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Flowers of Edo: Eighteenth-Century *Kabuki* and Its Patrons

C. Andrew Gerstle

At Tokyo's National Theatre, *kabuki* plays conceived and premiered during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are performed today, yet the audience's experience is radically different from that of the period before 1868. Patrons of *kabuki* in Edo (Tokyo) in 1770 would not have felt comfortable at all in having their theatre so close to the seat of government (in view of the Diet and Imperial Palace and next to the Supreme Court) nor would they have enjoyed the quiet, almost solemn atmosphere or the ban on eating and drinking in their seats. In short, they would be bored to tears at the exalted National Theatre with its posh furnishings. They would feel a bit more comfortable at the Kabuki-za perhaps or would have at the old Shinbashi Enbujō Theatre recently demolished. If they wanted to get closer to eighteenth-century *kabuki*, they would have to leave Tokyo altogether and travel to the Naka-za in Osaka's Dōtonbori district or the Minami-za in Kyoto during the face-showing (*kaomise*) performance in December. Still they would be bored by the stiffness of the audience and performance. They would not be part of the show. It would not be a festival.

For Edoites of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868)—commoner and samurai—*kabuki* was one of the pillars of social and cultural life, an ongoing festival. The scholar Gunji Masakatsu (1969) uses the term *kyōen* (banquet) to describe *kabuki* theatre, and the author Shikitei Sanba ([1806] 1973, 468) has a character say, “If you don't like Ichikawa Danjūrō's rough-style acting, Toraya *yōkan* sweets, and *katōbushi* singing, you're not a true Edokko.” *Kabuki*'s “festival” was something in which Edo's residents participated vigorously throughout the year, as the *kabuki* calendar was

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arranged in bimonthly programs following the rhythms of city life. Each program opened to coincide with the celebration of a festival: New Year, Dolls' (third month), Boys' (fifth month), All Souls' or Obon (seventh month), and Autumn (ninth month) with the special *kaomise* performance in the eleventh month. Raz (1983) and Thornbury (1982) give, respectively, descriptions of the liveliness of audiences and the yearlong schedule of programs. A comic poem (*senryū*) attests to the heights of *kabuki*'s smashing popularity: "A big hit/Finally/Corpses all carted away" (PLATE 1) (Gunji 1956, 160).¹ There is no doubt that Edo was a lively and creative place to be; most likely the largest city in the world, it had a range of entertainment facilities rivaling any city. *Kabuki* at the center of this urban culture, to a certain extent, embraced all levels of society—from the outcasts (*hinin*), who were allowed to enter free, to grand lords (daimyo), who entered through doors other than the small *nezumi* (rat) door at the front, namely the direct passages from adjoining teahouses. Because famous actors' names were used to advertise products, their fame extended into nearly every Edo home on kimono patterns, hair styles, candy, and cakes.

Further, through actor prints and touring companies *kabuki*'s radiance even penetrated far into the rural areas. Yet patronage of the theatre was not confined to the masses. Most Edo writers also were fascinated by this distinctive world of fantasy, and many actors conversely took part in literary groups as amateur poets. Ichikawa Danjūrō^a V (1741–1806), with the pen name Hakuen^b, is a famous actor well known for his literary activities and relations with writers of this period. Popular demand for information on theatre life was insatiable. Playbills (*banzuke*), critiques (*hyōbanki*), woodblock actor prints (*ukiyoe*), as well as a continuous array of books on, or set in, the theatrical world flourished nearly all through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, increasing as time progressed. Depending on one's moral perspective, for better or worse, the theatre radiated into all corners of Edo life.

Of course not everyone in Edo society fully appreciated the breadth or depths to which *kabuki*'s radiance permeated. For the top conservative echelon of the feudal government (*bakufu*), *kabuki* was an unpleasant evil—tolerated but pushed as far away from city life as possible. The government's attitude toward *kabuki* is generally well known because of the research of historians. In English, there is the work of Donald Shively in such articles as "Bakufu versus Kabuki" (1968), "The Social Environment of Tokugawa Kabuki" (1978), and "Tokugawa Plays on Forbidden Topics" (1982). Especially in the period before 1720, the *bakufu* was continually banning or restricting all aspects of *kabuki*. According to Shively, "the official attitude was that actors were a social group lower than merchants and only a little above the pariah class" (1968, 260). This

attitude remained official policy because actors were continually, throughout the Tokugawa period, restricted in where they could live and legally administered as beggars. They were considered male prostitutes and accordingly the theatre district was put near the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter far from the center of Edo. This does not mean that men of education or position did not patronize actors, however. In fact, samurai interest in *kabuki*, particularly in the mid-eighteenth century until the Kansei Reforms in the 1790s, seems to have been more widespread than is usually claimed. Though we imagine samurai (especially the young) in their large wicker hats stealthily making their way to the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter, the general view is that samurai and intellectuals had little love for *kabuki*. Gunji Masakatsu (1956, 10) emphasizes, however, that the distinction, first created in the Meiji period (1868–1912), between the brothel and theatrical worlds did not exist in the Tokugawa period. Commoners—as well as the *bakufu*—viewed these two spheres of entertainment as two sides of the same coin. The following *senryū* from the Kansei period (1790s) jokingly puts them in perspective: “Yoshiwara / *Kabuki* / The back and front of dice” (Gunji 1956, 10). For city dwellers these two areas were the worlds of pleasure and fun, a forbidden sphere outside restrictive society, often termed *akusho* (evil places) or *chikushō* (Buddhist realm of beasts) while the popular term was *gokuraku* (paradise).²

These contradictory attitudes toward *kabuki*—one of moral and social disdain versus the other of fascination and adulation—is an intriguing phenomenon. At least some actors seem to have been clearly aware of their official station. The source *Chūko kejōsetsu*^c (On theatre of the past; 1805) records that Ichikawa Danjūrō II (1689–1758) was visited by a famous shamisen player and had him eat from a separate fire, showing explicitly that Danjūrō considered himself to be of the outcaste class (Gunji 1956, 69). This humble attitude of Edo actors did not continue into the latter half of the eighteenth century, however, when records show actors visiting daimyo residences. Nor, ironically, does this humility seem to have been meant for the samurai class, because the same Danjūrō II was the creator of many of the most famous *aragoto* (rough-style) pieces which are defiant toward the samurai. Whatever the official *bakufu* attitude was toward actors, their popularity was enormous and continued to grow throughout the Tokugawa period. During the latter half of the eighteenth century this fascination for the world of Edo *kabuki* fully matures, encompassing all levels of society. The tension between official disdain and popular adoration was always felt more acutely by actors in the city of Edo, who lived under close samurai scrutiny, than by their counterparts in Kyoto or Osaka. Perhaps this may help to explain the distinctive Edo *aragoto* tradition with its bombastic and rebellious style. Playwrights were conscious of the sharp distinction in styles. The author of the 1801 *Sakusha*



FIGURE 11. Ichikawa Danjūrō II as Gorō in the play *Ya no ne* (The arrow maker). (Photo: Ichikawa Danjūrō Family Collection.)

shihō kezairoku^d (Treasury of rules for playwrights) compares *kabuki* in the three cities: the *kokoro* (heart) of Kyoto *kabuki* is a “beautiful woman”; Osaka, a “dandy”; and Edo, a “samurai” (*KGR* 1972, 511). *Aragoto*, the essence of Edo *kabuki*, as described by Danjūrō I, is recorded in the important book *Kokon yakusha rongo sakigake*^e (Past and present actors’ analects—advanced; 1772):

When invited to a daimyo’s residence, after saké was served, I was asked to show them *aragoto*. Therefore, to the chanting of the *nō* play *Kagekiyo*, I stripped to my underclothes and violently smashed the *shōji* and *fusuma* (sliding doors) with my feet. Whereupon, the patrons asked what are you doing? When I replied that this is *aragoto*, the daimyo was delighted and rewarded me well. Even in front of daimyo you must never be afraid, or it won’t be *aragoto* (*KGR* 1972, 480).

The essence of *aragoto* is defiance toward the samurai. The actor must consider his audience to be samurai. Though most today imagine such defiance to be symbolic or abstract, I shall show that, in fact, during the eighteenth century samurai were more intimately involved in *kabuki* life than previously thought.

Kabuki fans in Edo regarded the actors as godlike hero figures, and Ichikawa Danjūrō—whoever bore the name—was the king of this world; he was “the flower of Edo” (*Edo no hana*). During January 1982, in an interview with Ichikawa Ebizō,^f whose father was Danjūrō XI and who has since become Danjūrō XII, I asked him to elaborate on his ideas of the past and present “Danjūrō” image. One reason for asking this question is that, on viewing a Danjūrō-type piece in the Edo *kabuki* repertoire for the first time, a spectator may be totally baffled by the ritualistic formality, lack of action, and the grandiose exaggerations of the hero. In the famous and annually performed play *Shibaraku*^g (Wait a minute!) almost nothing happens. The stage is filled with an array of red-bodied thugs, evil-looking villains, conniving priests, innocent victims, and beautiful princesses. The background to the story is a complicated power struggle for control of a family treasure, but in the scene performed nothing happens except for the grand entrance of Gongorō in an oversized outfit with a gigantic sword. After yelling “*shibaraku!*” (“wait a minute!”) from offstage to halt the villains’ actions, he then enters along the *hanamichi*. He stops midway and announces his name and lineage, along with an assortment of hyperbole and humorous references to contemporary happenings. This kind of soliloquy, called *tsurane*, is famous in traditional Edo *kabuki*. The play on first view may seem absolutely bizarre. During the Edo period, however, this was a magic moment in theatre. The contemporary Danjūrō’s view (and sources support it) is that Danjūrō was considered a deity for the Edo *chōnin*



FIGURE 12. Ichikawa Danjūrō I as Soga Gorō uprooting a bamboo in a print by Torii Kiyomasu dated 1697. (Photo: Tokyo National Museum.)



FIGURE 13. In a painting by Torii Kiyomasu, Ichikawa Danjūrō I plays Gongorō in the play *Shibaraku*. (Photo: Ricar Museum.)



FIGURE 14. Ichikawa Danjūrō IX portraying Fudō Myōō. (Photo: Narita Shinshōji Temple.)

(townsman), a god whose fierce look—like that of the guardian god Fudō Myōō^h at a temple—could exorcise evil and cure sickness.³ Danjūrō was a superhero above the samurai and even above the shogun himself: “In all the world / There’s Danjūrō / And a spring morn”—that is, in this world of Edo only Danjūrō matters—not the shogun (Gunji 1956, 65). Evidence from Danjūrō’s letters to temples and shrines shows that he considered his performance to be inspired by the powers of this god: “My fame as the founder of *kabuki* is not due to human effort” (*KGR* 1972, 690).

Gunji Masakatsu takes a step further and suggests that Danjūrō's *aragoto* performances were “not just theatrics, but prayers” (*KGR* 1972, 690). Various references indicate that the myth of the Danjūrō relationship with Fudō was significant in the eighteenth century. The 1774 *Yakusha zensho*¹ (All about actors) states:

Danjūrō I prayed to the Fudō at Narita temple and was blessed with a son, who later became Danjūrō II. Because of the circumstances of his birth Danjūrō II had, from his childhood days, deep faith in Fudō Myōō. Eventually he excelled and became a famous actor. The sacred mirror he presented to the temple is said to be still there. . . . During his lifetime he performed the Fudō role many times, always with great success. No other actor could charm audiences as he did in moments of nonacting. It was surely the power of Fudō Myōō. His eyes looked exactly like Fudō, frightening; the pupils would remain fixed for an extraordinarily long time. He was certainly inspired by the spirit of the god (*NSBSS* 1973, VI: 122).

The earlier *Kabuki jishi*^j (Origins of *kabuki*; 1762) records a similar story. Danjūrō II was having a difficult time keeping his eyelids from blinking during the Fudō Myōō stare. He went to the Narita temple and pledged to pray continuously for seventeen days. After completing his pledge, “his eyes had exactly the fierce look of a Fudō, and could stay fixed in a stare. He surely was possessed by the spirit” (*NSBSS* 1973, VI: 124). In a play like *Shibaraku* or *Fudō*, the audience went to see their favorite actor as superman, the guardian of Edo's citizens.

The third element central to the myth of *aragoto* acting—along with defiance of the samurai class and religious devotion—is the playboy image. Danjūrō, as an outlaw hero, swaggers boldly with flair and brashness, perhaps comparable to the “rebels” of modern film or rock music. Like them Danjūrō was the rugged ladies' man, the sex idol of Edo. A short, fictional work gives us an insight into the popular legend. The 1782 *kibyōshi* (illustrated satirical fiction) *Ichikawa sanshōen*^k (Ichikawa Danjūrō) refers to an oracle at the Narita Fudō temple who proclaimed a miracle drug called “Ichikawa sanshōen,” namely Danjūrō. “Listen folks, drink this potion three times, and pass through the Yoshiwara gate; no courtesan will ever turn away from you again” (Hino 1977, 57; Mori 1972, 283). In Edo, one's reputation among courtesans was the touchstone for male sexual prowess. Edoites saw Danjūrō (or other actors) in the popular play *Sukeroku*^l as a virile, sexual powerhouse—loved by all the courtesans of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter. In the entrance soliloquy of that play, the actor gives a confident, egotistical, humorous, self-introduction that brashly glorifies his role as the savior of the Edo townsmen—who lived beneath the sword of approximately 500,000 resident samurai. Edoites



FIGURE 15. In a triptych by Utagawa Kuniyoshi dated 1850, Ichikawa Danjūrō VIII plays Sukeroku. (Photo: Waseda Theatre Museum.)

took pride in the actor Danjūrō, their number one “Edokko.” Sukeroku is an especially intriguing role. Though really Soga Gorō, a samurai of the twelfth century, he is on the surface the townsmen’s townsman—standing up to a samurai. As the contemporary Danjūrō remarks, however, for most people today that magic is gone. There are no longer official distinctions between tycoons and outcasts.

As for the *onnagata* (female impersonators), famous actors were greatly influential in ladies’ fashion—in coiffure, kimono design, walking style, and a general sense of “femininity,” extending from commoner homes through samurai residences all the way to the shogun’s castle. Segawa Kikunojō II^m (1741–1773), also known as Rokōⁿ, was a particularly popular eighteenth-century *onnagata*, and the name Rokō came to be used as a brand name for various products. Another *senryū* poem expresses Kikunojō’s popularity and the wealth it brought him: “One glance / A thousand gold pieces / Kikunojō on the *hanamichi*” (Gunji 1956, 66). Rokō’s fame extended even to the nether world. In Hiraga Gennai’s^o *Nenashigusa*^p (Floating weeds; [1763] 1961, 46–48) Emma, lord of the underworld, becomes infatuated with the actor after seeing a print and demands that his subjects bring Rokō in the flesh.⁴ His name adorned incense, hair oil, tea, hair ornaments, and the like—indeed, an incident in Shikitei Sanba’s^a *Ukiyoburo*^r (Bath in a floating world; 1809), where a young girl persuades her mother to color her kimono with *rokōcha* dye, suggests the extent of actor adulation (Shikitei [1809] 1957, 187).⁵ Most



FIGURE 16. The *onnagata* performer Segawa Kikunojō II, in an illustration by Torii Kiyomitsu dated 1756. (Photo: Waseda Theatre Museum.)



PLATE 1. A print by Toyokuni I illustrates the festive mood of *kabuki* patrons in the 18th century. (Photo: James R. Brandon; collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)



PLATE 2. As both an actor and a poet, Ichikawa Danjūrō V, seen here in a print by Toyokuni I, was an important figure in Edo *kabuki*. (Photo: Waseda Theatre Museum.)



PLATE 3. *Dalang* I Nyoman Rajeg in performance. (Photo: Fredrik deBoer.)



PLATE 4. BIMA battles against DIMBA. (Photo: Fredrik deBoer.)



PLATE 5. *Mangandiri*, presented by the Sining Kambayoka troupe of Marawi City, used a theatrical style derived from Maranaw art and tradition to express contemporary concerns. (Photo: Doreen G. Fernandez.)

PLATE 6. An Awa puppet head in the Tokushima City Museum. (Photo: John Elzey.)

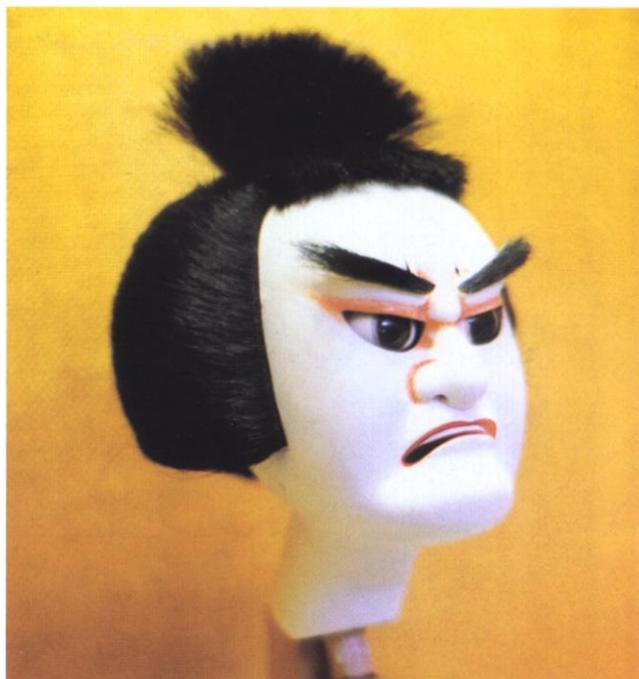


PLATE 7. In the “Pilgrim’s song” scene of the play *Keisei Awa no Naruto*, Otsuru and Oyumi perform the cloth-pulling *kata*. (Photo: John Elzey.)

famous *kabuki* actors' names of the period adorned products, and adoring fans were loyal to their favorite actor's wares. Another *senryū* attests to the competition: "Face powder too / Chrysanthemum (Kikugorō⁸) versus Peony (Danjūrō) / Patrons argue" (Gunji 1956, 81). Of course, *bakufu* officialdom frowned at such fawning over actors. Ironically, even courtesans, who had been the models for the development of the *onnagata* style—the basic role being the *keisei* (courtesan)—in the formative period during the seventeenth century, were in the eighteenth century, rather, imitators of *kabuki* actors. They looked to males acting as women for the ultimate in the arts of femininity. It is still a strong tradition, in Kyoto at least, that geisha are expected to attend the December *kaomise kabuki*.

For townsmen, and samurai as well, the theatre district, with its restaurants and teahouses, provided a venue, like Yoshiwara, of complete freedom from the strictures of an officially moralistic Confucian society. The content of much eighteenth-century Edo *kabuki*, particularly the *jūhachiban* (eighteen favorites) is superhuman; most of the characters, Sukeroku, Kagekiyo, Gongorō, and others, are brash outlaw-heroes who stand in defiance of the samurai class. Theatre was a fantasy world and delicious, often ridiculous, fun, surely to some extent, because of the official disfavor it continually received.⁶ Perhaps people today would call it escapist art; an Edoite would surely not have disagreed. To what extent was the Edo preference for this type of drama (including later gangster-hero plays) influenced by an atmosphere in which "outcaste" *kabuki* actors played for a mostly commoner audience in a city dominated by samurai? Certainly an unusual setting.

It is still generally thought today that *kabuki* performances were directed at the commoner population of Edo while the samurai class kept their distance from the plebeian art. *Nō* drama was supposed to have been their theatre. Numerous references—particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century—clearly indicate, however, that from low-level samurai retainers through high-ranking *bakufu* officials (*hatamoto*) to powerful daimyo these outcaste *kabuki* performers had devoted fans.

Several works of fiction from the late eighteenth century make jest of the daimyo craze for *kabuki*. One published in 1784 is *Kyōgenzuki yabo daimyō*,⁴ literally *The boorish daimyo in love with kabuki*, by Kishida Tohō.⁵ The character Umanosuke, or Horseface, is a young, uncouth daimyo whose retainers introduce him to *kabuki* for aesthetic training. Horseface is an impossible fool who follows all suggestions to the letter and has *kabuki* performed at his residence. After this exposure, he becomes so theatrical that he imagines his servant committing adultery with a salesman and accuses them in grand *kabuki* language. His retainers, worried that his histrionics may get out of hand, introduce him to the women of the pleasure quarter. They invite a group to his residence and Horseface has them put

on a Soga *kabuki* play with himself in a leading role: courtesans and actors, a daimyo's dream! This fictional work is a hearty satire aimed at the highest of the samurai class—especially robust considering that the author was a lowly picture-framer.

From diaries and essays of the time we know that satire on daimyos' love for *kabuki* was not simply idle fantasy. One *bakufu* official, Moriyama Takamori^v (1738–1815), records various current happenings, and in *Shizu no oda maki*^w (Humble mutterings; 1802) he scornfully discusses eighteenth-century samurai love for imitating *kabuki* actors' speech and manners and putting on *kabuki* skits. Theatrical singing, *bungobushi* and *gidayū*, became popular during this time among samurai. He notes ([1802] 1929, 658):

The *shamisen* became extremely popular from 1740 to 1760. Eldest sons of good samurai families and even other sons all took lessons; from morn till night *shamisen* sounds were always to be heard. Eventually they began to perform other *kabuki* music and full dramas, and the like, and followed this depravity to the extent of performing amateur *kabuki* plays in residences. High *hatamoto* officials mimicking riverbed beggars (actors), aping female impersonators and stage heroes!⁸

However, he adds: “But with the Kansei Reforms in the 1790s, all this ceased and society returned to normal.”

In an earlier work, *Tōdai Edo hyakabutsu*^x (A hundred strange things in Edo), Baba Bunkō,^y also a *bakufu* official, discusses ([1758] 1928, 402) unusual characters in society. He mentions that the Matsue daimyo, Matsudaira Munenobu^z (1729–1781), built a stage in his Edo residence for *kabuki* and invited merchants to see productions. He invited the actor Segawa Kikunojō to perform and later, when he met Mizoguchi Naoatsu^{aa} (1715–1780), the Shibata daimyo, he was thanked by Mizoguchi for being kind to his Kikunojō—as if Kikunojō was a member of Mizoguchi's family. Mizoguchi thereafter acquired the nickname of “Foster Father.” In *Nenashigusa*, Gennai expands this theme in satirical fiction, poking fun at samurai love for Kikunojō and other actors. Lord Emma can be seen as representing a daimyo or even the shogun. Consistent references in a variety of sources support a hypothesis that such activities were anything but uncommon. Ōta Nanpo^{bb} (1749–1823), a *bakufu* official, poet, critic, and fiction writer, records in *Hannichi kanwa*^{cc} (Idle chatter; 1927, 491) an incident in 1776 of a senior samurai official arranging seats on behalf of his daimyo's wife for a *Sukeroku* performance at the Ichimura Theatre. Upon arriving, however, he discovers a mix-up: no seats are available. At that point, as an apology, the samurai commits suicide (*seppuku*) in the theatre teahouse. This all sounds rather fantastic, and Nanpo admits his doubts on the truth of the affair. True or not, we can be sure that *kabuki* was not completely alien to the warrior class in Edo.

Our most authoritative source on this matter is a diary by a powerful daimyo, Yanagizawa Nobutoki^{dd} (grandson of Yanagizawa Yoshiyasu^{ee}), called *Enyū nikki*^{ff} (A banquet diary), compiled over the years 1773–1785 (and continued thereafter as *Shōkaku nikki*^{gg}).⁹ This source, printed for the first time in 1977, confirms the fictional and other accounts of samurai interest in *kabuki* theatre. Nobutoki was such an avid fan that he kept a separate record of all performances attended. He describes in detail daylong excursions (with entourage) to the theatre district and speaks of collecting playbills and other materials from the theatrical world. His diary covers the years after retiring from active duty, but it is clear his interest did not emerge suddenly at the age of fifty.

Nobutoki was active in *haikai* poetry circles and other arts but was an extraordinarily devoted admirer of popular theatre. He patronized directly one actor only, Nakamura Nakazō,^{hh} but had indirect relations with other actors. His devotion to *kabuki* was zealous, his commitment perhaps unparalleled. He appears to have hired ladies-in-waiting according to their acting and dancing talents, and eventually he created a small *kabuki* troupe within his household (Koike 1980). Directed by Nobutoki and assisted by Nakazō, the women's troupe performed once or twice a year in a play written by the daimyo himself. He would take an old *jōruri* play, rewrite it into *kabuki*, arrange cast and props, prepare playbills, and finally write his *hyōbanki* after the performance. For these shows he had a stage—complete with *hanamichi*—built within his residence. Certainly he was a fascinating daimyo who preferred the popular theatre of *kabuki* and *jōruri* over the austere *nō* and, as we have seen, was most likely not the only daimyo with such proclivities. The Kansei Reforms of the 1790s, however, suppressed this kind of open flirtation with the demimonde, and daimyo were obliged to pursue their theatrical pleasures more discreetly. Nevertheless, *kabuki* was far more central to the life of all levels of Edo society than most historians admit.

Another substratum of Edo society for which *kabuki* was essential was the *gesaku* (popular fiction) writers and poets. For Utei Enba,ⁱⁱ Ōta Nanpo, Hiraga Gennai, Santō Kyōden,^{jj} and Shikitei Sanba—to name but a few of the many samurai and commoner authors—*kabuki* was an important venue particularly for the communal arts of *haikai* and *kyōka* (crazy poem) in which all the artists participated. *Kabuki* was not just a meeting place or common ground for them; actors often were poets who entered the writers' *bundan* (coterie) under poetic names. One actor, Ichikawa Danjūrō V (1741–1806), was a favorite among these writers and published *kyōka* with them under the name Hakuen (PLATE 2). References from the writers themselves attest that Hakuen was friends with Nanpo, Enba, Kyōden, and others.¹⁰ Hino Tatsuo (1977, 63–64) has suggested that the *kyōka* world of fantasy was, for these writers, an imaginary utopia

away from the restrictive society and that Hakuen stood as the pillar of this coterie. The fictional “Danjūrō” image was central to their fantasy world.

Along with this social contact with actors, fiction writers continually drew on the theatre for source material and inspiration to such an extent that a contemporary scholar of Edo fiction, Mizuno Minoru (1974, 59; also see Suwa, 1976, 187–193), complains about the theatrical world’s grip on Edo fiction. *Gesaku* writers borrowed content and styles from *kabuki* and *jōruri* books, and certain writers—Kyōden and in particular Shikitei Sanba—seem to have kept their eyes on the theatre. Sanba wrote guide-books on *kabuki* and used the *kabuki* audience as fictional settings for his works, which give us today a magnificent picture of *kabuki* audiences of the past. His *Kejō suigen maku no soto*^{kk} (Theatre on the other side of the curtain; 1806) shows the audience to be lively and riotous at times—even causing performances to be halted briefly until calm could be restored. Popular fiction was part of the theatrical world. An awareness of this fact helps us to understand the context of Edo fiction, which has not been well received in the twentieth century in Japan.

For the commonfolk of Edo, popular theatre was a source of both festive entertainment and endless amateur activities. Shikitei Sanba’s *Ka-kusha hyōbanki*^{ll} (A critique of audiences; 1811)^{ll} humorously delineates all types of lively fans—from patrons, through connoisseurs, actor worshipers, young ladies, loud-mouthed ruffians, boorish samurai, and country folk, to tough old ladies. One of the most fascinating types is the actor mimic, who apes stage dress and actions all the time, even outside the theatre. These characters literally live an actor’s life; art and life are reversed. Others specialize in mimicking monologues and spontaneously begin reciting during performances without care for those around them. This imitation of *kabuki* dialogue actually developed into a formal art, and practice texts for this *kowairo* hobby have survived. *Kabuki* fans today, as well, love to imitate the histrionic style of declamation, a style that certainly begs for mimicry.

Other amateur arts emerging from the theatre were *chaban* (skit), *zashiki kyōgen* (home *kabuki*), dance, and *gidayū* (puppet theatre) chanting. The first two arts were not formalized but were nevertheless very popular in Edo. *Chaban* was the art of performing a *kabuki*-style skit when serving tea or food to a guest. In competitions, a theme would be given and the person had to improvise a skit. There are references to semi-professional teachers (*chabanshi*) and numerous works of fiction contain episodes of *chaban* games.¹² *Zashiki kyōgen* was the more elaborate art of putting on *kabuki* plays in private residences. Evidence of the extent of the popularity for amateur productions is found in the 1774 book *Zashiki kyōgen haya gatten*^{mmm} (The basic book of home *kabuki*), which explains the whole procedure and includes references to specialty shops in Edo for stage props

and makeup. *Kabuki*-style dance became increasingly popular during the eighteenth century and professional schools developed that still exist today. *Gidayū* chanting was a popular hobby for Edoites as well as Osaka city folk. Numerous records and fictional works attest to its popularity—particularly among women.¹³ In fact, female *gidayū* performers became such a craze that official edicts against public performances were issued frequently, but to no apparent avail. In Edo, *gidayū* puppet theatre flourished particularly from the 1770s when Hiraga Gennai and others wrote new plays for Edo theatres, giving further impetus to amateur devotees.¹⁴ Most *kabuki* singing styles (*tokiwazu*, *shinnaibushi*, *nagauta*) also matured and flourished from the mid-eighteenth century onward.

The fondness for things theatrical among the merchant class in Edo extended from the lowest clerk to the richest broker. In the records of crimes of male clerks in the huge Shirokiya department store, two reasons for theft stand out: the young men wish, first of all, to buy an expensive courtesan and, secondly, to spend a fortune on a lavish day of theatre.¹⁵ Having both women and theatre, all their desires were satisfied. These young men were trying to imitate the eighteen grand-*tsū*—wealthy merchants who made an art of spending the money they had made as rice brokers and financiers for *hatamoto* samurai.¹⁶ By the mid-eighteenth century, nearly all *hatamoto* were in debt to these *fudasashi* (official merchants and brokers) and were saved only by the cancellation of debts that came with the Kansei Reforms in the 1790s. All of these grand-*tsū* were *kabuki* fans and usually patrons of favorite actors. Some even had their own stages for private performances. Indeed, these imitators of *kabuki* became so successful in their attempts to emulate theatre life that Matsudaira Sadanobu,¹⁷ the architect of the reforms, called these wealthy men “*kabuki* actors” (Kitahara 1975). The Kansei Reforms, however, put an end to their overt extravagance.

Depending on one’s viewpoint, theatre was either a source of depravity which corrupted the moral fibre of Confucian society or a source of life, imagination, fun, creativity—an escape from that same Confucian society. This tension, created by living directly under continuous official disfavor, certainly contributed to the rebellious tone of *kabuki* in Edo. Told that popular theatre was frivolous and immoral, eighteenth-century Edo actors and playwrights seem readily to have agreed (tongue in cheek), producing outlandish bombast with a vigor rarely matched in world theatre. What did it mean for actors in the mid-to-late eighteenth century to find themselves the darlings of daimyo and intellectual society as well as idols in the popular mind? What did it mean to be idolized, taken seriously as artists, and, at the same time, officially remain prostitutes of pleasure, wealthy but restricted to the outcaste ghetto? Contact with sophisticated patrons surely affected their self-esteem as artists. This atmosphere, in which theatre thrived under such contradictory attitudes, must

have affected the development of Edo *kabuki*, which is strikingly different from that in Kyoto or Osaka. *Kabuki* was by and for the commoners of Edo, but actors could not, as they could in Kyoto and Osaka, ignore the samurai who were both their police and their patrons. Actors always had something before their eyes to react against, producing an irreverent flavor particular to Edo's popular culture. Further, *bakufu* policy toward *kabuki* fluctuated throughout this most crucial century—relaxed during Genroku (1690s to 1710s), strict during the Kyōhō Reforms (1720s to 1740s), relaxed during the Tanuma period (1750s to 1780s), and strict in the Kansei Reforms (1790s). With this history, Edo *kabuki* could hardly be anything but a bit twisted in its attitude toward the samurai class and its morality. Even with the overwhelming eighteenth-century influence of Osaka *jōruri* and *kabuki*, Edo *kabuki*, at its core, kept its “swaggering outlaw” image and amoral stance.

The role of the samurai class in Edo *kabuki*'s development, therefore, should not be forgotten. In Danjūrō's words, *aragoto* is performed for daimyo: samurai were never out of sight for Edo actors. Though modern *kabuki*, clothed in artistic respectability, must suffer its fate of becoming representative of “national” culture, we must not forget its defiant past. *Aragoto* thrived on the tension implicit in the class structure of Edo society. I conclude with a comment by that great observer of Edo life, Shikitei Sanba, on the ambiguity of Edo *kabuki*'s position vis-à-vis its enemies and patrons:

Theatre-lovers think theatre-haters fools.
 Theatre-haters think theatre-lovers fools.
 Theatre-lovers who think theatre is about
 morality are fools.
 Theatre-haters who think theatre has no
 morality are fools.
 Such fools know not that all morality is
 in theatre.
 Such fools know not that all theatre is
 in morality.

 Fools, fools, if you truly know morality
 and attend theatre,
 you'll realize theatre is morality.
 Ah! Theatre, thou art morality!

Sanba adds, however, that:

This, too, is written by a fool,
 the chief priest of the Temple of Fun.¹⁷

NOTES

KGR *Kinsei geidō ron*

NZT *Nihon zuihitsu taisei*

NSBSS *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*

1. See Nishihara Ryū (1925) for *senryū* poems on *kabuki*.
2. There is a reference to the pleasure quarter as the “Western Paradise” (*saihō gokuraku*) in Ki no Kaion’s play *Wankyū sue no Matsuyama* (1708).
3. See Gunji (1969, chapter on *aragoto* style) and *Kabuki jūhachiban shū* (1965). See Watanabe (1975, 103–114) for information on the Narita Fudō. A verse by Kikaku, “Here inside / With Danjūrō / Demons driven outside” (quoted in *Yakusha zensho* [1774] 1973, 218) expresses the popular image of Danjūrō as the protector.
4. In this work Gennai was parodying certain daimyo’s fascination for actors.
5. There are numerous references to Rokō fashion in fiction of the time. See *Yakusha zensho* ([1774] 1973, 229–230) for a list of products with actors’ names.
6. Eight of the eighteen plays are in *Kabuki jūhachiban shū*. There are translations of *Sukeroku*, *Kenuki*, and *Narukami* in Brandon (1975).
7. *Nenashigusa* (1763) by Hiraga Gennai has already been mentioned as a satire on daimyo love for *kabuki*. Satirical *kibyōshi* fiction has many examples of absurd characters imitating *kabuki*. Santō Kyōden’s *Edo umare uwaki no kabayaki* (1785) is a famous example; the fellow is a rich, young merchant.
8. Moriyama was a supporter of Sadanobu’s reforms. In another work, *Ama no yakimo no ki* ([1728] 1929, 706), Moriyama relates Sadanobu’s attitude to the *kabuki*-like behavior and debauchery of samurai.
9. Printed in *NSBSS* (1977, XIII). *Shōkaku nikki* was published in 1981; the text is a photocopy of the manuscript.
10. Hamada Giichirō (1942, 70–73) cites examples from Ōta Nanpo’s writing of his frequent contact with Ichikawa Danjūrō V. For Danjūrō II’s relations with poets see Ichikawa ([1734–1747] 1972).
11. The text is in *NSBSS* (1973, VI). See Jacob Raz (1980) for a summary of its contents.
12. Shikitei Sanba’s *Chaban kyōgen haya gatten* ([1824] 1915) gives all the basics of this amateur art.
13. *Jōruri keiko buri* (1777), by Saiza Sanjin, presents a picture of a woman giving *gidayū* lessons in Edo. The book attests to the increasing popularity of *jōruri* puppet theatre in Edo in the last thirty years of the eighteenth century.
14. Wakatsuki Yasuji (1943) outlines this development. See also Stanleigh Jones (1978).
15. Hayashi Reiko (1972, 125–128) quotes from *Meikan roku*, the Shirokiya store record of crimes by employees, to show the popularity of *gidayū* lessons and of *kabuki*.
16. There are numerous sources for the eighteen grand-*tsū* (*daitō*), including *kibyōshi* and *sharebon* as well as nonfictional accounts. Their antics were

extremely marketable products for book publishers. *Okuramae baka monogatari*, or *Jūhachi daisū* ([1846] 1928), by the popular dramatist and former *fudasashi* Mimasuya Nisōji (1784–1856), gives a history of these characters.

17. Shikitei ([1806] 1973, 478). He is perhaps echoing Hiraga Gennai's *Nenashigusa* ([1763] 1961, 61): "If you watch *kabuki* with a moral heart, then it becomes teachings or admonitions. . . ." He is also parodying a common style of exposition found in Buddhist sutras.

a	市川団十郎	u	岸田杜芳
b	白猿	v	森山考盛
c	中古戯場説	w	賤のをだ巻
d	作者式法戯財録	x	当代江都百化物
e	古今役者論語魁	y	馬場文耕
f	市川海老蔵	z	松平宗衍
g	暫	aa	溝口直温
h	不動明王	bb	大田南畝
i	役者全書	cc	半日閑話
j	歌舞妓事始	dd	柳沢信鴻
k	市川三升円	ee	柳沢吉保
l	助六	ff	宴遊日記
m	瀬川菊之丞	gg	松鶴日記
n	路考	hh	中村仲蔵
o	平賀源内	ii	烏亭焉馬
p	根無草	jj	山東京伝
q	式亭三馬	kk	戯場粹言幕の外
r	浮世風呂	ll	客者評判記
s	菊五郎	mm	座敷狂言早合点
t	狂言好野暮大名	nn	松平定信

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