



Developing Zeami: The Noh Actor's Attunement in Practice

Shelley Fenno Quinn

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The great noh actor, theorist, and playwright Zeami Motokiyo (ca. 1363-1443) is one of the major figures of world drama. His critical treatises have attracted international attention ever since their publication in the early 1900s. His corpus of work and ideas continues to offer a wealth of insights on issues ranging from the nature of dramatic illusion and audience interest to tactics for composing successful plays to issues of somaticity and bodily training. Shelley Fenno Quinn's impressive interpretive examination of Zeami's treatises addresses all of these areas as it outlines the development of the playwright's ideas on how best to cultivate attunement between performer and audience. Quinn begins by tracing Zeami's transformation of the largely mimetic stage art of his father's troupe into a theater of poesis in which the playwright and actors aim for performances wherein dance and chant are re-keyed to the evocative power of literary memory. Synthesizing this remembered language of stories, poems, phrases, and their prosodies and associated auras with the flow of dance and chant led to the creation of a dramatic prototype that engaged and depended on the audience as never before. Later chapters examine a performance configuration created by Zeami (the nikyoku santai) as articulated in his mature theories on the training of the performer. Drawing on possible reference points from Buddhist and Daoist thought, the author argues that Zeami came to treat the nikyoku santai as a set of guidelines for bracketing the subjectivity of the novice actor, thereby allowing the actor to reach a certain skill level or threshold from which his freedom as an artist might begin.

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