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# The Visions of a Creative Artist

## Zenchiku's *Rokurin Ichiro* Treatises

MARK J NEARMAN

THE year 1443 was marked by the death at age eighty of the great noh actor, playwright, teacher, and theoretician Zeami Motokiyo 世阿弥本清 of the Kanze 観世 sarugaku noh company. This master left behind as his artistic heir his son-in-law Zenchiku Ujinobu 禅竹氏信, 1405–1468?, who was an outstanding actor and playwright in his own right and head of the Komparu 金春 sarugaku noh company, traditionally recognized as the oldest sarugaku performing company in Japan, presumed to date back to its seventh-century founder, Hada no Kōkatsu 秦河勝.<sup>1</sup>

Presumably, some time prior to the spring of 1444 but probably after the death of Zeami, Zenchiku experienced a vision of six circular diagrams and a sword while meditating at the Kanzeon Shrine in Hasedera, and realized that this vision was directly related to the process of artistic creativity as a spiritual expression. He referred to this vision as *rokurin ichiro* 六輪一露, which, for present convenience, may be rendered as ‘the six circles and the single dew-drop’.<sup>2</sup> But it was not until 1456 that Zenchiku began to produce a series of treatises that serve as commentaries on and deeper explorations into his earliest known account of this vision. These treatises are generally considered Zenchiku’s most important and original theoretical contribution to his theatre art; they encompass not only what he had absorbed from his master Zeami, but also what he had discovered for himself through his meditation and personal experience, which goes beyond anything found in Zeami’s treatises.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The medieval Japanese reading, now more commonly read as Hata no Kawakatsu.

<sup>2</sup> Considering the closeness of their relationship on both a personal and a professional level, had Zenchiku had his vision while Zeami was still alive, he would undoubtedly have shared it with his master and passed on in his writings any comments that Zeami might have made in regard to it. No such references appear in any of Zenchiku’s known writings.

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps significant that none of Zenchiku’s voluminous writings is dated prior to Zeami’s death and, from internal evidence, it seem unlikely that any of those undated were produced prior to that event either. Indeed, the earliest document having a colophon actually dated and signed by Zenchiku is 1455.

Zenchiku's earliest exposition of his *rokurin ichiro* metaphor appears in a copy of a document dated 1444. By studying the various versions of this and related documents, the following history may be surmised. At some time during 1443 or early 1444, while in his late thirties, Zenchiku experienced his vision of six circles and a sword. He apparently wrote down a description of it as he understood it at the time and turned it over to a well-known and respected Kegon Buddhist scholar, Nittō Shamon Shigyoku 入唐沙門志玉, 1384–1464. Obviously impressed by the document, Shigyoku prepared a commentary in Chinese, which incorporated Zenchiku's earlier text. (No copy of Zenchiku's original text has yet surfaced). The earliest version of this document combines Zenchiku's original text and Shigyoku's commentary, dated 27 March 1444.<sup>4</sup> It concludes with a comment appended by Zenchiku and dated 26 August 1459:

This single work is a highly secret storehouse among the secretmost, and its depth is extremely important. It should be kept concealed. It can be trusted. Except for one offspring in a generation, it should by no means be imparted to any other person!

Subsequent to his presenting his vision to Shigyoku, but when is not certain, Zenchiku shared this combined text-commentary with the great courtier and scholar of Chinese classics, Ichijō Kanera 一条兼良, 1402–1481, who must have also been intrigued with the vision since he appended his own commentary, in Japanese. Then, for motives unknown, this newly expanded version was passed on to Nankō Sōgen 南江宗沅, a Zen monk and poet who added his own remarks, in Chinese, dated 1455. Sōgen's original manuscript survives.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Some scholars have questioned the 1444 date, and feel that it may be of later composition, although, of necessity, before Sōgen's commentary of 1455.

<sup>5</sup> The earliest version is part of a group of manuscripts in the Yoshida Collection of Tenri Library. In addition, there is a group of twenty-two texts copied in 1621 by Komparu Hachizaemon 金春八左衛門. These manuscripts served Yoshida Tōgo 吉田東五 as the basis for his *Zenchiku Shū* 禪竹集, Nōgakukai, 1915, the first published version of Zenchiku texts. This manuscript contains Zenchiku's text and all three commentaries, but with the following changes: Shigyoku's and Sōgen's commentaries have been translated into Japanese; Zenchiku's own statements, which alternate with the passages of Shigyoku's commentary, are clearly identified by the phrase 'my own words' (*watakushi no kotoba* 私詞); and a particularly laudatory statement by Shigyoku as well as his and Zenchiku's colophon as found in the Yoshida Collection manuscript are omitted. English translations of the three commentaries, with extensive analysis, appear in Arthur H. Thornhill III, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop*, Princeton U.P., 1993, pp. 24–43.

In his published version Yoshida misidentifies Sōgen as Ikkyū Sōjun 一休宗純, the great Muromachi-period Zen monk and poet, thereby giving credence to various eighteenth-century accounts of the relationship between the famous monk and Zenchiku. Thornhill, pp. 18–19, gives a short but reliable account of their verifiable connection. A more detailed analysis of the references to their relationship can be found in Itō Masayoshi 伊藤正義, *Komparu Zenchiku no Kenkyū* 金春禪竹の研究, Akao Shōbundō, 1970, pp. 32ff. The accounts of their meetings, presented as fact in the various modern, English-language studies of Ikkyū, apparently derive from legends that flourished during the Tokugawa period. In addition, some references by Ikkyū to Komparu Taiyu 金春太夫 (that is, the head of the Komparu family) may not refer to Zenchiku but to his son, who was known to have had contact with Ikkyū.

Shigyoku's commentary attempts to interpret Zenchiku's symbols in terms of their possible significance to orthodox scholastic Buddhism, whereas Kanera's commentary supplies Confucianist and Taoist associations drawn from his own scholarly background. In his later treatises Zenchiku makes use of quotations from Buddhist and classical Chinese writings that appear in these commentaries, although sometimes implying an understanding different from that in their original context.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast, Sōgen's commentary does not attempt to offer an interpretation, but aims at other purposes. On the surface it appears highly laudatory of both Zenchiku's text and the two previous commentaries. Even so, it not too subtly points out the loquaciousness and pedantry that mark the other two commentaries: he implies that Shigyoku and Kanera are superimposing their more conventional and intellectualized views upon the work of someone whose perspective is creatively, and perhaps spiritually, more advanced. Significantly, he admonishes Zenchiku to write his own commentary, since Zenchiku's own text, as it stands, is far too sparse. Zenchiku evidently took Sōgen's suggestion to heart, and from age fifty-one until shortly before his death some fifteen years later, he explored the dimensions of his *rokurin ichiro* metaphor through nine documents, at first incorporating and then moving farther and farther beyond the conventional Buddhist views and traditional Chinese thought of his commentators to explore the realm of his own original insights.<sup>7</sup>

When examined in sequence, these texts supply a remarkable documentation of the evolution of a creative artist's meditation on and personal exploration of what had come to him from the deepest recesses of his spiritual awareness. Although some material is repeated in several of these works—for the most part because they are founded upon the same metaphor—each document contributes new and often unique information. For readers interested in creative, non-intellectual processes, this series of documents is indeed a rich source for study.

As far as can be determined from the colophons to this group of treatises, only the very first version of his metaphor was 'made public', at least to the ex-

<sup>6</sup> While the commentaries by Shigyoku and Kanera may be of historical interest, their relevance to Zenchiku's treatises remains marginal. His original text was composed independent of them; his later treatises, although expressing deep respect for what these commentators have said and occasionally making use of quotations that they have cited, nevertheless move off in directions other than those pursued by the two commentators.

<sup>7</sup> Thornhill presents a full translation of Zenchiku's first and second *Rokurin Ichiro* texts, plus excerpts from his later writings. Because those translations were made from a perspective quite different from that of the present work, it has seemed advisable to offer here another translation of these (plus the rest of the documents), intended for those with more practical interests. Thornhill's commentaries, however, offer much background information that Western students of Zenchiku's writings will undoubtedly find of value. The translations and commentaries for the present work were, for all intents and purposes, completed several years before Thornhill's book was published, but owing to personal circumstances, no attempt has been made to correlate what appears in the present work with what is contained in that particular book.

tent of being shared with the three persons mentioned above.<sup>8</sup> All the remaining texts were apparently intended for his own son and heir, to be transmitted to him and his successors alone as part of the Secret Tradition writings of his family's theatre company. The only clear indication that anyone outside the Zenchiku family was given access to any of these particular documents prior to the twentieth century is a copy of one short document summarizing some aspects of Zenchiku's commentaries, which Zenchiku's grandson made for his cousin, who was head of the Kanze family acting company. As Zenchiku's comment of 1456 to Shigyoku's commentary (quoted above) indicates, even his earliest version as well as Shigyoku's additions were to be considered 'off limits' to all except the head actor of the family's company. Hence, it is difficult to see them on the whole as intended to contribute to some open discussion or debate on Japanese aesthetics. Indeed, since aesthetic theories, however abstract, are customarily concerned with matters as perceived from a spectator's perspective, there is no reason to keep them secret, and their value lies in part in sharing them with the general public. By contrast, discussions of art as seen from a practitioner's perspective may well need to carry restrictions as to who has access to them.

Secret Tradition writings by Zenchiku and his teacher Zeami, like Zen kōans, may strike the general reader as obscure, suggestive of arcane meanings, allogical, 'profound', or even trivial, whereas they are, in fact, intended for a specific audience—the acknowledged heirs to their tradition—who would already have had considerable background and experience for understanding and making use of what was being transmitted to them. Once the proper contexts for these writings is known, much of their mystery disappears and what is genuinely profound and insightful may then emerge. Because these more advanced teachings can be misunderstood or misapplied by those inexperienced in the practice of the art, they were kept confidential not only for the safekeeping of what was being transmitted, but also for the benefit of those who might unfortunately be misled through misunderstanding or misapplying them.

Further, these works by Zenchiku are not the product of ratiocination or philosophical speculation, but arise from deeper levels of awareness and the intuitive certainty associated with direct experience; thus they are rich in meaning, nuance, and significance. In addition, they reflect not only Zenchiku's commitment to his art but also to his recognition of its inseparable connections to his everyday spiritual practices. Indeed, it is due to his combined practice as a creative artist and as a devout practicing Buddhist that these works arise, for Zenchiku had come to realize on a practical, experiential level that the source

<sup>8</sup> But it is quite possible that Zenchiku's drawings of his six circles that he had shared with these non-family members may somehow have entered the stream of Shinto thought, since an almost identical set appears as part of a seventeenth-century text, *Shintō Denju* 神道伝授, 'Initiation into the Way of the Deities', reproduced in Ishida Ichirō 石田一良, ed., *Shintō Shisō Shū* 神道思想集, Chikuma, 1970, p. 19.

of his personal creativity was not something of his own making, but was synonymous with that spiritual Source<sup>9</sup> that, in Buddhism, is beyond any delimiting that a name implies.<sup>10</sup>

No matter what implications his writings may have for those outside the art that he practiced, these documents were his testament for one who is a practitioner of that art, a testament as set forth by a mature and recognized creative artist who not only saw the oneness of the highest practice of that art with the spiritual Source from which it arose, but also had lived the experience of that oneness. Had these documents been intended for public consumption, they might well be judged as a self-serving defense of some personal approach to art or as an apologia for a specific religious view. The fact that they were to be kept private as part of the Secret Tradition lends credence to their author's sincerity of purpose. In sum, they are not an academician's aesthetic theory or a pious mouthing of statements culled from religious writings, but an attempt to articulate as fully and accurately as possible what the creative process is and how it operates within the sphere of *noh* acting. At the same time, what is fundamental to this narrower perspective is applicable to the larger issue of that process itself and, today, can invite readers willing to expend the effort needed to see the relevance to the practice of any creative endeavor what Zenchiku has articulated in terms of acting.

<sup>9</sup> In the translations and commentary, many technical terms have been capitalized as a signal to the reader that they carry a non-literal or non-conventional meaning. For instance, terms such as 'Source', 'Unborn', 'the One Mind', 'Ultimate Reality', 'the Void', and 'That Which' refer to the spiritual origin or underlying reality of all phenomena, as understood in Buddhism.

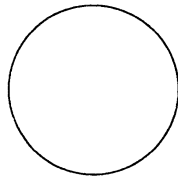
<sup>10</sup> Unlike Zeami, whose personal Buddhist connections were with the Sōtō Zen tradition, Zenchiku seems to have leaned more toward the Jōdo tradition, at least as far as his writings reveal. By birthright, Zenchiku was also a Shinto priest, which he says in one of his treatises he treated as 'in name only'. But as time went on he made more and more references to Shinto texts and deities in his writings, and regarded respect, gratitude, and fidelity to these deities as part of both his spiritual and his artistic practice.

[*Rokurin Ichiro no Ki* 六輪一露の記  
An Account of the Six Spheres and the Single Dewdrop]

Zenchiku's first articulation of his vision, drawn from the passages in the Yoshida Collection manuscript and presented here as an independent work, is little more than an outline.<sup>11</sup> But it will serve to introduce readers to the principal symbols that were to occupy Zenchiku's contemplations over much of his remaining life.<sup>12</sup>

In the traditional practice of the sarugaku profession, we strive for the utmost grace with our body as our voice creates its patterns. As a result, we do not focus on the [specific] movements of our hands or the stamping of our feet. When such is the case, how could our acting then not have the seemingly miraculous effect of being essentially unselfconscious and impalpable? Thus, as illustration, acting on this level assumes a [metaphorical] form of six circles and a single drop of dew. The first of these I call the Circle of Perpetual Flow; the second, the Circle of Arising; the third, the Circle of Settling In; the fourth, the Circle of Likening; the fifth, the Circle of Breaking Free; and the sixth, the Emptied Circle. The One Dewdrop is the principal level of the Supreme.

One: The Circle of Perpetual Flow



The first, the Sphere of Perpetual Flow, is the source of ineffable subtlety in recitation and movement. When an audience listens to your vocal interpretation, this sphere corresponds to your capacity to create feelings [in the listener].<sup>13</sup>

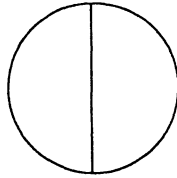
<sup>11</sup> Thornhill, p. 20, speculates that one should not 'assume that this manuscript contains a full expression of Zenchiku's initial conception' of his metaphor. But there is no evidence in his writings or in the commentaries by Shigyoku and Kanera that he articulated his vision to his commentators more extensively. Indeed, Sōgen's concern with the sparseness of Zenchiku's presentation plus Zenchiku's own later expanding on this text suggest that what we read here may well have been as far as Zenchiku had taken matters initially.

<sup>12</sup> This and all subsequent translations of Zenchiku's texts are based on the versions in Omote Akira 表章 and Itō Masayoshi, ed., *Komparu Kodensho Shūsei* 金春古伝書集成 [=KKS], Wan'ya, 1969. Treatise titles in square brackets are ones as cited in that edition for documents originally untitled.

<sup>13</sup> That is, his innate capacity not only to feel but also to express feelings is used by the master actor as a means for evoking feelings.

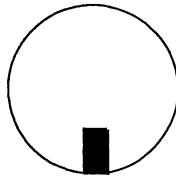
Inasmuch as [this aspect of acting] is analogous to an integrated and enduring life span, I call [its symbolic representation] the Sphere of Perpetual Flow.

### Two: The Circle of Arising



With the second, the Circle of Arising, the ascending mark in this diagram becomes [a representation of] the pure creative spirit: [the distinction of] high and low [tones] arises, and pure modulation [of the intonational line] is born. This corresponds to the aim of the feelings [that arise with the creative impulse] associated with superior acting effects.<sup>14</sup>

### Three: The Circle of Settling In



With the third, the Circle of Settling In, the occurrence of the short mark represents a stabilizing place where the actor effects a mode of performing that will produce his various creative causes.

### Four: The Circle of Likening

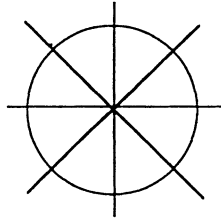


With the fourth, the Sphere of Likening, the [manifest] varieties of Heaven, Man, and Earth—the whole of the manifold universe [of concrete expression]—are governed by this sphere.

<sup>14</sup> That is, the aim or direction inherent in a master actor's creative impulse that he permits to manifest and that evokes emotions in the spectator.

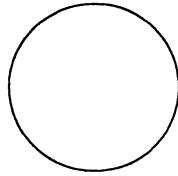


## Five: The Circle of Breaking Free



With the fifth, the Sphere of Breaking Free, even though an actor creates differentiated forms that do not begin to exhaust [the potentials of] Heaven and Earth in all ten directions, nevertheless, properly speaking, they arise from within this sphere. But because it signifies, for example, a 'breaking up of circular form', it is called the Sphere of Breaking Free.<sup>15</sup>

## Six: The Emptied Circle



The sixth, the Emptied Sphere, is a level without subject or object; the actor having turned away [from the world] comes back, and again arrives at the original Sphere of Perpetual Flow.



This single Dewdrop does not come under the rubric of space or of form; it is free and without hindrance; not even a single speck of dust affects it. This, accordingly, takes on the form of the Sword of the Absolute.

<sup>15</sup> That is, when an actor creates something so unique that it seems to break from the circle of traditional form, it is still within the realm of the potentials of artistic expression, even though he has 'broken free' from the expected.

The phrase *rokurin ichiro* has such a multiplicity of meanings that any set rendering is of limited value and may obscure the various levels of significance that exist within a visionary metaphor. Although the term *rokurin* certainly can mean ‘six circles’, *rin* is a noun classifier that also signifies ‘circlings, wheels, rings, spheres, layers, blossoms, and chakras’. The term *ichiro* is likewise multivalued. While the characters signify ‘one dewdrop’, by application of a particular method of Sino-Japanese character analysis applied by medieval Japanese, *ro* may be read as the two-character phrase 雨路, *ame no michi*, ‘the path that a rain-droplet makes’ as it courses down a vertical surface: hence, ‘a flowing path’. *Ichiro* is also an *ateji* 当字 (characters interpreted as homonyms for another word) for 一呂, ‘the spine’, both literally and figuratively. In seeming contradiction to the literal meaning of the term, Zenchiku depicts and refers to this ‘single dewdrop’ as ‘the single [two-edged] sword’ of Spiritual Wisdom associated with Monju 文殊 (Skt. Mañjuśrī), the Buddhist ‘personification’ of Enlightened Spiritual Understanding.

As a result of these multiple meanings, several relevant renderings of *rokurin ichiro* can be construed, each forming a metaphor applicable to some aspect of Zenchiku’s description of the creative process in this and his subsequent texts: ‘the six wheels and the one flowing path [that they follow]’, ‘the six blossoms [of creative flowering] and the one [evanescent] dewdrop [that characterizes the actor’s art]’, ‘the six [psychophysical energy centers called] chakras and the spine [as the path up and down which the energy flows]’, ‘the six spheres [of creative activity] and the unified non-discriminatory understanding [that integrates them]’, ‘the six rings [as the targets that the artist is to aim for] and the one sword [that penetrates them]’, ‘the six circlings [of creative energy] and the [intellectually unpredictable] path [that such energy follows]’.

Throughout his treatises on this subject, Zenchiku explores these various metaphorical meanings on various levels and from different perspectives, although his signals to the reader that he has shifted levels or perspectives can at times be easily overlooked. Further, while his writings are founded and focused upon the practiced art of acting, he enriches his metaphor with references to Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian concepts, as well as to the theory and practice of classical Japanese poetry.

Basically, his metaphor describes what may be called the ‘natural’ creative process. This process is not limited to the arts, but may also be seen to operate in the everyday life of humans and indeed in all sentient beings. In its broadest application it may be considered a paradigm for the creation of the universe. Essentially, this process involves an arising (Circle Two) from the limitless, unbounded creative Source (Circle One) that becomes differentiated through recognizing distinctions (Circle Three) until it comes to its ‘flowering’ as manifest phenomena (Circle Four), and then breaks up and dissolves (Circle Five), returning to the Source (Circle Six) from which it had originally arisen—just as human thoughts or feelings arise, come to consciousness, are experienced as having phenomenal existence, and then dissipate and disappear.

This process whereby both physical and psychological phenomena arise is analogous to the Buddhist ‘cycle of birth-and-death’. This cycle customarily operates on an unconscious, ‘unintentional’ level of existence, although certain

aspects of the cycle, at least in humans, are viewed as products of volition. Even so, certain phases of the cycle may remain for most individuals something that they have no interest in bringing to full consciousness. To the extent that any phase of the cycle remains operationally unconscious, an individual to that extent may be said 'to be created' by the cycle rather than 'to create' with it. Hence, if someone is to function as a genuinely creative artist, it is necessary for him to broaden his sphere of consciousness of the phases of this cycle to the point where he can experience the interplay of all the processes and energies involved in producing an artistic expression, allowing them to work through him so that they may realize their full potential and not be diverted, misused, or rendered ineffective through his ignorance of them.

As his metaphor indicates, Zenchiku distinguishes six primary phases in this creative cycle, each phase representing a different 'sphere of activity' (*rin*) called into play during the process. In everyday life, these phases customarily occur spontaneously, without the individual focusing on them. In an untrained performer, there is a marked tendency to ignore the bringing to consciousness these otherwise non-conscious phases, and simply to reproduce a model supplied by the teacher or to rely on some 'inspirational' impulse, whose source is unknown to this type of performer. For the actor who would fulfill his potential as a genuinely creative artist, it becomes necessary ultimately to bring all six phases into the act of creative play. Further, since the creative process is universal and natural to all humans, genuine creativity is not a matter of select talent but of development of this commonly shared, innate, potential 'natural creativity'.

Zenchiku assigns a name and a symbolic diagram to each of these spheres of activity. These names have multiple meanings that he plays upon as he explores and develops his insights throughout his treatises, but for the sake of easy reference they have been translated as follows:

1. *Jurin* 寿輪: the Circle or Sphere of Perpetual Flow. 'Circle' is used to translate *rin* in passages that refer to the shape rather than the meaning of the symbol. *Ju*, rendered here as 'perpetual flow', denotes more literally 'life' as a process or uninterrupted flow. It also carries a congratulatory connotation, as in a wish for 'long life'. In Zenchiku, the term usually refers to the continual, underlying flow of existence that never ceases, even for a moment. This existential flow is the course and ground from which creative impulses arise. It is also analogous to the 'inner space' within which any mental distinctions will be made. On a spiritual level, it signifies That Which is the source and 'substance' of all things as It manifests as an individual sentient being.

2. *Shurin* 豎輪: the Circle or Sphere of Arising. *Shu* basically means 'that which is vertical', which implies the action of arising. In noh practice this term is often used in relation to the tones of a modal scale that sound at different heights or vertical intervals from the base tone level. Just as these tones arise from the ground established by the base tone level, so by analogy a particular creative impulse can be discerned to arise from the ground of existence. This discernment represents a phase of differentiation and discrimination, although the 'manifest' content of the impulse may still be non-specific and unfocused.<sup>16</sup>

3. *Jūrin* 住輪: the Circle or Sphere of Settling In. *Jū* more familiarly means 'to

reside, dwell in'. In Zenchiku, it refers to that phase where the creative impulse takes on specificity in the form of a mental image of what the artist intends to effect through his physicalized expression.

4. *Zōrin* 像輪: the Circle or Sphere of Likening. *Zō* literally signifies an 'image' or 'likeness', and in Zenchiku corresponds to the physical expression created on stage by the actor. This physicalized 'likeness' is, most immediately, a reflection of the inner image that the artist has constructed during the operation of the previous sphere.

5. *Harin* 破輪: the Circle or Sphere of Breaking Free. *Ha* literally means 'to break' or 'to break up'. Zenchiku equates this phase with the discreteness and uniqueness of any individual creative expression. By nature, no expression effected by the arising of a creative impulse is exactly like any other. Even so, the task of a creative artist includes learning how to create genuine uniqueness and originality within the framework of his art. As this presupposes mastery of the art of producing a vital likeness based on the integrated operation of the first or 'upper' three spheres, its conscious pursuit constitutes a different and more advanced phase in the artist's career.

6. *Kūrin* 空輪: the Emptied Circle or Sphere. *Kū* (literally, 'empty', 'sky', 'what is devoid') is a Buddhist term for That Which is beyond differentiation and discriminatory judgments, and is associated with freedom from entrapment in the cycle of birth-and-death and from entanglement with greed, anger, and delusory mind sets. In the natural creative cycle, it is what the creative impulse 'disappears into' after it has effected its phenomenal manifestation. Because this 'Void'<sup>17</sup> is effectively the same as the source of the creative impulse, Zenchiku equates it with a return to the first sphere, and uses the same diagram for both the first and sixth spheres.

7. *Ichiro* 一露: the Single Dewdrop. This represents in Zenchiku the illimitable 'energy' that constitutes 'the substance' of existence. This energy flows where it will, like a drop of water upon a window pane, and exhibits an inner cohesiveness and consistency even when it is shattered into myriad impulses. In its more concrete manifestations it seems to be as evanescent as the dew, and, like water, is universally the same everywhere. At the same time, Zenchiku diagrammatically symbolizes this dewdrop with a sword, or more specifically, the Sword of Wisdom of Monju. This symbol is a metaphor for the power, strength, and 'cutting edge' of a creative impulse. That is, the underlying, ever-creative energy that is of the Source has the capacity to appear both as yielding and accommodating like water and as irresistibly effective as Monju's Sword that cuts through all delusions and duality-based, discriminatory thoughts.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Shurin* appears in the Yoshida Collection version as 主輪, 'the Circle of Purpose', whereas in the Hachizaemon version as well as in later treatises it is 豎輪, more literally, 'the Circle of Verticality'. In some contexts, an alternative, more dynamic rendering as 'the Circle of Arousing' or 'the Circle of Arousal' is useful.

<sup>17</sup> 'Void' is a common but somewhat misleading translation for *kū* 空 if it suggests a nihilistic emptiness to a reader. It is simply a convenient, one-word term that refers in Buddhism to That Which is devoid of any set boundaries that the rational and judgmental aspects of the conventional mind may try to apply to It.

<sup>18</sup> For the significance of this sword in Zeami's writings, see Mark J Nearman, 'Zeami's *Kyūi*: A Pedagogical Guide for Teachers of Acting', in MN 33:3 (Autumn 1978), pp. 311-12.

While these various spheres and their underlying energy can most readily be seen to operate in a sequentially linear manner, in certain treatises Zenchiku indicates that the spheres also function simultaneously. That is, they are all inherent within each moment of creative activity. In addition, the first or 'upper' three spheres refer to the inner or psychospiritual plane of the artistic process, whereas the other three spheres refer to the outer manifestation or expression of the creative impulse that has been transmuted through the functioning of the upper spheres.

To grasp the practical significance of Zenchiku's metaphor, it is useful to consider these six spheres from the standpoint of their relevance to various stages in the art of performing: that is, the order in which these spheres function is brought to a conscious level by the actor, rather than in the order in which Zenchiku presents them in his treatises.

What an actor produces on stage and what spectators see and hear is called the physicalized expression (*sugata* 姿 or *fūshi* 風姿) of acting. From a naive perspective, this expression may seem nothing more than a series of movements and sounds from which viewers deduce meaning and by which they may be emotionally aroused. It may also be accompanied by a degree of aesthetic pleasure attributed to the obvious display of skills not ordinarily seen in everyday life. When a performer attempts to operate from such a naive viewpoint, his acting will appear as a series of patterns that emulate those established by a tradition or supplied by the actor himself. Such a viewpoint may be said to derive from an awareness of only the physicalizing phase of creativity, without recognizing what underlies the production of that physicalization. This physicalizing phase in itself correlates with Zenchiku's fourth sphere, that of Likening.

On a more sophisticated level, a viewer may discern that there are essential qualitative differences between the acting of the naive performer and that of a master, differences that clearly go beyond a question of mechanical skill and practical experience. While such a viewpoint affirms that something lies 'behind' the master's performing that is lacking in the naive performer's presentation, this 'something' is often attributed to 'talent' or some other innate attribute that is thought to be absent in the naive performer.

An even more sophisticated viewer will be able to distinguish many subtle differences among performers and recognize that there are not just two types: the talented and the untalented. But again, working only from a viewer's perspective, how these differences arise may remain a total mystery, be attributed to levels of craftsmanship, or become a source for psychological, philosophical, or metaphysical speculation on their cause.

The Secret Tradition writings of Zenchiku and his teacher Zeami together comprise an analysis from the performer's perspective of what lies behind the physicalized performance as perceived by the sophisticated viewer. From the standpoint of Zenchiku's discussion, what distinguishes the naive performer from others is the failure to recognize that acting is not simply a mechanical or rote act but involves intent, so that what is physically performed derives from this intent. Zenchiku correlates the intentional aspects of acting with the 'upper' or first three spheres in his metaphor.

By nature, whatever is physicalized is always specific, be it in acting or in everyday life. In the natural creative cycle, it will be preceded by some conscious or unconscious (reflexive) impulse to perform that specific gesture. In the Zeami-Zenchiku approach, the first task is to bring that phase of the creative cycle into consciousness, as it is the phase during which a performer determines beforehand what he will actually perform. If an actor does not consciously plan what he will specifically do, his performing will be vague, merely mechanical, or left to chance. To bring this phase to consciousness, the noh actor begins his training by developing his skill in fashioning an 'image' of what he will perform, along with his skill in realizing that image through the manipulation of his voice and body as his primary media of expression.<sup>19</sup> This phase in training correlates with the bringing of Zenchiku's third sphere, that of Settling In, into consciousness. In this phase, the actor learns how to 'settle into' the details and feel comfortable with them before he attempts to execute them in an actual performance.

Creative acting, however, involves more than the craft of skilled preparation and execution. How a line is delivered or how a gesture is shaped conveys subtle nuances of feeling and meaning. Such subtleties are part of the intent that underlies and determines what the specifics of the performance will actually be. Actor training, therefore, also involves the development of sensitivity to nuances. This is not only related to the question of interpretation of patterns mastered through technical training; it also concerns the development of the actor's awareness of the intent inherent in what he performs and how his intent shapes the details that make up the creative 'image' that he will bring to life through his performing. While this phase may be correlated to some extent with the development of style, the focus falls on the material to be represented and not upon the idiosyncrasies of the performer, which are sometimes designated 'the actor's style' in Western schools of acting. This phase of intellectual and emotional development of sensitivity to nuance is analogous to Zenchiku's second sphere, that of Arising or Arousal.

Underlying the actor's sensitivity to nuance and recognition of intent is the source from which such intents and nuances arise. In many successful professional performers, this underlying source is never brought to consciousness, since their performing has already proved effective and attractive to viewers. But in the Zeami-Zenchiku tradition, this type of actor is still but a skilled craftsman since he has not yet discovered the source of this creativity, and therefore is not yet performing as a genuine creative artist. When the functioning of this source of the creative impulse is brought to consciousness, it is signaled by a marked change in the quality of the actor's performing. It takes on a vitality and brilliance that unify and enliven the stage presentation. Not only does the character

<sup>19</sup> Several of Zeami's treatises discuss the specific techniques that an actor must master to develop the physical control and mental concentration needed not only to produce a skilled and controlled performance but also to prepare himself for more advanced levels. Zeami's most inclusive treatise on actor training is 'The Mirror of the Flower'—see Mark J Nearman, 'Kakyō: Zeami's Fundamental Principles of Acting', in MN 37:3 (Autumn 1982), pp. 333-74; 37:4 (Winter 1982), pp. 461-96; and 38:1 (Spring 1983), pp. 51-71. Zeami analyzes the various levels of acting in his treatise 'The Nine Levels', in Nearman, *Kyūi*, pp. 299-332.

'come alive' but the stage itself is transformed into the very world in which that character lives. Bringing to consciousness this phase in the natural creative process is associated with Zenchiku's first sphere, that of Perpetual Flow. Development of this phase goes beyond a question of intellectual comprehension or emotional sensitivity. It requires an awakening of a psychospiritual awareness, or perhaps more accurately, a physiospiritual awareness, for this source of the creative impulse may have a degree of 'inner tangibility'.

The part that each of these upper three spheres play in an actor's fashioning of the performance will account for many of the differences that a sophisticated viewer will perceive among performers. Further, Zenchiku assumes that the actor who studies these Secret Tradition writings has already brought these three spheres into conscious play in his own performing. Even so, some levels of acting go beyond that of the 'vitaly fascinating' characterization. According to Zenchiku's later writings, an actor should not undertake the study of these phases until he is in his fifties, as they are not concerned with techniques but with an inner development of the creative spirit. The first of these phases correlates with the fifth sphere, that of Breaking Free, associated with genuine originality and uniqueness in acting. The second is the sixth sphere, the Emptied Sphere, in which the actor discovers how to go beyond any concern with the process of acting to perform simply, honestly, and with a sense of the joy of being.

That which underlies the whole creative process is an 'energy' that can only be intuited, a force as protean as a drop of water, yet as powerful and irresistible as a mighty sword, the images that Zenchiku uses for the 'illimitable' aspect of creativity.

Zenchiku's purpose in exploring the implications of his metaphor throughout his treatises on the subject do not derive from some philosophically motivated curiosity, but from a deeper need to fathom his art and aid his heirs in attaining a level of creativity whose expressions go beyond the superficial interests of craftsmen or those who only seek personal gain. This realm beyond the superficial is referred to as *yūgen* 幽玄, a multivalued term borrowed from poetics by Zeami and his father, and passed on to Zenchiku. It refers to any and all aspects of creative expression that transcend the superficial, the literal, the obvious, or even the intellectually definable, while still remaining within the realm of a viewer's direct experience. Since Zenchiku, like his teacher Zeami, is primarily concerned with the practice of his art, *yūgen* functions as an artistic term rather than an aesthetic one. Hence, 'entering the realm of *yūgen*' becomes a practical goal for the actor. When appearing in the treatises, this term is often rendered for convenience as 'ineffable subtlety' or 'the ineffably subtle'.

Further, these treatises, intended only for perusal and study by those already advanced in the art of acting, contain not only an outline of how genuine creativity works but also the 'secrets' of how an actor (or indeed anyone seeking to be a genuinely creative artist) can discover it within himself. Since the treatises are built upon a highly complex system of analogical correspondences, it is expected that the advanced actor would study them in relation to his own understanding of his practice rather than accept them as dogma.

[*Rokurin Ichiro no Ki Chū* 六輪一露の記注]

## Notes on ‘An Account of the Six Spheres and the Single Dewdrop’]

This treatise, dated 1456, is Zenchiku’s earliest commentary on his exposition of his *rokurin ichiro* metaphor. In this text, he incorporates material drawn from Shigyoku’s and Kanera’s earlier commentaries. He does not seem to borrow from his commentators to justify his assertions, but rather to illustrate how these borrowed ideas are the result of the operation of the process that he attempts to articulate through his metaphor. In subsequent treatises, he moves away from his early dependency on Shigyoku’s Buddhist scholasticism and Kanera’s scholarly erudition.

Only the copy in the Hachizaemon collection has survived.

It says in the commentaries [by Shigyoku and Kanera] to my account of the Six Spheres and the Single Dewdrop that the Sphere of Perpetual Flow is the universe [in principle and manifestation] of the Buddha’s Teaching, and of Confucianism, which [together] express the whole of the matter concerning the creation of Heaven and Earth.

To begin with, the Sphere of Perpetual Flow has the form of ‘Heaven and Earth before they split’. Hence, it is spherical, like a bird’s egg. This sphere is the primal source of all the deities of Shinto. It is a form of the primary life force and the Unborn that is the origin and source of the letter A, as described in the Buddha’s Teachings.<sup>20</sup> This sphere is also the spirit of the way of *The Book of Changes*. As such, it constitutes the level of the Creative, moves the Wheel of Heaven day and night, and exists without a breath’s interruption. The all-encompassing circular form of [the diagram for] this Sphere of Perpetual Flow, then, is [a metaphor for] the spirit that circulates, flowing without ceasing even for a moment.<sup>21</sup>

When taken in relation to acting, [the operation of this first sphere] is responsible for connecting the phrasing of the vocal performing and the recitation as a complete whole. The actor makes his vocal flow a level where a departing phrase constitutes an entering phrase [for what follows].<sup>22</sup> Even though the

<sup>20</sup> In esoteric Buddhist texts the Sanskrit letter A is considered the source or ‘mother’ of all sounds, not unlike the Hebrew letter *aleph*, which represents the opening of the throat in preparation for speech. In turn, the potential for speech that underlies this preparatory letter A is used in Buddhism as a metaphor for That Which is beyond the dualities created by discriminatory mental functions.

<sup>21</sup> That is, even though the first sphere is presented by a static, two-dimensional circle, this diagram is intended to convey the idea of ceaseless movement, a circulation of undifferentiated energy that is omnidirectional, and like a bird’s egg, it contains all that is necessary for the ultimate production of a vital phenomenal manifestation.

<sup>22</sup> That is, even though a phrase pattern used for ending a speech occurs in a recitation, in terms of vocal flow it should be treated as if something more came after it, although that ‘some-



voice is nonexistent apart from the breath, you should make this [stream of exhaled] breath into a string for connecting the voicing of the syllables. For instance, whenever there is a single breath's interruption [in this sense of flow], your recitation loses life. When you do not lose sight of the all-encompassing circular aspect of this sphere, the 'life' of your recitation is prolonged. When your recitation and movement both derive from one and the same [underlying causal agent], this sphere will also be the 'breath' of movement. When you create continuity in whatever you enact through [awareness of] this circular aspect, this too will be the 'life' of movement. It is the receptacle<sup>23</sup> for producing all [created] things. This sphere is the origin and source of [that quality in an art expression called] *yūgen*.

In summary, the Sphere of Perpetual Flow refers to that level of creative activity that underlies not only what is physically manifest but also all creative intents on the part of an artist. It is that which gives continuity, flow, and a sense of unity, interrelationship, and integration to an art expression, regardless of what media are employed.

The artist who is aware of the operation of this creative sphere in his work will find it the true source of that ineffable subtlety called *yūgen*. One who is unaware of its operation is apt to produce a series of discrete acts that lack the underlying unity that Zenchiku equates with the breath and life of an art expression.

Next, the Sphere of Arising. It is equivalent to 'Heaven and Earth already divided' and is the physical expression where the fluctuating of high and low tones is produced as a single creative 'breath'.<sup>24</sup> This sphere is the progenitor of all the deities. It is like those golden waves on the sea of one's own Nature [of which Shigyoku spoke]. Further, [as Kanera observed,] it is the level of 'originating', and as 'the first and chief quality of moral goodness', it is the starting point for the arising of all [created] things. When the season of spring is reached, the vegetation buds. Also, as [the Chinese classic *The Book of Odes*] says, 'Rising and falling on the various tones [of the modal scale], the voice makes a pattern. This is called sound.' This sphere is equivalent to a respectful admiration for what serenely arises and clearly excels. Movement too becomes a living performance that comes into existence beginning with a single creative 'breath' from the moment when [a properly trained actor] shifts from the *jo* phase to the *ha* phase.<sup>25</sup> The feeling [engendered in the audience]

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thing' may be silence. Phrases, therefore, are considered not to have independent existence, but to be part of a 'whole recitation', which is comprised of both sound and silence. In Zenchiku's writings, the character 息 *iki* is his common term for both 'breath' and 'vocal phrase', content easily determining which is intended.

<sup>23</sup> *Utsuwamono* 器物 refers to an artist's 'capacity' for making an art expression manifest and the 'instrument' for creating it, as well as the 'receptacle' or universe in which it will manifest.

<sup>24</sup> *Ikki* 一気 refers to the actor's 'unified creative energy' brought into focus and applied for effecting whatever he does. For a more extensive analysis of this energy and its relation to noh acting, see Nearman, 'Kakyō', pp. 346-49.

<sup>25</sup> Here, Zenchiku equates the *jo* phase with the period of interior preparation that is then made manifest as the *ha* phase by the push of the actor's focused creative energy (his single or

that the spirit of this actor excels in all styles and modes of performing as well as in every spoken syllable and movement of his sleeve arises because all these particulars in his performance will be [products of] this level.

In summary, the Sphere of Arising refers to that level of creative intent where the artist experiences the urge to create that arises from his innate creative energy source. Hence, it is associated with the rising up of the discriminative faculties. When the performer brings the Sphere of Arising into conscious operation, each particular that he will ultimately produce will arise as something relative to a unified and unifying base. Sounds will arise in relation to silence as well as in relation to some base pitch. Likewise, movements will arise in relation to stillness as well as in relation to some basic stance.

An actor who performs without awareness of the operation of this sphere is apt to produce discrete tones or gestures that attempt to accurately reproduce the perceivable elements in a master teacher's performance, but these elements will fail to have a feeling of inner relatedness. Since this inner relatedness derives from the arising of discriminative awareness in the artist, failure to develop this inner sphere results in a performer whose mode of performing always looks the same because it derives from mechanical reproduction rather than from an inner awareness of interrelatedness. Successful cultivation of an actor's discriminative powers is recognized by spectators as artistic versatility and complete control of each moment in the performance.

How an actor develops this discriminative level is the subject of the first six sections of Zeami's treatise *Kakyō*.<sup>26</sup>

On the third level, the Sphere of Settling In, as a form of 'Heaven is Heaven and Earth is Earth', is 'the bringing to completion' [what one will do] in the dwelling place of all images.<sup>27</sup> [As Shigyoku observed,] the myriad phenomena both material and non-material flow by cause and effect. The phenomena of birth-and-death and nirvana manifest here on this level. Also, [as Kanera commented,] 'penetrating' or 'pervading' is the coming together of all that is excellent. The physical expression of the luxuriance of summer vegetation is comparable to this condition where a short vertical line appears in this circular form.

The overall physical appearance of all things is created from this sphere, and it is the miraculous place that causes all performing modes in acting. Hence, when the actor has a 'dwelling place', it is like the disappearing and appearing

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unified 'creative breath'). This use of the terminology of *jo-ha-kyū* 序破急, the tripartite sequential division of various aspects of the noh art, differs from that employed by Zeami (see Nearman, 'Kakyō', pp. 463-68) as well as by Zenchiku in his earlier treatises on acting techniques.

<sup>26</sup> Nearman, 'Kakyō', pp. 343-74.

<sup>27</sup> A similar use of terms appears in Zeami's treatise *Shūgyoku Tokka* 拾玉得花, 'Picking Up Jewels and Gathering Flowers', which he composed specifically for Zenchiku: "'Fulfillment" is synonymous with "to succeed, to become completed" . . . This "fulfillment" is suited to the *jo-ha-kyū* pattern. The reason why is that "to succeed" means "to bring something to completion." If there is no "bringing of things to completion", the minds and hearts of people will not experience fulfillment.' Omote Akira & Katō Shūichi 加藤周一, ed., *Zeami, Zenchiku* 世阿弥, 禅竹 [=zz], Iwanami, 1974, p. 190.

of thoughts in the mind as it naturally shifts its focus. The mind that dwells on some particular point and departs itself there becomes a concealed causal agent by serving as the time [frame] for the various specific actions in a performance.<sup>28</sup>

Now when we shift to the topic of the various modes of performing, this [third] circular form corresponds to what brings about the various particular stage actions. These stage actions constitute the ‘living flesh’ that an actor will manifest in an actual performance. When an actor fails to settle on any of the tones or phonetic sounds [that he will use] and bring the matter to its completion on this level, it is because he has not understood the characteristics of this sphere. When acting corresponds to [the saying in the *Lotus Sutra* that] ‘All things abide in their fixed order; hence, the world abides forever,’ it will consist of moments when the immediacy of ‘the scattering flowers and the falling leaves’ will become synonymous with the constant and imperishable.<sup>29</sup>

When an actor does not understand this ‘native place’ [of his mind’s functioning], he will not recognize the fundamental seed [that produces a vital stage characterization]. His acting will be like a plucked flower [that is cut off before it has fulfilled itself].

In summary, the Sphere of Settling In refers to the level of creative activity where the particulars to be performed are settled on. While these particulars should arise from the operation of the previous two spheres, the process is not automatic. Further, failure to bring this third sphere into action can produce a performance where the actor displays emotionality, but without those emotions being tied to events in the play, as with bombastic acting.

These upper three spheres are supreme levels, the hidden depths of all profound and subtle feelings, and the very essence of Miwa purity.

That is, the upper three spheres encompass everything that precedes what will appear as visible manifestations to the viewer. Altogether, they constitute the levels of inner preparation requisite for a genuinely creative performance. Further, not

<sup>28</sup> This paragraph describes the phenomenon of imaging, in which the actor creates a highly specific mental image of the ‘world’ in which his character resides, and then uses this image as the frame for the specific actions that he performs on stage. Thus, this image informs all the performer’s actions. Manifest actions are modeled upon this image and are associated with the fourth sphere, the Sphere of Likening.

<sup>29</sup> This metaphor refers to the constancy of spring and fall cycles. While the direct experiencing of the spring and fall phenomena has an ever-fascinating immediacy, their regular occurrence can be depended on. Hence, on this level, process and principle are seen to be as one.

Zenchiku’s use of this metaphor probably derives from a passage in Zeami’s *Shūgyoku Tokka*: ‘Someone asked. “What is the essence of impermanency?” The answer, “The scattering flowers and the falling leaves.” Again asking, “What is constant and imperishable?” The answer, “The scattering flowers and the falling leaves.” Even so, there is no deliberate or conscious intent [on the part of the viewer] behind his immediate response of seeing these phenomena as interesting [that is, the viewer’s reaction is spontaneous and unpremeditated.] . . . The actor who has sustained his interest for audiences over many years of experience is for the spectator like seeing “the scattering flowers and the falling leaves” as constants.’ ZZ, p. 186.

only are these three spheres the highest, but they are also the most profound, and the basis of what appears in an art expression as *yūgen*, those subtle effects that seem to transcend the physical manifestation.

The phrase ‘the very essence of Miwa purity’ has a double meaning. When the term 三輪 is read as *miwa*, it refers to a geographical site in Japan sacred for Shinto, as well as to a particular quality associated with a person who has attained a state of spiritual development in which he no longer discriminates among ‘the gift, the giver, and the one given to’. When read as *sanrin*, it refers to the upper three spheres that, when ‘purified’ by the artist’s practical understanding of the functioning in his creative activities, become the essence of his art and resemble ‘Miwa purity’, a term with associations to both Shinto and Buddhism. Zenchiku explores the various meanings of ‘Miwa purity’ in his treatise *Myōshuku Shū* 明宿集, ‘Essays on the Ancient of Days’.<sup>30</sup>

On the fourth level, the Sphere of Likening differentiates and transforms the various ways and varieties of things from the three powers of Heaven, Earth, and Man, and is the totality of universes of every description. Nevertheless, it arises from the three upper spheres and becomes the path for them. In the fullness of its world it resembles the great earth with its mountains and rivers, and all created things whatever. [As Kanera remarked,] this sphere, as the level of ‘bringing into accord’, is also in accord with all things and benefits humans. In the season of autumn, the heads of the five grains droop with ripeness. The fruits of vegetation are bound in sheaths and bunches. The actor’s mental function that conforms itself to these various phenomena, and then arranges and realizes the elements of his recitation and movement, I call the Sphere of Likening. Consequently, [any properly trained actor] will distinguish between youthful voices and elderly sounds, then alter his voice in performing on this specific level of likening to attain those particular qualities [that differentiate the character]. Even so, when his mind [at the same time] functions without forgetting the levels of the upper three spheres, he will create stage performances supreme in their subtlety. The role types of that actor will be within the circle of ‘the subtle path of acting’ even though the various qualities that he exhibits in his acting change from role to role.

In summary, the Sphere of Likening has the potential for the expression of all possibilities that comprise the various ‘worlds’ or ‘universes’ that an actor creates through his performing. Such a universe is the ‘world’ that the actor must create for his character if it is to convey a genuine feeling of ‘being alive’, and this cannot be achieved independently of the functioning of the upper three spheres. Nevertheless, those elements of performing that require technical proficiency are not to be dismissed. But they must be governed by the actor’s consciousness of the deeper levels of mental functioning associated with the

<sup>30</sup> The pertinent passage, with commentary, appears in Mark J Nearman, ‘Behind the Mask of Nō’, in *Mime Journal*, 1984, pp. 45–48. This theme of ‘Miwa purity’, which is also the purity of the functioning of the upper three spheres, occurs in several later treatises.

upper three spheres; otherwise, the performance may have technical brilliance, but will lack the requisite subtlety (*yūgen*) that transforms craft into art.

The actor who has attained the level of performing that Zenchiku advocates will be able to maintain variety among the characters that he creates, but without losing their essential identity for the viewer. For example, each young warrior role that he plays will be different, yet none of his characterizations will fail to appear as a ‘young warrior’ to the audience.

In short, the actor who has made use of a creative mental image as the basis for his acting is one whose mind is functioning in compliance with Zenchiku’s fourth sphere.

On the fifth level, the Sphere of Breaking Free, everything phenomenal, in any case, changes or breaks apart, yet the all-encompassing receptacle of Heaven and Earth never changes. Turbulent times return to peaceful times, and what is broken apart is invariably wrought into something else. It is a [constant] revolving of the sequence of materializing, abiding for a while, disintegrating, and [returning to] the Void, materializing, abiding for a while, disintegrating, and [returning to] the Void. This sphere, as the level of ‘undergoing extinguishing’, is the level where ‘what is subject to the birth-and-death cycle, accordingly, changes into nirvana’ and where ‘the passions are equivalent to enlightenment’. When taken on the level of ‘being true’, [as Kanera indicated,] it becomes the causal agent of creating as the faculty for producing actions. It is the basis of all that is created. When taken as one of the four seasons, it is winter when all plants yellow, their leaves fall, and their energy returns to their roots. Yet, even though it is said that the actor’s behaving as he pleases by ‘destroying’ the characteristics of a sphere, he does not depart from the underlying purport of the upper three spheres. It is said, ‘At seventy, although I desire what my heart follows, I do not transgress the natural law.’<sup>31</sup> Even though such an actor moves and works his miming with considerable vigor, he does not depart from an overall tranquil artistic expression that is associated with a high level of acting. The power of his voice, distinct in quality and highly individual in its modes of performing, creates a feeling in the audience of subtle pleasingness.<sup>32</sup> Further, his innovative shifts in his style of moving attain an ephemerally graceful performance quality.

In summary, all phenomenal manifestations, however substantial they may appear, are mutable and will, in time, change and disintegrate, but this principle of mutability, itself not being a phenomenon, does not change. Further, even

<sup>31</sup> This statement is based on a line in the Confucian *Analecets*, 2:4: ‘At seventy I follow what my heart desires, without transgressing the natural law.’ Editors have usually revised Zenchiku’s version to conform to the Confucian text on the assumption that a copyist’s error has been made. But Zenchiku may have deliberately revised the statement as his later discussion of the Fifth Sphere in both versions of his *Rokurin Ichiro Hichū* 六輪一露秘注 suggests.

<sup>32</sup> *Yūbi* 幽美, ‘subtle pleasingness’, implies that the ‘beauty’ of the actor’s voice does not reside in some identifiable richness or resonance of tone, but in the subtle effect that the voice has on the listener, an effect that comes from deeper levels of expressiveness that charm and captivate without calling attention to the vocal instrument itself.

though the phenomenal contents may alter, the totality of universes, being all, cannot increase or decrease. This fifth sphere is associated with the Buddhist concept of spiritual realization wherein the practitioner breaks free from being fettered to the phenomenal world, while at the same time recognizing that such a state of freedom does not exclude the phenomenal world.

The comment that Zenchiku has adopted from Kanera derives its relevance from the significance of the original text in *The Book of Changes*. The four qualities of the Creative—namely, creating, penetrating, bringing into accord, and being true—that Kanera assigned in his commentary to the second through the fourth spheres, form a cycle. Hence, when an actor has attained the creative freedom associated with the fifth sphere, he is in control of ‘the wheel of creativity’, and this creatively free control permits the actor to start the cycle again, beginning with ‘creating’. However, he is still subject to the first sphere, which is the Source of his creativity. The artist who loses sight of this opens himself to self-indulgent artistic license in the mistaken notion that he is practicing artistic freedom. No matter how original the advanced actor’s performances may be, no matter how much they may seem to ‘break the rules’, his overall performing will still display the gracefulness, charm, pleasingness, and ease characteristic of the finest acting.

On the sixth level, the Emptied Sphere, ‘the world’ is totally annihilated and becomes null when the three great calamities [from fire, water, and wind] occur. This sphere is also a form that arrives at the original beginning. Further, the Absolute is the principle of excess, and the vastness of Heaven and Earth also arise from this principle of the Absolute. Being completely enlightened is the same as the state of unenlightenment. The artistic expression that arrives at the Sphere of Perpetual Flow by having gone to the utmost is truly on the level of ‘becoming [artistically] successful and attaining a reputation’,<sup>33</sup> and is the seminal cause that leaves behind a flower blossoming upon an old tree. All representational things having completely withered away, the actor, faintly youthful, returns to the place where he germinates just a single sound and a single gesture for the first time. Accordingly, it has become the original circle.

In summary, ‘the world’ of which Zenchiku speaks refers, on a practical level, to the one created by the actor on stage. The general reference is to the way in which mentally created forms that are projected out and declared to be ‘the world’ are ultimately disposed of. These ‘mind forms’ break apart and are ‘annihilated’ by being metaphorically burned up, washed away, or blown away. This psychological action appears to leave the mind blank or totally empty of specific content. But when it is realized that this void is actually the whole universe of creative possibilities, then the actor and his audience have once again arrived at the first sphere whose symbolic diagram is the same as the one for the sixth.

These three elemental instruments of ‘annihilation’ correspond to the modes

<sup>33</sup> Originally derived from the writings of the Chinese Taoist philosopher Lao-tzu 老子, this phrase appears often in the treatises of Zenchiku and Zeami in reference to the professional actor who has attained over the years a solid reputation for brilliant acting.

of performing that Zenchiku has associated with the fifth sphere. Through increasing the vigor of his performing, but without losing the ease, grace, and sense of control or ‘tranquillity’, the actor produces stage effects that transcend the representational aspect characteristic of the fourth sphere. An actor whose performance brings the fifth sphere into manifestation might be described by a viewer as one projecting great warmth or carrying his audience along in the flood or whirlwind of his expression.

Such a strong emotional performance differs from that produced by the kind of actor that Zeami describes in his treatise *Kyūi* as performing on the eighth level of acting, who is like a tiger cub three days old ready to devour an ox.<sup>34</sup> That is, Zenchiku’s actor is one who has already mastered his technique, and has moved free of a level of exhibitionism, and thence is operating on Zeami’s second level of acting, characterized by a profoundly warm and loving mode of creative expression. The representational aspects have disappeared as the significant elements of his performing, and what remains is simply the sounds and gestures presented one at a time, just as the actor had done when he first began his acting training. This closely resembles the effect arising when the actor, in Zeami’s words, ‘does not forget the beginner’s spirit in old age.’<sup>35</sup> It also correlates with Zeami’s idea of the well-seasoned, advanced actor who returns to the lower levels of acting.<sup>36</sup>

The Single Dewdrop that lies deep within all the spheres is, graciously, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and is the vital energy that gives birth to all creation. [As Shigyoku observed,] the immovable firmness of this mysterious principle corresponds to the Sword of Spiritual Benefit of [the Bodhisattva of Steadfastness] Fudō as well as Monju’s Sword of Deepest Wisdom. Further, [as Kanera] said,

Up to [the sixth sphere of] the Absolute, one is not free from the two aspects of thinking and feeling. Reaching the Illimitable, one is free of beautiful but empty words, and does not keep within the bounds of manifold thought. As Chung Yung said, ‘It is beyond speaking of, beyond sensing,’ and is the temperament behind disciple Tsan’s single ‘Yes!’ and behind Tsang’s father Tien’s bathing in the River I.

Even though the [true] substance of material things is not seen, this Single Dewdrop is the animating spirit that keeps guard over all modes of performing and is the Sword of Spirit that brushes aside the myriad hindrance. A single sound, a single gesture, a single character, all are [expressions of] this energy. This sword transforms itself into the Great All-encompassing Mirror Wisdom. This is perfect serenity and clarity, regardless of perspective.

The contradictory image of a dewdrop that is also a sword carries implications.

<sup>34</sup> Nearman, ‘*Kyūi*’, pp. 309–10.

<sup>35</sup> Nearman, ‘*Kakyō*’, pp. 70–71.

<sup>36</sup> Mark J Nearman, ‘*Kyakuraika*: Zeami’s Final Legacy for the Master Actor’, in MN 35:2 (Summer 1980), pp. 169–78.

The dewdrop as water represents the irresistible force, that which in Taoist thought is considered the strongest element since it always gives way yet, by erosion, can ultimately wear away even the most solid of substances. The sword as the diamond-cutting edge of Spiritual Wisdom is at the same time the immovability of the steadfast. In other words, that which underlies the whole of the creative process (represented by the six spheres) can be seen as partaking of the qualities of both metaphors, seeming at times to be completely yielding and at others to be immovable.

‘The Great All-encompassing Mirror Wisdom’ is a Buddhist term for the naturally enlightened state of one’s mind: one’s Original Face before the duality of Father-and-Mother arises.

Notwithstanding these observations, by using the phrase ‘the Six Spheres and the Single Dewdrop’, this aspect called the Great Mirror Wisdom has not been revealed. Even though this Primal Wisdom supplies the operational rules for each of these seven stages, It is [simultaneously] the Sword of One’s Original Nature that has returned to the non-dualistic Mind, the intent that pervades all since it is also the One, and the [expressed] form that reveals the principal level as a mirror. Hence, the situation arises where these three attributes—one’s Original Nature, intent, and form—are not fashioned into a sequence [but operate simultaneously].

<i>masu kagami</i>	The crystal-clear mirror:
<i>ura wo katachi no</i>	know that which lies behind it
<i>omote nite</i>	by means of the appearance of its reflected forms
<i>omote wo ura no</i>	as well as what is upon its face
<i>hikari to mo shire</i>	by means of the Light that lies behind it. <sup>37</sup>

To gather the chief points and catch the essence of the remarks above:

One, the Sphere of Perpetual Flow. [In a master actor’s performing,] the recitational phrasing is of an all-encompassing circular pattern, and the look of his movements likewise links the beginning and the end of the first circle [to create an all-embracing whole]. There is a front and a back to this [mirror-like] circular form. To be transmitted later.

Zenchiku plays upon various meanings of *rin* in this paragraph. It refers to the first and primal ‘sphere’ of creative activity. This sphere is represented by a ‘circle’, implying something that is ‘all-embracing’ and ‘all-encompassing’. It is what gives a performance a sense of wholeness and overall unity. But this circle is not something static or rigid, but like a ‘wheel’ in motion circles to create a sense of dynamic flow.

By contrast, in some Western schools of acting, such as the one promulgated by Konstantin Stanislavski, unity in performing is achieved by relating all elements of a performance to a ‘through line of action’. Such an approach, however, is more suitable to strictly naturalist or realist forms of representational

<sup>37</sup> This poem by Zenchiku appears in slightly revised forms in several of his later treatises.



theatre. While Zenchiku's phenomenology of acting does not exclude such a straight-line, causal factor, his analysis does not limit aesthetic wholeness exclusively to a dependency on psychological motivation. Hence, it provides a broader, more universal approach to the matter of aesthetic unity.

Two, the Sphere of Arising. [From the operation of this level] two aspects will appear [in a master actor's performing]: the patterns by which the cool, crystalline clarity of this actor's reciting becomes preeminent in the theatre, and the feeling in the audience of the supremely subtle in the appearance of his movements.

The 'cool, crystalline clarity' renders *hienobori* 冷上り, literally, 'what has become thoroughly chilled'. The term appears in Zenchiku's and Zeami's treatises as designating a highly favorable state in acting. Although not specifically defined by either writer, the term in context points to two qualities: a toning down or 'cooling down' of the surface manifestation of emotions so as not to dissipate inner intensity, and the making of details in performance specific and clear. Both qualities are essential for creating a feeling of subtlety in performing.

Three, the Sphere of Settling In. Not one line, one word, or even one aesthetic effect of his recitation and movement is haphazard. It is the marvelous place where all his intended actions are settled or regulated and come to completion on that level.

Four, the Sphere of Likening. Even on this level where he arranges and discriminates [among the elements in his performance] so that his modes of performing with sound and his acts of gesturing become the various particulars [expressive of his stage character], he does not forget the upper three spheres of the higher levels of acting.

Five, the Sphere of Breaking Free. Even though he may bellow or make unexpected, innovative shifts in his manner of moving, he does not naturally exceed the bounds of the effects of the upper three spheres. Although called 'breaking [free]', his acting is still contained within this sphere.

Six, the Emptied Sphere. He has gone to the utmost so that his reciting and movements completely wither away [in importance], and the appearance of his acting is as if flowers blooming on an old tree have been left behind.<sup>38</sup> The appearance of these flowering moments is rare and becomes without any identifiable external characteristics, as his acting returns to the original Sphere of Perpetual Flow.

The Single Dewdrop is the vital spirit that links these six spheres [like a warrior's sword pierces through target rings].

You must understand how these seven items, one and all, are inherent in

<sup>38</sup> That is, his performing is such as to make even the most familiar moments in a play seem ever fresh.

each creative intent, each mode of performing, each syllable, and each pose. Yes, this must be understood! The overall appearance of the character portrayed [upon its entrance], its completeness and subtlety in form and spirit, comprise the Sphere of Perpetual Flow.

That is, when an actor first enters stage in character, the audience should sense a ‘completeness’ about the stage figure. The actor should be so ‘in character’ that there is no sense of ‘two worlds’, one in which the character exists and the other in which the actor attempts to maintain with his audience his identity as actor independent of the character. If the actor succeeds, the audience will feel a sense not only of wholeness in the physical appearance (or outer consistency) but also of an inner identity.

The audience’s awareness of both the inner and outer identity, however, will not be due to symbolic gestures or some aspect, such as a manner of walking or an item of clothing, but to what appears as an indefinable quality that comes through the appearance, which is spoken of as being ‘ineffably subtle’ (*yūgen*).

Then he speaks. The power of his tones is at its height and his performing is cooled down and crystalline clear as with the Distant White Style:<sup>39</sup> these establish the Sphere of Arising. The actor resides at ease in this spirit. Thus, he [inwardly] comes to rest and settles into the Sphere of Settling In.

These three layers occupy the place of honor [in the master actor’s art] and constitute the supreme power of the ineffably subtle. It is the level where his spirit resides at ease in the realm of the ineffably subtle, even for the moving of a sleeve by a single finger, the styling of a single pose, the stamping of a single foot, the shaping of a single sound. So also, the five sections of a dance are well governed by this spirit.

When [a master actor] practices the various and sundry manifestations of the Sphere of Likening while his three mental functions [associated with the three upper spheres] remain at their utmost ease, this ease will be inherent in the performing levels of the highest effects.<sup>40</sup>

After that, [the master actor,] functioning in the Sphere of Breaking Free, descends to the lower levels<sup>41</sup> and deliberately creates any effect that he may choose. He may perform in a highly unusual manner, or do his actions as a

<sup>39</sup> An allusion to one of the poetic styles discussed in *Sangoki* 三五記, ‘Notes [on Poetic Styles, Written at the Time] of the Full Moon in September’, characterized by great inner passion accompanied by an outer reserve, as though one were on shore looking at huge whitecaps far out at sea. *Sangoki*, a medieval treatise attributed at one time to Fujiwara Teika 藤原定家, 1162–1241, presents ten major poetic styles (plus a number of substyles) with illustrative poems, each of which is distinguished by the feeling tone (indicated by the style name) that is the foundation for what the given poem expresses and is to evoke in its audience.

<sup>40</sup> This final phrase refers to Zeami’s highest three levels of acting, which are accessible only to the master actor. Nearman, ‘*Kyūi*’, pp. 318–25.

<sup>41</sup> The lowest three of Zeami’s nine levels of acting that constitute the innate qualities that untrained actors rely on. The professional actor must transcend them first through mastery of technique and craft and then through a creative breakthrough.

child might perform them, or reproduce the actions of a completely demonic being,<sup>42</sup> thereby creating a stage expression that shatters [what are considered] the basic styles of acting. Even so, without placing stress on these acts or coloring them, he will be just like a court lady playfully mimicking the actions of someone on a lower social level.<sup>43</sup>

Even though he performs those acts completely and his acting is ‘beyond a question of style and beyond one of making superficial patterns’, this level lends a redolence and a luminosity to his performing. This level of acting is considered to correspond to the Emptied Sphere.

The One Dewdrop is the vital spirit that sustains these levels of mind.

These six spheres and single dewdrop above not only record my understanding of the spirit of my master [Zeami’s] instructions. Their purport that I realized during a spiritual retreat at the temple of the Great Bodhisattva Kanzeon at Hatsuse is an explication of the skillful means of Kannon for the spiritual benefit of all sentient beings and a way of exhortational instruction for all living beings. Therefore, I have also named these the Six Wheels of Kannon.

On a fortunate day in the First Month of Kōshō 2 [1456]

HADA NO UJINOBU [monogram]

The heart of the Six Spheres.

*tama wo nashite  
kari no kusaba ni  
noboriotsuru  
hana mo chirinaba  
moto no shiratsuyu*

Even though the blossom that nods  
upon the transitory blades of grass  
where forms this jewel  
must end by scattering away,  
the dewdrop will return to its Source.<sup>44</sup>

The traveler in *Kantan*

And his pillow of blossoming glory,  
The courtesan in *Eguchi*  
And her vessel of poetry and dance.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> In the Zeami-Zenchiku tradition, the student was trained to play demon roles so that they had something human about them, rather than being purely demonic.

<sup>43</sup> That is, he does not call the audience’s attention to these moments or ‘comment’ on them by acting as if he were superior to them.

<sup>44</sup> A poem by Zenchiku, containing allusions to Zeami’s treatise, *Shūgyoku Tokka*. The ‘blossoms’ refer to creatively vital performances that by their nature are transitory. The ‘jewel’ of dew represents a burst of creative brilliance that accompanies such performances. Although this jewel is likewise evanescent, its energy nevertheless returns to that creative source, which Zenchiku has associated with the Sphere of Perpetual Flow.

<sup>45</sup> A couplet in Chinese by Sōgen, included in his commentary in praise of Zenchiku’s acting of these two roles.

*toshi tsuki wa  
makura ni suguru  
yume no yo no  
utsuru mo shiranu  
mizu no ukifune*

Over the months and years  
upon my pillow flows past  
the world of dreams,  
yet without realizing its shiftings  
I drift like a barque upon its waters.<sup>46</sup>

Item:<sup>47</sup> The nature is of the mind; the levels are of the body. Effects exist within these.

Intuition and reason. Poetry and dance. Recitation. Performance effects. Intonational line. Aesthetic effects. Rhythm. Voice. Breath. Mouth. Within, throat, tongue, lips.

The gesturing of hands, the stamping of feet. Dancing. The Dance of the Heavenly Maiden. The dance of mortals. Social conditions. The conditions of appearance. The conditions of the body. Styles effected.

*To be continued.*

<sup>46</sup> A poem by Zenchiku containing allusions to two roles for which Zenchiku was famous: *Kantan* 邯鄲, in which a young man in a spiritual dilemma, having slept upon a magic pillow and dreamed of his possible future if he were to choose a worldly path, awakens and decides to follow a spiritual path as a monk; and *Ukifune* 浮舟, the central character whose name means 'The Floating Barque'.

<sup>47</sup> This closing section appears to be notes for his later treatises.