
Izutsu · THE WELL-CRADLE

Since the term 'well-cradle' does not properly exist, the first thing to explain about *The Well-Cradle* is its English title. It refers to a 'well-curb' (the railing round the mouth of a well), and 'well-curb' would have been good enough were it not for one of the poems in the play: 'Cradle, well-cradle, well-cradle that told who was the taller: I've grown up, love, since I saw you last.' In Japanese, the poem starts with the musical, repeated syllables *tsutsu izutsu izutsu ni*, and it has to do with the love of two children who grew up to marry one another. They used to measure their heights against the 'well-cradle'. 'Well-curb' would have destroyed the euphony of the poem, and 'cradle', so suitable in sound and meaning, proved impossible to set aside.

Zeami wrote *The Well-Cradle* in his sixties. Many people believe it is his greatest play, and one authority (Kōsai Tsutomu) called it frankly 'a masterpiece among masterpieces'. It is admired as a model of the *yūgen* (depth and grace) that was Zeami's own ideal and that the modern schools of *nō* proudly uphold. Post-war scholars have therefore examined it carefully, and have given special attention to its history. Their discoveries are very interesting.

The Well-Cradle draws openly on episode no. 23 of *Ise monogatari* ('Tales of Ise'). This tenth-century work, a collection of some 125 short episodes or anecdotes centred on poems, is one of the pillars of the classical tradition. It evokes the many moods of love. Episode no. 23 tells of two children, a boy and a girl, whose houses were side by side. Before the two gates there was a well. They played by the well, as just described, until they grew up and 'knew modesty one toward the other'. The young man courted the girl and they married, but then his heart wandered, until, with a moving display of devotion, she recaptured his love. Part one of *The Well-Cradle* tells this story.

However, the anonymous *Ise monogatari* is an enigmatic work. Its title is arbitrary, no one in it is named, no episode is dated, and not a word links any episode to any other. Episode no. 23 therefore does *not* say, as the play does, that the man was Ariwara no Narihira (825-880)

and the woman the daughter of one Ki no Arisune (815–877); nor does it suggest any connection between itself and any other passage of the work. Moreover, *The Well-Cradle* assumes that Narihira and the daughter of Arisune figure also in episodes nos. 17 and 24. Scholars having long ago dismissed such notions as fantasy, Zeami's use of *Ise monogatari* seems a bit free, even though cavalier use of sources is unlike him.

Ariwara no Narihira has always been linked with *Ise monogatari* because several dozen poems in the work are identified elsewhere as his. An outstanding poet, he seems also to have been an enterprising lover, and for these traits he became immortal. *Ise monogatari* promoted his legend because it left readers (who desperately needed help in making sense of the work) free to connect any or all of it with Narihira and his amorous adventures. In short, *Ise monogatari* tended to be read as a sort of encrypted biography of Narihira.

By the Kamakura period (1180–1333), the work of restoring largely spurious names, dates, and coherence to *Ise monogatari* was well advanced, and people read the work through commentaries. So did Zeami. *The Well-Cradle* is therefore based on these medieval commentaries. Since different lines of commentary disagree with one another minutely, one can even tell which texts Zeami used. His treatment of his sources, though brilliant, was not cavalier. The commentaries assured him that episodes nos. 17, 23, and 24 are all about Narihira and Arisune's daughter. Zeami simply read continuity into the three, in the order 23, 17, 24.

All this helps to explain the difference between sixteenth-century and more recent performances. Nowadays, the *shite* wears a young woman's mask (*Waka-onna*) throughout the play, and one scholar (Yashima Masaharu) has shown that Zeami's own conception of the play may have corresponded to the gentle refinement this mask suggests. In the sixteenth century, however, the *shite* in part one wore *Fukai*, the face of a woman of about forty. (This is the mask in part one of *The Diver*.) Then, in part two, the 'Well-Cradle Lady' often appeared wearing *Masugami*, the face of a similarly mature woman touched by madness; and she danced not an elegant *jo-no-mai*, but a disturbed *kakeri*. (*Masugami* can be worn by the wildly perplexed princess in *Semimaru*.) In other words, the modern interpretation of the play differs from the sixteenth-century one.

The medieval commentaries were forgotten in the Edo period

(1600–1868), and it is easy for one who does not know them to see *The Well-Cradle* almost entirely in terms of episode no. 23. The allusions to nos. 17 and 24, in part two, seem then to lack weight, and in any case, their significance is not spelt out in words. Episode no. 23 evokes childhood friendship, youthful courtship, a first threat to conjugal happiness, and the triumph of a young wife's tender concern. It is no wonder that the phantom of this young wife should wear the *Waka-onna* mask. To the extent that the play is hers, it resembles a touching song of lost, still innocent love.

The 'Well-Cradle Lady' of part two is the same person as in part one, but her mind is concerned with trials the young wife never dreamed of. That is why, in the sixteenth century, she could change from *Fukai* into a different, more troubled mask. Her opening words are a poem from episode no. 17: 'Fickle they are, or so people say, these cherry blossoms, who have yet been pining for one rare all year round.' The woman in *Ise monogatari* speaks this poem when a man who has long neglected her suddenly appears at her door in cherry blossom time. Assuming this woman is Aritsune's daughter, Narihira has been wandering again, leaving her once more forlorn. By this time, however, she is no longer the innocent young wife. According to the commentaries, she does not mean, 'These cherry blossoms are said to be fickle, since they fall so soon, but even they, and still more so I, have been faithfully awaiting your coming.' Instead, she means, 'I know they call me fickle, just like these blossoms, but still, I have been waiting for you after all.' And the man's reply amounts to this: 'Perhaps you have been waiting, but then, if I had not come today, you no doubt would have taken up with someone else tomorrow.' She is therefore an older, more experienced woman. She, too, has stumbled. Perhaps she deserves no blame for that, since Narihira treated her intolerably, and no doubt she remained true to him in her heart. Still, she has learned more than she once knew about the world.

More time passes while this now wiser lady suffers from her husband's continued neglect. This is presumably when Narihira was pursuing his famous and disastrous affair with an empress. In episode no. 24, he has been gone three years and she has at last given up. Someone else has been courting her, and she has finally admitted him to her room. Just then Narihira knocks at the door. She explains the situation in a poem, and he replies: 'The days, the months, the years have passed while I loved you: so do you love him.' Then he leaves.

She calls out after him, in another poem, that she has always loved him alone, but he does not turn back. Desperate, she then sets out to catch up with him. Alas, the effort is beyond her strength. By a clear spring she collapses, with blood from her finger writes a last poem on a rock, and dies.

This is the lady of *The Well-Cradle*. The *Waka-onna* mask conveys her tender constancy, and the play certainly dwells on her childhood. Yet it is no wonder that she once wore *Fukai* and *Masugami*. Her sisters in Zeami's plays are not only the young women of *Pining Wind*, but the distraught singing-girl of *Lady Han* and the tragic wife of *The Fulling Block*. To see *The Well-Cradle* through *Ise monogatari* no. 24 is to see for the first time the force of her clinging to the place where she and Narihira were so happy as children, and to understand why she treasures the old victory – her only one – that briefly made him hers again. Looking back through depths of experience and time, she dances under the moon in Narihira's clothes, still calling him; and when she begins the poem *he* sang to lament his own great love, the empress ('Is this not the moon, this spring not the spring of old . . .?'), one hardly knows who is speaking. A few lines later, she looks into the well and sees him as in life, though she also knows he is a reflection – her own.

The site of *The Well-Cradle* is Ariwara Temple (Ariwara-dera) at Isonokami, below the hills a short way south of Nara. According to the play, although not to *Ise monogatari*, Narihira built it where he and the lady had lived as children. The temple no longer exists, if it ever did (the only confirmed Ariwara Temple is Futai-ji in Nara), but three sites at Isonokami claim it. For example, a stone pillar inscribed 'Ariwara-dera' stands at the entrance to a croquet ground for old people, and on the croquet ground itself one finds a little shrine to Narihira and his father. A well nearby is identified as the one in the story, although actually it is new: its predecessor fell victim to road construction. But apart from all this affection for old legends, Narihira could well have had a tie with Isonokami. It is a venerable locality and boasts one of the oldest and most sacred shrines in all Japan. A play on the Isonokami deity (*Furu no nō*), although not in the current repertoire, survives in Zeami's own hand.

THE WELL-CRADLE

Persons in order of appearance

A Monk	<i>waki</i>
A young Woman (<i>Waka-onna</i> mask)	<i>maeshite</i>
A Villager	<i>ai</i>
The 'Well-Cradle Lady' (<i>Waka-onna</i> mask)	<i>nohijite</i>

Remarks: A third-category play (*kazura-mono*) current in all five schools of nō. A variant performance tradition (*kogaki*) in the Kanze, Hōshō, Kongō, and Kita schools retains the Woman on stage, at the stage assistant position, at the end of part one; there she is clothed in the hat and robe that she wears in part two. In this case, the interlude is dropped. (The differences between sixteenth-century and modern performances is discussed in the introduction.)

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Stage assistant places a 'well-cradle' (the square railing round the mouth of a well) at front of stage. A few stalks of tall plume grass (pampas grass) rise from one corner.

To nanori-bue music, enter Monk. He stands in base square, facing the audience.

MONK (*nanori*) You have before you a monk who is seeing all the provinces. Lately I visited the southern capital, and now I am on my way to Hatsuse.¹ Someone told me, when I inquired, that this temple is called Ariwara Temple. I will go to it and have a look.
[*Moves to centre.*]

(*sashi*) Why, this Ariwara Temple can only be
at Isonokami, where, long ago,
Narihira and the daughter of Ki no Arisune
lived together as man and wife.

Let the wild wind blow,
and at sea white waves
rise, O Tatsuta! . . .²

1. The site of Hase-dera, in the mountains south-east of Nara. Hase-dera, one of the most famous Kannon temples in Japan, has been a pilgrimage centre since at least the tenth century. The 'southern capital' is Nara.

2. This poem appears in full later on. See note 12, below.

No doubt she spoke that poem here.

(*uta*) Now I have reached this storied spot,
 where Narihira and his chosen friend,
 Aritsune's daughter, tarried,
 I will comfort those two lovers,
 I will comfort that fond pair.

Sits in place.

Sits at witness position.

To shidai music, enter Woman, carrying a rosary and a leafy twig. She stops in base square, facing back of stage.

WOMAN (*shidai*) Dawn after dawn, holy water³
 dawn after dawn, holy water
 refreshes both heart and moon.

(*sashi*) Yet it is true, a loneliness
 pervades the autumn nights,
 and at this ancient temple,
 callers are rare.

Faces audience.

Wind through the garden pine
 sighs through long, wakeful hours;
 the sinking moon gleams through grasses
 fringing the eaves,⁴
 while the old days, once forgotten,
 flood a troubled mind.
 How long must one live on
 in this world, all hope gone,
 when every thought is of *him*?

(*sageuta*) But ceaselessly, with pure devotion,
 I trust Amida's proffered cord:⁵
 guide me, I beg, voice of the Teaching!

(*ageuta*) Even the lost
 He shall illumine, for so He promised
 He shall illumine, for so He promised,
 and He surely will: the moon
 at dawn sets in the western hills,⁶

3. *Aka no mizu*, water placed as an offering on a Buddhist altar. The offering gladdens the giver's heart, and the pure water reflects a pure moon. The flowers mentioned later on are probably *shikimi* (star anise), the normal offering to the dead.

4. *Shinobu* grasses that grow in the thatch. *Shinobu* also means 'to remember with longing'.

5. The Buddha Amida was often shown holding a cord, the other end of which could be grasped by the devotee. With this cord, Amida was believed to draw the devotee's soul into his Western Paradise.

6. The moon's westward course recalls the journey of the soul towards Amida's Western Paradise.

though autumn fills the sky
 and pines' sighing all the air
 as storm winds sweep abroad:
 a shifting world that seems a dream.

She places the leafy twigs as an offering before the well-cradle and joins her palms in prayer.

What sound will bring on awakening
 what sound will bring on awakening?

She returns to base square and stands facing audience.

MONK (*mondō*) As I pause a while at the temple, quietly collecting my thoughts, a beautiful lady comes to draw water from the garden well. She then offers the water, with flowers, to the Buddha. All her prayers seem to be for the benefit of this grave-mound. Lady, please tell me: who are you?

WOMAN I am simply one who lives nearby. Ariwara no Narihira, whose vow founded this temple, left his name behind, and no doubt his remains lie beneath this mound. I myself do not know for certain, but I give him comfort, as you see, by offering flowers and water.

MONK Narihira did indeed leave us his name. Yet he whose memory still lingers here lived so very long ago. Why is it, then, that you, a woman, tend him and give him comfort? Do you and Ariwara no Narihira have some deeper tie?

WOMAN Have I some tie with Narihira, you ask, who even then was called 'A Man of Old'?⁷ Why, it was all so long ago! No one now could have any tie with him at all.

MONK One cannot argue with what you say,
 but still, his grave preserves the past.

WOMAN The man is gone, yet Narihira's

MONK trace⁸ still lingers, even now

WOMAN his fame lives on the lips of those

MONK who speak of him,

7. Many episodes of *Ise monogatari* start with the words *mukashi otoko*, 'Once upon a time, a man . . .'. In the commentaries used by Zeami, these words appear as a name for Narihira.

8. *Ato*, a reminder of the continuing presence or memory of the deceased. Despite the use of the English word 'grave', Narihira's body is not necessarily buried here. The notion of *ato* requires a physical 'trace' of some sort, but it is quite different from the idea of a tomb.

WOMAN 'A Man of Old':

CHORUS (*agenta*) the name, at least, is with us still,
 while Ariwara Temple, his own, grows old
 while Ariwara Temple, his own, grows old,
 and a pine springs from the mound's grasses.
 Seek him here, then, by a grave *Moves towards well.*
 nodding with grasses in full plume . . .⁹
 that call to mind what times now gone? *Gazes at grasses.*
 Wild, wild the weeds,
 deep, deep the dews
 that moisten the ancient grave.
 O, it is true! Out of the past,
 his present trace holds my love still *To base square.*
 his present trace holds my love still.

During the passage above, the Villager has slipped in to sit at villager position.

MONK (*unnamed*) Please go on speaking to me of Narihira.

Woman sits at centre.

CHORUS (*kuri*) Of old, the Ariwara Middle Captain¹⁰
 lived long years in this ancient village,
 Isonokami,
 for its spring blossoms and its autumn moon.¹¹

WOMAN (*sashi*) Then he courted Aritsune's daughter,
 and their love was far from shallow;

CHORUS yet in Takayasu, in Kawachi province,
 he had yet another lady,
 so that his loves led him two ways.

WOMAN Then she sang, the lady here,
 Let the wild wind blow,
 and at sea white waves
 rise, O Tatsuta!

CHORUS Love, will you by night
 cross those hills alone?¹²

9. In poetry, the tall, nodding plumes of *susuki* resemble beckoning hands – the hands of those one knew in the past.

10. Narihira's court rank.

11. Blossoms and moon sum up the delights of all the seasons.

12. A poem from episode no. 23 of *Ise monogatari*. The Tatsuta hills had to be crossed on the way from Nara to Kawachi province, along Osaka Bay. The meaning of the opening lines, which ornament the place name Tatsuta, has long been debated. One theory, still cited, appeals to a motif from Chinese literature and holds that the 'white waves' are

being anxious where night might take him:
till that other left his heart
and his bond with her dissolved.

WOMAN Yes, her song, so naturally,
CHORUS told of a love delicate and true.

(*kuse*) There lived in this province, long ago,
two families, house by house
and, at their gates, a well.
To the well-cradle their two children came
fondly to talk and watch each other
in the mirroring water,
cheek to cheek and sleeve on sleeve;
and their hearts' waters knew no soundings.¹³
But as the moons and suns passed by,
they grew up, and knew modesty
one toward the other.

In time, that good man wrote in gemmed tracery
words given hue by his heart's flower:

WOMAN Cradle, well-cradle,
well-cradle that told
who was the taller:

CHORUS I've grown up, love,
since I saw you last.

He sent her the poem, and she, in turn:

The girlish tresses
I'd hold to yours
hang past my shoulders:
and if not you,
who will put them up for me?¹⁴

bandits; so that the lady is afraid her husband may be attacked. However, most critical opinion over the centuries has rejected this explanation as out of keeping with the spirit of the poem. The lines probably evoke the traveller's loneliness in a desolate landscape.

13. The water and the children's 'hearts' (their bottomless love) are one and the same. Most of this *kuse* passage is faithful to episode no. 23 of *Ise monogatari*, but Zeami added the picture of the children watching each other in the water of the well. The 'water mirror' (*mizu kagami*) motif occurs in one form or another in other plays attributed to Zeami, including *Pining Wind* and *Semimaru*.

14. Putting up a girl's hair meant marriage. Since information from the Heian period (794-1180) indicates that her hair was put up by the ceremonial sponsor of the marriage, most commentators reject the idea that the groom himself could do it, and prefer something like, 'If not for you, for whom will I have my hair put up?' Yet this is not

Perhaps their exchange is the reason why
one hears of the 'Well-Cradle Lady':
an old name for Aritsune's daughter.

Chorus now sings for Monk.

(*rongi*) Yes, it is an old tale you tell,
and, listening, I wonder still
at how strange you are.
Please let me know your name.

WOMAN Ah, if I am, love-wrapt so,
Aritsune's daughter, I little know,
yet white waves rise, O Tatsuta!
by night I have come to you.

CHORUS Astonishing! Then Tatsuta
hill bright with the hues of fall

WOMAN leaves Ki no Aritsune's daughter¹⁵

CHORUS or, it may be, the Well-Cradle Lady,

WOMAN disclosed, to my shame, as I!

CHORUS When we two vowed love's long-coiled strand
should bind us always, we were children *To base square.*
so near the cradle, the cradle, well-cradle,
into the well-cradle she slips and is gone
into the well-cradle she slips and is gone. *Exit.*

* * *

[The Villager, who previously had come in to sit at villager position, now comes forward, notices the Monk, and asks him who he is. The ensuing dialogue culminates in his recital of the story of Narihira and Aritsune's daughter. All this rather interrupts the mood of the play, at least for a reader, and conveys little that one does not already know. It is therefore omitted. This passage is typical.

... Yes, those two were deeply in love. Later on, Narihira had a mistress in Takayasu, in the province of Kawachi, and he used to go to see her every night. But Aritsune's daughter showed no sign of jealousy. Narihira concluded that she must have another lover of her own. One evening, he

what the original says, and as Takeoka Masao has pointed out, the literal meaning better suits the intimacy of the exchange.

15. 'Leaves' is a 'pivot word'. These autumn leaves are the goddess who figures in *Tatsuta*.

pretended to set off for Kawachi as usual, but actually he hid nearby in a clump of plume grass and from there spied on the house. He saw her pick flowers and light incense, and heard her lament that he was gone. Then she spoke this poem: 'Let the wild wind blow, and at sea white waves rise, O Tatsuta! Love, will you by night cross those hills alone?' When Narihira heard that, he remembered the saying that a sage minister does not serve two sovereigns or a chaste woman two husbands, and he marvelled that any man could have so true a wife. They say that after that, he gave up his visits to Kawachi for ever.

In the closing dialogue, the Villager urges the Monk to stay on and 'comfort those two lovers'. The Monk promises to chant the *Lotus Sutra* for them.]

* * *

MONK (*agenta*) The night hour grows late:
 above the temple hangs a moon
 above the temple hangs a moon
 to restore the past: with robe reversed,
 I prepare to dream,¹⁶ and, briefly pillowed,
 lie down upon a bed of moss
 lie down upon a bed of moss.

To issei music, enter the 'Well-Cradle Lady', wearing the hat and robe left her by Narihira.¹⁷ She stands in base square, facing audience.

LADY (*sashi*) Fickle they are,
 or so people say,
 these cherry blossoms,
 who have yet been pining
 for one rare all year round.¹⁸
 Yes, that poem being mine as well,
 they call me, too, the Pining Lady.¹⁹
 Since those old well-cradle days,
 the days, the months, the years have passed,²⁰

16. Gazing at the moon brought back memories of the past, and sleeping with one's robe inside out brought dreams of one's beloved.

17. This is the costume worn by Shizuka as she dances in *Benkei Aboard Ship* and by the *nochijite* in *Pining Wind*.

18. From *Ise monogatari*, episode no. 17. (See introduction.)

19. The medieval commentaries give her this name.

20. A line from a poem in episode no. 24 of *Ise monogatari*, discussed in the introduction.

till now, in a life long lost,
 I take upon me that same robe
 Narihira left me,
 (issei) O shame! to dance the Man of Old,
 CHORUS blossom sleeves swirling snow . . .²¹

(DANCE: *jo-no-mai*)

The Lady now dances a quiet jo-no-mai, ending in base square, and continues dancing as text resumes.

LADY (*waka*) Come hither now, I bring again
 the days of old; in Ariwara

CHORUS Temple's well, round and clear,
 a radiant moon shines
 a radiant moon shines.

LADY (*unnamed*) Is this not the moon,
 this spring
 not the spring of old . . .?²²

So he once sang – but when, I wonder?²³
 (*noriji*) Cradle, well-cradle,

She circles stage, approaches the well-cradle, parts the plume grasses, and peers into the well.

CHORUS cradle, well-cradle,
 well-cradle that told

LADY who was the taller,

CHORUS I've grown up, love . . .

LADY I've grown old, yes!

CHORUS Just as he looked, the Man of Old,
 his robe and headdress,
 conceal the woman, show me a man,
 Narihira:

Gazes at her reflection, then backs away, weeping.

LADY (*uta*) there before me, and so dear!

CHORUS I see myself, yet still I love him!
 Departed lover in phantom form,
 a flower withered, all colour gone,

21. Flying cherry petals were often likened to snow and the dancer's tossing sleeves to cherry blossoms.

22. The beginning of Narihira's most famous poem (*Ise monogatari*, episode no. 4): 'Is this not the moon, this spring not the spring of old? Am I alone the one I ever was?'

23. Grammatically, this line can just as well mean, 'So I once sang . . .'.

but fragrant yet, Ariwara²⁴
Temple bell tolls in the dawn:
an ancient temple, loud with pines
where the wind sighs. Plantain-leaf frail,²⁵
the dream has broken into waking,
the dream breaks into day.

Facing side from base square, stamps the final beat.

24. The *ari* of Ariwara is intended in the original to mean also 'he remains'.

25. The immensely long, graceful leaves of the *bashō* tree (a species of banana or plantain) tatter easily in the wind.