a splendid stage, seemingly built for theatrical performances, complete with a long hanamichi extending from the stage's left side.

(I would sneak into the building when no one was around and enjoy mimicking Benkei's flying six-directions from "[Kanjincho](#)" on this hanamichi.)

The auditorium also had projection equipment for showing movies.

Behind the stage, separated by a prop room, was a dressing room spacious enough for about fifty performers to prepare. It was a Japanese-style room with tatami mats.

However, there were no private rooms, only one large space. Along three walls facing the room, long single planks were laid horizontally to form dressing tables.

Three female students were assigned to the Public Relations Department. They all wore [monpe](#).

Among them was a beautiful girl named Kuga Chiyoko, two or three years older than me, with a bobbed haircut. She was primarily responsible for entertaining the visiting entertainment troupes.

When the visiting groups were large, I was ordered to assist with the hospitality under Kuga Chiyoko's direction.

After the Public Relations Department chief greeted the visiting group as they arrived by truck and exchanged greetings, it was Kuga Chiyoko's and my job to escort the performers to the dressing rooms in the Welfare Hall.

The dressing rooms immediately became their rest areas. I carried tea and meals there and handled various small tasks as their guide.

It was an interesting experience to see the off-stage personas of these famous entertainers.

I saw each of their distinct, strong personalities.

Some entertainers treated minors like me and Kuga Chiyoko with meaningless contempt and arrogance.

There were singers who seemed to be saying, “A top-tier performer like me came to entertain at a factory? Feed me something better!”

To a young boy’s eyes, many of the performers seemed like vulgar people.

I’ll skip the rest of this experience, as writing about it would be endless.

[Tokugawa Musei](#), the “manzai” comedian, arrived.

I nervously presented my lunch tray to Tokugawa Musei, who sat cross-legged on the tatami mat in the center of the dressing room.

I can never forget his warm, kind-faced expression at that moment.

“Oh ho, bread, is it? How stylish.” Smiling cheerfully, he picked up a roll from the tray, split it in two, and carried one half to his mouth with obvious relish.

Beside the bread sat a bowl of soup and a dish of simmered dried daikon radish. Though called bread, it was merely a coarse lump of flour, now recalling it was dry and crumbly, with bits of black bran mixed in.

Bran is the husk residue left when grinding wheat into flour, a part normally discarded.

In times of food scarcity, bread made by mixing this bran into the flour was the best treat the factory could offer to the visiting group.

Even to me, a boy who was always hungry, that bread was not tasty.

Yet Tokugawa Musei, mindful of us, ate it all with a smile, cheerful and without leaving a crumb.

The soup was a thick, sludgy broth, like gruel made from ground corn.

He drank that too, looking as if he enjoyed it.

That warm way of eating was conveyed to us, the servers.

I was deeply moved. I sensed the greatness of the man.

That emotion from sixty years ago remains unforgettable to this day.

He entertained the workers in the audience with stories from his days as a katsuben (live movie narrator), told with exquisite storytelling skill and brimming with humor.

Not much time has passed since silent films gave way to talkies. The term “katsuben” still held an everyday familiarity.

I’ll write about Shimikin and Asagiri Kyoko too.

Back then, the “King of Laughter” Shimikin, from Shimizu Kinichi’s troupe, came to the Welfare Hall as an entertainment troupe.

The audience was packed to the rafters with workers starved for laughter.

I had already seen Shimikin’s troupe perform their comedies many times on stages in Asakusa.

I watched “Shimikin’s Asakusa Young Master” from the front row at the Tokiwaza theater.

I can still sing the theme song from “Asakusa Young Master” today.

It goes like this: “Someone once taught me that being strong isn’t the only way to be a man.”

Decades later, [Seki Keiroku](#) took up this song and sang it on stage at [Asakusa’s Mokubatei theater](#) with the “21st Century Theater Company” until very recently.

Seki Keiroku, too, is now deceased.

I also saw Asagiri Kyoko perform on stage.

She was a star with the Shochiku Girls’ Revue before joining the Shimikin Troupe.

I saw her sing and dance at [Asakusa’s Kokusai Theater](#). She also starred in films.

She wasn’t a conventional beauty, but she had a round face and a warm, endearing, distinctly Japanese charm.

As soon as I guided her from outside to the dressing room entrance, she slipped close beside me and whispered in my ear, “Hey, where’s the restroom?”

Enveloped in a sweet feminine scent unlike anything I'd experienced in the factory, I was flustered and my legs went weak.

Feeling her dazzling aura so close, I felt like my knees buckled and couldn't respond.

I silently bowed my head repeatedly as I guided her to the shared restroom in a separate building.

As the cast attendant, I stayed in the dressing room, listening to the constant laughter from the audience during the Shimikin troupe's comedy.

As the performance neared its end, Shimikin, who had briefly returned to the dressing room, staggered over to me and said, "Son, got any sake? Bring me some sake."

Asagiri Kyoko also came backstage and stood beside Shimikin looking like she was about to tend to him.

"Boss, the show isn't over yet!" she said, almost scolding him.

"I'm thirsty. I can't go on without sake." Shimikin yelled in a raspy voice. He really did look miserable.

Hearing that, I immediately consulted Kuga Chiyoko.

She nodded, then trotted over to the kitchenette in the corner of the dressing room and unlocked a large metal cabinet.

She then pulled out a one-liter bottle of sake from the back of the bottom shelf.

"It's okay, the manager told me," Chiyoko said firmly to me. Then, carrying the bottle and a tea cup, she returned to where Shimikin was panting heavily.

"Thank you. You never know where you'll find it." Shimikin grabbed the bottle himself, poured sake into the cup, and drank it down with a gulp.

Asagiri Kyoko dutifully wiped the sake spilled on his knee with a hand towel.

Watching from a little distance away, Chiyoko whispered in my ear.

"The section chief told me to serve it to everyone in the troupe after the play ends today."

Occasionally, sake like this would be distributed from somewhere in the weapons manufacturing factory.

Even so, Kuga Chiyoko was a quick-witted, dependable schoolgirl. I respected her.

After the play ended, tables were set up in the dressing room, and sake and food were served to the troupe members.

The section chief greeted the performers who had given such a passionate performance and expressed his gratitude.

After the troupe members had left, only Shimikin lingered, drinking sake slowly with Asagiri Kyoko.

The section chief ordered me to take the two of them to Kameari Station.

It was past eight o'clock at night, and the road wound through dark rice paddies and fields on both sides.

Asagiri Kyoko supported Shimikin, who was drunk and staggering, practically carrying him on her shoulder as they walked.

I walked slowly about three meters ahead of them.

"Kyoko! Kyoko!" Shimikin would occasionally cry out in a voice that sounded like he was crying.

He would stumble, unable to walk, and drop to one knee on the ground.

I saw Shimikan's hand reach over Asagiri Kyoko's shoulder, grabbing and kneading her breast through her clothes.

Asagiri Kyoko, without trying to brush away Shimikin's clinging hand, bravely continued walking while supporting him.

Kneading her breast, Shimikin took his time walking the road to the station. "How nice!" I thought.

Being the troupe leader, he could freely knead a beautiful actress's breasts like this while walking. How nice!

I never became an elegant old man like Tokugawa Musei, radiating warmth and dignity, but I felt I had become a man like Shimikin, with a fondness for breasts.

This part is a bit funny, isn't it?

2009.1.9

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 71

広報劇団の異才たち

The Unconventional Talents of the Public Relations Theater Company

I can only understand the phenomena that unfolded before my eyes in this era.

I was still only fifteen.

Under something called the Student Mobilization Order, I was dragged out of my school district classroom against my will and brought to a massive factory manufacturing weapons.

Looking right or left, I saw towering masses of black iron. I hated the workshop where workers hammered and cut metal, covered in glistening machine oil.

I thought I'd rather die than work in such a soulless, bleak place.

I appealed directly to the teacher who had brought us there and was transferred to the publicity department, where I drew posters and entertained performers who came to cheer up the workers.

I could only see what was right in front of me, so I had no idea how the war would turn out.

All I knew was that I was still alive today and the daily changes were reflected before my eyes.

American bombers arriving in Tokyo's skies grew more numerous each day, killing many defenseless townspeople.

Calling it a dark age is one way to put it. But human society, human life, no matter how you struggle, it's always dark at its core.

Ever since humans first inhabited the earth until today, the killing has continued relentlessly, without end.

Neither the killer nor the killed can be called bright.

Kuga Chiyoko, who worked alongside me as an attendant for entertainers visiting the factory, suddenly disappeared one day.

She was a female student whose school was in Ochanomize, a fellow student mobilized for war work. She was three years older than me.

With her brisk movements and lively speech, she efficiently handled any task given to her. She was a pretty girl with a bob haircut who was well-regarded.

"I haven't seen Kuga-san lately. What happened?" I asked the Western-style painter, Ichiro Madokoro.

Like me, Kuga Chiyoko also looked up to Ichiro Madokoro, a senior in the Public Relations Department, as her teacher in painting and calligraphy.

He was carving the characters "一露" (Ichiro) into a piece of wood with a small engraving knife, making a seal.

Ichiro was his pen name in calligraphy. He was carving that signature seal.

"My name in calligraphy is Magokoro Ichiro," he laughed, Madokoro and Magokoro. He was the kind of person who could make puns like that.

"Kuga-san, she's been absent for three days now, right? Is she ill?" I asked again. Not seeing her made me feel lonely. I harbored a secret admiration for this senior colleague.

"Kuga-kun, huh? Well, Kuga-kun..." he paused his carving knife, his gaze growing heavy as he slowly scanned the room.

No one else was present in the Public Relations Office on the second floor of the wooden barracks.

"I warned her before, you know. You're not supposed to sketch around here." Stammering slightly, Ichiro Madokoro spoke in a low voice, avoiding my gaze.

"Huh?"

"Kuga-kun, you see, was sketching sunflowers blooming outside the south gate wall of the factory. She was spotted by someone scary. And then... she was taken somewhere." Ichiro Madokoro muttered.

Where she was taken, where she is now, I don't know.

He explained in a quiet, low voice that the scary people meant the [Secret Police](#), or perhaps the military police.

Behind the sunflowers Kuga Chiyoko had sketched stood the wall surrounding the factory buildings.

That alone was enough for her to be considered a spy and taken away somewhere.

Ichiro Madokoro didn't tell me anything more than that. He probably didn't know what happened after that either.

The beautiful girl with the bobbed haircut wrote poetry in a notebook she had bound herself from small pieces of straw paper.

Even when I asked to read it, she was too shy to show me.

On the edge of my diary from that time, I wrote these words.

So
That's how it is
Fellow humans
Seem to be living
But they all die
Even knowing they'll die
Just for today
They struggle and live
Today
The sunflower withered

For some reason, I thought Kuga Chiyoko disappeared from my life because she had died.

"Now is the time to rise up! The decisive battle on the mainland draws near!"

Days went by where I was forced to paint posters emblazoned with such desperate slogans. Now I realize they were the last gasps of those facing imminent death.

"The decisive battle on the mainland." Isn't that just another way of saying death?

Yet, I scarcely registered the reality of death.

Not just me, even the adults around me probably didn't feel the certain death brought by the "decisive battle on the mainland" as something very close to them.

By this time, there were air raids almost every day, and each time, women, children, and the elderly left behind in the towns were killed. Perhaps everyone already felt like they were in the midst of a decisive battle on the mainland.

Had we become accustomed to “death?”

The entertainment troupes that had once visited quite frequently stopped coming so often.

The war might have been so desperate that there was no longer any leeway to send entertainers to boost the morale of the workers.

I, the youngest and lowest-ranking member, didn't know the full story, but a plan had emerged. Instead of relying on outside performers, the Public Relations Section would take the lead and put on a play for the workers using only their own resources.

No matter how desperate the situation became, the factory management understood that people still needed comfort and entertainment.

Thousands, perhaps even over ten thousand conscripted laborers were gathered inside the factory.

It didn't seem difficult to find men and women with theatrical talent among the vast buildings lined up in rows.

An amateur theater troupe was quickly formed.

The leader was a man named Keichiro Suzuki, the deputy chief of the Public Relations Department.

He was a tall, stout man in his forties, not conscripted but originally an employee of Hitachi Ltd.

He apparently had no actual stage experience, but he loved theater and always wanted to play the leading roles.

It was the deputy chief who proposed forming an amateur troupe and took the initiative to make it happen.

He undoubtedly formed the troupe for his own hobby, not for the entertainment of the workers.

An interesting cast of characters came together.

Yoshioka Shintaro, a former movie-talker, a katsuben, who genuinely believed himself to be a leading man.

By currying favor with Chairman Suzuki, he was always given leading roles in the “Public Relations Troupe.”

He boasted about how the female audience members would scream and fuss over him during his katsuben days.

With his high cheekbones and sunken eyes, I didn’t think he was all that handsome.

He claimed he’d avoided being drafted into the army because he had a pre-existing tuberculosis condition.

When the “Public Relations Troupe” performed a parody of the kabuki play “[Suzugamori](#),” Yoshioka Shintaro energetically played the white-faced leading man, Shirai Gonpachi, opposite Suzuki, the troupe leader, who played Hatasui Inbee.

“I’ll do it in the [Tachibana-ya](#) style,” he declared with confidence, and indeed, his delivery was smooth, and it had the proper form.

There was a man who had once been part of the [Sogonoya Goro](#) troupe, performing as an onnagata.

Back then, I saw this troupe’s play just once, taken by my father to either the [Togeki](#) or the [Shinbashi Enbujo](#). They were immensely popular in Kansai at the time.

Few people have seen Sogonoya Goro in person anymore.

The role I saw him perform was his signature old woman part, but his voice was rough and raspy, making it hard to hear from the third floor seats.

He left behind many comedy scripts under the pen name [Ichisakai Gyojin](#), collected in an anthology.

Adaptations of his sentimental comedies are still performed by popular theater troupes nationwide. The performers likely have no idea they’re acting out works by Gyojin, that is, Sogonoya Goro.

Tracing the plays performed by [Fujiyama Naomi](#), the current leader of the Shochiku Shinkigeki troupe, leads back through [Fujiyama Kanbi](#) and [Shibuya Tenge](#) to these “Goro plays.”

And I, too, actually received several of these scripts from the complete collection of Gyojin's works later on.

But writing about that here would be endless, so I'll skip it.

After quitting the "Goro Plays," he ran some kind of business in Tokyo before being conscripted. His name was Yamakawa Otomatsu.

He spoke in a soft Kansai dialect, was kind, had a bit of a campy vibe, and was a genuinely good person. He could also do stage makeup, so he was highly valued in the "Public Relations Troupe."

A wig stylist is someone who ties, puts on, and does detailed maintenance on the wigs worn by actors.

On occasion, like when we'd be alone together in the dark backstage, she'd stare intently at my face and quietly say in a motherly tone, "Boy, you must take care of your head. You cannot die." Then from her large eyes behind her glasses, a single tear would suddenly fall.

"Watching your head" meant being careful of American air raids.

No matter how much she warned me, there was no way to watch out for them. They came in large planes, flying in formation high above, dropping bombs from the distant sky.

Among the gathering of extraordinary talents, seen through the eyes of a fifteen-year-old boy, was Kataoka Tobei, who would later take me to the Tsurukame Theater and turn me into an actor.

To begin with, I started writing about this Public Relations Section to explain my encounter with Kataoka Tobei.

But I ended up getting bogged down in details, and it became too long.

There is much for me to write about from this era.

I also wish to write about a woman named Ichimura Masako, who was in the Takarazuka Revue. So, I'll put Tobei aside for now and write about Ichimura Masako.

She had been stationed at some field office within the factory when, following orders from someone in upper management, she was reassigned to the "Public Relations Troupe." When she first appeared before me, my heart nearly stopped at her overwhelming beauty.

Every day, I was just drawing posters, surrounded by scattered plates of mixed paint. Though the colors were lively, the second floor of the office remained bleak. Suddenly, she entered with a bright, refreshing, bouncy voice.

“Nice to meet you! I’m Ichimura Masako!”

She was truly a crane in a dung heap.

After greeting each person in the room crisply, Ichimura Masako finally stood before me.

“Hey kid, let’s be friends,” she said, casually placing her hand on my shoulder and smiling with a warmth that made it hard to believe we just met.

She wore slightly heavy, pale makeup, even lipstick. I caught a whiff of perfume.

For the first time in my life, a young, beautiful woman had placed her hand on my shoulder.

Among the female singers who had come to entertain the workers, she shone more beautifully than any star.

There wasn’t a trace of the gloom brought on by the war. From her very presence, an air of decadence seemed to emanate.

Seeing that carefree, radiant smile right before me, I was so moved I nearly fainted.

After the war, Ichimura Masako did not return to the Takarazuka Revue but instead became a disciple of [Mizutani Yaeko](#) in the Shinpa theater company.

I went to see her while she was performing at the [Shochikuza theater](#) in Asakusa.

Mizutani Yaeko was, of course, the previous generation, and this was back when she was still married to Morita Kanya.

Ahh, how splendid it was when Yaeko and Kanya performed together as a duo in this Shochizuka production of the “Tale of the Last Chrysanthemum”!

Yaeko as Otoku, and Kanya as Kikunosuke!

I watched from the third-floor seats, tears streaming down my face. I saw it three or four times over.

At times, I pressed a hand towel to my mouth and sobbed.

Ichimura Masako was given several minor roles along with the other numerous characters and appeared on stage. Some roles had just two or three lines of dialogue.

During intermission, I went to the dressing room to see her.

Inside the room with the noren curtain hanging at Yaeko Mizutani's dressing room, she worked briskly and efficiently, just like a true disciple.

Fearing I might be in the way, I quickly said, "I'll come back later," bowing deeply with both hands pressed together, bowed to Yaeko, and returned to the audience seats.

Deeply moved by The Tale of the Last Chrysanthemum, I was seized by the desire to share that same emotion with my father and mother. So the three of us went together to the Shochizuka theater in Asakusa.

(Incidentally, that Shochikuza theater was located near where [Asakusa ROX](#) stands today, with its front facing Kokusai Street.)

This was an era when the Shinsei Shihan theater troupe boasted such renowned actors as Hideo Fujimura, Eijiro Yanagi, Ichijiro Oya, Hiroshi Ishi, and Taro Hanabusa.

(For some reason, Shotaro Hanayagi did not appear in this Asakusa production.)

Come to think of it, I also saw several performances by the grand master of the Shinkai, Ryokuro Kitamura.

But I've digressed again.

I should have written earlier about her before she became a disciple of Mizutani Yaeko, specifically about her earlier career as the heroine of the "Public Relations Troupe" during the final days of the war.

No, actually, before that, I must write about my encounter with Kataoka Tobei. Otherwise, I cannot return to the person I was at the Tsurukame Theater.

It was at the Tsurukame Theater that I first received payment as an actor.

But before Tobei, I still want to write about Ichimura Masako.

Because she was the one who first seared the raw, vivid image of a woman's eroticism into the heart of a fifteen-year-old boy.

2009.1.14

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 72

サドルの上のお尻

Butt on a Saddle

Ichimura Masako's butt is seated on the bicycle saddle.

More than resting, she clings to the saddle. More than clinging, it would be more accurate to say the flesh of her butt, tightly encased in her pants, digs in slightly.

Every time Ichimura Masako pedals with force, that flesh of her buttocks moves and sways right before my eyes.

It moves so tantalizingly, as if her butt alone were a separate living thing.

I'm riding astride the rear cargo rack of the bicycle she's pedaling.

Her constantly moving butt is right in front of my eyes because I'm behind her.

I'm wearing a backpack.

Inside are about thirty rolled up posters designed by the Public Relations Department to boost morale.

Several were hand drawn by me. All were hand-drawn, however.

My job was to paste those posters on bulletin boards inside and outside the factory buildings, which stood in rows.

Before Ichimura Masako came to the Public Relations Section, I would carry a bucket of paste and a brush, ride my bicycle alone, and spend the whole day putting up posters.

"Hey kid, I'll help you with that job. I like riding bicycles." She volunteered. After getting the section chief's permission, she started riding off with me on the back of her bicycle.

The bucket containing the paste and brush was tied to the front of the handlebars.

Back then, women, young and old alike, all wore “monpe” for their lower bodies, loose-fitting, baggy pants that flared around the hips.

Amidst these women, her appearance in trousers created a startling sense of dissonance. I believe the color was either dark navy or black.

She was probably nineteen or twenty. Her legs were slender and long.

It was an era when such a physique alone could label someone “non-traditional.” These trousers clearly showed the slenderness and length of her legs.

To my eyes, she looked dazzlingly, eerily beautiful and erotic.

When we reached the slightly wider main street inside the factory, she pedaled while turning back to me and said, “I’m going to speed up, so hold on tight to me!” I hesitated.

How could I possibly wrap my arms around the waist of such a beautiful woman from behind?

Then, “Ready? Here we go!” She suddenly shifted her hips, floating them in the air.

Then she tensed her lower body and began pedaling with fierce momentum.

The force nearly sent me tumbling backwards.

Panicking, I wrapped both arms around her waist and held on tight.

Her belly was soft.

Pressing my face against her back, I caught a pleasant scent. I felt her warmth.

As she lifted her body, pedaling as if standing, my hands slid down to grip her lower abdomen. And her butt pressed against my face.

I felt like I was dreaming.

Entering the narrow road between factory buildings, she slowed the bicycle’s speed.

Relieved, I released my hands from her body.

Her buttocks settled back onto the saddle, and right before my eyes, they moved teasingly up and down, up and down.

Putting up posters outdoors, which I hadn't particularly liked before, became enjoyable after Ichimura Masako joined us.

She preferred riding her bicycle around the vast factory grounds, covering about a square kilometer, rather than doing detailed, meticulous work at a desk.

She continued to accompany me on my poster-hanging work after that.

Sitting behind her on the bicycle she pedaled, I was enveloped in a dreamlike, sweetly erotic world. I forgot the reality of living side-by-side with death.

That sensation was something I experienced for the first time in my life.

Did I ever experience sexual pleasure greater than the ecstasy of riding that bicycle with Ichimura Masako? I don't think so.

I probably shouldn't be writing this, given that I've worked stripping naked over five thousand women and binding them with ropes, but just now, my true feelings slipped out.

But she didn't come to the Public Relations Section to help with poster-posting.

She'd been pulled straight from the factory site office to be the lead actress in the "Public Relations Theater Troupe."

I think she was still a trainee, or perhaps had only just joined the troupe.

She probably wasn't a star or an executive, but her track record of having been part of the Takarazuka Revue was undeniable.

I once saw a Takarazuka program from that time that she showed me.

Looking back now, it was a flimsy pamphlet, shoddy in both paper and printing, typical of the times. But sure enough, her photo was there, among the other troupe members, toward the back of the pages.

In that black-and-white photo, her eyes were slightly upturned at the corners, her features sharply defined and well-proportioned. She was indeed beautiful.

It wasn't the name Ichimura Masako; she went by a different stage name.

"Beautiful," I murmured, admiring that small portrait. It wasn't flattery, it was my genuine thought. She possessed the sharp, refined beauty typical of Edo-style elegance that I personally favored.

“Really? Beautiful?” She smiled, looking pleased.

The Public Relations Troupe performed plays for the industrial warriors once or twice a month using the stage at the Welfare Hall, and Ichimura Masako played the heroine each time.

As she delivered her lines, she would sway her body somewhat exaggeratedly and wave her arms and legs about. It wasn't exactly skillful, but her very presence was simply dazzling.

Her lines, while free of accent, had a peculiar quirk in their intonation.

I was only fifteen, but a child's intuition when encountering art and performance is surprisingly accurate.

Ten or fifteen years later, as an adult, I sometimes revisit the same work and am surprised to find my childhood impression was spot on.

Even now, I believe a child's intuition and discernment shouldn't be underestimated.

It wasn't exactly skillful, but Ichimura Masako's flamboyant, showy acting was nevertheless a hit with the audience of industrial warriors.

She was young and beautiful, possessing a sensual allure that seemed to emanate from her proportions, moving her entire body with a slightly exaggerated, supple flexibility. Sighs of admiration even rose from the audience.

She performed in the war-mongering play titled, “For the Peace of the Orient.”

The script was written by Keiichiro Suzuki, the deputy chief of the Public Relations Division who considered himself the leader of this troupe.

It was a flimsy play depicting a quasi-romantic scene between a Japanese soldier occupying a village somewhere on the Chinese mainland and a young woman from that village.

When I say “a flimsy play,” I don't mean that I, now eighty years old, recall it as flimsy. Rather, I, who was fifteen at the time, felt it even during rehearsals, “What a shoddy, shallow play this is!”

A village girl, crying after having her food stolen by Chinese soldiers, is rescued by a young Japanese soldier (played by the self-proclaimed handsome Katsuben actor, Shintaro Yoshioka) and the two fall into a faint love.

The girl has an elderly mother (played by Otoshi Yamakawa, a former onnagata from the Goro troupe) and a younger brother (a role I played). Their father had been killed by Chinese soldiers.

The retreating Chinese army was pursued, and the Japanese forces were soon to advance from this village.

The girl, the handsome soldier, and their tender romance ended in just three days, with their farewell scene as the climax. During that time, slogans like “Japan is fighting for peace in the Orient!” were inserted incessantly, making it a shallow, tedious play depicting a Japan-China friendship in a flimsy way. Yet the audience gave a thunderous applause.

This was because Ichimura Masako, playing the Chinese girl, wore a so-called “Chinese dress” with slits on both sides reaching above her knees.

Under the Chinese dress, she wore only white bloomers.

(Of course, underwear like panties didn’t exist back then.)

It was a floral patterned outfit that accentuated her slim waist and clearly showed the curves of her chest and hips.

There was a scene where the handsome Private First Class, played by Shintaro Yoshioka, who had gone out on reconnaissance, was shot by enemy soldiers and returned wounded. The girl bravely tended to him.

Ichimura Masako gave a passionate performance.

She performed so passionately it made me jealous.

Discovering Private Yoshioka crawling back like an insect after being shot in the leg, the daughter tenderly tends to his wounds.

She moves about the stage, standing, sitting, and kneeling.

Each time, the sides of her Chinese dress split open, revealing her thighs and white bloomers.

The audience, filled with industrial warriors, was overwhelmingly male. Their applause and cheers were only natural.

Neither the actors nor the audience questioned the unnaturalness of the Chinese villagers conversing fluently in Japanese with the Japanese soldiers.

As long as it looked entertaining, that was probably enough.

In that sense, it surely provided entertainment for the hearts of the workers laboring day and night under harsh conditions, offering them momentary comfort, and that likely contributed to increased productivity.

This play, “For the Peace of the Orient,” was for some reason well-received. Requests came from various factories, and it was performed repeatedly many times.

Not only from Kameari, but also from military supply factories in the Saitama area. The actors and staff would pile into the beds of trucks and head out.

The author and troupe leader, Deputy Chief Suzuki, was extremely proud.

In the play, Deputy Chief Suzuki portrayed the commander of the Japanese military unit with great dignity and pride. For Suzuki, who was well-built and always walked with his chest puffed out, it was truly the perfect role.

Early in the play, there was a scene where a brother and sister embraced joyfully after the brother rescued his sister, who had been attacked by Chinese soldiers and was in danger, with the help of a Japanese soldier.

“Don’t hold back, go ahead and hug me, boy,” Ichimura Masako said. I wrapped my arms around her back and clung to her with all my might, though I don’t actually remember the sensation very clearly.

It should have been an unforgettable, deeply moving experience, a sensual encounter during my sensitive adolescence. Yet somehow, only a vague memory remains.

Shouldn’t the memory of her body, held so tightly, with such forceful contact on stage, be more vivid in my mind?

What I remember clearly now is still her butt, wrapped in her pants, bouncing and swaying as we sat close together, straddling the bicycle seat.

More than the touch itself, it’s the heat of my desire back then, the desire to not touch. No, the inability to touch, the fantasy I held tightly in my chest, that remains more strongly etched in me now.

Truthfully, I wrote at length about my memories with Ichimura Masako precisely because I wanted to write about that butt on the saddle.

I don’t know if it was necessary to write so extensively about the sensuality and allure of that butt on the saddle.

Was this chapter about Ichimura Masako too long, just to write about that butt on the saddle?

Did I bore the readers?

I'm not confident.

But the fact remains, for sixty-five years, it has lived on in my mind, unforgotten.

2009.2.2

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 73

緊縛写真飢餓時代

The Age of Famine for Bondage Photography

“Though this is but a farce, I humbly offer my opening remarks (ゝ).”

In old plays, this would be the moment when the actor stepped out from behind the curtain at center stage, knelt in seiza, and bowed deeply with hands clasped toward the audience seats.

In other words, this passage suddenly shifts to a scene unrelated to the previous one.

While I've been rambling on about events from over sixty years ago, the reality of my daily life now keeps racing ahead.

Fearing I might miss the right moment if I didn't write this now, I hastily declared, “Though the play is still in progress...”

For others, these may be mere trifles of everyday life, but for me, they are events I wish to preserve in my memory.

So, I will set aside for now the subsequent events with Ichimura Masako, the addition of the kabuki actor Tobei Kataoka to the Public Relations Troupe, and how, after the war ended, Tobei invited me to join the troupe at Tsurukame Theater. Instead, I shall write a little about the present.

One reason I began writing this “Talking Theater” was to record my time at the Tsurukame Theater. Yet, as my consciousness returns to events from over sixty years ago, new stimuli appear before me every single day.

And, just as quickly, they vanish into the past.

If I don't jot them down immediately, they flit past my nose, and the moment I take a few steps away, I forget them.

Even if I don't forget them, the impact fades with time, and the impressions become vague.

Well, most things are fine to forget, but there are some I want to record.

So, the story suddenly shifts away from both the Tsurukame Theater and the Public Relations Theater Company to the present.

I am currently writing a serialized essay titled "Dear Editor, This is Nureki Chimuo, Your Bondage Specialist" for a bimonthly magazine called "SM Net".

It's still early in the series, but in the fourth installment, I wrote something a bit closer to my true feelings.

It's the truth about my current state of mind.

The gist is as follows.

On the shoot, the current bondage specialist mostly just demonstrates the procedure for tying a woman's body with rope, or the superficial form of bondage.

They consider that sufficient.

Since the recent models are almost exclusively women who enjoy being tied up, even if it's just for show, the moment rope touches their bodies, they react immediately, becoming intoxicated, forgetting any sense of shame, and plunging into their own sexual pleasures.

Well, if you want to be honest, they are honest. If you want to call it straightforward, it is straightforward.

Throwing aside pride and shame, rolling their eyes back, and shamelessly drowning in their own pleasure, video production companies seize the moment to film and commercialize this image of such M-women, inserting foreign objects into their genitals and boasting that this is SM. I no longer consider such things stimulating SM, and frankly, I don't even want to see them anymore.

For bondage enthusiasts who enjoy videos, what's truly stimulating isn't the woman who becomes docile and joyfully submissive just by seeing ropes in front of her. It's the woman who, when ropes approach her body, suddenly senses danger, trembles with fear, rejects the loathsome act of being bound, and shows resistance.

(This is where the element that first stirs the bondage enthusiast's mind with a strange excitement and builds it up to a peak lies.)

The sadistic process of subduing that trembling, fearful woman's resistance, applying the ropes, and binding her up (along with her sorrow-filled expression of resignation and her body writhing in fleeting agony) is precisely where the pleasure of SM, the exquisite taste of bondage, resides.

The presence or absence of this "subtle charm" is precisely what determines whether an SM video sells as a product or not.

Without scene capturing this subtle charm, a man holding ropes to bind a woman is nothing more than a mere service provider for masochistic women to satisfy their desires.

A bondage specialist is nothing more than a servant who performs the troublesome task of tying ropes for the pleasure of masochistic women, providing only labor.

To put it bluntly, they are like slaves existing solely for the woman's pleasure.

That's why I call myself a "bondage specialist" rather than a "rope master."

A bondage specialist is the lowly job of a man who devotes himself solely to giving pleasure to a dominatrix who enjoys stimulation from ropes (or perhaps not even ropes). (Put cynically, that's how it is.)

Even if you turned this raw reality into a commercial video, it wouldn't please today's discerning bondage enthusiasts with their specialized tastes.

(It might be welcomed at first, but enthusiasts' nerves are sensitive. It simply won't last.)

If it doesn't please them, it won't sell as a product.

Watching the SM publishing industry decline is, after all, a sad thing.

I hope it survives and continues, in whatever form it takes.

With that in mind, I proposed to the editorial department of "SM Net": "I will create scenes imbued with my passion, scenes where I intensely bind the female form, scenes where the ropes alone possess sufficient power and intensity, scenes that could be considered the origin of hardcore bondage for enthusiasts. Would your magazine like to photograph them?"

"And then, would you please include that footage in your magazine's lengthy supplementary DVD? Even just ten minutes, or five minutes would be fine. I absolutely guarantee it will delight true bondage enthusiasts." This was my request.

The supplementary DVD runs nearly three hours long.

I turned that proposal into a manuscript and had it published as the fourth installment of “Dear Editor, This is Nureki Chimuo, Bondage Specialist.”

But to cut to the chase, this proposal was not accepted.

First, I received a phone call from the editor in charge, and we discussed the matter.

“The manuscript for the fourth installment is truly wonderful, very much in the style of Nureki-san. We will publish it as is. I will explain our position, why we cannot accommodate your request, in a note following your manuscript. Please review the proof copy,” Mr. K, the editor in charge, said to me.

A couple of days later, the proof copy arrived by fax.

I read it immediately.

Following my manuscript, Mr. K’s text precisely and concisely explained why the editorial department could not realize the five-minute intense bondage scene I had proposed.

After reading it once, I was convinced.

Even though I had passionately advocated for it, the editorial department’s position, the reasons why they could not produce the bondage footage I had envisioned, were explained sincerely and succinctly.

What I appreciated most was that they accurately understood the feelings of someone like me, a member of the bondage enthusiast community.

I had met Mr. K several times even before starting the serialized manuscript, and his sincere character had always been pleasing to my heart.

This sincerity included his sometimes seemingly austere attitude toward SM itself.

I was deeply moved by how he honestly and unadornedly expressed his position as the magazine’s editor and his own feeling within that limited space.

If you wish to read my fourth installment of the serialized piece “Dear Editor, This is Nureki Chimuo, Your Bondage Specialist,” titled “I Want to Show You the True Beauty of Bondage,” along with Mr. K’s response to it, please look for and purchase the magazine, “SM Net” at your local bookstore.

You cannot view the included DVD supplement unless you purchase and own the magazine.

Watching this lengthy DVD will help you understand the sentiment behind my writing “I Want to Show the True Beauty of Bondage.”

That said, this is by no means to imply the content of this DVD is poor.

Far from it. Any ordinary person who sees it will absolutely find it fascinating. They’ll likely find themselves gripping their hands in excitement.

It possesses an extremely intense, overwhelming power.

(In that sense, I still consider this a type of abnormal imagery.)

Scenes that feel like the climaxes of each work, carefully selected new footage from various production companies, unfold one after another, brilliantly, like a showcase.

Scenes where the body is restrained, legs spread wide apart (or spread by the model herself), and phallic vibrators or other foreign objects are inserted into the genitals unfold with overwhelming force.

Scenes of humiliation by male performers also continue, of course.

While formulaic, a lavish number of young women, beautifully and lovingly made up, appear one after another, spreading their lower bodies to reveal nearly all of their genitals.

Of course, the central part of the genitals is blurred.

Perhaps the blurring makes the whole scene seem even more erotic.

To reiterate, if you watch this supplementary DVD, I believe those of you who are bondage enthusiasts will understand my desire to “show the true beauty of bondage.”

The color photographs featured in this magazine also effectively and beautifully showcase the climax scenes from each company’s videos, laid out in a masterful manner.

In the high standards of this layout, I sense the taste and skill of this magazine’s editors.

Two days after I proofread my manuscript and Mr. K’s reply, I received a call from Yuri Sunohara at Fuji Planning.

“I’d like to revive the Kinbiken Research Group soon. Would you like to meet for a discussion sometime soon?” I agreed.

Though I haven't met her yet and don't know the specifics of how it will take shape, Yuri's words were filled with extraordinary passion.

In our world, passion is everything.

Without passion, you're as good as nothing.

I have a feeling my earnest desire to "show the true beauty of bondage" is slowly starting to move towards becoming a reality.

It feels like the day is approaching again when true bondage enthusiasts will gather, and I'll demonstrate bondage restraint techniques using a model.

Speaking of which, on the Fuji Planning blog I've been writing a series titled "Nureki Chimuo's Secret Bondage Stories," and it's already reached its seventy-third installment. Reading this might give you some insight into the future direction of the Kinbiken revival.

Comment from Mika Suzume
Thoughts on the 73rd Talking Theater
February 3, 2009 15:03

Sensei, it's Mika.

It's been a while since we talked about SM bondage, hasn't it?

I've been thoroughly enjoying reading about your time with Ms. Ichimura Masako in the "Public Relations Troupe," your days as a member of the Tsurukame Theater troupe after the war, and your youthful memories. However, since I, Mika, have no background in theater, I haven't been able to offer any comments.

This time, since it's about SM, I think I'll write a long comment for the first time in ages.

"These days, it's unlikely to please the sharp-minded bondage enthusiasts with their particular tastes."

That's exactly right.

Even if I am not a bondage enthusiast, I believe any SM enthusiast would find SM without "torment" boring. I think you would understand, Sensei. SM enthusiasts derive pleasure from tormenting others or being tormented themselves. It's a sadistic (though I dislike

using the word) hobby. And precisely because they are aware that finding sexual pleasure in such acts makes them sadists, they possess timid and delicate nerves.

So while I insist "torment" is essential, that "torment" mustn't be genuinely cruel or grim. That kind of thing makes me sense impending ruin and feel revulsion.

Even though they despise real "torment," if the M submits without resistance or refusal, discarding any pride or shame as you describe, rolling their eyes back and wallowing shamelessly in their own pleasure, then the "torment" itself disappears. That kind of SM holds no interest and excites me not at all.

That said, I even feel anger toward SM where the "bullying" itself is genuine and the M genuinely dislikes it.

I don't get excited without the act of "bullying," but I also don't get excited when the act of "bullying" is genuine.

This is where things get misaligned when talking with people who don't understand this hobby. For SM enthusiasts (at least for me), "bullying" must not exist, yet must also not be absent.

I find the appeal of SM precisely on that fine line between genuine torment and fake torment. It's contradictory. Genuine torment is no good, yet fake torment is also no good. But I believe that's the true form of realistic SM play that's permissible while maintaining a social life.

Of course, in fiction or AV videos, artificial creations, even settings where someone genuinely seems repulsed are perfectly fine. In fact, I prefer SM scenes filled with masochism where someone reacts to such settings with genuine disgust and tears. But in recent AV videos, you sometimes see women playing the M role who look genuinely repulsed, even to the point of sniffing, and I really don't want to see that kind of footage.

"Subduing the trembling woman's resistance, binding her with ropes, restraining her, it is with this sadistic process (and the woman's sorrowful expression of resignation and her body writhing in fleeting agony) that the pleasure of SM, the exquisite taste of bondage truly lies."

That's exactly it.

The appeal of SM lies in this very fine line.

The M-woman's resistance shouldn't be genuine refusal, nor is it interesting if she actively seeks pleasure.

The phrase “a face filled with sorrowful resignation and a body writhing in fleeting agony” captures it perfectly, but what I find truly fascinating is precisely this fragile state of the submissive, a state that banishes the moment it tilts even slightly in either direction.

Many rope artists can create complex bindings that guide a woman to sexual pleasure, but few of them see through the truth. They are merely servants providing labor, performing tedious rope work solely for the M woman’s pleasure.

There’s a term, “Service S,” stemming from the view that the S should be a servant to the M’s pleasure. But if taken too far, that Service S becomes Slave S.

In such SM, where the S merely does what the M wants done to them with care, like a slave serving their master, the very essence of “torment” vanishes entirely.

If there is no “torment”, can M truly exist there?

For me, even if someone playing the M role in such SM indulges shamelessly in her own pleasure, she doesn’t sense the presence of the M in her demeanor.

Seeing such an M, I find it more pathetic than enviable.

And as for those S who approve of this kind of SM, this pleasure-seeking type, I can’t help but wonder why they bother with complex rope work and all this effort.

Of course, I don’t think it’s right for the S to lack a spirit of service or consideration, but that isn’t for the M to wallow shamelessly in pleasure. It must be to prevent refusal or resistance from turning into genuine disgust.

If SM contained no torment and only the pleasure of the M role existed, then the M role wouldn’t possess M’s pleasure either.

The joy of the M is such a fleeting, quiet presence.

It would be difficult to capture that on film, but that’s what SM enthusiasts, including M’s like me, want to see.

Thank you, Mika Suzume-san.

Please feel free to share your thoughts after reading it.

2009.2.3

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 74

緩縛(かんばく)よ、さらば

Farewell, Loose Bonds

I will set aside the farce for now and write a little about when I was hired as a rigger on another company's film set.

Truthfully, I've wanted to write about this for some time, but never had the chance.

By coincidence, I got a call from Yuri Sunohara at Fuji Planning, asking, "We'd like to revive the gatherings at Kinbiken. What do you think, Sensei?"

I felt passion in the tone of that inquiry.

I replied, "Let's do it!"

If I didn't feel passion in this kind of niche gathering, it would be worthless, and I wouldn't feel motivated to participate.

It requires passion beyond the ordinary. Passion that, you could say, carries a whiff of madness.

Common-sense passion just isn't enough.

We're not talking about doing ordinary, commonplace things, so unless I sense passion that transcends the ordinary, it's no good.

I lost motivation for the previous Kinbiken because I stopped sensing passion in the staff.

If everyone present doesn't have that gut-burning passion, that gut-twisting excitement, or even lust, that kind of surging, pallid heat, my ropes won't come alive.

Some scenes have staff who completely fail to grasp SM, merely moving limbs without passion or emotion, simply obeying the leader's commands.

Some shoots even have staff who cast cold, indifferent glances at what I do (that is, the act of binding the female model), let alone show any passion.

(You might think it's a lie, but it's true. I don't speak to such people on set. I ignore them and do the work assigned to me. They just say "Yes, sir" and obey whatever they're told.)

No, I wasn't supposed to be writing about this now. I've gone off on a tangent again.

Let's hurry on.

If we were to revive the Kinbiken gatherings, I intend to show the bondage enthusiasts who attend such intense restraints that the model can barely endure for three minutes.

It's a powerful style of binding that can only be sustained for three minutes at most.

In other words, I want to do true bondage.

Even though I say intense restraints, I won't do acrobatic things like rolling her around in shrimp-like bondage or hanging her upside down.

It's the usual, natural pose, just the shape of a very ordinary hands-behind-the-back binding (or takate kote). But I want to try a binding so severe that within three minutes the model cries out, pleading with a tearful voice, "I can't take this anymore, please untie me."

This isn't loose binding for the sake of photography. It's binding designed to be savored, to fully appreciate the expression and form of a woman writhing under the rope's tension.

That is the true bondage I strive for.

The three minutes is merely my benchmark. It's the standard.

Depending on the model, she might scream and beg for mercy within a minute, or even within thirty seconds of being bound. Regardless, I want to try tying her as tightly as possible, right at her limit.

The true beauty and eroticism of a bound woman's masochism only reveals itself with this kind of rope.

A masochistic woman who craves tight bondage will writhe and writhe in my ropes, moaning and crying, enduring while writhing, releasing an intense emotion I've never seen before. An unexpected pleasure born of pain.

If we're going to revive the Kinbiken gatherings, we must do this. Otherwise, there's no point in reviving them.

The era of superficial bondage is over at Kinbiken.

My heart is now filled with the desire to perform uncompromising, soul-infused bondage.

That said, this isn't a rejection of past Kinbiken videos.

At Kinbiken, we have always practiced quite severe, rigorous bondage.

I can say that with confidence. That's why it gained the support of many enthusiasts and sold well as a product.

In Kinbiken videos, we never have women pose in ways that expose their genitals (I have neither the inclination nor the desire for such concepts).

Much less do we ever perform the kind of "torture" that involves forcing vibrators or other foreign objects into genitals, the kind of thing that, when you think about it, isn't even particularly masochistic. It's just the kind of thing anyone might think of as normal "punishment."

We only use rope (that's why we're enthusiasts).

We have regarded using tools other than rope to torment the female body as "shameful" (that's why we're perverts. That's why we're abnormal).

However, only whips and small tools for nostril torture are occasionally used at the request of the M woman.

On other companies' "SM Video" sets, you can't perform such severe bondage that makes the model scream within two or three minutes.

Ideally, once the model is bound behind their back just before shooting begins, they should be able to endure it for an hour or two without the ropes loosening.

The binding must be done in a way that both the model and the ropes holding them can endure the entire time the camera is rolling.

This is because, after binding her, we must have the actress or model perform various actions, strike poses, insert phallic vibrators or other objects into her exposed lower body, and ultimately film extended scenes of her interacting with the male actor.

Therefore, the binding inevitably becomes merely symbolic.

It must look authentic, with ropes tightly bound without gaps, but in reality, it's merely a binding for the sake of filming.

It is pretentiously called “the beauty of tight bondage,” but in truth, calling it tight bondage is presumptuous. It is not tight bondage, but rather loose bondage for filming.

Looking back, I have called this loose bondage “tight bondage” and have bound over five thousand models and actresses over the past fifty years.

If it were real tight bondage, they wouldn’t last two or three minutes. They couldn’t endure it.

I’ll repeat myself, but in an SM video, the punishment scene is usually the climax, so it can’t possibly end in two or three minutes.

I devised and perfected fifty different ways to tie models so they could endure for an hour while bound.

From those fifty types, I further refined and varied them, ultimately demonstrating about three hundred distinct binding techniques.

I explained and serialized “Nureki Chimou’s Rope Techniques” in various magazines, complete with photographs.

Videos demonstrating these techniques were also produced, given countless titles, and distributed as commercial products.

I repeat once more.

People who have seen these videos, labelled as “bondage” but actually featuring loose binding, are now holding workshops on rope techniques all over the place.

That’s fine. If they are satisfied with that, then that’s perfectly acceptable. I have no reason to criticize them.

I have always considered my own “tight bondage” to be “loose bondage.”

This confession stems solely from that persistent sense of shame that refuses to leave my heart.

Yuri Sunohara’s passion has borne fruit. As the gathering of true bondage enthusiasts has progressed, and Kinbiken videos are set to resume, this is the moment I intend to show my comrades true bondage, not loose restraints.

Before the new members, I bound the female model with all my strength and spirit.

My ropes were intense from the very start.

I held nothing back. This was true bondage.

She tensed up and turned pale.

(This isn't like those loose ties for filming, with gaps between the skin and rope, she realized.)

I can almost hear the members' hearts stir in awe at the power of my ropes.

I was showing the real "bondage" to my comrades, who had grown tired of seeing only "loose binding."

Yes, I must make this clear here.

No matter how authentic the bondage, the fundamental way the ropes are applied is still the form of "beautiful bondage."

I cannot stray from the form of bondage beauty that inevitably arises from my own aesthetic sense.

However, what came before was, you might say, merely "loose binding beauty."

At the New Bondage Beauty Research Group (Kinbiken), I shall present you with the literal "tight binding beauty," focused with my true desire.

I will bind the model seated before me, hands behind their back, with a single rope, tightening it with force, pulling it taut.

(I love the sight of a woman bound with hands behind her back with a single rope. The more ropes there are, the more my passion seems to wane.)

Then, I tell her, "It must be painful, but please endure it for just three minutes. After three minutes, I'll untie you immediately." She nods.

Please imagine the pitiable sight of a woman seated upright in seiza, her wrists bound high and tightly behind her back with a single rope, silently nodding in response to my words.

Just imagining it will likely make some part of your insides tingle and ache with desire.

If you feel no tingling anywhere and feel no arousal, you are not a bondage enthusiast.

I make a request to the members surrounding us, cameras at the ready.

“Please film for three minutes. The ropes are this tight. If I don’t untie her soon, she’ll pass out. I’ll untie her after three minutes.” I step away from her.

Ah, the expression of pain endured by this woman, tightly bound behind her back, during these three minutes, the sensuality of her shoulders shaking, her writhing and trembling form.

Soon, her seiza posture collapses, and her body falls away.

Her hips writhe painfully and strangely, her chest heaving with agonizing breaths.

The eroticism of a single rope.

Three minutes seems short, but it’s actually quite long.

The members sigh with excitement and emotion, frantically pressing their camera shutters.

The heat of the men’s bodies and the sound of shutters drown the woman’s mind, already writhing in the pain of ropes digging into her skin, in even more bewitching, sometimes sweet waves of masochism.

Before three minutes had even passed, I untied the ropes of the woman who cried out, “I can’t take it anymore, I can’t endure it!”

I untied the ropes that had dug into her skin as if peeling them away.

After giving her a brief respite, I bind her hands behind her back once more. This time, I tie her more tightly than before, binding her with all my intent.

When three minutes pass, I release her once more.

The rope marks are etched sharply into her skin.

After five or ten minutes of rest, I bind her hands behind her back again. I show no mercy.

I repeat the binding over and over. Rope marks pile upon rope marks.

What happens after repeating this ten times?

Even I don’t know.

I've never done it before, so I don't know.

What I do know is that an intense, fierce, and profoundly erotic bondage experience, one I've never seen or experienced before, will emerge.

Yes, let me write this clearly here and now.

For us enthusiasts, the eroticism of forcing her to writhe with a vibrator thrust into her crotch is fundamentally different from the eroticism of making her writhe using only rope.

At first glance, they might seem similar, but they are fundamentally different.

No matter how pleasurable a woman looks as she gasps with her legs spread and a vibrator twisted inside her, a bondage enthusiast won't get excited.

But, seeing a woman writhing in agony, bound by ropes, arouses the enthusiast.

Even if the woman isn't naked with legs spread, even if nothing is forcibly inserted into her genitals to make her writhe, if the rope has realism and the binding has intensity, we enthusiasts get aroused and become hopelessly lustful.

How many times have I pleaded this truth about the enthusiast's desire to the heads of companies producing and selling SM-related publications and video products, and to the people working under them?

But, they wouldn't listen.

"Yeah, yeah, we know that," they'd say, "we're not amateurs, after all," but in the end, they just didn't get it.

Come to think of it, it's only natural they didn't understand.

Because no matter how much they put on an air of being enthusiasts, they weren't enthusiasts at their core.

(Oh, how many times have I uttered or written such complaints? Especially whenever I heard them lament, "SM doesn't sell anymore. You just can't make money unless you target normal sex," I insisted that if it were the real thing, it would absolutely be profitable.)

And so, for reasons like that, I decided to accept Yuri Sunohara's invitation this time.

I have no choice but to do it myself.

The details haven't been finalized yet, but if any women out there wish to experience the bondage of Nureki Chimuo, who has broken away from soft bondage, please contact Yuri Sunowara at Fuji Planning.

That is my honest sentiment, which I felt compelled to share even as I'm halfway through this "charade."

Writing this down serves to record my current state of mind.

It proves my desire. Even while writing about events from sixty years ago, my heart always looks forward, seeking new adventures and pleasures.

(Whoever says it's the lust of an old man is wrong!)

It is also proof that a seemingly trivial act like bondage, using just a single rope, can bring such obsessive, intense, and enduring pleasure.

Mika Suzume-san's Comment
Thoughts on the 74th Talking Theater
February 3, 2009 16:39

Sensei, it's Mika

I've just finished writing my thoughts on the 73rd "The Age of Famine for Bondage Photography."

After pouring out all my feelings about SM to you for the first time in ages, I feel wonderfully refreshed.

In that mood, I returned to the cover of "Talking Theater" once more, only to find, "Oh? The 74th installment of 'Talking Theater' has already been written!"

So I promptly read the 74th installment and thought, "Oh! I see.... Yes, the Sensei feels that way too," feeling a new sense of shared understanding.

Perhaps I, who reacts to everything in SM you write like this, possess a certain baseness, like those M women who "cast aside all pride and shame, roll their eyes back, and shamelessly drown in their own pleasure."

I have some experience playing.

Compared to the average person, I've had quite a bit.

But I rarely find others who share my feelings about SM like this.

So, however shallow it may seem, I want to write that I feel a deep resonance with what you've said.

"It's a binding technique so forceful she can only endure it for three minutes at most. In other words, she wants to experience true bondage."

From what I gather, this is "bondage" that doesn't stray from the principles of capture techniques, isn't it?

You're seeking a binding method that only an M could find pleasurable, aren't you?

Your "bondage technique," if I may dare to use the word "technique," is a safe form of binding that even an ordinary woman without masochistic tendencies could endure.

And that is also the binding of SM today.

In my view, it's no exaggeration to say that the bondage flooding the streets today is merely an arrangement of your "bondage techniques."

It's a binding method that boasts an overwhelming share in the "bondage" genre, a technical system that could be called the Nureki-ryu style.

However, I understand that this "new" Kinbiken involves not the Nureki style, but capture-style ropes that can truly restrain, meaning it's done without reducing the burden on the wrists or arms.

Sensei, this is perverted (please take that as a compliment).

I suspect few enthusiasts would be able to discern that.

Those who consider Nureki-style bondage the real deal might not understand why it doesn't last even three minutes.

But I understand your intentions, Sensei.

SM has become too safe, losing the tension inherent to it.

So, when the M approaches it half-heartedly, it becomes utterly ridiculous. I imagine you wanted to revive that kind of genuine, true restraint.

I no longer possess the physical strength or flexibility to endure such SM. I want to experience what that rope feels like, but I simply can't.

I've given up on receiving it as an M, knowing I'd only cause trouble by suffering nerve damage like median nerve palsy, ulnar nerve palsy, or radial nerve palsy. But I do want to see it.

How would rope with the limiter removed affect an M?

The answer to the current stagnation in SM can be seen at Kinbiken. I truly wish to witness that.

I would like to participate as one of the Kinbiken audience members.

Of course, that's assuming it's possible...

If it's something I can participate in, please let me know. I'd be thrilled and delighted to join.

Thank you, Mika Suzume-san

Please feel free to share your thoughts and impressions after reading.

2009.2.6

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 75

一時間よりも二十秒間

Twenty Seconds is Better than an Hour

Well, this person named “Mika Suzume” truly understands what I write and say so well. I’m always amazed by the accuracy and depth of her comprehension. I’m left speechless by her sharpness of expression, a skill I myself lack. Her brilliance is so overwhelming that sometimes I feel like I might faint.

The only people who grasp the behavioral patterns and psychological analysis of today’s “SM related individuals” with greater precision than I do, and express it so clearly, are firstly, The Sex Industry Museum’s Nakahara Rutsu, R-san, the veteran SM actress Uzuki Sayo, and then Rakka-san, along with Mika Suzume, who possesses truly outstanding writing skills.

Of course, there are also many bondage enthusiasts who cannot be named.

(I can tell by how my books sell and how Kinbiken videos sell.)

In her feedback to me this time, Mika Suzume wrote, “---Your “bondage technique,” if I may dare to use the word “technique,” is a safe form of binding that even an ordinary woman without masochistic tendencies could endure.”

That’s right. That’s exactly it, Mika-san.

“Safe bondage,” that’s precisely it.

My so-called “bondage technique” was developed over forty years ago when I took on the editing of a magazine called “Uramado.”

The models back then were precisely ordinary nude models, none of whom had masochistic tendencies. Therefore, it was a “bondage” that even such women could endure.

I’m now writing about this time, from a different angle and perspective, in Fuji Planning’s blog “Nureki Chimuo’s Secret Bondage Diary,” referencing the white cotton rope I used back then.

In other words, I'm confessing to how I gently, almost deceitfully, bound the models with soft cotton rope and photographed them.

The term, "beauty of bondage" is, in a way, just another form of deception.

"It's no exaggeration to say that bondage techniques flooding the streets today are merely adaptations of the Sensei's 'bondage techniques.' This method of binding, which boasts an overwhelming share in the 'bondage' genre, is essentially the Nureki-ryu system."

Mika Suzume-san writes this, but the reality is that my binding style holds an overwhelming share. Just the other day, I witnessed such practitioners at work with my own eyes and was astonished. I truly realized that their rope style is nothing more than a crude arrangement of the "Nureki-ryu."

(I was truly shocked then, and it left me feeling utterly disgusted...)

And then, deeply and profoundly, I became acutely aware of the depth of my own sin (wry smile).

With a clumsy arrangement of the Nureki-ryu, no matter how much the masochistic model rolls their eyes, snorts snot, and cries in agony, it simply cannot be sold as a product.

Genuine bondage enthusiasts aren't that foolish.

But you see, Mika-san, when we carelessly say things like "SM has become too safe, losing the tension that SM inherently possesses," it can lead to some serious misunderstandings.

"Oh, I see. So SM shouldn't be safe? It needs that tension?"

Some SM directors nod along, then proceed to hang people upside down, deliberately try to drop them, or insist on performing recklessly dangerous "torture" acts.

Forcing anxiety, pain, fear, and exhaustion onto models, then commodifying it, "How about that? Pretty amazing, huh? This is real SM!"

And then there are people who proudly puff out their chests and boast about it.

Let me give you an example.

There was a video director who, without any warning or prior discussion, suddenly shoved a model I had bound with their hands tied behind their back into a pool filled with water.

The model couldn't swim to begin with, and with her hands bound, she genuinely screamed in terror, crying out as she struggled to stay afloat.

She was rescued after about ten seconds, but it took a long time for her to regain her composure.

I was furious and got into a fight with the director.

"What if she had a heart attack from the shock?"

Even so, that director was quite pleased with himself and said, "I got some great expressions. If there's no danger, it's not SM. This is the real deal."

People like this exist in the SM industry.

I try my best to avoid associating with such people.

However, various obligations sometimes force me to go to such sets.

But once my task is done, I leave promptly.

I never discuss bondage or SM with people like that.

Mika Suzume-san uses skillful and precise expressions.

"I don't get excited without the act of 'bullying,' but even if the act of 'bullying' is real, I don't get excited."

"For SM enthusiasts (at least for me), 'bullying' must not exist, yet must also not be absent."

The expression "must not exist, yet must also not be absent" is something enthusiasts can readily understand. That's exactly right.

I would not call someone who fails to grasp this rhetoric an enthusiast.

"I (Mika Suzume) find the appeal of SM precisely on that fine line between genuine torment and fake torment. It's contradictory, genuine torment is unacceptable, yet fake torment is also unacceptable. But I believe that's the true form of realistic SM play that's permissible while maintaining a social life."

I completely agree with Mika Suzume's words.

This applies not only to personal play, but also to SM videos and photographic expressions using models.

Mika Suzume writes that the appeal of SM lies on this fine line between real torment and fake torment. I say that the exquisite pleasure of SM lies on this fine line. Of course, it's the same thing.

Rather than a line, it might be easier to understand as the thin wire of a tightrope walker's acrobatic act.

Well, either way, it's an extremely delicate sensation.

Fake torment is no good, but real torment is even worse.

It's a delicate pleasure, so for those with only coarse nerves, it's ultimately a sensual world they cannot understand or savor.

So really, it's best not to expect those who won't understand to ever get it.

It's better to just give up.

Those people have their own neatly packaged "common sense" concept of SM. They can't step even one inch outside that tiny, rigid box that fits perfectly in the palm of their hand.

"Common sense," of course, is my utmost sarcasm.

Our SM and bondage exist perpetually on a thin, delicate rope, swaying ever so slightly. It's a sensation so subtle that ordinary people can't perceive it, yet it's actually a pleasure zone as boundless as the universe.

A uniquely sensual world, vast and deep, where the bones of your limbs melt and your very marrow tingles.

But is describing it as "universe-like" in its vastness an exaggeration?

Then let me rephrase it.

The sensation of being able to feel lust as fresh and vibrant as a teenager even at eighty, and to immerse yourself deeply and passionately in pleasures that sometimes feel almost mystical.

That is bondage in the world of SM.

Since I, now eighty years old, experience and my testament to this personally, it must be true.

“In recent adult videos, there are scenes where the M role actress is so genuinely intoxicated she even has snot dripping from her nose, but I don’t really want to see that kind of footage,” writes Mika Suzume.

Mika Suzume refers to it as “AV footage” rather than “SM footage.”

That’s right.

No matter how much the producers label it “SM,” when we’re shown those kinds of “M women,” we can’t help but think of it as “AV.”

Not just Mika Suzume, but most bondage enthusiasts probably don’t want to see this kind of AV footage anymore.

(Though I did find it rare and interesting at one point...)

And I, too, don’t really want to see them anymore. Watching them doesn’t move me, it just leaves me feeling cold.

Since we’re on the subject, let me state this clearly.

No matter how much the producers promote it as “SM footage,” the reason it doesn’t sell well as a product is because it isn’t real “SM.”

Footage of models labeled “masochistic women” who spread their legs willingly, without any resistance or shame, greedily seeking and reveling in pleasure, it’s ultimately just a variation of the “adult videos” flooding the market and making us sick of them.

No matter how acrobatically or bizarrely you bind and suspend the model, if it lacks the essence and allure of “SM,” it won’t stir the hearts of true enthusiasts.

We have no intention of spending money on products that offer neither emotion nor excitement.

“The baseness of women who cast aside all pride and shame, roll their eyes back, and drown in their own pleasure,” writes Mika Suzume. And in this passage, the expression “baseness” here really got to me..

Yes, that’s it, it’s that “baseness.”

The moment my strength suddenly drains away on set is when I encounter the expressions and bodies of these women who call themselves M, their shamelessly arrogant, utterly defenseless forms, devouring pleasure without restraint.

When I'm shown the M women's figures, which are nothing but "baseness," the hidden eroticism of SM bondage vanishes pitifully. They become ordinary women, intoxicated by just another "sexual technique" as they surrender themselves to a man's caress.

And the troubling thing is, we are a breed that finds no interest in ordinary women.

Mika Suzume-san.

When Kinbiken restarted, you said that you could no longer experience the "three-minute" bondage I intended to perform, because you no longer possessed the physical strength or flexibility to endure it.

That's not true.

As I wrote before, "three minutes" is merely a guideline.

Or perhaps, a metaphor.

Two minutes, even one minute. If you couldn't endure that, then thirty seconds would be fine too.

If you couldn't bear the rope's tightness and after twenty seconds, and you said, "Ah, I can't take it anymore, please let me go," I would immediately untie you.

(Yes, my ropes involve intense torment, but it's not bullying.)

Your body's reaction during those twenty seconds should be more intense and captivating than footage of an "M woman" gasping and writhing for an hour, spread-eagle with a vibrator forced inside her.

And it should excite and move the enthusiasts watching it.

No matter how agonizing those twenty seconds may be, what remains in your mind and body should ultimately be pleasure.

Because what I aim for, in any case, is ultimately a sensual world of mutual pleasure.

If there is no deep and certain pleasure for the other person, then I too have no deep and certain joy or pleasure.

In past Kinbiken videos, to protect personal privacy, we didn't clearly film faces, meaning expressions.

What we filmed was solely the body's genuine reactions to the ropes.

Even without clearly showing the model's face, we resonated with many bondage enthusiasts and sold many copies.

Claiming that bondage material won't sell unless the model is beautiful, or that SM material won't sell unless the girl is beautiful, and then applying overly generic makeup to achieve this, is the height of foolishness that disregards the hearts of enthusiasts.

Oh, right, I just remembered.

Kujo Mikage-san, if you happen to see this message, please give me a call.

(I don't have a computer or cell phone, so please call my landline at home.)

Or contact Yuri Sunohara.

While writing my reply to Mika Suzume, I suddenly felt an urge to tie you up.

Ahh, I've gone off on a tangent again.

This time, I had intended to return once more to the era of the Tsurukame Theater.

Yet here I am, writing about how twenty seconds of intense bondage excites and arouses enthusiasts more than an hour-long video of an M woman spreading her legs.

(I wanted to write it, so what can I do?)

New, stimulating scenes keep appearing before my eyes and around me every day, leaving me no time to write about the past.

But R-san always tells me I have to write about it. Because that era is what made me who I am today, she says.

2009.2.10

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 76

ものすごく濡れながら

While Getting Incredibly Wet

The novel Double Fantasy, serialized in Weekly Bunshun by author [Yuka Murayama](#), has been published as a single volume.

Back then, I found it in the waiting room of the dentist I was seeing for treatment. I read it sporadically in Weekly Bunshun and found it interesting, so I decided to read the whole thing (published by Bugieshunju, 1695 yen plus tax).

Around the same time, a dialogue between Yuka Murayama and Ira Ishida, centered on “Double Fantasy,” was featured in the February 2009 issue of “All Yomimono.”

(Since it's the same publisher, it's probably also serving as a promotion for the new book.)

This dialogue between the two is refreshingly candid and wonderfully interesting.

I wonder if it's really okay to speak so boldly like this. I certainly couldn't do it myself.

After all, these two are now popular authors with established status and prestige. Their influence must be considerable too.

Reading the “Double Fantasy” book while glancing at the magazine interview, I found myself grinning uncontrollably. It's so entertaining, so utterly delightful, it somehow makes life feel light and buoyant.

When a man sleeps naked with a woman, the thing he worries about most is whether she is truly enjoying it.

How much she's enjoying it, he can't know. He's not a woman, so he absolutely can't know.

Since the author of “Double Fantasy” is a woman, unlike a male writer imagining and writing about it, I feel like it reveals her true feelings quite a bit.

That’s why it’s so intriguing, and why men get excited.

I find myself thinking that reading an interesting novel really is the greatest pleasure in this life.

And so, unable to resist the urge to record this feeling I have right now, I end up writing about drooling over “Double Fantasy” again, without returning to the Tsurukame Theater era.

(R-san might get upset, but this is how I feel right now, so it can’t be helped. Even though I’m enjoying this novel so much now, if a little time passes, this excitement will probably fade. I might forget the story, the characters, even the title. But the fact that I’m moved and engrossed right now is certain, so I want to honestly write down this feeling of mine, R-san!)

Damn, she’s good, this Yuka Murayama. No, calling her by her name alone feels disrespectful. From now on, I’ll write “Yuka Murayama-san” with respect and affection.

Now, where should I begin to convey the appeal of this novel?

That said, I’ve only just reached page 150 of its nearly 500 pages.

I haven’t even gotten to the part I read in the dentist’s waiting room yet.

But it really is interesting.

(I never expected [Yukio Ninagawa](#) to show up!)

I know I should wait until I’ve finished all the pages, calm down, and write about my overall impression. That’s probably the sensible thing to do. But right now, I just can’t wait.

I’m impatient.

Come to think of it, I’ve rarely been composed in my life.

I was born and raised in Asakusa, a born and bred scatterbrain.

In other words, I’m a frivolous person.

Since I’m saying it myself, there’s no mistake.

Both my father and mother were born and raised in Asakusa.

They loved entertainment, disliked working seriously, loved laziness, and were self-centered about everything.

When I was a child, it was the rainy season, and it rained every day.

My father said he hated working, so while it rained, he'd just lie around at home, sleeping on a futon spread out on the floor.

My mother slept too. They say birds of a feather flock together, and she was a lazy woman who also loved spreading out her futon and lazing around sleeping.

We three children (me, my younger brother, and my younger sister) also spent all day in the futon, skipping school and just lying around.

Futons were spread out on the tatami mats, and the five of us, parents and children, lay around all day.

Our family's futons were always damp and sticky, giving off some kind of musty smell.

I liked the feel and smell of those futons.

Oh, what was I trying to write?

That's right, I wanted to say that it's all my parents' fault I turned out to be this dim-witted, frivolous person, this clumsy vulgar individual.

I figured a vulgar Edo-period slang term like "clumsy" wouldn't be in the dictionary, but when I looked it up just to check, I was shocked.

It was there.

"Otchokochoi" Flighty and shallow-minded. Frivolous. Also, such a person.

That's just how it is. Being a scatterbrained, vulgar person since my parents' generation, there's no way I could ever write a logical, systematic critique.

So, with this "Double Fantasy", I'll just write about whatever parts I find interesting, without worrying about any particular order.

Writing in no particular order. That's the only way.

What really startled me at first was the scene depicting the heroine, a thirty-five year old screenwriter named Natsu, secretly masturbating while lying in bed with her beloved husband.

There are plenty of scenes depicting female masturbation written by male erotic novels.

They've written them energetically, sensationally, and in vast quantities; enough to feed a horse.

Even in submission magazines like "Sexual Life White Paper," there are mountains of female masturbation scenes written by male readers and contributors.

But the masturbation scene written by a female author, a young, beautiful, charming, and currently popular Naoki Prize Winner, which is so vividly raw that it makes you wonder if she really wrote this much, still manages to move me.

What really excites me is that in an interview for "All Yomimono," Yuka-san actually spoke about this very thing with Ira Ishida.

Ishida: For example, imagine you're eating at a dimly lit restaurant. I wrote about this in *Sleeping Pearl*, but I ask women to take off their panties.

Murayama: Oh my..

Ishida: If there's a tablecloth, you can't see their feet, right? So I say, "Well, take them off a bit," and she's like, 'Huh? Here?' while squirming like this (mimicking squirming), and then I say, "Could you put them on the table for a moment?" And she does.

Murayama: Woah.

Ishida: Then I pick them up, fold them so the lace shows, and tuck them into my breast pocket.

Murayama: What, that's so erotic!

Ishida: Then you use it to pay the bill or whatever.

Murayama: So then the woman's already head over heels?

Ishida: More like, she's having fun. She'll say stuff like, "Hmm, it feels kind of breezy."

Murayama: That's how you create that sense of the extraordinary.

Ishida: Not extraordinary, more like.. ordinary (laughs).

Murayama: Ordinary!

Ishida: Well, I could never say this on TV (laughs).

This talk by Ira Ishida, the Naoki Prize winning author currently at the height of his popularity, is bold and refreshingly witty.

Compared to a certain writer called “the grandmaster of the SM world”, who said, “There are stupid enthusiasts who carefully tie the wrists behind the back when binding a woman’s hands, but since the back can’t be seen anyway, there’s no need to put rope there.”

Ira Ishida’s chatter is enjoyable and likable.

(Incidentally I’m a fan of Ira Ishida’s novels and have bought and read many of his books.)

Come to think of it, that same “All Yomimono” magazine’s roundtable page a few years ago also featured that extremely ignorant remark by a certain grand master writer of the SM world.

(Reading that roundtable article made me furious and appalled, so I wrote about it in detail on Fuji Planning’s blog, “Nureki Chimou’s Secret Bondage Stories.” If you’re interested, please read it there.)

Now, following the Murayama-Ishida dialogue, there’s a remark that makes me gasp.

Murayama: So, Ishida-san, you don’t find it difficult to write sex scenes, then?

Ishida: It’s just fun, purely.

Murayama: Unlike Ishida-san, I’m honestly incredibly wet while writing them.

Ishida: Hmm, that’s nice.

Murayama: Isn’t it? (laughs). But then, after writing one scene, I get completely drained. Totally, utterly drained.

Ishida: I’m a little jealous (laughs).

Murayama: It's painful and leaves me frustrated. Words are just empty promises, after all. So controlling my own desires during the serialization was incredibly difficult.

What exactly does it mean for a young, cute female writer to "get incredibly wet while writing" sex scenes?

It's not just about getting wet.

It's about writing while getting "incredibly" wet.

It's about "getting completely exhausted after writing one scene, utterly exhausted."

That's amazing.

How can she even say something like that?

And it's a statement made in a monthly magazine published by a top-tier publisher that prides itself on its history and achievements, maintaining enormous circulation figures.

(I've been a devoted reader of this magazine since I can remember. As a boy, I eagerly awaited each issue of Nomura Koto's "Zenigata Heiji: The Detective Chronicles.")

It seems we've reached an era where such things can be stated openly even in a major magazine that could rightly be called national.

Several photos of Yuka Murayama and Ira Ishida are featured on the pages of this interview.

Ira-san's dapper appearance is familiar from his frequent TV appearances lately, but Yuka-san is rarely seen.

And this photo of Yuka... well, she's just so adorable.

Her face, wearing a slightly chubby, charming, and voluptuous white sweater, is perfectly captured.

The thought that such a charming, sensual and fresh woman writes novels like "Double Fantasy" and makes astonishing statements in magazine interviews makes a guy like me tingle all over.

The scene of Natsu, the thirty-five year old heroine in the novel, masturbating, and the image of Yuka writing that scene "while getting incredibly wet" blend together, overlapping in my mind until they become almost one and the same person.

Add a photo of Yuka herself to that, and well, the erotic fantasies spread endlessly, strangely, and eerily continuing to expand.

In their conversation, the two discuss this very thing with the flavorful language befitting writers.

Murayama: Once I started worrying about misunderstandings, it became endless, so I decided to think of everything I've written as fiction. The very words I chose to write were selected from countless others. By the time I intentionally wrote something, or, indeed, chose not to write something, it had already diverged from reality. Readers then translate it through their own experiences, causing further divergence. Thinking that way, I decided to stop worrying about trivial things, since everything becomes fiction the moment it's written, regardless of reality. I became quite relieved, resigning myself to the fact that people might think Natsu is based on me. In fact, I figured, if I'm going to strip naked anyway, I might as well do it in the middle of Ginza's busy streets (laughs).

Ishida: No, that's exactly it. With novels, everyone inevitably misunderstands, so just let them misunderstand.

You understand perfectly.

That's exactly right.

"Translation," "misunderstanding," "delusion," they're all the same thing.

Just let readers misunderstand, freely translate, and indulge in their own delusions.

For there is no greater pleasure than misunderstanding, translating and wallowing in delusion.

I was thinking of sharing a rather realistic masturbation scene from the novel here, but I decided against it due to copyright concerns.

Actually, when I read the description of this scene, I thought, "I could write something like this myself."

But then, imagining Yuka-san writing it "while getting incredibly wet," gazing at her plump, fleshy photos, adding a single rope while "translating," my lust began to surge.

In short, I'm just a lecherous man.

2009.3.4

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 77

血煙り高田の馬場

Blood-Red Smoke at Takada's Horse Market

I've taken quite a detour.

This time I'll write about the Tsurukame Theater.

Before that, I must briefly mention how I met Kataoka Tobei through Hitachi's public relations theater troupe.

Had I not crossed paths with Tobei, I doubt I would have ended up joining the Tsurukame Theater troupe, no matter how much I loved theater as a boy.

When Masako Ichimura joined this "Public Relations Troupe," her impression was dazzling and vivid. Tobei, however, seemed to have slipped seamlessly into the troupe's fold before anyone noticed.

Naturally, I only know the troupe members' stage names. When we call each other for business, it's always by our stage names.

Tobei, too, was over forty when he was conscripted and brought to this factory to make weapons, so he must have had a real name.

Yet, both I and the other troupe members all called him "Tobei-san."

And yet, no one had actually seen Kataoka Tobei perform as a kabuki actor on stage.

But he had a face that was very much like an actor's, a broad, wide face like a chopping board, with two slender, gentle eyes set upon it.

His nose and mouth were large, and his face was a fine one, well-powdered, yet only his eyes were small and gentle, set apart. He had the very air of a good natured "Tobei-san."

Despite being a professional kabuki actor, he never put on airs or acted superior toward us amateurs. Whenever we asked questions, he kindly answered everything.

He responded politely even to children like me.

However, judging by the hierarchy of the kabuki world, I guessed he was probably around the rank of “named actor” (meidaishita), not one of the leading actors who got the best roles on stage.

Having a father who loved theater meant I became knowledgeable about these things from childhood.

I practically grew up buried in the mountain of kabuki magazines my father loved to read, breathing in their dust.

When the public relations troupe was set to perform the kabuki piece “Oshiro Suzukamori,” I watched Tobei properly instructing Suzuki Keiichiro (playing Banzui Chobei) and Yoshoka Shintaro (playing Shirai Gonpachi) on kabuki movements and forms during their rehearsal.

(This man is the real deal, I thought to myself.)

Gonpachi cuts down a crowd of thugs, then draws back one leg, lowers his hips, and stares intently at the blood-stained blade. Chobei hides his face with his left sleeve, holds up a lantern, and checks the blade. Tobei performed each of these poses stylishly by himself, then efficiently taught them to the two actors.

The duo of this tall, stout Deputy Chief Suzuki from the Public Relations Department and the self-proclaimed handsome Yoshio Shintaro, formerly a silent film projectionist, was well-matched and well-received.

When we performed “Blood-Red Smoke at Takada’s Horse Market,” I played the daughter of Horibe Yahei. It was an onnagata role.

Looking back, this was my very first onnagata role.

Horibe Yahei would later become one of the forty-seven Ako ronin who stormed the residence of Kira Kozukenosuke, despite his advanced age.

This role was played by the painter, Kazato Ichiro. He, too, was perfectly suited to the part.

Tobei sat facing me in the corner of the dressing room, studying my face intently and meticulously applying my makeup.

He applied white powder to my face, neck, and nape, outlined my eyes with red and black, drew my eyebrows, and applied lipstick.

The cosmetic and makeup tools were all Tobei's own, his personal belongings.

I was intoxicated by the rich scent of the powder and the sticky sensation as it was applied to my skin.

When applying the eye makeup, Tobei's small eyes widened as wide as they could, his face coming close to mine.

I instinctively shrank back, but I still vividly recall the tiny pimples on either side of his nose, like little black sesame seeds stuck there.

Tobei even dressed me in the costume himself.

"You're looking pretty, boy, looking pretty. Stand up straight and turn around once."

For some reason, Tobei suddenly switched to a woman's voice, peering and squinting, looking at me with obvious delight.

I too, occasionally peering into the mirror before my makeup, watched my face and figure transform into that of a samurai daughter from a period drama. I felt a strange mix of embarrassment, dread, and something utterly inexplicable.

But at that moment, something else caught my eye. As I was changing, I found myself utterly captivated by it as well.

I must write about this honestly too.

Nakayama Yasubei, a rogue ronin known in the streets as a drunkard and a brawler, received a letter from his uncle and rushed to Takada's Horse Market. There he found his uncle already savagely slain by his duel opponent.

Upon learning this, Yasubei immediately drew his sword, declaring this spot the place for revenge, and engaged in a great battle against eighteen men.

A large crowd of onlookers and spectators gathered around this act of vengeance.

The residents of the poor tenement where Yasubei lived also cheered him on loudly and boisterously. It's a scene familiar from both popular theater and film.

Among these spectators were men and women from the Welfare Department, along with drama enthusiasts from other sections who had been rounded up to play their parts.

In a long, narrow dressing room about sixty tatami mats in size, the performers prepared without distinction between seniority or rank.

A girl playing one of the spectators stood up and began taking off her outer garment, entering my field of vision.

It was just as Tobei was applying lipstick to my lips with a red brush.

Still standing, she then hooked both hands under the hem of the white cotton undershirt she wore on her upper body and spun around to take it off.

The next instant, large white breasts popped out.

This was an era before bras existed. Beneath the shirt was bare skin.

Tobei was facing away from her, unaware of this. He was busily applying makeup to my face.

Seeing those two breasts, I was stunned by their overwhelming beauty.

It felt like I'd been suddenly struck on the back of the head with something hard.

They were perfectly spherical, as if a sphere had been precisely halved and the halves neatly affixed to either side of her chest, their shape vividly clear.

To me, the diameter of her breasts seemed larger than the area of her face.

There was not a hint of sagging, they were firm and full, a shape that could only be described as beautiful.

Her nipples resembled plum blossom buds.

The girl always sat at the desk at the far end of the general affairs department. I recognized her face, but I didn't know her name. We had never spoken.

She quickly put on a hada-juban, the undergarment of a town maiden, concealing those large breasts.

Thinking back now, it must have been just five or six seconds, no, maybe only two or three seconds.

But for me, in my adolescence, it was an impulsive moment.

Even now, sixty years later, I can recall that fleeting scene as if it were yesterday.

Later in life, though it was part of my job, I would touch the breasts of over five thousand young women.

It wasn't merely touching.

Sometimes I would grasp them with five fingers, twist and squeeze them, or even use all ten fingers to grasp and knead both breasts simultaneously.

Yet, the shock I felt that day as a boy, glimpsing the breasts of that nameless girl, was something I could no longer experience. I felt no eroticism.

One could say it was only natural, since I was touching them for work...

Is the sweet shock of eroticism tasted in adolescence something no one can ever forget for the rest of their life?

Or is this feeling something only I possess?

I can't help but feel that the rest of my life was perhaps dominated by that fleeting scene in the dressing room.

I have another memory associated with this "Blood-red Smoke at Takada's Horse Market."

Next to the two-story wooden building housing the Public Relations Section of the Welfare Department stood a similar wooden structure, the cafeteria for factory workers.

While today's employee cafeteria offers a rich variety of dishes, this was the era of food shortages toward the end of the war.

We were given rice mixed with large amounts of burnt-smelling soybeans, charred by air raids, and a meager soup containing some kind of seaweed, served in aluminum dishes in exchange for meal tickets.

At lunchtime, groups of female students dressed in monpe-style work clothes would come together to this cafeteria.

Brought here from their classrooms by government order to work in this massive munitions factory, they were engaged in weapons production. While eating alongside these "military schoolgirls," I said, "I'm performing in a play at the Welfare Hall this Saturday night. Would you like to come see it?"

"Wow, that's wonderful! What are you playing? A cool role?" They exclaimed in unison, looking at me with eyes full of expectation.

I was pleased with myself.

"Oh, it's a cool role. You'll all be surprised," I said, imagining myself dressed as a glamorous daughter in a period drama.

But I didn't go into details about what kind of play it was.

I felt it was something best left as a surprise to be seen. I was confident in my female role.

"We'll definitely come see it!" they said, their eyes sparkling.

And then, nearly ten of them came along and actually came to see it.

But the criticism I received after the performance was brutal.

What they had all imagined and talked about as the "cool role" was, believe it or not, the image of someone wearing a crisp white Japanese Navy officer's uniform, a dagger at the waist, and a military cap.

That was the image of the young man that the girls of militaristic Japan admired.

A pure and noble, valiant figure clad in the Navy's pure white uniform, wearing a cap with a chin strap.

What I portrayed was a samurai daughter, heavily powdered, wearing lipstick, a wig, and a long-sleeved kimono, waddling weakly from the hanamachi onto the stage.

Transformed into such a figure, gazing at myself with pride, I must have appeared to those "militaristic schoolgirls" as a "non-national" or even a "traitor."

It was probably around this time that I first realized there was a significant age gap between the values inherent in my nature and the values recognized by ordinary people.

Deputy Chief Suzuki, playing the role of Nakayama Yasubei, drew two swords, a large and small, midway through the scene, wielding them in both hands as he slashed down eighteen men one after another.

The sword fight had the sheer intensity of a Shin Kokugeki performance and drew thunderous applause.

(As an aside, I'll add this. After this, Yasubei married the daughter of Horibe Yahei, whom I portrayed, becoming Horibe Yasubei. He would later play a major role during the raid on the Kira residence.)

Six actors played Yasubei's opponents who were slain. They would be cut down, retreat offstage, reappear onstage only to be cut down again, and retreat. After being slain three times, they delivered a passionate performance, which also drew thunderous applause and cheers from the audience.

That "battle choreography" was also meticulously directed by Tobei.

After slaying eighteen men, Tobei even handled the "final strike" when Yasubei brandished both swords and struck a grand pose.

Truly, he was a man of remarkable skill and versatility.

Later, I wondered if Yasubei, being a professional actor, might already have been involved with the Tsurukame Theater at that time.

And I suspect all the costumes, wigs, swords, and other props were borrowed from the Tsurukame Theater.

But back then, I was just a child, unaware of such behind-the-scenes matters. Though I vaguely sensed the day would come when he'd be killed by the American military, I was completely absorbed in the daily changes unfolding before my eyes.

Though I feared the death that would surely come soon, for me, each day back then was a series of quite amusing, stimulating, and enjoyable events.

Even after the war ended, when there should have been no need to continue work in weapons production, the propaganda troupe somehow kept putting on plays.

I, as a boy, didn't understand any of these circumstances at all. No one explained them to me.

Even though the war ended in August 1945, the propaganda troupe continued performing at the Welfare Hall. With no other entertainment available, the audience seats were always packed.

Then, one day, Tobei came over to me and whispered, "Boy, wanna come to the Tsurukame Theater with me?"

He invited me in a voice that was almost a whisper.

“Wanna come” meant, “Wanna become an actor at the Tsurukame Theater?”

2009.4.13

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 78

福二郎時代の始まり

The Beginning of the Fukujiro Era

Led by Kataoka Tobei, I went to the dressing room of the Tsurukame Theater for the first time.

Unlike the entrance to a theater dressing room I had imagined, it was clearly the entrance to a two-story wooden apartment building that couldn't be called particularly upscale.

"The first floor of this apartment building is the dressing room, kid. Take off your shoes before you go up," Tobei said. With practiced ease, he placed his removed shoes into the built-in geta box against the right wall of the entrance, then ascended the hallway.

I followed behind him.

A hallway ran straight ahead from the entrance, flanked on either side by several rooms with wooden doors.

At the dimly lit end of the hallway, I could see a washroom and a shared toilet.

I later learned that the south-facing four and a half mat room immediately to the left of the entrance was the room of the head clerk, Nakamura Dengo.

Across the hallway from that head clerk's room, on the north side, was a six-mat Japanese style room that served as the wig-maker's room. There a man known as "Man-san" resided.

A tokoyama is a person who ties the wigs actors wear on stage. They are important artisans, not only tying the wigs but also placing them on the actor's heads, removing them, maintaining them, and storing them. Without a tokoyama, kabuki performances cannot take place.

Man-san was a man with sharp cheekbones and piercing eyes, who spoke his mind bluntly. He even critiqued the artistry of the troupe's actors.

Both the frontstage and backstage staff seemed to hold him in high regard.

Tobei appeared to be an old acquaintance of this Man-san. Opening the door to the wig-maker's room, he greeted him familiarly. "Hey, Man-chan, hello. I brought someone along," and introduced me.

While running a comb through the wig, Man-san fixed his piercing eyes on me and asked, "Boy, have you worked backstage before?"

People working out of sight of the audience are called the backstage crew (makuchi), but actors who actually perform on stage are also called makuchi.

Having grown up surrounded by the dusty theater magazines and books my father owned, and through my experience with the public relations troupe, I had naturally picked up such theater world terminology.

When Man-san asked if I had makuchi experience, I silently took my Japanese Film School admission letter out of my jacket pocket.

Then, I respectfully presented it to Man-san.

I had carelessly forgotten to mention it, but upon finishing elementary school (this was the year after the Pacific War began, and it was no longer called elementary school but had been renamed to National School), I took the entrance exam for the Japanese Film School near Sangubashi Station on the Odakyu Line and had passed.

(The principal of the Japanese Film School at that time was Eizo Tanaka.)

This was a secret from my parents.

While it was natural to be drawn to the world of the silver screen, there was another reason I took the film school entrance exam.

It was because graduating from that school would grant you something called a Special Technical Certificate, which would exempt you from the government's harsh orders like conscription or forced labor.

Ever since the lower grades of elementary school, I hated physical activity. I hated gym class, I absolutely hated sports days, and I hated the idea of becoming a soldier who had to carry a heavy rifle and march endlessly even more. Working in a factory making weapons that smelled of iron was just as repulsive to me as going to war.

I secretly took the exam without telling my parents, thinking that becoming an actor and obtaining that Special Technical Certificate (or maybe it was a Skills Certificate) would let me escape that kind of unpleasant labor. But the results didn't turn out so well.

I applied for the acting department at film school and passed all three days of exams. But during the final personal interview, [Isamu Kosugi](#) persuaded me, "You've passed, but you're still too young. Come back in two or three years." So I ended up deferring my enrollment.

Isamu Kosugi was a leading actor at the time, considered a master of his craft.

He was the head of the acting department at the film school and one of the examiners. Of course, I had seen Nikkatsu films starring Isamu Kosugi, including "Roadside Stone."

"I think it would be interesting to have a boy like you in the classroom," he said to me with a gentle, quiet smile. His deep, rich voice was exactly the same as it was on the screen.

Mixed in with nearly a hundred other applicants, mostly men and women around twenty, I was still just a kid. Small in stature too.

I was proud. I carried my acceptance letter like a protective charm from a shrine and went to the dressing room at the Tsurukame Theater.

But Man-san, the wig maker, glanced only briefly at the piece of paper I handed him, the combined printed notice of acceptance and admission permit, and coldly said, "That won't do you a damn bit of good."

Then, turning to Tobei, he brusquely snapped his chin and said, "Well then, take him straight to Master Fukunosuke's room. Everything's been arranged."

That day, stepping into the theater world, where skill and experience ruled supreme, rendering my film school acceptance letter utterly useless, remains strangely etched in my memory.

After exchanging a few words with Man-san, Tobei then took me to Ichikawa Fukunosuke's room.

It was Fukunosuke who had been seeking an apprentice.

Through the mediation of Man-san and Tobei, I became Fukunosuke's disciple from that day onward and began receiving a salary at the Tsurukame Theater.

Though I had seen Ichikawa Fukunosuke, the onnagata, countless times at the Kotobuki Theater in Honjo Midoricho, where my father had taken me, this was my first time seeing him sitting calmly in his dressing room.

"I've been thinking about names for you," Fukunosuke said in a thin, drawn-out voice, so very onnagata-like. "What about Fukujiro?"

From that day on, I became Ichikawa Fukujiro.

Here I would like to explain about the kabuki actor Ichikawa Fukunosuke. I will quote from the "Kabuki Actor Directory" published as a special October supplement to the magazine "Engekikai" in Showa 55 (1980).

His real name is Haruo Mizushima.

His address is 3-15-2 Omori Honcho, Ota Ward, Tokyo.

His stage name is Naritaya. His family crest is the gourd-shaped paulownia crest.

His teachers were Ichikawa Udanji II and Ichikawa Danjuro X.

His height is 1.54 meters.

His weight is 48 kilograms.

Career highlights: Made his stage debut in October 1920 (Taisho 9) as Ichikawa Tsurunosuke, playing the town maiden in the Nakaza production "Rokuhara Monogatari." Promoted to the main stage in November 1932 (Showa 7) as O-san and Koharu in the Miyadoza production "Shigure no Kotatsu." Changed his name to Ichikawa Fukunosuke in September 1935 (Showa 10).

Born on March 21, 1904, in Daiboji-cho, Shimanouchi, Osaka. His father, Asai Hidematsu, was a printer.

Final education: Graduated from Kansai Commercial School.

Within this "Kabuki Actor Directory," there is a section titled "People Supporting Kabuki." Ichikawa Fukunosuke is introduced there as follows, accompanied by a stage photo of him portraying Okaya in the sixth act of Chushingura.

Ichikawa Fukunosuke. One of the active members of the Katabami-za, his experience in diverse roles has proven invaluable, making him indispensable to the Naritaya lineage today. While his dialect-tinged delivery is noticeable, it is effectively utilized in his portrayal of elderly mothers in domestic plays. This was clearly demonstrated in his well-measured exchanges with his counterpart in the young actors' performance of Okaya in the sixth act of Chushingura. While he may lack the gravitas for an elderly mother in period plays, the role where his acting prowess truly shines is as Koyoshi in "Hattaicha."

It states here that he "was one of the active members of the Katabami-za," but from my (Nureki) perspective, his longest and most brilliant period was when he performed as a standing onnagata at the Kotobuki Theater in Honjo Midoricho.

After the Kotobuki Theater was destroyed in an American air raid, he became an onnagata for the newly formed Hanagat troupe, Bando Takejaku Ichiza, based at the Tsurukame Theater in Kameari, Adachi Ward. This troupe would later change its name to Katabami-za.

Even though the troupe name changed, many of the members had shared the stage since the Kotobuki Theater days.

Broadly speaking, it was essentially just a change in the troupe's name. The plays they performed stubbornly preserved the charm and tradition of what were known as "small plays."

And this "Katabami-za" became the last troupe of traditional "small-scale theater" in Tokyo. While it was indeed "small-scale theater," it was during this Fukujiro era, spent as a disciple of Fukunosuke, that I gained my closest connection to Kabuki.

Though it was only a brief period, the influence of this Fukujiro era has always been a pillar of my life thereafter.

In truth, this "Talking Theater" of mine began from a deep desire to write about, to record, those few years of that era.

2009.4.15

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第七十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 79

縄の体温について——Hさんへの返事

On the Body Heat of Rope— A Reply to H-san

To H-san.

I had started writing the seventy-ninth installment of “Talking Theater,” but since I received your earnest letter, I’ll set that aside for now and write my reply to you first.

The seventy-ninth installment of “Talking Theater” continues the story of “The Beginning of the Fukujiro Era,” so there’s no particular rush.

Reading your breathless, earnest letter, I felt I must reply as soon as possible.

Therefore, I’ve decided to write my reply to you in this 79th chapter.

Truthfully, I feel it would be best to directly include the full text of your letter here before my own writing. However, even though you used pseudonyms, a private letter remains private, and I cannot publish it without permission.

You tell me that even before you were fully grown, you knew of my existence, that of Nureki Chimuo, and have encountered everything I’ve written, the magazines I’ve created, the films I’ve made. You say you’ve quietly followed my work all this time, without telling anyone. For that, first and foremost, I must express my gratitude. I bow my head and say thank you.

For a writer, there is no one more precious than readers.

Moreover, for over a decade, you have consistently maintained your interest in what I write, create, and perform.

You say you have been captivated by each of my ideas, each of my feelings toward rope. For me, there are no words more reassuring or encouraging than these. Thank you.

You mentioned feeling confused by your own inclinations, agonizing over being an irredeemable pervert, suffering, and accumulating conflict and frustration (perhaps frustration with yourself). But you are not alone. I feel exactly the same way.

And I know many, many others who have wrestled with these same struggles as you and I.

(Having done this work for so long, fifty years now, I truly know many.)

Your sexual inclination is not something unique to you alone. It is certainly in the minority, but it is by no means a solitary, singular fetish.

In fact, I believe that those who agonize over it as seriously as you do are our true comrades.

It is precisely because you feel ashamed that you agonize.

Shameless people don't agonize.

Those who agonize possess charm.

That charm is something the other "normal," majority people lack. It's a deeply human charm and flavor.

I feel like there are more women now who, rather than agonizing, just want to satisfy their desires. They end up engaging with "rope" in convenient, easy, shallow ways.

The other day, I went to a place where such women gather, just to see. But I couldn't see them as "comrades" at all.

Watching people who know nothing of agonizing over their own sexual inclinations, who feel no shame, who simply flit about casually seeking pleasure. I cannot believe the same blood flows through their veins as mine.

I might share some common ground with those people, but they seem like a different race, unrelated to me or you.

When I see people who possess neither anguish nor shame touching the ropes, I feel as though the ropes themselves are being insulted.

In your letter, you also wrote, "I have nothing but contempt for those arrogant people who call themselves 'masters.'" I completely agree.

Because I possess "shame" and "fear," I could never presume to call myself a "master."

This “fear” carries both the meaning of “reverence” and the emotion of “dread.”

What captured my heart most in your letter was where you spoke of the temperature of the “rope” I use.

No one has ever written about my actions with the “rope” using such expressions before. It made me very happy.

You sense a warmth in my rope... I believe in your talent for feeling that way, even though you’ve never actually touched my rope.

I think these are words only a woman who is truly, deeply attached to “rope” could write.

And within the passionate words written before and after (it’s a shame I can’t share them here), I sensed your resolve to overcome shame, yet also the lingering hesitation and anguish that remained.

To be thought of so deeply by an unknown woman... it is the ultimate reward for a rope master, no, for a man.

I will gladly take your hand and wrap it in mine.

I will wrap your body in my blood-soaked ropes.

That said, I have no idea where you live or what you do. You probably know my background fairly well, but I know nothing about you.

I don’t know how to use a computer and I don’t own a cell phone.

Unless you tell me how we can meet safely, there’s nothing I can do.

Come to think of it, with someone unknown like you, we would start by exchanging letters handled by the post office (handwritten letters carry the blood and warmth of the people involved). We would get to know each other’s feelings, decide on a convenient day, set a place, and then meet.

Now, in this era of computers, pseudonyms and anonymity run rampant, and words from unidentified sources fly through the air.

It feels like meeting each other based on mutual trust has become harder, ironically.

I believe in the heart that sent me this email, overcoming hesitation and shame with desperate effort, expressing a desire to meet me.

But beyond that, I know nothing else.

I truly struggle with computer-based communication. Therefore, contacting me through the director of the Sex Industry Museum is the fastest and most reliable way.

H-san, thank you. Please write again. I'll be waiting.

2009.4.18

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 80

小芝居の役者ということ

A Bit-part Actor

I would like to write a little more about the career of my mentor, Ichikawa Fukunosuke.

In December 1985 (Showa 60), Fukunosuke was introduced in the “Kabuki Actor Directory,” also published as a special issue by “The Theater World,” alongside a black-and-white portrait, as follows:

When it comes to important supporting roles in the Kabuki world today, Fukunosuke is undoubtedly among the top five. He possesses an enduring Kabuki flavor and a rich foundation in Gidayu storytelling. In the role of Okaya in Chushingura, he approaches the level of the late [Taganojo](#), whose performance was considered a masterpiece.

The term “Nirien” refers to the kabuki world, the theater community. It originates from the story of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, who planted pear trees in the palace and used the area to train actors in their craft. It’s a slightly pretentious way of saying it.

“Engekikai¹⁶” is, of course, Japan’s only kabuki-specialized magazine, and its periodically published supplement, the “Kabuki Actor Directory,” features elegant, substantial, and splendidly rich content.

The opening color pages feature Onoe Kikugoro performing the shirabyoshi Hanako in “Kyokakashi Musume Dojiji.”

Kataoka Takao (now Nizaemon) portraying Koshiro Rokuzaburo in “Sanze So Nishikibunsho”

Bando Tamasaburo as the Wind Chime Princess in “Sakurahime Higashi Bunsho”

¹⁶ Translated to “The Theater World”

Sawamura Sojuro as Shizuka Gozen in “Yon no Kiri.” (Yon no Kiri refers to the climatic scene of the fourth act of “Yoshitsune Senbonzakura,” specifically the “Road Journey / Kwarazukan” scene.)

Matsumoto Koshiro dancing the role of the Kyogen performer Ukon in “Renjishi.”

Nakamura Kichiemon portraying Oboshi Yuranosuke in “Kana Tehon Chushingura.”

Nakamura Tomijuro performing “Kurama Shishi.”

Nakamura Fukusuke (now Nakamura Baigyoku) as Takechi Jujiro in “Ehon Daikoki.”

Nakamura Kankuro (now Kanzaburo) as Shoomaru in “Sugaware Denju Tenarai Kagami: Terakoya.”

Nakamura Kotaro (now Nakamura Fukusuke) as Shizuka Gozen in Yoshino-yama from “Yoshitsune Senbonzakura.”

Bando Yasozo (now Mitsugoro) as Takabe Genzo in “Sugawara Denju Tenargakki: Terayoka.”

Nakamura Matsue (now Nakamura Kaishun) as Princess Tachibana in “Imoseyama Onna Teikin.”

Ichikawa Sadanji as Ko Moranao in “Kana Tehon Chushingura.”

Ichikawa Danshira as Shin Chunagon Tomomori in “Yoshitsune Senbonzakura.”

Kataoka Gato as King Zhou in “Tamamo-no-mae Kesho Kisho.”

Bando Minosuke (who later became the ninth Bando Mitsugoro. The current Mitsugoro is his son, the tenth.) as Tonbei in “Shinrei Yaguchi Watashi.”

Sawamura Tanosuke as Okumurasaki in “Kan.”

Kawarasaki Gonjuro as Tsuribune Sabu in “Natsu Matsuri Naniwa Kagami” (This Gonjuro was the third generation, the current Gonjuro is the fourth generation.)

Nakamura Chitaro (now Nakamura Kanzaru) as Tokubei in “Sonezaki Shinju.”

Nakamura Shinjiro (now Nakamura Kinsuke) as Miuranosuke in “Tamamo No Mae Kesho Kisho.”

Nakamura Utagage dancing the role of Genpachi, the wish-granting monk, in “Ukare Bozu.”

Otani Tomoemon as the courtesan Usugumo in “The Chivalrous Man and the Spring Rain Umbrella.”

Nakamura Hashinosuke as the spirit of Shin Chunagon Tomomori in “Funabenkei.”

Nakamura Kotaro (now Nakamura Sensaku) as Oyana in “Tamamo No Mae: The Shining Robe.”

Ichikawa Monnosuke as Minamoto no Yorimitsu in “The Two-Faced Dojoji.”

Bando Hikosaburo as Wada Hyoe Hidemori in “Moritsuna’s Camp.”

Ichimura Manjiro as Kaoze Gozen in “Chushingura.”

Nakamura Shibajaku as Princess Asaka in “Settsu Gobo Tsuji.”

Kataoka Shutaro as Kishu no Kuniya Koharu in “The Love Suicide at Amijima.”

Nakamura Tozo as the hairpin seller Orin in “Roben Sugi Yurai.”

Nakamura Utaroku as Minamoto no Yoshitsune in “Yoshitsune Snebonzakura.”

Nakamura Tokizo as Omiwa in “Imoseyama Fujin Teikun.”

Onoe Tatsunosuke as Danshichi Kurobe in “Natsu Matsuri Naniwa Kagami” (This name, Tatsunosuke, refers to the first generation. The second generation Tatsunosuke succeeded as the fourth generation Matsugoro several years ago.)

Sawamura Tojuro as O-Mitsu in “Nozakimura.”

Ichikawa Ennosuke dancing the role of Sato Tadanobu in “Yoshitsune Senbozakura: Yoshino-yama.”

Nakamura Sensaku (now the fourth-generation Sakata Tojiro) dancing “Hona.”

Ichikawa Danjuro as Hanakawado Sukeroku in “Sukeroku Yuen Edo Zakura.”

Following these vibrant color pages, a single black-and-white page features twelve leading actors of this era, renowned for their exceptional talent and popularity. Presented as a

“Selection of Outstanding Stage Photographs,” each image is accompanied by commentary from the photographer.

Specifically: Nakamura Kaemon performing Hanako in “Kyokako Musume Dojoji.”

Once Matsugoro (Matsugoro III, the title “III” was posthumously conferred upon his eldest son, Tatsunosuke, and his descendant from Tatsunosuke is the current Matsugoro IV) portraying Fuwa Banzaemon in “Sankae Nagoya.”

Onoe Baiko performing the Lion Spirit in “Kagami Jishi.”

Ichimura Uzaemon as Kumagai Naozane in “Ichinotani Futaba Gunki.”

Jitsukawa Nobuyoshi dancing “Ayatsuri Sanbaso.”

Nakamura Matagoro as Kiyotsugu, the master carpenter, in “Shiranami Gonin Otoko.”

Kawarasaki Kunitaro of the Senjinza troupe as O-Fumi in “O-Fumi the Slain.” (This refers to the previous Kunitaro, the fifth generation. The current Kunitaro is the son of Arashi Yosaburo and succeeded as the sixth generation.)

Nakamura Shikan as the second shite in “Kyokakashi Musume Dojoji.”

Nakamura Sukeremon performing Umegae in “Mugen no Kane.”

Kataoka Nizaemon performing Heisaku in “Numazu.” (This Nizaemon is the 13th generation. The 14th Nizaemon was posthumously given to Gado, the eldest son of the 12th generation. The current Nizaemon is called the 15th generation.)

Kataoka Gado as Oen in “Fuin Giri.”

Nakamura Kanzaburo (the 17th generation; the current Kanzaburo is the 18th generation) as Danjuro Kurobe in “Summer Festival.”

Carried away, I ended up copying down the names of my favorite actors one after another.

As always, I write each character by hand on manuscript paper, and R-san types it up neatly on the computer. It must be incredibly nerve-wracking work. Sometimes when I see her eyelids swollen, I feel sorry for her.

Those uninterested in kyogen names and actors will likely skip over this.

Even thinking that, I kept writing as if possessed.

I'd like to write more names of my favorite actors, but I'll stop here.

I've seen every single play these actors performed in.

Every time I copy down a name, I hear these actors' voices in my ears.

I've seen the late Kunikitaro's "O-Fumi Being Cut Down," Gado's Oen in "Breaking the Seal," and Matagoro's master carpenter in "Hamamatsuya," all of them. Not just once or twice, but many times over.

But I can't see them anymore.

They've all gone to the other world.

Each of their stage appearances holds its own vivid memory for me. And yet, of these twelve, only two remain alive today!

We must return to the original topic.

When Ichikawa Fukunosuke is discussed, he is first labeled as an "actor from the small theater." He is also sometimes called an "actor from the Katabami-za." These are synonymous terms.

The term "small-scale theater" carries a derogatory undertone. It cannot be denied that actors worthy of this derogatory label exist.

However, there are also actors with substantial, undeniable skill who cannot be dismissed as inferior. Most possess unique personalities, are highly skilled, and have excellent artistry that truly entertains the audience.

"Fukunosuke's performance as Okaya in the sixth act of Chushingura rivals that of the late Taganojo," written in the introduction in "Engekikai," succinctly praising Fukunosuke's artistry.

This was, of course, Fukunosuke's portrayal of "Okaya" after he had moved from the "Katabami-za" to the grand Kabuki stage.

I watched this "Okaya" from the curtain-viewing seats at the Kabuki-za. Incidentally, I also saw the late Taganojo's Okaya. Taganojo was an actor hailed as a master of the role.

Ah, I really must stop writing things like this. If I start expounding on the merits of little plays here, there'll be no end to it. I'll just keep veering off on tangents.

Though somewhat different in quality, I've been frequently watching popular theater with R-san for several years now. Just a few days ago, at the Shinohara Entertainment Hall in Jujo, I unexpectedly saw a masterful performance that seemed to carry on the tradition of Hakata Ninka's "Warudassha" (ah, that word might be obsolete now too) and was deeply impressed.

I'm about to go off on a tangent again. Back to the main point.

In short, I wanted to speak of the refinement and high artistic quality of my teacher, Ichikawa Fukunosuke's artistry. And I wanted to say that this was fully recognized within the kabuki world of that time.

If Fukunosuke's artistry and character, which I encountered at the Tsurukame Theater immediately after the war, had been vulgar and lacking in refinement, my memories would have been entirely different.

No, they might not have remained as memories at all, but vanished entirely.

Though it was a truly brief period, I feel that the mysterious, magical power that seeped into and permeated every pore of my skin, my entire body, at that time, became a pillar supporting my life thereafter.

It's not just that I remember it because I was under twenty, a time of heightened sensitivity.

That's why, even after sixty years, it hasn't faded, I haven't forgotten it, and with a stiflingly vivid realism, remember as if it were yesterday (though I've already forgotten yesterday). My feelings from that time come back to me, raw and vivid.

2009.5.8

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 81

KさんとLさんへ

To K-san and L-san

Feeling quite content, I ramble on about memories from my youth, or rather, my boyhood days, when suddenly, right before my eyes, another exciting new event appears in various forms.

Among these events are some I must record now, forcing me to interrupt the nostalgic stories I'm happily immersed in.

As those reading both this "Talking Theater" and the "Secret Bondage Stories" I'm writing in parallel will understand, the "Secret Bondage Stories" me is also incredibly busy right now with the reopening of the Kinbiken.

Recounting memories is, in a way, what you might call a "retired gentleman's" job.

For someone like me, too poor to have free time, achieving the rather splendid status of a "retired gentleman" is quite difficult.

That said, I can't help but worry about how it will turn out when compiled into a book, since the serialized story jumps around so much every single time.

I'm actually writing this "Talking Theater" with the intention of crafting a full-length novel.

And that concludes this "preface."

In other words, this is my excuse for setting aside the me of the Fukujiro era from over sixty years ago and returning to the present story.

A call from my manager, R-san.

“We’ve received an email from someone named K-san. It requires a response from you. Please write it quickly. Responses to such important readers must be handled as promptly and reliably as possible.”

She said this in a rather stern tone. Scary.

If I receive emails that don’t really matter whether I reply or not, or emails I can’t possibly reply to, R-san never says a word to me.

But when it’s an email requiring a reply, R-san sternly orders me, “Write it.”

“Yes, understood. I’ll write it right away,” I reply.

And then I immediately get to work.

I interrupt the first article for the Kinbiken restart, which I’ve been writing consecutively in the “Secret Bondage Stories” section, and now shift to the current story of this “Talking Theater.”

To summarize the email from K-san, it goes like this.

I’m K, of the couple who had Sureki Sensei tie us up for a photo shoot recently published in a certain magazine.

I was amazed by the beauty of your ropes.

That she could show such a beautiful expression... it was truly beautiful, and it’s still burned into my mind, refusing to fade.

She herself, looking at the images, was surprised by the beauty of the bondage and her own expression.

Thank you so much for allowing us this truly precious experience.

I apologize for leaving without properly expressing my gratitude. Please accept my thanks here. Thank you.

I am also deeply grateful for the invitation to the Kinbiken regular meeting scheduled for next month.

Unfortunately, I cannot attend next month due to scheduling conflicts, but if meetings are held the following month or the month after, we would very much like to attend together.

As someone who has experienced your ropes on her body and been captivated by both your ropes on my body, and the beauty of bondage that reveals the heart's shame, I would be truly honored to receive an invitation.

Also, I would like to request your permission to post on my website about the atmosphere during the recent photo session, and about you.

I wish you continued success in your future endeavors.

The URL below is for the site I operate.

http://~[Remaining text omitted]~

"The URL below..." This means absolutely nothing to me, as I don't own a computer.

I also don't understand what a "site" is.

Numbers and letters are lined up side by side like a code, but of course, I don't understand that either.

With codes like this, I have no choice but to ask R-san to "decipher" it for me.

What follows is my reply to K-san. As usual, I wrote each character by hand with a pen on manuscript paper, and R-san transcribed it character by character onto the computer to send to the other party. R-san, thank you for your constant efforts. I truly appreciate it.

K-san, and L-san, who came as a couple with K-san.

Thank you for your hard work during the recent shoot.

It was a fun day of shooting.

The photography staff at that publisher, starting with Photographer A, are always polite, kind, and considerate to the models. I always enjoy working with them and have a great time every time.

You were able to respond to a casting call from a good publisher.

Just between us, there are some terrible publishers out there.

When they discover a model has masochistic tendencies, they deliberately use harsh language and treat them roughly, saying things like, "You're a masochist, so you must like this kind of treatment," completely missing the mark.

Then they push the model to the point of exhaustion.

Just as the model becomes utterly exhausted, so does my heart.

Why do I go to such mentally draining shoots? I've written about the reasons several times before. But I'll write it again.

Because, just before the shoot starts, while I'm tying them up, and for those few seconds immediately after I finish binding them, they show me a truly wonderful masochistic reaction.

It is precisely the beauty of bondage filled with the shame I crave, the very embodiment of masochistic sensual beauty that intoxicates my heart.

I believe K-san, who recently experienced a shoot for the first time, understands this feeling of mine very well.

(I think it's actually hard to understand without experiencing that kind of scene. That is, the beauty of bondage shines most brightly in the process of the woman being tied up and in the moments immediately after she's bound.)

It's the photographer and the rest of the filming crew who instantly destroy those wonderful few seconds of bondage and shame beauty, gradually turning it into a torture endurance contest.

Just to be clear, the shoots conducted by that publisher's staff that K-san and L-san experienced were never like that.

That staff always pursues sensual beauty over cruelty.

When I exclaim, "How lovely! How beautiful!" they too feel "Yes, it's lovely! It's beautiful!" and shoot with great enthusiasm. Both K-san and L-san were actually present on set and witnessed this firsthand.

Even if the shoot later devolves into an unbearable torture endurance contest, the vivid erotic masochistic beauty I first bound and felt with my own skin will never fade from my mind.

The time I enjoy is very brief, but precisely because of that, it holds an intense, sweet flavor. To savor that pleasure, even knowing it's a torture endurance contest shoot, I head out as the "bondage specialist," carrying the ropes on my back.

Is this also what you'd call the karma of being a rope enthusiast?

This feeling of mine, those who don't understand will never grasp it, but I believe K-san and L-san, who recently joined me for a shoot, will understand.

Oh dear, I've gone off on a tangent again without even realizing it.

I must write my reply to K-san.

First, we plan to hold regular meetings of the Kinbiken once a month.

K-san mentioned she won't be able to make it to this month's meeting. In that case, I recommend you sign up for the next meeting now.

We will not be sending out invitations.

We've already received sign-ups for the next meeting from several people.

Once we reach capacity, we'll start rolling people over to the following month. Signing up early is the surest way to secure your spot.

My role is simply to tie up the model while providing commentary (yes, I'm the bondage specialist here too), so I have no knowledge of the administrative details whatsoever.

Please do come to the meeting, together with that lovely L-san.

I'm already looking forward to the prospect of tying up the fresh and vibrant L-san again at the meeting.

The beauty in L-san's eyes when she was intoxicated by my ropes had a special flavor, something you don't find in professional models.

Reply, part two.

Please feel free to write about your experiences with the publisher's photo shoot the other day.

Feel free to write about me as well. Having been written about in various ways over the past sixty years, I'm perfectly fine with whatever you write. Being written about is one of the important jobs. If nothing is written anymore, it's the end.

But please, if possible, write about me in a complimentary way (laughing).

No matter how old you get, people always enjoy being praised.

K-san, L-san, let's meet again at the Kinbiken venue. Stay well.

2009.5.12

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 82

手書きのビラ

Handwritten Flyer

The conversation stalled when we reached the Tsurukame Theater, and after that, it just wouldn't move forward.

While repeatedly writing about this era, some parts have overlapped, making things a bit confusing.

I've lost track of how far I've written myself.

I'll take the plunge and move the story forward significantly.

"Okawa Kogyosha owned not only the Tsurukame Theater but also a small theater called the Shirahige Theater on the east side of the Sumida River.

This theater, too, was originally a movie theater that had been remodeled.

The indiscriminate bombing by the American air force was particularly severe from Honjo to Fukugawa, causing many deaths, but this corner of Mukojima miraculously survived the fire.

They widened the movie theater's stage, extended a small hanamichi, added a curtain, and made it suitable for plays.

Okawa Kogyosha divided the 'Hanagata Kabuki Troupe' from the former Kotobuki Theater in Honjo Midoricho between these two small theaters, the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahige Theater, and had them perform alternately.

They separated the two stars, Bando Tsuruzo and Bando Takejaku, assigned actors to each, and formed two theater companies.

In essence, the 'new' Hanagata Kabuki became two separate troupes, one led by Tsuruzo and the other by Takejaku.

They then staged performances at the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahage Theater, alternating weekly.

Ichikawa Fukunosuke was an onnagata in the Bando Takejaku troupe.

Therefore, as Fukunosuke's disciple, I naturally became a member of the Takejaku troupe."

In the sixty-eighth installment of this "Talking Theater," I wrote about the above.

I intended to continue from there, but my memory has scattered, and I don't know where to begin.

After several days of hesitation, I had an idea: I'd simply transcribe my diary entries from that time.

That way, I'm sure I'll be able to move forward easily.

I crawled on my stomach, burying my head deep inside the closet crammed full of old books and documents.

Covering myself in dust, I laboriously dragged out a cardboard box shoved into the darkest, farthest corner.

Opening the lid, I found over thirty diaries from more than sixty years ago (Oh, it really has been over sixty years!) packed tightly inside, lying silent.

(Yes, to me, those diaries felt as if they were breathing.)

But then I started wondering again, what's the point of writing about things from sixty years ago now?

That feeling and the feeling that I must write are constantly intertwined within me.

But anyway, I searched for the one volume that should have notes on the plays performed by the Bando Takejaku troupe.

It was hard to find. My hands became covered in dust. I sat down in front of the closet and, taking my time, finally found that one volume.

It was a diary, its corners worn down and tattered.

When I opened the pages, there were the pen strokes I had written over sixty years ago.

There, unmistakably, was the me from sixty-odd years ago, a disciple of Ichikawa Fukunosuke and a member of the Bando Takejaku troupe.

Not only the plays I performed, but my daily life back then and the feelings of my heart were etched within. The blue ink letters truly seemed to breathe.

I found myself engrossed in reading the pages I had opened.

Within those words was a me that was not the me of today.

The me in my memory should have been living happier, brighter days during this time.

The me in the diary spent each day in anxiety and doubt, lost, tormented, and starving.

While it's common for adolescence to be troubled, the image of the boy here was pitifully, almost cruelly, painful.

Calling myself pitiful is perhaps self-indulgent, but after more than sixty years, one can see oneself as objectively as if one were someone else. So please forgive me.

When I say I was starving, it wasn't just spiritually. I was actually, physically starving.

The war had ended, and the bombing by the American air force had ceased, but a food shortage was upon us.

I suffered from hunger pangs, constantly living with the awareness of starvation right behind me.

That fear of death was more immediate, more vivid, and present around the clock than the American bombing raids over Tokyo.

I was as thin as a skeleton.

(And what of me now? Horribly ugly and slovenly fat. It's because I gorge myself daily without restraint. Flab bands loosely around my belly, my back has stooped, my legs have shortened. I'm so hideous I can't bear to look at myself in the mirror. Out of sight, out of mind.)

Over sixty years ago, I was a thin boy with a fragile, vulnerable heart.

But now, when I look back on that time, only the images of a boy living joyful days, filled with bright hope, right after the war ended, comes to mind. All I have now are sweet memories. That's why this "Talking Theater" is filled only with pleasurable recollections.

I'm getting too carried away. I'm trying to write only about pleasant things.

Over the long years, I've forgotten all anxiety and suffering, leaving only the sensation of pleasure lingering in my mind and body.

But the diary from over sixty years ago brought back the days of anxiety and suffering with raw, vivid realism. Perhaps it was the power of the boy's handwritten words, carved out one character at a time.

But I shall refrain from detailing here those anxieties, doubts, skepticism, and suffering.

For now, I must force myself to brighten my mood and write about the plays performed by the Takejaku troupe.

Otherwise, this "Talking Theater" won't move forward. Right, first, I'll just list the plays performed by the Takejaku troupe. Then, somehow, I'll push this writing forward.

Tsurumake Theater

1. Chidori Tsukishiro Nagare: Before the Torii Gate. Act One

Matsushima Chita.....Sawamura Kisaburo

Benten Teru.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke

Tokuzo.....Umezawa Hideo

Akashi Shimazo.....Bando Takejaku

2. Comedy: The Substitute Servant. Three Scenes (Okawabata, Before Kuroda Residence, Inside Kuroda Residence)

Kuroda Sakyo.....Sawamura Kisaburo

Servant Kompei.....Onoe Takenosuke

Chikuan.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke

Kuroda's Servant.....Umezawa Hideo

Kuroda's Servant.....Ichikawa Fukujiro (Nureki)

Takaoka Ryunosuke.....Bando Takejaku

3. Battle of Kawanakajima: Terutora's Banquet Scene

Mother: Karakami.....Onoe Takenosuke

Daughter: Masaru.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke

Terutora.....Bando Takejaku

This was a note-like description.

Nothing else is written. This was scribbled in the margins of my diary in October 1945, when I was fifteen years old.

I now wish I had recorded the exact date and time of the performance, the duration, the admission fee, and the number of audience members in greater detail.

But thinking about it, a fifteen year old child could hardly have had the mental space to accurately document such factual information.

Back then, I simply wrote things down as I felt, following my emotions.

“Simply as I felt, following my mood and emotions” is because these characters are written in a copycat style of Kanto-ryu calligraphy. A faint Kanto-ryu written with a pen and blue ink.

This title and cast list were copied from a poster displayed on the wall behind the left-side hanamichi on the stage of the Tsurukame Theater.

That poster, too, was a very crude, single-color ink affair, likely written by someone at the theater.

It was the period immediately after the war, when Tokyo was littered with burnt ruins and every kind of material was in short supply.

There was absolutely no synopsis or anything resembling a program.

There were no printed promotional posters either.

The only advertising consisted of small, handwritten, single-ink-color posters plastered on utility poles around town.

Even so, the customers came. It was an era when entertainment was the only thing available.

2009.5.13

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 83

白鬚劇場のこと

About Shirahige Theater

「島千鳥月白浪」is correctly written as “Shima Chidori Tsuki Shiranami.”

It is a Meiji period play by Kawatake Mokuami, a “[zangiri](#)” play.

“Torii-mae” refers to the area in front of the torii gate of Kudan’s Shokonsha, the present-day [Yasukuni Shrine](#).

It is unusual to perform only this scene from the long tale of retribution, making it very much like a “small play.”

Several years ago, the National Theater staged a full performance of this “Tori-chidori.” When the late Ichimura Uzaemon (17th generation) appeared, dressed in a suit, wearing leather shoes, and holding a folding umbrella in one hand, the audience murmured in surprise for a moment.

The story of the comedy “Migwari Yakko” is as follows.

A lord of rather poor character bought a new sword. To test its sharpness, he sent one of his servants (a yakko, middleman or retainer) on an errand to a friend’s house, carrying a letter.

The letter instructed the friend to kill the servant and test the sword’s sharpness.

It is a cruel tale in which the servant, carrying the very sword that will kill him, sets off for the samurai’s residence.

The samurai devises a plan to save the servant’s life, and the story ends as a comedy. The compassionate samurai was played by the troupe leader, Bando Takejaku.

I played a middleman among the protagonist Sukomahei's (played by Onoe Takenosuke) companions, a role with no lines. This was my first stage appearance at the Tsurukame Theater.

"The Battle of Kawanakajima: Terutora's Meal Service" is a truly magnificent classical Gidayu tale.

Its original title is "The Battle of Kawanaka Jima in Shinano Province," but nowadays only this "Terutora's Meal Service" scene is performed. And even then, it's only done in so-called "short plays." In other words, it's a rare, precious one-act piece.

(I seem to recall it being performed once at the Tokyo Kabuki-za a few years ago, but unfortunately, I couldn't go see it at the time.)

Above, I've written very roughly about the three plays I performed in when I first stood on the stage (or rather, at the edge of the stage) with the Takejaku troupe.

Even just these three plays hold so many memories, and I have mountains of things I want to write about.

But if I wrote all that, there'd be no end to it.

For example, memories about "Torii-mae."

The protagonist, Akashi no Shimazo, has a line when he tries to persuade his fellow rogue, Matsushima Chita, to become a good man.

I absolutely adore this section of dialogue, so quintessentially Mokuami in its famous cadence. Years later, I even visited the grave of Sokuzenshinji (aka the Phantom Thief [Nezumi Kozo](#)) at Ryogoku Ekoin Temple. The lines are:

"...They say Nezumi Kozo could see through the darkness at night, but you, doing the same thievery, can't see a damn thing. Go pay your respects at Sokuzenshinji's grave and drink some shikimi water. What's this? Drawing your dagger to threaten me? You think you'll cut me? You might chip the corner of this stone monument, but you won't chip my skill. Go on, cut me if you dare."

There's a legend that the thief Nezumi Kozo was skilled at gambling. Since ancient times, gambling enthusiasts have chipped off the corner of the stone monument and kept the fragment as a talisman.

Now, the grave is completely covered with wire mesh, preventing anyone from touching it.

Instead, right next to that stone monument, a stone grave specifically prepared for gambling-loving pilgrims to chip away at is somehow odd.

I don't do horse racing or pachinko, but next to Ekoin Temple is a hall called Theater X. When I go there to see a play, I stop by Nezumi Kozo's grave. I enjoy seeing how the substitute stone has been chipped away.

It's amusing that such a silly superstition, passed down from the Edo period, still lives on today.

...Well, if I start writing down all the related memories like this, there's no end to it.

(Come to think of it, this "end" is also a kabuki term, referring to the end of a play or the climax of a scene.)

If I'm not careful, the story veers off course endlessly and just keeps expanding.

While writing this manuscript, I catch myself unconsciously murmuring in a kabuki tone, "They say Nezumi Kozo could see through the darkness of night..." using the voice of Bando Takejaku from over sixty years ago, I find myself lost in a pleasant reverie.

R-san says, "Even if you get carried away or the story expands, just write it. Write it down no matter what. In this era, the only person who knows these things is you now, so write diligently without hesitation." She stares straight at me, her expression resolute.

I, too, want to immerse myself in recollection, writing down whatever comes to mind, rambling on.

But that won't be possible, will it?

I inevitably end up considering the overall balance.

So, I push forward, eliminating or omitting sentimental feelings as much as possible.

From October to November 1945, the Takejaku Troupe relocated from the Tsurukame Theater in Kameari, Katsushika Ward, to the Shirahige Theater in Mukojima, Sumida Ward, where they performed.

Ichikawa Fukunosuke, the troupe's leading onnagata, and his apprentice Fukujiro, that is, myself, naturally performed at the Shirahige Theater as well.

The repertoire at that time.

1. Chidori Island, Moonlit Waves Before the Torii Gate, Act One

The lead role of Akashi no Shimazo is naturally played by Takejaku, but the supporting role of Matsushima Chita has changed from Kisaburo to the newly joined Sawamura Tetsuzo.

Kisaburo's presence vanished from this performance onward. In other words, he had left the Takejaku troupe. The reason for this departure was beyond the understanding of a lowly rookie like myself.

All I knew was that Sawamura Tetsuzo had joined the troupe in Kisaburo's place.

I had liked the actor Kisaburo since the days of the Honjo Kotobuki Theater.

He had a commanding presence, a handsome face, and the dignified bearing of a true kabuki actor, specializing in villainous roles with a fine delivery.

No matter how hateful the villain he played, there was always a certain charm about him, and I believe he was beloved by the audience.

Whenever Kisaburo appeared, the women in the audience would immediately call out in vibrant voices, "Ki-kuniyaya!" "Kino-kuniyaya!"

(Looking back now, the shouts from the audience at the Kotobuki Theater came almost exclusively from young women.)

The actor Sawamura Tetsuzaburo would remain with the Takejaku troupe for some time afterward and perform actively, but I didn't particularly like him. He was small and frail in build and face, and his delivery was poor, with a raspy voice that didn't resonate well. Yet Tetsuzaburo would go on to play one important villain role after another for the troupe.

2. Comedy: The Substitute Servant, Act Three

The newcomer Sawamura Tetsuzaburo played Lord Kuroda Sakyo, the protagonist and crucial supporting role. All other cast members were the same as in the Tsurukame Theater production.

I was one of the servants (yakko) of the Kuroda household. My line came after my senior, played by Umezawa Hideo, delivered, "The lord bought a new sword. Better not get too close to it."

My response was: "Why on earth is that?"

That was my entire line. Just that one line.

3. Ishii Tsuneemon. Scene 6.

The “Sixth Scene” consists of: Outside the Wall, Tsuneemon’s Residence, Takao’s Room, Outside Yoshiwara, the Brothel, and Outside the Wall. The cast was:

Ishii Tsuneemon.....Bando Takejaku
Takao Tayu.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Geisha.....Onoe Otojo
Waitress.....Bando Reiko
Chugami Ichisuke.....Onoe Takenosuke
Ito Satota.....Kataoka Tobei
Disciple 1.....Umezawa Hideo
Disciple 2.....Arisawa Kotaro
Disciple 3.....Ichikawa Fukujiro

This cast list is also a copy I made of a handwritten poster posted behind a short diagonal hanamichi stage left.

The area around the Shirahige Theater was also a district of low-roofed, blackened, soot-stained wooden houses in Tokyo’s lower town, which had narrowly escaped destruction in the American air raids.

It was a rather improvised production, using a slightly modified, fire-scarred, run-down movie theater converted into a makeshift stage.

The theater’s front and back, the dressing rooms, everything looked visibly poor. There were absolutely no programs, synopses, printed flyers, or posters. It was, after all, the immediate postwar period, a time when all supplies were scarce.

I had never heard of the play “Ishii Joemon.” It wasn’t mentioned in old theater books or kabuki magazines. It seemed like the kind of play only staged in small-time theaters.

Set in the glamorous Yoshiwara pleasure quarter, it was a play that mixed and mashed together stories like Konya Takao, Sukeroku, and Sano Jirozaemon.

Yet it was a bright, easy-to-follow story, thick with comedic flavor.

The decision to replace the heavy, serious Joruri piece like “Terutora’s Banquet” in the third act with the simple and straightforward “Ishii Tsuneemon” was undoubtedly the promoter’s request.

The maid at the courtesan house, Sakamoto Reiko, was an actress. This Reiko also performed at the Honjo Kotobuki Theater. Her name appears in the playbill.

In other words, “small plays” meant that when there weren’t enough actors, actresses would also appear within the kabuki performances. After this, several actresses would perform with the Takejaku troupe.

On the stage of “grand kabuki,” actresses could not appear, except for child roles. Any female role, no matter how minor, was played by an onnagata.

Breaking this rule would mean kabuki ceases to be kabuki.

2009.5.20

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 84

石井常右衛門

Ishii Tsuneemon

Tsurukame Theater is located about a three-minute walk from Kameari Station on the Joban Line, meaning it's easily accessible by train. Even visitors from far away can take the train to come see a play.

To reach Shirahige Theater, tucked away on the back side of Meiji-dori across Shirahige Bridge over the Sumida River, one must walk over twenty minutes from Minami-Senju Station on the Joban Line along a desolate, lonely road littered with bombed-out ruins.

Another nearby station is Tobu Isesaki Line's Tamanoi Station (now Higashi Mukojima Station), but disembarking there still requires a walk of nearly thirty minutes.

Even so, fans from the Honjo Kotobuki Theater days still come by daily, about four or five people. Still, the audiences were mostly made up of local residents.

Compared to the weighty historical plays with Gidayu narration, like "Terutora's Banquet" featuring characters such as Takeda Shingen, Nagao Terutora, Naoe Yamashiro, and Yamamoto Kanketsu, the more accessible and relatable plays for people around the theater, specifically the Mukojima neighborhood, are the domestic plays (sewamono) where the high-ranking courtesans of Yoshiwara shine in all their splendor.

From the perspective of the theater operators, it seems only natural that they adapted the story of "Koya Takao," which features a dye shop artisan as its protagonist, into the brightly comedic "Ishii Tsuneemon," reimagining it as a tale of naive, simple-minded samurai.

Around this time, I had read nearly all two hundred volumes of the Shun'yodo published "Complete Collection of Japanese Plays" and the similarly Shun'yodo published "Complete Collection of Meiji and Taisho Literature" from my father's bookshelf (it was wartime and postwar, so there was little else to read). Yet, even in theater magazines, plays like "Ishii Tsuneemon" never appeared.

It was probably a play only performed in small-scale productions. Or perhaps it was a play only staged by troupes now referred to as “popular theater.”

Through this “Ishii Tsuneemon,” I learned lines like: “Even in the pleasure quarter where the moon rises on New Year’s Eve, remember this is darkness.”

And: “The sincerity of a courtesan, a square egg, and the moon rising on the last day of the month... if such things existed”

I was able to memorize such interesting lines.

The country samurai Ishii Tsuneemon, played by Bando Takejaku, spoke with a country accent, yet his diction was clear, his speech crisp, and his lines had a light, rhythmic feel that was pleasant to the ear.

I think it was perhaps from this “Ishii Tsuneemon” that I first awakened to the appeal of what we now call “popular theater.” (currently, R-san has suddenly awakened to this “popular theater,” becoming a fervent fan. Almost every month, I am practically dragged by her to see various troupes of “popular theater” performing all over the place. As a result, I’ve gained much and been deeply moved many times.)

—And just like that, the conversation somehow veers off course again, derailing uncontrollably and spreading out.

Startled back to my senses, (is this really okay?), my pen hesitates.

Shuntaro Tanikawa has a piece titled “A Day Until I Return to the Earth.” One passage reads:

I wanted to write in my diary but was too sleepy to do so
Choosing which events of the day to write about
And which to leave out is always difficult
There’s nothing I absolutely must write down,
Yet why does leaving it blank make me restless?

This feels close to my current state of mind.

I intend to write only the titles of the plays performed at the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahige Theater, avoiding unnecessary details. Yet, I inevitably end up reminiscing about the memories tied to those plays.

And since there are people who enjoy reading those stories, I, being the show-off that I am (after all, I was born and raised in Asakusa), can't help but write them again. (Though those who find it entertaining are surely just being polite.)

A word of caution to myself.

Even though I have plenty of other things I ought to be writing about in this era.

After this period of experiencing kabuki "small plays," I eventually moved on to a children's theater troupe, or rather, a new-style theater troupe called "Gekidan Todo."

There, I gained stage experience as a new drama actor.

Though the years and time spent living daily as a new drama actor far outweigh my experience as a lowly kabuki actor, I surprisingly have little I wish to write about this period.

Deep within me, the inexhaustible charm of kabuki and the bubbling excitement of "small plays" have become ingrained, nestled deep in my bones.

The phrase "in my bones" felt like it might be a dead term now, so I decided to look it up in the dictionary.

"Bone-deep: When syphilis spreads throughout the body, causing the bones to ache and throb."

Well, well.

In this play, "Ishii Tsuneemon," the villainous samurai, Kato Satota, was played by Kataoka Tobei.

Among the three retainers following this villain, I, Ichikawa Fukujiro, was given the role of one of them.

A two act play at the Shirahige Theater.

One, Mikazuki Hanji: Origin of the Black Ships. Fourth Scene.

Scene 1: The Coast. Scene 2: Kiyoshi's Residence.

Scene 3: Godayu's Residence. Scene 4: The Road.

Mikazuki Hanji.....Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Carpenter Kiyokichi.....Onoe Otojo
His younger brother Tokimatsu.....Ichikawa Fukujiro
Kiyokichi's wife Kiyo.....Sakamoto Yoko

Ota Godayu.....Kataoka Tobei
Yamamoto Ippei.....Umezawa Hideo
Yamada Santayu.....Arisawa Kotaro
Yokogushi Osen.....Sakamoto Reiko

I clearly remember “Ishii Tsuneemon,” but this “Mikazuki Hanji” plays almost no part in my memory. I don’t recall the story either. It must have been a rather dull play.

I was given the role of the younger brother of a handsome carpenter named Seikichi (the actor Onoe Otojo typically played young female roles or handsome male roles). I must have had lines and movements, but I remember absolutely nothing about it.

I suspect this play was one Tetsuzaburo had actually performed with another troupe in the past, and the script existed only in his head.

The fact that Tetsuzaburo himself played the lead role of Mikazuki Hanji is likely proof of this.

The promoter’s policy of avoiding difficult kabuki and staging many easy to understand plays gradually became apparent.

Neither the troupe leader, Takejaku, nor Fukunosuke appeared in this “Mikazuki Hanji.” Basically, it had become Tetsuzaburo’s own production.

2. The Love Courier’s Journey to Yamato: The Scene of the Seal’s Breaking

Umekawa.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Oen.....Onoe Otojo
Jiemon.....Kataoka Tobei
Niwaya Hachiemon.....Onoe Takenosuke
Tesho/Yubei.....Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Chubei.....Bando Takejaku

This was a splendid Kabuki sewa-kyogen, and both Takejaku and Fukunosuke delivered dignified and passionate performances.

Fans traveled from afar, crossing the Sumida River, just to see this one act.

In this “Seal-Breaking,” I played the opening hokan, the drum bearer, dancing with a fan spread across my forehead and tied in place.

2009.6.10

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 85

五郎劇を焼き直す

Remaking Goro's Play

The second at the Mukojima Shirahige Theater is,

1. Mikazuki Hanji: Origin of the Black Ships, Act Four
2. Love Courier: The Yamato Road / The Seal-Breaking Scene

Following that, the third performance is,

3. Comedy: The Mountain Maiden (One Act)

Sakuhei.....Onoe Takenosuke
Daughter Ootoyo.....Onoe Otojō
Takano Yoichi.....Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Iketada.....Bando Chikuwaka
Wife Ohide.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Village Youth.....Umezawa Hideo

That was the play. My diary only records the title and cast. It's not a proper performance record, but rather it was jotted down like a memo.

Like the first play, "Mikazuki Hanji," I have absolutely no memory of this "Mountain Maiden" either.

I suspect it was probably a comedy from the Soganoya school.

Even if I say it was a Soganoya-style comedy, few people would know it today.

When I was a child, my father often took me to see these comedies.

(My father, truly, was an indiscriminate theater lover. If it was performed on stage, he'd take me to see it, no matter the genre. Each time he took time off work, our household grew

poorer and poorer. But thanks to such a father, I saw the plays performed at the Togekijo in Tokyo by Soganoya Goro, the blind actor who suffered from throat cancer during his very final years when he came up from Osaka.)

I have a book called “Geino Jiten” (Entertainment Dictionary) in my possession.

It’s a substantial, cloth-bound volume published by Tokyodo in 1953, supervised by Kawatake Shigetoshi and compiled by the Theater Museum.

It contains the following entry on “Soganoya Goro.”

I’ll quote just a small part of it.

“...While his acting foundation lay in kabuki, his style was characterized by a greasy quality, and he often proved tiresome with his peddling of vulgar moral lessons.”

The tradition of Osaka comedy passed down from Soganoya Goro’s theater to Shibuya Tenge, and then to Fujiyama Hiromi of the Shochiku Shinkigeki led by his disciple.

It mentions “peddling vulgar moral lessons,” and the reason I never grew to like Fujiyama Kanmi’s plays was precisely because I disliked that very “peddling of moral lessons” he had inherited.

(Even though it was unpleasant, whenever Fujiyama Kanmi came to perform at Tokyo’s Enbujo theater, I often went to see him. The skill of Kanmi’s acting was truly exceptional.)

No, this isn’t what I intended to write about here.

Writing about the history of Osaka comedy or offering criticism here would be pointless.

“...Soganoya plays were based on kabuki.” That’s the part I wanted you to read.

In other words, precisely because it was comedy based on kabuki, kabuki actors like Bando Takejaku, Ichikawa Fukunosuke, and others could perform “The Mountain Maiden” without much resistance or feeling out of place.

In the Soganoya family’s comedies, the characters’ “entrances” and “exits” are marked by particularly loud shamisen and taiko drumming, just like in kabuki plays. Songs are also incorporated.

Therefore, this “Mountain Maiden” was likely a play where all the actors, including Takejaku, Fukunosuke, and others, performed wearing kimono.

However, I have absolutely no memory of this play whatsoever.

As Fukunosuke's apprentice, whenever my master Fukunosuke was performing, I had to sit seiza-style in the wings and watch the performance properly.

Observing my master's artistry and engraving it into my mind was my study and training, except when I myself was on stage.

It's understandable that I have no memory of "Mikazuki Hanji" when Fukunosuke wasn't in it, but what does it mean that I remember absolutely nothing about "Mountain Maiden?"

It must have been a terribly unimpressive, dull play. Or perhaps, "Why must skilled actors like Master Fukunosuke and Master Takejaku perform in such a boring play?" That resentful thought, even in my childish mind, may have erased my memory of it from that time.

This habit of mine continues to this day.

When I see something dull, I forget it cleanly and completely. Only the good things remain in my memory forever.

I quickly forget dull people, but I remember interesting people forever and continue to associate with them.

But this isn't just me. Everyone is like that, I suppose.

In my case, it's just a bit more extreme.

Come to think of it, I never once saw Fukunosuke on stage wearing Western clothes.

Even offstage, Fukunosuke, true to his onnagata role, always wore dignified kimono.

Leaving his home in Omori, taking the train to Minami Senju Station on the Joban Line, then walking from there, passing the two huge gas tanks towering over Mukojima to the left, crossing Shirahige Bridge, turning immediately left, then right onto the narrow street where Shirahige Theater stood, even during that commute, he was always in kimono.

Even as a minor theater actor, he never once compromised the appearance and bearing befitting a kabuki actor.

The story digresses slightly again, but in the entry for Soganoya Goro in the "Geino Jiten" edited by the Theater Museum, it states:

“...Thirty-three years as a troupe leader, his self-written scripts under the pen name Issakai Gyojin were compiled into a complete collection.”

In my home, there was a complete collection of scripts written by Issakai Gyojin. Of course, was my father's.

It was a thick book in two volumes.

It was a collection of scripts for sentimental comedies that Soganoya Goro actually performed on stage.

I rewrote several of them to fit the social climate of the time, the “Peaceful Japan” and the “Democratic Japan” that became buzzwords immediately after the war.

I then showed them to Toyama, a senior staff member at the Tsurukame Theater.

The backstage manager was a person who worked under the patron, overseeing the dressing rooms and actors in general, a sort of producer role.

They must be well-versed in dressing room etiquette and also know the actors' personal circumstances.

He also served as a liaison between the patron and the troupe leader, deciding which plays to stage and considering the casting.

They also handled matters concerning shinsho. Shinsho refers to an actor's performance fee.

From the actors' perspective, they were people who stood on the patron's side. If an actor had something to say to the patron, they would first tell the okuyaku¹⁷.

I will never forget this okuyaku named Toyama, who was around forty years old.

He took the script I timidly offered him, spread it out earnestly with both hands, and read it carefully.

He treated me, a sixteen year old child, not with condescension, contempt, or ridicule, but as a writer, with proper respect.

That script was used in the next production at the Tsurukame Theater.

“Toyama-san, actually, this is a reworking of a piece by Issakai Gyojin. I just tried writing it as an experiment,” I said.

¹⁷ Backstage manager

"I knew it right away. But since you've rewritten it for today's times, it should be fine. We can use it. Soganoya Goro should still be alive, but surely he wouldn't come all the way here to see it," Toyama said with a slight smile.

Soganoya Goro passed away from throat cancer at Osaka University Hospital in Showa 23 (1948). He was seventy-two years old.

A week later, Toyama gave me an envelope containing the script fee. More accurately, it was the performance fee for my script.

I was surprised and gratefully accepted it.

Before becoming a disciple of Ichikawa Fukunosuke, I had written several scripts for Hitachi's public relations theater troupe, including "Blood-red Smoke at Takada's Horse Market" and "The Well-Known Bell Forest," among others.

But I had never received any script fees.

Since I was receiving a monthly salary from the Public Relations Section of the Welfare Department at Hitachi's Kameari Factory, there was no way I could be paid script fees.

The script fee I received from Toyama, who worked behind the scenes at the Tsurukame Theater, became the very first script fee I ever received for writing a play.

However, I have no memory of how much money was in that envelope. It wasn't written in my diary either.

Looking back now, I should have made sure to record the amount of that memorable first script fee.

I have this feeling that writing down money matters in detail is embarrassing, base.

This vanity is the shallow part of someone born and raised in Asakusa for generations.

I've written something unnecessary.

I had intended to write only the names of the plays performed at the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahige Theater, jotted down in my tattered diary from 1945, in this "Talking Theater."

That alone would have sufficed.

But being a born chatterbox with a frivolous nature, I ended up writing all sorts of unnecessary, trivial things.

2009.6.12

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 86

川部サブローの登場

The Appearance of Saburo Kawabe

The sections of my diary about the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahige Theater contain nothing of importance.

Namely, the daily performance times during this period, how many days each play ran, and how much my salary was.

(I clearly remember only that I received my salary regularly every month. I've forgotten the amount.)

A single run might have lasted half a month, ten days, or perhaps just a week. Since we aren't a traveling troupe, we didn't change the program daily. Today's "popular theater" troupes change their program daily, performing completely different shows in the afternoon and evening. That's nothing short of superhuman, bordering on divine skill.

The Bando Takejaku troupe, known as "flower-form kabuki," performed for ten days per run. They changed the play and ran for twenty days total, meaning they did two runs at the same theater, as far as I recall.

Performing just once a day, only at night, what time did they open the doors in the evening?

Tokyo, especially the lower town, was littered with ruins from American air raids. Come nightfall, it was so dark you could barely see your feet.

Streetlights were almost nonexistent; it was the immediate postwar era.

Such detailed records are not found in my diary.

It's remarkable that audiences came for these night-only performances over ten-day runs. I vaguely recall they only did two shows, day and night, on Saturdays and Sundays.

Thinking back now, things like admission prices, audience numbers, and audience reactions are incredibly interesting, yet I wrote nothing about them.

After all, I was sixteen. Still a child.

My first experience as an apprentice to a kabuki actor was so busy every day, leaving me no mental space, that simply jotting down the playbill and cast list in my diary was probably all I could manage.

It was also the immediate postwar period, a time of utter chaos where tomorrow was uncertain.

(Now, looking back, I think all the more that I should have recorded things in greater detail, being right in the thick of such an era.)

Schools had been destroyed by the war, and there was no talk of rebuilding them. Before I knew it, I had given up on returning to school.

My heart must have been far more unstable and hopeless than I can imagine now, a gray daily existence, always trembling with fear of something.

Still, I'm glad I recorded even just the plays and cast like this.

Even if it's just a brief, hastily scribbled note, it serves as a clue to recall my state of mind back then.

The Bando Takejaku Troupe returned to the Tsurukame Theater in Kameari after finishing their performances in Mukojima.

The promoter's method was to have the troupe that had been performing at the Tsurukame Theater move directly and entirely to the Shirahige Theater to perform there. It was an efficient system with no waste.

The performances by the Takejaku troupe upon their return to the Tsurukame Theater were as follows.

1. Light Theater: The Careless Messenger. Three Scenes

Lord.....Hideo Umezawa
Jiroemon.....Saburo Kawabe
Chinkuro Ueno.....Jun Yamamoto
Daughter.....Harue Kawabe
Disciple.....Tomma Kawabe

2. The Pine Gate of Kotobuki /The Residence of Jokan Yamazaki Scene 1

Jokan.....Onoe Takenosuke
Yogoro.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Azuma.....Onoe Otojo
Jibemon.....Kataoka Tobei
Kiku.....Bando Takejaku

3. Comedy: The Mountain Maiden One Act

The cast and roles are the same as before.

As I mentioned earlier, this cast list was handwritten on paper and posted on the wall behind the small hanamichi built on the stage left side. I took notes from it.

It was a time when there was no paper for making programs and the printing shops had been burned down in the war.

It's just a literal note listing the kyogen names and cast, but I think I did well to write it down at sixteen.

In an era of utter scarcity, no paper, no food, no shelter, no clothes, the very existence of such a theater troupe seems astonishing when I think about it now.

Yet I have personally come to understand how essential entertainment is for human beings.

On the very day American planes flew in formation over Tokyo dropping bombs, I wore a makeshift air-raid hood, a rolled-up cushion, and I went to see Akira Kurosawa's "Sanshiro Sugata" and "Miyamoto Musashi" starring Chiezo Kataoka.

During the screening, the "alert siren" sounded. It was the warning signal that American bombers were approaching the Kanto region.

The movie was immediately halted.

Audience members crouched small between the seats, covering their ears with their hands and pressing their fingers over their eyelids, waiting for the alert to be lifted.

They said if you didn't do this, the blast would pop your eyeballs out and rupture your eardrums, leaving you deaf.

Looking back now, it seems utterly unbelievable, a ridiculous story. But the common people listened closely to what the authorities said, and everyone did these things with the utmost seriousness. That was the era I lived through.

Oh, I've gone off on a tangent again.

I must write about how a non-Kabuki actor named Kawabe Saburo suddenly appeared at the Tsurukame Theater, leading a group.

That was the first act, a period drama titled "The Careless Messenger," deliberately billed as "light theater."

Only Hideo Umezawa, playing the lord, belonged to the Takejaku troupe. The rest was a slapstick comedy based on a storyteller's tale, performed by a group of men and women led by Kawabe Saburo.

To my eyes, it was a shallow play, completely unsuited to the Takejaku troupe.

What I remember from this "Careless Messenger" is only the figure of Hideo Umezawa, playing the lord with proper seriousness.

Incidentally, Umezawa was a young man who had jumped into the theater world, admiring Umezawa Noboru, who was popular in Asakusa at the time and called the "King of Sword Plays" or the "King of Sword Fights." He even chose the stage name "Umezawa" himself, out of his desire to become like Umezawa Noboru in the future.

Furthermore, during the early Showa years, I often went with my father to see the swordplay plays of popular troupes like Umezawa Noboru's troupe and Osamu Kanai's troupe in Asakusa.

(Truth be told, my father was a troublesome man who loved anything performed on stage and would abandon his work to go see it.)

My father, who especially loved Umezawa Noboru, had even joined his fan club under my name.

If I start talking about this sort of thing, I'll inevitably digress endlessly, so I'll stop here. I'll write more when the opportunity arises.

Why did the patron incorporate a group that performed such slapstick comedies into the Takejaku troupe?

It was likely influenced by box office receipts, that is, performance results.

As a child and low-ranking actor, I was unaware of such internal circumstances within the troupe.

But I could tell that the kabuki plays performed by Takejaku, Tsuruzo, and Fukunosuke didn't draw large crowds. Empty seats were indeed becoming conspicuous in the theater.

From the promoter's perspective, running at a loss was a problem. It was only natural they'd want to make even a small profit and try something new.

That's how the Kawabe Saburo group came onto the scene. Both their atmosphere and the material they performed clearly clashed with the Takejaku troupe.

For example, a character wearing a chonmage topknot and dressed as a young merchant's son would appear, strumming a guitar and singing songs.

Yet Takejaku, Fukunosuke, Takenosuke, Otojo and even Tobei performed their serious, authentic plays without flinching at the sounds of guitar or accordion.

They properly performed rare kabuki plays, the kind only small-time actors could pull off.

The second act play, "Nebiki no Kadomatsu," following the slapstick comedy reminiscent of amateur theater, is one such example.

It is written as "寿の門松" and read as "Nebiki no Kadomatsu."

Its full title is "Yamazaki Yojihei Nebiki no Kadomatsu," written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon at the age of sixty-six.

Since it's a rare play seldom staged in major kabuki productions, I'd like to introduce its basic plot using the Tokyo Sogensha publication Masterpieces of Kabuki, Volume 21: Chikamatsu Monzaemon, which I have at hand. However, it would become too lengthy, so I'll omit it.

Performing such a serious, old-fashioned tragedy immediately after a "light comedy" where actors slip and fall on stage while strumming guitars and playing accordions must have been quite painful for the proud kabuki actors, even in a small-scale production.

Yet, I never once heard such complaints from the mouths of Takejaku or Fukunosuke.

Looking back now, my heart swells thinking how brave, dedicated, and pure-hearted they truly were.

2009.6.20

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 87

小芝居讃歌

Ode to Small Theater

Last time, I wrote that the title “寿の門松” is read as “Nebiki no Kadomatsu.”

I intended to skip a detailed explanation of this kabuki play since it would take too long, but it's been on my mind, so I'll write a little about it.

Writing about it also helps me learn.

“Nebiki” refers to root pulling” (根引き), meaning: 1. Pulling up trees or grass with their roots intact. 2. Paying a ransom to free a courtesan or geisha from servitude.

In “Nebiki no Kadomatsu,” a beautiful courtesan named Azuma appears, and the story involves a ransom payment (minoshira-kin). Therefore, the title naturally leans heavily on the meaning from the second definition.

The plot is as follows.

The fallen Naniwaya Yohei becomes infatuated with Azuma, a courtesan at the height of her fame in Shinmachi, and agonizes over her.

Moved by Yohei's sincerity, Azuma confesses she has a lover named Yojihei and gives Yohei ten ryo, asking him to call her as a customer.

Impressed by her spirit, Yohei vows to use that ten ryo as his foundation to rise in the world and bring Azuma and Yojihei together.

He then swore brotherhood with Yojihei and, after wounding his rival, a man named Hikosuke of the Haya brothel, headed down to Edo.

This concludes the first part. Even just this much makes it easy to see why this play would not resonate with today's audience (or indeed, with audiences sixty years ago, immediately after the war).

High school student A fell for a girl at the same school.

That girl had a boyfriend, B, who was also a high school student.

A found B a nuisance and grew to hate him so much that he actually killed B. That news was on TV yesterday.

Well, this is an extreme example, but such are the times we live in now.

If this play were staged today, the prostitute girl might say to customer A, who has fallen for her, "I have a boyfriend named B. So I can't be with you. Here, take this money. Come to the shop with it and hold me."

And she'd hand him ten ryo... I wonder how much ten ryo from the time when Chikamatsu Monzaemon was alive would be worth today?

I'm not well-versed enough to know for sure, but it's undoubtedly a considerable sum. After all, it's enough to start some kind of business.

A is deeply moved.

(Anyone would be thrilled. If it were me, I'd be super super super thrilled and do a backflip.)

And then, using that money as a foundation, he vows to become a wealthy man and bring her and her lover B together. That's the story of the first part of this play.

Even for a play, it's an unbelievable story.

(You could say Chikamatsu made it into a play precisely because it's unbelievable.)

Now, the story progresses to the "Scene at the Yamazaki Joka Residence."

Yohei, in order to bring Yojihei and Azuma together, wounds a man named Hikosuke and, becoming a fugitive pursued by officials, flees to Edo.

Out of a man's sense of duty, Yojihei takes the blame for Yohei's crime upon himself and ends up imprisoned by his father, Joka.

Worried about this, the courtesan Azuma escapes from the pleasure quarter.

Then, with the mercy of Joka and Yojihei's wife, Okiku (yes, Yojihei has a wife!), she brings out her beloved Yojihei, and the two flee together. That's how the story goes.

The blind actor, Bando Takejaku, plays this Okiku in the role of a female character.

That means this Okiku is the most important role in this scene.

Joka was played by Onoe Takenosuke, and the courtesan Azuma by the young onnagata Onoe Otojo.

Yojihei, a shinbo tachiyaku (enduring supporting role), was played by Ichikawa Fukunosuke because the troupe lacked a suitable handsome leading man.

Even just explaining the plot this briefly, it's clear today's audience would struggle to follow it.

Okiku has a deep affection for her husband, Yojihei. Despite this, she is paired with the courtesan Azuma and allowed to escape with him. Her father, Joka, agrees to this arrangement.

I doubt an audience today would sympathize with such an unreasonable story if it were performed at the Kabuki-za.

However, the psychology of these characters must have been completely understood by the audiences of old (and, truth be told, I understand it too).

Since it seems unlikely to resonate with audiences today, especially younger ones, it is rarely staged in the Grand Kabuki.

Though not performed at the Kabuki-za, it is staged in smaller theaters. That's precisely where the value of these smaller theaters lies.

Because it can't be done at the Kabuki-za, it's performed in small theaters. That's where the pride and dignity of small theater actors reside.

As a child, I didn't fully grasp that, but my father seemed to understand it somewhat. He enjoyed these small theater performances and would take me along to see them.

My father said on those occasions, "Grand Kabuki is like the refined taste of sea bream. Small theaters are a bit coarse, but they have the rich, savory flavor of sardines."

I often heard this line, for instance, when he took me to places like the Kotobuki Theater in Honjo.

Even now, I can still clearly hear the cheerful, buoyant tone in his voice on those occasions.

I feel like we've gone off on a tangent again.

While we're on the tangent, let me get carried away and write a little more praise for the small plays.

That "praise" isn't my writing, but rather what literary critic Takehiko Noguchi wrote in the morning edition of the Nikkei newspaper on August 19, 2007.

There was a column titled "[The Style of Edo](#)," and one of its subheadings read "The Art of Small-Scale Theater."

I don't know where Mr. Takehiko Noguchi is now. Since I have no way to contact him, I'm reprinting it here without permission.

As soon as I find out how to contact him, I intend to reach out immediately, apologize for my rudeness, and seek his understanding.

Until then, I humbly ask for your forgiveness.

Once upon a time in the 1960s, there was a small theater troupe called the "Katabami-za" that made its home on the sixth floor of the Asakusa Matsuya Department Store at the "Sumida Theater," where it performed.

Performers like Bando Takejaku, Bando Shinsha, Ichikawa Joen, and Ichikawa Monsaburo were already seasoned veterans, yet they gave their all on stage with tireless energy. Their uniquely rich and flavorful style of performance, rarely seen at the Kabuki-za, was a delight to watch.

Small theater referred to all theater outside the major Kabuki houses like the Edo Sanza (Nakamura, Ichimura, Morita). While major Kabuki refined itself into an art during the Meiji era, small theater preserved the commoner sensibilities of Edo, presenting unique performances and

rare styles unseen elsewhere. The Katabami-za was one of the precious survivors of this tradition.

The first play I saw was “Moritsuna’s Garrison.” It’s a tragedy set against the backdrop of the Warring States period, where the brothers Sasaki Moritsuna and Takatsuna fight each other as enemies. The head of Takatsuna brought to the garrison was a fake, but his captive son, Shiro, stabs himself in the stomach with a sword to deceive the enemy into believing it was real. The child actor’s portrayal of clutching his intestines in agony was brutally realistic, and Moritsuna’s anguish, knowing the truth yet torn by filial love, was profoundly moving. That kind of facial expression, mobilizing every muscle in the face, is an art form you absolutely never see in the refined world of Grand Kabuki.

I was astonished to discover a play like “Badarai no Mitsuhide.” It depicts the brutal bullying Oda Nobunaga inflicts on his subordinate, Akechi Mitsuhide. Having incurred Nobunaga’s displeasure and been branded with a crescent-shaped scar on his forehead, Mitsuhide endures it silently, pleading for an audience to appease his lord. Thus, Nobunaga forces Mitsuhide to drink sake from a trough used for washing horses.

Takejaku’s portrayal of Mitsuhide’s agonized expression was almost an intangible cultural treasure of “facial art.” His jaw twisted from gnashing his teeth, and deep within his crossed eyes, the flames of resentment burned blue.

I recall an elderly local man seated nearby wearing a smug look, as if saying, “Well? Tastes good, doesn’t it?”

As expected of Mr. Noguchi Takehiko.

The charm of the “Katabami-za” is vividly captured in this passage, especially in the final three lines.

This truly captures the essence of the audience who loved the “Katabami-za” theater fifty years ago.

Mr. Noguchi, thank you for your wonderful writing and such kind words of praise.

As someone with even a slight connection to the “Katabami-za,” I offer my heartfelt thanks.

I am so deeply grateful, it brings tears to my eyes.

(R-san, please find Mr. Noguchi’s contact information. I beg you. I absolutely must go before Mr. Noguchi and express my gratitude.)

The “Katabami-za” was formed when the troupes of Bando Takejaku, Bando Tsuruzo, Ichikawa Fukunosuke, and others who had strived, no, struggled at the Tsurukame Theater and Shirahige Theater, gathered as comrades and reunited.

I, that is, Ichikawa Fukujiro, was no longer Fukunosuke’s disciple at this time.

Unable to endure the harsh life, I had fled the world of small theater.

Yet, just as Nureki Chimou still considers “Kitan Club” his home, Fukujiro forever regarded the Tsurukame and Shirahige theaters as his home, and in his heart, he takes pride in having been a disciple of Ichikawa Fukunosuke.

(Both the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahige Theater are, of course, long gone now. They’ve vanished without a trace, replaced by entirely new buildings, and the scenery has surely changed. Yet just a few days ago, I made a promise with R-san, that we would walk together to find that place, which certainly existed sixty-five years ago.)

2009.6.23

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 88

よだれくりのじい

Drooling Old Man

Next, the second act of the kyogen at the Tsurukame Theater.

1. Light Play: Tatsuan's Game of Life... Three Scenes

Tatsuan.....Kawabe Saburo
Wife O-Tetsu.....Kawabe Harue
Iwataya.....Yamamoto Jun
Wife O-Matsu.....Bando Yoko

2. The Teacher's Lesson: The Terakoya Scene

Takebe Genzo.....Onoe Takenosuke
Wife Tonami.....Onoe Otojo
Drooling Child.....Kataoka Tobei
Grandfather.....Ichikawa Fukujiro
Shunto Genba.....Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Matsumaru.....Bando Takejaku
Wife Chiyo.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke

3. Comedy: The Borrowed Wife, One Act

Nishiyama Ryokichi.....Onoe Takenosuke
Wife Ocho.....Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Okimi.....Bando Yoko
Former Wife Otaka...Bando Saikiko
Geisha.....Fushimi Yoko
Ikakeya Masajiro...Sawamura Tetsuzo
His Wife Miki.....Onoe Otojo

This title and cast list are my transcription of the text from a poster affixed behind the hanamichi, which, as mentioned earlier, extends diagonally from the stage left side.

Since this was immediately after the war, specifically the year 1945 (Showa 20), the character “傳” in Suguwara Denju Tenarai Kagami” is written with the old-style kanji.

The character for “geisha” is written as “藝.”

And the “い” in “Ikakeya Masajiro” is written as “ゐ¹⁸.”

That aside, the role of the drooling grandfather in “Terakoya” assigned to me in this production was the part with the most lines I had since becoming a member of the Takejaku troupe.

“Yodarekuri” means a slovenly child who is always drooling.

In “Terakoya,” the drooling child is the largest and most mischievous among the many temple school children appearing at the curtain rise. This role is traditionally played not by a child actor, but by a named actor, meaning a well-known adult performer.

“Boy, this is a scene where we can really let loose. Let’s make the audience laugh together, you and I.” Tobei said, the actor playing the drooling boy.

Tobei still called me “boy,” just like he did back in the Hitachi public relations troupe days.

“Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami” is considered one of kabuki’s most famous plays, alongside “Chushingura” and “Yoshitsune Senbonzakura.” Since many are likely familiar with it, I will omit the synopsis.

I’ll briefly describe only the “Terakoya” scene.

The red-faced villain, Shunto Genba, and the protagonist of this act, Matsumaru, arrive at the home of Takebe Genzo, where Kan Shosho’s son, Kan Shusai, is being sheltered, accompanied by a large number of guards.

They deliver Lord Fujiwara no Tokihira’s order to Minamoto no Genso, cut off Sugawara no Shusai’s head and present it. They have come to verify the head.

At the home of Minamoto no Genzo, who serves as the temple school teacher, many village children have gathered as students.

The villagers, fearing their own children or grandchildren might be mistaken for Kan Shusai and beheaded, come in droves along the hanamichi.

¹⁸ Note: ゐ is an now unused hiragana character, generally pronounced the same as い, in English think the “ee” in see.

The children are called by name by their fathers or grandfathers and return home one after another.

“...Next is fifteen year old Yodarekuri...” At the signal of the Gidayu singer raising his voice, I, playing the grandfather, stepped forward at the gate, bent low, and called out, “Bon-yo, bon-yo!” calling for the drooling boy.

Then, dressed like a mischievous little rascal, the drooling boy emerges from the back, clattering his feet loudly. He dons a paper armor, brandishing a broom as a naginata striking a grand pose.

The tension that had built up until now dissolves, and the audience bursts into laughter.

When the drooling boy saw me standing at the gate, “Oh, Grandpa, you’re here?” he said, and started to head outside.

But Shunto Genba, had been waiting, (A vulgar, filthy brat like you couldn’t possibly be Kan Shusai! Ugh, infuriating!)

With this feeling, he smacks Yodakuri’s head hard with the iron fan in his hand.

The smacked drooling kid comes crying loudly and sloppily to me, his grandfather.

“Grandpa, that red-faced samurai smacked my head!” he said, and continued crying sloppily.

“Oh dear, oh dear, how frightful, how frightful,” I say soothingly, taking Tobei’s hand and starting to walk home.

But the drooling child threw a tantrum and refused to budge.

From here, Tobei began an impromptu performance, saying to me, “This is a place where we can do as we please, so let’s make the guests laugh together.”

Standing stubbornly by the hanamachi, Tobei continues his tantrum, “If you won’t listen to what I say, I won’t move, you hear?”

“Oh, alright, alright, I’ll listen to anything you say,” I replied.

“Grandpa, will you really listen to anything I say?”

“Oh, I will, I will. Go ahead and tell me.”

“Well then, Grandpa. Take me to that place across the station with all the red lights,” said Tobei.

“What nonsense are you talking about?” I scolded him, waving my arms wide.

Here, the audience bursts into laughter.

The “other side of the station” referred to the area beyond the Joban Line’s Kameari Station, the opposite corner from Hitachi’s Kameari Factory and the Tsurukame Theater.

That’s where people from the “Sangyo District (Triple Industry)” of Kameido in Koto Ward had relocated after being displaced by the massive bombing raid on the downtown area by the American air force on the night of March 9th.

“Sangyo” was a colloquial term referring to three types of businesses, restaurants, waiting rooms, and geisha houses. It’s now obsolete, but when I was a child, the name “Sangyo District” still lingered.

“That area is the Sangyo District, so kids shouldn’t go near it.”

It only fueled my imagination. I’d wonder what kind of mysterious, frightening, yet fascinating people lived in a place children weren’t allowed to approach, and my heart would race with excitement.

The audience erupted at the drool-worthy line, “Take me to the place with the red lights across from the station,” and that’s exactly why.

“What are you talking about? That place isn’t for kids like you,” I scolded.

“No, no, Bon wants to go! I want to go to the place with lots of pretty girls wearing red kimonos and white powder!”

Spurred on by the audience’s laughter, Tobei continued to shout loudly.

The audience laughed simply at the bizarre contrast. I, playing the grandfather, was still a sixteen year old boy, while Tobei, playing the spoiled grandson, was a large man in his forties.

At that time, I was still a virgin.

I had never even gone to see the corner where they had relocated their business from Mamiedo to Kameari.

I was interested, but it felt frightening, and I couldn’t go.

People called me a terribly precocious brat for writing plays about love between men and women without batting an eye, but when it came to such places of prostitution, I was extremely timid.

That timidity, actually, remains with me to this day. You might not believe it, but it's true.

Grandpa, drooling, finally coaxes his whining grandson to stop fussing, turns him around, and begins walking.

After two or three steps, the grandson climbs off Grandpa's back and instead hoists Grandpa onto his own back.

"Hold on tight, Grandpa!" he says, retreating down the hanamichi with a comical waddle.

Laughter and applause erupt from the audience.

The play "Terakoya" then descends into an utterly gruesome tragedy where the innocent son of Matsumaru is sacrificed and beheaded. So perhaps this "laughter" in the first half is forgivable.

It is the unique artistry of Kabuki's staging.

Both the protagonist Matsumaru and the antagonist Shunto Genba remain silent and motionless, maintaining solemn expressions throughout this "laughing" scene.

Bando Takejaku's Matsumaru was a magnificent portrayal, filled with spirit and profoundly heart-warming.

Immediately after the curtain fell on that Matsumaru, "Fukujiro-san, you're quite good." I was praised, and I felt as if I were soaring to the heavens.

2009.6.24

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第八十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 89

寺子屋フリーク

Terakoya Freak

The brilliance of Tsurukame Theater's "Terakoya," featuring Takejaku as Matsumaru, Fukunosuke as Chiyo, Takenosuke as Takabe Genzo, and Otome as Tonami, has kept me a "Terakoya maniac" or "Terakoya freak" for the subsequent fifty years, right up to the present day.

Even after the Katabami-za, the last bastion of small-scale theater, eventually disbanded and vanished, whenever "Terakoya" was staged, whether at the Kabuki-za, the Shinbashi Enbujo, the National Theater, or any other venue, I went to see it.

(I was always poor, so naturally I watched from the cheapest seats.)

The "Terakoya" performed in grand kabuki productions, of course, possesses a first-rate flavor, always intoxicating me and sending me into raptures.

Of all kabuki plays, I love this "Terakoya" the most, and I have seen countless actors portray Matsumaru.

The origin of this likely stems from encountering the brilliance of Bando Takejaku's Matsumaru.

(Before Takejaku, I saw Matsumoto Korainosuke's Matsumaru at the Honjo Kotobuki Theater. At that time, Takebe Genzo was played by Jitsukawa Enmatsu, which was also quite interesting.)

That said, I possess absolutely none of the loyalty or devotion to one's lord depicted within "Terakoya."

My affection for parents or children is also extremely thin, I have no brotherly love whatsoever.

I sometimes shudder at how heartless and inhuman my character is, so devoid of affection for my own kin.

I value trusting relationships with strangers who understand me more than I do my own family.

I sometimes get carried away saying or writing things like “blood is thicker than water,” but as I write it, I scoff at myself, thinking “what a liar,” and give a wry smile.

Even if it’s true that I was “born and raised in Asakusa,” I’m an egoist who believes “blood is thinner than water.”

The reason I love the play “Terakoya” is that while it prominently features loyalty to one’s lord and parental affection, it actually depicts the irrationality, the unethical behavior filled with egoism, and the absurd actions of humans disguised as “beautiful duty and affection.”

It is a perfect drama that wraps the most cruel human psychology and actions in a lyrical wrapper.

I was deeply moved by it, and I have held onto that emotion ever since I was sixteen.

Looking back, the Takejaku troupe’s “Terakoya” was perfect both in terms of acting and overall direction.

If I were to go into detail about that here and now, I’d likely stray off topic again.

I recall the Takejaku troupe’s “Terakoya” at the Tsurukame Theater ran for a week.

If they performed twice daily on Saturday and Sunday, that makes nine performances total. I, too, played the role of “Grandpa” with the drooling child in all nine performances.

During this short run, I memorized every line and every movement of every character in “Terakoya.”

As a kabuki actor (even a lowly rookie), it was only natural, but I even memorized the joruri verses.

The “Iroha Okuri” in the final scene was utterly heartrending in both lyrics and melody. By this point, my level of rapture would soar, and I would be overcome with a feeling of my very soul being torn apart, almost reaching a state of ecstasy.

“...Relying on the gate’s firelight, the young lord and lady together raised their sobbing tears. Entering the temple for the journey to the afterlife, the master became a disciple of Amida Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha, and the Six Paths’ Enlightened Ones. At Sai no Kawara, children write the [Iroha alphabet](#) with sand as their model. How fleeting is life, how inevitable the

parting. Who will nurse them tomorrow night? The parent's heart grieves, seeing their sorrowful eyes. Crossing the sword and the mountain of death, feeling like a shallow dream, leaving no trace in the gate fire. Parting from Kyoto, their homeland, heading toward Toribeno..."

Oh, I've written it.

I never meant to write such gidayu lyrics here, but deep within my ears, the bass shamisen began to play, and carried away by its sound, I just wrote it.

In other words, it means I memorized the script for "Terakoya" word for word.

A sixteen year old boy's brain is malleable.

It wasn't that I thought, "I must memorize this," and then memorized it. Rather, as I watched the actors performing on stage, the lines naturally entered my mind. Each word seeped into the folds of my brain, becoming impossible to forget.

And that state continues even now, nearly sixty years later.

It's a bit embarrassing to admit, but I still perform on stage several times a year as an actor (though not kabuki).

However, I simply cannot memorize lines anymore. My brain is aging.

So, I manage to get through the performances by cheating in every way possible.

I haven't forgotten the lines of every character in the over two-hour play "Terakoya" for sixty years, yet I absolutely cannot memorize my own few lines in a one-hour play.

Kataoka Tobei, playing the drooling child, throws a tantrum at the edge of the hanamichi toward "grandpa" who has come to greet him.

"If you don't take me to the place beyond the station, under the red lights, where all the pretty girls in fancy dresses are, I'm not going home!"

Then, I, playing "grandpa," say, "What nonsense are you spouting, you little brat? Stop being so stubborn and hurry home, home!" and soothe the drooling child.

On the third or fourth night after the "Terakoya" started, after the play ended and I saw Master Fukunosuke off at Kameari Station, I mustered my courage and went alone to that "place with the red lights where lots of pretty women stand in a row."

Tobei had advised me, "You're still young, so you don't have to know about it, but since they say those things in the play to make the audience laugh, you might want to see it once, even if you just peek from outside."

But I was truly uncomfortable approaching such a place.

(I still am uncomfortable, as I wrote last time.)

I had more than my fair share of interest in the opposite sex, and a sixteen year old boy's sexual desire should have been sufficiently strong, yet for some reason, I was extremely timid about the act of buying a woman's body with money.

Despite that, I harbored a strong, romantic longing for the world of such amorous affairs as depicted in plays, movies, and novels.

In reality, though, I felt nothing but revulsion toward those "places of flesh" and the women who worked there.

I felt a sense of terror at the thought of touching that reality, suffused with such revulsion.

(Now, R-san, who stays in my shadow and sun, clinging close, is intensely curious and occasionally makes me guide her to such places. I tremble helplessly and hurry past those areas where that kind of smell is vividly present, because I am afraid.)

For me, women were, above all, pure romanticism.

They were richly emotional beings, wrapped in sweet sentimentality.

Perhaps I vaguely sensed and feared that such a "dream" would be shattered.

I went to that place, located east of Makeari Station, which had relocated there after being burned out of Koto Ward's Kameido.

Off the main street in the town center, along a dark, backwater ditch, stood a row of makeshift shacks that looked hastily thrown together. That corner was the red-light district.

Red-tinted lamps were indeed strung along the eaves, and men were shuffling along beneath them.

Though only from the outside, I saw a red-light district for the first time in my life.

Seeing the sad, horrifying reality I had anticipated there, I was shocked.

2009.7.7

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 90

紅灯の巷で

In the Red Light District

The drooling boy played by Kataoka Tobei, perched on my back. "Take me to where all the pretty girls in fancy dresses line up under the red lights!" he shouted loudly, throwing a tantrum. Summoning my courage, I set out alone for that red-light district.

Past the Joban Electric Railway crossing and emerging on the other side of Kameari Station, I was already tense.

The place was easy to find.

A corner of the dark night sky was faintly tinged red. I walked toward it.

With the gutter river at my back, they stood in a row, their cheap, makeshift appearance unmistakably that of shacks.

Three or so plain, two-story rectangular wooden houses, devoid of any decoration, huddled together as if clinging to each other.

The sight of these shacks, built with walls of roughly hewn, pale wooden planks, standing quietly along the black, flowing ditch, seemed like the naked form of a sinister woman.

On the side facing the alley, windows about fifty centimeters square were lined up neatly in a row. Beyond that, the building was featureless.

Inside the windows, women sat, extending only their hands and faces out to call the men passing by.

These windows were spaced about a meter apart, all at the same height.

In other words, women set every meter, beckoning customers. All together, there were probably around thirty windows.

I wrote there was no decoration, but small red lights hung above each window. While they could look cheap and pitiful depending on your perspective, they served as effective decoration.

It was truly a red-light district, and they were indeed women in decorated windows.

What struck me as most peculiar at that moment was that the alley outside the windows, where the women's faces were lined up, was enclosed by a crude, roughly hewn wooden fence.

To see the women's faces clearly up close, one had to step into the narrow alley inside that wooden fence.

Basically, that flimsy wooden fence, which looked as if it would collapse if pushed by hand, was an enclosure designed to hide the women's faces from the outside world.

It was a "device" to prevent passersby from openly seeing the precious "merchandise."

Outside the wooden fence lay a dark, desolate back alley, but inside, it became a strange, otherworldly realm illuminated by red lamps. I caught a glimpse of that other world.

As a boy, I was first struck by such a simple yet clever trick used to sell a woman's body.

Looking back now, it was nothing more than a makeshift brothel, set up as quickly and cheaply as possible.

Yet, even as a makeshift setup after the American air raids had burned everything down, it was undeniably an effective stage set, a way to line up many women in a small space and present them to men's eyes in an alluring, sensual way.

But more than being surprised by that, seeing the women leaning out the windows calling to men right before my eyes, I felt intensely that it was a "pitiful sight," and the shock nearly crushed my heart.

For the women beckoning men from the windows, I could feel nothing but pity.

They appeared not as human beings, but as "commodities" stripped of both body and soul.

Despite that pitiful environment, I felt awe for the women who sold their charms with resilient smiles. Pitiable, yes, but they were also terrifying beings.

Not a shred of the romanticism found in the love stories of the classical courtesans I admired could be felt here.

I'm not trying to act like a "good boy" or a "moralist."

(Even if I, Nureki Chimuo, played the moralist here and now, it wouldn't change a thing.)

Though still a child, at sixteen I already possessed a man's sexual desire.

Yet, in the sight of those women beckoning men from the windows, I felt not a shred of desire.

I suppose it's "normal" for a man to be aroused by the coquettish charms of such women.

Is a man like me, who feels only misery when looking at the women sitting at the windows, no eroticism, no sexual arousal, truly "abnormal?"

Thinking about it, I was someone who received "militaristic education" during most of my impressionable years.

After losing the war, society suddenly started clamoring about "democracy" and "gender equality," but I had disliked militarism even during the war.

"...I absolutely adore soldiers,
When I grow up,
I'll carry a rifle and raise a flag,
Ride a horse, and go on adventures..."

I was taught a nursery rhyme-like song like this as a child (oh, what does it mean that I still remember such a dreadful song like this!), but I never once thought I wanted to become a soldier.

I dislike rough things.

The reason I hated gym class and sports days so much

I dislike moving my body, and I instinctively detest war and soldiers.

During the final days of the war, when the government was screaming, "One hundred million hearts as one, a fireball!" I was on stage in a period drama, blissfully happy, playing the daughter of Horibe Yahei.

I gained a reputation for being more girlish than the girls themselves. I was unpopular with the militaristic schoolgirls, but I was secretly pleased (I've written about this before).

I was born with, you might say, a “gender equality” mindset and way of thinking; I believe that was simply my nature.

I never looked down on women simply because they were women.

Rather, I harbored something akin to reverence for them since childhood.

I think I inherited this trait from my father.

My father was also timid around women.

He was always gentle with my mother.

I never once saw him raise a hand to her.

No, perhaps “gentle” is too vague a word. Yes, I just remembered.

He never called my mother “you”. He always addressed her as “you, ma’am.”

Compared to my father, I can be quite cold toward women. But at least on the surface, I’m gentle.

Oh, I’ve gone off on quite a tangent again. I wasn’t supposed to write this far.

How did I get here from “drooling?”

I never intended to recount the story of the “red-light district” right after the war in such detail.

I’ve strayed quite far from the play at the Tsurukame Theater.

But I suppose I wrote it because I felt the urge to. It can’t be helped.

In any case, I was confronted with the reality of women selling their bodies to men in such a manner, and I found it tragic and was deeply shocked.

That shock was heavy and profound.

That I can remember scenes from over sixty years ago and my own feelings in such detail, and write about them now, is surely proof that I received an extraordinary shock to my heart that night.

I stood frozen in this “red-light district” that night for ten or fifteen minutes, at most.

Call it a boy's sentimentality if you will, but unable to bear the injustice and sadness of one human being buying another with money, I fled the scene.

It may be hard to believe, but on my way back to Kameari Station, I was actually shedding tears.

Even now, I detest the act of a man buying a woman's body with money.

Is it strange for a man like Nureki Chimuo to say such a thing?

Some will surely think it strange, or even a lie. That wouldn't be surprising.

Yet, I absolutely love the romanticized, idealized tales of courtesans that appear in plays and novels.

(I myself have written many such stories.)

While I could never lay a hand on a real courtesan, in the world of fantasy and delusion, I can embrace courtesans as boldly, joyfully, and lewdly as I please.

That night's experience made me wonder if perhaps my desire for women was a little different from other men's.

I felt contempt welling up inside me for the kind of man who shamelessly lays bare his desires in such places, buying and hunting down women's bodies.

When Kataoka Tobei, playing the "drooling child," whined, "Hey, old man, take me to that place across the station where there are lots of pretty ladies," I decided to picture in my mind the scene from the Kabuki play "Sukeroku," the one at the Miuraya brothel in Yoshiwara, starting with the next day's performance.

2009.7.8

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 91

きゃいのう

Kyainou

The Takejaku Troupe closed the Tsurukame Theater and relocated to the Shirahige Theater in Mukojima, Sumida Ward.

In turn, the Tsuruzou Troupe, which had previously performed at the Shiragige Theater, would now perform at the Tsurukame Theater.

I am very curious now about what kind of plays the Tsuruzou troupe was performing during this period, but back then, I was just a lowly rookie actor. I was also very young.

I was busy attending to the personal needs and errands of my master, Ichikawa Fukunosuke, and had no mental space to record the Tsuruzou Troupe's performances. It's a regret.

Just like the Takejaku Troupe, the Tsuruzou Troupe must have also selected rare plays only seen in small theaters, showcasing their skilled artistry.

Just jotting down the titles and cast lists of the plays performed by the Takejaku Troupe was all I could manage.

The plays performed by the Takejaku Troupe at the Shirahige Theater were:

1. Rare: Konjiki Yasha (Golden Demon) Two Scenes

Hazama Kan'ichi.....Kawabe Saburo
Miya.....Fushimi Yoko
Director.....Kataoka Tobei

2. The Lover's Wife's Parting Ties: Shigeno's Parting at the Well. One Act

Shigenoi.....Bando Takejaku
Akaji.....Sawamura Tetsuzaburo

Jinenjo's Mitsuyoshi.....Bando Emiko
Maid One.....Bando Sakiko
Maid Two.....Ichikawa Fukujiro

3. Comedy. The Borrowed Wife. One Act

Nishiyama Ryokichi.....Bando Takejaku
Wife Ocho.....Bando Sakiko
Okimi.....Bando Yoko
First Wife Otaka.....Bando Harue
Geisha Momoko.....Fushimi Yoko
Ikeya Masajiro.....Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Wife Miko.....Onoe Otojo

As I have written, I previously wrote a script and showed it to Toyama, the backstage manager at Tsurukame Theater.

It was a play performed by the troupe of Soganoya Goro, a leading figure in Osaka's comedy world, and the script itself was written by Goro under the pen name Issakai Gyojin.

It was essentially plagiarism. I arbitrarily rewrote the script from one published in the Soganoya Goro Comedy Complete Works collection, setting the background in the immediate postwar period and depicting the customs of the common people.

Yet Toyama read it promptly, declared it "interesting," and handed me the script fee in an envelope.

I was delighted. And I was grateful for the money.

From then on, Toyama never looked down on me as a youngster, but treated me as an aspiring actor with dreams of becoming a playwright.

I believe Toyama was around forty at the time. Rumor had it he'd avoided going to war because of tuberculosis.

Looking back now, he had the very look of a literary young man.

I felt something akin to admiration, a desire to get closer to him, to interact more. Yet he also had an air of being difficult and unapproachable, and at sixteen, I couldn't bring myself to speak to him casually.

In truth, both "Golden Demon" and "Mountain Maiden," along with several other comedies later staged at Tsurukame Theater and Shirahige Theater, were rewritten by me, fundamentally reworking the scripts from the Goro plays.

Though they should be memorable works, having been staged commercially for script fees, I have forgotten the contents of every single one of those scripts I wrote.

Well, judging by their content, they were all just shallow sentimental comedies centered on the old-fashioned affection between parents and children or husbands and wives.

It was an era before convenient machines like photocopiers existed.

If only the mimeographed scripts had survived, but they didn't.

It was an era without the custom of giving actors individual copies of the script in the first place.

Instead of a full script, actors received only the lines they had to deliver, written on scraps of paper handed to them by the stage manager or the lead actor.

If I told Ebizo, Kikunosuke, Somegoro, Kantaro, Schichinosuke, or Matsugyoku this now, they probably wouldn't believe me.

They'd say, "What kind of rehearsal can you do with a script that only has your own lines?"

But that's how it used to be, even in Grand Kabuki productions.

Proof of this can be found in the "Dictionary of Kabuki Terms" (Kodansha, supervised by Yukio Hattori, written by Haruaki Akasaka).

「書拔」(かきぬき)

Kakinuki

Refers to a script where a playwright extracts only the lines for a single actor's role (or multiple roles) from the full script, writes them out by hand with a brush, and binds them into a separate volume for each act. In the Kansai region, this was called "serifu-kaki." An actor receiving a "kakinuki" signified acceptance of the role. Upon receiving it, the actor memorized the lines from the kakinuki and devised their performance plan. However, in modern times, similar to contemporary theater, stage directions are included, and the text is printed after text-regie (text editing) is completed, serving as the performance script. Kakinuki are no longer created unless specifically requested by an actor.

The role I was given in this production was that of the lady-in-waiting, the second maid, who appears in the scene “The Lover’s Wife’s Parting Ties: Shige’s Parting with Iko.”

The first lady-in-waiting was Bando Sakiko, a veteran actress from the Kotobuki Theater days.

What was handed to me by Toyama, who was both the stage manager and the playwright, was a piece of washi paper cut to a quarter of its original size, bearing only the following two lines written in his own hand:

Maid 2: “Come on out!”

Maid 2: “Let the show begin!”

We say all these lines, in unison, with Bando Sakiko playing the other maid.

Just two lines written on washi paper about half the size of the fortune slips sold at shrines and temples.

On a slightly different note, there’s a classic rakugo story titled “Kyainou.”

I can really relate to the feelings of the protagonist of this rakugo, a low-ranking actor.

I can’t help but feel deeply connected to the protagonist of “Kyainou.”

(If you’re familiar with rakugo, you’re probably laughing right now.)

There’s no way this single scrap of paper could possibly convey the content of a fairly long play like “The Lover’s Wife’s Parting Ties.”

But watching the cast gather together, rehearsing earnestly in the narrow, long corridor of the dressing room, the play’s sequence and key scenes gradually become clear.

Even though it was a small play, I loved the sometimes fiery, intense atmosphere of the rehearsal space, which strictly adhered to Kabuki tradition.

I felt intoxicated and entranced by the uncompromising tension of the professionals, something absent from Hitachi’s public relations troupe.

“Let’s do this part like Koraiya does it,” or “I absolutely want to do this part using Tachibanaya style,” or, “Ah, you’ll do it that way? Then I’ll respond like this here.”

And so on. They would casually sprinkle in these cryptic phrases, like secret codes or hidden language, while rehearsal continued with practiced hands and feet.

Watching this from the far end of the corridor, seated stiffly in seiza position, the dressing room of this small theater in a corner of Tokyo, spared by the fires, began to feel like some unimaginable, otherworldly dimension.

Surrounded by a dull, otherworldly hue, I fell into the illusion that my entire body was being completely consumed by a bittersweet liquid. Yet, deep within my chest, I murmured, “Ah, I’m still alive. I’m glad I’m alive.”

Just three months earlier, I endured relentless American bombing raids from the sky, days filled with the sight of charred corpses and a constant sense of dread. How could such a life, soaked in this sweet feeling, appear before me again so soon? The reversal of my fate was something I simply couldn’t believe.

2009.8.8

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 92

河原乞食

Riverbank Beggar

The second act of the kyogen performed by the Takejaku Troupe at the Shirahige Theater in Mukojima is as follows.

1. Light Theater. Tatsuan's Game of Life. Three Scenes

Tatsuan.....Kataoka Tobei
Wife O-Tetsu.....Bando Sakiko
Iwataya.....Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Wife O-Matsu.....Fushimi Yoko

2. Shinrei Yaguchi Crossing Scene: Tonbee's Residence

O-Fune.....Bando Takejaku
Watashimori Tonbee.....Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Nitta Yoshimine.....Onoe Otojo
Servant Rokuzo.....Kataoka Tobei
Stagehand.....Fushimi Yoko

3. Two Crossing Guards. Second Scene

Sankichi.....Tobei
Kinzo.....Tetsuzaburo
Geisha Somika.....Otojo
Horiguchi Shinsaku.....Bando Takejaku
Sankichi's Wife.....Fushimi Yoko

I know I'm repeating myself, but these kyogen titles and cast names are my handwritten signs posted on the wooden wall behind the short, slanted hanamichi protruding from downstage left.

It was the impoverished era immediately after the war, when we couldn't afford luxuries like programs.

Of course, we couldn't make posters or flyers either.

In my memory, I recall the sight of a few handwritten, two-color (red and black) flyers posted on the walls of burned-out houses and telephone poles in Mukojima, Sumida Ward, just across the Shirahige Bridge.

The character “台” for the role appearing in the second play, “Shinrei Yaguchi Crossing,” used a complex character with many strokes on the flyers back then.

My handwriting in the notebook is a direct copy of that.

I looked it up in the dictionary I have on hand, but that character is no longer listed.

The entry for “うてな” only lists “台.”

In my notebook, it is neatly transcribed in my own writing as “臺.”

Do computers or word processors even have characters like this nowadays?

R-san, I know it's a hassle, but could you look into it for me?

The word “うてな (utena)” itself was still part of everyday speech during my childhood.

It refers to a palace built high up with a good view. It also means a platform with a flat top designed to hold things.

The calyx of a plant is also called “utena,” but this character “萼” might not exist anymore either.

For some reason, the name of my master, Ichikawa Fukunosuke, is missing from the cast list for the second performance at the Shirahige Theater.

The absence of his name means he did not appear.

Furthermore, the names of Kawabe Saburo and his troupe, who have been participating in several recent performances with the Takejaku troupe, are also missing.

“Tatsuan's Game of Life” was a performance by Kawabe's troupe.

Since the Kawabe troupe is not participating, Tachibana Ichiza's Tobei is playing the lead role of "Tatsuan," which Kawabe Saburo usually performed, while the other roles are being played by Kabuki actors.

In short, Ichikawa Fukunosuke and the Kawabe Saburo troupe are not performing in this production.

But I have absolutely no memory of this at all.

Why was I, his apprentice, the only one performing, while Fukunosuke, the leading onnagata, was taking a break?

Even when I say "performing," it was surely just standing on stage in a minor role with hardly any lines, and otherwise running errands in the dressing room.

I'm writing this "Talking Theater" now while looking at my diary from that time, but there's no record whatsoever about those circumstances.

There must have been some reason on the promoter's side, but there was no one who would explain the situation to a newcomer like me, a sixteen year old actor.

Even if I had known the reason, it wouldn't have mattered.

In the most chaotic period immediately after the war, in a corner of downtown Tokyo that had barely escaped destruction, among people struggling with scarce food and daily hardship, the reasons why an actor from a small theater troupe performing meagerly didn't show up were, frankly, of no consequence.

Besides, I'm probably the only one bringing this back to consciousness sixty years later.

"What meaning could there possibly be in reviving such a trivial matter from so long ago?" I suddenly ask myself.

There is absolutely no significance whatsoever.

Why am I writing so tediously about these matters, things from the distant past, forgotten by everyone else, trivial occurrences in the corners of ordinary life, things that are, you might say, little more than dust and rubbish?

I answer: I write because I want to write.

Why would you want to write such things? Stringing them together won't make you any more impressive.

Far from being something to boast about, isn't it rather the sort of background you'd better off hiding from the world?

In those days, the derogatory term "riverbank beggar" still clung to life.

A riverbank beggar is what they call an actor.

They were also called "riverbank performers." The name came from the days when kabuki was performed on the banks of the Shijo River in Kyoto.

My mother loved theater and performing arts almost as much as my father did. Yet, even she, when she learned I was hired by the Tsurukame Theater, muttered under her breath, "So you're going to be a riverbank beggar, are you?" And for a moment, her face looked sad.

My father was nearby at the time and said, "Theater is most enjoyable when you're doing it with an amateur troupe. Once you make it your job, the hardships outweigh the fun."

He didn't oppose it outright, but his expression clouded over just like my mother's, and he avoided looking me straight in the face.

Why do I feel the need to write about something I'm not proud of, something I should probably keep hidden?

I never thought I had this kind of morbid fascination.

If anything, I'm a person with a strong sense of vanity.

There's another reason I'm writing down these old, shameful things, so to speak.

It's because R-san is right beside me, is urging me on, "Write! Write! Write with all your might!"

Getting my butt kicked feels good.

Whatever he writes, it is Nureki Chimuo who breathes within it.

No matter what he writes, it is Nureki Chimuo who has lived that way.

I can't be the only one interested. Everyone is reading it.

Is that so? Would anyone even read something like this?

Yes, there must be.

Now, write it. Write it. You must write it.

It's because I'm told things like that, something like courage, something like a reason to live, wells up inside me, and that's why I've written until now.

Yes, I'll write.

But what I write is still boring, you know. Things from my childhood aren't worth writing down at all.

It's fine. Write. Just write.

Come to think of it, I might have written this "Talking Theater" with R-san as my sole reader.

Even if that's the case, it's fine.

That's how it should be, just make up your mind and accept it.

As mentioned earlier, Kawabe Saburo's troupe and Ichikawa Fukunosuke did not appear in the second performance at Shirahige Theater.

The name of the actress Fushimi Yoko appears in all three of the plays lined up.

Fushimi Yoko does not belong to Kawabe Saburo's troupe.

She was also not an actress with the Bando Takejaku troupe. All actresses in the Takejaku troupe were formally considered disciples of Master Takejaku, and this was immediately apparent because their names began with "Bando."

Fushimi Yoko, in a sense, was a guest performer with the troupe.

She appeared to be three or four years older than me, but I later learned she was actually my same age.

In other words, generally speaking, she was still a young girl.

Yet on stage, she was bold, mature beyond her years, and highly skilled.

In comedies, she naturally played the role of a young woman, but also portrayed a married woman with children.

In kabuki, she flawlessly portrayed dignified samurai wives and the like.

I remember when she played the role of a betrayed wife in “Two Crossing Guards,” clutching her infant and preparing to throw herself onto the train tracks. Sawamura Tetsuzaburo, watching from the wings, murmured in admiration, “She’s remarkably skilled. If she’s this accomplished at such a young age, what will she become in the future?”

This Fushimi Yoko also goes by another name, Komori Akiko.

As mentioned earlier, the “New Star Kabuki” troupe, performing at the Tsurukame and Shirahige theaters, was divided into two companies, one led by Bando Tsuruzo and another led by Bando Takejaku.

Fushimi Yoko was a disciple of Bando Tsuruzo in the Japanese dance division and also went by the stage name Fuji Ryuko.

There must have been some reason why Tsuruzo’s disciple was performing as a guest artist with the Takejaku troupe instead of appearing on Tsuruzo’s own stage, but I had no way of knowing that back then.

This young actress, Fushimi Yoko, would make a dazzling debut on the Asakusa stage a few years later and become the popular star [Asaka Mitsuyo](#).

It feels disrespectful to refer to her by her name alone, as she is still an active and energetic troupe leader today. However, this “Talking Theater” has omitted honorifics from the start, so I hope you’ll forgive me.

Asaka Mitsuyo herself wrote about this period of her life in a very candid style. It was published in 1958 by Gakufu Shion, a publisher in Nagasaki, Toshima Ward, under the title “Onna Kengeki” (Women’s Swordplay).

Written in her characteristic frank and spirited style, it depicts the social climate of the era, the underbelly of the entertainment world, and the interactions between people. It has become a valuable historical document.

2009.9.24

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 93

ドサ回りが好きだ！

I Love Touring!

The performance records of the Takejaku Troupe at the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahige Theater, from around October 1945 (Showa 20) to around March 1946, were notes I jotted down in the blank pages of a “student diary” (printed with the year Showa 15/2600 of the Imperial Era).

This cloth-bound diary, printed and bound as the “student diary,” was published in October 1939 (Showa 14) by Tanaka Soeido Publishing in Andoji Bashi Dori 3 Chome, Minami Ward, Osaka City, with a price of sixty yen.

It is that very diary, printed with detailed days of the month and days of the week, which still appears on the shelves of bookstores and stationery shops at year's end.

I used the “student diary,” edited and printed in Showa 14 (1939), starting in Showa 20 (1945).

Basically, that “student diary” was already a used book.

Or rather, it was mostly blank.

I had been using those blank pages as a memo pad.

It never occurred to me that the notes I jotted down then, just the kyogen titles and cast lists, would see the light of day like this over sixty years later.

Had I intended them as future reference material, I would have taken more detailed notes.

I deeply regret only writing down the kyogen titles and actors' names, without recording the dates of the performances, the admission fees, or the audience numbers.

My sixteen year old self foresaw, or rather sensed, that even if I had taken meticulous notes, they would be of no use whatsoever later on.

I simply don't think it was worth the effort to record everything in detail.

Still, the fact that I did jot down the names of the plays must have been a testament to my deep affection for the theater.

As mentioned earlier, I was already writing comedy scripts at this time, albeit imitations of Goro plays.

These weren't mere experiments: I wrote scripts that were staged immediately after completion, and I even received performance fees.

That said, I had no grandiose notion of making a living as a playwright in the future.

It was an era where looking ahead was utterly impossible.

The anxiety that today I might be alive, but a month from now I could starve to death, constantly haunted me.

In an era when everything had been occupied by the American military and the future of kabuki was uncertain, the sheer determination and passion of "small theater" actors like Bando Takejaku, Tsuruzo, and Ichikawa Fukunosuke, their desires to perform on stage and show themselves to the audience no matter what, captured the heart of the young boy.

The actors' passion for their craft was pure, and it translated into the impact of their daily performances, moving me deeply.

Whether it was "Terakoya," "Fuin Giri," "Nozakimura," "Kawasho from Shinju: Ten no Amijima," or "Shigure no Kotatsu," I truly watched from the wings, tears streaming down my face.

Even when the audience was sparse, they never cut corners. They performed kabuki properly.

Had they not moved me, I doubt I would have become such a long-lasting kabuki fan.

In a way, they were traveling kabuki actors.

No, calling them "travelling actors" feels like an insult.

What are "traveling actors?"

I looked up “dosamawari (travelling troupe)” in the Obunsha Japanese Dictionary to see if it was listed.

It was.

“Dosamawari: A travelling theater troupe without a permanent venue. A provincial circuit. A vagrant wandering from one venue to another.”

“Vagabond troupe” is harsh. “Vagabond troupe” means “good-for-nothing troupe.”

I looked up “good-for-nothing” in the same dictionary.

It says, “A delinquent. A useless person. A slacker.” Even worse.

There wasn’t a single slacker in the Takejaku troupe.

Everyone was diligent and dignified. They had pride.

They had a strict attitude toward their art.

First of all, even though they used a converted movie theater, they had two permanent venues in Tokyo.

I retract my careless use of the term “traveling troupe.”

I never truly believed they fell into that category to begin with.

Or rather, I simply don’t harbor any contempt for travelling troupes.

Far from contempt, I confess I feel something close to admiration for their performances.

“Travelling troupe”... what a romantic word, full with dreams of freedom, abandon, and pure pleasure.

Ever since I learned to read and began devouring novels as a child, I’ve felt a powerful pull toward that strange, alluring world of “travelling theater,” a realm brimming with a narrative quality so utterly removed from ordinary life it borders on the mystical.

The work that influenced me most profoundly was the Meiji-era novelist Mikiyoko Nagata’s [“Decline.”](#)

Besides “Decline,” this author wrote “The Story of Ogi Noboru,” a novel featuring a traveling kabuki actor as its protagonist. I was so captivated by it that I copied the entire text by hand and read it aloud.

To proceed with this manuscript now, I pulled a volume from the “Meiji-Taisho Literature Complete Collection,” published by Shun’yodo in 1928, edited by Mikihiko Nagata and Tatoko Nogami, from my bookshelf.

Then I opened the pages and began reading “Decline.”

Once I started, I couldn’t stop.

I was pulled deeper and deeper into the emotional world of a wandering troupe of traveling actors.

Yes. I might be veering off course again, but I’ll transcribe a little here from the section introducing and explaining Mikihiko Nagata in this book.

Come to think of it, before the Tsurukame Theater era, there was a time when I was utterly absorbed in this novel, “Decline,” and it’s not unreasonable to say that it had a fateful influence on my life thereafter.

To say that if I hadn’t encountered “Decline” during my most impressionable boyhood, the path I walked might have been slightly different. Well, that might be a bit of an exaggeration.

First, there is a “Brief Biography of Mikihiko Nagata””

“Born on March 1, 1887, in Kudan Nakasaka, Kojimachi Ward, Tokyo City. (His father, Ashiho, was a physician from Kumamoto Prefecture, his grandfather was the chief priest of Kikuchi Shrine in the same prefecture and was known as a poet.) After graduating from Kojimachi Fujimi Elementary School and the Middle school affiliated with Tokyo High School, he entered the English Literature Department at Waseda University, devoting himself to the study of English, French, and Russian literature. From 1909, he embarked on a nomadic life, eventually joining a troupe of travelling actors in Hokkaido. Upon returning, he submitted his breakthrough work, “Decline,” to Chuo Koron, instantly gaining literary fame. He later drifted to the Kyoto-Osaka region, where he authored 89 volumes over the next seventeen years.”

A detailed chronology follows, but it will be omitted here.

After studying English, French, and Russian literature at Waseda University, he wandered through Hokkaido and finally threw himself into the ranks of traveling actors. That part is truly remarkable.

In other words, both “Decline” and “The Story of Ogi Noboru” are, in that sense, akin to private novels about Mikihiko Nagata himself.

2009.9.25

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 94

饅頭笠、犬、煙管

Manju, a Dog, and a Pipe

As I've written several times before, my notes contain only the names of kyogen plays performed at the Tsurukame Theater and the Shirahige Theater, along with the cast members.

It states, "Tsurukame Theater: December 20, 1945 (Showa 20) opening night, December 27 closing night."

And the plays and cast members are noted as follows.

1. The Lover's Wife's Parting Ties / Shige's Parting at the Well. One Act

Nursemaid (Menoto) / Shigeno's Child ... Bando Takejaku
Honda Yasozaemon (Red Old Man) ... Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Horse Handler (Umakata) Mitsuyoshi ... Bando Shoko
Daughter, Princess Shirabe ... Bando Kotake
Attendant One ... Bando Sakiko
Attendant Two ... Ichikawa Fukujiro

2. The Keian Chronicles of Peace and Tranquility / Maruhashi Chuya / The Edge of the Moat / The Scene of the Arrest

Maruhashi Chuya ... Bando Takejaku
Matsudaira Izumori ... Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Yumishi Fujishiro ... Kataoka Tobei
Sake Warmer Kansuke ... Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Intermediary 1 ... Hideo Umezawa
Intermediary 2 ... Kotaro Arisawa
Intermediary 3 ... Ichikawa Fukujiro
Arresting Officers ... Many

3. Two Crossing Guards. Two Scenes.

Sankichi ... Kataoka Tobei
Kinzo ... Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Geisha Someko ... Onoe Otojo
Horiguchi Shinsaku ... Bando Takejaku
Sankichi's Wife ... Fushimi Yoko

And on the next page of my notes, it reads, "1946 - Tsurukame Theater New Year's Performance - Opening Day. December 31st."

In other words, the second run at Tsurukame Theater would be the New Year's performance.

The plays and cast names were as follows:

1. Silence. One Act.

Tokuni Taro ... Bando Takejaku
Uesugi Terutora ... Onoe Takenosuke
Aramusha Taro ... Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
And various others.

2. New Edition of the Song Offering Text

Farmer Hisasaku ... Onoe Takenosuke
Daughter O-Mitsu ... Bando Takejaku
Apprentice Hisamatsu ... Onoe Otojo
Oil Merchant's Widow O-Tsune ... Bando Reiko
Daughter O-Some ... Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Maid Yoshi ... Ichikawa Fukujiro

3. Comedy. Daughter at Eighteen. Two Acts

O-Hana ... Bando Yoko
Fujigoro ... Onoe Takenosuke
Seizaburo ... Onoe Otojo
Someko ... Bando Sakiko
O-Hana's Mother ... Bando Reiko
Homatsu ... Ichikawa Fukujiro

From late December of Showa 20 (that is, the year of defeat) until mid-January of the following year, Showa 21, I was unquestionably performing at the Tsurukame Theater. The dates are recorded, so I know this for certain.

My memories of the stage during that time are quite vivid.

It had been about three months since I became Fukunosuke's apprentice. Perhaps because I had grown accustomed to life in the troupe and had gained some leeway, both mentally and physically.

At the opening scene of "Maruhashi Chuya," set at the outer moat of Edo Castle, Umezawa Hideo, Kotaro Arisawa, and I were dressed as chugen (intermediate actors), exchanging lines with the old man from Tetsuzaburo's sake shop.

Though called a sake-warmer stall, it was more like a simple bamboo-mat-covered stand.

"Ah, what a splendid feeling. I only drank two small cups at the riverside tavern, but I'm thoroughly drunk. Well, I suppose I should be. First thing this morning, I had two cups of sake with breakfast at home. Then at the loach shop on the corner, I had five cups while it was still hot. After leaving there, I had three cups of clam sake, two cups each. Then, since they had good raw yellowfin tuna in the goose pot, I had another cup of sashimi sake. What a hellish plum branch! Three cups here, five cups there. All told, about thirty cups. This is turning into a Genta-like situation. I'll have to pawn my armor. Even naked, I can't stop drinking sake..."

Takejaku's crisp delivery echoed in my ears, and I found myself writing on and on.

Maruhashi Chuya's costume at that time was a high-collared, dark-brown cotton kimono, a red haori over it, a single sword in a vermillion scabbard, and a manju¹⁹-style hat.

And the way he delivered his lines with a slightly exaggerated flair, singing them as if they were a famous melody, was the very essence of the joy of "small theater."

Chuya approached the stage in high spirits. Spotting me and Umezawa playing the intermediaries, he called out, "Well, well, simmered oden²⁰, eh?"

He then exchanged lines with the sake shop owner.

The two intermediaries, having been treated to sake by Chuya, bowed their heads in thanks and withdrew to stage left.

From here, my big moment in this play begins.

Backstage, I hurriedly shed the intermediary's costume.

Stripping down to my skin, I slipped into a stuffed dog costume (they'd probably call it a full-body suit nowadays), got down on all fours, and immediately returned to the stage.

¹⁹ A rounded bamboo straw hat.

²⁰ Oden is a fish cake stew.

Basically, this time, I was a dog.

And I played opposite Chuya in his scene.

The dog barked, “woof woof!” at Chuya.

Chuya: “What’s this, ‘woof woof’? You’re quite the modern fellow. Barking ‘woof’ is only natural. They say red dogs taste like beef, so bark ‘moo.’”

Dog: “Woof woof!”

Chuya stares down the dog, then eventually picks up a stone and throws it.

The stone splashes into the moat. Chuya draws his pipe, takes aim, and measures the depth of Edo Castle’s moat.

Chuya, in truth, is not drunk.

He’s part of the rebel group led by Yui Masayuki, who plots to overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate.

“Manju hat, dog, pipe”, that meant Maruhashi Chuya was at the moat’s edge.

Drunk on the hanamichi, he’d say, “...three cups here, five cups there, gather ‘em up, about three sho...”

Alongside this famous line by [Kawatake Mokuami](#), this image became widely known among the people during the Meiji era, and early Showa eras.

Now, it’s not just unknown. It vanished without a trace. Alas!

Behind Chuya, who is measuring the depth of the moat with water sounds and his pipe, Matsudaira Izumigami approaches unnoticed. Without a word, he holds an umbrella over Chuya’s head.

A light rain is falling.

Playing the shogunate dignitary Matsudaira Izumigami is my teacher, Ichikawa Fukunosuke.

Though perhaps a bit too slender, he embodies the role of a samurai with dignified poise and grace.

Enemy and ally find themselves face to face beneath a single umbrella, creating a uniquely beautiful kabuki composition.

The sight of Izumigami, a high ranking shogunate councilor, holding an umbrella over Maruhashi Chuya, a common rogue and, moreover, a rebel, was utterly cool.

“You two!” a voice calls out from the audience.

The stray dog pelted with stones by Chuya, that is, me, yips and retreats backstage.

Then, without a moment to catch my breath, I shed the dog costume and change into the next scene’s guard outfit.

(I had intended to write about my own performance in this act. That is, Ichikawa Fukujiro’s, but I became so intoxicated by the play’s overall mood that my own role ceased to matter.)

I became one of the officers arresting Chuya.

Since it was an unmanned troupe, I performed fight scenes where I was slashed by Chuya three or four times, retreating only to reappear again and again. There was no time to transform from dog to arresting officer.

On my opening night, I somehow managed to make it work. I had my arm and leg guards on, but I forgot my headband, and it became clear it just wasn’t going to work.

So I decided to take the plunge and appeal to Takejaku.

“Master, I’m sorry, but I cannot do it. There’s simply not enough time to switch from being a dog to an arresting officer in the middle of the prologue.”

Then, with the gentlest of smiles, Takejaku looked me straight in the face and said, “I see, I see. Well, it might be a bit much, I suppose. But this troupe is short on actors, as you can see. Do your best to manage it. Your dog is very good.” With that, he gave me two bars of soap.

How precious soap was in Showa 21 (1946). No one would believe it if I wrote it here now. They wouldn’t understand.

So I won’t write it.

The soap was black, made from solidified fish oil, and smelled of sardines.

Even so, it was a precious commodity.

I stood before Takejaku, received the two bars of soap with both hands, and tears welled up in my eyes from sheer gratitude.

Takejaku's kindness made me happy.

2009.9.26

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 95

「だんまり」の立ち回り

The Art of Staying Silent

The New Year's Performance at Tsurukame Theater in Showa 21 (1946) opened on December 31.

Was it a week-long run starting on New Year's Eve the previous year, or did it continue for two weeks because it was a New Year's performance? My diary doesn't record that.

But, following the precious time, my memories of this performance are also vivid.

First, the opening act was "Danmari (Silence)."

My diary simply notes "Silence, one act" and beyond that,

Tokoku Taro ... Bando Takejaku
Uesugi Terutora ... Onoe Takenosuke
Aramusha Taro ... Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
And other numerous roles.

It only says that.

I'm included in this "other numerous roles" category.

There are many kinds of "silence."

In the darkness, the main characters move silently, sometimes groping their way around, a kind of pantomime, or perhaps dance drama. Thus, when written in kanji, it is rendered a “暗闘” and read as “danmari.”

“Jidai danmari” (period drama pantomime) and “sewa danmari” (domestic drama pantomime) are still occasionally seen in Grand Kabuki today.

The “Japanese Theater Dictionary” mentions variations like “erotic silent plays” and “humorous silent plays,” but I have never seen them myself.

I vaguely recall seeing something resembling “Okashimidanmari” (comedy pantomime) once at the Kotobuki Theater in Honjo, but I don’t remember clearly.

The danmari performed at the Tsurukame Theater during the New Year season of 1946, under the direction of Bando Takejaku, was undoubtedly a “jidai danmari” judging by the character names and costumes. However, after that, I never saw a danmari featuring a character like Tokoku Taro at any theater.

Perhaps it was a rare danmari from a kyogen play only performed in small theaters.

In October 2009, the kyogen “Otowagadake Danmari” performed at the Kabuki-za in Tokyo during the matinee was the stage debut of Onoe Matsugoro’s eldest son, performing under the stage name “Fujima Taiga.” Judging by the title alone, it was likely a kind of demonstration “danmari” by the Otowaya troupe.

Kikugoro, the head of the Otowaya troupe, will play the hero role of “Otowa Yasha Goro.”

Matsugoro, who is also Taiga’s father, will appear in an important (probably) role as “Yakko Datehei.” However, I have never seen this kyogen play.

Also, distinguished figures like Kaishun, Tanosuke, Kichiemon, and Tomijuro will make appearances.

Of course, Kikunosuke, the next head of the Otowaya family, also appears.

It promises to be a splendidly lavish danmari.

Given the name of the play and the character names, this is undoubtedly a “period danmari.”

It will likely be a script akin to a new work, combining the traditional danmari with the debut of Otowaya’s new star.

I take my hat off to Shochiku's stance of seizing every possible opportunity to preserve traditional performing arts.

In contrast, the Tsurukame Theater's New Year's performance titled "Silence" simply bears the name "Silence" with no further explanation.

Of course, we don't get a proper script.

As the youngest, lowliest actor, I was in no position to ask my seniors, "What kind of play is this? What kind of silent role is it?"

All I could do was move my body exactly as Director Takejaku had instructed.

When the opening clappers sounded, two samurai from the Warring States period, played by Hideo Umezawa and myself, appeared from the hanamichi, accompanied by the clamor of gongs and drums evoking the battlefield.

Outside the curtain, at center stage, we drew our swords and immediately launched into a sword fight.

This choreography was arranged by Kataoka Tobei.

I knew Tobei's skill as a fight choreographer from plays like "Blood-red Smoke at Takeda Horse Market" and "The Famous Suzukamori" during my time with the Hitachi public relations troupe.

"Let's have Umezawa-kun and the youngster do a slightly more intense fight scene. After all, they're both young. Right, Master? That's fine, isn't it?"

Smiling cheerfully at Takejaku, Tobei choreographed the fight scene for the danmari scene outside the curtain.

Tobei still called me "the boy," just as he had during the public relations troupe days.

At first, it was a gentle, dance-like, choreographed fight. Partway through, it became intense, like the stage combat of the New National Theater.

"Wow, you're good! Amazing! That's some serious power!" Takejaku was delighted even during rehearsals, watching Umezawa and my fight scenes with narrowed eyes.

Hideo Umezawa, the popular swordplay king from Asakusa performed this fight scene with more intensity and passion than usual.

Afterwards, even after the curtain fell on the danmari, Takejaku approached me and said, “Umezawa-kun and Fukujiro-san’s fight scene was like fire. The audience was amazed.”

I loved Takejaku’s smile at moments like this.

Deep wrinkles gathered on either side of his nose, extending down to the lower lip. It was an incredibly warm, gentle smile. His gold tooth was set in place, glinting brightly.

I still remember this “danmari” because Takejaku praised me.

Come to think of it, my master Fukunosuke never once praised me.

Not only did he never praise me, he barely spoke to me at all.

He always sat quietly in seiza, his eyes narrowed, looking as if he were deep in thought.

He was a man of few words.

Even when old patrons brought precious food items, rare at the time, to his dressing room, he rarely showed much of a smile.

In that, I saw the uncompromising, solitary nobility of Fukunosuke, a truly talented onnagata, and my respect and admiration for him only deepened.

The second play following “Silence” was “Nozakimura,” and thanks to Fukunosuke’s recommendation, I was given the role of Yoshi, the maid serving O-Some, the oil merchant’s daughter.

This role of the maid accompanying O-Some, who comes from Osaka to Nozakimura longing to see her lover, Hisamatsu, is usually played by a well-known mid-level actor even in Grand Kabuki productions.

Fukunosuke played O-Some, and the heroine O-Mitsu was played by Takejaku, a role he excelled at.

O-Some and the maid Yoshi enter from the hanamichi and exchange the following lines:

O-Some: Oh, no, no. I long to see Hisamatsu soon, but is Hisamatsu’s house still far off?

Yoshi: Even in this cold season, His Excellency Hisamatsu’s pilgrimage to Nozaki is made out of deep faith, more so than for the Kannon statue. The plum tree at the boat landing, which served as our landmark, is likely the one we were told about.

O-Some: Then it must be that house over there, I suppose.

Yoshi: It certainly seems so, but I'll go ask just to be sure.

O-Some: Ah, no, be quiet. Though I've come eager to see His Lordship Hisamatsu, it's still the village. It wouldn't do to be seen by others. You wait here by the boat.

Yoshi: No, no, my lady. How could I possibly leave you alone?

O-Some: Well, that house is right there. There's nothing to worry about.

Yoshi: Farewell then. I shall see you to the gate.

O-Some: No, no, that's not necessary. You should hurry back to the boat.

Yoshi: Yes, yes, understood.

Here, the gidayu chant begins: "The maid hurries back to the riverbank, turning back in haste..."

I exit the hanamichi alone.

The reason I cannot forget this kyogen play, "Nozakimura," is that it was the only play where I exchanged lines with my master, Fukunosuke, on stage.

Like "Terakoya," this is also one of my favorite plays. It's a fine piece that beautifully expresses the earnest romantic psychology of men and women of that era. I still remember every line, even the gidayu verses, without forgetting a single word.

And whenever "Nozakimura" is performed in a grand kabuki production, I always go to see it.

Like "Terakoya," it's a popular play frequently staged in the Grand Kabuki, so I've seen countless actors portray O-Some, Hisamatsu, Hisasaku, and O-Mitsu over the years.

I keep returning to see "Nozaki Village" because I want to weep over this pure tragedy of self-sacrifice, and at the same time, I long to feel the warmth of remembering Ichikawa Fukunosuke in his prime, to see the image of sixteen year old Fukujiro, to feel as if his spirit is still present.

2009.9.28

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 96

木馬館の勝ち

Kibakan's Victory

If I keep writing only about the 1940s, I start feeling like some old geezer reminiscing about the good old days, so I'll come back to reality once in a while.

Namely, my theater-going situation in the autumn of 2009.

As always, I love plays and see them often.

"The sparrow never forgets to dance."

My daily life exists between the plays.

To say my daily life is the play itself might sound a bit pretentious.

My love for theater infected R-san, and now she loves plays even more than I do.

Just yesterday, I accepted R-san's invitation and spent the entire day watching plays, following the plan she had laid out.

That plan R-san devised was pretty amazing. It's not something most people would think of.

After seeing the afternoon matinee of popular theater at Asakusa's Komakan, we'd move straight to Higashi Ginza to catch the evening performance of "[Shochiku Bai Yushima no Kakegaku](#)" at the Kabuki-za, just for the curtain call.

Even though it was a curtain-call, it included two acts. "[Kisshoin O-Dosha](#)" and "[Yagura no Oshichi](#)."

Just a few days earlier, we had already seen the evening performance of "[Ukiyo-zuka Hiyoku no Inazuma](#)" with R-san.

That performance also consisted of two acts: “Saya-ate” and “Suzugamori.”

I’ve seen both the daytime and evening performances at the Kabuki-za on the same day several times myself.

I’ve also seen both the daytime and evening performances at the Mokubakan theater in a single day.

But seeing performances at both the Mokubakan and the Kabuki-za on the same day was a first for me.

Moving from Asakusa to Ginza is no trouble at all if you take the subway.

The problem is the sheer weight of the plays themselves. If you’re unlucky, you’ll get diarrhea.

But since it was R-san’s strong wish, I agreed to this plan.

To state the result: after watching thoroughly, I felt neither disgust nor fatigue.

Somehow, there was a deep, satisfying weight in my gut, yet a refreshing breeze blew through my head.

A fighting spirit surged through my entire body, telling me I must not quit.

In particular, the pure, passionate performances of the actors on the stage of the Kibakan radiated a dazzling aura, and I felt as though I had received something akin to energy from them.

Watching the period drama “[Kantaro Yumemakura](#),” performed by popular theater actors like Koizumi Tatsumi, Koizumi Dia, and Koizumi Noboru, I thought I must write more firmly about my 1945 and the years that followed in my “Talking Theater.”

And, unconsciously, I began organizing my memories to write as accurately and honestly as possible about the physical and mental movements of my own self during that era.

The play at the Kibakan Theater was fascinating.

It was exhilarating.

There were many moments when I couldn’t help but laugh out loud, my body shaking.

Comedy talent on TV constantly try to “be funny,” but I just can’t laugh at that.

But the stage at Kibakan makes you laugh without thinking. Captivating lines fly back and forth vividly right before your eyes.

“That’s funny!” I found myself shouting and clapping my hands.

After the show, moving from Asakusa to Higashi Ginza, we had a light meal along the way and happily discussed that humor again and again.

Within the humor, there was a definite sense of emotion.

“If you do good work, the audience will always recognize it.” R-san and I debated something along those lines.

The Kibakan Theater was packed. It was always packed no matter when you went.

I’ve seen the Kabuki-za’s “Shochikubai Yushima Kakegaki” several times in the past. It’s a play featuring the heroine Oshichi the Greengrocer.

There’s a scene where the statue of the celestial maiden from the transom at Kichijoin Temple is removed, and Oshichi takes its place. It also uses the folk tradition of sprinkling “dosha” (soil) on a stiffened corpse to soften it as a joke. Because of this, the play is commonly called either “Celestial Maiden Oshichi” or “Dosha.”

Knowing it’s full of shallow gags chasing cheap laughs, I told R-san, “The play I just saw at Kibakan has much richer humor.”

“Huh? What do you mean?” R-san asked, looking puzzled. But explaining it was too much trouble, so I kept quiet.

“Well, it just means kabuki has everything.”

They say the previous Yoshioemon performed this play happily, but I’d rather not have the current Yoshiemon play this third-rate manager named Bencho.

Not only does he turn into a stiff corpse, but when Bencho throws his dirt, everyone else becomes all limp too.

Getting carried away, he throws dirt at everyone on stage.

He even throws dirt at the bookkeeper sitting in the upper right corner of the stage, making him limp for no reason.

A gentleman in a suit walks up from the raised curtain, unaware it’s the hanamichi. Trying to stop him, a hostess chases after him.

Bencho throws dirt on these two as well, making them all limp and floppy.

After that, he even throws dirt on the curtain operator. Kichimon himself pulls the curtain and exits, ending the scene.

In kabuki theater, I don't think there's any other instance where a real woman appears wearing Western style clothing.

While the various gimmicks shown when Unosuke and the others in "Suzumori" are slain by Shirai Gonpachi are delightfully kabuki-like, this dirt gag is decidedly lowbrow humor.

The performances at the Kibakan theater make you laugh without hesitation, but the dirt gag at the Kabuki-za isn't funny. It sends a chill down your spine.

Well, perhaps some audience members enjoy the contrast. Seeing Kichemon perform the profoundly tragic, solemn role of Mitsuhide in "[Badarai no Mitsuhide](#)" during the matinee, then completely transform into this slapstick character by night.

Incidentally, Nakamura Fukusuke's movements in "Yagura no Oshichi," performed in a puppet-like style, also felt half-hearted.

This puppet-like style was likely intended to express the fierce actions of a childish girl, still only sixteen, driven by a woman's passion for her lover Kichisaburo, with a terrifying expression.

But Fukusuke's Oshichi lacked that intensity (and deliberately making his voice sound like a sixteen year old girl was also unnatural.)

Climbing the watchtower at night without a fire, beating the drum to open the town gate, that would be a capital offense. Arrested, she would be beheaded.

It's the "drum of the watchtower, struck again and again."

With that fate in mind, Oshichi scrambled up the ladder, hair disheveled, and beat the drum. Yet, Fukusuke's puppet-like movements failed to convey much of the sense of that tragic destiny.

The overall staging felt somewhat soft, too.

Itoh Seiu painted several pictures of Oshichi the Greengrocer.

This "Oshichi on the Tower" is one, but there is also a painting of Oshichi bound to a cross-shaped stake and being burned alive.

Records state that the real Oshichi was executed at the stake in the first year of Tenna²¹ for the crime of arson.

Fukusuke's Oshichi falls far short of the power and raw intensity of Itoh Seiu's painting.

Stepping outside the Kabuki-za, R-san said to me, "Kabuki truly has everything, doesn't it? This was interesting in its own way."

Those words alone were enough to satisfy me.

She tacitly acknowledged one example of how deeply Itoh Seiu's paintings are intertwined with kabuki. That was a significant achievement.

I wrote several scripts for what we'd now call "popular theater" when I was sixteen or seventeen. All of those scripts were actually staged.

After parting ways with R-san, rocked by the train, I thought, "I'll write about that time too, without holding anything back, in the 'Talking Theater.'"

One reason I left my beloved master, Ichikawa Fukunosuke, was because I had written such scripts, full of myself. That earned me my master's displeasure. From his perspective, it was surely justified anger.

For me, it's not a particularly pleasant memory.

But, I must write it.

Just as I made up my mind, the sound of clappers rang out, right by my ear.

It wasn't the clapper from the Kabuki-za, but the sounds of the clapper from the Kibakan.

The image of Kunisada Chuji, portrayed with such dignified presence by Noboru Koizumi, still lingered in my mind.

P.S.

As I have often stated, this manuscript of mine is handwritten.

Once I finish writing, I send it to R-san, who edits it for readability, types it up on the computer, and posts it on the homepage.

The day after I sent this draft, R-san called me.

²¹ Circa 556 CE.

“The Noboru Koizumi mentioned in your manuscript, it seems that’s not the Noboru Koizumi you often saw ten years ago, but someone else.”

I couldn’t help but exclaim, “What!?”

The moment I saw Kunisada Chuji’s imposing presence, radiating stage presence down to his fingertips and toes, I mistakenly assumed he was Koizumi Noboru, the actor who had once delighted me with his exceptionally skilled performance.

Moreover, the theater company’s name is “Tatsumi Theater BOX,” centered around Koizumi Tatsuya and Koizumi Dia.

As I climbed the old wooden stairs at the entrance to Kibakan, I was already convinced that Koizumi Tatsuya and Koizumi Dia must be actors descended from that Koizumi Noboru. Part of me wanted it to be true.

Because I had watched their performances as child actors with affection.

However, according to R-san’s investigation, Koizumi Noboru had passed away several years ago.

“What!?” I exclaimed again.

I had once been so moved by Koizumi Noboru’s artistry on the stage of the Kibakan that I went to see him perform two days in a row.

Alongside Wakaba Shigeru and Umezawa Tomio, Koizumi Noboru was the actor who had made a profound impact on me.

That actor was already dead.

So then, who was the actor playing that role of Kunisada Chuji, whom I had always thought was Noboru Koizumi?

“Let’s try to find out somehow,” R-san said. But unlike actors performing at the Kabuki-za, such information isn’t readily available. That’s also part of the charm of traveling popular theater troupes crisscrossing Japan.

In this bland world where everything is standardized, regulated, and formalized, isn’t the very existence of people who don’t quite understand such things itself a kind of “poetry?”

2009.10.19

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 97

深井俊彦とたこ八郎

Fukai Toshihiko and Tako Hachiro

My dear reader, who has read every installment of this “Talking Theater” of mine, who has also read both “Secret Bondage Stories,” written for Fuji Planning, and “Nureki Chimou’s Obscene Testament of Pleasure,” which I began writing for Web Sniper, and who has promptly purchased and read all six of my paperback books published by Kawade Shobo Shinsha. From this reader, who is the most precious to me, a question was raised.

It concerned a passage I wrote in the twenty-first chapter of this Talking Theater, titled “The Mindset of Calling Oneself a ‘Rope Master.’”

There I wrote that in 1958, I gathered with Minomura Ko, Toshihiko Fukai, Heikichi Yoshimura, Komasa Tanaka, and So Odakiri at a certain bar in Shinjuku, enjoying casual conversation. And I wrote that “Tako Hachiro” was also present.

However, Tako Hachi (real name, Seisaku Saito) began attending a boxing gym in 1958, made his professional debut in 1960, and became the Japanese champion in 1962.

Therefore, the question raised was, “Isn’t it a mistake to say he was at the drinking party with me and Minomura Ko in 1958?”

First, I want to thank this reader, K-san, for carefully reading my writing.

Indeed, you are my best reader. I thank you once again.

No matter how earnestly I write, I can’t help feeling uneasy when it’s published via these computer based media.

Even if calling it unease is an overstatement, it feels somehow unreliable and I can’t help it.

I am a die-hard “paper” person.

Unless it's firmly printed on "paper," I can't even trust my own writing.

Saying this, I can almost hear R-san scolding me, "Even text flowing across a screen can be good if the content is good!" But intuitively, it just doesn't sit right with me.

Through years of experience, I can picture the faces of those reading text printed on paper. But the faces of those viewing what appears on a computer screen? Somehow, I just can't see them clearly.

Especially when I receive feedback from people with strange names like Pongpokoling or Chinchikuring, I simply can't imagine them as real human beings.

(Well, then again, a name like Nureki Chimuo might not exactly be the name of someone with perfectly normal nerves.)

This time, the person who emailed me, whom I assume is using a pen name, K-san, gave a proper full name and the content was serious. So, I couldn't just ignore this kind of question. I decided to pull myself together and write a reply.

And so, here is my answer to Mr. K.

As K-san questioned, the appearance of "Tako Hachiro" before us in 1958 may indeed be a bit premature.

I believe K-san's observation that it should have been a little later is correct.

Then, I will write about why I came to think that way.

My brain seems to be wired to struggle with recognizing precise numbers, so whatever I write, the record-breaking figures always become vague.

That's why I always rely on memory rather than records when writing.

I can write about memorable events from that era, but when it comes to detailed descriptions like "this happened at such-and-such a place on such-and-such a date and time," it just becomes too much trouble.

I'm just not built with a meticulous mind. I'm terrible at arithmetic and math.

I suppose I could dig out and examine the notes I made back then, but I was born and raised in Asakusa and I'm an impatient sort. I simply can't handle such painstaking meticulous work.

Well, but that's just an excuse.

The bottom line is, my account of the event was wrong.

But 1958 was over fifty years ago.

Ah, fifty years!

Oh my, has it really been fifty years since then?!

It's overwhelming.

As far as I know, not a single person who gathered at the "Takobeya" izakaya²² in Shinjuku Hyakunichino back then, drinking and making a racket, is still alive today.

They're all gone.

I'm the only one left alive.

Why?

Because I was the youngest among them.

I write about events from fifty years ago, relying solely on memory.

Therefore, this has no documentary value.

It's just memory. And ultimately, it's highly sentimental, based entirely on my own subjective perspective.

Memory is a sad thing.

It's sad because they're all gone.

Records are cold, hard facts, so they aren't sad.

They only calmly note the date of death and age at passing, so they do not evoke such deep sorrow.

This time, for this "Talking Theater," I had intended to write about myself in 1946, but suddenly I felt compelled to write a reply to K-san.

So, the story leaps from the 1946 era at the Tsurukame Theater straight to the Shinjuku "Takobeya" era.

²² A Japanese style bar.

Ignoring any attempt at documentation, I write only fragments of memory, sentimentally.

The bar's name "Takobeya" came from the fact it was run by "Tako Hachiro," and he also lived there.

"Lived" doesn't quite fit. "Dwelt" is more accurate.

Walking from Shinjuku Station, passing in front of Shinjuku Koma (ah, that theater's gone now too), crossing the street known as Job Center Street, and turning into the narrow alley opposite leads you into the love hotel district.

These were not the bright, ostentatious, gaudy, glittering fairy tale castle-like love hotels of today. Instead, they were dark and damp, standing quietly and modestly, as if afraid of the world's gaze.

On the left side of that narrow alley, Takobeya stood, all alone.

It was a tiny, tiny drinking establishment, devoid of any decoration, barely able to squeeze in ten customers at most.

In truth, it occupied the first floor of a two-story wooden apartment building called Inoue-so. And Tako Hachiro lived and slept in a four and a half mat room on the second floor.

I don't know when or how Tako Hachiro came to run the Takobeya.

The first time I met Tako Hachiro and spoke to him, he was preparing stew to serve to customers at the shop.

(It was a place that only served sake and stew. That stew was actually pretty good.)

Before actually meeting him, I first heard his name from Minomura Ko.

"Sensei, do you know Kappa no Kiyo?" Minomura Ko asked me.

At the time, I was a contributor to the magazine "Uramado," and he was an editor.

So, habitually, ceremoniously, he called me "Sensei." Later, I somehow ended up joining the "Uramado" editorial department and then he started calling me "Foo-san."

At the time, I often wrote under the pen name "Fujimi Iku," so that's why he called me "Foo-san."

Incidentally, during this period, the name Nureki Chimuo hadn't been created yet. This story takes place long before Nureki Chimuo appeared.

"What's this Kappa no Kiyo?" I asked.

Minomura Ko was a fan of professional boxing and knew all about Saito Kiyosaku.

"He'd keep moving forward no matter how many times he got hit. He was an interesting boxer. Next time, I'll take you to the bar Kappa no Kiyo runs."

He told me that he was called Kappa no Kiyo because of his hairstyle and appearance, and that he was now retired.

Then one day, as usual, I went to deliver a freshly written manuscript to the Uramado editorial office.

"There's someone I really want you to meet. Let's go together now. He's the manager of the Shinjuku French Theater, a director and a writer."

I don't know what year, month, or day of the Showa era this was. I didn't record it, and I don't remember.

The Shinjuku French Theater was a strip theater located behind what is now the Isetan Annex.

I think there was a building called the Sogo Department Store back then, and it was adjacent to it.

Or perhaps the French Theater was built in the building after the Sogo Department Store withdrew? I don't know. That French Theater itself disappeared a long time ago.

Anyway, this is an old story from fifty years ago.

(This sort of thing might be written about in Hata Ichibei's "Comedians' Revolving Stage" or Yodobashi Taro's "Life Sleeping on the Floor.")

An iron staircase leading up from the street below is attached to the back entrance on the outside of the second floor of that strip theater building.

You climbed the iron stairs from outside to enter the theater's dressing rooms.

Holding onto the railing outside that backstage entrance, Minomura Ko pointed out a figure standing there, seemingly lost in thought, and said to me from a distance.

“That’s Fukai Toshihiko. See? He looks like an interesting guy, doesn’t he?”

Minomura Ko and I climbed the stairs leading up to the backstage entrance of the nude theater.

This is my memory of meeting Fukai Toshihiko, a truly remarkable man I will never forget for the rest of my life.

At that time, Fukai Toshihiko was living in a room on the second floor of an apartment building called Inoue-so, Shinjuku Hyakunincho, a so-called “Takobeya.”

It was the room next to Tako Hachiro’s.

After quitting boxing, Tako Hachiro aspired to be a comedian, and Fukai Toshihiko was a big shot in the strip world who had launched many famous comedians in Asakusa.

When I met Fukai Toshihiko, Tako Hachiro called him “Master” and was studying under him.

Fukai Toshihiko and Minomura Ko grew close and developed a tight relationship. Initially, it was because Fukai Toshihiko, who had free access to strip club girls, was providing models for “Uramado.”

However, they found they were on the same wavelength, and eventually developed a deep, human, and fascinating friendship.

(As for me, several years later, I became the resident writer for Fukai Toshihiko’s troupe and even accompanied them on their traveling performances along the Tokaido Road.)

When Fukai Toshihiko, the well-connected boss of the striptease world, and Minomura Ko, the equally well-connected editor, painter, and writer, met at the “Takobeya,” their respective professional connections and friends would naturally gather around them.

It was a dazzling array of faces.

Because Tako Hachiro was the proprietor of that establishment, the man responsible for bringing customers their sake and serving them bowls of stew, it was only natural that Tako Hachiro was present at such a gathering.

But I cannot now clearly state how many years, from which Showa year to which, that era lasted.

All that remains is to recall the record of my faint, brief, yet deeply impressionable friendship with Tako Hachiro.

So, next, I shall attempt to write down those memories fragmentarily.

The following message was submitted by K-san. We are reprinting it with his permission.

K-san's email 10-14-2009 09:48

Nureki Sensei,

I always look forward to reading "Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater," "Bondage Secrets," and the recently launched "Nureki Chimuo's Obscene Testament of Pleasure."

I've also read all six paperback volumes of Nureki-san's works published by Kawade Shobo Shinsha. I've even posted comments several times in the past on "Bondage Secrets."

I consider myself a fairly dedicated pervert and enthusiast, but I get incredibly nervous about emailing Nureki-san, who "hates fake enthusiasts who approach wearing the mask of a true enthusiast." I'm afraid he might say something like, "You're not a pervert at all. You're just a fake."

Regarding "Nureki Chimuo Talking Theater," I have a question, though it might seem like nitpicking. If possible, I'd appreciate your thoughts when you have a moment. I occasionally visit the museum, so I'd be delighted if you could comment then (though I'd be too intimidated to ask anything if I actually saw you, Nureki Sensei).

My question concerns Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater, Chapter 21, "The Mindset of Calling Oneself a 'Rope Master.'" In it, you wrote about memories from a Shinjuku bar in 1958. It's the memory of Suma-san (Minomura Ko) introducing himself by saying, "I'm a rope master."

You mention that Tanaka Komasa, Fukai Toshihiko, Yoshimura Heikichi, and Tako Hachiro were also present at the time.

I'm personally organizing the history of SM as a hobby, and seeing the name "Tako Hachiro" here surprised me a bit. I knew his name appeared in SM circles from the mid-60s onward, but learning he was interacting with Suma-san and Nureki-san as early as 1958 was quite surprising.

However, as I've recently been tracing Tako Hachiro's path, 1958 was when Tako Hachiro, aka Saito Seisaku, was 18 years old, having just graduated high school and moved from Sendai to Tokyo. He was working transporting film reels between theaters and hadn't yet joined a boxing gym. He seems to have harbored aspirations for the entertainment world, but I think it might have been a bit too early for him to be drinking with people like Tanaka Komasa in Shinjuku. Tako Hachiro started going to the boxing gym in 1959, made his professional debut in 1960, and became the Japanese champion in 1962. So,

* Wasn't this 1958 actually a bit later, around 1960?

* Wasn't Tako Hachiro absent from this 1958 gathering?

I think it must be one of these two possibilities. What do you think?

I apologize for nitpicking the details, but since Nureki Sensei's work holds immense historical value, I believe this section is crucial for the record of SM history. If there is any misunderstanding on your part, I would appreciate it if it could be corrected.

I realize this email is quite presumptuous, but I hope you will forgive me.

K

The following is a reply from Nureki Chimuo to K-san.

It was written prior to the composition of the above "Talking Theater, Chapter 97" and sent to K-san as a private letter via me, R-san.

Please note that we always ask for permission before publishing any correspondence in "Talking Theater."

If you prefer your correspondence to remain private, we will not publish it. Please feel free to send your questions anytime.

Nureki Chimuo's Response

10-15-2009 11:09

From Nureki Chimuo

Mr K.,

I couldn't be happier that you've already read my "Talking Theater," "Secret Bondage Stories," and even my latest work, "Obscene Testament of Pleasure," which just started recently.

Furthermore, I'm deeply grateful to hear you've also read the six paperback volumes published by Kawade Shobo Shinsha. I offer my heartfelt thanks once again.

Among the messages sent to me via the internet, R-san selects the meaningful ones, prints them out neatly, and lets me read them.

Regarding your comments about "Tako Hachiro," I felt I absolutely had to respond properly, which is why I'm writing this as a personal letter.

(Of course, this too is my handwritten manuscript that R-san has retyped for the computer.)

Centering on the letters you sent, Director Nakahara of the Sex Industry Museum and I spent a truly fulfilling time yesterday (10-14-2009), chatting happily for over three hours, reminiscing about various things.

(As always, my chatter ended up getting in the way of the director's work quite a bit.)

The conversation spread endlessly, even touching on Tako Hachiro and the people around him, and we just couldn't seem to stop.

Back then, Tako Hachiro was in charge of a small izakaya called "Takobeya" (a tiny place with just the manager, no staff), and that's where we all gathered.

Back then, the person Tako Hachiro called his master was Fukai Toshihiko, and his friends were Yoshimura Heikichi and Suma Toshiyuki. I was Suma Toshiyuki's companion (this was before the name Nureki Chimuo was born), and so the human connections spread rapidly and endlessly.

Fukai Toshihiko lived on the second floor of the "Takobeya" with his young, beautiful lover (Hiroe Kumi), whom he met on tour, and right next to him was where Tako Hachiro slept and lived. Nakata Masahisa and Tanaka Komasa were originally editor and writer, and Suma Toshiyuki set up his desk next to Nakata Masahisa and began editing "Uramado."

Eventually, I became the resident writer for Fukai Toshihiko's traveling theater troupe, touring from place to place. Tanaka Komasa joined that troupe as an actor, and so the story keeps expanding. Within our circle of friends, Tako Hachiro was always there, playing a supporting role, sticking close by. Being an izakaya owner, he was always in a supporting role. In short, it was an era when we all got along well and had a lively, fun time together.

As for the matter you inquired about, I believe I will write about it in the "Talking Theater." Thank you very much. Please write again.

2009.10.15 11:09

2009.10.21

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十八回

Nureki Chimuo's Taking Theater Chapter 98

たこ部屋のこと

The Takobeya

Tako Hachiro called me "Sensei."

That was because he had heard Minomura Ko, editor-in-chief of Uramado, call me "Sensei," since I was a regular contributor to the magazine.

Minomura Ko also called Fukai Toshihiko "Sensei."

Though I hadn't written about it in Uramado at the time, Fukai Toshihiko published plays in specialized theater magazines and was a well-known director within the industry. Having lived through the postwar light theater scene and the world of strip theaters, it was only natural he was called "Sensei," unlike me.

(Fukai Toshihiko appears in the 1974 collection of dialogues by Ozawa Shoichi, "Clear Talk, Sex Talk, Sacred Talk, and Casual Chat," published by Shirakawa Shoin in Kyoto. Other names featured in this collection include Inoue Hisashi, Toita Koji, Ozaki Koji, Yoshiyuki Junnosuke, and Tanaka Komasa. It is a substantial and profoundly rich book. The vivid accounts recorded here form a solid part of the enduring history of popular culture. Yet, if you want to read these writings published over thirty years ago, you can simply pick up the book and open it immediately. But when someone tries to read this computer-written text thirty-odd years from now, will they be able to just pull it out and read it instantly like this book? As someone completely clueless about computers, I have no idea. R-san, please enlighten me.)

Fukai Toshihiko referred to Minomura Ko as "Suma-san."

This is because Minomura Ko's real name was Suma Toshiyuki.

Tako Hachiro naturally called Fukai Toshihiko "Sensei." He also called Minomura Ko, who conversed with Fukai as an equal, "Sensei" too, even though he didn't quite grasp Minomura's true identity.

For example, one night, I arrived at the “Takobeya” a little early. When I slid open the shop’s glass door with a clatter, Tako Hachiro, who was simmering stew in a large pot behind the counter, bowed his head and said, “Ah, Sensei, welcome. Where is the Master today?” That’s how it went.

The Master in question, of course, was Minomura.

“The Master will come later,” I’d say. “He’ll bring a whole bunch of important teachers with him. Make sure you cook up plenty of stew.”

Minomura had arranged to meet the writers and painters who contributed to Uramado right here in this “Takobeya.”

Even though it was called “Uramado,” Tako Hachiro couldn’t grasp what kind of magazine it was.

Later, Fukai Toshihiko would write articles for “Uramado” and “Suspense Magazine” under the pen name Kitano Ryuichi. Even though Tako Hachiro was his disciple, and had some association with Minomura Ko and myself, Tako Hachiro had absolutely nothing to do with SM.

That much, at least, I want to make perfectly clear.

Even if he didn’t understand the term SM, he knew the word “pervert.”

This was because when Fukai talked about Minomura and me to others, he would chuckle with a smirk, using the affectionate and gentle phrase “those perverted people.”

For example, whenever Minomura and I would show up at the Takobeya, Fukai, who was waiting, would greet us not with a hello but with, “Well, well, the perverted duo has arrived. Hehehe...”

He’d greet us with a happy chuckle deep in his throat. Then raising his voice a bit, “Well then, I guess I’ll become a pervert too,” he’d say, narrowing his eyes with even more intimacy and laughing happily again.

Even when Tako Hachiro is nearby, he doesn’t seem to understand what’s going on. He just tilts his head, his one squinting eye looking off in some random direction, and laughs, “Hehehehe...” That’s all he does.

The izakaya “Takobeya” hung its noren curtain on the ground floor of Inoue-so, a two-story wooden apartment building facing a narrow alley. The owner of this Inoue-so, a stylish woman called Mama, was an old acquaintance of the writer Heikichi Yoshimura, who lived in Asakusa.

Heikichi Yoshimura and Fukai Toshihiko were old workmates and close friends from the postwar Asakusa world of light theater and striptease.

Mama of Inoue-so was connected to the writer Takami Jun, famous for his novel “Under What Star,” set in Asakusa. Heikichi Yoshimura knew all about these connections and told me every detail.

Basically, everyone was connected in some way. When people linked horizontally, vertically, and diagonally all gathered together in the “Takobeya” one night, the drinks and conversation flowed freely, and the night stretched into the early hours.

The dancers from the theater managed by Fukai Toshihiko would come over after their performances.

Drunk from the sake that customers had made him drink, Tako Hachiro lay sprawled out, his face flushed red, fast asleep on the small raised tatami area at the back of the shop.

Seeing this, the dancer said, “Oh well, Tako-chan, you really are hopeless. I’ll watch the shop tonight, so don’t go wetting the bed over there.”

As she spoke, she began serving the customers, pouring them sake and dishing out stewed dishes.

Watching the dancer, Minomura Ko called out, “Miss, you’re beautiful. Would you consider modeling for our magazine next time?”

Strictly speaking, at that time, “Uramado” didn’t yet have any photo pages requiring models.

Back then, Uramado still wore the mask of a pulp fiction magazine.

“Wow, a job offer? I’d be delighted!” The dancer rejoiced, then turned to Fukai Toshihiko and asked with a flattering smile, “Sensei, is it okay if I take the job?”

“Sure, why not,” Fukai replied with a smirk, clearly enjoying himself.

“But if you model for that guy, you’ll turn into a pervert.”

“Wow, that sounds interesting. What kind of pervert?”

Shokunai meant “side job.” It was a reversal of the word, “naiko²³.”

²³ Naiko is spelled 内職, but if you spell 職内, it reads as shokunai.

In today's terms, it's like a part-time job. It meant taking work outside the stage. The dancers were salaried employees.

This is how regular customers would become part of the establishment and later provide services to new customers.

The clientele itself gradually became people who enjoyed the unrestrained atmosphere.

Near the bar, love hotels lined the streets. Women who lured men to such places would also show up at the Takobeya.

Tako Hachiro acted as a go-between, connecting those women with men.

I know of no other person who was so universally liked and loved.

Before long, Tako Hachiro started frequenting the home of popular comedian Yuri Toru, becoming his apprentice.

Thanks to Yuri Toru, he started appearing on television and even landed small roles in movies.

At first, he apparently aimed to be a comedian performing skits between dances at strip theaters, but that wasn't an easy act to pull off. It wasn't something the tongue-tied Tako Hachiro could manage.

You need a distinct character and considerable skill as an entertainer to make it on that kind of stage.

Writing this brought it back to me.

Back then, the theater Fukai Toshihiko was involved with also had performers like Sasajuro, who later went to Osaka and became a TV star, and Ichiro Chagawa.

When exactly was the heyday of the Takobeya? From what year of the Showa era to around what year?

I don't know, since I never recorded it precisely.

All that remains for me are rather vague memories. What's left are really just mere "impressions."

Minomura Ko and I went to the "Takobeya" solely to meet Fukai Toshihiko. Tako Hachiro just happened to be there.

But I also encountered Tako Hachiro several times by chance in places other than the Takobeya.

Those times, I was usually walking alone through the city.

And Tako Hachiro would suddenly call out to me.

For example, on the night of the Tori no Ichi festival at Hanazono Shrine in Shinjuku, where rake sellers and street vendors crowded together in a colorful array, calling out “Come on in, come on in!” Tako Hachiro was among them, calling out to customers.

Spotting me in the throng, “Hey, Sensei! Have some sweet red bean soup! It’s on the house!” he’d say, stopping me in my tracks with a bit of force.

I could see the partially melted adzuki beans floating at the bottom of a large black iron pot.

He poured boiling water from a kettle into it, stirred it vigorously, and ladled the diluted sweet red bean soup into a plastic bowl, and said, “Here you go! Sorry to keep you waiting!” as he handed it to me.

Another time, in front of the Shinjuku Kinokuniya Ad Hoc, he was actually selling cheap ceramic bowls laid out on a table.

Spotting me from afar, he shouts, “Hey, Sensei! Buy something, anything! Just buy one thing!”

Standing about 150 centimeters tall, he had a slight build and a constant, distant gaze, his squint giving him a rather vulnerable look that made him seem like a good-natured fellow. Yet, as a former boxer, his eyes were sharp when it came to sizing up his opponent.

Reluctantly, I bought a small, inexpensive teacup.

At times like that, Tako Hachiro was probably helping out the street vendors in that neighborhood.

I wonder how business was going at the “Takobeya,” but I never asked about it and didn’t keep any records, so I have no idea.

I was once approached in front of Asakusa’s “Hanayashiki” amusement park.

Back then, there were still vacant lots in that area, with sideshow booths featuring attractions like the Snake Girl who devoured live chickens whole, or the beautiful Bear Woman covered head to toe in bear fur.

(Ah, how old and nostalgic this story is. But truly, back then, remnants of such sideshows still lingered in Asakusa.)

Tako Hachiro stood at the entrance to the "play" being performed after the tented sideshow act, working as a barker.

This time, I noticed him first and approached. He recognized me immediately.

"Hey, Sensei! Come see the show! Come on in! I'm playing a role with a topknot! I've got lines too! Come see it, Sensei!" Invited, I went inside.

Inside was a tent theater, popular at the time, and indeed, the play had begun.

Looking back now, I suspect it might have been an avant-garde play by a troupe calling itself the "Hamadashi Theater," but I haven't recorded this clearly so I can't say for sure.

Tako Hachiro appeared wearing a topknot, yelling and waving his sword around.

The final scene was interesting and made me gasp. When the backdrop curtain was removed, the Asakusa streets, not a set, were directly visible from the audience seats, and rain was pouring down.

That rain was actually actors, still in costume, climbing onto the theater roof and pouring water from hoses and buckets.

People walking along Hanayashiki Street stopped in surprise, watching this artificial rain. Tako Hachiro was perched at the very top of the tent, wildly swinging a bucket while yelling something.

2009.10.21

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第九十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 99

奇妙な家畜人ヤプー

The Strange Human Cattle of Yapu

I had some acquaintance with Tako Hachiro, but as I wrote before, it wasn't anything involving SM.

But there was just a tiny bit.

No, wait, maybe it wasn't really SM after all. Anyway, I'll write it down.

At a small theater, more like a movie theater stage, under Mihara Bridge in Higashi Ginza, they were performing a play titled "The Beast-Men of Yapoo," and Tako Hachiro was in it.

That movie theater is now called Cine Pathos and has become a somewhat unique Western film specialty house. But back then, it only showed so-called "pink films."

Pink films were being churned out one after another, showing signs of a boom.

It was run by a certain production company that owned several directly managed pink film theaters in Tokyo. Alongside the films, they staged daily "live performances" lasting about an hour as attractions.

By "live performances," they meant plays. That is, theater.

They had two or three small theater troupes for this purpose. These were pink troupes, centered around pink film actresses.

Among them was a troupe called "Theater Group Flame," with five or six members. I had a connection there and spent a period working as something like their resident writer.

I remember the years it was, from around Showa year X to around year Y, but I have no records.

All the scripts for my plays performed by “Theater Group Flame” were published in “Uramado” and “Suspense Magazine,” so researching them would reveal the details. My pen name at that time was Fujimi Iku.

But even if I knew exactly which Showa year I wrote scripts for Aoki Mari or Mizusaki Yoko of “Theater Group Flame,” it wouldn’t really matter.

During this period, my main job was as editor-in-chief of Uramado.

I finished the editorial work in a week, left the minor tasks to the staff, and enjoyed my days involved with these plays.

Ah, I remember now. Before getting involved with “Theater Group Flame,” I also had a period where I wrote scripts for TV movies. That was also during my time as editor-in-chief.

If I start writing about that, I’ll stray further and further from the topic of “Tako Hachiro,” so I’ll return to the main point.

Because of the script for “Theater Group Flame” that had to be staged next at this movie theater, I went to see the play “The Human Cattle of Yapu,” which featured Tako Hachiro.

It was an extremely poor play, almost entirely unrelated to “The Beast-Man of Yapoo,” which, at the time, had the general media buzzing with “Who on earth is [Shozo Numa](#)?”

The only scene I remember is Tako Hachiro naked, dressed as an alien, constantly shouting out strange cries of “kyaa, kyaa!” while flailing his arms and legs about.

It was so utterly ridiculous, I didn’t even get angry.

Tako Hachiro on stage spotted me in the audience. Thinking it would be rude to just leave silently, I called him outside.

The backstage area and dressing rooms were cramped. There was no room for outsiders.

Even if I’d called him outside, he wasn’t the type to engage in conversation, so I just said, “I saw it. It was great. Keep up the good work,” and parted ways with him.

He had absolutely no idea what “The Human Cattle of Yapu” was about, so conversation was impossible. Tako Hachiro and SM simply didn’t connect.

When Tako Hachiro was performing in plays like this, what was happening with the “Takobeya” business?

The manager of Inoue-so or some acquaintance must have opened the shop and run it. The real owner of "Takobeya" was originally the manager of Inoue-so.

I don't really know about those details. I never even tried to ask.

One night, when I went to the "Takobeya," Fukai Toshihiko and Tako Hachiro were unusually deep in earnest conversation about something.

There were no other customers in sight.

"See, that's why I say you're an idiot. If you're the only one looking back at a time like that, it ruins the whole atmosphere of that scene where everyone's running for their lives. You won't get hired by that director again. You really did something stupid." Fukai Toshihiko was lecturing him.

"Wow, what an unusual thing," I thought, and listened silently.

I'd never seen Fukai get angry or lecture anyone before.

He was a quiet man with a naturally low voice.

He was missing both his upper and lower front teeth, probably from cavities.

Because of this, his upper and lower lips were pulled back, making it hard for him to speak loudly and clearly.

He talks in a low murmur, breathing from deep in his throat.

His gentle, low voice suited his features well. Arched eyebrows, soft, narrow eyes, and black-rimmed glasses.

He rarely visited barbershops, so his hair grew freely, naturally forming a rugged, slicked-back style that flowed long and loose behind him.

Standing nearly 190 centimeters tall, he always walked with his back hunched.

Seeing this tall, slouching, middle-aged man with unkempt, bushy hair stroll nonchalantly through Shinjuku, the dancers called him the "Beggar Lion" or "Lion Beggar."

Of course, these were affectionate nicknames born of familiarity and fondness.

Though somewhat grubby, and perhaps a bit disdainful, he was nonetheless kind and a good-natured fellow, making him popular with the dancers.

He was gentle with everyone and always joking around. Even everyday conversations were carried out entirely through jokes.

As mentioned earlier, when Minomura Ko and I visited, he'd squint his eyes happily, grinning, and say something like, "Hey, the pervy duo's here. Well then, count me in too. Let's make it the pervy trio!"

It was unusual to see that same Fukai Toshihiko talking to Tako Hachiro with a serious expression on his face.

"You see, an actor has to move as if he were the director. You won't get hired by that director anymore," Fukai said, hunching his back deeply and leaning in close to Tako Hachiro's face.

"But listen, Master, I turned around back there because I wanted to be recognized as an actor, even just a little. I had my actor's stance!" Tako Hachiro refused to back down.

The two were discussing a scene from director Kinji Fukasaku's film "Battle Without Honor and Humanity."

In that film, there's a scene where a group of petty thugs and yakuza are being chased and flee, either from a police squad or another rival gang.

Among that group of small-time yakuza is Tako Hachiro. He's a step behind the others, and there's a shot where he glances back for just a split second.

Looking back means, essentially, looking towards the audience watching the screen.

Tako Hachiro insists that he did it intentionally as an actor wanting to make himself stand out as a performer.

Fukai Toshihiko scolds him, saying that doing something like that would ruin the harmony of the entire scene and must not be done.

I happened to be watching that movie.

I clearly remembered that scene, when seven or eight men huddled together then scattered and ran off. Tako Hachiro deliberately lagged behind, turned around, and showed his face directly to the camera.

And indeed, at that moment, I thought, "Ah, Tako Hachiro is in it!" The actor Tako Hachiro made an impression on me.

But Fukai Toshihiko's point isn't wrong either.

As a director, I wouldn't want them doing that on their own.

Director Fukusaku used that scene as-is because the filming was done fluidly with a handheld camera. Even if there was some camera shake or other imperfections, his intent was to realistically express human movement, and he likely prioritized that effect.

Tako Hachiro was only visible for a split second, so the director probably didn't think it warranted a reshoot.

The glass door of the "Takobeya" rattled open, and a customer whose face neither Fukai nor I recognized entered. This halted the master-apprentice debate, but what stuck with me was Tako Hachiro starting to say something like, "As an actor's attitude..."

Mid-debate, Tako Hachiro looked at me and asked, "Hey, what do you think, Sensei?"

Naturally, I believed Fukai's opinion was correct. Yet I was somewhat moved that Tako Hachiro, who everyone treated like a fool, had his own convictions. I gave a vague reply, "Hmm, yeah, I guess so," and left it at that.

I never once thought Tako Hachiro was stupid. I always believed he was just pretending to be.

Tako Hachiro always behaved politely. Rumors circulated about him suffering from brain damage after boxing, even losing bladder control, but I never actually witnessed it.

I thought his strategy for navigating the entertainment world was to pretend to be stupid, keep a low profile, and just get by.

The sharpness of his gaze as he spotted me and called out to me in the bustling, crowded chaos of a busy festival night, and the warmth and intimacy radiating from his entire being at that moment, were extraordinary.

I bumped into Tako Hachiro unexpectedly in Golden Gai, Shinjuku.

"Sensei, I'm in this movie called 'The Yellow Handkerchief of Happiness' by director Yoji Yamada! I get punched by Ken Takakura! You gotta see it!" He said it with a high-pitched voice, and he smiled happily with one eye.

My diary doesn't record what year, month, or day of the Showa era that was.

2009.10.30

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 100

野崎村は寒かった

Nozaki Village was Cold

The year after defeat, in 1946 (Showa 21), during the New Year's performances at the Tsurukame Theater, I stood on the same stage for the first time with my master, Ichikawa Fukunosuke. Though brief, I exchanged lines with my teacher.

It was the scene set in Nozaki Village from the "New Version of the Song Festival Text."

Fukunosuke played O-Some, the daughter of a pawnbroker named Aburaya, who had traveled all the way from Osaka to visit her lover, Hisamatsu.

My role was Yoshi, the maid who followed O-Some.

Nakajima-san, Fukunosuke's attendant, made a special trip to the audience seats to watch my performance.

"Fukujiro-san, you were good. You see, whatever role you play, you fully become that character. Regardless of whether it's good or bad acting, that's your strength."

"Thank you very much." I bowed my head and thanked him.

But I wondered, what did he mean by "regardless of whether it's good or bad acting?"

This woman had been Fukunosuke's attendant since the Honjo Kotobuki Theater days. She carried the dignified air of a veteran attendant. She must have been close to fifty by now.

She meticulously took care of every detail of Fukunosuke's personal needs, dressing him in stage costumes, assisting with his makeup, and so on.

She was a stern-looking woman with high cheekbones, sunken eyes, and full lips, but she was kind and considerate to me.

It was also Nakajima-san who did the makeup for the role of Yoshi, the maid in Nozaki Village.

First came "Silence (Danmari)," then "Nozaki Village," and the third play, the closing piece, was "Comedy: The Eighteen Year Old Daughter." However, I've forgotten the content of this play, it's no longer in my memory.

I was also in the cast, playing the role of "Hosho," but I don't remember it.

Judging by the title, I suspect it was a rehash of one of Soganoya Goro's usual plays, but what kind of play it was and what lines I spoke have fallen from my memory.

Though labeled a "comedy," it must have been a rather dull, unimpressive play.

After the New Year's run at the Tsurukame Theater ended, the Bando Takejaku troupe took those three plays exactly as they were and moved them to the Shirahige Theater.

Here at the Shirahige Theater in Mukojima, it was still the New Year's season.

My notes only list the three plays under the cast section, it simply says "same as before."

There's no mention of when the performances ran from or to. The record is thin. So what I write ends up being mostly "reminiscences." There's no helping it now.

That winter, I recall, was especially cold.

It might be hard to believe now, but in those days, there were no heating or cooling systems.

Even when the auditorium was packed, the human body heat did nothing to ease the cold.

Both the stage and the audience area were frozen solid by the midwinter cold. The floor beneath the audience seats was concrete. The cold seeped in, starting from my toes, up through my ankles, and all the way to my knees.

Audience members who lived nearby brought cushions from home. They placed them on the chairs, folded their legs, and watched the play seated in seiza.

This wasn't just because it was a small theater in the backwater of Mukoshima that lacked heating.

It was the year after the defeat. Back then, no movie theater or playhouse had the luxury of heating.

At the newsreel theater in the basement of the Nikkatsu in front of Yurakucho Station, there were no chairs. I watched the movies standing up. I wasn't alone. All the customers watched the movies standing up.

There were no chairs in the audience seating.

You might find it hard to believe, but it's true.

The north wind whistled through the vacant lot, scorched by American air raids.

Leaving the Shirahige Theater, on the walk to Minami-Senju Station on the Joban Line, all you could see were two huge gas tanks.

Just a few months earlier, the bodies of men, women, and children, charred and mangled, lay piled up and scattered across this very ground.

In this area, only the section centered around the Shirahige Theater had miraculously survived the fire.

The slightly modified cinema hut was also terribly drafty.

When the north wind blew, the corrugated iron roof would peel up and creak loudly.

In the margins of my diary from that time, I wrote a poem-like passage about the stage on that bitterly cold day.

Nozaki Village

It's a bitterly cold day
O-Some, who came from Osaka to see Hisamatsu
Finally got to see the man she longed for
Yet she narrowed her eyes like a fox
And trembled on stage

O-Mitsu, betrayed by Hisamatsu
Weeps with her back to the audience
Early-blooming plum branches sway from the eaves
The north wind blows, rattling the hut's roof
On cold days, everyone is unhappy

O-Mitsu, the daughter of Kusaku, a farmer in Nozaki Village, and Hisamatsu had been betrothed since childhood and were destined to become husband and wife.

However, Hisamatsu became close to O-Some, the daughter of the pawnbroker where he worked in Osaka. Hisamatsu and O-Some had grown so deeply attached that they vowed to commit double suicide if their love could not be fulfilled.

Upon learning this, O-Mitsu resolved to give up her feelings for Hisamatsu. She decided to cut her topknot and become a nun.

Persuaded by their parents, they decided to return to Osaka for the time being. O-Some traveled by boat, while Hiramatsu rode in a palanquin.

Here comes the climactic scene. The boat carrying O-Some moves from the left side of the stage to the hanamichi.

Meanwhile, Hisamatsu in his palanquin moves to the temporary hanamichi on the right side of the stage. From the audience's perspective, the actors dramatically part ways, exiting to opposite sides of the stage. It's a scene both sorrowful and splendid.

This becomes the famous lively accompaniment piece "Nozaki no Okuri" on the Gidayu shamisen, and I absolutely adore this scene.

However, this is the lavish, splendid production seen on grand stages like the Kabuki-za. On the small stage of the former movie theater in Mukojima, it simply couldn't be done that way.

In the grand production, after the stage rotates from the scene at Hisamatsu's house, it immediately becomes the scene on the earthen embankment behind it, from which the boat departs. But the Shirahige Theater lacks the equipment for a revolving stage.

To condense two scenes into one, the boat must depart from in front of Hiramatsu's house.

O-Some and her mother O-Tsune boarded the boat, steered by the boatman with his pole, and retreated down the hanamichi. But that boat was nothing more than a thin plywood board with a crude painting on it.

O-Some and O-Tsune board the boat, sit down, and then grasp the edge of this single plywood boat with their own hands.

Basically, they must support the edge of the boat with their own hands to keep it from tipping over.

The boat's bottom rests directly on the stage floor.

Since it's just a single, long, narrow plank for a boat, it would tip over without being supported by hand.

The boat moves forward in sync with the Gidayu music and the boatman's movements as he stands and maneuvers the pole.

O-Some and O-Tsune, seated inside, must move the boat while remaining seated, shifting their entire bodies sideways in time with the music.

Keeping their upper bodies still, they subtly support the boat's edge while gradually shifting their hips and feet sideways, making it appear as if the boat is moving forward.

It's a simple and crude mechanism, so it's completely visible from the audience seats.

(Now, with advanced mechanisms like sensors, a single boat glides freely across seas and rivers constructed on stage.)

Even without the real thing present, acting as if it exists is undoubtedly part of an actor's craft. Yet, at the climax of a tragedy, the poverty of such a crude, small-scale production, a mere "small play," made me sad. It seemed unbearably pitiful.

The one who was truly sad, more so than a novice actor like me, was surely Fukunosuke, who played O-Some.

Hisamatsu's exit scene should have been a grand one too, leaving the stage in a palanquin from the temporary hanamichi built on the upstage side. But here, he merely moved his body while standing, making dance-like gestures to the rhythm of the Gidayu shamisen, taking half-hearted steps one by one until he hid himself behind the wing curtain.

Even to my seventeen year old eyes, it was a poor production.

Still, Onoe Otojo as Hisamatsu, Onoe Takenosuke as her father, Hisakatsu, and Bando Takejaku as the leading lady O-Mitsu all poured their hearts into this scene, elevating its emotional intensity with earnest, passionate performances.

Drawn in by the actors' earnest artistry, I don't recall any hint of the audience mocking the crude boat's movements.

Their performance was undoubtedly passionate, yet the biting cold in the unheated hut was severe. Enduring it, O-Some's face had grown stiff, her eyes narrowed and upturned like a fox's.

I remember Fukunosuke's face, frozen stiff from the cold at that moment, as if it were yesterday.

The cramped dressing room had barely enough space to fit a single brazier.

In winter, the feel of lukewarm white powder brushes against the face is cold.

Even now, when I think of the other side of the Sumida River, I have this sense that it's a place so cold, O-Somoe's face would freeze and resemble a fox.

The Shirahige Theater is probably nothing but a shadow now, but I've made a promise to walk with R-San to the place where I once felt that way. We'll get off at JR Minami-Senju Station, turn left at Namida Bridge, cross Shirahige Bridge, and go there.

R-San says some vestiges of that era might still linger, but over sixty years have passed. I feel like not a single fragment remains.

Why is it that, while I never want to taste that cold, that misery, that pain again, it has also become a nostalgic memory, causing me to reminisce like this from time to time?

From the age of fifteen or sixteen, I enjoyed reading the novels of Kubota Mantaro, but at the same time, I repeatedly read and cherished novels like Nagata Mikihiko's "Decline," "The Story of Ogi Noboru," and "Mio."

It wasn't so much reading as devouring. I was utterly immersed in the world of these novels.

Reading them would make my whole body tingle.

And I dreamed that someday, I too would become like the protagonists of these novels.

It's the tale of a man who grew weary of life in Tokyo, set out traveling alone, met a group of wretched traveling actors in Hokkaido, and eventually became one of them.

The figures of these poor, lonely, unfortunate traveling actors, who had turned their backs on ordinary life, were depicted with poetic feeling.

From a young age, I had a sort of "taste for the fallen," an inclination close to masochism. Immersing myself in this novel only seemed to strengthen that tendency.

Regarding the writer Nagata Mikihiko, the following brief biography is recorded in Volume 33 of the "Meiji-Taisho Literary Collection" published by Shunyo-do in 1928, under "Nagata Mikihiko and Nogami Yayoi."

A Brief Biography of Professor Mikihiko Nagata

Born on March 1, 1887, in Kudan Nakasaka, Kojimachi Ward, Tokyo City. (Omitted) He entered the English Literature Department at Waseda University, devoting himself to the study

of English, French and Russian literature. Beginning in 1909, he embarked on a nomadic life, eventually joining a troupe of traveling actors in Hokkaido. Upon returning, he submitted his breakthrough work, "Decline," to Chuo Kuron, instantly gaining literary fame. Later, he again lived in exile in the Keihan region, producing eighty-nine volumes of works over the following seventeen years.

Though fate played a part in the chaotic period immediately following the war, I believe it was the influence of this novel, "Decline," that led me to become a disciple of Ichikawa Fukunosuke and to shiver with cold in a shabby, burnt-out hut in Mukojima.

But when I actually experienced it, I found myself trembling in a daily life even harsher, more desolate, and more hopeless than the world depicted in the novel.

Yet, the troupe leader, Bando Takejaku, my master Ichikawa Fukunosuke, and all the other actors, they all performed every day with a tenacious, wholehearted dedication. They all loved the theater.

No, one could also say they had nothing else to do but perform.

No matter how poorly equipped or impoverished the hut, if they put on a show and even a few customers came, they could stave off hunger.

In the uncertain world immediately after defeat, when tomorrow's fate was unknown, simply staving off hunger was what mattered most.

After losing the war, the terrifying planes dropping bombs over our heads no longer flew. People shouted that peace had come, yet it was an anxious time, unsure if true peace had truly arrived. Perhaps that is precisely why their performances possessed such single-minded devotion and passion, continuing to move me to this day.

2009.10.31

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 101

漂泊零落趣味

Wandering and Scattered Charm

I finished the manuscript for “Nozaki Village Was Cold” and immediately faxed it to R-san. Soon after, her reply arrived.

“Sensei, the ‘Brief Biography of Nagata Mikihiro’ section at the end of this manuscript is already included elsewhere. You’ve already written it in the ninety-third installment, ‘I Love Touring!’” she told me over the phone.

She always reviews my manuscripts immediately. I’m truly grateful for her.

“What?!” I was stunned.

Then, I immediately went back and reread it.

When I send manuscripts by fax, the handwritten draft remains in my possession. That’s the best thing about this fax machine.

Indeed, at the end of “I Love Touring!” there was a “Brief Biography of Nagata Mikihiro.” It was something I had transcribed myself.

What I published this time was a further abridged version of that “Brief Biography.”

But I realized that my desire to include that “Brief Biography” had grown deeper and more urgent than it had been last time.

It was precisely because it had become so deep and urgent that, carried away by the momentum, I forgot I’d introduced it once before and published it again.

It wasn’t a deliberate blunder. It just happened naturally as I wrote, riding the flow of the text and pouring my heart into it.

Writing with passion, specifically, meant things like, “My taste for the lowly felt almost like a masochistic sensation.” That sort of thing.

Perhaps I should have written not “close to a masochistic sensation,” but that it was masochism itself.

But I hesitated, thinking that stating it so definitively might be too much of a leap.

So I softened the expression.

Regarding the blunder of having Nagata Mikihiro appear twice in this “Talking Theater,” I consulted R-san, asking, “What should I do?”

“When text from a webpage is published over time like this, readers might not mind much. But readers who pick up a book and read it continuously might think, ‘Oh, there he is again,’ don’t you think?” R-san said.

I pondered and pondered, “What should I do? Should I delete one? But reading them both, they’re both the natural flow of my feelings, or the result of my heightened mood. To be honest, I don’t want to delete either one,” I said.

And so, I reread the novels written by Nagata Mikihiro from the late Meiji to the early Taisho periods, “Decline,” “The Story of Sensho,” and “Zero (Mio).”

Reading all three in succession, that same crushing, profoundly poignant, oppressive sense of desolation overwhelmed my mind and body, plunging me into the exact same masochistic mood I’d felt when I first read them at fifteen or sixteen.

This masochism wasn’t the simplistic kind involving direct, overt dynamics like the typical “mistress and slave” dynamic (though deep down, there might be such sexual connections). It felt like a fundamental, all-encompassing masochism, enveloping my entire being from head to toe.

The above is my explanation for posting “A Brief Biography of Nagata Mikihiro” twice.

For now, I have no intention of deleting one of the duplicates or rewriting the surrounding text.

However, if R-san were to say, “You really should rewrite it,” I would heed that advice when compiling it into a single book.

Because I believe R-san is the finest reader and most precise critic of this “Talking Theater.”

“To put it simply, I think it’s fine as it is. Your feelings are expressed very naturally, and I believe readers will accept it straightforwardly without any sense of discomfort,” R-san stated decisively at the end.

When I think about it, the stage performances and lives of traveling actors of this era and type are preserved only in writing.

They are not preserved in photographs, paintings, or of course, film.

(Reading this novel, it seems traveling actors of this era also performed different plays every night, meaning they did kabuki on a daily rotation. So perhaps the fact that today’s “popular theater” performs different plays every single night is a tradition after all.)

It is precisely because it is writing, precisely because it is a world expressed through fiction, that it could sing the romanticism of people wandering in miserable circumstances, imbued with poetic sentiment, while concealing a profound scent of masochism at its core.

Oh, somehow we’ve gone off on a tangent again.

Where did it start? What triggered it?

Ah, yes, it was the story of O-Some from “Nozaki Village,” who must perform on a poor, desolate stage, carrying her own boat with her own hands. That’s how far we’ve strayed from the tale.

In 1946 (Showa 21), the New Year’s performance at the Shirahige Theater featured the following play as the second act.

1. Keian Taiheki (The Keian Chronicle of Peace) by Maruhashi Chuya. The Scene at the Moat.

Maruhashi Chuya ... Onoe Takenosuke
Matsudaira Izumigami ... Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Archer: Fujishiro ... Kataoka Tobei
Teahouse Woman ... Bando Reiko
Attendant One ... Umezawa Hideo
Attendant Two ... Arisawa Kotaro
Attendant Three ... Ichikawa Fukujiro

2. The Black-Handed Group: The Round-Up From Nakano-cho to Retribution. Three Acts

Hanakawado Sukeroku ... Bando Takejaku

Agemaki ... Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Shriatama ... Onoe Otojo
Shiraki Uri/Shibei ... Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Torii Shinsaemon ... Kataoka Tobei
Disciple 1 ... Hideo Umezawa
Disciple 2 ... Kotaro Arisawa
Disciple 3 ... Ichikawa Fukujiro

3. The Love Suicide at Amijima. The Riverbank Scene.

Kamiya Jibei ... Bando Takejaku
Koharu ... Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Konaya Magoemon ... Onoe Takenosuke
Zenroku ... Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Tahei ... Kataoka Tobei

Marubashi Chuya was originally slated to play the role of Takejaku, the lead actor. However, since Takejaku was performing the important roles of Sukeroku in the second act and Kamiya in the third act, the role of Tadayoshi was likely given to Takenosuke instead.

The role of Kansuke, the sake warmer at the moat scene, has been changed to a tea shop woman. This is likely because Tetsuzaburo, who previously played Kansuke, has an important role in the next act, so actress Reiko took his place instead.

I played the same role as before. The attendant number three, wearing a stuffed animal costume as the dog barking at Chuya. This time, it was only the moat scene. There was no arrest scene.

The performance of "Kawasho (Riverbank)" by the duo of Takejaku and Fukunosuke was a truly moving stage.

It seemed as though their passionate acting covered up the crudeness of the costumes and set.

No, rather than passionate acting, it appeared to me that the actors of this troupe simply loved performing so much they couldn't contain themselves.

Well, it is their profession, so you might say it's only natural. But on that cold, harsh stage, it seemed to me they were performing with more than just professionalism. They were performing with passion.

I had discovered the appeal of traditional Kamigata theater a few weeks earlier through Takejaku and Fukunosuke's performance of "Koi Hikyaku: Yamato Orai - Fuin Giri," but the

excellence of this “Kawasho” was shocking, moving me even more deeply than “Umezawa Chubei.”

Takenosuke’s performance as Koya Magoemon, too, was superb, rich in human warmth and perfectly suited to the actor’s gentle nature.

Looking back now, among the plays performed by the Takejaku troupe, this “Kawasho” was the absolute masterpiece. To add, the second best was “Terakoya,” and the third was “Umezawa Chubei. The Seal Breaker.”

The “Kawasho” performed at the Shirahige Theater ran a total of nine times: one evening performance on weekdays, and two performances each (matinee and evening) on Saturdays and Sundays.

The following run at the Tsurukame Theater also featured this “Kawasho,” meaning I saw this play a total of eighteen times.

And each time, I watched it intently from beginning to end, without even blinking. I was utterly captivated by the charm of this play and simply couldn’t stop watching it.

The protagonist, Kamiya Jibei, has a wife and two children with her, yet he falls for Koharu, a courtesan employed by Kinokuniya in Sonezaki Shintchi.

It was a deeply poignant play about two lovers who, having fallen deeply for each other, ultimately end in a double suicide. Looking back now, it’s impossible for a seventeen year old boy to truly grasp such a desperate, tragic adult love story, yet somehow, I understood it.

I wept for the heartrending feelings of the courtesan Koharu and the pitifulness of their illicit love.

Even as an elementary school student, and despite it being wartime, I was engrossed in reading nothing but such novels. I suppose I was what you’d call precocious.

Captivated by “Kawasho,” I watched the stage every day. It was only natural for a young mind, but I ended up memorizing every line of dialogue spoken by the characters.

And even now, sixty years later, I remember every single word of that dialogue.

I didn’t memorize them intentionally. They simply entered my mind and became etched there.

It truly is a masterpiece. A masterpiece excels in its scenes, structure, and character portrayal.

The emotion stirred by encountering that masterpiece soaked into my seventeen year old brain like rain seeping into parched sand.

Whenever “Kawasho” is performed in the current Grand Kabuki, I always go to see it. The lines flow effortlessly from my mouth, matching the actors on stage. I murmur the lines in my mouth and become intoxicated.

Just the other day, I performed in part of my neighborhood’s theater festival. I struggled to memorize a dozen lines of dialogue. I perform in this festival every year, yet it seems my ability to memorize lines grows worse with each passing year.

The influence of Nagata Mikihiro’s novels about drifting and decline is significant, but facing “Kawasho,” drowning in it, and being moved eighteen times, didn’t that also suggest some direction for how I would live my life afterward?

The Shirahige Theater was bleak and impoverished, devoid of the emotional depth or poetic lyricism found in the novel “Decline.” Yet it was also the season when my body and soul were shaken by the impact of “Kawasho,” performed by Takejaku and Fukunosuke.

2009.11.3

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 102

痴女の棲む二階

The Second Floor Where the Slut Dwells

While discussing the “Talking Theater” with R-san, this topic came up.

“You previously wrote about this Shirahige Theater era under the pen name Fujimi Iku. It’s published in SM Select. It’s a good novel.”

“Huh? I’d forgotten about that. Maybe I’ll give it a read.”

I promptly asked Director Nakahara of the Sex Industry Museum to look for that magazine.

Sure enough, the story was published in the April 1976 issue of “SM Selected,” published by Tokyo Sanseisha.

The title was “The Second Floor Where the Slut Dwells,” and the pen name was Fujimi Iku.

As always, I was amazed at Director Nakahara, who swiftly located that single issue from among the vast number of books and materials on the shelves inside the museum and placed it before me.

The phrase, “encyclopedic knowledge” surely refers to this person.

He knows my numerous pen names better than I do myself and is more knowledgeable about my writings than I am. I can only stand in awe.

Director Nakahara promptly photocopied the twenty-three page “The Second Floor Where the Slut Dwells” and handed it to me.

So, I read it.

The name “Shirahige Theater” appears exactly as it is.

The name of the writer “Nagata Mikihiro” also appears.

It must be a novel I wrote, but this was unexpected.

Since I wrote it thirty years ago, I’d forgotten the details, but I could see the traces of my effort to depict my own boyhood relatively seriously and faithfully.

It describes how actors, after finishing their performances, were allowed to bathe in the family bath of the udon shop owners that adjoined the back of the Shirahige Theater.

It says that late at night, after a dozen or so actors had used it, the bathwater became thick and murky with dissolved white powder and makeup oil, and it had a strong odor.

I fondly recalled the feel of that murky water and its smell.

Thirty years ago, when I wrote this novel, both the Shirahige Theater and the Tsurukame Theater were still relatively recent in my memory.

In other words, 1976, when this magazine was published, marked thirty years after the war’s end.

Another thirty-odd years have passed since then.

The war is now a full sixty-five years behind us.

I have forgotten the slimy feel and the smell of the bathwater, saturated with the white powder and makeup oil the actors shed.

Yet, within this “Second Floor Where the Slut Dwells,” it was vividly depicted, and it felt nostalgic.

However, the story about the daughter of the udon shop behind the house who lent us that bath is entirely made up.

The parts about the udon shop girl getting naked and joining me in the bath I was soaking in, or sneaking into the second floor of that house and indulging in erotic acts with her, all of that is pure fiction, created to suit the nature of the magazine it was published in.

So when you read it now, it seems too absurd and lacks realism.

Even though creating such stories is my job, I can’t help but think now how I could have diligently written down things that never even happened.

I feel like I've written down a series of wistful wishes, how wonderful it would be if such a "slut" actually existed.

From the 1970s through the 1980s and into the 1990s, I spent my days working as a bondage specialist on the photo shoots for the dozen or so SM magazines published at the time, spending my days and nights alongside naked female models.

Even facing young female bodies every day in these closed-off spaces, I never actually encountered a single woman who was such a convenient "slut" for a man.

The female models were naked because it was their job to be naked.

They weren't naked because they were "sluts."

They were naked because they got paid that day for being naked.

(Come to think of it, during that era, my pay for the shoots was also paid on the day. The editor-in-chief handed it to me the moment the shoot ended. I recall getting thirty thousand yen per day.)

I bound countless models, but I never encountered a single "slut" or "nymphomaniac."

(Well, maybe it was just that I wasn't popular with women.)

My own unfulfilled desires, stemming from my unpopularity, might have created the character in my novel who was wildly popular, "me," like the one in "The Second Floor Where the Slut Dwells."

And one more thing.

When you're in daily contact with naked models, you start seeing them not as women, but merely as material.

Basically, they cease to be objects of eroticism.

The troubling thing is, after working with paid models several times, the SM-like eroticism of the female body starts to fade.

If bondage becomes merely a form without soul, simply a nude woman wrapped in rope, enthusiasts will turn away from it.

That's why we, or rather I, write such stories to stir my own erotic desires.

The seventeen year old “I” who appears in “The Second Floor Where the Slut Dwells” is bright and glamorous, but my actual reality was dark, miserable, and a daily struggle against the bitter cold.

The cold hit hard partly because there was no food.

Unfortunately, there were no pleasurable realities like those in “The Second Floor where the Slut Dwells.”

It was, after all, nothing but a fantasy.

It wasn't just me. I think all the common people back then were starving.

I'll go ahead and write something embarrassing.

Walking through the narrow, dark alleys of Mukojima, charred by air raids, I found what looked like scraps of some kind of food lying near the back door of a house.

I picked it up and put it in my mouth. But I spat it out immediately. It was dog feces.

Yet, through that era of starvation, those actors lived, performing with all their might, wholeheartedly, without giving up. And so did I.

Touched by their passion for kabuki, sometimes shedding tears of emotion, I too lived through that cold, dark era.

The Bando Takejaku troupe moved from the Shirahige Theater in Mukojima to the Tsurukame Theater in Kameari.

1. The Black-Handed Group: The Round-Up From Nakano-cho to Retribution. Three Acts.

Hanakawado Sukeroku ... Bando Takejaku
Agemaki ... Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Shirotama ... Onoe Otojo
Cast remains the same as at the Shirahige Theater

2. The Love Suicide at Amijima. The Riverbank Scene (Kawasho)

Kamiji: Bando Takejaku, Koharu: Ichikawa Fukunosuke
All other cast members are the same as at the Shirahige Theater.

3. Dance

This “dance” thing, I don’t understand it anymore.

Was it nagauta, seigen, or gidayu dance? I can’t tell.

Since there was no jikata, that is, musicians, it’s certain it wasn’t a full-fledged kabuki dance.

Or perhaps they danced to a record?

My diary only records “dance.”

I regret not jotting down more details, even just a line or two.

If I had written about the dance’s content, I feel I might have glimpsed a fragment of the chaotic times, what kind of show was being presented to audiences on the poor, backstreet stages of Tokyo immediately after the war. It’s a pity.

On the other hand, I also feel that even if someone like me were to know it now, what difference would it make? What value would it hold?

Whether it holds value or not, I think I should have written down everything. Perhaps that’s the nature of the writer’s craft, even for a hack like me.

Come to think of it, the names of Kawabe Saburo and his troupe, who had temporarily participated in the Takejaku troupe, have also vanished from my notes without noticing.

Perhaps standing on the same stage as a kabuki troupe felt incongruous to them. Or maybe the audience didn’t take to them, so the production company pulled them off. The reason they disappeared was likely a combination of both.

I find myself wanting to know the details now, but back then, as the lowest-ranking seventeen year old actor in the troupe, poor and hungry, I had neither the power nor the means to pry such information out and record it.

2009.11.7

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 103

おさんの悲しみ

O-San's Sorrow

R-san is truly a person I am deeply grateful for.

She searched through past records on her computer and found information about Ichikawa Fukunosuke and Bando Takejaku.

It was information I had never seen before.

I'm always complaining about computers and cell phones, but when I think about how the internet holds such rare, precious records like this, I realize I really can't take it for granted.

It's called the "Kabuki Actor Directory: Memorable Masters Edition" and it includes profiles, career histories, and even photographs of the two actors.

It's truly a blessing. Honestly, it brought tears to my eyes.

R-san, thank you. What can I possibly do to repay you for this?

Within those records, there's a mention of Fukunosuke and Takejaku in grand kabuki productions after the dissolution of their small theater troupe, the Katabami-za.

It was a brief entry, but it meant the world to me.

I'd like to transcribe that part of the record here now, but doing so would mean interrupting the flow of the Tsurukame Theater and Shirahige Theater era again.

Therefore, I will postpone introducing that valuable record for now.

No, even though I said I'd postpone it, I'll go ahead and transcribe one line from that record right here.

It concerns Ichikawa Fukunosuke.

“Was promoted to named actor in November 1932, playing O-san and Koharu in ‘Shigure no Kotatsu’ at the Miyadoza.”

“Shigure no Kotatsu” is the scene immediately following the “Kawasho” scene in Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s “Double Suicide.”

Then, in the early spring season of 1946 at the Tsurukame Theater, immediately following the “Kawasho” scene, this very scene from “Shigure no Kotatsu” was performed as the second act.

Tsurukame Theater. Second Show

1. Pure Love and Regret. One Act

Koyama ... Kataoka Tobei
Lieutenant Murayama’s Daughter ... Bando Reiko
Her Sister ... Bando Takemaru
Murano Sawamura Tetsuzaburo
Seiichi ... Umezawa Hideo

2. The Love Suicide at Amijima: The Kotatsu Scene in Kamiya’s House

Kamiachi Jihe ... Bando Takejaku
O-san ... Ichikawa Fukunosuke
Koharu ... Onoe Otojo
Father-in-law Gozaemon ... Onoe Takenosuke
Daughter O-Sumi ... Bando Takemaru
Son Kantaro ... Bando Kotake
Apprentice Sangoro ... Umezawa Hideo

3. A Nighttime Conversation by the Yagawa River. One Act.

Shinnojo ... Bando Takejaku
Hayato ... Onoe Takenosuke
Kinu ... Ichikawa Fukunosuke

I have absolutely no memory of the first play, “Pure Love and Regret.”

It’s a strange title, or perhaps one should say mysterious. A decidedly antiquated one.

This too was likely a rehash of a Soganoya Goro play.

It’s also baffling that wartime rank names like “Lieutenant” appear in it.

Now, the second one is “Shigure no Kotatsu.”

It was a good stage production.

Within the cramped, poor stage set of the Tsurukame Theater, I saw the atmosphere of the paper shop owned by Kamiji, also known as Kamiebe of Tenma in Osaka.

At seventeen, I still didn’t know the city of Osaka. I didn’t know the town of Tenma either. Born and raised in the downtown area, I had never left Tokyo.

Of course, I also didn’t know the layout inside and out of Osaka merchant houses at that time.

Yet, I found myself completely immersed, body and soul, in the dark, poignant, and frustrating atmosphere of Kamiji’s shop.

I was utterly captivated by the performances of Jihe, played by Takejaku, and his wife O-san, played by Fukunosuke.

I would sit in seiza in the dark, cramped corner of the stage wings, hands on my knees, watching every performance without blinking.

Though weekdays had only one evening show, Saturdays and Sundays had matinee and evening performances, so I saw it nine times at the Tsurukame Theater.

The following week, the Takejaku troupe moved to a new venue, the Heiwa Theater in Totsugi, Katsuhika Ward. They performed “Shigure no Kotatsu” there too, so just like with “Kawasho,” I was able to see this play eighteen times.

As mentioned earlier, “Shigure no Kotatsu” followed the scene from “Kawasho” and the story connected.

I felt the actors’ emotions were connected too. They showed us their skilled, fine artistry.

Especially Fukunosuke. This was the play where, in November 1932, he performed the roles of O-san and Koharu at Asakusa’s Miyodoza, and it was with this role that he was promoted to the rank of named actor.

Fukunosuke brilliantly portrayed the agonizing, desperate feelings of a wife whose husband loves another woman, a courtesan, no less, and might even commit double suicide with her tonight, using his superb onnagata expressiveness.

Watching Fukunosuke’s O-san, I wept silently in my heart every day.

You might wonder, how could a seventeen year old boy possibly understand such a sad, complex woman's feelings? As if I could understand!

But they do understand.

They do understand.

I understood it well back then. More than understanding, I think I just sensed it intuitively.

Now, as I approach eighty, I can still clearly recall the feelings I had sixty-three years ago, the emotion I felt then, and the certainty of my understanding of that play.

That's precisely why I still remember the lines of the wife, O-san, from that scene in "The Love Suicide at Amijima: The Kotatsu Scene."

I can say them in Fukunosuke's voice, in O-san's tone.

If you doubt me, the next time we meet, I'll perform it right there on the spot.

"---Well, that's a bit much, Jihe-san. If you're so reluctant to part, I shan't write the pledge. Why do you hate me so?"

Then Takejaku's Jihe rose from the kotatsu²⁴ and said this (I can even do Takejaku's voice from that moment; I'm quite good at it):

"What are you saying, O-san? How could I possibly hate you when we've even had a child together?"

That's right. Jihe loves his wife. He doesn't hate her at all. Yet he has fallen in love with the courtesan Koharu.

The trouble is, Koharou, O-san, and Jihe are all kind-hearted, compassionate, good people.

It is precisely because the portrayal of these characters is so superb and convincing that this drama is considered a masterpiece and remains a wildly popular kyogen to this day.

Hearing Jihe's words, O-san grumbles.

²⁴ A kotatsu is a low wooden table.

This scene of her complaining is also wonderfully human.

What's great is that O-san isn't portrayed as a stereotypical, meek, chaste wife.

"No, no, you hate me, you hate me. You hate me, don't you? You really do hate me, don't you?"

Here the Gidayu begins,

—In October two years past, on the day of the Boar in the middle of the month, as a gift for opening the kotatsu...

O-san's lines:

"Here, here, since we laid our pillows here—"

Gidayu:

—If a demon dwells in your wife's bosom, or a serpent dwells there, if it troubles you so much, then cry, cry. If those tears flow into the Shijimi River, Koharu will scoop them up and drink them—

O-san's lines:

"How cruel, Jihe-san! No matter how painful your duty may be, what about our two children? Don't you care for them at all?"

Gidayu:

—I'll plead with all my heart, pour out my resentment, truly—

Jihe's subsequent lines of explanation are also splendid, and I can perform them in Takejaku's voice.

"---Oh, you're right. I apologize. Sad tears flow from the eyes, and tears of regret flow from the ears. If that be so, then one should see the heart without words spoken. Yet these tears, spilling from the same eyes, flowed for nearly three years. To speak this to you, who never once showed the slightest jealousy, is shameful. But just the other day, at Sonezaki, I heard it all, that Koharu was unfaithful..."

Right, I'll see R-san again soon. I'll act out Jihe's lines for her, just like Takejaku did.

Even if she says no, I'll do it. It might be a bother for R-san, but I'll make her listen whether she likes it or not.

But when I write like this, it just goes on and on.

I'll probably keep going like this until the curtains close.

Ah, before I knew it, I'd gone off on a tangent again.

I need to get back to the story.

2009.11.9

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 104

四ツ木平和劇場

Yotsugi Heiwa Theater

Regarding the scene “Shigure no Kotatsu,” from “The Love Suicide at Amijima,” performed by the Bando Takejaku troupe, I would like to elaborate a little further.

In the online “Kabuki Actor Directory: Memorable Masters Edition” that R-san printed and sent me, it states about Ichikawa Fukunosuke:

“In November 1932, he was promoted to the rank of named actor for his roles as O-san and Koharu in the scene ‘Shigure no Kotatsu.’”

This means Fukunosuke played two roles in this scene. The wife O-san and Koharu of Kinokuniya.

This play allows a single actor to perform both roles of O-san and Koharu.

In fact, I later saw Nakamura Sensaku (now Sakata Tojuro) perform both O-san and Koharu several times on the Grand Kabuki stage. The role of Jihe in those performances was played by Sensaku's father, the late Ganjiro.

I also recall seeing Kanjiro (a favorite actor of mine! He was brilliant!) as Kamiji, with Nakamura Kanzaburo (the previous generation) playing both O-san and Koharu. (O-san was strangely alluring!)

I also remember seeing the late Utaemon perform both O-san and Koharu.

Gosaburo, the father-in-law utterly appalled by Jihe's actions, tries to separate his daughter O-san from Jihe. He forcibly takes O-san's hand and exits toward the inner part of the house.

Then Koharu, who had been watching from outside the house, rushes inside, and:

Koharu: “Jihe-san!”

Jihe: “Ah, Koharu, why are you here?”

They take each other’s hands, and the tragedy builds toward its climax.

Since O-san and Koharu wear different wigs and costumes, when one actor plays both roles, a quick change is naturally required here.

However, both the Tsurukame Theater and the Yotsugi Heiwa Theater were not originally built as theaters. Their backstage areas are cramped, with little space to spare, making such quick changes impossible.

Therefore, my notes from that time state that Onoe Otojo played the role of Koharu.

Otojo was also a reliable onnagata supporting the Takejaku troupe’s performances. Younger than Fukunosuke, she portrayed the courtesan Koharu with alluring charm.

Though my notes state this, my memory holds a different image: Fukunosuke performing both O-san and Koharu in quick succession. Particularly vivid behind my eyelids, even now, is the almost heartbreaking beauty of Koharu in her black costume.

Deep within my heart is the image of Fukunosuke playing both roles.

I am convinced that the O-san and Koharu in “Shigure no Kotatsu” must have been Fukunosuke’s dual roles.

The poignancy and beauty of Fukunosuke in the “Kawasho” scene, and the overwhelmingly sorrowful O-san in the “Kamiyauchi” scene, suggesting the sadness of human existence. Perhaps these two images merged, dragging me into a hallucinatory world and refusing to let me awaken.

Even now, I believe my notes from that time were mistaken, and my memory is the more reliable one

Whenever “Shinju Amagashima” is performed in the Grand Kabuki, I make sure to see both the “Kawasho Scene” from the first act and the “Kamiya Scene” from the second act. I watch them again and again, from the standing room only seats.

I curl up in a corner of the audience, seeking both the pleasure of seeing a well-crafted masterpiece of Chikamatsu drama and, at the same time, the purpose of remembering the artistry of Fukunosuke and Takejaku, the two actors who performed so passionately on that cramped, poor little stage over sixty years ago, giving such profound emotion to the heart of a seventeen year old boy, and feeling my chest grow warm and tremble.

I seem to have written quite a lot of unnecessary things.

No matter how much I get worked up writing about this, it's no use.

After all, no one will ever understand.

Not even a single shred of it.

Because seeing Fukunosuke and Takejaku on stage is something absolutely no one can ever do.

Only a handful of stage photos remain. Of course, not even promotional photos exist. That was the postwar era.

Or perhaps, precisely because no footage or recordings survive at all, it has remained etched in my heart for so many long years. Deeply, heavily, yet forever fresh in my memory.

Beautiful things are best seen with your eyes closed.

I recall that the second replacement play of the month at the Tsurukame Theater, the closing performance of the day titled "Kamo River Night Talk," was also a fine revenge drama that skillfully portrayed the characters' psychology.

It wasn't a traditional kabuki period piece. If pressed, I'd call it "new kabuki."

Hideo Umezawa, a senior colleague a few years my senior who idolized swordplay king Noboru Umezawa, was so excited he declared this play better than "Kamiji." Watching from the wing curtain, he kept nodding his head and murmuring,

"This is great, this is great, Fuku-chan. I love plays like this. If they made it snow during the final duel, it would really heighten the atmosphere."

The Tsurukame Theater simply didn't have the equipment to make it snow.

They used the sound of the taiko drums from the orchestra pit to represent the snow scene, and I think it worked quite well.

I still remember it being a good play, but partly because the impression of "Kamiji" was so strong. I've forgotten the details.

I also appeared in this play as an onnagata and I only remember the lines I was given.

It was the line I delivered as a young courtesan's attendant, entering from stage left, "Excuse me, Okinu-san. Your brother has come looking for you from Arima," spoken to Fukunosuke's Okinu.

My role was to deliver just that and immediately exit the stage.

After this run, the Takejaku troupe, which would normally have moved on to the Shirahige Theater in Mukojima, ended up performing instead at a small theater called the Heiwa Theater in Yotsugi, Katsushika Ward.

It was the troupe's first time at this particular theater.

As the youngest actor in the company, I had no idea why things had turned out this way.

I simply followed the instructions of my master, Ichikawa Fukunosuke.

Living in Matsudo at the time, I took the bus to Ichikawa's Konodai, then transferred to the Keisei Oshiage Line, getting off at Yotsugi Station.

It's unclear whether Yotsugi had been bombed, but the town was deserted.

Near the station, small shops lined the streets, presenting the ordinary scene of a typical town.

It felt less densely populated than a downtown area like Mukojima.

It had the distinct atmosphere of the outskirts of Tokyo. A cold north wind blew into every corner of the town.

Walking as instructed, about ten minutes from the station, I found a small theater with a sign reading Heiwa Theater.

Its exterior was bleak and devoid of any charm or character.

The auditorium felt oddly spacious.

The stage was also larger than those at the Tsurukame Theater or the Shirahige Theater, and I was a bit surprised to see it had a rather impressive hanamichi.

Behind this hanamichi, on the opposite side from the audience, was a long, narrow dressing room.

Makeup tables were lined up in a row.

There was only this one dressing room. All the actors applied their makeup and changed into their costumes here.

An entrance to the dressing room connected to the left side of the stage. At the very back, right next to the raised curtain of the hanamichi, was the actors' restroom.

It was a strange theater, built differently from both movie theaters and traditional playhouses.

It wasn't until much later, a full forty years after this time, that I learned the story behind this theater's creation.

I learned that Heiwa Theater had been converted from a town's communal warehouse for wartime rationing supplies.

The one who told me this was a customer at a bar in Asakusa called "Sawamasa."

One night, I was chatting with the owner of Sawamasa, a theater enthusiast, about that little theater that had been in Yotsugi after the war, reminiscing our stories.

Then, a white-haired customer drinking at the next table suddenly turned his face toward us and said, "I've lived in Yotsugi for a long time, so I know this. That theater was a warehouse during the war."

He was a customer I'd never seen before at Sawamasa.

"Huh, no wonder I thought it was a strange little theater," I said, laughing, but I thought this was a coincidence straight out of a novel.

The owner of Sawamasa listened with an amused look, as if thinking, "Is that really true?"

That middle-aged male customer then spent some time telling me and the owner of Sawamasa stories about Yotsugi back in those days.

He said that most of the theaters in central Tokyo had been burned by air raids, and because of that, quite a few famous actors and performers had come to that little theater in Yotsugi.

The owner of Sawamasa, who listened to that story from the Yotsugi customer alongside me, is no longer with us either. He was a close friend of fifty years.

There was no one else who could talk about Kabuki and the New National Theater with such joy.

The Sawamasa sign was taken down. In its place stood a flashy red and blue signboard at the storefront, and a foreigner in a white chef's coat was slicing large chunks of meat with a knife to sell.

The other day, passing by, I saw those lively decorations had already been taken down, and the foreigner was nowhere to be seen. The world of impermanence.

The shop's glass doors remain closed, bleak and uninviting.

Staring at the silent glass doors, I said to R-san, walking beside me, "Looking back now, I really understand how strong the bond with the old man who ran this place was."

R-san remained silent, her eyes fixed on the four decidedly aged glass doors of that two-story wooden house, blackened and dirty with dust.

I've gone off on a tangent again.

I need to get back to the Yotsugi Heiwa Theater.

That theater was my last stop before leaving the Takejaku troupe.

Which means I parted ways with Ichikawa Fukunoske.

2009.11.17

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 105

竹次のなさけ

Taketsugu's Compassion

The performance by the Bando Takejaku troupe at the Yotsugi Heiwa Theater, as noted in my tattered, sixty year old diary, was as follows:

The first week,

1. The Mountain Maiden
2. Shigure no Kotatsu
3. Maruhashi Chuya: The Chase

Act 2

1. Gonsaburo and Skueji
2. The King of Flowers at Hidaka River

That's all that's written.

In other words, the cast and other details are not recorded.

It's literally just a memo.

It was the winter of 1946 (Showa 21), the year after the war ended, and I was sixteen.

In the last few entries, I've written my age as seventeen in this text, but it seems I was mistaken.

Counting it up, I was sixteen.

Why did I make such a mistake?

R-san, please tell me what to do.

It feels like a hassle to correct it now. I'm pretty sure I wrote it as seventeen quite a few times.

Part of me thinks, "Who cares about my age, give it a rest."

This is all I wrote down and the penmanship is a bit messy.

At that time, my sixteen year old heart must have been far from calm.

I think I'd even lost the energy to jot down the cast list.

Maybe I'd just reached a point where I felt, "whatever."

"The Mountain Maiden" and "Shigure no Kotatsu" and "Maruhashi Chuya" were plays already performed at both the Tsurukame and Shirahige theaters, and the cast was probably the same.

So, maybe that's why I couldn't bring myself to write it down.

Even though I was unsettled and had lost my inner peace at that time, as mentioned earlier, I concentrated my mind and watched "Shigure no Kotatsu" intently. And it left an indelible impression on my mind and body, one I will never forget for the rest of my life.

In the moat scene of "Maruhashi Chuya," I wore a stuffed animal costume, became a dog, and interacted with the blind actor Takejaku's Maruhashi Chuya. In the chase scene, I became one of the pursuers and was cut down two or three times.

Even without taking notes, I remember the cast for the second act, "Gonsaburo and Sukeju."

It wasn't Okamoto Kido's "Gonsaburo and Sukeju," but rather the storytelling version of "Ooka's Judgement," a script that wasn't particularly highbrow, heavy on the comedic flavor.

Takejaku played Gonza, and his partner Sukeji was played, surprisingly, by the onnagata Fukunosuke.

This memory is absolutely correct.

The impression of Fukunosuke, whose selling point was his beauty, playing the role of a foolish third-rate character, a palanquin bearer living in a filthy, poor tenement, was intensely powerful to me.

Fukunosuke still did his best to paint the area under his nose blue, and played the dirty, comical role.

Watching him was painful and pitiful.

It was so pitifully sad it made my chest ache. It was a role an onnagata should never have played.

That's why I remember it so well.

In contrast, in the next act, "Hidakagawa Irai Sakura," Fukunosuke appeared as a tate-onnagata²⁵, beautifully dressed as a princess, dancing the role of Kiyohime with graceful movements.

This act centers on Kiyohime, who, driven mad by her longing for the absent Anchin, transforms into a serpent. It is the play based on the legendary tale of Anchin and Kiyohime at Dojoji Temple.

The sorrow on the banks of the Hidaka River and the frenzied movements upon the waves are conveyed through the shosa (dance movements).

Shosa, or shosajutsu, refers to dance.

Fukunosuke, as expected, displayed a splendid, highly dignified doll-like dance.

However, while I could see Kiyohime's movements of love-crazed agony and grief-stricken anguish on the riverbank, I could not see her leaping into the river, swimming, and dancing upon the waves.

Because at that moment, I was crawling beneath the wave curtain, lying sideways, moving the wave cloth with my entire body.

In other words, I had become the waves within the river.

The waves were not just made by me.

There was an actor named Taketsugu who, like me, lay sprawled on the stage, covered by the wave cloth.

I'd like to write a little about Taketsugu.

He was five or six years older than me, probably already over twenty, but since he had joined the troupe recently, I was technically his senior within the company.

²⁵ A tate-onnagata means lead onnagata.

While submerged beneath the wave cloth, Taketsugu whispered, "Fukujiro-san, you must be hungry. Want something to eat?" and offered me his hand.

I reflexively reached out and took it, saying, "What?"

It was about a hundred brown, burnt rice grains.

I sniffed them. They smelled toasty. In other words, they were roasted rice.

Rice grains roasted in a pot or pan. A handful of food.

"Thank you," I said, catching them in my palm and popping a few into my mouth. Slightly bitter, fragrant, and delicious.

"They're good, Taketsugu-san," I murmured my thanks in a low voice.

Hungry, I finished about a hundred grains of roasted rice in no time. It was so delicious I almost cried. I stuck out my tongue and licked my palm clean. Then Taketsugu gave me another hundred or so grains.

"Eat these, then drink some water later, and you'll feel full."

I still cannot forget the delicious taste of that roasted rice I put in my mouth under the wave-beaten shore.

Because I cannot forget it, I am writing this now.

The taste of that handful of hard, charred rice grains, warmed in Taketsugu's palm.

Yes, I should write a little more about Taketsugu.

He joined the Takejaku troupe, aspiring to be an onnagata.

At first, he wanted to become Fukunosuke's disciple, but Fukunosuke refused, saying his face and figure weren't suited for female roles.

He also went to see the young onnagata, Onoe Otojo, but was turned down.

"Then come to us," Master Takejaku offered him a helping hand. He immediately received the stage name Takeji. "I was so happy," he told me.

With thick eyebrows, deep-set eyes, a large nose perched high on his face, and thick lips, both upper and lower, forming a crocodile mouth, even I could see Takegutsu had a face unsuited for onnagata.

He was about 150 centimeters tall. While being short is good for an onnagata, his shoulders were broad and sturdy.

But he was a born lover of theater, a good-natured person, and he threw himself passionately into every role.

He seemed to have trained somewhere, as he could deliver his lines clearly on stage.

“Fukujiro-san, Fukujiro-san,” he would say, treating me, his junior, with respect as his senior. Sometimes he would wash my underwear or mend holes in my socks with patches.

After performances at the Heiwa Theater in Yotsugi, I would sometimes become so exhausted and hungry that I could barely move, and going home became a painful ordeal.

The Keisei Bus departing from Ichikawa Station on the Keisei Line went through Konodai to Matsudo Station, and I rode it daily to commute to Yotsugi.

But late at night, that bus stopped running.

Walking from Keisei Konodai Station to my house took nearly an hour, partly because of a long uphill slope along the way.

Walking for an hour with my exhausted body was agonizing. Back then, halfway up that slope, called Ryodan-zaka, I once became unable to move and ended up lying down on the roadside.

Had I fallen asleep, I would have frozen to death.

When I complained about that agony to Taketsugu he said, “In times like that, you should stay at my place. It’s right near Kameari Station, less than a three-minute walk. Don’t be shy. Come on, come on.” He said this gently, and he would take me to the room he rented.

Taketsugu’s rented room was a small four-and-a-half mat space next to the entrance of a tiny house at the end of a narrow alley, reached by turning down it two or three times.

He offered me the only futon set he had.

He would slowly slip his feet in from the foot of the futon where I was sleeping, and we would lie down on the futon, our feet at opposite ends.

Taketsugu’s feet stretched out in front of my face.

"It's okay. I washed my feet really well, so they don't smell," he said, chuckling to himself happily.

Had this been when nearly twenty different SM magazines were published monthly, I would have made this Taketsugu a beautiful young man, made myself a beautiful young man too, and written such a novel it would be dreamlike.

But in reality, nothing happened.

That was the extent of Taketsugu's and my relationship.

And perhaps because it was only that much, I think, is why I still remember it like this forever.

Despite that terrifying face, the timid, gentle Taketsugu never had the courage to touch my body.

He never even held my hand.

The only time he held my hand was in the waves of the Hidaka River, when he said, "Fukujiro-san, here, eat this," and placed a handful of roasted rice into my palm.

Ahh, I've gone off on a tangent again.

No matter how elegantly Takejaku and Fukunosuke performed "Shigure no Kotatsu," or how hard the beautiful onnagata Fukunosuke tried playing the third-rate Sukeji, the audience remained sparse every single day.

Old patrons from the Honjo Kotobuki Theater days still made their way to the Tsurukame Theater, located about a thirty-minute ride from Ueno on the Joban Line, a three minute walk from Kameari Station.

But I think there were still very few customers who took the Keisei Line all the way to Yotsugi in Katsushika Ward, searching and searching to find us.

What's more, around this time, the Keisei Line (though thinking back now, it probably wasn't just the Keisei Line) didn't run on schedule. For some reason, it was always stopped somewhere, running late.

Kataoka Tobei joked, "Ah, so this is what they mean when they say 'no faithfulness in courtesans'."

I don't think the local patrons could relate to suddenly being shown "Shigure no Kotatsu."

That's probably why they performed the easily understandable comedy "Gonsaburo and Sukeji," but with the audience sparse, laughter didn't come.

In the narrow dressing room, like an eel's bed, I remember Takejaku saying to Fukunosuke with a laugh, "For some reason, whenever we do this play, the troupe's dissolution seems to draw nearer."

2009.11.18

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 106

誇り高き役者たち

Proud Actors

Several readers of "Talking Theater" have sent me very kind emails.

Thank you very much.

They have been a great encouragement.

Among them was a question about the "small-scale theater" that persisted for several years after the war.

To be honest, while answering that question, I find myself wanting to write much more about "small-scale theater." I feel I could write about it.

However, I have written this far not so much about "small theater" itself, but to confirm my own self, someone who has had at least some contact with that rare world.

I intend to write only about what I have actually seen with my own eyes and been directly involved with.

Regarding "small theater" in general, several valuable printed works exist that describe it more broadly, from a theatrical historical and archival perspective, rather than through subjective, sometimes myopic personal accounts like mine.

Though this may stray from the flow of this "Talking Theater" piece, I will introduce those books next.

First, "Tokyo's Small Theaters," published in March 1982 by the Taito Ward Board of Education.

Edited by the Taito Ward Shitamachi Museum, a second edition was published in March 1986. The price is nowhere listed. As I recall, I bought my copy in 1986 at the Shitamachi Museum near Shinobazu Pond in Ueno. I've forgotten how much I paid for it.

Next is "Memories of Small Theater" by Saburo Miyake. This is part of the "Kabuki Materials Selected Works 5" series, edited by the National Theater Performing Arts Research Office. It is marked as published on January 30, 1981. I bought this at the bookstore next to the program sales counter at the National Theater, but this book also has no price listed. I distinctly remember it costing either 1000 or 1500 yen. Still, why don't books sold by official institutions clearly display their prices? I definitely paid for them.

Next, "Asakusa Notes," published as a special commemorative issue for the 200th meeting of the Asakusa Society.

This was published in November 1978 by Miyosha in Misakicho, Chiyoda Ward, edited by the "Asakusa Society." Priced at 1500 yen, it features many illustrations and is a book I find extremely valuable.

The cover features an advertisement for the SKD's²⁶ "Autumn Dance" at the Asakusa International Theater under the cover page "3." Ah, SKD! Asakusa's downtown, my review, dancing on for half a century!

Believe it or not, I've been an SKD fan since the days of Ryushi Kawaji and Saeko Kozuki!

Admission for general seating was 1700 yen. The accompanying film was "It's Tough Being a Man: Tora-san Goes His Own Way."

At this International Theater, besides SKD, I also saw things like "The Hunchback of Notre Dame." I saw Shin Kugeki too. Of course, it was the height of the Tatsuya and Shimada actors' prime, their most active period. They also did Shinpa.

It was at this very Kokusai Theater that Nobu Morikawa, originally active in Kansai, first came to Tokyo to perform as the troupe leader. It was during the war, but I saw that too.

(Ah, I've gone off on a tangent again. This isn't just a tangent, it's veered off onto a side street, then down an alley. Once I start writing about Asakusa, I just can't stop.)

Next is another publication by the Asakusa Association, "Asakusa Performing Arts Through Photographs," issued in October 1990. It's labeled the "Asakusa Association 40th Anniversary Commemorative Issue." Priced at 3500 yen, it contains many precious photographs. For me, it's a book that brings back memories in tatters and tears in torrents.

²⁶ SKD stands for Shochiku Shojō Kageki-dan, an all female dance revue formed in 1928, and existing in Asakusa until their home theater closed in 1982.

Next, in 1970, Abe Yuzo's "Tokyo's Small Theaters," published by Gekijo Shuppansha, and then in 1997, Nakagawa Tetsu's "Tokyo Small Theaters" published by Seiwabo, priced at 2300 yen.

The author of this book, Nakagawa Tetsu, was born in 1921 (Taisho 10), making him ten years older than me.

The upheavals and turmoil of the past decade have been intense, both personally and for society.

Nakagawa-san has seen quite a lot of performances at the Kotobuki-za in Honjo Midoricho and the connected "Katabami-za" stage.

He described the actors' stage presence based on his own observations.

Therefore, this "Tokyo Small Theaters" is also an extremely valuable and cherished volume for me.

I had always wanted to meet him, but he passed away a few years ago.

Another living trace of the small theater's essence has faded away. While the record remains, its scent, its colors, its very essence have vanished.

In March 1945, the Ju Theater was destroyed by the American air force's massive bombing raid on the downtown Tokyo area.

After the war, several years later in 1950 (Showa 25), the actors who had fought valiantly to defend the last bastion of "small theater" at the Kotobuki Theater gathered and formed the "Katabami-za" troupe.

They then resumed performing "small plays" on a regular basis. This record is clearly preserved in theater history.

However, nowhere is there any record of the roughly five-year "blank" period, the time between the Ju Theater's destruction and the actors scattering, and their eventual formation of the Katabami-za and their revival.

Yet these actors lived through the most chaotic times just before and immediately after the defeat. Even that "blank" period itself was filled with theater, with them performing to survive.

They lived by performing plays, whether you call it secretly or desperately.

And I happened to come into contact with that troupe during that unrecorded, brief “blank” period and received their kindness. This encounter was purely by chance.

Yet for me, who had been taken by my father to see plays at the Kotobuki Theater continuously from the time I became aware of things until I was fifteen, the reunion with Tsuruzo, Takejaku, and Fukunosuke felt almost inevitable.

I cannot write anything about the “Katabami-za” troupe formed after overcoming the “blank” period. I know neither its circumstances nor its reality.

What I intend to write about in “Talking Theater” is “myself.”

Or rather, I can only write about “myself.” Even if I wanted to write about the “Katabami-za,” I couldn’t.

Lacking the knowledge or learning to view things from a broader perspective, having lived a petty life guided solely by my emotions, I can ultimately write only about “myself.”

I received an inquiry from an enthusiastic reader asking whether the Tsurukame Theater in Kameari, Katsushika Ward, and the Shirahige Theater in Mukojima, Sumida Ward, actually existed. They couldn’t find any mention of these theaters in any reference books.

The names of these two theaters are either anonymous or pseudonyms. The theaters themselves definitely existed.

(The Heiwa Theater in Yotsugi is a real name.)

I intended to write about “myself” as accurately as possible, honestly conveying the emotions I felt at that time.

For that reason, I hesitated to mention the theater names directly. I feared that naming them might cause someone unpleasant feelings.

I worry that not using pseudonyms might hurt someone.

To make it clear, let me give one example.

I have anonymized the name of the woman who appears in this “Talking Theater.”

I did this because revealing her name could potentially cause trouble for her.

Even just specifying her address and the place where she works would undoubtedly cause her trouble.

Similarly, I feel that even though it was fifty years ago, naming the theater outright might cause trouble for the woman involved.

When writing something like this, one can sometimes cause trouble for someone without even realizing it.

I want to avoid that as much as possible.

And another thing, I secretly suspect that my beloved, proud Kabuki actors didn't want people to know, or didn't want it recorded, that before the "Katabami-za" they had performed plays alongside an amateurish light theater troupe in a poor, nameless, run-down shack that had once been a movie theater.

If that's the case, some might say, shouldn't I also refrain from mentioning real stage names in this "Talking Theater?"

But unless I clearly state their stage names, my writing won't serve as proof that this account is true.

Putting myself in those actors' shoes, I also think perhaps the Tsurukame/Shirahige Theater era should remain a secret. Yet I still wish to "record" here that they, amidst the dire adversity immediately following defeat, continued to perform their own pure form of kabuki without compromise. Because it's something only I know.

Using pseudonyms only for the Tsurukame and Shirahige theaters is contradictory, but it also involves a rather sly calculation. Should this text ever come to her eyes (this "her" will appear frequently later), it would allow for an explanation, a way to settle things peacefully.

Anyway, I want to write honestly only about what I saw with my own eyes and felt with my own skin.

I want to write straightforwardly about those times, relying not on records, but solely on my own notes, my memory, and my senses.

Ah, as I write these things, the story keeps veering off down the side roads.

My feelings drift further and further away from the spirit of the "Talking Theater."

I must return to the original tone.

Returning to my senses, I will continue writing about that era.

Yes, I'll include here a letter I recently wrote and sent to someone.

It's a letter I wrote quite earnestly, pouring my heart into it.

Dear [Recipient's Name]

Thank you very much. I went to see the performance at the Shimbashi Enbujo.

"Three Kichisaburo and the White Waves" with Kikunosuke was excellent. I think the current Kikugoro is more vibrant and alluring than when he was Kikunosuke. Having experienced Ninagawa's direction firsthand (during "Twelfth Night") seems to have been a significant positive for him.

However, in the matinee performance of "Mitsugoro's Vow," Mitsugoro was too refined, too gentle, lacking any shadow. I felt he should have carried a bit more of a hint of villainy about him. Still, he was clean-cut, very Edo-style, and beautiful.

Kikunosuke's O-Jokichi and Ainosuke's Bokichi were wonderfully homoerotic, beautiful, bewitching, and fascinating.

Matsugoro's rough-and-ready Oshokichi lacked inner expression, failing to fully heighten the tragedy of this fated brother-sister pair.

Thank you for also showing me Chushingura at the Kabuki-za. It was a great seat. I am very grateful.

Nizaemon's Yuronosuke was easy to follow, charming, and very good.

Koshiro's Heimon and Fukusuke's Okaru were even easier to follow than Nizaemon's performance, almost like a modern play, but I imagine today's audience would prefer this style.

I found myself comparing it to the Yuranosuke played by the previous Koshiro (Hakucho), the O-Kuru by Utaemon, and the Helemon by the previous Matsugoro. Still, I enjoyed it.

The sixth act's Danshiro had a grand, dignified presence. Truly kabuki-like and impressive.

At the Enbujo theater, I was unquestionably moved by Kamijiro's demon woman in Togakushi-yama.

It's rare to be so purely moved by stage movement alone.

I've been so deeply moved that lately, every night as I try to sleep, the face and form of Kamejiro's demon woman, with her dark red eye makeup, looms over my eyelids, and the resounding, heroic sound of her stomping feet reverberates in my head.

That said, it is by no means unpleasant, nor does it make sleep difficult. On the contrary, my entire being is immersed in the delightful, brilliant colors and waves of music (the Tokiwazu ensemble, and the Nagauta accompaniment ensemble were all splendidly lined up; this three-way interplay gave me a feeling of luxury).

It was a scene of breathtaking beauty and overwhelming power.

Kamejiro had stated in the program that he would perform this "Oni-zoro Momijigari" exactly as directed by Sannosuke, and indeed, he gave it his all.

Even as I silently commended him, "You've danced enough, that's good enough, it was wonderful, you danced plenty, that's fine, it was great." Kamejiro kept dancing with fierce determination, as if to say, "Is that all? I'll show you more!"

In 1920, the first-generation Ennosuke (En'o) founded the Shunjuza theater company and launched a new theatrical movement. I sensed that the impassioned spirit of that young, first-generation Ennosuke flows strongly through Kamejiro.

Even for a young man, his energy was astonishing. He danced relentlessly, putting such force into his limbs it made the audience nervous, all while maintaining perfect rhythm.

The thunderous applause that erupted from the audience all at once was only natural.

I couldn't help but turn around, wondering if perhaps Sannosuke, the director of this dance drama, had come secretly, worried about his nephew's performance, watching from the back of the audience, and if Kamejiro knew this and was performing with such passion because of it.

It reminded me of a few years ago, when the current Kanzaburo, back in his Kankuro days, first danced "Kagamijishi" on the Asakusa Kabuki stage. His father, the late Kanzaburo, had watched from the back of the audience, looking worried.

If Ennosuke had seen this Kamejiro's passionate yet dignified "Momijigari," I'm sure he would have been beaming with satisfaction.

I don't know how Ennosuke is doing during his convalescence, but at this hour, Danshiro was likely at the nearby Kabuki-za. Since his role for the day ended with Fuba Sukeemon's scene in the sixth act of Chushigura, Kanpei's Seppuku, and he had no more performances scheduled, I wondered if he had come to the theater to see Kiri's son dance.

And I imagine he too, seeing this powerful, dignified performance by his youthful successor, would feel reassured and nod approvingly.

Kamejiro's performance, bearing the pride and honor of Sawagataya on his shoulders, moved me deeply time and again.

2009.11.25

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 107

夢か芝居か

Is it a Dream or a Play?

My letter of thanks to the person who, knowing my love of theater, graciously invites me every month to special seats at the Grand Kabuki, a person I am most grateful to, continues on and on.

If I am a fan of Ichikawa Kamejiro, then does this person who sends me expensive special seat tickets count as my fan?

At the small theater called Heiwa Gekijo, a five-minute walk from Yotsugi Station on the Keisei Line, Ichikawa Fukunosuke, dressed as Kiyohime, danced with puppet-like movements in “Hidakagawa Iriai Zakura.”

That winter of 1946 (Showa 21), I staved off hunger by eating roasted rice given to me by Taketsugu in the shadow of the waves at Takigawa.

Sixty three years later, I sink into the plush, soft special seats of a grand theater, watching the play performed by top-tier kabuki actors with a smug, know-it-all expression.

It's like a dream.

No, is this not a dream?

Could it be that I've been sleeping in the shadow of the waves on the Takigawa River all this time, simply watching the dream continue?

When I think that, it begins to feel like it might be true.

It's not a bad feeling.

Well, for some reason, I found myself strangely enchanted and forgot to continue writing my fan letter to Kamejiro.

Come to think of it, Kamejiro is the actor destined to become the head of the Omotakaya troupe.

Kamejiro's performance, dancing and leaping with relentless intensity, never letting up, pouring his soul into it, and serving the audience to the fullest, truly evoked the dynamic energy of the great Sannosuke of old (I have seen all of his revival performances of the Tsukikigen cycles, and that too, two, three, four times over).

Enough already, stop now, the audience is thoroughly delighted, you don't need to keep dancing so fiercely. Tomorrow you must perform the major role of Komaru in "San Go Daichi," you mustn't tire yourself out. Such unnecessary worries from me, a mere spectator with no connection or ties to Sawagataya.

Yet, in my heart, I was hurling those very words at him on stage.

What a fiery young actor he was.

This intensity is the very strength that will carry tomorrow's kabuki forward.

Not only was his body remarkably agile, but every single movement of Kamejiro's dance, every single pose, had a dignified elegance to it.

Before Sarashina, he truly embodied the spirit of the demon woman of Togakushi Mountain, and the theme of his dance drama had deeply penetrated his mind and body.

I sensed the artistic soul and dignity of Grand Kabuki, firmly inherited from his grandfather, Ennosuke.

Huh? Huh? Wait a minute. Isn't Ennosuke Kamejiro's grandfather? Does that make him a generation older?

So that would make him his great-grandfather?

For Kamejiro, his grandfather would be Danshiro, the father of the current Ennosuke, who passed away young.

This is getting confusing.

So does that mean I've been watching this family's performances for four generations now? The current Kamejiro, his father, the current Danshiro, his father, the Danshiro who appeared in movies and TV (like playing Toyama no Kinnosuke), and his father, the previous Sannosuke; that is, Sannosuke himself?

I saw Ennosuke (En'o) perform the role of Benkei in "Kanjinchō" at the Enbu Hall during the final days of the Pacific War.

The Togashi at that time was the 16th Usaemon.

I recall Yoshitsune was played by Ebizo, who later became the 11th Danjuro.

On the stage of the current Kabuki-za, I have seen four generations of Sawagataya.

I hear Ukon Ichikawa will perform "Kurozuka" at the Enbujo theater next time, but I wonder if he can perform it with the same artistic spirit, depth, and high elegance as Kamejiro.

I hope he doesn't become just a superficial, empty-shelled Demon Woman of Iwate.

A superficial Demon Woman is boring. The audience won't feel Iwate's sorrow. Ukon, I beg you. I feel like praying.

Kamejiro will likely perform "Kurozuka" in due time.

Judging by this "Momijigari," "Kurozuka" will be fine too. He can do it splendidly. Kamejiro has soul.

Ah, I want to see Kamejiro's "Kurozuka." I am looking forward to it.

I saw Ennosuke's "Kurozuka" before he became En'o, back during the war. And then, how many times did I see "Kurozuka" performed by his grandson, Ennosuke? I've seen it countless times.

The current Sarunosuke's "Kurozuka" seems to have only gotten better with age.

When Iwate, now a demon woman, dances under the moonlight, recalling the past, it brings tears to my eyes.

Even the moon itself is a hindrance
Leaves on the branches, dew and frost
Once more, I hate the wind and clouds
Oh, woe is me, oh, woe is me

That part.

Sarunosuke portrayed the heart of the woman who had no choice but to become an ogress with such deep, poignant emotion.

Is it just me, or could the current Kamejiro perform “Kurozuka” even better than Sarunosuke?

Kamejiro was also excellent as the geisha Komama in the matinee performance of “Meisangotai.”

You could see he had a firm grasp of the character’s personality. I was thoroughly satisfied.

He embodied the form of a woman in Kabuki. This is crucial. He must not become a woman. He must be an onnagata.

Ever since seeing him as Otsuta in “Ippon To Dohyoiri,” I’ve been a fan of Kamejiro performing onnagata roles.

(Kantaro’s Komagata Shobei was also good. Both Kamejiro and Kantaro made me feel the strong presence of the bloodline of great actors.)

Kamejiro’s Otatsu was, quite frankly, the best Otatsu I’ve ever seen.

If I were to list here all the actors I’ve seen playing Mobei or Otsuta, it would sound like I’m bragging about how many plays I’ve seen, so I’ll refrain.

I’ve also seen the legendary Otsuta performed by the late Kumikitaro of the Senzenza troupe several times. As for Shin Kokugeki’s “Ippon To Dohyoiri,” I’ve seen it countless times because I loved Shimada.

Utaroku’s Tosaemon Denkichi in “Sannin Kichisa” was excellent, wasn’t it?

I thought, “So this is what it means to have a flavorful, compelling delivery of lines.”

He must have practiced and refined his craft tremendously on his own.

Utaroku has really improved a lot lately.

I thought it was a convincing, excellent Denkichi.

Perhaps because everyone else around him was young, he stood out even more.

Utakichi, whom I’d always considered one of the young talents, and Utasho too, had quietly become pillars of the Yorozya troupe.

It seems the young actors once trained in the Sannosuke troupe have all built up their skills and now hold important positions.

Shido, for instance, was just a toddler-like child actor not so long ago.

Sarunosuke's achievements are immense.

Komai has quietly succeeded Monnosuke, Umee has become Tokizo and greatly improved his skills, and Tokizo's son has become Umee, now showing off his fresh young onnagata charm every month.

His Otose in "Sannin Kichisa" was particularly fresh, endearing, and excellent.

(Ah, I've now seen four generations of the Manya family. I remember as if it were yesterday when Tokizo's grandfather, Tokizo, brought the toddling Kinnosuke and Kazuo to dance "Kairoshi" for their debut performance. That Kinnosuke later became Manya Kinnosuke, and Kazuo became Nakamura Katsuo.)

Above Kinnosuke and Katsu was an older brother named Shido, whose son is the current Nakamura Shido.

Writing about this could go on forever. I've ended up writing quite a lot.

I am deeply grateful for your constant invitations. I shall come to express my thanks properly at a later date.

On the 19th and 20th, I plan to go to Pegasus Hall consecutively to see Tsuka Kohei Theater Company's "New Atami Murder Case" and "Romance."

I sent this thank-you letter by fax to the kind person who treated me to an expensive play.

They called back immediately.

"As always, your review is youthful and passionate. More than a review, this is a critique. Why not send a copy to Kamejiro-san too? I'm sure he'd be delighted."

Being called youthful warmed my heart even more.

When I calculated it, I realized I had spent a full sixteen hours watching quite a bit of kabuki.

It felt like a dream.

Just yesterday, I was on the stage of a theater in Yotsugi, Katsushika Ward, a place that used to be a warehouse, immersed in the waves of Hidaka River, chewing roasted rice given to me by someone to stave off hunger.

I feel a strange illusion that the person I was back then, buried in those waves, and the person I am now, are directly connected.

The sixty-odd years between them have vanished.

I live within the play as if in a dream, and I die while watching the play as if in a dream.

I am happy.

2009.11.26

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 108

三人姉妹

Three Sisters

Behind the Tsurukame Theater lay a vacant lot overgrown with tall weeds, filthy and sprawling across the entire area.

When it rained, puddles formed everywhere, lingering and never quite drying out. It was a swamp-like vacant lot.

Adjacent to this damp, gloomy lot, a two-story wooden apartment building stood, its rear end pressed right up against the theater's.

The front entrance of the Tsurukame Theater faced southwest, while the entrance to the apartment building faced northeast.

This arrangement meant their back doors were practically touching.

The entire first floor of the apartment building served as dressing rooms for the Tsurukame Theater, rented exclusively by the theater staff, as mentioned earlier.

The Tsurukame Theater and the apartment building had the same owner. So it wasn't that the theater "rented out" the first floor, rather, the owner "allowed" the use of part of his own building for theatrical performances.

The second floor of the apartment building housed residents unrelated to the theater. In essence, ordinary people.

Most of them were families whose homes had been burned down by American air raids.

Among them was a family of five with the surname Nishiki.

The Nishiki family rented two rooms on the second floor of the Tsurakame apartments.

The heads of the household, Mr. and Mrs. Nishiki, who were around fifty, lived in one room. Their three daughters slept and lived in the other room, a six-mat space separated by a partition.

The names of those three sisters.

Hideyo, twenty-eight.

Tamayo, twenty-one.

Yukiyo, fifteen.

At sixteen, I already knew it was rude to ask a woman her age. So these ages were heard from someone other than the individuals themselves and are not precise.

The eldest daughter, Hideko, had a husband who had been drafted into the war. She was holding a baby. Her husband was in Burma, and his fate was still unknown.

The youngest, Yukiyo, was a student, but she was waiting for her school, destroyed in an air raid, to be rebuilt. She was almost my age, and like me, her school had been burned down. Yet she was a remarkably precocious beauty who looked much older than me.

The second daughter, Tamayo, was also unemployed and had the rather comfortable status of loafing around every day.

This Tamayo would become deeply involved in my fate from this point onward.

(Well, calling it fate might be an exaggeration. Perhaps she was simply the woman who provided me with the catalyst to separate myself from the Takejaku Fukunosuke troupe.)

Only the father of these three sisters worked in the Nishiki household.

He was supposedly an executive at a famous insurance company, but I had hardly ever seen the man who was their father.

Originally, they had a luxurious mansion somewhere around Meguro, but after suffering damage in the air raids, they now seem to be living temporarily on the second floor of this apartment building. They were a family with a certain leisurely, unhurried pace.

Perhaps I was drawn to and captivated by the atmosphere of these three sisters, wealthy and refined, as if transcending the chaotic and anxious postwar era.

My own home, however, was simply poor and vulgar. I half-boastingly brag about being born and raised in Asakusa, but I don't really mean it seriously.

I don't truly like the strangely cloying, overly familiar nature of the downtown crowd.

Somewhere deep inside, I harbor a longing for the upper class, for refinement.

I dislike stupidity and prefer things that suggest intelligence.

The reason I'm drawn to this woman, Rakka-san, is that she carries an air of having been raised in a fastidiously refined upper-class household. She possesses a fierce, otherworldly conviction and common sense. The polar opposite of my own.

I have this taste for the fallen, this inclination toward decline, but I also harbor this yearning for the upper class. (Or rather, to be precise, the middle class, or perhaps the petty bourgeoisie?) Both are jumbled together inside me.

Honestly, I don't really understand myself. Since I don't understand myself now, I probably never will, even until I die.

The whole thing began when the three sisters happened to come together to see a play by the Takejaku troupe at the Tsurukame Theater.

It was a performance of "New Edition: Song Festival Text, Nozaki Village."

I was playing the role of a maid following O-Some, portrayed by my master, Ichikawa Fukunosuke. The moment I stepped out from behind the raised curtain onto the hanamichi, a young woman sitting right in front of me in the audience exclaimed, "Oh my, how cute!"

Then, the two other young women sitting on either side of her, as if caught up in the moment, burst out laughing.

The sound of that voice was so absurd that the entire audience laughed.

The cry of "how cute!" was directed at me.

The role of the maid Oyoji is traditionally played by a chari (clown). So I took the stage with makeup that gave me a slightly comical look, lowered the corners of my eyes and painted my cheeks red.

But it was the first time I had been spoken to from the audience, and by a woman.

I later learned that those three female audience members were sisters living on the second floor of the Tsurukame Apartments.

Until then, I hadn't even known such people lived upstairs.

For me, the Tsurukame Apartments wasn't an apartment building. It was purely the dressing room of the Tsurukame Theater.

The next day, invited by the youngest sister, Yukiyo, I went up to the second floor of the Tsurukame Apartments.

It was Yukiyo who came down to the dressing room and spoke to me, but waiting for me upstairs was the second daughter, Tamayo.

"Fukujiro-san, you were adorable. Sorry for calling out to you like that yesterday."

Saying this, Tamayo peered closely at my face and smiled.

I was overwhelmed by the beauty of that smile.

It wasn't just beauty. It was the beauty of a woman.

To the eyes of a sixteen year old boy, Tamayo's smile was bewitchingly, sexually beautiful.

Seeing Tamayo's smile, overwhelmed, I looked up the word "bewitching" in Japanese and learned it existed.

The beauty of Tamayo's smile could not be expressed in any other word than "bewitching."

From that moment on, for about half a year, my heart was in love with Tamayo, and I believe Tamayo loved me too.

Whether this romantic feeling developed through such psychological processes, or the details, I no longer remember.

After all, it was over sixty years ago.

I carelessly wrote "love" or "affection," but was that truly love or affection?

If I embellished those six months, organized them neatly, and strung them together like a novel under a plausible story, readers might accept it. But I simply don't have the energy for that now.

Or rather, writing like that wouldn't satisfy me.

But when scenes with complex, intertwining emotions come up, I still think, "I'm just not smart enough," and I get flustered.

I can't write it well.

I'm painfully aware, even now, of my lack of expressive power and my poor writing skills.

In other words, this is the only way I can write.

After finishing my day's work, I go to the three sisters' room upstairs, lie down, and rest my body.

After ten o'clock at night, nearing eleven, futons are spread out to fill the entire six-mat room, and the fifteen-year-old, twenty-one-year-old, and twenty-eight-year-old women sleep there, their bodies piled next to each other.

If I'm still in that room by that hour, they all start saying things like this, inviting me to join them:

"It's already late, Fukujiro-san. You should sleep here too. Your house is over an hour's walk from Matsudo Station, right? There are no buses anymore, so it's really tough. Just stay the night here."

Even the eldest daughter, Hideyo, says things like this to me.

But she does lower her voice when she says it.

The walls between the rooms in this apartment are thin. The door was just flimsy board painted brown, little more than a formality.

Hideyo playfully placed her index finger over her lips as she spoke.

"Do it."

"Do it, Fukujiro-san," the second and third daughters whispered, smiling.

Hideyo's baby was sleeping in the parents' room. Even during the day, Hideyo rarely looked after her own child. Hideyo's mother was always holding or carrying the baby.

Her husband had been conscripted into the army and taken to Burma. She didn't know when he would return, or even if he was alive or dead. Yet here was Hideyo, a wife and mother of one child, telling me, a lowly, easily blown-away actor, to stay the night. I couldn't help but feel uneasy.

The room was so small, the futon completely covered the tatami mats. It was a room for young women only.

(This woman, Hideyo, still thinks of me as a real child.)

And I felt a little pissed off.

I had enough common sense to know that much.

Even so, I had written several plays, even if they bordered on plagiarism, on themes like love, romance, and parental affection. They had been staged, and I had been paid for them.

While I'm a bit annoyed at being treated like a child, I'm still pleased by their invitation.

Truly, walking home from the station to the house on the hill late at night, my body exhausted, was grueling. After a full day's work, I simply didn't have the strength.

More than the joy of spending the whole night in the same room with them, I was grateful not to have to drag my feet along that dark, long path from the station to the house.

"Yeah, I'll stay," I said, and crawled into the futon at the foot of the bed where the three sisters slept with their heads pressed together.

It was winter. This was an era without heating or air conditioning, yet I wasn't cold.

Far from cold, the room was stiflingly hot, heated by the young women's body heat.

One quilt was more than enough.

They weren't in pajamas, but old yukata nightgowns.

The air in the room was suffocating with the scent of their bodies, but that suffocation was a sweetness I'd never tasted before.

In a typical SM novel, this is where the young man I was would suffer brutal sexual humiliation at the hands of the three sisters, awakening to the pleasure of being a masochist.

I myself have written several such novels.

But in reality nothing like that happened.

They paid no attention to my presence. After turning off the light, they chatted freely and then fell asleep, snoring softly. Though I was tired, I felt a little tense about sleeping between the body heat of three women. But as soon as I lay down, I grew sleepy.

When I woke from the nap, moonlight streamed into the room through the glass window facing outside.

I felt a little more energetic.

Even though it was a winter night, the room felt even warmer.

The women slept with their feet sticking out from under the quilt.

The hems of their nightgowns were pulled up high.

The women's thighs were visible in the moonlight.

The white thighs looked even whiter in the moonlight.

I didn't know whose thighs they were.

They must have belonged to one of the three sisters.

To my eyes, those thighs appeared with a shocking eroticism.

I think this was the first time I clearly felt and became conscious of the eroticism emanating from a woman's body.

If my sixteen year old self had then thrown myself passionately onto those thighs and clung to them, it would have been a scene straight out of a pulp SM novel. But in reality, I frantically looked away.

And then I burrowed back under the futon.

So, I only saw those thighs for just a moment.

Perhaps it was precisely because it lasted only an instant that it burned itself so intensely into my heart.

And it was precisely because it lasted only a mere instant that, even now, over sixty years later, I still cannot forget it.

Eratta

Fukunosuke

Fukunosuke Ichikawa (III)

Real Name: Haruo Mizutori (formerly Haruo Asai)

Stage Name: Naritaya

Crest: Gourd and Paulownia



Dates of Birth and Death: March 21, Meiji 37 (1904) - August 4, Heisei 2 (1990)

Place of Birth: Daiboji-cho, Shima-no-uchi, Osaka

Profile

In his youth, he was a beautiful onnagata who made a name for himself playing roles such as Akahime and young women in medium-sized and small theaters like the Miyato-za and Kotobuki-za. In her later years, at the suggestion of the third-generation Onoe Taganosuke, he shifted primarily to playing older roles, and after Taganosuke's death, he portrayed Okaya in the sixth act of "Kanadehon Chushingura."

Fukunosuke's portrayal of Okaya, which was, if anything, reserved, warm, and full of tenderness, proved to be the perfect match for the Kanpei characters played by the young Onoe Kikugoro and Ichikawa Danjuro, bringing a sense of discipline to the stage. He served as an important mentor to the Naritaya family and was also a fatherly figure to the current Ichikawa Danjuro. Whether as Komatsu's mother in "The Tale of Sanemori" or Gonta's mother at the "Sushiya" in "Yoshitune and the Thousand Cherry Trees," he deeply moved the audience with his poignant portrayal of the sorrow of an elderly mother outliving her child. In his younger roles, his portrayal of the landlady in "Shukuya Shinsuke," a worldly sophisticated woman of a certain age, is particularly noteworthy.

Career

Professional Career:

Although he was the heir to a printing business, he aspired to become an actor and entered the troupe of the second-generation Ichikawa Udanji. In October of Taisho 9, he took the stage name Ichikawa Tsurunosuke and made his stage debut as a town girl in "The Tale of the Glory of Rokuhara" (written by Shinoyama Ginba) at the Osaka Nakaza Theater. In Showa 4, he moved to Tokyo and joined the Miyato-za in Asakusa. In November of Showa 7, he was promoted to the rank of Meidai for his roles as O-san and Koharu in "Shigure no Kotatsu" at the

Miyato-za. In Showa 10, he joined the Toho Theater Company. In September of the same year, he changed his name to Ichikawa Fukunosuke III. In January of Showa 14, he returned to the Kansai Kabuki and became a disciple of the Ichikawa Soke (Ichikawa Sanjo V). From Showa 16 onward, he settled in Tokyo, performing at small theaters such as the Kotobuki-za and, after the war, the Katabami-za. Beginning in Showa 25, he joined the Kikugoro Theater Company under the guidance of Ichikawa Ebizo (the 11th-generation Danjuro) and became an active member of the troupe.

Awards:

July, Showa 54: National Theater Special Award.

October, Showa 56: Japan Actors Association Award for Distinguished Service.

Takejaku

Takejaku Bando (II)

Real Name: Keitaro Suzuki

Stage Name: Otowaya

Crest: Bando Crane, Double-Petaled Wood Sorrel

Dates of Birth and Death: March 10, Meiji 28 (1895) - November 13, Showa 44 (1969)

Place of Birth: Shizuoka Prefecture

Profile

Before the war, he performed at the Kotobuki-za (later at the Kotobuki Theater) in Honjo Midori-cho, Tokyo. After the Kotobuki Theater was destroyed in the war, he co-founded the "Katabami-za" with the Fourth Bando Tsuruzo, Matsumoto Korinosuke, and others, and played an active role as one of its key members. After the war, he made the Sumida Theater, located inside the Asakusa Matsuya department store, his base. With his versatility as both a male lead and an onnagata, he entertained audiences with performances typical of small-theater productions, such as playing the dual roles of Omiya and Rancho in "Rancho" and the dual roles of Sodehagi and Sadatomo in the third act of "Oshu Adachigahara." When the theater closed, he moved to the major Kabuki theater in his later years alongside Ichikawa Monzaburo (Hakuzo) and others. During the summer Hanagata Kabuki season at the former Shinbashi Enbujo, he effortlessly played the role of the village headman who announces Kajiwara's arrival in the "Sushiya" scene of "Yoshitune Senbonzakura," leaving the audience thinking, "So this is that Takejaku."

Biography



Stage Career:

Made his stage debut in October, Meiji 33, at the Kyogoku-za in Kyoto, playing the role of a pageboy in “Ichii Joemon” under the stage name Seki Rikio. In April of Meiji 44, he became a disciple of the second-generation Bando Hikojiro and changed his name to Bando Utsuru. In October of Taisho 8, he assumed the name of the second-generation Bando Shuzaburo at the Asakusa Engi-za. In September of Taisho 10, he took the name of the second-generation Bando Takejaku at the Imperial Theater and was promoted to the rank of Meitai (leading actor).