

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* 井筒 (The Well Curb) is widely considered to be one of Zeami's 世阿弥 (1363?–1443?) masterpieces. In general its underlying story is based on Episode 23 of the *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語 (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 石上 in Yamato 大和 Province, as well as the identification of the main character (*shite* シテ) as Ki no Arisune's 紀有常 (815–877) 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* 高安の女), 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 在原業平 (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:

<i>kaze fukeba</i>	風吹けば
<i>okitsu shiranami</i>	沖つしら浪
<i>Tatsuta yama</i>	たつた山
<i>yowa ni ya kimi ga</i>	夜半にや君が
<i>hitori koyuramu</i>	ひとりこゆらむ ¹

¹ *Ise monogatari*, p. 137. In the noh play, the wording of the last line of this poem is slightly different (*hitori 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:

<i>sanagara mimieshi</i>	さながら見見えし
<i>mukashi otoko no</i>	昔男の
<i>kamuri naoshi wa</i>	冠直衣は
<i>onna to mo miezu</i>	女とも見えず
<i>otoko narikeri</i>	男なりけり
<i>Naribira no omokage</i>	業平の面影
<i>mireba natsukashi ya</i>	見ればなつかしや
<i>ware nagara natsukashi ya</i>	われながらなつかしや ⁴

CHORUS:

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

² Yasuda, *Masterworks of the Nō Theater*, p. 215.

³ *izutsu ni yorite unaiko no / tomodachi kataraitte / tagai ni kage o mizukagami / omote o narabe sode o kake / kokoro no mizu mo soko ni naku* 井筒によりてうなゐ子の友だち語りひて互ひに影を水鏡面を並べ袖をかけ心の水もそこひなく. Brazell, “Izutsu,” p. 151; Zeami, *Izutsu*, p. 291.

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* recognizing 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 gender-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 question 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 multiple 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 Banquet in a Pavilion by the Yangzi River” (江樓宴別, 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 encounters 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

⁵ Brazell, “Izutsu,” p. 156.

⁶ *Baishi wenji*, vols. 9, 16, 52. These can be found, respectively, in *Shinshaku kanbun taikei* 117, 99, 105.

Water) in the *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文章 (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:

<i>toshi o hete</i>	年をへて
<i>hana no kagami to</i>	花の鏡と
<i>naru mizu wa</i>	なる水は
<i>chiri kakaru o ya</i>	ちりかかるをや
<i>kumoru to iuran</i>	くもるといふらん ⁹

Are we to call them
clouded—stream waters where for
many years we saw
the blossoms mirrored—now are
hidden by fallen petals.¹⁰

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

<i>minasoko ni</i>	水底に
<i>kage shi utsureba</i>	影しうつれば
<i>momijiba no</i>	紅葉葉の
<i>iro mo fukaku ya</i>	色も深くや
<i>narimasaruran</i>	成まさるらん

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.

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.

¹⁰ Rodd and Henkenius, *Kokinshū*, p. 61.

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* 土佐日記 (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:

<i>kage mireba</i>	かげ見れば
<i>nami no soko naru</i>	波の底なる
<i>hisakata no</i>	ひさかたの
<i>sora kogi wataru</i>	空漕ぎわたる
<i>ware zo wabishiki</i>	われぞわびしき ¹³

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:

<i>Sao wa ugatsu nami no ue no tsuki o</i>	棹は穿つ波の上の月を
<i>fune wa osou umi no uchi no sora o</i>	舟は圧ふ海の中の空を ¹⁵

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* 大和物語 (Tales of Yamato, mid-tenth century). The Dainagon's 大納言 (Major Counselor) daughter, who has been confined to a small hut on Mt. Asaka 安積 in Mutsu 陸奥 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:

<i>Asakayama</i>	あさか山
<i>kage sae miyuru</i>	影さへ見ゆる
<i>yama no i no</i>	山の井の
<i>asaku wa hito o</i>	あさくは人を
<i>omou mono ka wa</i>	思ふものかは ¹⁷

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 賈島 (779–843) 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.¹⁸

This poem is clearly a variation on poem 3807 in the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, completed after 759):

<i>Asakayama</i>	安積山
<i>kage sae miyuru</i>	影さへ見ゆる
<i>yama no i no</i>	山の井の
<i>asaki kokoro o</i>	浅き心を
<i>wa ga omowanaku ni</i>	我が思はなくに ¹⁹

Asaka Mountain—
 In a shallow mountain spring
 a clear reflection
 not so shallow in the heart
 where my thoughts have mirrored you.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 *Man'yōshū*, one of the songs of the *sakimori* 防人 soldiers:

<i>wa ga tsuma wa</i>	我が妻は
<i>itaku koi rashi</i>	いたく恋ひらし
<i>nomu mizu ni</i>	飲む水に
<i>kago sae miete</i>	影さへ見えて
<i>yo ni wasurarezu</i>	よに忘れず ²¹

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.²²

¹⁸ In the English translation, the first three lines are taken from Cranston's translation of *Man'yōshū* 3807 in *A Waka Anthology, Volume 1*, p. 752, while the fourth and fifth lines are translated by Michael Burtscher. For an English translation of the *Yamato monogatari*, see Tahara, *Tales of Yamato*, p. 109.

¹⁹ *Man'yōshū* 3807, p. 102.

²⁰ Cranston, *A Waka Anthology, Volume 1*, p. 752 (capitalizations changed).

²¹ *Man'yōshū* 4322, p. 384.

²² Cranston, *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* 寛平御時后宮歌合 (Poetry Contest Held at the Residence of the Consort in the Kanpyō Era, between the years of 889 and 893):

<i>bito shirezu</i>	人知れず
<i>shita ni nagaruru</i>	下に流るる
<i>namidagawa</i>	涙川
<i>seki todomenamu</i>	せきとどめなむ
<i>kage ya miyuru to</i>	影や見ゆると ²³

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):

<i>namidagawa</i>	涙河
<i>nodoka ni dani mo</i>	のどかにだにも
<i>nagarenan</i>	流れ南 <small>なみ</small>
<i>koishiki hito no</i>	恋しき人の
<i>kage ya miyuru to</i>	影や見ゆると ²⁵

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.

²⁴ As poem-pairs 189–190 and 227–228. See *Shinsen Man'yōshū*, vol. 1:2, pp. 381–387 and 510–514.

²⁵ *Shūi wakashū* 875, p. 252.

In this next poem, also from *Kanpyō no ōtoki kīsai 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:

<i>shiratama no</i>	白玉の
<i>kiède namida to</i>	消えて涙と
<i>narinureba</i>	なりぬれば
<i>koishiki kage o</i>	恋しき影を
<i>soko ni koso mire</i>	そこにこそ見れ ²⁶

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* 和歌知顯集 (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 bakubyō 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

²⁶ *Kanpyō no ōtoki kīsai no miya no utaawase* 158, p. 474.

²⁷ Ōtani, *Zeami no chūsei*, pp. 67–71.

²⁸ *Ise monogatari emaki ebon taisei: Shiryōhen*, pp. 16–17.

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:

<i>ware bakari</i>	わればかり
<i>mono omou hito wa</i>	もの思ふ人は
<i>mata mo araji</i>	またもあらじ
<i>to omoeba mizu no</i>	と思へば水の
<i>shita ni mo arikeri</i>	下にもありけり ³⁰

No one, anywhere,
could be as miserable
as unhappy me,
I assure myself, yet spy,
beneath the water, one more.³¹

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

<i>minakuchi ni</i>	みなくちに
<i>ware ya miyuramu</i>	われや見ゆらむ
<i>kawazu sae</i>	かはづさへ
<i>mizu no shita ni te</i>	水の下にて
<i>morogoe ni naku</i>	もろ声に鳴く ³²

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.³³

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

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 bichite / musubishi mizu* 袖ひちてむすびし水 (waters in which we once dipped / cupped hands drenching summer robes)³⁴—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).³⁵

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:

<i>ge ni mo nomori no mizukagami</i>	げにも野守の水鏡
<i>kage o utsushite itodo nao</i>	影を映していとどなほ
<i>oi no nami wa mashimizu no</i>	老いの波は真清水の
<i>awarege ni mishi mama no</i>	あはれげに見しままの
<i>mukashi no ware zo koishiki</i>	昔の我ぞ恋しき ³⁶

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!³⁷

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:

<i>kōgan no yosooi</i>	紅顔のよそほひ
<i>bujo no homare mo ito semete</i>	舞女の誉れもいと迫めて
<i>samo utsukushiki kōgan no</i>	さも美しき紅顔の
<i>hisui no kazura hana shiore</i>	翡翠の鬘花萎れ
<i>katsura no mayu mo shimo furite</i>	桂の眉も霜降りて
<i>mizu ni utsuru omokage</i>	水に映る面影
<i>rōsui kage shizunde</i>	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.

<i>midori ni mieshi kurokami wa</i>	緑に見えし黒髪は
<i>dosui no mokuzu chiriakuta</i>	土水の藻屑塵芥
<i>kawarikeru</i>	変はりける
<i>mi no arisama zo kanashiki</i>	身の有様ぞ悲しき ³⁸

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:

<i>waga mi nagara mo</i>	我が身ながらも
<i>utsukushikarishi yosooi no ima wa</i>	美しかりし粧いの今は
<i>mukashi ni kawaru rōsui no kage</i>	昔に変わる老衰の影
<i>yosuru wa oinami</i>	寄するは老波
<i>midaruru bakubatsu</i>	乱るゝ白髪
<i>kamuri wa take no ha</i>	冠は竹の葉
<i>mayubige wa sanagara</i>	眉鬚はさながら
<i>shimo no okina no keshiki wa tada</i>	霜の翁の気色はたゞ
<i>odoro ni yuki no furu ka to miete</i>	おどろに雪の降るかと見えて ⁴⁰

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.

³⁸ Zeami, *Higaki*, p. 285.

³⁹ Yasuda, *Masterworks of the Nō Theater*, p. 321.

⁴⁰ Zeami, *Sanekata*, p. 704.

In the noh play *Sanemori* 実盛, by contrast, it is not the *shite* himself who peers into the water. When Sanemori's ghost appears as the *nochi-jite* 後シテ, the priest Taami 他阿弥—in the supporting character role (*waki* ワキ)—sees an old warrior dressed in armor on the surface of a pond.⁴¹

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 嵯峨本 edition, the earliest printed version of the *Ise monogatari*, published in Keichō 慶長 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.



Figure 1. *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語 (Saga-bon 嵯峨本), Keichō 13 (1608). Tesshinsai Bunko 鉄心斎文庫, National Institute of Japanese Literature.
<https://doi.org/10.20730/200024817> (image 37).

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**).



Figure 2. *Ise monogatari*, Kan'ei 6 (1629). National Institute of Japanese Literature.

<https://doi.org/10.20730/200024958> (image 27).

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 courting 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.



Figure 3. *Kaisei Ise monogatari* 改正伊勢物語, vol. 1 (*jō* 上), Hōreki 宝曆 6 (1756). Publisher: Minoya Heibee 美濃屋平兵衛. National Institute of Japanese Literature. <https://doi.org/10.20730/200007225> (image 17).

Especially interesting in this regard is the “black book” (*kurobon* 黒本), *Utagaruta* うたがるた, published in Hōreki 6 (1756; **fig. 4**).⁴² 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 Arisune’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*

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



Figure 4. *Utagaruta no bajimari* 続松紀原, Hōreki 6 (1756). National Institute of Japanese Literature. <https://doi.org/10.20730/200012536> (image 15).

monogatari story, its interpretation appears to have become based entirely on its reworking by Zeami.

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 曲亭馬琴 (1767–1848) *Nansō Satomi bakkenden* 南総里見八犬伝 (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* 氣 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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