

**LINKING MASKS WITH MAJORA:**  
***THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK AND NOH THEATER***

by

Sterling Anderson Osborne

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Swanstrom, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

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The field of video game studies is young and requires innovation in its approach to its object of study. Despite the large number of Japanese games and game developers, most scholars in the West approach video games from a point of view that emphasizes Western thought and that is concerned with either very recent video games or the medium as a whole. *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* defies Western interpretations as its inspiration and aesthetics are steeped in a Japanese theatrical tradition that dates to the early Middle Ages, namely Noh theater. The game's emphasis on masks and possession provides unique commentary on the experience of playing a video game while the structure of the game harkens back to traditional Noh cycles, tying in pre-modern ideas with a modern medium in order to comment on video games and the people who play them.

For Mumma, Sarah, and Max

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## **INTRODUCTION: AN UNCOMMON APPROACH TO VIDEO GAME STUDIES**

In his essay “Some Notes on Aesthetics in Japanese Video Games,” William Huber describes a trend<sup>1</sup> in Western video game development: “videogame development is nearing the apogee of a progression to perfect realism that will lose prescriptive force as technology and production processes make photorealism technically trivial” (212). He goes on to say that “what we might reluctantly describe as ‘the Japanese aesthetic tradition’ does not track this model at all.” Instead, he describes a set of cultural aesthetics foreign to the West that appears in Japanese video games. Some of the aesthetics he mentions have equivalents in Western thought—*mono no aware*, the “feeling of things” is similar to the Greek concept of *pathos*, and *sabi* can be compared to melancholy or nostalgia. However, the cultural psychology behind each of the concepts his essay details is different from that underlying Western ideas. At the end of his essay, Huber describes how some of these concepts and the traditions associated with them have made their way into Japanese video games. This, the influence of Japanese culture upon video games, is a rare topic in video game studies, a field dominated by Western scholarship and ideas. Huber’s essay poses an implicit challenge to video game scholars to approach video games from Japan and other Eastern countries with an eye for their cultural roots. This thesis takes up this challenge, using Huber’s essay to analyze *The Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask*, an important cultural artifact that many Westerners can miss. I argue that the game draws not only aesthetic inspiration from traditional Noh theater, but that the game structures its entire virtual world according to Noh ontology

and patterns key actions of the player-participant according to Noh ritual. Noh theater is more than entertainment, as we might think of theater in the West. Noh embodies traditional Japanese views of the world as a sacred space, alive with spirits which inhabit various objects and places and with whom the living individual is obliged to interact. While parallels do exist between *Majora's Mask* and Noh theater, it is important to keep in mind that the game does not allegorize its cultural roots. Nevertheless, the game stands as an ambitious project that creates nothing less than a virtual bridge between traditional Japanese culture and the modern technological culture shared by the East and West.

This comparison may seem odd at first. Video games and video game studies are a relatively new phenomenon while Noh theater and its critics date back to the Middle Ages. Scholarship on video games is predominantly the endeavor of Western scholars who approach the medium from various Western traditions despite the fact that much of the hardware and software on the market originated and was developed in Japan. Although the field of video game studies has far to go before it reaches the current status of film studies and lags further behind literary criticism, both of these earlier fields of study have much to contribute to a theory of gaming. Film and literary studies, along with scholarship in the field of ludology, provide tools for taking an analytical approach to video games (Bradford 55). One scholar has noted that video games “demonstrate the propensity of emerging media forms to pattern themselves on the characteristic behaviors and tendencies of their predecessors” (Rehak 104). In their introduction to *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, Bernard Perron and J.P. Wolf describe video game studies as moving from an ontological approach of study to a methodological approach—that is, scholars are asking less and less what a video game is and seeking for the “correct” way

to analyze them (10). Considering the differences in aesthetics in different cultures—not just in the arbitrarily defined “East” and “West” —is of considerable importance when taking into account a game’s cultural context and also contributes to an analysis of its features, narrative elements, gameplay style, etc.

This is not to say that the cultural context in which a video game is made is the only thing to consider when analyzing it. Many of the more popular video games today are part of larger franchises or series and the analysis of one installment may be aided by an analysis of another within the series. In addition to a game’s place within its respective franchise, there are multiple real-world cultures to take into account when examining the various elements of a game, ranging from the culture in which the game is rooted to the fan culture that provides more analysis<sup>2</sup> of it than even formal scholarship. Additionally, an analysis of a video game must also include a formal examination of its components. Again, as Wolf and Perron point out,

One has also to ask what exactly is being analyzed, since the video game is such a multi-layered phenomenon...How much of a game is it necessary to see to draw a conclusion? What is being analyzed—the graphics and sound, the interface, interactions, the structure of the game’s world, the storyline or lack thereof, the experience of the player, the sociocultural impact of the experience, even the physical impact of the experience?

How is analysis affected if one or more of these is left out? (11)

These questions imply a study of a particular game or, at most, a small group of games, perhaps two or three. It should be noted that very few articles in video game studies focus on one particular game—most are concerned with theorizing about the experience of

playing video games and how to apply theory to various types of video games. Marie-Laure Ryan has pointed out that the most striking feature of the study of digital textuality is “the precedence of theory over the object of study” (1). This is also true for video game studies and can be problematic. A preoccupation with theory may result in a scholar overlooking important aspects of a particular video game, even overlooking how that video game may speak to the experience of playing video games. Game structure, controls, story, and cultural elements may pass right under a scholar’s nose if he is preoccupied with fitting a particular game into a category. This is not to say that theory should not be applied, only that it can go so far before it exhausts itself, usually without addressing most, if not all, of the questions that Wolf and Perron pose.

Taking these questions and considerations into account, I have opted to analyze *The Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask*.<sup>3</sup> The *Zelda* franchise<sup>4</sup> is one of the earliest in which players are encouraged to explore notions of identity in the video game medium. It has been debated<sup>5</sup> which perspective gives a deeper immersive experience in video games involving avatars, but whatever the player’s experience is with an avatar, there is still a “duality of the playing subject, who is both outside and inside the game” (Bradford 59). The games in the *Legend of Zelda* series have exemplified this idea since the developmental stages of the first installment:

We named the protagonist Link because he connects people together...Link came from his role as a connector, but Link is you, the player. The series has been so successful because the player must solve puzzles and defeat tough enemies in order to ultimately save the world. (Miyamoto 3)<sup>6</sup>

*Majora's Mask* takes the concept of connecting, and even equating, the avatar to the player to an exponential level from beginning to end with its motif of masks and the structure of the game and game world. The interface used with other *Zelda* games has also taken a large role in their development: "We have even designed the controllers themselves with the *Zelda* games in mind, and I feel that the Wii MotionPlus and the Nunchuck [accessories for the Wii console] are ideal for *Skyward Sword*" (3). Shigeru Miyamoto, the creator of the *Zelda* series and franchise, emphasizes the controllers when discussing the apparatuses used for playing the *Zelda* games, but *Majora's Mask* makes interesting and unique use of the television as well as the controller. During certain cut-scenes<sup>7</sup>, clever placement of the in-game camera makes of the television a mirror into which the player may gaze at their avatar staring back at him or her. These types of cut-scenes occur frequently and suggest the experience of the Noh actor who gazes at his masked face in the theater dressing room (the "mirror room") in order to blend his personality with that of the spirit inhabiting the mask.

*Majora's Mask* is a Japanese video game. Its structure, motifs, aesthetics, and themes all have their roots in Japanese culture, so much so that it is easy for foreign audiences to miss the cultural references due to a lack of sensitivity to them. Each of these aspects of the game (structure, motifs, etc.) shall be explored throughout this essay, but the most prominent aspect of the game's narrative elements can be found in the game's connections with Noh theater. For its part, fan culture and scholarship alike have ignored this aspect of the game when analyzing its elements. Books like *The Legend of Zelda and Theology* and *The Legend of Zelda and Philosophy: I Link Therefore I Am* not only show the cultural importance of the *Zelda* franchise, but also provide interesting

interpretations of the games in the series as well as educational insights into philosophy and Christian theology through considerations of certain elements of the games.

However, the articles in these books are predominantly Western in their thought. This is especially evident in *The Legend of Zelda and Theology*, in which the editor explicitly states that one of the intentions of the book is “that these articles clarify and provide you with a better understanding of *why* Christians believe what we believe” (Walls 13). Fan culture has offered analyses of certain elements of *Majora’s Mask*—the nature of the titular final boss, the five major locations in the game’s diegesis—but those fan theories also rely upon Western ideas and literary theories. The parallels that this particular video game has with Noh theater are too abundant and explicit to be coincidence, and to apply certain ideas where they do not fit a text or where they need not apply to a text may result in incomplete analyses, however interesting they may be.

Note also that *Majora’s Mask* also involves the player playing as an avatar. The concept of the avatar has been given considerable attention, most of which is rooted in Western thought. Analyses of the video game avatar from a scholarly perspective have been largely written without consideration for the cultural context of the particular games in which the avatar is found. Scholars have been more interested in what the avatar is and how the avatar relates to the player. These are important considerations in themselves, but my research has shown that different cultures will have different answers to questions about the relationship between the two, a matter that I shall also address in the course of this thesis.

One of the translators of the game has stated in his journal, posted online at Nintendo.com, that *Majora’s Mask* is a game about relationships: “As much as it is about

exploring dungeons, *Majora's Mask* is about helping people. You spend a lot of time changing the courses of many lives, like a man who was wronged by a thief, a ranch girl whose cows are terrorized by aliens and a Goron baby who won't stop crying" (Leung). Here Leung describes various events found in the game's three-day timeframe; much of the game is about "helping people" within that three-day timeframe. Relationships are important within the game's diegesis in terms of relations between its characters, but the game also emphasizes the relationship between the player and the game's avatar in unique and thought-provoking ways. However, there is a more profound concept underlying the game than relationships between people, one that takes more of the game into account than its "sidequests" and in-game interactions. *Majora's Mask* is about reflection. This is seen literally in the relationship(s) between the player and their avatar(s) through the apparatuses used to play the game: the television which functions at times as a mirror and the controller which allows for a nearly one-to-one correspondence between the player's button pressing and Link's actions. The game's theme of reflection is also evident practically in the course of gameplay, especially with the game's emphasis on time and masks, and philosophically in the questions asked by the game (both explicitly and implicitly) and the philosophies of Noh found throughout the game. More than any other video game I have played, *Majora's Mask* provides a meta-commentary on the experience of playing a video game through its structure, its philosophies, and its address of the player throughout the course of gameplay. This meta-commentary, when read aright, provides important keys to a full interpretation of the game and any theory that would account for the experience of participating in it.

In the following pages, I shall explore the major elements of the game—the

masks, the game's structure, and the game's overall feel (its *mono no aware*) and philosophy—pointing out the parallels between these aspects of the game and the various elements and traditions associated with Noh theater. In the first chapter, “Masks in *Majora's Mask* and Noh Theater,” I shall explore the motif of masks in *Majora's Mask*. I shall point out the imagery and phenomena associated with the masks in the game and connect these to the ideas about masks rooted in Noh theater. In the second chapter, “Structure,” I shall point out how the classical Noh play cycle informed the structure of *Majora's Mask's* diegesis and plot. Having established these connections between the game and its cultural roots, I shall have a grounding to explain “the game's overall feel” and philosophy by exploring certain narrative elements not covered in my explorations of masks and structure. The narrative elements I intend to explore give the game its themes of remorse, regret, and redemption, themes which are also common and emphasized in Noh theater.



## CHAPTER 1: MASKS IN *MAJORA'S MASK* AND NOH THEATER

### Transformative Masks

On its surface, *Majora's Mask* appears very much like a traditional *Zelda* game albeit with a few strange gameplay elements and a story that is uncommon for the franchise. It was released by Nintendo in 2000 for their Nintendo64 console as a follow-up to their popular 1998 title, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. The game is a direct sequel to *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* and, like its predecessors, is presented as a quest that involves exploration, puzzle-solving, and the accrual of various items and weapons for the purpose of defeating an evil antagonist. This particular quest does not involve the usual *Zelda* trope of saving the princess. Instead, *Majora's Mask* is “a secret and personal journey” for Link, the protagonist of this and other *Zelda* games (Nintendo EAD). While searching for a lost friend, Navi the fairy, in a forest, he is attacked by an imp called Skull Kid and two fairies, Tatl and Tael. Skull Kid, who is wearing *Majora's Mask*, steals Link's Ocarina of Time, a magical instrument that allows Link to manipulate time when he plays it, and Link's horse, Epona. Link gives chase and ends up in a land called Termina where he befriends Tatl and meets a man known as the Happy Mask Salesman. The Salesman tasks Link with retrieving *Majora's Mask* within three days. Coincidentally, Skull Kid and *Majora's Mask* are magically calling the moon out of orbit to crash into Termina by the end of three days. In order to stop the moon and retrieve the mask, Link must venture into four regions of Termina and free a captive giant in each region. The giants, who are Termina's guardians, help by holding up the moon,

giving Link a chance to retrieve Majora's Mask from Skull Kid by defeating Majora, the evil spirit within the mask. The game is obviously a fantasy, but even certain superficial elements of the story such as the magical qualities of Majora's Mask hint at the game's roots in Noh theater.

Based on its title alone, it can be assumed that at least one mask in *Majora's Mask* will play an important role in the game. Within an hour of play, however, players of *Majora's Mask* find out just how prominent and important the motif of masks is in this game. Masks are found everywhere: in the opening sequence, hanging on walls, worn upon peoples' faces, given as gifts. Even the major bosses of the game are described as being "masked" in their onscreen descriptions (Nintendo EAD). The person who assigns to Link and the player the major task of the game—to retrieve Majora's Mask for him from Skull Kid—is called the "Happy Mask Salesman." There are twenty-four obtainable masks in the game, each with a different purpose and effect. Some are used for sidequests that yield a life energy increasing heart piece, while others transform Link into a completely different species giving him a new body and new abilities. The game shares this preoccupation with masks with Noh theater which has its roots in the religion indigenous to Japan, Shinto.

Noh plays were originally "performed in a building belonging to a shrine, and the actors, then as today, were participants in a rite" (Keene 20). Keene says elsewhere that

Noh begins with a mask, and within the mask the presence of a god.

Before a performance of *Okina*, the mask to be worn is displayed in the dressing room and honored with ritual salutations. When the actors have filed onto the stage and taken their places, one called the Mask Bearer

offers the mask of *Okina* to another, who prostrates himself in reverence before accepting it. The *Okina* mask is unlike that for any other role; though its features are those of a benevolent old man and not a fearsome being, they are nonetheless a god's, and performing this role, devoid though it is of emotion or special displays of technique, is considered so arduous as to shorten the life of the actor. (19)

This reverence for the mask used for *Okina* as well as the ritual surrounding it speaks to key elements of *Majora's Mask*: transformation of the person wearing a mask, possession by the spirit of a mask, and the unity of the personalities of the wearer and the spirit of the mask. I shall explore each of these in turn.

It is with the type of mask that transforms Link that I am most concerned. These transformative masks are necessary to complete the game and are obtained during key moments in the game's narrative. There are five in total, and one of them can only be obtained after all of the other obtainable masks in the game have been won through adventuring and sidequesting. The transformative masks are different from the other masks in the game in that they alter Link's physical shape and usually give a different set of commands for the player to work with. The first three that are obtained—the Deku Mask, the Goron Mask, and the Zora Mask—are the most used masks in the game. Each of them are necessary for navigating the large portions of the diegesis which correspond to the masks themselves: the Deku Mask allows Link to stand on lily pads and launch out of Deku flowers in the Southern Swamp, the Goron Mask allows Link to roll up steep slopes and race over icy terrain in the Snowhead mountain range, and the Zora Mask enables Link to swim swiftly and dive into the deep ocean waters of Great Bay. The other

two masks are made less for a particular environment and more for battle: the Giant's Mask makes Link grow in size to facilitate the fight with the fourth major boss in the game, Twinmold, and the Fierce Deity's Mask (the Oni Mask in Japanese) transforms Link into a being, very much like his adult self, which can defeat all of the game's major bosses with a few strikes of his sword. These transformations upon putting on the transformative masks parallels the donning of a mask by a Noh actor. The actor's transformation may go far beyond a mere change of face, incorporating a change of wardrobe or physical appearance—for example, the addition of a large wig—in order to fully transform into a particular character who must be played a specific way.

One thing to note about these masks is that, while they transform Link's body and sometimes give him a different set of abilities, the visuals of the game let the player know that he or she is still playing Link. In a Noh play, it is obvious which character transforms as the character of the *shite*, or lead actor, is the only character who undergoes transformation. In *Majora's Mask*, there is always some part of Link's clothing that remains green or some part of his new body that retains the shape of his hat even when



Figure 1: Goron Link still wears a green cap

transformed; there is always something that shows that he is still Link (see Figure 1). Yet at the same time, there are definitely aspects of each new body that suggest that he has become someone else. As a Goron, Link wears the necklace found around the neck of Darmani, the deceased Goron hero whose spirit possesses the Goron Mask. As a Zora, Link's fins and facial features show the yellow shades found on Mikau, the Zora guitarist whose spirit inhabits the Zora Mask. The unique qualities of the Deku Scrub transformation are somewhat more difficult to pin down visually for the player, but some of the dialogue reveals that Link looks very much like the son of the Butler of the Deku Palace in the Southern Swamp: upon losing a race against Link, the Deku Butler says "Actually, when I see you, I am reminded of my son who left home long ago... Somehow, I feel as if I am once again racing with my son..." (Nintendo EAD). And during the end credits, a short scene shows the Butler mourning in front of a tree that Tatli the fairy says looks like Link when he is in the shape of a Deku Scrub. As mentioned, the Fierce Deity's Mask gives Link a body that looks similar to (and sounds exactly like) his adult self from *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, but its clothes are white, its face has distinct markings, and its sword is different in shape and power to any sword Link has possessed in this or any previous game in the series. The Giant's Mask yields the least amount of visual difference between Link and the transformation associated with it, yet Link's voice is different and, due to having to wear the mask, Link's face at least, appears different. Just as the audience of a Noh play is given enough information to understand that the *shite* is the actor whose character has undergone transformation, there is sufficient evidence for the player to discern that the character onscreen is still Link.

In addition to the similarities and differences in appearance of Link's five forms,

there are cut-scenes associated with each of the transformative masks which emphasize a dramatic change in Link's character. The first time Link wears each mask, the player is not allowed to skip the cut-scene and is therefore forced to watch. During the cut-scene, Link first puts on the mask which bears a face that is neutral in the culture associated with the species it represents. Once the mask is put on, however, Link gasps and appears to choke before letting out a cry and revealing his face to the in-game camera (see Figure 2). When Link shows his face to the camera the mask no longer bears the neutral expression it had before it was put on but instead reflects the cry of pain and anguish heard from Link. From the cut-scene and the subsequent transformation, it can easily be

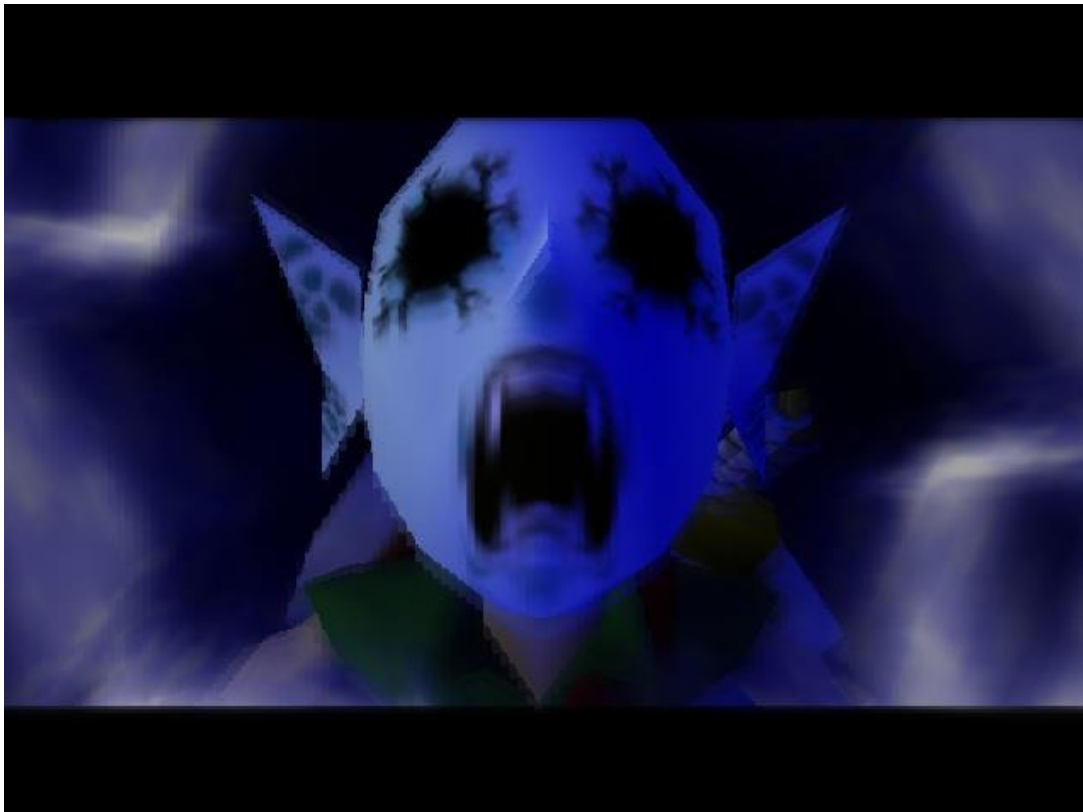


Figure 2: Link donning the Zora Mask

assumed that the mask has become Link's face just as the body associated with the spirit possessing the mask becomes Link's new body. Once again, this recalls the complete

transformation of a *shite* who, in addition to a mask, must also don certain clothing or accessories such as wigs in order to fully become the character they are to portray.

### Masks and Possession

This brings up the question of possession associated with Noh masks, the transformative masks, and of masks in general within the game's diegesis. Within the Noh mask, there is "presence of a god" (Keene 19). The in-game descriptions of the Goron Mask and the Zora Mask are similarly described as containing "the spirit of a proud Goron hero" and "the spirit of a legendary guitarist" respectively. The cut-scenes in which Link receives these masks also suggest that the spirits of Darmani and Mikau are sealed within their respective masks. Once Link puts on the Goron Mask or the Zora Mask, he takes on the bodies of the deceased person whose spirit possesses the particular mask he is wearing. Considering these phenomena and the similarities between these two masks and the Deku Mask, Fierce Deity's Mask, and Giant's Mask, it is suggested that each of the transformative masks contains the spirit of a person and, when he assumes them, Link is possessed by the spirit of that person and given the body of that person.

This, of course, is significant. The phenomenon is strikingly similar to the traditions associated with masks in Noh theater. I have mentioned Keene's observations about the reverence for the mask used in *Okina* and its associations with the god it represents/contains. Here I wish to emphasize what this presence means for the actor wearing the mask. Once the mask is put on, the actor "gazes at his masked face in the mirror, and though until that moment an ordinary man...he himself becomes as he stares at the mask a reflection" (19). This is done in the theater's dressing room, or mirror room. Although Keene does not describe in detail what the actor is doing, other scholars have

explained what goes on before the mirror mentioned in the above quote. Mikiko Ishii says that the mirror room is

in no way...a conventional dressing room, for it is a place where the actor...puts on his mask and sits in front of the mirror to study the figure that he has made. In so doing he undergoes the process of becoming the character that he is to portray. Reflecting on his image in the mirror, he transcends his merely physical portrayal of the role and is spiritually possessed by the self that he will be personifying. (56)

Through spiritual contemplation of and concentration on his physical appearance in the mirror, the Noh actor who wears a mask is possessed by the character he is to play through the medium of the mask he wears. Although centuries have passed since Noh first became an art form and even more time has passed since it first began to develop as a ritual, the attitude toward the mask in Japanese performance and thought remains that the mask is “an embodiment of a ‘wholly other’” who can move and act through its wearer (Hooas 82). Opinions of the Noh mask throughout history have shifted “from functioning as a receptacle of the god to [being] a central focus for the controlled expression of emotion” but “in Noh theater today...the legacy of possession is a dominating dramatic concept and the mask is seen as an agent of that possession” (83). The uses and qualities of the Noh mask as a method of subtle yet profound emotional expression are also retained, but the predominant function of the mask is to allow the actor to be possessed by the spirit of the mask for a performance.

This attitude is clearly identical to the attitude of *Majora's Mask*. Once link puts on one of the transformative masks, he literally takes on the body of an “other.” Through



this transformation via possession, Link is able to fulfil his obligation to satisfy the last wishes of the deceased or divine spirits embodying the masks he wears, to live out the life of the regretful dead or to battle a magnanimous demon. Noh masks function as mediums through which their respective spirits possess the bodies of the actors who wear them, enabling the actors to tell the tales of those spirits. The transformative masks in *Majora's Mask* enable the spirits contained within them to possess Link and to empower him to navigate their homelands and complete the acts of valor and heroism that they would be unable to complete otherwise.

But what of the other masks in the game, the nineteen non-transformative masks? They do not change Link's shape, at least not as dramatically as the transformative masks. However, though Link may not change in appearance aside from the donning of a new accessory, wearing the non-transformative masks and speaking to various non-player characters yields various changes in dialogue. One of the translators of the game has commented on this in his development journal: "Link can talk to every character, and they'll each say something different depending on the situation...I had to write dozens of replies for each character based on the time of day and the mask Link's wearing" (Leung). Thus, Link is addressed differently by different characters depending on the mask he wears. The tones of these responses to Link range from superficial curiosity about why he wears a certain mask to misidentification of Link by the person addressing him. However, it is uncommon for a non-player character to mention seeing through Link's disguise as the fox-spirit (*kitsune*) does when Link is wearing the Keaton Mask. In some situations, some non-transformative masks even have magical qualities such as the Stone Mask's ability to make its wearer effectively invisible by becoming "plain as

stone” or the Bremen Mask’s “strange power of making young animals mature.” Thus, the dialogue and text of the game implies a type of transformation which is not as obvious as that shown to the player when Link wears one of the transformative masks. The magical qualities of certain non-transformative masks especially emphasize this idea, and it is this magical quality that has its roots in Noh.

Ishii describes the phenomenon of the possession of a Noh actor as an “almost magical interaction” between the actor, the mask, and the mirror in the mirror room (56). This offers an adequate explanation of the non-transformative masks in *Majora’s Mask*. Something magical and inexplicable occurs when Link wears certain masks and does certain things or talks with certain people. Though the player can still see Link and can tell that he or she is still playing as Link, the other characters in the game recognize Link as someone who is not Link.

#### Linking the Game with the Player

What, though, of the player’s identification of Link? And, more importantly, what of the player’s identification with Link? The Noh actor has the mirror in the mirror room to identify himself with the character he shall be playing, but the player of *Majora’s Mask* does not have a literal mirror with which to contemplate his or her relationship to their avatar. The avatar has been an important object of study in video game studies and some scholars have gone so far as to say that the relationship between the player and the avatar is the most important aspect of playing a video game. Bob Rehak, for example, has stated that “the crucial relationship in many games...is not between avatar and environment or even between protagonist and antagonist, but between the human player and the image of him- or herself encountered onscreen” (104). Rehak’s focus in “Playing

at Being” is on the nature of this relationship between the player and their avatar. This relationship is very important for a proper understanding of *Majora’s Mask*, but it is not the game’s sole concern. Just as Link and the spirits of the masks he wears are blended into one person, a concept rooted in the Noh tradition, the player is blended, to an extent, with Link. While Rehak makes an important point about the player-avatar relationship, his analysis does not take the cultural roots of individual games into account. It is because of its roots in Noh tradition that *Majora’s Mask* readily addresses and emphasizes the player-avatar relationship in unique ways. It accomplishes this in its cinematic elements, gameplay elements, and narrative elements. All three are especially important in the relationship between the player of *Majora’s Mask* and Link, their avatar.

The use of the in-game camera is especially crucial in equating Link to the player in *Majora’s Mask*. The most prevalent cut-scenes in the game—those involving the donning, removal, or replacement of the transformative masks—all involve the camera viewing Link from a frontal perspective, usually with a close-up of his face. This positioning of the camera directly in front of Link’s face, allowing some of his body to be in the shot and emphasizing his facial expressions, turns the television into a mirror for the player to view himself or herself. The television is the mirror through which the player “undergoes the process of becoming the character that he [or she] is to portray” (Ishii 56). Although the cut-scenes involving this phenomenon last only a few seconds, this is likely for practical purposes: making a game that involves frequent instances of staring at one’s avatar for minutes on end without doing anything would be dull and boring by the standards of the medium.

However, it may also be a deliberate aesthetic choice by the game designers. The

combination of identity suggested by the use of the television as a mirror is exactly what occurs with the Noh actor when he contemplates his masked face in the mirror room. Japanese thought already holds that “the self that is presented to the world, even the ‘self’ of things, is to be understood as tactical and unstable—a mask” (Huber 213). Through the lens of Japanese aesthetics, the player is himself or herself an unstable persona as shown by the “other” in their reflection in a mirror. The addition of Mikau, for example, to the player’s reflection in the game—namely, Link—by way of the Zora Mask results in three persons in one. In a similar way, the addition of a mask to the face of a Noh actor is an addition of a personality to two others, i.e. to the observer before the mirror and the observed within the mirror.

In Western thought, particularly in the psychology of Lacan, the subject’s relation to his mirror image is similarly complex. Seeing oneself in a mirror “situates the agency of the ego...in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone...which will only rejoin the coming-into-being (*le devenir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical synthesis by which he must resolve as *I* in his discordance with his own reality” (Lacan 1123). Western tradition holds that the view of oneself in a mirror results in a divided personality, in a dissonant distancing of a human being from his or her true self. However, while “ambivalence is considered a marker for falsehood and dishonesty” in the West, it is a sign “of sincerity and consideration in Japanese practice” (Huber 213). In Japanese aesthetics, Link’s and the player’s multiple personas result in a person who is more true, not less, because of the multiple identities within their persons. The use of various masks—the adoption of various identities—throughout the game results not in a dilution of the player’s and

Link's personalities but a combination and amplification of their personalities, one that is closer to truth than if they were only one person.

These instances where Link dons, removes, or replaces a transformative mask, then, form a strong tie between the aesthetics of Japanese culture, the traditions and rituals of Noh theater, and the phenomena associated with playing *Majora's Mask*. Yet, these are not the only instances in *Majora's Mask* where a combination of identity between player and avatar occurs. The game encourages the contemplation of the avatar in additional ways: through gameplay, through simultaneous address of the player and the avatar, and through certain longer cut-scenes involving the receipt of certain transformative masks.

The first manner, that most involving gameplay, involves the relationship between the actions of the player and the actions of the avatar. The player controls Link via the controller in his or her hand, and there is a certain set of button presses and button press combinations that make Link to do particular actions. For example, pressing the B button while playing as Link in his natural Hylian form results in Link swinging his sword in a horizontal motion. A more elaborate example would be the button combination to make Link thrust his sword: to make Link do this, the player must hold down the Z button, push forward on the control stick, and press the B button. Although Link and the player are doing different things, there is a correspondence between what the player does and what Link does. The player is not swinging a sword around and Link is not holding a Nintendo 64 controller, but, while the game is on and under certain other conditions, the actions of the player and the actions of Link are united in such a way that encourages gamers and video game scholars to say things like "I defeated such-and-such a boss," or

“Look at what I can do with this new item,” or “I spend...time looking for my corpse” (Bradford 59). I have already mentioned Bradford’s comments on “the duality of the playing subject, who is both outside and inside the game” and here I wish to emphasize the use of the first-person to refer to the avatar. She notes that this phenomenon and the expressions associated with it (such as those I just mentioned) go “to the heart of the gaming experience.” In light of these comments, it is imperative to recognize the associations even between *Majora’s Mask’s* gameplay and Noh theater, an art form at the heart of which is a duality of the playing subject, the actor who is possessed by the spirit of the mask he wears and whose presence onstage is a dual presence of mortal actor and immortal spirit. The actions of the actor onstage are unified with those of the spirit possessing the actor just as the actions of the avatar are unified to certain actions, certain button presses, performed by the player.

In addition to the relationship between the actions of the player and the avatar, it is important to note that the game explicitly addresses an ambiguous “you” upon receipt of certain items and in certain cut-scenes. For example, when Link and the player receives the Hero’s Bow in the Woodfall Temple, a text box with the following text appears onscreen: “You got the Hero’s Bow! Set it to [(C)] to equip it. Press [(C)] to draw it. Press and hold [(C)] to aim. Release [(C)] to shoot” (Nintendo EAD). I say Link and the player because the game is ambiguous about whom it is addressing. It is Link who holds, equips, aims, and shoots the Hero’s Bow, but it is the player who makes Link do these things by following the instructions given onscreen upon receipt of the weapon. Some scholars have proposed a cautious interpretation of this kind of language in fiction. David Herman for example has said that

Narrative you produces an ontological hesitation between the virtual and the actual by constantly repositioning readers, to a fundamentally indeterminate degree, within the emergent spatiotemporal parameters of one or more alternative possible worlds. (378)

This hesitant attitude towards the use of “you” may be more applicable for literary media and even for digital fiction, but there is a bit more confidence in a video games use of “you” as a video game can more closely tie the player to their avatar, their visual representation/reflection onscreen, through words as well as through shared actions. *Majora’s Mask* is even more confident about this considering its associations with Noh theater. If the player gazes at their reflection, their other self, in the television when Link undergoes a Noh-inspired possession and transformation, then, according to the spiritual thought surrounding Noh theater, the player is certainly looking at his or her self. The “you” in the television is the same as the “you” holding the controller and receiving instructions, just as someone may refer both to the *shite* and the being he becomes after donning the mask with a singular “you.”

Although I do not believe that this technique works well with every game, *Majora’s Mask* is a notable exception. The receipt of items is not the only instance of the ambiguous use of “you” in the game. The other instances—the ones involving major cut-scenes and important dialogue in the game—are more important: they serve to better solidify the unity between player and avatar and to connect the game to its theatrical roots. One example from early on in the game exemplifies this. Upon first meeting the Happy Mask Salesman, Link and the player have just been turned into a Deku Scrub by Skull Kid and are ignorant of a way to change back into Link’s normal shape. The Happy

Mask Salesman informs Link/the player about Majora's Mask and a possible cure to Link's altered form:

During my travels, a very important mask was stolen from me by an imp in the woods. So here I am at a loss...And now I've found you. Now don't think me rude, but I have been following you...For I know of a way to return you to your former self...All I ask is that you...get back my precious mask...to someone like you, it should by no means be a difficult task... (Nintendo EAD)

Here, the Happy Mask Salesman gives Link and the player the major goal of the game: to retrieve Majora's Mask for him. Verbally, this is indicated by the Salesman's frequent use of "you." The previous example with the Hero's Bow uses an ambiguous "you," spoken by nobody in particular, to simultaneously address Link and the player, but here the Happy Mask Salesman seems to be addressing only Link. However, this scene involves two major kinds of camera positionings: one in which the Happy Mask Salesman is clearly talking to Link—usually shown by a medium shot from the side of the two characters—and one in which the camera is positioned at about the level of his waist and pointing up at his face as though from Link's (shrunken) height (see Figure 3). The former kind of shot, again, indicates that the Happy Mask Salesman is talking to Link, but the latter kind shows him facing the camera in such a way as to be looking at and addressing the player. This phenomenon functions in a similar way to the use of "you" upon receipt of items, masks, and weapons. More importantly it forms a closer tie to Noh than the previous example: the relationship between Link and the Happy Mask Salesman may loosely allude to the relationship between the *shite* and the *waki*, a





Figure 3: The Happy Mask Salesman addressing Link and the player

“supporting actor in Noh” who “has an important role in confronting and drawing out the performance of the *shite*” (“*Waki*”). As stated, this occurs very early on in the game’s narrative, even before the receipt of any particular item and thus serves to set up the dual identity of player and avatar and the connection to Noh theater from very early in the game.

Even earlier than this instance, however, is another type of cut-scene that shows a combination of personas. The cut-scenes in which Link and the player receive the Deku Mask and the Goron Mask both involve a camera technique that is similar to the one employed in the cut-scenes where Link dons the transformative masks, i.e. the use of the television as a mirror. When Link is being transformed into a Deku Scrub by Skull Kid as a cruel practical joke, a cut-scene occurs in which Link is in a place that is completely dark and is surrounded by Deku Scrubs. He runs from them and, as he runs, the camera is

positioned in such a way as to portray him running towards the television screen, revealing a giant Deku Scrub appearing onscreen behind him (see Figure 4). The camera then zooms in quickly on the giant Deku Scrub, the screen goes black, and the scene were Link is standing before Skull Kid resumes, albeit with Link in the form of a Deku Scrub. It is unclear what exactly the dark space was and whether or not there were actual Deku

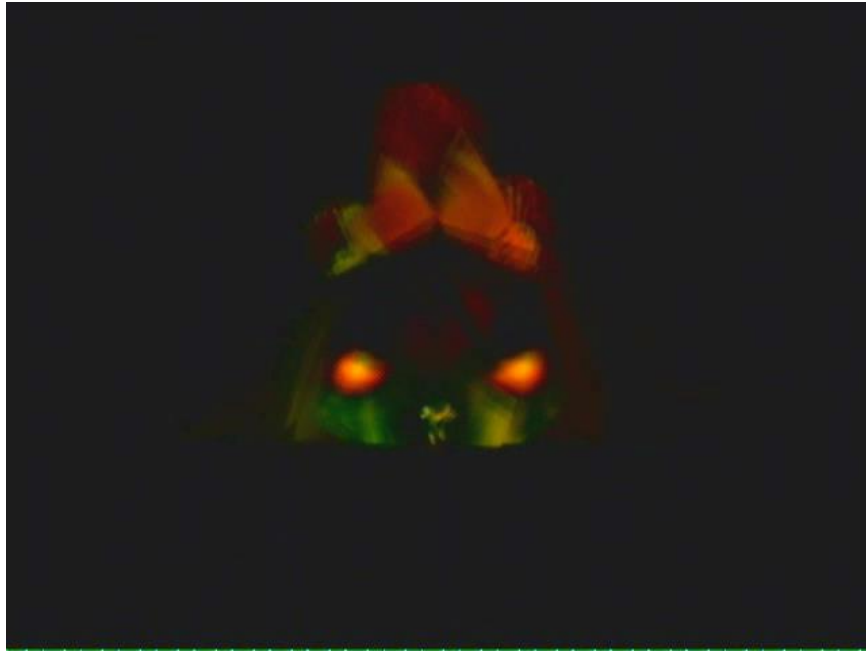


Figure 4: Link running from a nightmarish Deku Scrub

Scrubs surrounding Link—for all players know, the whole scene with the Deku Scrubs could have taken place in Link's mind—but the purpose of the scene is to show the combination of characters. The positioning of the camera allows the player to watch one of his or her selves, Link, being engulfed in another self, the Deku Scrub, whom the player sees as though it were his or her reflection in a mirror. The cut-scene is more dramatic and bizarre than most cut-scenes in other Zelda games, drawing attention to itself as a memorable moment of the game. The transformation of the television into a mirror, again alluding to the mirror room of Noh theater, is even echoed immediately

after Link's transformation when he sees and frets over his new face in a pool of water, a natural mirror.

In a similar fashion, the cut-scene associated with the receipt of the Goron Mask, which involves playing the Song of Healing for Darmani while Link stands before Darmani's grave, places the camera in front of the Goron hero. The camera only changes its position once to show other Gorons with arms raised cheering for their hero. At one point in the cut-scene, during which the camera is pointing directly at Darmani's face, so that he is effectively staring back at the player, an image of Link is superimposed on Darmani for less than a second. The image of Link is also facing the camera directly, looking into it as though staring out of the television at the player. This once again turns the television into a mirror and implies a combination of the personas of the player, Link, and Darmani in a way that recalls the combination of personas in the Noh theater's mirror room.

One other aspect of *Majora's Mask* and Noh reflects the idea that "the self that is presented to the world...is to be understood as tactical and unstable—a mask" (Huber 213). Eastern views of the self tend to be more fluid, more dynamic than Western views of the self. In Noh theater, "even when an actor plays without a mask, he is expected to perform as if he were wearing one. Ze-ami advises the actor in a maskless Noh play to keep his face utterly without expression" (Ishii 58). In *Majora's Mask*, Link almost manages this feat of expressionlessness throughout the game. He has a handful of basic expressions: his neutral expression which is most common, an expression of shock or horror with eyes open, an expression of pain or struggle with eyes closed, and an expression used when letting out a battle cry while swinging his sword. The first, the

neutral expression, is the one that is seen most often. It is the expression that is seen in the superimpositions of his face with the Deku Scrub and with Darmani during the cut-scenes associated with Skull Kid's cursing of Link and with the receipt of the Goron Mask, respectively. The other expressions are present, but not often noticeable. The looks of surprise usually accompany instances of taking damage from enemy attacks and the last expression is barely noticeable and not very different from his neutral expression (the only difference is that Link's mouth is open and his eyes are possibly wider). Although Link does not keep his neutral expression throughout the game, it is of note that it is his most prominent one. While the game does not perfectly match the performance of a Noh play, its aesthetics as they pertain to Link's physical appearance and use of masks are heavily influenced by that theatrical tradition.

Bob Rehak states that "the long history of video games... makes clear that there is no perfectly reflective avatar, that is, one that resembles the player visually and (in the fashion of a real mirror) seems to gaze back on him or her" (107). However, *Majora's Mask* proves an exception to this observation and actually defies it. Link and the player frequently gaze at each other. Whenever Link puts on one of the transformative masks, the player has an opportunity, however brief, to gaze at himself or herself in the mirror of the television, to contemplate the phenomenon of combining his or her personality, not only with that of their avatar, but with that of the spirit possessing and assuming Link. In *Majora's Mask*, the avatar need not resemble the player visually. He is, in a sense, a mask, a persona adopted to explore the game's diegesis, a mask that is, in Japanese thought, just as valid as the one the player assumes in their life outside of the game. In the next chapter, I shall explore the ways in which the diegesis, Termina, and the structure of

the game reflect the structure of the kinds of Noh play and of Noh play cycles.

## CHAPTER 2: STRUCTURE

### Termina and the Noh Play Cycle

Extending analysis beyond the avatar and into the structure of the game world yields another important parallel between *Majora's Mask* and Noh theater. The structure of the game appears simple but relies on structures common to Noh plays and to Noh play cycles. This is seen in the order in which the five major regions of Termina are explored, in the types of characters with whom the player and Link interact in those regions, and in the way that the game comes full circle, ending in a manner and a setting similar to that with which it began.

First, a glance at Terminian geography reveals that the land is divided into five major sections (see Figure 5). The manner in which the game is designed is such that



Figure 5: A map of Termina

these areas are intended to be explored in the order I list them here. Clock Town is at the center and four unique regions are located in each cardinal direction: the Southern Swamp in the south, the Snowhead mountain range in the north, Great Bay in the west, and Ikana Canyon in the east. Clock Town serves as a central hub where the main part of the game begins and ends and where there are opportunities for meeting people who will requests favors and offer opportunities for sidequests. In the Southern Swamp, there is a small kingdom of Deku Scrubs as well as a pair of witches who run a potion shop. The Snowhead mountains are the home of a tribe of Gorons. Zoras and a small band of pirates make their homes in Great Bay. Finally, the ruined Kingdom of Ikana is in Ikana Canyon. The game comes full circle near the end back in Clock Town when the four giants are summoned to stop the moon. In Noh theater, there are six types of plays, not five, and each focuses on a different type of person or feeling or character. First, there is the extremely ritualistic *Okina*, which Keene says, “was set apart, no doubt because it clearly belonged to an older tradition than the rest, and was invariably performed at the start of a program”; then there are “plays about the gods (*waki Nō*)”; “plays about martial heroes (*shuramono*)”; “plays about women (*kazuramono*)”; “plays of a miscellaneous or contemporary character (*genzaimono*)” usually with an emphasis on various kinds of madness; and “plays about demons (*kiri Nō*)” (27). At first, there seems to be a discrepancy between the portions of the game and the number of the different types of plays. However, the beginning and final portion of *Majora’s Mask*, neither of which involves the in-game clock<sup>8</sup>, bear certain resemblances to *Okina* which, like these parts of the game, is set apart. Thus, the opening scene of the game in the woods and the final part of the game in the moon both function as a sixth part to the game and parallel *Okina*. The

player can opt to go on certain sidequests before tackling certain parts of the game, but it is my opinion that the majority of the sidequests are best completed either just before or just after going through the section of the game involving Ikana Canyon. I shall examine the parallels between each region and its Noh cycle counterpart in turn, beginning with the *waki Noh*.

#### Woodfall as *Waki Noh*

At first, it is not easy to find any mention of gods in the Southern Swamp. It is home to a pair of witches and is the location of a small kingdom of Deku Scrubs, but neither the witches nor the Deku Scrubs explicitly mention any gods. However, there is one other type of creature found in the swamp that plays an important role in this part of the game: monkeys. The Deku King's daughter is "captured by the monster" in the Woodfall Temple and one of the four monkeys is held captive in the Deku Palace by the Deku King who thinks that the monkey has kidnapped her (Nintendo EAD). Link and the player are first informed of this particular monkey's plight after encountering three other monkeys who help Link rescue one of the witches who has gotten lost in a forest within the swamp. It may seem arbitrary that the game designers would use monkeys in this situation instead of another animal, but a look at monkeys in Japanese mythology makes very apparent that these creatures are more than talking animals.

Some scholars believe the famous three monkeys—speak no evil, hear no evil, see no evil—originated in Japan in association with the Mt. Hiei multiplex and the sacred monkey of the Hie Shrine. The central deity at Mt. Hiei is SANNŌ (lit. = Mountain King 山王). Sannō's messenger...and avatar...is the monkey. The Sannō deity represents three



Buddhas (Shaka, Yakushi, and Amida) who in turn represent the three most important Shinto Kami (deities) of Hie Shrine. (Schumaker)

Schumaker shows that monkeys are important deities, specifically at Mt. Hiei, and that their significance is found not only in the Buddhist religion that came over from the Asian mainland but also in Japan's indigenous religion, Shinto. Note that Sannō, the major deity of the Mt. Hiei shrine, represents three Buddhas as well as three Kami (major gods of the Shinto religion). In a sense, this signifies four distinct beings or personalities: that of Sannō, the god proper, and those of his three avatars in Shinto and in Buddhism. Although these avatars add up to six if totaled, there are only three in each respective religion, and the three in each religion corresponds to the three in the other. The three monkeys who first tell Link of the plight of their fellow monkey are messengers just like the three avatars. Likewise, Sannō himself is represented as a monkey—in *Majora's Mask* this would be the monkey who is held captive by the Deku King. This seemingly small choice of which animal to use in this part of *Majora's Mask* in fact has a great significance and, since these creatures presumably represent the god(s) of Mt. Hiei, this section of the game is, in a sense, about rescuing a god. This is the game's version of a *waki Noh*, a play about gods.

#### Snowhead as *Shuramono*

Consider also the parallels between the events at Snowhead in *Majora's Mask* and the *shuramono*. At Snowhead, Link encounters a tribe of Gorons whose hero, Darmani, ventured to the Snowhead Temple and was blown into a canyon by the blizzard plaguing the region. Darmani died and Link meets his ghost near the homes of the Goron tribe. He leads Link to his grave (that is, to Darmani's grave) and says

when I was alive, I was a renowned warrior and veteran...But alas...I am now dead. I was fine until I marched off to Snowhead by myself, hoping that I could drive off a demon...Then the blizzard at Snowhead blew me into the valley...I beg you! Bring me back to life with your magic! If it is beyond your power then I beg of you to do this for me instead...Heal my sorrows. Any way that you can do it will suffice..." (Nintendo EAD).

After playing the Song of Healing, Link receives the Goron Mask and is able to be possessed by the spirit of Darmani and thus to transform into him. Link then fulfills Darmani's mission to defeat the demon at the Snowhead Temple and brings spring back to the mountains. This closely resembles the *shuramono*, a play in which "usually the ghost of a warrior of the Genji or Heike clan appears as an ordinary person on the stage, reveals his identity and his tragic tale, then fades away in a dance. In some plays he expels a demon and keeps the peace" (Qamber 50). The dialogue with Darmani in *Majora's Mask* involves him sharing his tale as the warrior does in the *shuramono* and the actions taken by Link and the player involve the Goron hero (through possession of Link) ridding the Goron people of the demon at Snowhead Temple. This, then, is the game's *shuramono*.

#### Great Bay as *Kazuramono*

The section of the game at Great Bay parallels some themes and motifs of a *kazuramono*. These "woman plays" in Noh theater mostly involve love stories. Keene notes that "the intensity of the woman's love portrayed in these plays might be pushed to the extreme of madness" (28). Ishii also notes that the "woman plays [signify] love, always intense, sometimes tragic" (160). These qualities are found in the singer of the

Zora band in Great Bay. The small community of Zoras at Great Bay are mostly musicians and the vocalist, Lulu, for the band, the Indigo-Go's, has lost her voice due to grief over her eggs which were kidnapped by the Gerudo pirates. This section of the game entails rescuing the eggs using the Zora Mask (which allows Link to be possessed by Mikau, the Zora warrior) and restoring Lulu's voice by playing a song taught by the Zora babies upon their hatching. It is suggested in various bits of dialogue and in the cut-scene involving Mikau's "healing" that Lulu and Mikau are lovers ("There aren't any secrets between [Mikau] and Lulu"); Mikau's concern for Lulu's offspring to the point of attempting their rescue (when nobody else does) supports this idea (Nintendo EAD). Lulu's silence and isolation upon the kidnapping of her eggs may suggest a kind of madness which manifests itself as depression ("Ever since the pirates stole her eggs, she's just been standing out there gazing at the sea and sighing..."). The intensity and intimacy of Lulu's and Mikau's relationship and the tragedy of her kidnapped, unborn children exemplify the qualities of a *kazuramono*.

#### *Genzaimono, Kiri Noh, Ikana, and Sidequests*

The parallels to the *genzaimono* and *kiri Noh* are somewhat more difficult to pin down for various reasons. First, the emphasis in the *genzaimono* on madness inspired by intensity of emotion, by obsession, or by grief is seen in various elements of the game including the undead denizens of Ikana Canyon, in Lulu, in some of the characters involved in special sidequests, and even in Link's own character and initial quest to find his lost friend, Navi. Since the Great Bay section of the game better parallels the *kazuramono*, the possibility of a parallel between that section and the *genzaimono* can be eliminated. Also, although Link's adventures in Termina have parallels with the

*genzaimono* type of play, his whole adventure has parallels with the whole Noh play cycle. To call his whole quest a *genzaimono* play would be too broad a claim. This leaves the major sidequests and the Ikana Canyon section of the game as possible parallels to the *genzaimono*.

Ikana Canyon is home to many undead creatures obsessed with certain objects and with fulfilling martial duties; the fact that they are undead seems to suggest that this section belongs more to the *kiri Noh* category. However, this final category also involves “a supernatural protagonist” (Qamber 50) and its mood is “triumphant, informed with the mystery of the supernatural” (Lamarque 161). The final part of the game, in which Link enters the moon and fights Majora in its various forms using the Fierce Deity’s Mask (or *Oni* Mask) seems to offer a better parallel to the *kiri Noh* than do the events in Ikana Canyon. However, as mentioned, this last part also shares qualities with *Okina* that I shall discuss later. The various sidequests usually involve obsession over something, even if it is something as seemingly insignificant as toilet paper or watching chicks grow into roosters. It is also important to note that Qambar has stated that the fourth play in a cycle “may be a *Kyogen*, an earthy farce characterized by lively realism, depicting the foibles and weaknesses of mankind,” qualities that are more apparent in the quirky nature of some of the sidequests than they are in the solemn and macabre kingdom of Ikana (Qambar 50). Although there is humor in Ikana, it has more serious undertones which are more apparent in a Noh performance than in a *Kyogen* farce. Whatever the case, no matter how dispersed they are between the sidequests, Ikana Canyon, and the final part of the game inside the moon, the parallels between the final sections of the game and the final plays in a Noh cycle are still present. I shall thus proceed to point out in a little more

detail the parallels between these last sections of the game and the corresponding category of Noh play.

As mentioned, the sidequests may function best as the game's version of a *kyogen* play. The word *kyogen* usually refers to “rustics or menials” (Keene 26). Thus a *kyogen* play is generally about people who are servants or who are a part of the layperson class. Of the people recorded in the Bomber's Notebook (an item received towards the beginning of the game to help in completing specific sidequests), four are certainly of a political or military class (the mayor's family and a soldier), five are performers, and nine are either merchants or else run a business of their own (e.g. Romani and her sister run a ranch). There are also two miscellaneous entries—one for the Bombers Secret Society of Justice, the members of which give you the notebook, and one for a person in the Stock Pot Inn's bathroom who is identified as “???” and asks for paper. With the exception of the Mayor's family of three and the invisible soldier, Shiro, the people whom Link and the player help in the sidequests are not of the upper class. In addition to this, many of the concerns of the people who offer the sidequests are of a quirky nature. The most blunt example of this is the one involving “???” who asks for paper in the inn bathroom. Giving this groping hand a piece of paper—be it mail or a land deed—seems insignificant and does not result in the receipt of a mask, but it is still a part of the game. It is a quirky instance and one involving toilet humor which would likely fit in with the “earthy...realism” of a *kyogen* play (Qambar 50). Another good example would be the brief sidequest in which Link and the player are mocked by the Gorman Brothers, two horse trainers near Romani Ranch, who challenge Link to a race. The player can take up the challenge as many times as he or she likes and winning involves the humiliation of

the two brothers who not only use grown horses to compete with Link's Epona (who has not yet fully grown) but also get a slight head start in the race. This is exemplary of a scenario "depicting the foibles and weaknesses of mankind."

Certain other sidequests, however, exemplify the obsessive madness of certain plays in the *genzaimono* more than they do the humor of the *kyogen* farces. One example is the plight of the deceased dancer, Kamaro. His ghost is found between midnight and sunrise near the entrance to the Snowhead Mountains performing a dance he has created. He speaks poetically, though the poetry of his speech may be lost in the English translation of the game. Each of his utterances is accompanied by a "translation" which simplifies his speech. He says, for example, "I am no longer part of the living...My sadness to the moon...I haven't left my dance to the world...I am filled with regret (Translation) I am disappointed, oh moon. I have died!" (Nintendo EAD). This character may be inspired by two types of *genzaimono*: one "which deals with madness caused by extreme grief, extreme longing" and one which concerns "characters who have become afflicted with madness on account of over-refined sensibilities" (Ishii 60-61). After conversing with him, he gives you Kamaro's Mask which, when worn, enables Link to perform Kamaro's dance; satisfied, he then disappears. This dance can be taught to the two Rosa sisters who practice between dusk and dawn trying to come up with a dance routine for the Carnival of Time. This latter exchange results in a heart piece (four of which will extend Link's health meter). These three characters—Kamaro and the two Rosa Sisters—are obsessed with dancing, the former with passing on his new dance to the point of remaining within the realm of the living until he has done so, the latter two with learning a new dance to the point of sleep deprivation and artist's block. All would

make for acceptable protagonists of a *genzaimono*.

Another example of obsessive madness comparable to that seen in a *genzaimono* is the sidequest given by Romani of Romani Ranch. The player can agree to help her to drive off “them,” a group of extra-terrestrials who “come at night every year when the carnival gets closer...riding in a bright, shining ball...to the barn...” Romani also mentions that her older sister Cremia, “won’t believe” her about “them.” Romani is obsessed with these extra-terrestrials, trying to get her sister to help her to defend the cows in the barn and practicing with her own bow and arrows all day, regardless of whether or not she receives help. If Link fails to help Romani, she gets abducted along with the ranch cow and disappears for the second day in the three-day cycle; upon her return on the third day, Romani will say very little compared to the first day and merely sits upon a crate in front of her home frowning and shaking her head trying to remember why she was practicing with her bow and arrows. The sequence of events should the player fail to help Romani provides the tragedy in this subplot, but Romani’s obsession with the extra-terrestrials and with helping her sister on the ranch remains the focus throughout the sidequest. Romani’s silence, repetitive behavior, and obsession with remembering what she was practicing for, should Link and the player fail to help her, are certainly signs of a the type of madness seen in a *genzaimono*.

Certain denizens of Ikana Canyon also exemplify the madness and obsession of the *shite* in a *genzaimono*. Like Kamaro, certain undead denizens of Ikana Canyon are obsessed with fulfilling certain tasks left undone in life before allowing themselves to pass on fully into death. Take, for example, the case of the ghosts of the two composer brothers Sharp and Flat. At some point after the fall of the Ikana Kingdom, Sharp, “sold

his soul to the devil” and sealed away his brother Flat (Nintendo EAD). Upon meeting Sharp, Link has his health temporarily drained by a magical song conducted by the ghost who claims that Link will “join the ranks of the dead.” Sharp also mentions that he “dreamt of the revival of the Royal Family.” Although the full story is not given, Sharp shows an obsession with death and with the furtherance of his employers’ reign. His brother Flat, bitter at Sharp’s sealing him away, teaches Link the Song of Storms which causes a thunderstorm to magically appear wherever it is played. Flat gives Link a message for Sharp: “The thousand years of raindrops summoned by my song are my tears. The thunder that strikes the earth is my anger!” Where Sharp’s obsession is with his employers, Flat’s obsession is with his brother. The former is mad enough to kill others with his music; the latter is more poetic, though just as bitter and filled with grief, in his madness. Both provide excellent examples of the type of madness seen in a *genzaimono*.

A less dramatic example of obsession and madness can be found in the underground tunnel leading to the ruins of Ikana Castle. Most of the doors in the tunnel are guarded by creatures called Gibdos, which look exactly like the Western “mummy” monster. Each Gibdo asks for a particular item, sometimes many of one particular item. If it does not receive the item from Link, it will respond “If you don’t have it, I have no need for you! Awayyyy!” If the Gibdo requests many of one item but Link does not have enough to satisfy the creature, it will say “Not enough. LEEEEAVE more!” Upon satisfactory receipt of the item requested, each Gibdo declares “Ah! Thissss! Thissss! I bear you no remorssse!” and sinks into the ground. The game hints at the obsessive nature of the Gibdos in the well even before Link enters it. One member of the Garo, a group of undead assassins in Ikana, says that “the Gibdos in Ikana’s well have regrets and



long to savor items from this world.” Notice the attitude of the Gibdos in the well. They demand objects from this world and have no interest in any sort of relationship that will not yield their receipt of their desired material good. Upon receipt of the item, they do not thank Link, but merely say that they “bear [him] no remorse.” This obsession over a particular item, over an unfulfilled task in their time alive, signifies an antisocial madness that would fit in well in a *genzaimono*.

The nature of the creatures in Ikana also suggests that this portion of the game has parallels with the *kiri Noh*. These plays, like the *waki Noh*, are concerned with the supernatural, particularly with *oni* (“demons” or “spirits”).

“Due to their fearful spiritual power, *oni* were considered ambivalent beings possessing the power of both good and evil, and were thus the objects of both worship and avoidance...the concept of *oni* can be classified into three main types: (1) wicked spirits or evil *kami*, (2) *oni* as foreigners or strangers, and (3) *oni* as good *kami*” (Kunimitsu).

Oni, then can be wicked, good, or of an ambivalent nature. This is interesting when considering the nature of the undead in Ikana canyon, especially in relation to their other appearances in the rest of the *Zelda* series. With the exception of a researcher and his daughter, the creatures in Ikana Canyon are all malevolent creatures that make appearances throughout the *Zelda* video game series. However, in this particular section of *Majora's Mask*, outside of the Stone Tower Temple, each malevolent creature benevolently assists Link and the player (under certain circumstances) in completing the quest of the game. Some, like the stalchildren in Ikana's graveyard, even address Link in a humble fashion. This is the only part of the game where creatures who are normally

common enemies become allies which may speak to Ishii's note that the demon in a *kiri Noh* may undergo a type of salvation (58).

This change of attitude is almost always caused by wearing one of three masks: the Gibdo Mask, the Captain's Hat, or the Garo's Mask. When Link is wearing one of these while standing before particular types of creatures associated with each mask, the malevolent creatures mistake him for one of them. This gives us the other parallel between this part of the game and the *kiri No*: the protagonists of the demon plays are usually supernatural. Link already exhibits supernatural qualities in *Ocarina of Time* as the Hero of Time and the chosen one of the three golden goddesses, and he retains some implicit supernatural status in his use of magic in *Majora's Mask*. However, this intimate association with the dead, with the *oni* in Ikana Canyon, and their acceptance of him as one of their own suggests an additional supernatural quality to Link in this portion of the game. To drive this point home, consider the effects of the "Elegy of Emptiness" taught to Link by the King of Ikana. The song creates a "soldier who has no heart...who...is your twin image. A shell of yourself that you will shed when your song commands it" (Nintendo EAD). This "soldier" is a statue on a pedestal which must be used to enter into and complete the Stone Tower Temple, the temple in this region of the game. The statue created takes on the shape of Link's body and changes depending on the transformative mask he is wearing. Wearing the Goron's Mask and playing the song yields a powerful looking statue of Darmani, wearing the Zora's Mask and playing the song yields a statue of Mikau holding his guitar in front of his body as though at attention, and, though it cannot really be used for anything, wearing the Deku Mask and playing the song yields a small statue of what is apparently the Deku Butler's son. However, the statue that is most

interesting and provides the most explicit parallel between *Majora's Mask* and Noh theater is the statue which players see first in the game: the statue resembling Link. This



Figure 6: Link Statue

statue is perhaps one of the strangest ones because of its countenance. Never do we see Link's teeth in a way that resembles those of the statue, and never does he wear an expression like the one on the face of the statue. This face however, very closely resembles the type of mask worn by Noh actors to indicate the character of a young man (an *otoko* mask) (see Figure 7). If this statue is Link's twin and a shell, or outer appearance of his self, then, considering the supernatural qualities of Noh masks, Link is at least partially supernatural and thus is a parallel of the "supernatural protagonist" of the *Kiri Noh* in a Noh play cycle. Considering Miyamoto's words, this also paints Link as an "everyman," since Link is every player who plays as him, further equating the player with their avatar in a fashion alluding to the compilation of personalities that occurs when a *shite* wears a Noh mask.



Figure 7: *Wakaotoko* Mask

*Okina* and the Cyclical Nature of *Majora's* Mask

The final type of play I shall address is actually the first type of play in a cycle. Keene says that “*Okina* was set apart, no doubt because it clearly belonged to an older tradition than the rest, and was invariably performed at the start of a program” (27). One important thing to keep in mind is that the six types of play function as a cycle—that is, the plays, when performed in the traditional form of a play cycle, come full circle starting with “the blessing of a god” and going on “to the salvation of a demon and then back to the beginning again” (Ishii 58). *Okina* is a performance in honor of the god of the Kasuga Shrine in Nara who manifested himself as an old man and danced underneath the Yogo Pine at the shrine. Therefore, Noh play cycles, which begin with a performance of *Okina*, start with an old man underneath a tree. Ishii also notes that the presence of “the pine trees, both the live ones on the bridge [leading to the main stage] and the painted ones on

the [backdrop known as the] ‘mirror boards,’ indicate that the stage is a sacred space in which the gods appear and from which they depart, while also at the same time the trees symbolize the actors' desire for the everlasting prosperity of their theater” (54). The pine tree and *Okina*, then, set the stage apart as a sacred space where the supernatural and natural realms coincide and interact, where gods, demons, and humans are all addressed and share their stories.

In *Majora's Mask*, this task of establishing the game as a space where the supernatural and natural realms coincide and interact is also thoroughly accomplished at the beginning of the game. At the beginning of the game, Link is wandering through a forest beneath tall, straight trees. Once he is attacked by Skull Kid, Link chases the imp into a tree. Once inside, Link falls down a long shaft, presumably within the trunk of the tree, and lands on a Deku flower in a pool deep underground. Here is where the adventure begins, quite literally underneath a tree. This underground passage leads Link into Clock Town's Clock Tower where he is confronted by the Happy Mask Salesman. Fan culture has noted the resemblance between the Salesman and Shigeru Miyamoto, suggesting that the former is a caricature of the latter. I have considered above that the Salesman may function as a *waki* to Link's *shite*. Allow me to add one more interpretation of the Happy Mask Salesman to these<sup>9</sup>: in considering the parallels between *Majora's Mask* and a Noh play cycle, the Salesman may also signify the old man in *Okina*. This is certainly possible as, like the elder in *Okina*, the Happy Mask Salesman introduces the main point of the game, promises healing (a blessing), and praises Link's virtue. (Hung-ting Ku has noted that Noh theater has been known to teach—although perhaps not too explicitly—“moral ideas” among other things [qtd. in Nafziger-Leis 32]. Thus, Noh is at least to some

extent, concerned with expounding virtue to its audience).

It may be argued that Link meets the Happy Mask Salesman inside Clock Town's clock tower and not underneath a tree, but Link's surreal entrance into Termina as well as the level of experience the player has had with the game suggest something else. The final portion of the tunnel leading into the clock tower still has roots and foliage in it, suggesting the thriving plant life of the forest in the first scenes of the game. Someone may say that these roots may be those of trees above ground in Termina, but there are few trees near the clock tower, much less close enough to Clock Town, to extend their roots so close to the tower as to reach into that particular tunnel. The geography of *Zelda* is not the concern of this thesis, so suffice it to say that the tunnel leading to the clock tower in Clock Town still suggests the forest at the beginning of the game. Even if this is not fully explicable, to the inexperienced player playing *Majora's Mask* for the first time, Link may very well still be in (or beneath) the forest seen at the beginning of the game even once he enters the clock tower. It is not revealed that he is in a completely different place until he steps out into Clock Town.

So, the game begins underneath trees and (literally) underneath a particular tree. The final portion of the game also has this motif. Once the four giants are freed from the remains of each of the temple bosses and are summoned at the end of the three days to hold up the moon, Majora's Mask, Link, and Tatl are sucked up into the moon itself at Majora's will. Once inside the moon, the player and Link find themselves in a vast field at the center of which is a knoll with a tree in its center. Although this tree may not be a pine tree, other factors suggest a parallel between this portion of the game and the first and final plays in a Noh play cycle (*Okina* and the *kiri Noh*).

Underneath the tree, there are what appear to be five children wearing masks. Four of the children wear masks identical to the masks worn by the major boss enemies of each of the four temples in the game. The fifth child is wearing Majora's Mask. I shall refer to these five children as "Moon Children." It is not clear in the game what the Moon Children are or where they come from, but it is suggested that they have some kind of relationship to the Happy Mask Salesman and to Majora's Mask.

Their connection to the Salesman is twofold. First, their models closely resemble his. The children and the Happy Mask Salesman both have red hair (parted the same way), the same color skin, the same shaped ears, the same shaped body, and the same shaped limbs and hands. Removing the masks from the model of the Moon Children does not reveal a face similar to that of the Mask Salesman, but the other physical similarities result in an uncanny resemblance (see Figure 8). The other connection comes from a line



Figure 8: A Moon Child with mask removed

spoken by each of the children: "Masks... You have... a lot. You, too... Will you be... a mask salesman? Then I'll play with you. So... The masks... Give me some..." (Nintendo EAD). The mention of Link being or becoming a mask salesman clearly refers to the Happy Mask Salesman for whom players are to retrieve Majora's Mask, further

indicating a relationship between the Moon Children and the Happy Mask Salesman. This line is crucial when paralleling the beginning and end of the game with *Okina*. In the beginning of the game, Link and the player meet the Happy Mask Salesman after falling underneath a tree. At the end of the game, Link and the player encounter the Moon Children—who look just like the Salesman—underneath a tree. The encouraging words of the Mask Salesman at the beginning of the game spur Link and the player on to complete the task that the Salesman sets before them. At the end of the game, the Moon Children ask questions of Link (and, thus, of the player) which encourage reflection on, and perhaps even proper completion of, the game. The last portion of the game inside the moon is where Link receives the Fierce Deity's Mask, or *Oni* Mask. If he only appeared to be a supernatural protagonist in Ikana Canyon, he explicitly becomes one at the end of the game when he puts on the *Oni* Mask and becomes whatever being inhabits that mask. In addition to this, a bird's eye view of the field in which the Moon Children and their knoll is found reveals a design that matches that of the design on the Mask of Truth, a mask that is used to read minds and is closely associated with the Happy Mask Salesman. The parallels between this portion of the game and the beginning of the game—the resemblance and connections between the Happy Mask Salesman and the Moon Children, the motif of the tree, and the theme of having an important event occur beneath a tree—point to a parallel between these parts of the game and *Okina*.

Taking all of these connections between Noh theater and *Majora's Mask* into account, I shall draw conclusions in my final chapter about what the game means as a video game and what it suggests to players.



### CHAPTER 3: FINDING MEANING IN *MAJORA'S MASK*

In the article I referenced at the beginning of this essay, Huber discusses several elements of Japanese aesthetics that have made their way into the video game medium. At the end of the article, he demonstrates how game designers have used these aesthetics in various video game franchises and genres in order to illustrate his point. Here I have attempted to do likewise with an individual game, *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*. Both Huber's observations and mine suggest a continuity between general ideas about art and culture and how such aesthetics and culture make their way into video games. As I mentioned in my introduction, it is necessary to consider the cultural elements in video games in order to come to a better understanding of the message of each individual game, series, and genre. Video game scholars cannot come to their object of study with only theories about what a video game is and does and expect to analyze it completely as is suggested by Wolf and Perron. We already know what video games are, and we are continuously discovering the things which video games are capable of doing.

As a final note, I would like to consider what *Majora's Mask* manages to do with its roots in Noh theater tradition. I have mentioned that the Moon Children ask Link and the player certain questions at the end of the game. These questions make for a fitting ultimate challenge to players, encouraging them to reflect on their experiences with the game and its diegesis. The questions are as follow: "Your friends... What kind of... people are they? I wonder... Do those people... think of you... as a friend?" "You... What makes you... happy? I wonder... What makes you happy... Does it make

others happy, too?” “The right thing... What is it? I wonder... If you do the right thing... Does it really make... everybody... happy?” “Your true face... What kind of... face is it?” “I wonder... The face under the mask... Is that... your true face?”

These questions are full of *yojo*, or “surplus of meaning,” in that they apply to multiple aspects of the game at once (Huber 212). They apply to three main people in the experience of playing the game: Skull Kid, Link, and the player of the game. First, the questions may suggest the method by which Majora was able to possess Skull Kid. Like Link’s transformative masks, Majora’s Mask is also inhabited by a spirit capable of possessing the wearer of its mask. Once Skull Kid put on Majora’s Mask, the spirit of the mask may have begun asking the same questions asked by the Moon Children. These questions may have influenced Skull Kid to forget his good friends, the four giants, and become bitter towards them; to push the boundaries of his morals further than he would on his own; and, finally, to question and confuse his own identity with that of the mask.

Alternatively, the questions also apply to Link’s situation. The question of friendship could be applied to his loss of Navi, his companion in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. It may also apply to his departure from Zelda and the other friends he made in that game’s adventure in order to search for Navi. He found other friends on his quest in Termina, but they turn out to be either temporary or else temporarily antagonistic to him. The questions about morals and happiness apply to all of the help Link gives to others in the game and his ultimate inability to help everyone in one three-day cycle (not to mention any possible ulterior motives he and the player may have had in helping people). He helps people in order to obtain masks and items to help him on his journey, but no matter how much good he does for others, he is forced over and over to reset the

game's three-day cycle in order to try again to stop Majora's Mask. There is no method by which one can complete all of the game's time-based sidequests in one three-day cycle; Link and the player are forced to neglect at least one person's request for help. As for the question about the face beneath the mask, Link almost constantly wears a blank expression despite the traumatic experiences to which he has been subjected in this game and in *Ocarina of Time*. His "true self" is actually multi-faceted within the game (because of his assimilation of multiple personalities through possession via the transformative masks), within the series (after *Ocarina of Time*, this incarnation of Link is one who has an adult's mind and memory within the body of a child), and outside of the game (because of the many people who play as him and are thus identified with/as him). These aspects of his character in *Majora's Mask* exemplify the qualities "of sincerity and consideration in Japanese practice" through Link's multi-faceted nature as well as the problems associated such a nature, specifically, a struggle with the idea that one person is unable to be a hero to everyone.

Finally, the questions may also apply to the player both within and without their experience of the game. The question of friendships is especially applicable to the phenomena of digital and social media in the twenty-first century and the questions about happiness and morality apply to the human condition since time immemorial. The last question in particular is especially relevant to this essay as it alludes to the Japanese conception of self as it pertains to the player, "the self that is presented to the world...understood as tactical and unstable" (Huber 213). The multiplicity of the person experiencing *Majora's Mask* is one of the game's prime concerns. Each time the player enters a section of Termina and dons a transformative mask, they are doing what they do

when they play any *Zelda* game or any other video game involving an avatar: blending their self with a different self to the point of a kind of unification. Although it may seem asymmetrical because of the apparatus by which the interaction between player and avatar occurs, such a concept is not a problem in Japanese aesthetics as asymmetry speaks of Japan just as strongly as the blending of personalities via a Noh mask (Alland 5). The question also applies to the player's experiences beyond the scope of the game: they certainly have had other human interaction and have had to, in terms of Japanese aesthetics, put on a particular mask in the process of that human interaction. The question encourages them to consider their relationship with themselves as well as the world around them.

This last application of the Moon Children's questions to the player is a key to finding meaning in *Majora's Mask* and in video games in general. The player's experiences with the game—all of the sidequests they completed, all of the (fictional) people they helped or neglected, all of the enemies they defeated—provide pictures and memories upon which the player may reflect using the questions provided by the Moon Children. Other video games rarely provide such questions though the experiences may be many, emotional, and/or mentally taxing. *Majora's Mask* takes the leap beyond mere experience and encourages the player to consider the experiences that they had with the game. It encourages commentary on specific play experiences and may thus serve as a meta-commentary on a person's experience with this and other video games. *Majora's Mask* teaches us that video games are sources of experiences to be reflected upon in order for the player to better understand them and, perhaps, to better themselves.

The questions asked by the Moon Children may also encourage a morally didactic

relationship to video games. Although *Majora's Mask* is set in a fantasy realm involving magic, fairies, and masks with the ability to possess their wearers, the game does not allow Link to be an *ubermensch* and save everyone as he managed to do in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. *Majora's Mask* makes Link more human in that he cannot do everything on his own because of time constraints and the limits placed on his Hylian (and very human) physiology. The designers' use of the television as a mirror gives players a character to assume and by which to be assumed in the same sense as a Noh actor and the spirit of his mask become one personality, unifying Link's and the player's morally troubling experiences within the game. It is especially because these experiences are limited by time constraints that the game gives a realistic perspective to moral dilemmas in the real world (and one that predates most other games that do likewise). This character, Link, who is also the player, may not be a completely blank slate, but he and the player can relate to each other. The experiences he has that involve moral choices are relatable to the same kinds of experiences players have outside the game.

Noh theater is similar: although the theater is set apart for actors and musicians, the audience has been known to take part in performances, if not through direct interaction with the actors, then through a spiritual association with the sacred space of the stage, playhouse, and stories told by the *shite* and the *waki*. As Keene observes, "Nō reaches out toward eternity through beauty and the elimination of the temporal and accidental" (23). Noh addresses transcendent truths like piety, beauty, and heroism upon which both actor and audience may meditate during and after the plays' variously paced performances. "A Nō play must move an audience" and its purpose may also be multi-faceted, but today it is rarely to entertain. As mentioned above, the purposes of a Noh

play are didactic in the “moral ideas” as well as the “religious beliefs, artistic aspirations and aesthetic taste of the people.” Noh is meant to get its audience thinking and reflecting on their experience at the playhouse and on the experiences had by the ghosts, gods, and travelers in the stories played out.

In the twenty-first century, video games are developing a similar capacity to express such ideas and *Majora's Mask* exemplifies this capacity. Through its association with Noh theater, *Majora's Mask* helps to bring these centuries-old concepts from a medieval tradition into the twenty-first century through a modern medium. I have shown here that the game is steeped in the traditions of Noh theater and Japanese culture despite superficially Western motifs of swords and sorcery. To bring Western ideas to a game like this would be ineffective at worst and inadequate at best when analyzing and trying to understand its purposes and its message. The game must be taken as a whole and in the context of its cultural background in order to be adequately understood and fully appreciated. Gamers and video game scholars must reflect on their experiences with video games deeply, taking into account all that the game has to offer, including the meanings of its cultural origins. *Majora's Mask* creates a cultural bridge and encourages players to cross it fully aware of where they are venturing. In terms of its structural complexity and symbolic correspondences with Noh theater, it almost begs to be analyzed by players and gives us copious experiences on which to reflect. The traditions on which it is based also involve reflection on the self and on others and encourages a morality in which honor, love, and respect of the transcendent and of one's fellow man are vital and relevant aspects of daily life. If we take this game as seriously as it requests, then we will gain the ability to address other video games more and more appropriately

for what they are and where they come from.

## **APPENDICES**



## APPENDIX A—NOTES

1. This trend was originally noted by Will Wright, creator of *The Sims*.
2. Several websites and videos developed by fans of the *Zelda* games, for example, offer analyses of and commentaries on the different games in the series. One such website, *ZeldaInformer.com*, was created in 2012 and has over fifteen articles on *Majora's Mask* alone. More formal publications such as *The Legend of Zelda and Theology* and *The Legend of Zelda and Philosophy: I Link, Therefore I Am* devote two essays at most to the game and, along with Nintendo's *Hyrule Historia*, are the only books to give formal commentary on the series. I have not found any analyses of specific games in this franchise in scholarly journals nor in books about video games in general. Although scholarship can be found on specific games, they are rarely analyzed individually and the analysis usually focuses on one dimension of the game (gameplay, visual aesthetics, structure, etc.).
3. I refer to the game throughout the essay simply as *Majora's Mask*.
4. *Majora's Mask* is the sixth game in the canonical *Legend of Zelda* series, the ninth of the non-canonical games *Link: The Faces of Evil* (Philips Media, 1993), *Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon* (Philips Media, 1993), and *Zelda's Adventure* (Philips Media, 1994) are counted. *Majora's Mask* is a product of tried and tested gameplay mechanics from its canonical predecessors. It is the second *Zelda* game to have an explorable Z-axis and capitalizes on innovations made in its predecessor, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, to which it is also a direct sequel. By “z-axis” I mean the third dimension added to the two dimensions present in the first four canonical *Zelda* games. In these four *Zelda* games players

could move up, down, left, and right, allowing them to explore a two-dimensional plane from a top-down perspective as though moving flat pieces of paper around on a paper map. The second and third *Zelda* games also incorporated a sidescrolling element that allowed players to navigate an area by moving left and right on an x-axis with the added capability of jumping up on a y-axis. The z-axis of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask* allowed for movement in several directions on the ground (i.e. along an x-axis and a y-axis) and also for free movement through air above ground the ground or the floor and through water. This constitutes the game's addition of a z-axis in terms of gameplay.

5. See, for example, Bob Rehak's "Playing at Being: Psychoanalysis and the Avatar" in *The Video Game Theory Reader* (Wolf and Perron 103-127). Rehak and other scholars prefer games that emphasize the first-person perspective such as *Doom* and *Quake*.
6. As far as my research shows, the names of most characters in *Majora's Mask* are kept close enough to their Japanese counterparts for any changes to be negligible. The one exception exception is the name of the final boss. In his diary, Leung mentions changing the name to "Majora" since the Japanese name translates to "Magician" in English which "wasn't quite the scary we were aiming for."
7. See Appendix B for a glossary of video game and video game studies terms used in this thesis.
8. The clock that is displayed onscreen for most of the game is non-diegetic and, in a sense, in the foreground of the player's view of the screen. It begins after Link

and the player exit the clock tower for the first time and it disappears when Link and the player enter the moon. It is not present during cut-scenes, when text boxes are displayed, or when playing a musical instrument. Playing the “Song of Time” saves the player’s progress and resets the three-day cycle while still allowing the player to keep major items, weapons, records, and masks that he or she has obtained in the game.

9. The possibility that the Salesman suggests both a *waki* and the old man in *Okina* is perfectly feasible and opens more possibilities for discovering meaning in *Majora’s Mask*.

## APPENDIX B—GLOSSARY

**avatar:** the persona within the game’s diegesis that is controlled by the player during gameplay and through which the player is able to explore the game’s diegesis

**boss:** usually the final and strongest enemy in a region or portion of the game; Odolwa, Goht, Gyorg, Twinmold, and Majora’s Mask are all bosses in *Majora’s Mask*

**command icons:** images displayed at the top of the screen during most periods of gameplay which resemble buttons on the Nintendo64 controller; these allow the player to see which buttons on the controller correspond to which actions in the diegesis

**cut-scene:** a cinematic display that furthers the plot or emphasizes a particular action during which the player has little or no opportunity for input; achieved by a cut from a moment in which input is possible to a moment in which it is not possible; in *Majora’s Mask*, this and gameplay may be blended if a text box is displayed onscreen: the player must scroll through the text from beginning to end by pressing a button

**diegesis:** the “gameworld” and everything in it including locations, people, objects, and ambient sounds; this does not include things like text boxes, game music not made by a character, command icons, the health (heart) and magic meters, and the in-game clock

**enemy:** a character or creature in the game that hinders Link and the player in some way, usually by harming Link

**gameplay:** actions made by the player which result in one or more onscreen effects in the course of the game; whenever the player is allowed to do something with their avatar or with something onscreen, it is considered to be gameplay

**Hylian:** a term used in the *Legend of Zelda* franchise to designate a native of Hyrule, the main setting of most *Zelda* games; they are completely humanoid, except for their ears

which are pointed on top

**in-game clock:** a non-diegetic chronometer introduced early in the game that allows the player to determine what time it is within the diegesis; it does not run at the same speed as real-world time and can be slowed down or sped up at the player's will at certain points in the game; this is a key tool for effective gameplay in *Majora's Mask* as many tasks involve careful attention to the time of day within the game

**narrative elements:** aspects of a video game—visual, audial, textual, or otherwise—which provide motifs, themes, plot, and other elements from literary texts for the player to discover within the diegesis of the game

**non-player character:** a character as whom the player is unable to play; usually, the player can interact with these characters by talking to them

**player:** the person inputting commands directly into the game by way of a controller with knobs, buttons, keys, etc.

**sidequest:** a task within the diegesis given to the player/avatar that is unnecessary for the completion of the ultimate goal within the game, but which offers a reward that may or may not facilitate the completion of that ultimate goal; in *Majora's Mask*, an example of this would be collecting the stray fairies in the four major dungeons and receiving a longer magic meter and other bonuses such as new attacks

**temple:** in *Majora's Mask*, this is an architectural structure which must be navigated in order to defeat a boss enemy and free one of the four giants who are Termina's guardians

**text box:** an onscreen, semi-transparent, non-diegetic phenomenon that displays the text of dialogue, instructions, sign-posts, etc. for the player to read

**video game:** an artifact with which one plays a game through an interface involving

projected or displayed lights using a method of input (knobs, buttons, keys, etc.) which controls what happens in the projected pictures; the game played may or may not involve narrative elements, an end towards which players progress, and the possibility of multiple players

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