The Water Mirror Motif in the Noh Play

*Izutsu*: Continuation and Variation of a Classical Theme

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1. From *Ise monogatari* to Zeami’s Noh Play *Izutsu*

The celebrated noh play *Izutsu* (The Well Curb) is widely considered to be one of Zeami’s masterpieces. In general its underlying story is based on Episode 23 of *Ise monogatari* (The Ise Stories, late ninth–mid-tenth century), yet scholars have long recognized that the play also departs significantly from the original. For example, the play’s setting in Isonokami, as well as the identification of the main character (shite) as Ki no Aritsune’s daughter, are both derived from medieval commentaries on the *Ise monogatari*, and not the *Ise monogatari* itself. Also, the play cuts Episode 23’s last scene, which focused on the figure known as “the woman in Takayasu” (*Takayasu no onna*), the secret lover of the male protagonist.

Furthermore, the plot of the play reverses the narrative’s time axis, ending with a scene focused on the shite’s childhood. In Act 1, as the main female character reminisces about the past, it is revealed that her husband, Ariwara no Narihira (825–880), had desisted from further visits to his lover after clandestinely overhearing his wife’s poem. The *Ise monogatari* gives the poem as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
kaze & \text{ fukeba} \\
okitsu & \text{ shiranami} \\
Tatsuta & \text{ yama} \\
yowa & \text{ ni ya kimi ga} \\
bitori & \text{ koyuramu}
\end{align*}
\]

1 "Ise monogatari*, p. 137. In the noh play, the wording of the last line of this poem is slightly different (*bitori yukuran* 独り行くらん) but without significant change in sense. Zeami, *Izutsu*, p. 291.
When the wind rises
the white waves from the offing
Mount Tatsuta's Pass,
In the deepest midnight dark,
Do you cross there all alone?²

The scene then returns to the couple’s childhood, and the time spent together around their neighborhood well, where they became engaged through an exchange of poems.

In Act 2, after the shite has identified herself as “the woman who waits” (bito matsu onna 人待つ女), she proceeds, while clad in her husband’s gown, to relive the couple’s childhood play. As she does, she sees her beloved reflected in her own reflection in the well. With this, the play reaches its climax. Upon her entry in Act 1, the shite’s worldly passions and yearning for deliverance had been expressed, but here the play’s climax eventually finds her led, not to salvation from earthly attachments, but rather to immersion in memories of a happier past.

The narrative device through which this effect is achieved—the water mirror—is not found in the Ise monogatari episode but is original to Zeami’s play. The shite’s embodied presence, as reflected in the water over which she leans peering, creates a dramatic effect.

Already in Act 1, the shite’s reminiscences refer to the “wooden well, around which the young children played, conspiring in friendly ways, peering at their reflections in the water mirror, heads together, sleeves o’erlaid, bosom friends, hearts fathomless as the water.”³

Act 2 then overlays the movements of the shite, peering into the well, with the following words:

\begin{equation}
\begin{align*}
sanagara mimieshi & \text{さながら見見えし} \\
mukashi otoko no & \text{昔男の} \\
kamuri naoshi wa & \text{冠直衣は} \\
onna to mo miezu & \text{女とも見えず} \\
otoko narikeri & \text{男なりけり} \\
Narihira no omokage & \text{業平の面影} \\
mireba natsukashi ya & \text{見ればなつかしや} \\
ware nagara natsukashi ya & \text{われながらなつかしや}^4
\end{align*}
\end{equation}

CHORUS:
Thus we saw each other, he,
the man of old,

² Yasuda, Masterworks of the Nō Theater, p. 215.
⁴ Zeami, Izutsu, p. 296.
his court cap and gown
now conceal the woman,
it is indeed a man—
the image of Narihira

SHITE:
seeing it, I yearn,

CHORUS:
'tis my own self, yet I yearn.5

The woman’s ghost, by reenacting her childhood play with her beloved, causes
his reflection to appear. She becomes absorbed in his image, even as she realizes
that the reflection is but her own.

The noh play Matsukaze 松風 (Pine Wind) features a similar scene in which a
male actor playing a woman puts on a man’s cloak and cap, as if possessed. In
Izutsu, however, this motif is intensified by the additional layer of the shite recogni-
zing her lover in the image reflected on the water mirror. A male actor playing
the role of a woman dresses as a man, only to create the illusion of a woman
thinking of her reflection in a mirror as that of a man. Multiple layers of gen-
der-switching are piled up, one on top of the other, to produce a moment that
yields the play’s most impressive scene.

However, as we have seen, this water mirror motif, while playing a pivotal role
in Izutsu, is not found in Episode 23 of the Ise monogatari. This invites the ques-
tion of whether this motif can be attributed to another source.

2. The Water Mirror Motif in Japanese Medieval Literary Tradition

The water mirror motif as such has a long history. The Baishi wenji 白氏文集
(Jp. Hakushi bunshū; Collected Writings of Bai Juyi, 845), a widely popular work in
Heian (794–1185) Japan that left a profound mark on its literature, contains multi-
ple poems in which such a water mirror motif appears. The poem “An Evening in
Early Autumn” (新秋夕, vol. 9) includes the line “The autumn pond shining
brightly with the harvest moon” (秋池明月水). Likewise, the poem “Farewell Ban-
quet in a Pavilion by the Yangzi River” (江燈宴别, vol. 16) includes the line “The cold
stream, floating the moon on its surface, lay clear as a mirror” (寒流帶月澄如鏡).
And the poem “A Night by the Pond” (池上夜境, vol. 52) includes “The clear
sky’s stars and moon fell onto the pond and its banks” (晴空星月落池塘).6
Among collections of Chinese poetry composed by Japanese authors, one en-
counters other titles with similar motifs. These include “Suichū no kage” 水中影
(Reflections in the Water) in the Bunka shūreishū 文華秀麗集 (Anthology of
Splendid Literary Flowerings, 818) and “Suichū no tsuki” 水中月 (Moon in the

5Brazell, “Izutsu,” p. 156.
6Baishi wenji, vols. 9, 16, 52. These can be found, respectively, in Shinsaku kanbun taikei 117, 99,
105.
Water) in the *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文草 (The Literary Works of Sugawara [no Michizane], 900).\(^7\)

However, in all these cases, the objects whose images are reflected by the water are natural features, primarily the moon, or flowers and grass. The “reflections in the water” addressed by the aforementioned poem of the same title are of flowers, leaves, a bird, and a shrub, in addition to celestial bodies.\(^8\)

Such an association with natural elements holds true also for Japanese *waka* 和歌 composed around the same time. The *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (905), in Book 1 (Spring 1), contains a poem by Lady Ise 伊勢 (c. 877–c. 939) in which flowers are reflected in the water:

\[
\begin{align*}
toshi o hete & \quad \text{年をへて} \\
bana no kagami to & \quad \text{花の鏡と} \\
naru mizu wa & \quad \text{なる水は} \\
chiri kakaru o ya & \quad \text{ちりかかるをや} \\
kumoru to iuran & \quad \text{くもるといふらん}\end{align*}
\]

Are we to call them clouded—stream waters where for many years we saw the blossoms mirrored—now are hidden by fallen petals.\(^9\)

Another poem, by Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (d. 945), describes the reflection of autumn leaves:\(^11\)

\[
\begin{align*}
minasoko ni & \quad \text{水底に} \\
kage shi utsureba & \quad \text{影うつれば} \\
momiji no & \quad \text{紅葉の} \\
iro no fukaku ya & \quad \text{色も深くや} \\
narimasaruran & \quad \text{成まさるらん}\end{align*}
\]

Turned autumn leaves reflected into the depths of a water’s ground— their scarlet hue must then too be cast in still deeper tone.\(^{12}\)

Yet further poems by Tsurayuki employ, among others, images of wisteria, or kerria, as natural features reflected in water.

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\(^7\) *Bunka shūrei shū* 2:125; Sugawara no Michizane, *Kanke bunsō* 2:116.

\(^8\) For an English translation of this poem, see Rabinovitch and Bradstock, *No Moonlight in My Cup*, p. 125.

\(^9\) *Kokin wakashū* 44.


\(^11\) *Tsurayuki shū* 26.

\(^{12}\) Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise indicated, all translations of original sources are by Michael Burtscher.
However, in the *Tosa nikki* (Tosa Diary, c. 935), Tsurayuki includes the following verse in which the water reflects an image different from those found in the poems described above:

```
kage mireba  かげ見れば
nami no soko naru  波の底なる
hisakata no  ひさかたの
sora kogi wataru  空漕ぎわたる
ware zo wabishiki  われぞわびしき
```

With a forlorn heart
I gaze into the moonlight
where beneath the waves
stretches a limitless sky
to be traversed by this boat.14

This *waka* is one of a number of rarer poems in which the reflection in the water is the poet’s own. It responds to the Chinese couplet below, which the *Tosa nikki* quotes immediately before as follows:

```
Sao wa ugatsu nami no ue no tsuki o  棒は穿つ波の上の月を
fune wa osou umi no uchi no sora o  舟は圧ふ海の中の空を
```

The oar strikes through the moon on the waves;
The boat presses against the sky in the sea.16

In the few cases where a reflection produced by a water mirror is portrayed as the poet’s own, the image conveyed is usually negative. An example is Episode 155 of the *Yamato monogatari* (Tales of Yamato, mid-tenth century). The Dainagon’s daughter, who has been confined to a small hut on Mt. Asaka in Mutsu Province after being kidnapped by a certain man, sees her reflection in a mountain spring, only to realize that her erstwhile beauty is now gone. Overcome by shame about her dreadful appearance, she recites the following poem and dies:

```
Asakayama  あさか山
kage sae miyuru  影へ見ゆる
yama no i no  山の井の
asaku wa bito o  あさくは人を
omou mono ka wa  思ふものかは
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13 *Tosa nikki*, p. 31.
14 The English translation, with “sea” in the fourth line corrected to “sky” (*sora* 空), by McCullough, *Kokin Wakashū*, p. 275.
15 *Tosa nikki*, p. 31.
16 McCullough, *Kokin Wakashū*, p. 275. On Jia Dao’s Chinese poem, see also Hasebe, “Ka Tō.”
17 *Yamato monogatari*, p. 390.
Asaka Mountain—
In a shallow mountain spring
a clear reflection
not so shallow are my thoughts
as I long and think of him.\textsuperscript{18}

This poem is clearly a variation on poem 3807 in the \textit{Man’yōshū} \textit{Man’yo Shu} (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, completed after 759):

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{Asakayama} & 安積山
\textit{kage sae miyuru} & 影さへ見ゆる
\textit{yama no i no} & 山の井の
\textit{asaki kokoro o} & 浅き心を
\textit{wa ga omonawaku ni} & 我が思はなくに\textsuperscript{19}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Asaka Mountain—
In a shallow mountain spring
a clear reflection
not so shallow in the heart
where my thoughts have mirrored you.\textsuperscript{20}

The motif of a poet’s persona suddenly realizing, upon seeing their reflection in a water mirror, that she or he has aged follows a long tradition of poetic expression in which a mirror impresses on its beholder the inescapable reality of old age. As discussed below, Zeami himself also employed this motif to express a feeling of impermanence.

The motif of a water mirror showing a loved one’s reflection has precedents as well, even if not many. An early example appears in poem 4322 of the \textit{Man’yōshū}, one of the songs of the sakimori \textit{Shin} soldiers:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{wa ga tsuma wa} & 我が妻は
\textit{itaku koi rashi} & いたく恋ひらし
\textit{nomu mizu ni} & 飲む水に
\textit{kage sae miete} & 影さへ見えて
\textit{yo ni wasurarezu} & よに忘れず\textsuperscript{21}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

My wife misses me—
See, with how sore a yearning:
in the very water
that I drink her face appears;
I can never forget her.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} In the English translation, the first three lines are taken from Cranston’s translation of \textit{Man’yōshū} \textit{Man’yo Shu} 3807 in \textit{A Waka Anthology, Volume 1}, p. 752, while the fourth and fifth lines are translated by Michael Burtscher. For an English translation of the \textit{Yamato monogatari}, see Tahara, \textit{Tales of Yamato}, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Man’yōshū} 3807, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{20} Cranston, \textit{A Waka Anthology, Volume 1}, p. 752 (capitalizations changed).
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Man’yōshū} 4322, p. 384.
\textsuperscript{22} Cranston, \textit{A Waka Anthology, Volume 1}, p. 630.
This motif derives from the folk belief that seeing one’s beloved reflected in water was proof that the latter was thinking of oneself. In Heian poetry, however, we occasionally also encounter love poems where the poet’s persona actively searches for a beloved’s reflection. Take, for example, poem 189 from the Kanpyō no ōntoki kisai no miya no utaawase 寛平御時時后宮歌合 (Poetry Contest Held at the Residence of the Consort in the Kanpyō Era, between the years of 889 and 893):

\begin{verbatim}
  hito shirezu 人知れず
  shita ni nagaruru 下に流るる
  namidadagawa 涙川
  seki todomenamu せきとどめなむ
  kage ya miyuru to 影や見ゆると
\end{verbatim}

Unbeknownst to her
streaming with no end beneath,
a river of tears.
Its rushing flow I must halt
to see her countenance clear.

In the poem above, the medium producing the reflection is not actual water but the imaginary water of a river of tears. The image of such a lachrymal river becoming a water mirror is also found in the “Winter Poems” (fuyu no uta 冬歌) section of the same poetry contest (poem 139). Both poems were later selected for inclusion in the first volume of the Shinsen Man’yōshū 新撰万葉集 (Newly Compiled Man’yōshū, 893–913), where they were paired with poems in Chinese.²⁴ The image of a river of tears as a water mirror is not derived from Chinese poetry, however, but is original to Japanese literature.

A further example featuring this motif is the following poem from the Shūi wakashū 拾遺和歌集 (Collection of Waka Gleanings, c. 1005–1007):

\begin{verbatim}
  namidadagawa 涕河
  nodoka ni dan mo のどかにだにも
  nagarenan 流れ南
  koishiki hito no 恋しき人の
  kage ya miyuru to 影や見ゆると
\end{verbatim}

My river of tears,
oh, how I wish for its flow
to slow to a calm!
The image of my beloved
will find its reflection here.

²³ Kanpyō no ōntoki kisai no miya no utaawase 189, p. 480.
²⁵ Shūi wakashū 875, p. 252.
In this next poem, also from *Kanpyō no ōntoki kisai no miya no utaawase*, in particular its “Love Poems” (*koi no uta* 恋歌) section, the water mirror likewise consists of tears, but here the beloved’s reflected image has already appeared:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{shiratama no} & \quad \text{白玉の} \\
\text{kiede namida to} & \quad \text{消えて涙と} \\
\text{narinureba} & \quad \text{なりぬれば} \\
\text{koishiki kage o} & \quad \text{恋しき影を} \\
\text{soko ni koso mire} & \quad \text{そこにこそ見れ}\end{align*}
\]

Glistening white pearls
clinging to my forlorn sleeve
as but trailing tears.
My beloved’s countenance
casting forth an image here.

The water mirror motif in Zeami’s play had thus a long literary tradition behind it. But Zeami’s motivation for introducing that motif into the *Izutsu* story from the *Ise monogatari*, where it is not found, cannot be sufficiently explained by literary tradition alone. As is frequently pointed out, noh plays on stories from classical literature were often based less on the original work itself than on contemporaneous commentaries explaining that work. In the case of *Izutsu*, Ōtani Setsuko 大谷節子 has remarked that the *Waka chikenshū* 和歌知顕集 (Collection of Manifest Knowledge about Poetry, eleventh century) contains commentary according to which the two children playing by the well “observed with envy how grown-up men and women could peer into the well and see its bottom.” They began measuring their heights against the well because “they were desperately awaiting the time when they would be grown up” themselves. Ōtani further discusses the subtlety with which the *shite*’s act of peering into the well in Act 2, by alluding to the children’s ardent desire to glimpse into the well in days gone by, connects back through time to their childhood play and thus assumes multiple layers of meaning.27

Another possible influence on the water mirror motif in Zeami’s play was contemporaneous illustrations of this story. The *Bonjikyō-zuri hakubyō Ise monogatari emaki* 梵字経刷白描伊勢物語絵巻 (Plain-Ink *Ise Stories* Illustrated Scrolls Imprinted with Sanskrit Letters, early Kamakura period),28 the oldest extant set of *Ise monogatari* illustrated scrolls, depicts from behind two children leaning on adjacent sides of the well curb. The left figure appears to be peering into the well, while the other appears to be looking at the first. The *Ihon Ise monogatari emaki* 異本伊勢物語絵巻 (Variant *Ise Stories* Illustrated Scrolls)29—a late Tokugawa-period copy of a picture scroll from the Kamakura era which is thought to preserve and

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26 *Kanpyō no ōntoki kisai no miya no utaawase* 158, p. 474.
29 Ibid., pp. 62–63.
convey the earlier style—again depicts the two children leaning on adjacent sides of the well curb, with the figure to the left peering into the well, while the figure to the right again looks towards the other. Unfortunately, other early illustrations are not available, therefore this vector of influence must remain within the realm of speculation.

_Ise monogatari_, Episode 27, sometimes known as “Tarai no kage” たらひの影 (The Reflection in the Wash Basin), offers an especially interesting comparative case for the superimposition, in water, of a man’s reflection onto the reflection of a woman. In that episode, a certain woman, lamenting that a man who visited for one night has never returned, recites the following poem upon seeing her reflection in her washbasin:

```
ware bakari
mono omou hito wa
mata mo arajī
to omoeba mizu no
shita ni mizu ni arikeri
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No one, anywhere, could be as miserable as unhappy me, I assure myself, yet spy, beneath the water, one more.  

The man, who happens to be standing nearby, overhears this and answers with the following poem:

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imakuchi ni
ware ya miyuramu
kawazu sae
mizu no shita ni te
morogoe ni naku
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I must be the one you have glimpsed there by the spout, for even a frog may, from beneath the water, join in when another cries.

In his own poem, the man assumes that the woman has seen his reflection in the water, not her own. By switching the reflected subject, he turns the woman’s grudge against him back against herself. The situation differs entirely from that

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30 _Ise monogatari_, p. 141.
31 Mostow and Tyler, _The Ise Stories_, p. 77.
32 _Ise monogatari_, p. 141.
33 Mostow and Tyler, _The Ise Stories_, p. 78.
found in Zeami’s play, but there is some similarity in the subtle effect achieved by overlaying the reflections of a woman and a man in a water mirror.

3. The Water Mirror Motif in Zeami’s Other Works

It bears mention that Zeami employs the water mirror motif quite frequently in his other works. The play Yōrō 養老 (Fostering Long Life), for example, quotes the lines “In a shallow mountain spring / a clear reflection” from the “Asaka Mountain” Man’yōshū poem mentioned above, alluding simultaneously to a line from a Ki no Tsurayuki poem in the Kokin wakashū (Book 1)—sode hichite / musubishi mizu 袖ひちてむすびし水 (waters in which we once dipped / cupped hands drenching summer robes)—in a scene where the shite sees himself reflected in the mountain spring: “My aged figure seems to me as young as this rejuvenating water” (oi no sugata mo wakamizu to miru 老いの姿も若水と見る).

In the play Nomori 野守 (The Watchman’s Mirror), the pool of water in which the Kasuga Plain 春日野 watchman (the shite) sees his reflection day-in and day-out is called “the watchman’s water mirror” (nomori no mizukagami 野守の水鏡) in the course of the following lament:

ge ni mo nomori no mizukagami 影にも野守の水鏡
kage o utsuhite itodo nao 影を映していとたるほ
oi no nami wa mashibizu no 老いの波は真清水の
awarege ni mishi mama no あはれげに見てしまうの
mukashi no ware zo koishiki 昔の我を恋しき

The watchman’s water mirror throws back his reflection, ah, so much older now, creased by such wrinkling waves! The unerring surface makes plain the sad truth: O how I miss those looks, once mine when I was young!

In the play Higaki 檜垣 (The Cypress Fence), a former shirabyōshi 白拍子 dancer seeing a reflection of her aged self in a well is accompanied by the following chorus:

kōgan no yosooi 紅顔のぞそび
bujo no homare mo ito semete 舞女の誉れもいと迫て
samo utsukusabiki kōgan no さも美しき紅顔の
bisui no kazura hana shiore 翡翠の髪花萎れ
katsura no mayu mo shimo furite 桂の眉も霜降りて
mizu ni utsuru omokage 水に映る面影
rōsui kage shizunde 老衰影沈んで

34 Kokin wakashū 2; Rodd and Henkenius, Kokinshū, p 49.
35 Zeami, Yōrō, p. 231.
36 Zeami, Nomori, p. 314.
37 Tyler, To Hallow Genji, p. 152.
Fair and rosy cheeked, bright in costumes, 
as a dancer highly praised at the least is she; 
so superbly beautiful, fair and rosy cheeked 
with the long kingfisher’s wig, but as flowers wilt 
so her crescent eyebrows too whiten with the frost; 
on the water mirror old and feeble 
is her form reflected, sunken deeply, 
and her hair that once appeared flowing raven-black 
looks like the weeds and rubbish in the muddy pool. 
Altered, indeed, are 
all her old appearances sorrowfully.39

A work that is especially remarkable for a character lamenting his feeble, old appearance, while remembering the dashing young figure he once cut, is the play Sanekata 実方, about the poet Fujiwara no Sanekata 藤原実方 (d. 998). He reminisces how, as a young man, he had enjoyed the emperor’s favor and once danced at a special festival on imperial command; captivated by the beauty of his own reflection in a nearby basin, he unwittingly halted his dance. But now, seeing his completely changed appearance reflected in water again, he laments:

Even as it was myself
I was beautiful to see thus artfully made up.
But now the image of a feeble old man has replaced what was.
Creases of old age like pressing waves,
white hair in tangles,
a cap made of bamboo leaves,
brows and beard as so much frost
on an old man, like a landscape
covered in a snowstorm.

39 Yasuda, Masterworks of the Nō Theater, p. 321.
40 Zeami, Sanekata, p. 704.
In the noh play Sanemori, by contrast, it is not the shite himself who peers into the water. When Sanemori’s ghost appears as the nochi-jite, the priest Taami—in the supporting character role (waki)—sees an old warrior dressed in armor on the surface of a pond.

In all of the above-mentioned plays, the person seeing their reflection in a water mirror is someone already old. And with the exception of the auspicious play Yōrō, these characters are confronted with an image of decay, one so overflowing with a sense of life’s impermanence that it awakens in them the desire to be delivered from it.

The play Izutsu, however, is distinct in this regard. In the water mirror scene in Act 2, the climax of the play, the shite becomes absorbed in the illusion that her reflection is an image of her lover of bygone days. She thus denies the reality of impermanence for the time being, and her behavior is not linked to a yearning for salvation. Here the water mirror, which in the other plays discussed above confronted its beholders with the reality of their aging, causes instead a nonexistent object of longing to appear. The water mirror, in this case, serves as a conduit for the display of an illusionary other world, a transcendent dimension of ardent desire. Yet the shite also remains conscious of the fact that the image in the water mirror is but a mirage, as attested by the lines “’tis my own self / yet I yearn”. Nonetheless, the figure of a woman immersed in nostalgic memories conveys a sense not so much of impermanence and yearning for salvation as of a past that lingers on, creating a sensation of deeply felt pathos. Even as Zeami carries forward an existing tradition, in other words, he succeeds in imbuing that tradition with an altered emotional charge by skillfully shifting the basic idea at its core.

4. The Influence of Zeami’s Play on Tokugawa-Era Ise Monogatari Illustrations

While various factors, such as an existing literary tradition, medieval commentaries, illustrations—and also Zeami’s own literary tastes—together formed Izutsu’s background, the altered structure of his play, produced by its superimposition of a woman’s real image with a man’s illusionary one, had a profound impact also on the subsequent reception of the original Ise monogatari story. This is clearly evidenced by representations of the Ise monogatari in illustrated scrolls and books. Such texts of the late-Muromachi (sixteenth century) and early-Tokugawa periods (seventeenth century) that show the scene of the two children playing by the well almost always depict them as peering into it. In the Saga-bon edition, the earliest printed version of the Ise monogatari, published in Keichō 13 (1608; fig. 1), the two figures are depicted opposite each other, looking into the well. This composition, which shows a dwelling in the back, a barrel on top of the well curb, and a stream to the lower right, in addition to props such as a well bucket, was widely taken as a visual model from that time on.

41 For an English translation of this play, see Smethurst, “Sanemori,” pp. 147–168.
The *Ise monogatari* edition printed about two decades later, in Kan’ei 寛永 6 (1629; *fig. 2*), appears to have been especially widely disseminated. This is suggested by the fact that the *kana-zōshi*仮名草子 parody *Nise monogatari* 仁勢物語 (Fake Stories), published during the Kan’ei era (1624–1644), was based on that edition’s text. Its illustration of the well curb scene closely follows that of the Saga-bon.

As far as I can see, other illustrated editions evince slight differences in how they depict the dwelling in the background, the tree next to the well, the barrel, and the well bucket. The well’s form and composition (with or without the curb) are also subject to variation, as is the positioning of the two figures, either side by side or opposite one another. Moreover, the clothing and hairstyles of the two figures frequently make them appear more like adults than children, with their styles perhaps also reflecting contemporary fashions (*fig. 3*).
Such variations notwithstanding, the two figures are almost always depicted as peering into the well, their hands placed on the curb. In the original story, however, they are described only as having played by the well. Furthermore, the nature of their play is not specified beyond the man’s reminiscence in his courtly poem that they used to measure their heights against the well curb when they were children. That it became standard to depict the two figures peering into the well most likely stems, therefore, from the lines “peering at their reflections in the water mirror, heads together, sleeves o’erlaid” in Zeami’s play.
Especially interesting in this regard is the “black book” (kurohon 黒本), *Utgaruta うたがるた*, published in Hōreki 6 (1756; fig. 4). The illustration of Episode 23 of the *Ise monogatari* in this work does not depict the male and female figures peering into the well. But in this work’s commentary on the love poems that lead to the pair’s engagement, the female figure is identified as “Ki no Aritsune’s daughter.” Furthermore, even though the illustration does not show the figures in a peering posture, the commentary quotes the line “peering at their reflections in the water mirror” from Zeami’s play. By this point in the history of the *Ise*...

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42 For an English translation and detailed analysis of this work, see Moretti, *Recasting the Past*. 

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In other words, these illustrations suggest a process by which Zeami’s *Izutsu*, which had been informed less by the original story in the *Ise monogatari* than by later medieval commentaries on the work, had itself come to serve as a reference point for interpretations of the original text.

This article has discussed continuations of and variations on the water mirror motif in an attempt to trace the reception and transformation of a classical text. The water mirror motif is found in still other works as well. One example is the famous scene in Chapter 12 of Kyokutei Bakin’s *Nansō Satomi hakkenden* (The Lives of the Eight Dogs of the Satomi of Southern Fusa, also the Eight Dogs Chronicles, 1814–1842). Therein, Princess
Fuse 伏姫 sees her reflection in water only to realize that her head has turned into the head of a dog, suggesting her impregnation by the *qi* 気 of the dog Yatsufusa 八房. This motif—of a woman and a man (or male dog, in this case) ensconced deep in the mountains; of a woman seeing her reflection in water and being suddenly faced with the reality of her changed appearance, causing her and, in turn, the man's death—distantly recalls, moreover, the scene from Episode 155 of the *Yamato monogatari*, described above. A classic text thus sets into motion a dynamic process in which it is continuously reproduced through a sequence of creative rewritings.
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