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**The Shape of a Woman: Representations of Kabuki and *Onnagata* in
Scholarship and Media**

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**The Shape of a Woman: Representations of Kabuki and *Onnagata* in
Scholarship and Media**

by

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Abstract

The Shape of a Woman: Kabuki and *Onnagata* Representations in Scholarship and Media

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The *onnagata* is a crucial element in Japanese kabuki; his presence in four centuries of kabuki history has shaped how Japanese femininity is viewed in women. This thesis discusses perspectives on the *onnagata* in film and scholarship, with an emphasis on Western perspective and representation. It discusses the idea of 'kabuki queerness' and *onnagata* as a staged gender. It also proposes different configurations that would allow women to join kabuki without injecting reality into theatre.

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Introduction

The Kabuki-za, located in Tokyo's ritzy Ginza district, is packed with audience members anticipating a long program packed with dances and excerpts from famous plays. Pictures of the leading actors line the atrium's walls, all of them middle-aged or elderly men in suits who could easily be mistaken for the average executive. When the lights dim and the curtain rises for a performance of *Chō no Michiyuki* (The Last Journey of Two Butterflies), it is not an elderly man who appears on stage but a young woman, dressed in elaborate kimono and a large wig. She dances gracefully across the stage and weeps for her tragic fate in a high, plaintive voice, stirring audience emotions. A brief look at the program book, however, shows this is no young actress. This is an actor from one of kabuki's oldest families, a man well into his sixties performing with the agility of a woman in her early twenties. The audience yells his name at the climax of his performance, which elicits applause for his masterful acting.

The performances continue, the actors performing comedic elderly women and vengeful female ghosts, goddesses and prostitutes, princesses and paupers. The men perform a striking versatility of female roles, but do not privately identify as a women. These are the *onnagata* (女形, 'lit. woman-shape'), or kabuki actors who perform women's roles. These actors are part of a tradition that spans hundreds of years of Japanese classical theatre, and their presence provokes questions-how have kabuki and *onnagata* shaped their own gender identity, and can they ever perform with actresses?

THESIS COMPONENTS

This paper analyzes kabuki and *onnagata* performances in film, discusses scholarship on these performances and addresses the reception of women and femininity from these works with a particular focus on Western reception. It focuses on representations of kabuki actors, particularly *onnagata*, as a form of subversive gender performance. Overall, I argue the *onnagata* is a fantasy-based gender that enhances kabuki queerness in its defiance of Japanese societal gender standards. Kabuki queerness is not related to an actor's sexual orientation or gender identity; it is strictly an aspect of stage performance.

The first chapter discusses how kabuki has been translated for the screen in three different eras. It opens with a brief discussion of Japanese women's history to place each film in historical context. The first, Mizoguchi Kenji's *Zangiku Monogatari (The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums)* (1939) uses actresses to bring awareness to their struggles and sacrifices in both a patriarchal society and kabuki world, but also highlights how the male lead is only able to realize his full potential by performing women as an *onnagata*. Ichikawa Kon's 1963 *An Actor's Revenge* highlights kabuki's transformation and gender play as the actresses take on *tachiyaku* roles to pursue an *onnagata*. Thirdly is the 2008 remake of *An Actor's Revenge*, which removes both gender play and fantasy in favor of a more realistic drama, making it a kabuki movie in name only. It is necessary to discuss the 2008 remake, as it tells the same story, but removing the kabuki elements minimized the women's roles in the film. It was made less about transformation and more as a film that only highlighted the lead actor.

The second chapter analyzes Western conceptions of kabuki and onnagata in scholarship and popular culture. It discusses the Orientalist roots in early (1950-1960) scholarship and the role that postwar scholars Faubion Bowers and Earle Ernst took in both introducing kabuki to a non-Japanese speaking audience and “straightening” kabuki to Western approval, but which also adhered to Japanese stereotypes, such as the “Mystic Orient.” The contemporary scholars discussed (1990-present) analyze *onnagata* using gender and sexuality scholarship, but also discuss *onnagata* gender as a personal gender identification rather than an on-stage gender.

It also takes a brief look at the problem of making kabuki for an elite audience and its role in both helping and hindering Japanese-American relations, from postwar admiration to Japan-bashing in the 1980s. It discusses an American studio’s attempt at making a kabuki-themed superhero in *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.* and the continuing stereotyping of both Japan and kabuki. The Western perception of kabuki and *onnagata*’s importance comes from its power in presenting kabuki to a non-Japanese speaking audience, and its commentary shapes the audience’s attitudes towards kabuki.

Chapter Three examines the potential for women on the kabuki stage. It presents opinions from both kabuki actors and outside theatre professionals and proposes different configurations that would allow actresses to perform kabuki.

KABUKI HISTORY

Kabuki is the most recent of the four forms of classical Japanese theatre. Kabuki developed in 1603 from dance-dramas performed by Izumo no Okuni, legendarily a priestess of Izumo Shrine. Her troupe was entirely female, believed to have been made

up of prostitutes and other lower-class women who played both male and female roles. These dances and dramas were popular among Japanese peasants, but the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867) banned women from kabuki in 1629 for its eroticism and the actresses' practice of prostitution.

To replace the women, *wakashu* kabuki (Young Men's Kabuki) developed, but was also quickly banned due to actor prostitution. Instead of kabuki being banned altogether, *yaro* kabuki (men's kabuki) was developed by 1693, which combined elements of the less-sexual elements of *wakashu* kabuki with serious storytelling.

Modern kabuki still exists in its *yaro* form, which includes several distinct character archetypes.

TACHIYAKU ROLES

Tachiyaku roles are the young male characters in kabuki, usually the protagonist. The heads of acting families, no matter how old the actor is, generally play these roles. *Tachiyaku* can be divided into two main categories that were originally popularized in the Kanto and Kansai region respectively, but in modern kabuki, both types of role are performed throughout Japan.

The more forceful of the *tachiyaku* is the *aragoto*, or rough style roles. The *aragoto* style was popular in the Kanto region due to its bold acting and colorful costuming. *Aragoto* wear enlarged, padded costumes and red and blue makeup and use strong *kata* and *mie* (movements and ending poses). The *aragoto* roles do not rely on realism but on theatrics, and their distinctive look is the most recognizable to foreign

audiences as being 'kabuki.' *Aragoto* are mostly found in dramas that focus on Japanese myths and magic.

The second type is the *wagoto*, or gentle style roles. *Wagoto* appealed more to Kansai audiences who preferred realism to the exaggerated *aragoto* theatrics. The *wagoto* makeup consists of a 'natural' face and the costuming is understated, without padding or bright colors. *Wagoto* rely on softer *kata* and *mie*, as well as more natural speech. These leads are most common in love suicide dramas or historical plays.

No matter which style is used, the *tachiyaku* is normally the focus of kabuki drama.. The action centers on the fate of the *tachiyaku*, with every other character in the drama being affected by his decisions. He performs an exaggerated masculinity in either *aragoto* or *wagoto* roles, which is only matched by an exaggerated femininity performed by *onnagata*.

ONNAGATA AND ROLES

Early *onnagata* roles relied on sexuality. Japan idealized adolescent boy's androgyny, and their expressions of sexuality drew patrons to the top performers during the *wakashu* kabuki era. Early *onnagata* during the *yaro* period were also under heavy restrictions by the Tokugawa Shogunate, including being required to shave off their forelock and wear hairstyles approved for older men. *Onnagata* complied with this restriction by covering their shaved forelock with a purple headscarf, which quickly became a sexual symbol. The *onnagata* removed much of their sexual performances as their roles evolved into serious dramatic portrayals.

While the *onnagata* portray the women of the kabuki world, *onnagata* themselves are not based on actual women. The art stems from the *wakashu*, which also refers to the younger partner in a homosexual relationship (Morinaga 246). These young men, called into service in kabuki after the actress ban of 1623, were revered for their feminine-like beauty, but were also banished from the stage in 1652 due to the actors' own prostitution. These boys, aged between eleven and fifteen, brought new elements to kabuki, including acrobatics, but it was their beauty and affected femininity for which they are most noted (Ortolani 176). Their *onnagata* performances were refined and stylized by the late eighteenth century, where this idealized femininity grew popular and remains on stage today as a traditional element of kabuki theatre.

The art of the *onnagata*, was formed out of necessity, but it endures. It has become a contested segment of kabuki performance, with both gender and theatre scholars asking about the necessity of the *onnagata*. As women have been allowed on stage and screen in Japan since the fall of the Tokugawa in 1876, men playing women on stage seems to be an outdated restriction from a more conservative era. The *onnagata*, however, are a critical piece not only of kabuki's history but also of kabuki's present, and it is their art that preserves a highly stylized femininity that is carefully constructed rather than naturally developed. It provides a fantasy world of hyper-feminine women, who portray a nuanced 'pure femininity' interpreted through a masculine gaze.

Onnagata are not actual portrayals of women. Rather, they represent another gender, one male-bodied but appearing female. This androgynous gender, rather than falling along the binary, presents a feminine image with a distinctly male body

underneath. Rather than *being* female-gendered, they are performing a femininity that was developed by and for *onnagata*, not for actual women (Mezur 2). The early *onnagata* Kikunojo I (c.1693-c.1749) wrote that women should copy the *onnagata*'s fashion but not their actions, as men are supposed to wish "if only there were a woman like this" (Morinaga 269). To this extent, early *onnagata* remained "in-character" at all times—dressing in women's clothing, using more feminine speech and mannerisms, and even eating foods that women enjoyed while off-stage. One *onnagata*, Kodenji I (c.1665-unknown), was known to take this to an extreme, even chastising palanquin bearers during a particularly rough ride that his bouncing in the palanquin was so severe that it brought on his menstruation (Kominz 203). Despite mannerisms and makeup, however, modern audiences are instructed, via pre-recorded kabuki narration, to focus on the duality of a male-bodied actor in female costuming and how an elderly man could change himself into an ageless beauty through training and action¹. Kabuki plays with the audience rather than to the audience by involving them in the action to an extent, and the interactions with audience members, such as shouting for a particular actor and the use of the *hanamichi* (lit. "flower passage", a raised section of stage that protrudes into the audience) heightens audience appreciation of these dualities as they view the actor from a more intimate distance. They call out the actor's male stage name to appreciate *onnagata* in his female dress (while at the same time acknowledging his masculinity), or are close enough to detect the actor's wrinkles and masculine facial features.

¹ I experienced this during my April 2014 visit to the Kabuki-za.

Despite Kikunojo's declaration that women should not view the *onnagata* romantically, women from merchant and peasant classes still made up a significant part of the Edo kabuki audience and the *onnagata's* fans. The female audience was able to identify with the characters portrayed by *onnagata* and the variety of women they portrayed, from high-ranking courtesan to lowly servant (Kominz 183). Women today still make up a significant portion of the kabuki audience, both to marvel at the male actors who portray a stylized femininity and to sympathize with the struggles of early Japanese women ('The Written Face', 3:27). This sympathetic view is carefully constructed by the *onnagata* through a combination of character analysis, *kata*, and previous actors' interpretations of the role ('The Written Face'). The femininity within each role follows certain structures depending on the role type, and it is recognized by kabuki aficionados that the hardest roles to play on stage are courtesans and princesses², which require a deep understanding of both natural and *onnagata* femininity (Leiter, 'From Gay to *Gei*', 220).

The courtesan and princess roles require a femininity that has absolutely no trace of masculinity. The princess roles, in particular, are able to use illusions to hide any traces of masculinity, such as hiding fingers to conceal large, masculine hands, and wearing hair-switches to make his neck appear slim. These costumed illusions and *kata* also serve to reflect the gracefulness of the character, which help create the illusion of the pinnacle of ideal femininity (Japan Arts Council). Princess and courtesan roles also

² The three princesses (*sanhime*) are considered the most difficult *onnagata* princess roles. They are Yaegaki (*Honchō Nijūshikō*), Yuki (*Kamakura Sandaiki*), and Toki (*Kinkakuji*).

require the seduction of the male main character, which adds an element of sexuality to *onnagata* as a male actor, acting as a woman, seduces another male actor. This onstage romance pushes the boundaries of theatrical heteronormativity and recalls *wakashu* kabuki, which relied on early Japanese sexuality between men. Men, performing as seductive women imbued the roles with their own sexual power (not necessarily inclination), which still adhered to Tokugawa societal standards of chaste women and male pursuers.

A skilled *onnagata* also takes on the roles of samurai wives' and elderly women. These roles are considered easier, as these are rough or comical characters, which allow for more masculine traits to show through the *onnagata's* acting and physicality for additional comic effect (Dunn 49-50). The *onnagata* continues to use the an affected voice and mannerisms in wife or elderly woman roles. The contrast between the stronger wife roles versus the overly dainty princess and courtesan roles create different kinds of stylized femininity.

CREATING FEMININITY

According to recent *onnagata*, such as the late Nakamura Jakuemon IV, the essence of the *onnagata* roles lies in the process of crystallizing femininity into restrained beauty (Sasaguchi 49). This beauty is meant to be impossible for women to achieve, as the heart of kabuki lies in the realm of fantasy, where heavily stylized characters and situations are meant to reenact famous stories and cause the heart of the audience to stir, but are not meant to be copied in daily life.

The *onnagata* characterizes much of traditionally lauded femininity—he portrays beauty but approachability, seductiveness blended with chasteness, independence yet subservience to men. This traditional femininity, blended with the stylized ideal, creates an interesting yet confusing identity that is constantly questioned and challenged. The *onnagata's* identity is neither male nor female, but presents a gender fluidity that performs feminine action in a male body as a separate gender. It exists both onstage and off with its own conventions and standards of behavior. Kabuki has proven its adaptability and versatility throughout the four hundred years of its history, and future kabuki productions may once again call on this adaptability to both change and subvert evolving gender standards in modern Japan.

Chapter 1: Kabuki and *Onnagata* in Japanese Film

The films discussed in this chapter represent three eras of kabuki film in Japan: the 1939 prewar drama *Zangiku Monogatari* (*The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*) and the 1963 and 2008 post-war and modern remakes of 1936's *Yukinojō Henge* (*An Actor's Revenge*). All three films focus on an *onnagata* and female sacrifice for the *onnagata*'s goal. One mechanism for portraying women in the early years of cinema was via an *onnagata* in a filmed kabuki drama, a practice that continued for nearly twenty years. Each film approaches the idea of female sacrifice, and the earlier two do so with a particularly feminist bent that challenge notions of the place of the woman in entertainment. The 2008 film, the only one of the three that does not use any kabuki actors, takes a more contemporary look at Japanese women and ultimately does not challenge women's place in either the entertainment industry or society itself.

WOMEN'S STATUS IN PRE- AND POST-WAR JAPAN

To analyze each film, I first examine the historical and societal circumstances surrounding women. The prewar and wartime woman, the nationalistic good wife, wise mother, supposedly lived happily under the control and protection of both men and the state. Her role in life was to produce children, particularly sons, who would continue this grand tradition of exhibiting ultra-masculinity while the woman remained quiet and subservient; the ideal Japanese woman. In theatre, this archetype was present in war dramas—while little to no romantic elements were present between characters, the wartime woman acted as nurse, messengers, and loyal Japanese women who support the war effort—women are most useful when aiding men (Kano 64).

The American Occupation of Japan promised to usher in a new era for women. The American forces pressured the Japanese Diet into giving women the right to vote in 1945, selling women into marriage or prostitution was banned, and with the combined forces of Occupation reformer Beate Sirota Gordon and Japanese feminist leaders like Katō Shizue (one of the first female Diet members), women looked towards a brighter future. After a long history of subjugation and the more recent pressure to work in brothels to protect themselves from being raped by American soldiers, the legal ramifications of denying female autonomy were a large step forward in Japanese women's rights.

Even as women became more plentiful in the Japanese workforce, they remained delegated to "women's work" such as nursing and modeling. Women were still expected to leave the workforce after marrying to focus on caring for her husband and future children. Despite attempts to introduce feminism into Japanese society, artifacts of the prewar good wife, wise mother ideal remained with women. Kano describes this as "wifeing the woman"-a view that women remain complementary to men and need a man's guidance and control to emerge into a complete womanhood (41). Even women in modern political movements were referred to as wives despite many of these movements, such as socialist and communist movements, calling for women's equality. By designating the woman as wife versus woman as woman, she remained under heterosexual male control.

EARLY TRANSLATIONS FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

Filmed kabuki helped introduce audiences to the concept of a movie. Starting with 1899's *Maple Viewing* and continuing into the mid-1930s, these narratives were an ideal choice for Japanese audiences familiar with the plots (McDonald 38). The earliest kabuki movies were strictly filmed plays or dance pieces, with virtually no film conventions, save for being filmed with more options for scenery and the ability to film scenes outdoors. Long kabuki dramas were also shortened due to technological constraints of the time; plays with multiple acts could not be performed in their entirety (McDonald 42). These films made movie stars out of kabuki stars, aided by the conventions of silent films, which relied heavily on an actor's facial expressions and physicality instead of voice. The *onnagata* played female roles in all films, not just kabuki ones, until the mid-1920s. As actresses became more popular, *oyama* (*onnagata* on film) were phased out of movies in female roles.

The second element that aided in kabuki's translation from stage to silent film was the usage of live narration. All kabuki plays rely on *jôruri*, a form of narration set to music which not only explains the play, but explains character motivations and warns characters of consequences. Each silent film in Japan relied on atmospheric music and the *benshi*, who performed not only narration but multiple characters as well. The *benshi* remained a fixture in the Japanese cinema until well into the 1930s when silent film gave way to the more popular sound films.

While filmed kabuki plays and *onnagata* as actresses were slowly replaced with women beginning in the 1920s, kabuki was still occasionally used as a vehicle to subvert

gendered expectations. These films twisted gender roles and expectations, challenging their audiences to rethink the potential of man and woman, actress and *onnagata*. Film also transformed notions of traditional kabuki itself by having women perform on camera with *onnagata*, which added realism to an art form strictly against anything of the sort. Actresses performed natural femininity (as opposed to the idealized *onnagata* femininity), and thus created the ‘everyday woman’; one who is not hyper-feminine but is recognizable as a character that could fit easily into modern society.

In my analysis of the three kabuki films, I closely analyze character and plot while taking into consideration the available background information on the performers and directors. This chapter argues that adding actresses into the film emphasizes kabuki’s unique *onnagata* element by having actresses interact with an *onnagata* rather than detracting from the *onnagata*’s idealized female fantasy. The uniqueness of the three films, in choosing to center on *onnagata* rather than a *tachiyaku* player defies the patriarchal notion of a film or play needing to center on a man’s adventures to create a rich film.

FEMININE STRENGTH IN ONNAGATA ROLES: THE *STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS*

Even as kabuki drama in movies began to decline in numbers, the art form was still being explored in film. Since attending classical theatre was still a popular pastime, films still tried to capitalize on its popularity. However, due to the trend in film realism, the use of *onnagata* to portray female characters declined and kabuki became more of a backdrop or element of plotlines in films rather than the stylistic substance of the film

itself. Actresses began to appear in dramas about kabuki (but not as an actress in a kabuki play; any kabuki performed films used *onnagata*) and other classical theatre, the most noted of those in pre-war film being Kenji Mizoguchi's *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*. *Chrysanthemums* explores women's burdens in a prewar society and commends women on their unsung self-sacrifice for the good of their families. While the film reproduced some gender norms, representing women as docile and sacrificial, it also allowed female-bodied actresses, rather than *onnagata*, to portray the strength of "real women" in the world of kabuki, if not on the stage itself. Mizoguchi's prewar portrayal of women in a kabuki themed-movie was progressive for the period. He would go on to direct post-war films featuring strong women and their fight for liberation, such as 1946's *The Victory of Women* and 1948's *The Women of the Night* but such attitudes were less unusual in that era.

The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums was an unusual choice for Mizoguchi to adapt into a film. *Chrysanthemums* was a popular stage play depicting Meiji-era (1868-1912) kabuki (McDonald, *Mizoguchi* 56), while Mizoguchi was known for his movies based on Meiji-era novels, such as his adaptation of one of Kyōka Izumi's works as *Orizuru Osen (The Downfall of Osen)*. It was also a sound film—while Mizoguchi was one of the earliest adopters of sound film in Japan with *Furusato no Uta (The Song of Home)* (1929), many of his films in the 1930s still used *benshi*. *Chrysanthemums*, like Mizoguchi's more feminist pre-war works, were fully voiced. I argue that choice to use sound film allowed his female characters to express their lines using their own voice, rather than their words and actions explained by a *benshi*.

The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums, released in Japan as *Zangiku Monogatari*, was Mizoguchi's last film in Japan prior to being sent to Manchuria, where the Japanese government required him to produce propaganda films. The film, regarded as his best pre-war film, uses kabuki and a struggling actor's story to frame an exploration into the lower role of women in society.

Plot Summary

Chrysanthemums details the semi-true story of Kikunosuke, a struggling kabuki actor and adopted son of Kikugoro V, who causes scandals within the closed Tokyo kabuki world—Kikunosuke is lazy, enjoys carousing more than practicing, and is a poor actor. After Otoku, a nursemaid for Kikunosuke's infant brother, confronts him that his acting is poor and he is only applauded because of his name, Kikunosuke attempts to change his ways and falls in love with Otoku. The forbidden romance drives a wedge between father and son, and Kikunosuke and Otoku leave for Osaka, and he later joins a traveling kabuki troupe to become a strong actor on his own merits, which he achieves by performing in *onnagata* roles. When this fails, Otoku, now in declining health, manages to secure an *onnagata* leading role for Kikunosuke. He performs well and reconciles with his father in Tokyo at the cost of his marriage. Kikunosuke returns to Osaka at the end of the film as a celebrated actor, where he is able to tell Otoku of his success before she passes away. While the plot centers around Kikunosuke and his relationship with his adoptive father, it is Otoku who is the true protagonist of the film.

Otoku and Idealistic Femininity

Kabuki is a male-only world, and focusing on Otoku brings attention to the pre-war woman's struggles. Focusing on the kabuki world also allowed for *onnagata* role use, and Kikunosuke demonstrates that he could only reach full maturity by utilizing femininity. The overarching theme of female sacrifice, while not created as prewar propaganda, still glorifies the role of suffering to fulfill the dreams of a male Other. By portraying Otoku defying the standards of society rather than being subjugated by them, a common theme in kabuki drama, Mizoguchi essentially puts a woman played by a female actress at the center of a movie focusing on a male-only world.

Otoku, a servant to a rich family, is an outsider in the kabuki world through gender and class. She announces her outsider standing early in the film, when she admits she knows little about kabuki other than that Kikugoro V is highly accomplished and that Kikunosuke is nowhere near the level of his adoptive father. However, she defies her lower standing in the household by giving advice and encouragement to Kikunosuke, which leads to her dismissal from the house by Kikugoro V's wife. Kikunosuke's pleas that she has been unfairly treated are ignored. The audience has witnessed Otoku's exemplary behavior—chaste in her relationship with Kikunosuke, deferential to the higher-ranked members of the household, yet willing to dispense advice as a 'good wife, wise mother.' When her advice is ignored, such as when she warns Kikunosuke of the perils of joining a traveling kabuki troupe, the pair suffers the consequences of Kikunosuke's actions—Otoku, being the doting wife, must follow Kikunosuke or risk no longer being the ideal woman. It is because of Otoku's pleas to Kikunosuke's fellow

actor that Kikunosuke gets his last chance at becoming a member of his father's Tokyo-based troupe, although she is aware that she will lose her marriage if Kikunosuke is able to return to his father's home. She is not allowed to return to Tokyo because Kikunosuke marrying his father's servant is scandalous; by her not returning, Kikunosuke can save his career. Otoku's suffering manifests into illness, and yet she continues to sacrifice herself until her death. Even on her deathbed, she begs for Kikunosuke to join his troupe in a river procession celebrating his newfound popularity. By achieving his goal of stardom, he gained permission to freely refer to Otoku as his wife in public. Otoku's goal is thus completed and she can rest in peace.

Gender Ideals in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*

Even Otoku's suffering is portrayed in a way that emphasizes the ideal Japanese woman. Near the end of the film, when she is asked by Kikunosuke's fellow actors not to return to Tokyo with him if he performs well, she accepts stoically. Otoku understands that, in order for him to restore his own honor, it was important for the then-disgraced Kikunosuke not to be married to a lower-class person even if Kikunosuke does not. After his first acclaimed performance, Otoku waits by the dressing room door to congratulate her husband when a group of young women appear to congratulate him as new fans. Otoku quickly slips away and cries alone as she fully grasps that while she is happy for her husband, she cannot reveal her true feelings if she wishes in order to keep him encouraged instead of having him throw away his chance at a thriving acting career in order to remain publicly as his wife. She continues to cry in secret despite Kikunosuke's joy and makes false plans to return to Tokyo with him, but makes sure that he does not

know her intention to stay behind until he is on the train to Tokyo and unable to search for her.

Despite Otoku's idealized feminine sacrifice, however, she also subverts societal expectations. Mizoguchi presents two options for her at the beginning of the movie: either yield to kabuki society and her master or challenge the assumptions others make about her based on her gender and class (McDonald, *Mizoguchi* 58). She chooses the latter, giving up the security of her job and home in order to encourage Kikunosuke in Osaka.

Kikunosuke begins the film as a young, overconfident young man known for his over-acted performances and little desire to change his ways. Kikunosuke embodies the criticisms of the Meiji young man; he is lazy, shielded from critiques, and hides behind his family name instead of working. He openly courts Otoku, that transparency in his romance echoing critiques of Meiji men being "indiscrete and unrestrained (Karlin 29)." His rebellion against Kikugoro and Otoku, the representations of traditional behavior causes serious consequences. When he listens to them and abandons his modern mindset, his relationships and acting skills improve. He realizes that projecting his modern ideals onto a traditional world does not integrate well into kabuki society. He struggles as an unknown without Kikugoro's name and support, and only by accepting that he needs kabuki's traditional structure does Kikunosuke become a top actor.

Kikunosuke is given his lead *onnagata* by his fellow actor Fuku, an *onnagata* who declares that he wants "to help Kiku regain his manhood (Mizoguchi 1:30:22)," i.e. that by performing the role of a woman, Kikunosuke could restore his former confidence

and/or masculinity. Here, Mizoguchi reiterates his admiration of female strength, claiming it as a source of male masculinity. While Kikunosuke played *tachiyaku* roles, he saw little success due to his overconfidence, but after being subjected to the harshness of life outside of the most popular kabuki companies and theatres, his confidence had broken almost entirely, although strengthened again by Otoku's support. The role that he performs, the courtesan and cherry tree spirit Sumizome in *Tsumoru Koi Yuki no Sekinoto* (*In Sekinoto, Love and Snow Accumulate*), is one of a fighting woman. As Sumizome fights to avenge her lover's death, Kikunosuke fights for his place in a Tokyo acting company, and both mirror Otoku's struggle--fighting for Kikunosuke's place while realizing that victory means losing him as her lover. Kikunosuke only regains his masculinity by portraying femininity, and while he returns to more *tachiyaku* based roles at the end of the movie, it was only possible to do so because of his previous feminine performance.

However, Kikunosuke is the last to realize in the film that his success is only thanks to Otoku, just as she begins to die. He is forced to visit her by Kikugoro V, who directly tells him that "you became who you are because of Otoku's sacrifices (Mizoguchi 2:09:30)." It is only then that Kikunosuke realizes that Otoku was not an unwilling victim of a patriarchal kabuki system, but that she gave her rightful place as Kikunosuke's wife away in order for him to regain his role in kabuki society. Other characters, such as Fuku and his father, marvel at her sacrifices, after Otoku approaches them about giving Kikunosuke another chance. He then takes the more feminine role of the caregiver as he begs her not to die, a choice echoed in his posture and gestures at her

deathbed (McDonald, *Mizoguchi* 59). He kneels over her futon, keeping his head low, grasps one of her hands with both of his, and speaks with a low voice, all feminine-coded actions that convey a gentler personality than what was displayed during most of the film. His actions recall his earlier work as an onnagata, demonstrating that his affected femininity has altered his personality. Kikunosuke is no longer a young, brash actor who believes himself to be immune to criticism; failure and his choice of onnagata roles has softened him into a more compassionate character.

The actual Kikugoro V was famous for his performances in *zangirimono* (the cropped-hair plays); a kabuki experiment that used Western-style hair and dress and performed kabuki in Meiji situations, such as conflicts between office workers rather than samurai on the battlefield. In *Chrysanthemums*, he is portrayed by Kawarazaki Gonjurô II, a kabuki actor specializing in traditional male roles and he is not shown performing any *zangirimono* roles. This choice to portray traditional kabuki integrates into Kikugoro V's characterization as the traditional man with Tokugawa ideals, having been born and raised during the last years of that period. He is strict and moralistic, much like early Meiji critics and in contrast with his son's carousing behavior. He does not doubt Kikunosuke's masculinity directly, but he doubts his sincerity and commitment to both his art and family name. He is angered that Kikunosuke does not immediately adhere to patriarchal filial piety; Kikunosuke does not submit to his demands to end his romance and submit to a likely arranged marriage. Kikunosuke's defiant behavior is shocking—not only does he not apologize to his father for his actions but instead marries into lower status, which has negative implications for Kikugoro. Kikugoro's capabilities as a father

and as a man would be questioned; Kikunosuke's actions would cause him to lose face in both society and kabuki.

The women of *Chrysanthemums*, who on the surface seem to exist only to support the men, assert and affirm that emotional strength, particularly in an unforgiving society, should be recognized as vital to the advancement of art and society. Otoku's constant support, even when she disagreed with Kikunosuke, exemplified her strength despite her situation—she understands that she is fated for a tragic end, but it is her death that brings some transformation in kabuki society when it comes to its treatment of women. Women involved in the kabuki world portrayed in *Chrysanthemums* were recognized as positive, active supporters of their husbands' work. This is demonstrated by Kikugoro's recognition of Otoku as Kikunosuke's wife—even the traditional Kikugoro understood how Otoku's guidance aided Kikunosuke. Otoku's feminine presence helped Kikunosuke develop as both a person and *onnagata* as she reduced his arrogance and gentled his performance.

KABUKI IN MODERN FILM: AN ACTOR'S REVENGE, 1963 AND 2008

In the postwar era, kabuki (and kabuki-style) plays rarely, if ever, were adapted for film. While Japan's early film history is filled with kabuki plays adapted for screen, this had resulted in low audience numbers and the eventual abandonment of the idea for original screenplays or adaptations of musicals and other Hollywood favorites. By the early 1920s, film audiences demanded realism, not the fantastical plots and exaggerated acting found in classical live theatre, and the arrival of female actresses on Japanese screens sounded the death knell for *onnagata* as film stars. Kabuki movies soon became

akin to the American film industry's B-Horror, a low-budget film destined not to attract audiences. When movies centered on kabuki became less focused on the play and more on the actors within it, they created a potential vehicle for male film or stage stars to revitalize their careers. Kon Ichikawa's *Yukinojō henge*, or *Revenge of a Kabuki Actor* (1963) explores both onnagata and actor identity by placing famed film actor and accomplished onnagata Hasegawa Kazuo in a reprise of his 1935 role.

The title of the film highlights its theme of transformation and revitalization. While released in English under the title *An Actor's Revenge*, the Japanese title translates more closely as "apparition (or transformation) of Yukinojō. The movie, featuring actors and thieves who become entangled in Yukinojō's revenge-murder plot, uses kabuki to transform and revitalize the actual and historical status of actors by providing them with a desirable new identity. During the Edo period (1600-1868) kabuki actors were considered low-status outcasts, as disrespectable as thieves, *Revenge* created actor and thief roles in which they behaved heroically or like revolutionaries, supporting societal and peasant uprisings (particularly Yamitarō of the 2008 remake, discussed later) rather than as antagonists. This revitalization extended beyond the movie to the film's actors, director, and studio, as they worked to transform a dated, campy script into a film vehicle that could provide new life into fading careers and a dying studio.

The film chronicles multiple transformations: Yukinojō's from cowering child to cunning actor, Namiji's from princess into pursuer, and Ohatsu's from thief into repentant. It also represents the transformation of the kabuki stage into a viable film setting. Instead of just performing a kabuki play for the camera, which had already proven unsuccessful

in early cinema, Ichikawa integrated scenes from two plays to bookend the film, which elaborated the world where these plays took place and underlined that the film was not just a filmed play, or a play within a play. Ichikawa uses historical events and circumstances in his film, such as rice riots, elite fascination with Dutch objects, and the poverty common among Edo citizens in order to inject historical realism into the larger movie plot, which depicts the world of 1830s Edo, facing the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate and its own transformation.

Nevertheless, for scenes set outside of the kabuki theatre, Ishikawa chose to use kabuki archetypes, scenery, and motifs, maintaining 'kabuki set' aesthetic rather than a world outside of the theatre that was steeped in realism. In one of the earliest scenes, when Yukinojō is returning to his home late at night, only the lantern that his attendant holds gives any indication that he is outside. The world around the characters is pitch-black, a convention used in kabuki to add suspense for a dramatic reveal, which in the movie arrives as the first attack on Yukinojō's life. Other scenes filmed outdoors only give the impression of being outdoors, such as part of an external wall to indicate a house, or a bush to give the film audience the impression of a garden. There are no long shots that set the scenes, all establishing shots are medium-range and focused on the characters rather than the scenery. While film often employs expansive sets and shots for scenes, theatre is confined to a small stage area. Ichikawa chose to use medium-range establishing shots and impressionistic backdrops to give the movie audience a sense of the stage world around the characters, with gaps which they must fill in themselves. Such techniques and choices result in the interweaving of kabuki traditions and modern

filmmaking that create a kabuki audience out of a film audience. This attempt to transform a modern film audience into a film-kabuki audience was eased by Hasegawa, veteran of both kabuki stage and silver screen.

Kazuo Hasegawa and the Fall of Daiei Studios

The role provided Hasegawa, too, with opportunities for transformation.

Hasegawa had aged out of romantic male leading roles by 1963. Having performed since the age of five in kabuki and then transitioning to film in his early twenties, Hasegawa known for performing the young, dashing male lead. He played the titular role in *The Tale of Genji* (1951) and Kuranosuke Oishi, the main hero in *The Loyal 47 Ronin* (1958) among other movies that cemented his legend as an actor of brave and dashing samurai roles, a hero saving virtuous maidens who immediately fell in love with him. While Hasegawa was celebrated as an actor with excellent skills on both stage and screen, he had aged out of such lead roles until reprising *An Actor's Revenge* to commemorate his 300th screen appearance (0:0:17). His dual role as the cunning onnagata Yukinojō and Yamitarō the Thief, necessitated strong acting skills, but did not require a youthful appearance.

It was not just Hasegawa who was uncertain about his future in 1963, as new technology was encroaching on the security of film studios and signaling an end to Japanese film's golden age (1950-1959.) The widespread use of televisions in Japanese homes in the 1960s and 70s led to Daiei Film's eventual bankruptcy in 1971, the hardest hit of Japan's biggest film producers during the golden age of film. The widespread introduction of televisions in Japanese homes from the late 1950s led to Daiei Film's

eventual demise in 1971, the hardest hit among Japan's biggest film producers. By the early 1960s, Daiei was known as a producer of low-budget, low box office performing films rather than major features. In 1963, the studio was already floundering and blamed Kon Ichikawa, already a prominent director, as a culprit, because his previous films with Daiei had cost far more than they had made. Daiei supposedly saddled Ichikawa with *An Actor's Revenge* as punishment. The original version of *Revenge*, despite having been the biggest box office hit of 1936 (McDonald 60), had not aged well. Furthermore, assigning Hasegawa, long past his prime, to reprise his dual roles (McDonald 146) made for a hard sell, as film audiences of the 1960s were used to a handsome young leads and beautiful women, not actors attempting to regain their former glory. While Hasegawa's name carried some recognition to movie audiences, it was the additions of Yamamoto Fujiko, Miss Japan 1950, and Wakao Ayako, a relatively new starlet, that brought not only fresh talent, but the visual and sexual appeal important for movie success.

Revenge bridged film and theatre by using kabuki as both backdrop and integral plot element. The use of real women to play many of the female-bodied and gendered characters insured that *Revenge* would not be mistaken merely for a filmed play, but as a film that played with both the constraints of film and theatre. With a famed director, a star-studded cast, and hybrid film- theatre conventions, it became a hit that the studio hoped the film would echo the success of the 1936 version. The film embodied an innovative concept—a play-within-a-film without the exaggerated unrealistic characters that caused the decline of kabuki portrayals in film, Daiei Studios declared bankruptcy in 1971 but *An Actor's Revenge* remains one of its most critically lauded films.

Deceiving the Audience: Hasegawa as *Onnagata*

While Hasegawa was no longer the young man who set teenaged girls' hearts aflutter, his *onnagata* character Yukinojō, with help from theatrical makeup, costuming, staging techniques, and careful film angles, bridged the gap between aging star and dashing lead. It is the perception of *onnagata* youth and beauty that causes Namiji to fall hopelessly in love with Yukinojō during the first moments of the film, when Yukinojō is playing an *onnagata* role. Namiji is a prospect in her own right while Yukinojō is not only a low-status actor, but one from Kansai, a fact that many other characters point out as undesirable. This match would have been impossible if Yukinojō was an actor who took only male roles. rather than an *onnagata* who evoked a rich legacy of illusions and romances.

In contrast to the kabuki audience, a film audience would expect to see women in female roles and would find men playing women's roles in movies ludicrous; too much of a break in film reality. *An Actor's Revenge* skirts this worry by having women and *onnagata* performing in the same film, in scenes together, but making specific distinctions between them. Having both women and *onnagata* on screen at the same time breaks the kabuki rules, but makes for an easier sell to a film audience.

While the addition of women to the cast helped to solve the problem of translating kabuki to the screen, the actresses' young ages (Wakao and Yamamoto were 29 and 32 respectively,) in contrast with 55-year-old Hasegawa produced another quandary-how could, realistically, two young women pursue an older man? In live theatre, the *onnagata*'s draw is not in his looks, but in the skill he exuded while portraying young

women. Traditionally, the *onnagata* was supposed to be the draw for male spectators, but the addition of beautiful young women was more likely the draw for young men, while women came to see Hasegawa perform again.

While Hasegawa was no longer the young man who set teenaged girls' hearts aflutter, his character of Yukinojō, with help from theatrical makeup, costuming, and staging techniques, along with careful film angles, bridged the gap between aging star and dashing lead. It is the perception of *onnagata* youth and beauty that causes Namiji to fall hopelessly in love with Yukinojō. Namiji is a prospect in her own right—a beautiful young woman from an upper-class family, who also has a job as one of the shogun's many female consorts, but who fell in love with a member of the lowest class of Edo society. Yukinojō is not only an actor, but one from Kansai, which gave him extra difficulty of not just being an actor, but one from the outer provinces (a fact that many characters in the film are quick to point out was definitely not a desirable trait.) This match would have been impossible if Yukinojō was portrayed as an actor who took on only the male roles.

Camera close-ups could ruin the illusion of youth so shots were carefully planned. *An Actor's Revenge* starts with Yukinojō in a wide shot, in full *onnagata* dress and makeup, then quickly cuts to Namiji's point of view. To her and the film audience, Yukinojō is young and graceful at first glance. As the camera gets closer to him during his internal monologue, Yukinojō's features are finally made out as distinctly male, but still of indiscriminate age due to lighting and the long distance between actor and camera. It is not until the camera sees Yukinojō close up again, once again in Namiji's

perspective (0:30:40) that his real age is apparent. The camera finally catches Hasegawa's strong facial wrinkles and double chin, but Namiji has already fallen in love and overlooks these obvious signs of aging. Namiji's attraction and enthusiasm aids the film audience in seeing Yukinojō as young, sexual, and desirable. Namiji, who viewed Yukinojō from a theatre audience perspective, as opposed to the film audience perspective, sees Yukinojō as his role (as Yukinojō the *onnagata*), rather than separating actor from role. The film audience is aware that Hasegawa is older and his history of playing action/romance male leads, and most likely had not seen him portraying traditional kabuki roles. Namiji's romance helps to bridge between Hasegawa the action hero to Hasegawa the (action) *onnagata*, showing that even in softer roles, Hasegawa still had the star power to carry off a non-masculine lead.

Yukinojō's Gender Performativity

Yukinojō's status as *onnagata* provides a juxtaposition of male and female acts and characteristics. Outside of the play performances, Yukinojō continues to wear women's dress and use affected mannerisms, but characters refer to him as *yatsu* (fellow). Yukinojō eventually engages in intercourse with Namiji after her advances, confirming that she understands that he is male-bodied and sexually inclined towards women.

Yukinojō refers to himself as a son in his internal monologues, but continues to use his falsetto within almost all of his internal thoughts. The only masculine-voiced internal monologue is his second monologue, when he describes the contrasts in the personalities he presents to others and himself. His female-voiced monologues focus on

filial piety, empathy with Namiji and his regret at her becoming a pawn in his plan provide a stark contrast between male and female actions in Yukinojō. The male side of Yukinojō is the cunning and ruthless one. The male voice is sure of his plan and will not stop until he dies or his revenge is fully enacted. His female voice is the one that shows hesitation and longing. It is the female voice that mourns over Namiji's death, both in his internal and external monologues, but pledges to be Namiji's husband in another life. However, as his female voice also acts as his false exterior, used to disarm the three antagonists into thinking that Yukinojō is nothing but a poor actor, Yukinojō's internal sympathy and regret may still be falsified, in a ploy to make his character sympathetic to the audience, much as he would while on stage. Even his stage performances allude to his lies—in his final performance, he cries out “I have no reason to hide now (1:46:00)!” as he reveals his on-stage character's true identity, which is not only synonymous with the role-layering common in kabuki, but Yukinojō's double life. As he can hide no longer at the end of the film, Yukinojō disappears into myth, a symbolic shedding of his onnagata role and possible resumption of his life as a masculine-appearing male. As his subterfuge and revenge is completed, it is no longer necessary for him to continue to portray unrealistic femininity, and he can continue his life appearing as a man.

Yukinojō is first painted as a stereotypical onnagata. The theatre manager incorrectly alludes to Yukinojō being a former child prostitute like most onnagata of the time had been, an artifact of *wakashu* kabuki that remained well into the late Tokugawa period. While the onnagata performed sexuality in non-sexual capacities on stage, such as performing prostitutes or courtesans, the *character* of onnagata remained non-sexual

while the actor performed sexuality off-stage, generally as a prostitute serving wealthy patrons. However, Yukinojō's vengeful plot also recalls a typical onnagata, as most roles for onnagata involved revenge, either for the character's family or lover, which ultimately ended in their death and disgrace. Yukinojō not only subverts the tragic ending afforded to onnagata characters, but even the role of women in Tokugawa as he becomes a feminine object of heterosexual pursuit while remaining male-bodied.

Gender Role Subversion in Romance

Namiji's contrast character, Ohatsu the thief, has more of a rivalry with Yukinojō than a romance, but even she admits at the end of the movie that she's also attracted to him. Ohatsu has the same close encounters as Namiji with Yukinojō, but as she meets him either while he's on stage or outside at night, so both shadows and makeup obscure Hasegawa's face, allowing for film audiences to adhere to the the same suspension of disbelief afforded to Namiji's point of view.

Ohatsu and Namiji are the spectators to Yukinojō's affected beauty, and act as both patron and pursuer, taking on a traditionally male role in Edo-era kabuki. Namiji's status as the favored daughter of a high-ranking Edo family designates her as a patron. It is her romance and desire to meet Yukinojō that brings him into high society, and later allows him an avenue to formally meet Hiromiya and Kawaguchiya, the other two objects of his revenge. Ohatsu is the pursuer as she uses any option available her to meet Yukinojō and find out his secrets, from blackmail to breaking into his home and eavesdropping. Both Namiji and Ohatsu act in ways not afforded to Edo women, but it is

their tenacity that allows Yukinojō to carry out his plot, thus backing the man even as they act outside of their societal-imposed roles.

The women of the early Tokugawa period held little power and virtually no political clout except through marriage. While they attended and greatly enjoyed kabuki performances, it was the men—who held both the money and power—who acted as the actors' patrons giving them money and gifts in exchange for companionship, which ranged from drinking with the actors in their private boxes to more eroticized favors (Kelly 131). Namiji is able to receive sexual encounters with Yukinojō due to her father's political clout and financial assets, so she performs the role of the rich patron. Admirers who could not afford to patronize an actor could buy a *hyōbanki*, the ancestor to movie magazines. The *hyōbanki* contained woodblock portraits of actors and praise or criticism of their skills. Ohatsu, as the poor admirer, is relegated to combing the *hyōbanki* for information about Yukinojō. Her poverty is further exemplified by her home—while Namiji lives in a large estate, Ohatsu's room is unfurnished, with a ceiling so low she cannot stand up.

Their dogged pursuit of Yukinojō subverts traditional gendered roles in Tokugawa Japan: Yukinojō is the princess, receiving favors and causing fights between admirers and enemies while Namiji and Ohatsu play the interested suitors who pursue the unobtainable woman. In kabuki's grand tradition of gender play and performance, all three leads correspond to classic kabuki stereotypes that do not adhere to their biological sex, but their roles play out as they would in a typical kabuki romance drama.

Namiji is originally set up as a traditional kabuki princess, young, wealthy, and beautiful enough to attract the shogun, yet she rejects this role, complaining that she hates the attention she receives from the shogun and would rather die than continue to serve as one of his many consorts. Instead of waiting to be rescued as a “good princess” should be, she chooses to be the aggressor in the kabuki *wagoto* style, used for male protagonists in more realistic plays. *Wagoto* roles are masculine and dominant, but not overtly so. She is not overly dominant, but still forces her more masculine body language onto Yukinojō’s character while he reacts as the feminized virgin.

Namiji leans forward in the romantic scenes, pushing herself into Yukinojō’s space rather than wait for him to express his interest. She is the one who initiates all physical contact and shares her emotional secrets while Yukinojō plays the traditional *onnagata* virgin, using *onnagata* constructs that convey a young woman’s repressed sexual interest and desires. These include body language, such as keeping his head bent and eyes lowered, acting coy and embarrassed, to show sex appeal without being outwardly sexual (Leiter 217), and coquettish touching and folding of his kimono sleeves. Enacting other feminine norms, Yukinojō keeps his feelings to himself, not even admitting to false love. He picks up his sake cup only after Namiji directs him to do so, showing that he is following her lead rather than taking control. He uses subservient language, telling Namiji that she is clearly too high-class for him and that her pursuit should end immediately, which serves to increase her desire.

Yukinojō demonstrates his control through his interior monologues, a stage construct which translates easily to screen, which adds further genderbending to the

romance scenes. Yukinojō, who is biologically male, takes on a virginal feminine character through outward action, voice, and dress, but still holds dominance, which is a trait held only by male characters in kabuki (Leiter 222). His performance of feminine roles, while male-bodied and identified, and Namiji's performance of soft masculinity while female recalls the inherent queerness and calls into question exactly who Namiji is love with- Yukinojō, as a man with a clearly identifiable feminine side, or Yukinojō as a woman?

Ohatsu and Namiji as *Aragoto* and *Wagoto*: Performing the Masculine

Yukinojō's performance as a "pure woman" extends to his interaction with Ohatsu. Although she has no sexual involvement with him, she witnesses Namiji's courtship of him and becomes incensed when he rebuffs her advances. Ohatsu is not the generous patron that Namiji is, but Yukinojō still treats Ohatsu with the same respect he gives to Namiji by trying not to involve her in his revenge plot. Ohatsu, however, plays the *aragoto* role-the bold and brash warrior-hero. She uses rough language and is unafraid to use force when needed, particularly when she attempts to shoot and kill Yukinojō. In every scene, she is in either red or blue, usually in her hair ornaments but also in boldly-patterned red and blue kimonos, akin to an *aragoto's* bold costuming and red and blue makeup.

Ohatsu the *aragoto* has adventures through criminal activity and does not stray from her role. Her temper is exaggerated, her physicality is fierce, and she is seen as a goddess among thieves, much like how *aragoto* actors are seen to kabuki audiences as gods (Johnson). When she tries to become more feminine at the end of the movie,

Yamitarō tells her that she'll “never reform and become a decent, ordinary woman (1:46:37).” While she smiles and plays with her sleeves in a call-back to Yukinojō's pure woman character, she is still in bold and blue costuming, signifying that Yamitarō is correct, Ohatsu will never be able to leave her *aragoto* role. Ohatsu's shift in demeanor also speaks to the gender fluidity in kabuki. As a female-appearing and female-bodied character, she performs the ideal man in Edo-style kabuki through her adventures, including her ninja-like break-in into both Dobe's estate and Yukinojō's home. She holds and correctly aims a gun during Yukinojō's final fight scene, which was a male-coded act in Tokugawa Japan (Walthall 26). Ohatsu's feminine-gendered acts are still aggressive, including trying to seduce Yukinojō by referring to her womanly needs. She asks Yamitarō to make her his wife, thus doubling back to an ideal woman's desire for husband and family—but she is the proposer. She performs the same gender fluidity that Yukinojō does, without performing a male-identified character. Her fluidity is more subtle than Yukinojō, but its presence lends credibility to women in kabuki. Ohatsu may be a female role played by a female actress, but Ohatsu the character could have just as easily been a male character played by a woman, with the same actions and personality that she currently endows.

Ohatsu moves freely about the underworld as its queen; she refers to Yamitarō as her boss as a respectful gesture. *Aragoto* Ohatsu is independent and free, and, like the *aragoto* characters in kabuki, answers only to herself. The character herself is in contrast with other supporting female characters of the late 1950s and early 1960s. She is not Namiji's best friend nor “evil rival who gets her comeuppance” at the end of the film.

Ohatsu has her own motivations, desires, and even a subplot. While the majority of her plot is played for comedy, it is Ohatsu's and Yamitarō's interference that aids Yukinojō's murder quest.

Wagoto Namiji, while softer and more feminine, still holds autonomy through her tragic role. She is the one who has the idea to run away from society and tries to convince Yukinojō to do so as well, again taking on the masculine-coded role of instigator and pursuer. While her plan is fated to go awry as she unwittingly serves as a pawn for Yukinojō's revenge, she has already accepted that she would rather die than remain in her status. Namiji manages to sneak out and throw both hers and Yukinojō's plans into motion, thus no longer designating her as just the love interest, but as the *wagoto* by taking an active role in her fate.

Namiji does not perform similar hard adventure actions as Ohatsu or Yamitarō; her adventures are in defiance to her father, the shogun, and society by not following class rules. By performing masculine-coded *wagoto* characteristics while being female, Namiji performs subtler gender fluidity than either Ohatsu or Yukinojō, but she performs this within historical societal constraints familiar to a Japanese film audience. She is the Romeo of *An Actor's Revenge*, not the Juliet.

The Princess and the Pauper: Hasegawa's Dual Performativity

While Namiji and Ohatsu perform the masculine roles, Yukinojō plays the feminine. Yukinojō provides the most gender-bending in *Revenge*, as a male-bodied actor taking on female roles, appearing in public as a woman, but still male. As the princess, he is the 'ideal woman', but he uses his identity as a weak and frail woman to indirectly

murder the three men responsible for his parents' suicides. His performance was enough to have him wanted and adored by not just Namiji, but other members of high society, such as Hiromiya and Kawaguchiya, both of whom he planned to kill. Having Hasegawa play both Yukinojō and Yamitarō, the Robin Hood of Edo who not only serves as narrator, but as an echo of both Hasegawa's kabuki past and former adventurous leading roles. The interweaving of both facets of Hasegawa's past into a dual role highlighting his vast experience on both stage and screen provided a bridge between the traditional world of the onnagata and the modern world of the film star.

Yamitarō, again like Yukinojō, is at the bottom of Edo society with little hope of climbing upward. His cynical commentary and interventions into Yukinojō's plan work into the film as he gives Yukinojō advice, directives, and even saves his life. Although Yamitarō's ultimate function is to serve as the narrator for *Revenge*, he acts as both a film *benshi* and kabuki *jōruri*, being both involved and separated from the action. Yamitarō is immersed in the Ohatsu subplot, scolds both Ohatsu and Yukinojō, and serves as the thieves' boss and guide. Yamitarō is not a neutral character in the film, and so his narration is affected by his attitudes towards specific characters. He is flabbergasted that Namiji cannot see beyond Yukinojō's makeup and flashy clothing to see the 'old man' underneath. He is the first character to realize how Yukinojō's revenge would negatively impact the innocent bystander characters, but he lets the action continue to play out, as he has no control over the impending events. He performs his monologues outside, but on top of roofs or otherwise away from other characters, thus separating him as a narrator as he predicts future actions. Standing on the roof provides both separation and elevation-

Yamitarō is the only “leading man” of the movie; his gender is not questioned and he is the only main male character who does not come to unfortunate ends.

Yamitarō, like Hasegawa in his younger years, leads a celebrity cult, has other thieves follow him, but in the end retires from his career while he’s at the top of it. Hasegawa was not afforded the chance to retire at his peak and cultivate the air of mystique that Yamitarō did. Surprisingly like Yukinojō, Hasegawa stopped performing in feature films after *An Actor’s Revenge*. He traded screen to return to stage and continued playing *onnagata* roles until his death in 1984. Hasegawa essentially traded Yamitarō for Yukinojō for the rest of his career. Just as he was able to conceal his age as Yukinojō with makeup and carefully filmed angles, he was able to do the same under the stage lights until his death.

Aftermath

Hasegawa’s film career was not the only one affected by *An Actor’s Revenge*. For Fujiko Yamamoto, her portrayal of Ohatsu became her last role with Daiei Studios. Daiei refused to renew her contract and she was allegedly unilaterally banned from performing with any major film studio. Yamamoto continues to perform on stage and television, but she has not appeared in a feature film since 1963. She and Hasegawa were able to ‘transform’ or revitalize their careers away from film, just as their characters tried to transform their lives into something new, but both actors returned to their stage roots.

The transformations and revitalizations that *An Actor’s Revenge* tried to provide had varying levels of success. While it failed to save Hasegawa’s film career and also marked the end of Yamamoto’s, Ichikawa’s directing career soared with the films he

directed after Daiei's imposed punishment. The film failed to be a benchmark in medium transformation, but succeeded in bringing kabuki to film with a new receptive audience. With several showings at international film festivals as a Japanese cult classic, inclusions on essential movies lists, and even an adaptation into an opera, *An Actor's Revenge* brought kabuki-themed drama to a global audience. *Revenge's* plays on gender and role archetypes brought a fresh playfulness to a set art form, in which women are allowed to lead and pursue, and men (in a caricature of women) are content to be pursued, but only in order to exact bloody, desperate revenge.

AN ACTOR'S REVENGE RETURNS

By the mid-2000s, the *shojō* (young girl) aesthetic became the ideal for Japanese women, no matter their age. The fights for equality and feminism of the 1970s and 80s had given way to women in their 30s and 40s pretending to be young girls for the sake of cute. This *kawaii* (cute) aesthetic emphasizes delicateness, vulnerability, and weakness in all things (Kinsella 220). To be *kawaii*, a woman is expected to engage in childish behavior, such as baby talk and throwing tantrums. This weaker portrayal of women for the sake of 'adorable' behavior remains rampant throughout Japanese media. Celebrities well into their twenties still dress and behave as high school girls in competition with the ever-decreasing debut ages of budding starlets (As of 2016, girls as young as ten were being recruited for idol music groups).

While the fashion aesthetic changed, cuteness in personality remained. A weak young woman, particularly paired with a *bishōnen* (beautiful young boy), is still a dominant force in current media, and any adaptation or reimagining of older films or

television shows, as seen in *An Actor's Revenge*, were forced to fit the current *kawaii* aesthetic.

The 2008 remake of *An Actor's Revenge*, produced by NHK and starring popular idol singer Takizawa Hideaki as Yukinojō/Yamitarō, was a gritty retelling of the 1963 version, including a grisly reenactment of Yukinojō's father's death, two rapes, gory murders, and suicide. While the 1963 version brought Namiji and Ohatsu forth as fully developed roles, the two women are only a minor section of the plot of the latest remake, possibly in order to draw in more Takizawa fans. However, not only did this move ignore the popularity of Toda Erika (Namiji) and Takaoka Saki (Ohatsu), both established actresses, it also eliminates the kabuki dynamics between the three. Namiji and Ohatsu were relegated strictly to being love interests—Ohatsu even professes her love to Yukinojō on their first meeting rather than declaring him as her rival.

Rather than being the aggressive *aragoto*, Ohatsu is virtually written out of the film. After threatening blackmail shortly after Yukinojō rejects her advances, she is locked in an abandoned temple by Yamitarō and only makes a brief appearance before the climax of the movie. Her role is relegated from troublemaker to the bitter older woman who tells Namiji of Yukinojō's deceit. This change in Ohatsu's role could have been instigated by the nine-year age difference between Takaoka (35) and Takizawa (26). Takaoka, being a 'considerably older' woman could not have possibly been a *kawaii* love interest for Takizawa. However, she could fit the archetypal role of the bitter older woman pushed aside for the younger girl, who schemes to destroy their relationship. The 2008 film seems to ignore the over twenty year age gap between Hasegawa, Yamamoto,

and Wakao in their love triangle and instead wrote out the tension. Ohatsu's *aragoto* adventures are performed by Yamitarō; she is a thief and spy in name only.

Namiji the Idol and Yukinojō the Protagonist

Namiji's, while appearing more frequently in the remake, suffers 'idol syndrome'. She cries and constantly speaks of her tragic life, which is commonly used by idol celebrities to enhance their *kawaii* as *kawaisō* (pitiful) (Kinsella 236). Her 'lovesickness' manifests as an actual illness, and it is heavily implied she has been abused by her father (instead of being his prized daughter) to create more of a victimization narrative to induce audience sympathy. She demands a love-suicide pact from Yukinojō, an action more suited to a Juliet than a *wagoto*. Her final illness is not started by killing Hiromiya, but by learning about Yukinojō's deceit (and having it confirmed by Yukinojō himself.) She commits suicide in front of Yukinojō just as his mother did, placing her death as Yukinojō's tragedy rather than her own. Yukinojō's lack of compassion for Namiji (as she dies, he is recalling his mother's suicide), even in his internal monologues, has little in common with doomed love relationships in kabuki or with 1963 Yukinojō's mourning.

Despite the lack of presence of the female characters, it is the Yukinojō/Yamitarō dual role that experiences the most changes. Unlike Hasegawa, Takizawa has no formal kabuki training or kabuki stage experience, and Yukinojō's onnagata conventions are barely present to account for Takizawa's lack of experience. Takizawa does not put on an affected voice for Yukinojō, nor does he wear heavy makeup when not performing. He wears women's kimono and the traditional onnagata purple headscarf, but rather than bending gender conventions, he is essentially playing a man in women's clothing. His

revenge is almost nonexistent—after telling his entire plan to Yamitarō, he does not actively play a part in his own revenge, as Yamitarō executes the entire plan.

It is Yamitarō who instigates the rice riots, breaks into Dobe's estate, and is the one who delivers the final killing blow to Dobe. Yamitarō is the innocent sacrifice instead of Namiji, as he is executed at the end of the film for his role in Dobe's murder (while Yukinojō remains unscathed.) While Yamitarō's role was expanded essentially to mask Takizawa's lack of onnagata experience, having Yamitarō perform all masculine-coded actions shatters the gender fluidity of the first film. No other main character in the film is capable of performing their own plan, in some cases going to extremes (such as locking Ohatsu up) to remove any barriers to Yukinojō's plan rather than adapting and performing more feminine-like subterfuge to resolve problems.

By taking the deceit, theatrical acting (as opposed to more understated film acting), and gender play out, *An Actor's Revenge* is no longer a kabuki drama but instead Yamitarō's Revenge, where the male-bodied, masculine-coded character serves justice, saves the day, and dies heroically while feminine-coded Yukinojō and Ohatsu mourn over his death. The removal of the play (kabuki and the inherent playfulness of the 1963 version) from the 2008 remake to make a more realistic movie removes the important unreal element of kabuki and calls into question why this particular movie would be remade without an actor with kabuki experience playing the title character, rather than creating a new period drama.

CONCLUSION

Kabuki's contribution to the Japanese film scene continued beyond its earliest filmed productions. Using kabuki as a film element allowed directors and actors experiment with acceptable gender portrayal and subversion in a mass medium. *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* took a then-new look at oppressed women in a patriarchal society that still adhered to acceptable norms; Otoku's main aspiration was for kabuki society to recognize her as Kikunosuke's wife. Highlighting her sacrifices rather than hiding them in the background displayed her willingness to volunteer instead of allowing for audience assumptions that she simply followed a prescribed lifestyle.

In the 1963 *An Actor's Revenge*, using kabuki to switch male and female roles provided subversion and a touch of queerness. Ohatsu and Namiji are given as much freedom as allowed by their class, not gender, and Namiji's romance was not entirely a heterosexual love story. Both movies raised questions about women in society by using both actresses and *onnagata*, and having them perform together displayed various degrees of masculinity and femininity, not just over-affected and stylized gender performances.

When the kabuki is removed from a kabuki movie, as in the 2008 *An Actor's Revenge*, it creates a movie that adheres to current gender ideals. Gender play's removal in the 2008 version affirms its necessity in kabuki-*Revenge* is a gritty and realistic-styled period drama, but not a kabuki drama.

Chapter 2: Kabuki and The West

When kabuki was introduced to the West, it was embraced as the epitome of Japanese theatre and culture. With kabuki dance troupes touring the United States as early as 1952, theatre was Japanese entertainment that did not recall World War II, but produced a Japan palatable to foreign tastes eager to devour the next new and exciting trend. Shortly after the Occupation, Americans viewed Japan as the epitome of peaceful modernization, and the kabuki performances abroad reignited America's view of exotic Japan. Kabuki quickly became equated with all Japanese culture (Thornbury 194-5).

American theatre enthusiasts, through a plethora of books and articles written by theatre and Japan scholars, quickly gained the impression that kabuki was an unchanging art form, hundreds of years old that still entranced and attracted huge crowds despite more modern entertainments such as cinema and radio. American executives working to broker business deals in Japan would watch kabuki and exclaim their appreciation loudly and enthusiastically in an attempt to impress potential Japanese business partners with their knowledge of Japanese culture. Kabuki to foreign visitors was an intellectual art, incomprehensible to anyone not from a highly cultured background. However, the majority of these executives did not understand the theatre themselves, being unable to understand classical Japanese or cultural references needed to fully appreciate a kabuki play. To Westerners, kabuki as a high art remains heavily intertwined with the modern image of Japan. Kabuki remains on many tourists' 'must-do' lists despite the high costs of tickets and little understanding of ancient Japanese folklore and culture.

The scholars who introduced kabuki to a new audience saw kabuki as a way to enlighten Western audiences about a form vastly different from modern and post-modernist theatre. Much of this older scholarship, which did aid in lifting anti-Japanese sentiment in the West, still worked within older Japanese stereotyping, particularly the “Mystic Orient.” This chapter discusses problematic issues in both postwar and contemporary kabuki scholarship written by non-Japanese scholars. It discusses the orientalism found in early contributions to Western scholarship, and later the use of Western gender stereotypes and ideals in *onnagata* analysis. The last section focuses on *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.* (1990), an American film that depicts mischaracterizations of kabuki conveyed by postwar scholarship into popular culture.

I also use the term ‘queer’ to describe certain facets of the *onnagata*. Kabuki queerness does not refer to just sexual queerness but each exaggerated act and line. Queerness also comes in the form of kabuki’s lack of realism—a samurai in battle using only his fan, a character dancing to act out his death, or the consistent element of the supernatural via gods, demons, or vengeful ghosts. My use of ‘kabuki queer’ does not denote a specific gender or sexual identity. I used it to define kabuki’s identity as subversive classical theatre; its play with role and gender makes it distinct in modern performances by continuing to use *onnagata*. I look at the *onnagata* as a performative gender, not within the sociological definitions of gender identity. My description of *onnagata* identity is as a counter-normative gender, which blends cisgender male actors with feminine attributes but in theatrical genderfluidity, not personal genderfluidity.

ISSUES IN POSTWAR SCHOLARSHIP (1950s-1960s)

The postwar scholars were mostly affiliated with the American Occupation in a cultural capacity. Earle Ernst was appointed as the Japanese theatre censor, having been a Japanese theatre professor at the University of Hawaii. Faubion Bowers was Gen. Douglas MacArthur's interpreter and aide-de-camp (later also a theatre censor). A.C. Scott came to kabuki via Chinese theatre study (5), and does not comment on the Japanese population. I chose to focus on primarily on Ernst and Bowers for their contributions and how lingering anti-Japanese sentiment remained in their early writings.

It is ironic that kabuki was chosen for this type of analysis, as it was considered low theatre in the Tokugawa period, known for its crassness and appeal to common audiences, opposed to noh theatre, patronized primarily by the samurai class. Kabuki also bears resemblance to Shakespearean dramas, including an all-male cast and plot foci on war and romance. Unlike Western drama, the tradition of the *onnagata* has continued despite actresses in modern theatre. The differences which make kabuki original should be both celebrated and analyzed. Early English scholarship on kabuki made an impact in the Western theatre world, but this scholarship also presents an orientalist view of both classical theatre and its modern Japanese patrons.

In 1955 in *The Kabuki Theatre* Earle Ernst declared "The Japanese are a violently mercurial people, and, possessed of a strong natural curiosity, they are quick to seize upon anything new...the Japanese is a willing prey to almost any novelty (70)." This statement, along with his descriptions of a typical kabuki audience as having a deep, unique love of nature that enlightened them to the particular nuances of kabuki (72-3) and

highly respectful of all forms of ancient Japanese art, forms a picture of an oxymoronic population. Ernst's preference for the latter more cultured audience, along with similar sentiment by fellow post-war scholars, aided in ushering the orientalist wave in the United States in the late 1950s and early 60s. While books such as Ernst's remain a standard research tool in English language kabuki scholarship, the style with which he treats both Japanese people and kabuki falls in line with Western stereotypes of Japan at the time as enlightened. This is evident in his comparison of Japanese and Western attitudes towards theatre. He criticizes Western movie or theatregoers who enjoy performances because of their emotional attachment to the actor, but praises Japanese audiences who have similar connections with the actor and claims that only kabuki audiences could make a delineation between actor and performance quality (82). Ernst uses his idea of a typical kabuki audience to condemn a typical Western theatre audience, whom he sees as being in its infancy when it comes to a 'true' understanding of theatre.

The Kabuki Audience

Early post-war scholars praised Japanese audiences for their knowledge of haiku, adherence to Buddhist traditions, and refusal to accept Western customs. When these early books were being written shortly after Japan had regained independence from the postwar occupation, they neglected to realize that Japan had already long embraced Western culture, particularly in fashion and entertainment. Ernst in particular contradicts himself, describing Japanese stubbornness against accepting American culture and customs, but he shortly before complained about the popularity of pinball in Japan. The statements he makes about Japan and Japanese attitudes do not apply to his description of

kabuki actors and audiences, and yet it should—even kabuki-lovers were not unaffected by the numerous political and cultural changes of 1950s Japan.

Ernst's contemporary, Faubion Bowers, disagreed with Ernst's assessment of the kabuki audience. In his book, *Japanese Theatre*, written in 1951 during the American Occupation, he states that a postwar kabuki audience consisted of black market vendors and war profiteers who could afford the high price of kabuki tickets. Kabuki theatres became scarcer because of the inflated ticket price, and most Japanese preferred the cheaper and more plentiful cinemas or vaudeville performances (219). He likened kabuki to opera in the West, which connoisseurs could truly understand and appreciate, while the general person would find the art incomprehensible. In Ernst's audience, each person truly understands and enjoys traditional theatre while Bowers provides a more nuanced view of an audience—some go to appreciate theatrical culture, some go in an attempt to attain culture.

Kabuki and Western Understanding

Ernst decries the realism of Western theatre and stating that the advent of the detachment from realism in modern theatre (as of 1956) allows for Western understanding of kabuki (ix). Here, he suggests that it was not the uniquely Japanese conventions that would confuse the average Western viewer of Japanese theatre, but that Western theatre was too realistic for the audience to understand the fantasy and playfulness of kabuki. Ernst neglected to consider the unrealistic elements in numerous forms of Western drama. Shakespearean dramas that are still performed to this day included faeries, magic, and ghosts and are well understood by audiences. Victorian

farce used the same bawdy comedy to mock people and situations of the day that kabuki did. Theatre of the Absurd, the post-war movement of anti-realism in theatre headed by playwrights such as Edward Albee, was not the first instance of absolute unrealism in theatre. In contrast to Ernst, Leonard Pronko, more perceptively compared kabuki to Elizabethan theatre, describing both dramas as forms that “mingle air-raising realism with extreme formalism, low farce with high seriousness (329).” While stylistically, classical Western drama and kabuki are extremely different, the plots, underlying messages, and meanings are universal constructs such as romance, tragedy, and historical chronicles.

ISSUES IN EARLY *ONNAGATA* SCHOLARSHIP

The difference in form, specifically the use of *onnagata* over female actresses, is one of the most unrealistic elements of kabuki. However, much early scholarship regarding the actor and kabuki roles, focused on male characters, with *onnagata* almost being an afterthought. The *onnagata* is remarked upon for his versatility in playing both old and young women, and his overly stylized femininity (Scott 169), but the analysis rests almost entirely with *aragoto* actors. The *onnagata* are referred to as female impersonators, a label which is heavily criticized within more recent scholarship.

The mistake in just calling an *onnagata* a female impersonator is apparent when one considers the central tenets of kabuki itself. Kabuki is the theatre of the grotesque and absurd, the name itself stemming from the verb kabuki, meaning ‘to be out of the ordinary.’ A female impersonator works to convince the audience that she is a woman; an

onnagata leaves the impression of unobtainable femininity. A kabuki audience knows that the *onnagata* is a man, generally an elderly man playing a young girl. I argue that the contemporary *onnagata* does not want to convey anything more than a male-bodied but feminine acting persona, as an *onnagata* who performed a "natural woman" too closely would be too realistic for kabuki.

In contrast, earlier *onnagata*-(eighteenth to early twentieth century) often tried their best to live as women, including claiming menstrual pains and feeling praised when he was mistaken as a woman outside of the theatre. Morinaga detailed several incidents in which early *onnagata* were so convincing that they were guided to the women's public baths (Morinaga, Women "Onnagata" 107). Modern *onnagata* generally live their life as men outside of the theatre—they are open about having wives and children in contrast with Ayame's demand that *onnagata* conceal their private life lest the illusion be disturbed (Dunn 62, Item XXIII). Nevertheless, the *onnagata* continues to live on—Faubion Bowers, one of the earliest English speaking kabuki enthusiasts (widely credited as "saving" kabuki during the American Occupation) referred to them as "man-actresses" as late as a 1989 *New York Times* article. (Bowers). This designation implies that the actor is a transgendered woman, rather than a male actor playing a female role. Calling the *onnagata* a man-actress is thus misleading—refer to them as *onnagata* rather than man-actress would have been a clearer word choice that still would have served to introduce a non-Japanese speaking audience to kabuki basics.

Despite Bowers's integral role in preserving kabuki past World War II, in doing so he inadvertently adopted the perspectives of the Meiji-era theatre censors and

continued their sanitization of kabuki's inherent queerness. He widely disapproved of homosexual *onnagata* despite being open about his own homosexuality (Okamoto/Leiter ix), as he claimed that an *onnagata*'s homosexual practices degraded the quality of his art. Bowers's guides that explained kabuki to a non-Japanese audience, along with pre-war censorship, created a kabuki that was palatable to conservative American military audiences and thus was spared from being quashed under even heavier censorship.

Bowers even approved of the earliest censorship attempts by the Japanese government when *wakashu* kabuki was banned. He believed that the removal of sensuality from kabuki forced *yaro* kabuki (men's kabuki) to develop into more sophisticated theatre without the earlier dependence on sensuality on stage and sexual favors offered to wealthy audience patrons ('Japanese Theatre', 50). However, legally eliminating sensuality gave actors a way to work around restrictions by adding the *onnagata*; stronger state attempts to force sexual components out of the theatre, such as forcing *onnagata* to shave their forelock and wear adult men's hairstyles were also defied. *Onnagata* wore a purple headscarf to hide their forced masculine haircuts, and the scarf quickly became a symbol of sexual desire to both men and women. Fully removing the sexual elements of kabuki would remove much of kabuki's queerness.

While kabuki through the ages has been 'straightened' into an art form now called classic and traditional in order to survive the various censors throughout the years (Kano 58), its now revered stance as a theatre form hundreds of years old should allow for the queerness ignored or concealed in earlier studies to be acknowledged in current

scholarship. Even in its beginnings as a women's art, the actresses cross-dressed and imitated masculinity, just as actors of modern kabuki imitate femininity.

The *onnagata* characters, particularly courtesans, portray women who not only have forbidden romance, but find power in their sexuality and are unashamed of it. The character is the antithesis of Edo period Confucian sexual standards for elite women—courtesan characters are portrayed as finding strength through their seductive qualities, not shying away from them. The traditional *onnagata*, however, was to retain an air of innocence and chastity, thus taking on the role of a highborn woman. However, as many of the *onnagata* did have a wife and family, they continued to perform queerness on stage in romances or sexual situations that could not quite be construed as being entirely heterosexual.

The *onnagata* portray these female characters in situations that enoble them to Japanese audiences through situations such as tragic partings with their children or obeying their male superiors (fathers, lords, or husbands) in violation of their own morals and values. Such situations allow *onnagata* to rise "to the heights of honor at the cost of their human emotions...their ability to bear their cruel fate makes them noble (Bowers, 'Japanese Theatre', 133)." Portraying these women not just as sexual, but honorable and noble enough to accept their inevitable death or exile is another facet of counter-normative gender identity creation—these characters' transgressions, such as affairs or defying family wishes to be with their lover, does not lead to their degradation but rather uplifting both the woman and her tragedy as something beautiful, even something to be aspired.

Kabuki's past as a low-brow theatre, complete with heavy censorship of plays and a ban on performances themselves was ignored by postwar scholars or construed the fault of early censors who simply couldn't understand the art. By ignoring sexuality, and instead emphasizing kabuki as 'mystical' or 'a higher form of theatre.' early scholars may have made kabuki and other Japanese arts more palatable to a Western audience, but the queer and satirical heart of kabuki was lost.

What Bowers, Ernst, and Scott could not foresee was that their work, still an instrumental part of English kabuki scholarship, would alter the perceptions of Japanese culture to Western audiences so heavily that engagement with Japanese traditional arts would become a form of highly privileged orientalism Bowers's romantic descriptions of the "razzle-dazzle theatrics" of kabuki and its embodiment of the spirit of Japan, Ernst's simultaneous decrying of Western theatre and overenthusiastic praise for kabuki, and Scott's similar views all told the Western reader one thing-that to be a cultural elite, one had to attend and understand kabuki. Being part of a kabuki audience was the gateway to the "mystic Orient", and available only to the elite who had both the time and money to be able to visit Japan and attend the theatre.

THE RISE OF CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

Classical drama grew in popularity thanks to postwar scholarship, and opened the way for professional kabuki troupes to travel overseas in performances commanding high prices for tickets. The mobility of these troupes and the availability of explanatory English guides created a more accessible kabuki, but it lost its designation as a theatre for commoners. For an American to attend these performances, one had to be located in or

near major metropolitan areas (or had the ability to travel to such) and purchase tickets that were, at the lowest cost, \$38 (\$76 with 2016 inflation). While the chance to attend a live performance is still privileged to those who can afford the steep ticket prices, kabuki is now far more accessible thanks to the advent of the internet and websites such as YouTube, which host clips of performances, many narrated in English. Kabuki has returned to its roots as a theatre for everyone, and modern scholarship reflects this phenomenon. Instead of focusing just on kabuki as an art form, contemporary scholars analyze the social constructs, attempt to reveal the queer in kabuki, and emphasize both the place of and current need for the *onnagata*.

Contemporary scholarship, such as the work of Maki Morinaga (Isaka) and Katherine Mezur, describe the *onnagata* as a third gender, one that exists beyond the boundaries of male and female but also moves fluidly between them. Mezur describes the *onnagata* as transcending the boundaries of gender and also performance, as the actor's masculinity melds into the *onnagata* feminine aesthetic, which forms the basis of creating a third *onnagata* gender (252). This combination of masculine and feminine traits, the masculine physicality with feminine gestures and voice makes for a character that is unlike a female impersonator or a drag queen, which represent different forms of non-cisgender performance. These are drastically different arts, and it is nearly impossible to compare the three. Kabuki actors interpret a non-realistic femininity, female impersonators and drag queens aim to convince the audience with realistic yet theatric feminine performance. In the words of modern *onnagata* Nakamura Matsue V, "I am a

man so I perform *onnagata*. I must perform female-likeness, so I must not be a woman (Mezur 37).”

Katherine Mezur’s work on the *onnagata* focuses on performing the woman in a male body and its place in current Japanese sex and gender politics (6). She also proposes that *onnagata* completely replace the role of women in kabuki with their gender play, as they create their own constructs of essential womanliness, thus combining (and surpassing) traditional gender roles on stage (26). While she agrees with *onnagata* actors that an *onnagata* role cannot be played by a woman, she also agrees with the idea of women being present in kabuki in an actress role.

Mezur also argues that the *onnagata* and the body beneath are both distinctly ambiguous (47). Separating both character and body as both being ambiguous works against the *onnagata*’s ‘lie’, which she describes later as the false gender acts performed by *onnagata* (141). While she states earlier that *onnagata* is femininity imitated, an overly exaggerated femininity played by a female character with a male body defines body, character, and action by distinctly male and female gender roles, disregarding the blend between them. The *onnagata* does perform a lie in that the body below the costume is that of a man, but the *onnagata* is not ambiguous in its appearance or performance in the view of the audience. The kabuki audience is aware that the character being performed is performed by a man, and there is a mental separation between the two.

. Mezur does not discuss the legendary female origins of kabuki, or that early kabuki actresses also cross-dressed and mimicked masculinity. While she does not adhere with early scholars who exoticized the *onnagata*, using Japanese gender studies as the

basis of her analysis would have elevated her critique and study of the *onnagata* by considering Japanese gender roles and social norms.

Western Scholarship and Language Barriers

Frank Episale's article on reading *onnagata* literature in English further represents the difficulty of analyzing kabuki solely through a Western lens. He claims that it is now possible to write and research effectively on *onnagata* without use of any Japanese resources (92), but earlier declares that he knows very little about kabuki and *onnagata* (90). His critiques of Western scholarship on kabuki represent a critique of the use of *onnagata* and he pushes heavily for the use of women instead of *onnagata*. He also takes issue with Samuel Leiter for referring to *wakashu* kabuki as 'homosexual boys' kabuki' and argues against the notion that even the majority of boys involved had homosexual or bisexual leanings, comparing them to modern sex workers who must adapt to their client's preference (101).

While he is correct that modern notions of homosexuality do not accord with premodern Japan sexual practices, Episale does not mention the idealization of male-male sexual relations within the upper classes in premodern Japan, nor the heavy patronage of the actors particularly during the *wakashu* kabuki period. Episale is correct in that many of the performers were drawn into the kabuki world out of a need to survive rather than sexual satisfaction, but the homosexuality mentioned in *wakashu* has little to do with intercourse and more to do with the fantasy provided by the actors as they simulated "romance" between young men (even while dressed as a woman.) Calling *wakashu* 'homosexual boys' kabuki' does not mean that all of the actors involved were homo- or

bisexual in the Japanese premodern views of sexuality, but only that they performed their version of sexuality on stage, and the patrons, of whom a majority were male, were attracted to the boys masked in *onnagata* beauty. Leiter has taken his own issues with Episale's critique, stating that "Frank's unhappy reaction to my comments on homosexuality among the young actors called *wakashu* would require additional space for a response ('Onnagata', 119)."

Episale's attempt to criticize Western scholarship without an understanding of Japanese culture or Japanese scholarship exposes the same difficulties found in early kabuki scholarship. He relies heavily on modern ideas of gender and sex; he does not erase the queerness of kabuki but defines this misleadingly by using western ideas of modern homosexuality. There are numerous available kabuki resources translated from Japanese (as Leiter discusses), and not utilizing Japanese scholarship provides a heavily one-sided version of kabuki that potentially leads to cultural misunderstanding.

SGT. KABUKIMAN, N.Y.P.D.

Western media rarely looked to kabuki for mass marketed media; Japanese films that became immensely popular overseas were early influential monster movies, such as *Godzilla* or *Mothra*. Kabuki did not seem to intensely grab the movie-going audience in either US or Japan, and live theatre attendance declined as movies and television rose in popularity. Namco's and Troma Studios's 1990 venture, *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.*, combined classical theatre and cinema by using a kabuki-themed superhero in order to save the world from 'The Evil One' in a film that relies on a heavily orientalist view of kabuki and Japan in general.

The idea for *Kabukiman* stemmed from director Lloyd Kaufman's joking comment at a press conference in Japan to create a movie based on Kabukiboy, a minor character in the 1989 film *The Toxic Avenger Part II*. He and co-director Michael Herz were approached afterwards by Tetsu Fujimura, a film producer who was able to help secure a sponsorship from Namco to create a children's film with a kabuki-themed superhero. The Namco sponsorship granted the film a budget of a million and a half dollars, the largest of any Troma Studios production (Kaufman, 1-3).

Troma Studios, however, had already established itself as a studio which produced campy cult-favorites filled with sex and violence, and making a movie suitable for children caused a rift between Kaufman and Herz—Kaufman wanted *Kabukiman* to follow in the gore-and-sex tradition of Troma movies, while both Herz and Namco wanted a film suitable for Japanese families. In his column for the website DVD Talk, Kaufman recounted a conversation with Kuninori Onishi, a Namco executive:

Kuninori informed me that he and the others were taken aback by a scene in which a man ate worms. "Worms are a good source of protein," I told him. He told me that this didn't matter too much, that people in Japan were disgusted by the devouring of invertebrate crawlers. It didn't even cross my mind what he was telling me: showing this scene would destroy *Kabukiman's* chances as mainstream family fare in Japan. I was simply focus on the worms I so dearly wanted. I somehow convinced him that keeping the scene in was okay (3).

The scene Kaufman refers to, in which Sato, the elderly man who originally holds the Kabukiman mantle, eats an entire box of worms in order to channel his powers. This instance, along with Kabukiman later eating a whole raw mackerel, more worms, (with the further intention of disgusting American audiences) and being subject to torturous ‘Japanese kabuki training methods’ served to place Japan as the ‘mystic primitive other’ archetype also found in early Western scholarship. Eating live animals furthered this archetype by implying that not killing or cooking food was disgusting to the American characters, but that the Japanese engaged in Neanderthal-like culinary exploits (primitive) in order to engage the mystic. Kaufman’s choice to ignore Namco’s suggestion that the scene be removed from the film displayed that he chose his artistic vision of gross-out tactics over engaging with Japanese family audiences by creating a superhero that both Japanese and American children could enjoy.

What follows the worm-eating sequence near the beginning of the movie is a mixture of kabuki as both framing piece and vital plot point. It also includes the objectification of Japanese women as dragon lady, sex object, and damsel in distress, but which oddly enough remains true to kabuki’s roots of bawdy, overly crude theatre which appealed to the majority of Japanese society.

The movie introduces its protagonist, Harry Griswald, as an audience member for an amateur kabuki troupe performing a ‘kabuki’ adaptation of Neil Simon’s *The Odd Couple*. While the choice of play does not fall within the realm of Japanese folklore, using *The Odd Couple* for an American audience adheres to kabuki tradition of choosing stories already known to the audience. Even the choice of costuming (baseball caps and

hair curlers combined with kimono) is reminiscent of the Meiji-era (1868-1912) cropped hair plays³. The set is decorated with beer bottles and the actors are playing poker, but Sato, the leader of the troupe, dresses and acts in a traditional kabuki-like style, including dramatic movement and making noises more typically found in a karate film. The contrast here is clear-Sato is the ‘mystic, fish-out-of-water Japanese’ who performs his role solemnly, with unintentional comedic affect as opposed to the American actors that are only performing for the comedic benefit. Sato is murdered shortly after his appearance and he passes on the ‘power of Kabukiman’ to Griswald, thus endowing the bumbling American hero as the only one who can save the world via Japanese-styled superhero powers.

These powers, which include throwing chopsticks and attacks with sushi, highlight less of a kabuki archetype and more of a Japanese stereotype. Kabukiman’s costume itself is made from the main stage curtain, and consists of *aragoto* makeup and an *onnagata* wig. Griswald (as Kabukiman) has a tendency to make stereotypically “Japanese” yells by using a higher-pitched voice and Japanese-sounding syllables. Aside from the costume and name, Kabukiman has little in common with the kabuki stage heroes that perform in epic dramas, but kabuki does have several comedic plays that rely on the same heavy slapstick and fish-out-of-water gags that power the movie. This includes randomly transforming into Kabukiman at the least opportune moment (such as in his boss’s office, or when interviewing the main antagonist), and a long sequence in

³ The cropped-hair plays are kabuki dramas written about contemporary situations. They used modern costumes and music, but the staging and acting techniques remained as traditional kabuki.

which he turns into a circus clown (as punishment for not following the Kabukiman training regimen) to fight crime. These gags, generally at the expense of Griswald and to the eternal exasperation of love interest and Sato's granddaughter, Lotus, lead to her exoticization.

She is prone to dispensing 'ancient Japanese prophecies' that herald the coming of an evil monster that would rule the universe if they came to fruition. These prophecies, such as "the dragon dances through the hoop of Jupiter" and "the monkey will ride the jaguar," parody Asian folklore and reiterate the already established stereotype of the mystical Asian. The movie goes further with Lotus (being the only Asian in the movie who survives for longer than five minutes) as she takes on the role of Griswald's teacher in a Mr. Miyagi-esque sequence that includes forcing Griswald to mediate for hours while standing on his head. Her training methods, along with her constant belittling of Griswald form the dragon lady stereotype, being a demanding Asian woman by physically punishing Griswald when he is unable to complete Kabukiman training correctly. However, at the climax of the movie, she is kidnapped in order for Griswald to save her, simultaneously becoming the dragon lady and the damsel in distress. Lotus demonstrates throughout the movie that she is capable of rescuing herself and occasionally Griswald, but finds herself suddenly unable to defend herself against her *onnagata* kidnapper.

The *onnagata* in this film, one of the antagonist's henchmen, is used for comic relief. He wears a cheap blonde wig, *aragotō* makeup, and a woman's kimono as he murders most of the kabuki troupe at the beginning of the movie, and while later

discarding the makeup and feminine dress, the character still wears the wig until Kabukiman removes near the end of the film. The film had dismissed *onnagata* earlier with Griswald describing them as “men [who] dressed up like women and strike some poses (0:06:00),” and this unnamed character (credited as one of “Stuart’s Evil Men”) serves to confirm Griswald’s earlier comments—he is, literally, a man dressed up as a woman, but not a man performing as a woman. However, the use of *onnagata* as villainous henchman is a concept not really explored in traditional kabuki. The *onnagata* can play a villain, particularly as a woman or ghost demanding revenge on or for a lover and laying curses, but rarely does an *onnagata* character perform active, physical attacks. The *onnagata* in the film is involved in almost every fight scene in the movie and generally leads the attacks. While the character here is strictly for shock purposes, it provides an American layman’s perception of *onnagata* as just a man wearing a dress. This perspective was necessary for the American market—if Kabukiman and his compatriots were closer to a more nuanced view of kabuki; the film would be virtually unrecognizable to American audiences who associated Japan only with sushi and sumo.

When *Sgt. Kabukiman, N.Y.P.D.* premiered outside of the home video market in 1996, the film was viewed by critics as being a satire on New York City and had overall positive reviews (Kaufman). The minor success of the movie inspired an unaired cartoon version of *Kabukiman*, which continued its predecessor’s crime-fighting activities in a format more suitable for children. This Kabukiman iteration lost all of its kabuki roots and became an amalgam of Japanese stereotypes, including having sidekicks Mr. Ninja and Master Gung Ho.

The movie saw limited release in Japan, but internet reviews were also largely positive. One reviewer applauded the correct use of kabuki makeup (red for the hotblooded hero, blue for the antagonist) ('Kabukiman suishō'). However, another reviewer commented that he did not understand the connection between kabuki and worm-eating, and that watching a kabuki actor devour a box of worms made him uneasy and expressed disappointment that the kimono that the actors wear were fake. The reviewer seemed dismayed at the way Japanese culture was treated, asking, "is this the [American] image of Japan ('Kabukiman')?" Despite that negative response on the handling of Japan and Japanese culture, the review still recommended the movie to Japanese audiences.

While not intended to make political commentary, *Kabukiman* was developed and written during the United States' strained economic relations with Japan. As Japan's bubble economy grew, the United States faced several trade and budget deficits that led to growing anti-Japanese sentiment, particularly due to Japan's success in the automobile industry threatening American manufacturers. Japan bashing was popular in the media, which only increased as the dollar plummeted against the yen. As Japanese electronics and entertainment began to grow in popularity in America, the 'wacky Japan' stereotype was born and similarly mocked in the media, which remains popular into the present day. *Kabukiman's* production, instead of reaching its original aim of being family entertainment for both Japanese and American families, plays on already heightened anti-Japanese sentiments by turning cultural properties into mockeries.

The stereotypes performed, which had a mixed reaction from Japanese audiences but were largely popular with early American audiences, stem from a combination of both mystifying Japan and a declaration of American superiority. Griswald takes the Kabukiman powers after the original designated Japanese recipient was murdered by the antagonist's henchmen prior to the kabuki performance and proceeds to save the world after every Asian in the movie, including Lotus, is murdered or otherwise incapacitated at the climax despite Griswald's general incompetence. Only the red-blooded American male (as opposed to the competent Japanese female) could save the world with 'mysterious Japanese powers', combining both into a character that strangely echoes early Western scholarship into kabuki, its patrons, and its performers.

CONCLUSION

The earliest kabuki scholars in English brought new understanding of international theatre to a general audience. Their contributions to the greater dramatic scholarship field are still vital to classical Japanese theatre scholarship in English today, but their exaltation of kabuki as a high art only understandable to the highly cultured succeeded in separating formerly common theatre from the general population. The separation affected prices of kabuki tickets and the way the West viewed kabuki.

Kabuki's Western image often clouded a view of modern Japan, as seen in *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.* Lotus, who to be appears a modern woman, still speaks ancient prophecies and is wholly focused on arcane traditions despite being a modern woman in the middle of New York City. Modern kabuki actors and their families as depicted still lead lives similar to actors in Tokugawa Japan, inadvertently offering a second

separation. Kabuki tradition is destroyed, according to Lotus, when Griswald the common man does not take his role seriously, and only be adhering to ancient tradition and high art is the world saved. Griswald changes his life, from personality down to his eating habits, to understand the supposed true nature of kabuki. This is similar to major Western business executives learning rudimentary Japanese and proclaiming their love of traditional arts despite both the taste of their Japanese hosts and Japanese society.

Chapter 3: Women and the Future of Kabuki

In the spring of 2014, I attended a kabuki performance at the new Kabuki-za with a small group of Japanese male and female friends. The performance that day included *Sonezaki Shinjū* (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*) and an excerpt from *Kamakura Sandaiki* (*Three Generations of the Kamakura Shogunate*.) In both these productions, the onnagata dies tragically or prepares for her inevitable death to save her lover. After the performance was over, the women in the group commented that they were happy to see such strong women being portrayed on stage without regarding that each character was being played by an elderly man. With women now freely taking the stage as professional actresses, also demonstrating the ability to portray strong female characters, is it still necessary for the onnagata to exist?

Productions of kabuki plays have been done with women, either in the all-female troupes of the 1920s that failed to flourish, or in the late James R. Brandon's kabuki productions at the University of Hawaii, where women took on the traditionally onnagata roles. Attempts at kabuki fusion have met with failure, with strong onnagata adherents claiming that a woman could not possibly be able to portray a classical woman. The question of women in kabuki has been raised not only by scholars, but by the actors themselves with mixed answers. While kabuki is traditionally male, it has proven throughout history that it has the ability to transform and adapt as societal standards change.

Opponents to women on the kabuki stage claim that having actresses would be detrimental to the fantasy of the kabuki world, as women on stage would be too real. The

spirit of kabuki lies in the art of transformation of male into female, of an elderly man into a beautiful young woman. Having a woman perform, even using the same mie and kata as current onnagata, would be too natural despite the exaggerated behaviors that kabuki requires. Removing the onnagata from the stage also removes the transformative element from kabuki, which is necessary in maintaining kabuki's carefully constructed fantasy world.

James R. Brandon cites the Chinese opera, having been traditionally all-male, as having no issues with adding women into its cast, but believes that there is too much invested commercially in professional kabuki for it to change so drastically (122). He is not opposed to the idea of actresses playing female kabuki characters, as he cites both Joan Crawford and Bette Davis as being women who portrayed powerful women, just as well as any male actor could (125). There is plenty of room for women in kabuki, he asserts, as kabuki is not a single unified art (123).

He, along with others, attacks the traditional idea that women lack the physical and mental strength to correctly perform female kabuki roles. Much of this argument stems from the weight of the costumes and the physical and mental difficulties the onnagata faces while transforming himself into his character. Most leading onnagata who wear these heavy costumes are elderly men, and a younger woman could easily bear the weight just as well if not better than a traditional onnagata. She would be subjected to the same rigorous physical and vocal training as she would in any sort of transformative role, a feat which has been accomplished by thousands of professional actresses.

However, some of the beauty in kabuki is found in the unobtainable woman, in a similar way to how the all-female Takarazuka Revue portrays unobtainable men. Fans of the Takarazuka speak of the ‘dream world’ that they create, and that if the male roles were played by male actors, “the results would be too coarse. But because women act the male roles, they can create the ideal man that women really want...They don’t have any of the coarseness or bad sides of real men (Dream Girls, 35:30).” This is the same sentiment used when discussing the portrayal of women by men—the audience revels in the ideal femininity rather than an actual femininity. The women of the Takarazuka perform an exaggerated masculinity, involving changes in voice and adopting an overly male physicality and attitude, just as an onnagata acts overly feminine and dainty in a courtesan or princess role.

With the success of women playing male roles, it is surprising that a full reverse-gendered kabuki troupe has not been proposed, with women playing tachiyaku and men playing onnagata, as it legendarily happened in Okuni’s early kabuki dance performances. The exaggerations in masculinity and femininity would remain, and the same stories would be told. However, in troupes like the Takarazuka, roles portraying middle-aged or elderly men tend to be comic relief in their overt masculinity as opposed to playing the ideal rawness of a seasoned samurai or general. Onnagata are also tasked with playing elderly women or middle-aged wives, and while the elderly roles tend to be more comedic, they appear and are acted with seriousness in the graver dramas.

It is not just kabuki outsiders who question the place of women in kabuki; several onnagata of the prewar period also made statements to the Japanese Ministry of

Education as actresses began to gain more recognition on stage and screen in the 1920s. While most onnagata such as Utaemon V (1865-1940) seemed disgusted with the idea, stating “Why should women appear when I am here? There is no woman in all Japan who can act as femininely on stage as I (Bowers, ‘Japanese Theatre’ 194),” Sadanji II (1880-1940) was not repulsed by the idea, stating that “the stage needs the authoritative realism of women (Bowers, ‘Japanese Theatre’ 194).” The contrasting statements reflect both onnagatas’ kabuki heritage—while both were part of prestigious kabuki families and both at the height of their popularity in the 1920s, Utaemon V was the dean of actors at the Kabuki-za and thus tasked to uphold kabuki tradition. Sadanji II was known as an unconventional (Bowers describes him as ‘heretical’) kabuki reformist (Kabuki21). Utaemon V upholds the traditional kabuki idea that women cannot portray ideal femininity, but Sadanji II calls women’s acting realistic. While on the surface Sadanji II’s comment appears extremely progressive, he still subconsciously reiterated that women could not perform the constructed femininity of the onnagata.

Koshiro VII (1911-1949) suggested that women on a traditional stage was impossible, as it was too late for women to appear on stage, and to cast women instead of onnagata would make kabuki lose its essence. He stated that “If women had appeared a hundred years ago, they could have created their own kind of woman for the stage; now all they can do is imitate what men have created for them (Bowers, ‘Japanese Theatre’ 194).” Kabuki had already shown its elasticity and adaptation through theatrical history, and while onnagata could naturally fear their jobs and family lines being replaced with women, actresses could have acted alongside onnagata, rather than a full replacement.

Conclusion

Kabuki's rich and storied history has been subject to interpretation from several different angles, including theatrical, historic, and feminist perspectives. These interpretations provoked questions on what exactly the *onnagata* is, and the answer is an amalgam of gender, performance, and social aspects that form to create a feminine essence on stage that is not quite female or male in appearance or design.

Kabuki interpretations in Japanese popular culture highlight its transformative aspects. Its translation into movies had varying degrees of success, but it remains an integral part of Japanese film history as it proved that live theatre could find its place in film as the framework for a larger, more realistic plot. Films such as *Chrysanthemums* and the 1963 *Actor's Revenge* used kabuki as a way to transform women from "just women" into cunning, independent characters capable of more than just being beautiful and tragic. The 2008 version of *Revenge*, by focusing more on gritty realism, removed the true kabuki from the film by not transforming the characters into something more than their given societal roles; kabuki was merely window dressing for this film. When done well, kabuki in film is defiant and questions societal standards, poorly and it adheres to acceptable roles for both men and women, with *onnagata* as an afterthought rather than highlighting his role in kabuki defiance.

In Western scholarship, writings on kabuki and *onnagata* were originally defiant due to writing about Japan and the Japanese in a positive light to an audience that still harbored anti-Japanese sentiment, which in time provoked curiosity about Japanese culture and classical arts and helped to create a Japanese cultural boom particularly

among wealthier classes. In writing positively, Orientalism remained in introductions of kabuki by postwar scholars. This is particularly evident in Ernst's writings on the Japanese audience, which supposedly still adhered to a Tokugawa Period way of life while other, less enlightened Western audiences could not appreciate the beauty and traditions of kabuki theatre.

Contemporary scholars used postwar scholarship as a basis for their own works focusing on gender and *onnagata* and constructed a separate gender identity for them, but within established Western gender and sexuality framework. This framework does not take into consideration Japanese ideas of gender or gender performativity, and occasionally treats *onnagata* as a private identity rather than strictly a performed identity that appears only onstage in modern times.

Western popular media depictions of kabuki, such as those found in *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.* use the general population's idea of kabuki to create a story that uses kabuki more as a comedic point than a framework for a larger picture as found in Japanese films. It conveys an unsubtle message that it takes an American hero to save the world; the Asian characters are either disposed of or regulated just as a love interest once their usefulness to the hero has ended. It relies on harmful stereotypes of Japanese people to shock and disgust audiences, in particular the worm-eating scene.

Despite *Kabukiman's* heavy reliance on Japanese stereotypes, it and the Japanese kabuki films still portray women and *onnagata* in the same space without breaking the *onnagata's* lack of realism, showing that it is possible that the two can coexist. Women have proven that they can portray the idealistic man as shown in Takarazuka, and a

kabuki cast that fully crosses gender boundaries can bring a new element of kabuki queerness into a traditional theatrical framework.

As Japan continues to evolve, kabuki will adapt to new audiences and actors as it has over four centuries of censorship and changing societal standards. The *onnagata*'s place and identity on stage will continue to be analyzed as the nuances of *onnagata* evolve into an art form that remains true to its roots, but can still connect a modern, global audience with the same fairytales and folklore that entranced audiences over four hundred years ago.

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