

EXPERIMENTATION IN JO-HA-KYŪ
NARRATIVE THEORY: THE ORIGIN
OF A NOVELLA

by

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OF A NOVELLA

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INTRODUCTION

Jo-Ha-Kyū is a highly productive aesthetic principle that, in the Japanese tradition, characterizes spatiotemporal, logical, and tonal movement in artistic genres such as gagaku court music, kendo, flower arrangement, rengo and haiku poetry, and Noh dramatic structure. Following Motokiyo Zeami's treatises on the principle, and Takemono Gidayū's later elaborations, Jo-Ha-Kyū accounted for a critical standard and a heuristic in the Japanese artistic and literary tradition. In this project my goal was to apprehend and embody Jo-Ha-Kyū in fiction writing, and I have arrived at the origin of a novella. Meditations on the theory served as a productive heuristic in relation, especially, to pacing, characterization, and plot structure. In this short introduction, I intend to briefly express my understanding of Jo-Ha-Kyū and its relation to my writing.

Zeami Motokiyo was a prominent Noh actor, rengo poet, and aesthetician in 12th century Japan. Of his sizable body of work, *The Transition of the Flower through the Forms* and *The Three Paths* most clearly expose the three-part movement of Jo-Ha-Kyū. I have listed each element below with Zeami's explanation followed by various scholars' translations (See References):

- (1) Jo: "The tributary's gentle rill"—Opening, Introduction, Auspicious, Slow.
- (2) Ha: "The powerful cutting back and forth between peaks of river in spate"—Breaking, Tearing, Gradually Accelerating, Scattering, Intensifying.
- (3) Kyū: "The plunge of a mighty waterfall into a deep and silent pool"—Rapidity, Fast, Rushing, Conclusion.

These three movements embody what Magumi Sata calls a "concept of rhythmic order"—which, according to Zeami, manifests in all beautiful art objects (Sata). Like in

Aristotle, mimesis, or imitation, of nature and social reality is the foundation of Zeami's conception of beauty. The similar religious origins in Greek and Japanese theatre may partially account for proximities in Zeami's and Aristotle's ideas, but discussion of this is fodder for a different study. Zeami's Jo-Ha-Kyū, in application to dramatic composition, departs from Aristotle's narrative theory in one key way: it accounts for pacing, characterization, and narrative structure in the same terms.

Being grounded in rhythm, Jo-Ha-Kyū theory most naturally applies to the pacing of a work. Jo-Ha-Kyū, which “opens, scatters, rushes,” allowed me to carry out an appropriate arrangement of exposition and action. The Jo of a scene establishes the spatial and tonal zero-point, and thus necessitates a slowness and clarity of vision. The framing of the initial Jo moments sets the terms for the contradiction, the Ha—the breaking, accelerating—which coincides with the emergence of conflict. From this moment, the scene begins to accelerate, and the description of action naturally overtakes more reflective moments. As the story rushes toward conclusion—Kyū—one senses the gravity of dramatic action in the abrupt arrival of the end: in relation to the zero-point established by the Jo. In this way, Jo-Ha-Kyū stands as a tripod, each leg carrying equal weight.

After a great deal of thought, I found that Jo-Ha-Kyū applies to characterization in the coexistence of three elements, which attain dominance in a character's thought and action at different moments in a scene. The tripartite interaction of these concepts—*honne*, real intention; *tatamae*, façade; and *giri*, obligation—govern my characters' behavior. As the Jo, *honne* establishes the character's introverted motivation—which, in effect, is her spirit, and the element through which all her actions are rendered cogent.

The Ha—or the breaking—equates to the façade: her necessary reaction to the forces that constrict her on the outside, which is established in relation to an interiority (the Jo). And the Kyū—*giri*, duty—is the swift resolution of the Jo and the Ha, interiority and exteriority.

In the process of applying Jo-Ha-Kyū narrative structure to the novella, the work of the 15th century Jōruri chanter Gidayū was immensely helpful. His work centers on adapting Zeami’s theory to a five-act Kabuki plot using thematic shifts.

Act 1: “Love” — An auspicious opening

Act 2: “Warriors and Battles” — Heightened tempo

Act 3: “Pathos, tragedy” — The play’s climax

Act 4: “Travel Song” — A light travel scene or dance

Act 5: “Auspicious Conclusion” — A swift denouement (Gerstle)

These themed acts became the models by which I will construct the five-part novella.

In experimentation with Jo-Ha-Kyū theory, I have found myself at the origin of a novella. In the following pages, you will find what will be the third act of the final product. This story, which one day will exist in the wider context another story, served as my primary ground for exploration.

EXCERPT

On a late-February evening, Elena Hua walked east on Adams Street to attend a concert at Chicago's Theodore Thomas Orchestra Hall. The wind had carried the sun down faster than in the days before. Behind her the last edge of lit sky had already evaporated; ahead, lights on Michigan Avenue fuzzed in the mist. She wrapped her coat around her and another gust blew past. As she moved through the warmed circles of streetlight on the concrete, her shadow swung around in lazy arcs. She watched her flat form walk, warp, and curve behind her in step. She checked the time again—7:24 P.M., six minutes till the downbeat—and holding her purse tight, clacked forward at a jog.

Michigan Avenue bustled ahead of her. At the street corner, she looked left and right. To the north the road stretched toward populated shops, Millennium Park, all punctuated by calls and conversation. A stream of slow churning traffic divided the road. Buildings loomed up in the distance, closing off small patches of the sky, twinkling reflections of the city. To the south, half a block down, stood the orchestra hall.

For a moment Elena paused near the street corner, peering down at the hall's worn bricks. The wind blew strong, and she folded in toward the building's side. Between the modernized towers that sat on its flanks, the smaller hall looked out of place and prematurely aged. Accent lights shining up from the ground revealed all the cracks and contours of its façade. Even the Hellenic front of the Art Institute across the street seemed newer. She turned to the temple-like gallery. In front, a black statue of a lion stood at the top of the steps. People shrunk as they stepped past that place. Grandiose was the word. The orchestra hall was not, she thought.

The concert hall's marble blocks, which surrounded the windows and formed the arches on its lower levels, looked dirty, and the windows had cataracts of scum. The building recalled a corroded past that imposed itself unpleasantly on the present. Near the top floor of the building, a banner featuring a portrait of Franco Aloia, tuxedoed, baton in hand, wavered in the wind. Its top right fastening had come undone. The corner of the banner drooped down and obscured half of Aloia's face and the concert title. Elena continued down the sidewalk toward the hall's entrance, trying to keep her eyes fixed on her shoes.

Two men were in the hall: two in particular whom she half feared, half longed to see together. The first, Franco Aloia, virtuoso conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; the second, Lin Hua, her husband, first violin of the same.

Lin had returned the night before from a several month exchange at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. He slept half the morning and played the afternoon away in their kitchen. She skipped work to sleep in with him, stay and talk. They didn't talk much. From the bench, she watched across the hall as he practiced. In a wooden dining chair pulled next to window, he stared outside and played. Hearing him moved her. She breathed with the beat of the song and stared awhile. But watching his back bear down to the music, hearing the honeyed sound, her mind drifted. She looked past him, out at the sky through the window. She thought of the smell of Aloia's skin. Aloia—the conductor, her lover. Like breathing clear air. Inhaling, she closed her eyes and rebuilt his musculature in her mind: skin, skin on back, on neck, on thigh, on hand. His sinewed pec beating in her hand. And the feeling of knowing he was looking at her lips. His eyes pressing across her body in the way his body would.

Guilt one moment, something less the next. It had been a long time coming, Elena thought. She stood as if to do something important, but couldn't remember what it was. The song Lin played was sad. She didn't recognize it. She entered the kitchen, approaching slowly, stepping in a game to avoid the grout lines on the tile floor. Toe after toe, she reached his chair and toyed with a tin of rosin on the counter. He stopped playing then. She closed her eyes and kissed. And for the first time then, she felt him coil back against her lips—slightly enough to be imagined. She opened her eyes. Silence thickened between them. She cleared her throat. "Sounds good," she said.

Elena paused in front of the Orchestra Hall's entrance. She glared up at the once-white arches again, and then stepped into the revolving doors. As she pushed the sounds of the street muffled behind her, then the hubbub of the entryway poured in.

The room swelled with well-dressed regulars, music aficionados with eccentric hair, small women tottering on too-tall heels. Some of those who worked in the hall recognized and greeted Elena. Ushers, usually retired people with kind faces, passed between concertgoers, distributing programs, checking tickets, directing patrons to their seats. A doorman who Elena did not know nodded and uttered a goodevening. She smiled back and showed her ticket. As she strode into the main atrium, a few people grinned in her direction, acquaintances. Some stood in the corners, strangers, checking their watches. Couples rushed past, chatting between themselves.

On her way to the cloakroom, Elena saw Mary, a fragile woman who attended every concert. She was clad in a pink cotton dress and wore a string of oblong pearls around her neck. She posed her knobbed hand awkwardly on her hip. As Elena passed Mary said softly: "Lovely to see you tonight, Elena."

A smile spread across Elena's face when she noticed Mary near the wall. "Lovely to see you too—"

"So I hear Lin is playing tonight. Is it true?" the woman shot back before Elena could continue.

Elena stared at her for a moment, then opened her mouth.

"I knew," Mary interrupted. She winked. "You know, I bet I missed him more than you."

For a moment Elena thought to defend herself, but Mary seemed to have lost interest. She noticed a ruffle in her dress and was tried to press it out with the side of her thumb.

"I thought I was rid of the scoundrel," Elena quipped. "Just when I get comfortable on my own, he comes back expecting his morning coffee."

Mary looked up and acknowledged the joke, but only responded by absently glancing at the concert hall door.

"You're right though," continued Elena. "He is brilliant, and it's going to be good to hear him play."

"I am looking forward to that," mumbled Mary. "Right, see you at cocktail after the show?"

"Right," said Elena. A tinge of anticipation tightened in her chest.

At the cloakroom desk, Elena unwrapped her black parka and passed it to an attendant whom she didn't recognize. She intended to greet him, but for a moment, still addled by the sudden nervousness, couldn't speak.

“Your number is 433, ma’am,” muttered the old man. Elena stared blankly toward his eyes, or nose, or neck.

The attendant leaned farther forward. “Ma’am, please take the ticket. You can return for your coat after the show,” he repeated with an apologetic nod to those behind her in line.

Elena still stood silently, her eyes tracked down at the paper in his hand, which read 433, but her mind processed nothing. Again, she moved her lips as if to speak, but made no sound. A small crowd was beginning to form behind her.

“Next, please,” called the attendant, looking past her.

He set her ticket on the counter, and Elena woke from her daze all at once, adrenaline rushing. A couple was squeezing past her left side. Other concertgoers grumbled impatiently, nudging her from the counter. The orderly line seemed ready to dissolve. Just before she was pushed too far away, Elena reached out and snatched the ticket off the counter as the people converged. Surrounded by the throng, ticket in hand, Elena felt her stomach turn. She hated a crowd. Unease poured over her, and a bead of sweat gathered at the small of her back. She took a deep breath and hummed to herself.

“Nothing to worry about,” she whispered in rhythm as she walked. She looked back down at her ticket—433—and felt an ill-formed idea billow through her mind. She turned back toward the cloakroom desk and looked up over the crowd. From the tips of her toes, she shouted, “Hey!” at the attendant, waving her arm, heart pounding. “I need my coat back!” She stepped forward to the back of throng and repeated, “Hey! 433!”

Elena felt the muscles in her face and throat tighten. The cloakroom attendant, now far out of reach, was occupied with the coats and hats of the other concertgoers.

Elena gave up. Ashamed of her absentminded request, she stuffed the ticket in her purse, and stepped back into the atrium. With or without her coat, in that moment, she knew she had no choice but to leave.

Without another thought, Elena pressed back toward the doors of the concert hall, intent on fleeing. Her breath was short. Her steps, quick. An announcement sounded for the beginning of the concert, and the remaining audience members filed from the entryway to their respective sections. Elena moved against the flow, toward the exterior doors, stepping to the side to allow hurried people by her. Her mind pulled in all directions. She kept her head at a slight bow to avoid being seen and, whenever possible, turned away from all the faces she recognized. At a pause in traffic, she slipped out of the revolving glass doors. Outside, the cold shocked her body. For a moment she heard nothing but her breath, then slowly the sounds of street traffic materialized with the whipping wind and Saturday night racket.

The temperature had plummeted and the mist drizzled down. Arms wrapped around her shoulders, she braced for a walk back to the Wabash/Adams station, another commute on the ‘L’, then the final leg back to the apartment. What she would say and how she would look at Lin later that night she would decide later. A thin premonition of the conversation flashed before her eyes: she imagines Lin come in, she confesses, he, destroyed, gasps, on his knees grasps for the flounce of her skirt, face gone blanker than blank. She knows there’s no other way.

But before Elena could step north on Michigan toward her home, she heard a quiet call behind her that made her pause.

“Ms. Hua?”

The voice was strangely familiar, but she couldn't place it. Curiosity made her turn back toward the hall. Beside the revolving glass doors, she saw Clinton Pareja's silhouette. He was middle-aged and short, a CSO door manager and an old friend. He had a kind face and spoke softly.

"Thought that was you," he said, rubbing his gloved hands together.

Elena beamed. "I didn't see you there, Clinton." The weight on her mind suddenly lifted, she rushed toward him and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. Steam poured from her mouth as she spoke. "It's so good to see you!"

He grinned. "Where's your jacket? It's freezing."

"I already threw it in the coatroom," Elena responded nonchalantly. She paused for a moment and huddled in toward the side of the building. "Yeah, I don't know where my head is tonight. Anyway, how are you? How's Angela? I've hardly been around, haven't talked to her in ages."

A big grin wrapped across Clinton's face. "I'm fine. I guess she hasn't told you then?"

"No?" Elena said expectantly.

"We're having a baby."

"You did it!" Elena screamed. She threw her hands in the air and hugged Clinton again. "I knew you had in you, Clinton." She held him at arm's length, then punched him lightly on the chest. "Congratulations."

"Thanks," he said.

"Well when's the due date?"

"August."

“So exciting,” said Elena, “I need to call Angela right away. We’ll go to lunch—”

“But wait,” Clinton said. “Now that Lin’s back are you gonna, well, try again?”

Elena turned back toward the hall’s yellow light, “I—”

A microphone crackled on, and Elena paused to listen. “Ladies and Gentlemen,” it boomed. “Please make your way to your seats. The concert will begin shortly.”

“You better get going,” Clinton sighed. “Wouldn’t wanna miss Lin’s grand return, crazy woman.” He shooed her inside.

“Fine.” She pulled out her cell phone and started a text to Angela Pareja as she walked back toward the hall. She stopped in front of the door, mouthing the text message she wrote: “let’s... get... together...” When finished, she closed her phone and looked up at the building again for a few moments, as if considering something. Workers on the upper floors were leaning out to refasten Aloia’s poster. She looked back at Clinton.

“You wouldn’t happen to have a cigarette, would you Clinton?” Elena asked.

“You smoke now?” Clinton replied with surprise. “I’m quitting.” He grinned.

“Oh,” replied Elena. “I don’t. I mean, usually.” There was silence for a few seconds. “I’m really happy for you,” she announced. She stepped forward and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

Elena waved goodbye as she went through the door. Inside, she turned back and saw Clinton wink and wave her on. She thought she must have looked pitiful through the glass. Her cheeks felt weighted and tension built under her brow. She bore down and felt the heavy-swirling emotions build momentum inside her chest.

As Elena approached the concert hall doors, she slowed. Light drafts from the revolving doors behind her ruffled the air as latecomers rushed inside. When people

ahead entered the concert hall, the disjointed notes of the orchestra's tuning slipped out, and muted as soon as the doors shut again. It was one of her favorite sounds. If she closed her eyes listening to it, she saw her father standing on stage, tuning his viola at the Bogotá Philharmonic. She and her family would attend his concerts weekly. They sat in the left wing of the concert section, Elena always small next to her grandmother. She wasn't tall enough to see her father around the conductor, but learned quickly to distinguish the sound of his instrument. In the disorder of turning, woodwind squeals, and the irregular timpani beats, she would listen for his instrument's low C. A lazy arpeggio followed this, and tremored richly up the viola's range. The sound was worn into her. She sensed it in her body more than with her ears. This memory brought Elena another wave of calm. She looked toward the doors.

By this time the ushers had left their places and were chatting in the corners of the halls. Elena approached the door, placed her hand on the handle and paused. She gestured toward the closest usher as if to say, "Can I go in?" He smiled back at her with a thumbs-up. Elena turned toward the door, inches from her face. She traced the lines of the wood grain with her eyes, took a breath, and entered.

The moment Elena appeared in the concert hall, the cacophony of the many musicians' tuning resolved into an odd harmony. The first violin, Lin Hua, as if cued by Elena's entering the large door, stepped on stage, umber instrument in hand, and the hall erupted in applause. Elena stood frozen and stared.

Clapping rang out, rising up the heights of the muraled dome, down each balcony to the red velvet seats and their occupants. At the back of the immense symphony hall, under the first mezzanine where Elena stood, the sound was dampered. The doors shut

behind her, and she looked out. Dim reflections off the audience's jewelry whirled in the lowering light on the draped or wooden walls; the stage, peppered with the shifting specks, glowed under blazing lamps. Lin's distant figure, showered in the stage lights and ovation, bowed slowly center stage in front of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Elena pitied him. She scrutinized her husband's face, whitewashed in the light. Just as the accent lights aged the architecture on the outside of the building, the stage lights revealed a gauntness in Lin's eyes and cheeks. Elena wondered, for a moment, if this was because he knew what she had done.

On stage Lin looked thin. Light reflected off the toecap of his new-shined Oxford shoes. The cuffs of his pants hung down too low over the laces and behind his heel. His black suit fit baggily on his shoulders. Elena thought of the countless times she had stood behind him and straightened it or traced his features with a lint roller. She had always been infatuated by his back. When he stood up straight, she would watch his shoulder blades articulate underneath his shirt. In fact, her most clear memory of the first time they fucked was watching his bare back as he stood from the bed. His muscles shifted slowly in the low light, and she noticed a small mole tucked beside the middle of his spine. She felt guilty that, out of all of it, this was the memory her mind selected, but something in that sight made her insides shimmer. A part of her had hoped to return tonight and find that spark in him again somehow.

The hall quieted as Lin raised his instrument and behind him an oboe rang out in concert B-flat. He thrust his bow down across the violin and matched the tone, and seconds later, the ensemble sounded in unison. Elena, still standing at the back reaches of the hall, began moving down the aisle as if suddenly awoken again. The moment she

emerged from under the mezzanine, the house lights faded out entirely. The orchestra's tone mounted, but as she continued toward the hall's center and neared her seat, the sound stopped. The room, as if it were inhaling, filled with a new silence. Then the orchestra descended again back into quiet tapping and tuning.

With her eyes deliberately fixed on peoples' feet, Elena shuffled toward her seat in row K, hunched, stepping over knees. At last when she sat down, she heard the audience's applause redouble. Without seeing, Elena knew that Aloia had entered. Cheers rang out from the highest balconies and vibrated down through the hall again. To avoid the sight of him, for a few seconds, she rummaged through her purse as if intently searching for something. She pawed between crumpled receipts, half-spilled blush, coins, and discarded chapstick lids. The deafening applause rained down. There was nothing worth finding. Finally, the bag slid from her hands toward the ground, and she lifted her head to look.

Aloia seemed to have a larger frame on stage than in person. He took long strides, with an oddly boyish bounce, hunching his shoulders slightly as if trying to avoid hitting his head on a low ceiling. On his face was the same expression he always seemed to when entering a room, a confident grin, a dimple on his left cheek. Despite his poor posture, Elena thought his figure seemed imposing. And his broad shoulders gave him an air of authority. He raised his large hand to salute the crowd. Elena recalled holding that hand the first night they were together. Her palm was small against his; his fingers calloused on the sides. Elena held her hands together in her lap. After reaching center stage, next to Lin, Aloia stopped. They greeted one another with a familiar smile and shook hands.

Elena turned her eyes away and it felt as if the room turned with her. Even in her peripheral vision, she could tell Aloia's skin was becoming more olive in the light; his hair, which was straightened and combed back, lay uncharacteristically neat. Vague and disproportionate images of the men kept moving through her mind, becoming stranger the longer she looked away. She imagined a dejected scowl curling Lin's face, his disgust with her and Aloia overflowing. Aloia, in her vision, held an unblinking stare straight toward her: she read apathy in his blank expression. Or was it rejection?

In order to banish Aloia from her mind, Elena tried conjuring a memory of Lin's face. She wanted to envision it in every detail—from chin, to lips, to nose, to eyes—Lin's expression playing his violin, drinking and eating, making love. But what she saw lacked all distinction. What did it mean that she could not even imagine him? She looked at him on stage as he stood, eyes toward the balconies, still smiling next to Aloia. His expression was one of complete levity. For a moment she could almost believe he was ignorant of all that had happened.

Watching this exchange was what Elena had feared most about attending the concert. The moment the two men shared, to anyone else in the room, appeared to be nothing beyond professional. But Elena was battered by waves of memory. She felt the past replayed on her skin like a film of feeling. Pictures projected on her from the outside. Her face flushed. She looked down at her lap. At that moment, Elena wanted nothing more than to take back the past, flee to Lin, and forget.

When the music erupted—Schumann's *Violin Concerto in D Minor*—she came back to the present. The woodwinds soared above and dipped below the strings' kneading background. Elena allowed herself to be battered by the notes like a boat in the sea. When

the music dipped, she fell; when it trilled, she tingled. She sunk into her chair, anonymous in the crowd, and watched Aloia unfold the piece before her eyes. As the soloist, Lin stood and carved notes nimbly into the air. In her mind, time slowed and tension weakened. She closed her eyes.

By the opening of the second movement, *Langsam*, Elena's mind was transported away from her troubles. She opened her eyes and in front of her laid the whole visual and aural beauty of the symphony. Under the bright lights, the musicians played on and seemed to shimmer as they moved. Aloia stood high, guiding the orchestra with gentle motions, his wrist ticking left occasionally. Lin pulled his bow over the strings slowly and measured out each subtlety of the song. The string section echoed his melody in bright tremors, which faded away as quickly as they came. He and Aloia worked in unison. Their parallel movements animated the music, which sometimes danced, sometimes flowed slowly like silt-heavy stream. The world was intact and Elena could breathe.

Inspired by the music's beauty, he looked up at Aloia and remembered, in a moment, unashamedly, every reason she had wanted to be with him. His talent and experience were unparalleled; he embodied both gentleness, and wild energy. Something in the way he carried himself, the way he spoke, his laugh, made her smile. Elena was smiling to herself as the second movement ended. When Aloia raised his arms and silenced the orchestra, she recalled the way his body would stretch out in bed at night. He would lay naked, breathing slowly, arms above his head, and she would watch the low light play blue over his skin. Their bodies, lying between pillars of sunlit dust, formed

small mountains between the sheets. The orchestra hall was as silent as one of those mornings. Before she could inhale again, the music recommenced.

Lin stepped forward then and began masterfully interpreting the most difficult section of Schumann's only concerto. His hand tremored down the fingerboard as he pulled the bow over the strings. Lengthy arpeggios folded into the air between bright strokes of sound. His face turned red and sweat formed at his brow, which wrinkled tensely when he focused. The music he played enraptured Elena, and she began to see him through its sounds. As the frenzied notes resolved, her troubles gave way to clarity. Her reasons for loving him, her husband, were as evident as ever. He was brilliant, loyal, and loving. His absence during the exchange had left a hole her: a void she could only pretend to fill. She had warned him that something would change if he accepted the exchange. She didn't know it would be her. To see him again this way—on stage, playing—filled her with warmth of many memories. She was taken back to quiet cups of coffee with him at breakfast. To riding beside him on an Amtrak train. To their days at university when she had seen him first. How she would sneak into the music building to listen to his practice. How seeing him on stage had left her gasping.

After the last notes of the music faded beyond perception, Aloia relaxed his shoulders. The audience applauded. Until the end, Lin had played in rapture. He let out a heavy sigh and bowed toward the orchestra, then tipped his head, it seemed, to the lights above the audience.

For a moment, still addled by the song's ecstatic ending, Elena sat calmly and clapped, thinking everything settled. At that moment, her feelings for Lin and Aloia were not in contradiction. The affair was a result of circumstance and forces beyond her

control. The love of her husband was given. Why she had thought that coming to the concert would expose her infidelity she could not remember. Truthfully, she did not know how she would move on. Perhaps she would end it with Aloia, perhaps it would continue. Either way, she was free. She felt free until, again, the chains of her choices bound her down.

After his bow, Aloia walked down and around his stand. Unexpected to Elena, he gestured toward the left wing of the orchestra. From there, a woman Elena did not recognize walked on stage.

Unlike the rest of the musicians, clothed in plain black dresses or tuxedos, this woman wore a red, sequined gown that made her waver like a mirage in the light. She was beautiful. Her dark hair was tied back in a bun and the lightness of her skin seemed to indicate that she wore little make-up. She greeted Aloia with a kiss on the cheek. Then, after she sat in a chair placed near his right side, stagehands brought her a mahogany cello. When this was done, Aloia mounted the stand two steps at a time, surveyed the orchestra, and flipped through his notes.

Elena ground her teeth. Upon the woman's arrival, her distraction transformed into heightened anxiety. All peace—and the guilt, doubt, and regret that preceded it—fled to the back of her mind. She was consumed by a new longing to know who this contender was and from where she came. The vixen, in commanding some gravity-like force, reoriented space itself, the lines and geometry of the room, so that all converged upon her. She sat staring forward, instrument in hand, waiting, her expression broadcasting a dreamy melancholy. Her look alone was enough to change the concert hall's tone. The hall's lights dimmed again, and a spot brightened on her and Aloia.

Elena pulled her eyes away from the stage with some difficulty, glancing back once as if to confirm that the woman was really there. As calmly as she could, she looked from side to side in search of a program. The crowd around her was shrouded in darkness. Everyone's eyes fixed forward, faces lit only from the front. A stirring in the orchestra punctuated the silence. Two seats to her right, Elena saw a man turning the pages of the concert handbill. She leaned forward in her seat, motioned in his direction, and mouthed, "May I see that for a moment?"

At first, the man didn't understand. "What?" he whispered back.

Elena pointed at the program, and mouthed her request again: "The program. One moment."

The man nodded, whispered, "excuse me," to his neighbors, and passed the paper across to Elena.

She shook as she opened the handbill. Its lacquered pages shuffled, and listeners in the area stared. She flipped from page to page, passing patrons' names and high-end advertisements until, finally, she reached the list of musicians. A cough sounded from the upper levels, and Aloia raised his arms. His entire body flexed, and with it, the orchestra. A leaflet fell out of the program, it read: "L. Bedouille, first cello, will be replaced tonight by A. Novacek, visiting musician from the Berliner Philharmoniker."

Aloia's baton dropped as if taken by a sudden weight. Elena watched the tip of it trace a line through the air, and, as if pulled in time with his motion, Novacek bowed the strings. The auditorium, in an instant, flooded with the first arresting tones of Elgar's *Cello Concerto in E Minor*.

The cello growled with a hollowness and speed that wiped Elena's face blank. All other sounds seemed to sink into the floor. Novacek brought her instrument to life, and it pulled her body with every note, stroke by stroke, at the beat of Aloia's baton. Elena could feel the air warped on her skin by the cello's whining sound. That sound sunk in. She felt every note deep in her chest—stir, rise, catch in her throat, then whirl up to some bright spot behind her eyes. The musician in red sat shrunken behind her instrument as if hiding from what she was doing. She tucked her chin into her chest by the cello's neck.

After the first few bars of the movement, prompted by a light gesture from Aloia, the rest of the orchestra joined in a quiet counterpoint to the cello's melody. He was a masterful interpreter of Elgar: one of the best in the world. But the brilliance of the music tonight was obviously not his doing. It was hers. The competing and concordant movements of the cellist and strings, the woodwinds and percussion melded into an ornate procession of tone in time. Aloia painted the music onto the air with his baton, and, upon that canvas, it awoke.

Before Elena noticed any time pass, the concerto's violent fourth movement had opened. The orchestra played at a volume previously unachieved in the piece. The violins and woodwinds galloped down in an energetic rondo, which soon subsided again to the cello's funereal lyric. Novacek played perfectly. For a brief moment, Elena heard the music of the whole orchestra. She scanned the stage, her eyes resting on the parallel movements of musicians' bows, on her husband's neck, on Aloia's back, and then again on the face of woman who worked the spell. Novacek's chin was jutting to the side, her eyes slits, shoulders rocking rhythmically.

Elena looked back and forth between Novacek and Aloia. Aloia's whole body had begun to sway with the music. Elena could tell, even from behind and slightly to the side, his face was contorted the way it always was when worked: a grin that wrinkled up the whole left side of his face. The hair on the back of his head, now disheveled and dampened by sweat, gathered in uneven locks that bounced to the motion of his arm. The cellist continued to play in her impenetrable trance. Elena stared, and in a fleeting moment, saw something. A break, a glimmer, an unconscious variation. She wouldn't have seen it without such attention. At a lull in the music, without a doubt, Novacek had cracked open her eyes, fixed her gaze on Aloia, and twitched her lip up in such a way that revealed she was his lover. Elena was certain.

Each time the cellist played before, Elena's mind went blank; now, at every note, it came closer to eruption. Novacek was a threat and a release at once. Only when the orchestra's sound rose over the soloist's raw melody were her thoughts able emerge. She recognized what Novacek represented: a possible release from Aloia. Her lip twitched. She turned the thought over in her mind. The prospect was terrifying and tempting. She looked up at Lin, his gaunt eyes shadowed out by the light. Something in the way he moved was wrong, the way he held his head, his neck, his mouth, but she knew she loved him. His playing was perfection. Aloia towered over the stage, but Elena hated him now in the same proportion as her desire. Her mind marinated in the prospect of his betrayal, visions of the woman and Aloia, until her fists tingled.

Elena heard her heartbeat resounding throughout her body. In her mind's eye, the flickering wisp of the cellist stood up on stage and set her instrument down. As the music

continued, she walked across to Aloia's stand and kissed him on the cheek. It was clear. Elena gasped for breath and the vision transformed.

Suddenly, the stage was emptied of the orchestra, except for Lin, Aloia, and Novacek. Aloia stepped down from the stand. Behind him, Lin alone played the violin. Back in her chair, Novacek set her cello on the ground and crossed from her place again: this time, she kissed Aloia on the mouth.

Elena stood. She saw the concert hall was empty. Behind Aloia, Lin paced. His jaw clinched, lip curled, eyes as angry pools. He knew. Novacek pulled her bow across the cello strings, staring coldly into Elena's eyes.

Suddenly, Elena appeared on the stage. Aloia grinned on the stand. The cellist in her chair. Elena grabbed the cello from the woman's hands—it was heavier than it looked, the dark wood, cold. Novacek snatched it back, and they struggled across the stage, grunting, muscles tearing. Finally, Elena ripped it away and kicked Novacek down. She raised the instrument as high as she could, and threw it against the floor, eyes welling. The cello thudded against the ground. A crack, and the dull twang of breaking strings echoed out.

Silence hurtled through the hall. Elena opened her eyes. She was the lone person standing in the audience. Aware of every noise and movement around her. Aloia too faced Novacek on stage, his mouth agape. Novacek stared out into the audience—through the blinding light—straight, somehow, into Elena's eyes. Elena's stomach dropped in the eerie silence. The entire orchestra, all the people in the room, stared at the woman in red. On stage, she sat, bow in hand, still held across the two strings that had broken as she played the concerto's penultimate chord.

Applause thundered around Elena. The lights in the room went faint. The audience stood and Elena found herself in a standing mass. The ovation barreled through the hall, magnifying upwards until the din was deafening. She leaned from side to side trying to see the stage. Between the people's bodies in front, cheering and waving arms, she only saw brief movements, glimpses of motion from which she could draw no meaning. She began pushing her way out of the row.

Before long, the applause stopped and Elena was lost in the crowd leaving for intermission. Aloia, Lin, and Novacek stood on stage side by side, under the light, then, one by one, left.

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ABSTRACT

This project consisted of a creative exploration of Jo-Ha-Kyū aesthetic as described in Motokiyo Zeami's *The Transition of the Flower through the Forms* and *The Three Paths*, and Takemono Gidayū's *Sixteen Eighty-Seven Collection of Jōruri Scenes*. I sought to implement Jo-Ha-Kyū concepts as a writing heuristic and produced plans for a five-part novella, modeled after the conventions of Noh theatre composition. The final product presented here is an excerpt from the third act—which, as per Jo-Ha-Kyū, is characterized by pathos and dramatic climax.