

# What Happened To The Zatô Kyôgen?

## Paradigm Shifts in the Evolution of Blind Man Plays

by

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*Nothing of him that doth fade  
but doth suffer a sea-change  
into something rich and strange*  
(from Ariel's song)

Among the conventional categories of the kyôgen repertoire – including *waki* or auspicious plays, *daimyô*, *shômyô* or Tarôkaja plays, bridegroom, woman, demon, *yamabushi*, priest, *zatô* or blind man, dance and miscellaneous kyôgen<sup>1</sup> – there is one that evolved in a quite unusual way: *zatô* plays. They feature blind men, strictly speaking a well defined group among them, the medieval *biwa* playing reciters of war epics (especially the *Heike monogatari*), organized in a pseudo-religious professional guild (*tôdôza*).<sup>2</sup> *Zatô*, actually the lowest rank in the *za* hierarchy, is used generically to designate blind men.

### Present performances

There are seven *zatô* plays in the present Izumi repertoire (*Kikazu zatô*, *Hakuyô*, *Dobu katchiri*, *Kiyomizu zatô*, *Saru zatô*, *Kawakami*, *Mari zatô*) and six in the Ôkura (which does not include *Kiyomizu zatô* and *Kawakami*, but adds instead *Tsukimi zatô*). Still, only two of them are actually performed in a more or less routine way: *Kawakami* by the Izumi school and *Tsukimi zatô* by the Ôkura actors.<sup>3</sup>

These two plays are regarded as the outstanding representatives of the genre and usually referred to when discussing *zatô* kyôgen as a thematic group.<sup>4</sup> They both appeal

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<sup>1</sup> This enumeration, fairly close to the 17th century typology, follows Koyama Hiroshi ed., *Kyôgen kanshô annai*, vol. VII of the Iwanami kôza *Nô-Kyôgen* series, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> For further information on the history and organization of the blind Heike performers see Nakayama Tarô, *Nihon môjinshi*, 1934 and *Zoku Nihon môjinshi*, 1937; also Susan Matisoff, *The Legend of Semimaru, Blind Musician of Japan*, New York 1978: 39–46.

<sup>3</sup> The delineation got blurred since the Izumi school first performed *Tsukimi zatô* in the fifties. Nowadays they are performed by both kyôgen schools.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed presentation see Jacqueline Golay, “Pathos and Farce. *Zatô* Plays of the Kyôgen Repertoire”, in: *Monumenta Nipponica* XXVIII, Nr. 2, 1973: 139–149.

by an intense and pathetic depiction of blindness – utterly avoiding cheap melodrama, but creating a very complete theatre experience which draws its power from a delicate balance of hues. Theirs is a wide scope of dramatic expression, covering all shades between farce and serious drama reaching up to tragic pathos. Their stories draw on ‘the unexpected twist of fate’ that leads the action to a gloomy outcome – a clear deviation from the logic of the farce. The blind man in *Tsukimi zatô* enjoying – he of all people – the pleasures of a moon viewing party, that most exquisite of the Japanese visual feasts, and poignantly evoking the dense atmospherica of an autumn night in the fields, reverberating with the voices of insects, is unexpectedly abused by a stranger who up to then had proved a most pleasant party companion: knocked down and insulted, the *zatô* is left alone on the stage. As to the blind man in *Kawakami*, miraculously healed by a merciful bodhisattva Jizô, promptly loses his sight again on his refusal to divorce his wife (the divorce having been made a condition of his healing). Both are strongly suggestive of man's helplessness – in front of irrational agents of fate. Both plays assign the comic a marginal role, both are pervaded by a gloomy melancholy inferring the sense of the existentially absurd to be constitutive of the *zatô kyôgen*. This is certainly true of present performances. But are the two plays typical of the *zatô* genre as such?

### The present repertoire: a historical perspective

A look into older *kyôgen* textbooks reveals a surprising discovery: neither of the two plays appears in early sources among the fairly numerous *zatô kyôgen*. They are neither listed in the earliest collection of plots, the *Tenshō kyôgenbon* dating from the second half of the sixteenth century,<sup>5</sup> nor among the *zatô kyôgen* in the earliest textbooks of the Ôkura and Izumi schools compiled in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup>

*Kawakami* certainly appears in the *Toraakibon*, the *Tenribon* and the “reader's book” *Kyôgenki*<sup>7</sup>, but *not* as a *zatô kyôgen*. Ôkura Yaemon Toraaki, who was especially meticulous about classifying and ordering the repertoire, includes it instead among the “woman plays” (*onna kyôgen*). And he had good reason for doing so, for the original *Kawakami* had nothing whatsoever to do with *zatô* plays, but was rather meant as a parable on the dangers of bad karma, that here as so often manifests itself in the person of a woman – allegedly a wicked, egoistic, suspicious, jealous, verbacious, hateful, blasphemous wife.

<sup>5</sup> The earliest collection of *kyôgen* plots and titles, presumably compiled in the Tôhoku area (colophon dated Tenshō 6/1578). Cf. *Kyôgenshû*, vol. 3, of *Nihon koten zensho*, Tôkyô 1955, edited and introduced by Omote Akira (whose name is however not mentioned in the volume); hereafter TKB.

<sup>6</sup> The so-called *Toraakibon* (TA) of the Ôkura school, compiled 1642 by Ôkura Yaemon Toraakira, quoted hereafter from Ikeda Hiroshi and Kitahara Yasuo, *Ôkura Toraakibon Kyôgenshû no kenkyû*, honbunhen, chû, Tôkyô 1973 contains six *zatô* plays in the group *shukke zatô kyôgen*. The earliest Izumi text is located in Kitahara Yasuo and Kobayashi Kenji eds., *Kyôgen rikugi zenchû*, Tôkyô 1991 (hereafter *Tenribon*).

<sup>7</sup> A four volume collection of “readers' *kyôgen*” printed between 1660 and 1730, that enjoyed a wide popularity and appeared in many successive editions down to our century. *Kawakami jizô* is included in *Kyôgenki ge* (first edition 1700). Quoted from Kokumin bunko kankôkai eds., *Kyôgen zenshû*, Meiji 43: 645–648.

Its hero is not a zatô (i.e. not a biwa-playing Heike-reciter) and his blindness is not innate but temporary – and caused by his wife's wickedness, or this is at least what he pretends:

MAN: I am a man from the vicinity. My blindness is a feat of my wife's. When I was temporarily stricken with these sore eyes, she didn't care for my health and so it came to this.<sup>8</sup>

He repeats the accusation in front of his wife when taking leave to embark on a pilgrimage to the wonder-working Jizô of Kawakami:

MAN: You know, I got blind because it was your wish, so I suppose you must be perfectly content now!

WIFE: You're talking nonsense. Since your eyes got sore, I have taken care of you with the greatest diligence. You're talking such nonsense.

MAN: All right, be it as you say. Still, you always desired it, you always said how nice it would be if I lost my eyes, for they might lead me to take a concubine. So I suppose you're glad now.<sup>9</sup>

The accusation seems farfetched, but it appears as a motif in European woman farces as well, where husbands' blindness – be it symbolic or physical – plays a conspicuous role. Did not the adulterous wife of Hans Sachs' *Fastnachtspiel* (written 1554) beseech a fancy Saint Stumblion to strike her husband with blindness? Her prayer – “Du heiliger Sant Stolprion / Ich bitt, mach blind mein alten Mon”<sup>10</sup> – suggests that frustrated wives' dreams are not so different East and West. In the kyôgen, the blind man spends seven days of fasting and praying at Jizô's shrine and is miraculously healed. But instead of a warm welcome, his wife receives him with a torrent of accusations, suspecting him of a secret tryst with a concubine, who must have fed him well, for he showed no signs of malnutrition after the long fast! The couple's quarrel culminates in a regular thrashing from the infuriated wife who drags and tosses her husband around the stage – until he finally loses his sight again. The kyôgen ends with her shouting: “Yeah, husband, you've cheated me! You kept pretending to be blind, but you're not going to escape, you rascal!” as she chases him from the stage. A different type of the finale, proposed by Toraaki as a variant at the end of the text, prefigures the modern versions of the kyôgen: bodhisattva Jizô warns the man of his dangerous wife and as the husband reports to her his oracular dream with the deity's advice to divorce, she is driven into a rage. This scene, shortly epitomized in the Toraakibon, is given full dialogue form in the Izumi text of 1646:

WIFE: That good-for-nothing Jizô, that syphilitic Jizô! I'm furious, I'm furious! (she continues to rage like this)

MAN: We'll be damned.

WIFE: Let us be damned. Well, you thought you would get rid of me, didn't you!<sup>11</sup>

And she threatens, should he take another wife, to jump at her throat and bite her dead.

<sup>8</sup> TA: 191.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hans Sachs, *Werke in zwei Bänden*, vol. 2, Berlin/Weimar 1972: *Der blind Messner mit dem Pfarrer und sein Weib*: 247–261. In This play, the adulterous wife and her lover, the priest, have good reason to wish the husband lose his sight.

<sup>11</sup> Tenribon, p. 687.

Now, it is out of question that facing this blasphemous woman – in fact one of the most insolent in the gallery of kyôgen wives<sup>12</sup> – the man's punishment serves a didactic-moralistic end. Jizô is far from playing pranks on a helpless blind man. It is only the modern version, featuring a gentle and loving wife who suffers the punishment of an absurd deity, that prefers the moving finale with the resigned couple walking out hand in hand. But this is obviously a transposition of the “woman play” into the pattern of late, sophisticated zatô kyôgen using blindness as a symbol of human condition.

If *Kawakami* obviously underwent a paradigm shift, *Tsukimi zatô* does not appear in any form whatsoever before the end of the Edo period. The *Kentsûbon* (1855) of the Sagi-ryû, a school of kyôgen now extinct, is the first textbook to include it. Its title appears next in the Ôkura-ryû official report (*kakiage*) of the first year of Meiji (1868).

Thus the two outstanding models of the present zatô kyôgen reveal themselves as late additions to the corpus, where they finally replaced the old repertoire. But what then are the genuine zatô kyôgen really about? What shades of laughter, what heroes are typical to them? Do they represent the “dramatic”, the abyssal, the gloomy or even tragic sides of the kyôgen repertoire, a *sui generis* Japanese prefiguration of the theatre of the absurd, as we might infer from the two modern versions discussed above?

### Medieval zatô kyôgen

The *Tenshō kyôgenbon* contains eight zatô kyôgen: seven plots and one bare title. It is shocking to discover that no sympathetic or lyrical depiction of blindness is to be found in either of them. Instead, a gallery of ridiculous blind men are made the object of a crude and aggressive laughter. Their plots, epitomized:

A blind itinerant performer is travelling through the lands with his young wife bound with a sash to his biwa, only to have his bride surreptitiously replaced by a dog, who chases him off-stage, as a passing hunter had seduced her from his side (*Inu-hiki zatô*). Another blind man intends to hire a horse but instead ends up riding on an ox. Upon touching the animal's horns, he consoles himself with the ironical remark that in such a “happy reign, even horses seem to be blessed with horns” and follows his way to the capital in the laughter of all passers-by (*Dachin zatô*). Two blind men are quarrelling for one and the same piece of cloth that a cunning dealer had sold to each of them in turn (*Nuno-kai zatô*). A poor blind man has his clothes stolen by an artful woman who had lured him into wading in the river beside the bridge (*Tarashi zatô*). Two blind men compete with one another in insulting verse and wrestling for the privilege of borrowing a horse (*Muma-kari zatô*). A group of blind men endeavour to play *kemari* – an elegant version of football – with a cloth ball to which they have attached a bell, but they end up indiscriminately kicking each other (*Mari zatô*). A lonely blind man in search for a mate encounters a woman at the temple and finally finds out that she too is a poor blind itinerant entertainer like himself (*Kiyomizu zatô*).

The farcical plots are utterly free from any lyrical, delicate, sentimental or sympathetic, to say nothing of tragic view of blindness. Instead, they feature a series of coarse pranks played upon the ignorant and helpless disabled, drawing on the inherent comicality of the blind: their mechanical gestures, their inadequate response to reality, their ridiculous endeavour to cope with misunderstood situations. A roar of coarse laughter, cruel and aggressive, echoes through the plays, sadistic and grotesque, and still innocent

<sup>12</sup> See for instance the author's “Weiber im Zorn”, in: *Theologie zwischen Zeiten und Kontinenten*, Herder 1993: 414–430.

in its basic vitality disregarding moral considerations – a wicked childish laughter after all. The blind men are kicked and tossed about, cheated, derided, chased around the stage by a dog or a monkey, forced to mount an ox instead of a horse, incited to insult and fight with each other, to mistake their own bodies for a ball – a grotesque *comédie humaine*. In addition to their involuntary comicality, there is a basic complacency in their playing the buffoon role, rooted in the blind men's profession as entertainers. Moreover, stage performance of biwa-accompanied 'numbers', such as the mock-heroic Heike fragment quoted in the Tenribon appendix (see translation below) are a basic ingredient of zato kyôgen and certainly one *raison d'être* of this group of plays in the repertoire.

### European parallels

This gallery blind buffoons provoke the same coarse laughter that accompanies the treatment of the blind in medieval Europe, whether displayed in the market places (where cruel ceremonies as the “play of the blind beggars and the pig” were performed in cities such as Paris, Venice and Augsburg until late into the 16th century)<sup>13</sup> or recorded in literature and drama. The medieval farces embedded in Christian mystery plays include derision of the blind as one major motif appearing in episodes such as the famous “blind man and his servant”, the “blind man and the hunchback”, the “blind man and the paralytic”, the “three blind men from Compiègne” etc.<sup>14</sup> As a matter of fact, the very earliest text of a French farce preserved happens to be a “blind man play”. *Le Garçon et l'Aveugle*<sup>15</sup> features a blind beggar cheated by a sly young ‘servant’ who pretends to help him, but finally escapes with all his money and clothes, after giving his master a good thrashing. The farce is strikingly similar to its kyôgen counterparts by its simple plot built on a practical joke as well as its treatment of the blind, a mendicant entertainer performing at crossroads verse prayers to the Virgin Mary and *chansons de geste* (heroic ballads)<sup>16</sup> very much like the Heike epos.

<sup>13</sup> For a succinct history of blindness in Europe see Pilar Baumeister, *Die literarische Gestalt des Blinden im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt 1991, passim.

<sup>14</sup> For reference to ‘blind man’ farces see f.i. Gustave Cohen, *Études d'Histoire du Théâtre en France au Moyen-Age et à la Renaissance*, Paris 1956. Medieval plots on blind men survived in works like the picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*, and down to Wilhelm Busch or even Dario Fo (*The Blind and the Lame*), suggesting the popularity of the subject and its suitability to allegoric and symbolic interpretation.

<sup>15</sup> A modern French translation is available in Claude-Alain Chevallier, *Théâtre comique du Moyen Âge*, Bibliothèque médiévale, Paris 1973/82: 183–192.

<sup>16</sup> Along with prayers to Holy Virgin (“Mère de Dieu, qui vous sera dévot / aura joie toute sa vie...”), the blind man chants of recent wars: “Je dirai du roi de Sicile, / Que Dieu lui vienne en aide! / Il est chaque jour sur la brèche / contre le peuple maudit...” Transl. Chevallier, op.cit.: 187.

### Social satire?

This derision of the disabled, felt as natural in a society that also integrated the blind into public life,<sup>17</sup> finally became embarrassing to later audiences in both Japan and the West. The modern man's reluctance to accept uninhibited derision of the blind led later recipients to distorted readings of the plays. Thus one Japanese researcher looks for social satire at the core of *zatô kyôgen*, which after him depict conflicts within the hierarchically organized *tôdôza* and show clear sympathy for the low-rank blind men.<sup>18</sup> It is true that the heroes in the Tenshō *kyôgenbon* are not always plain *zatô*, but occasionally higher-ranked *kôtô* and *kengyô*, in one instance even a *sô-kengyô*, as well as young blind servants deprived of rank (called *kogyu* or *kozatô*). It is true that the plays incidentally reflect status conflicts within the guild hierarchy. Thus low-ranked *zatô* may lustily kick their superior, the *kengyô* (*Mari-zatô*); a young blind servant may mock his blind master mounted on an ox (*Dachin zatô*); two blind men who wrestled for a horse finally give the horse owner a sound thrashing (*Muma-kari zatô*); and two low-rank blind men quarrelling over the piece of cloth may take the opportunity to kick the *kengyô* who tries to mediate (*Nuno-kai zatô*). But to declare the *gekokuujô* (“inferiors overthrowing superiors”) ideology as basic to the early *zatô kyôgen* seems as farfetched as the similar attempt by some European researchers to limit blindness in the farces to the allegoric representation of transgressions of Christian morals (haughtiness, lack of faith, stinginess etc.), while neglecting their coarse mockery.<sup>19</sup> In spite of their satiric or moralizing accents, the crude laughter at the blind appears as essential to *zatô kyôgen* as it was to medieval European farce. This is precisely the point that let the genre grow obsolete in later ages and brought about the decisive text changes as well as new priorities in the repertoire. There is indeed no other category of *kyôgen* that witnessed such drastic changes in its historical evolution as the *zatô kyôgen*. Thus an investigation of the blind man plays reveals the significant displacements occurred within this stage art that continues to be treated in terms of a fictitious timelessness.<sup>20</sup>

### Pattern changes: Saru *zatô*

This evolution is most clearly illustrated by the case of *Saru zatô*, *The Blind Man and the Monkey*, a play appearing in all collections down to the present, and thus available in a great number of text variants.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, it is regarded as the model and main inspiration source of *Tsukimi zatô*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For their proportion within the population, and their “profession” as itinerant beggar singers, see *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, which also mentions the institutionalized care for them: the first House of the Blind founded 1260 in Paris.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Hashimoto Asao, “Tenshō *kyôgenbon* no shukke-*zatô kyôgen*”, in: *Kokugo to kokubungaku*, 1974, June, pp. 28–41.

<sup>19</sup> The allegorical treatment of blindness in Christian parables is discussed in Cohen, op.cit., passim.

<sup>20</sup> Practically all papers on *kyôgen* written by Western researchers refer exclusively to the texts and stage form of the present repertoire.

<sup>21</sup> Other titles: *Hanami zatô* (Sagi school); *Saru-kae kôtô* (Kyôgenki). Twelve variants have been consulted for the following discussion: five texts from the Ôgura school, three of the Sagi-

It is the story of the ‘stolen wife’, a young woman seduced from beside her blind husband by a stranger. After a short and comical courting scene, the stranger elopes with the woman and leaves his monkey bound to the blind man's waist instead. The farcical plot, with parallels in medieval narrative,<sup>23</sup> is a variation of a broader universal literary motive: the triangle story with the husband deceived and eventually derided by his wife and her lover.

*Saru zatô* appears as a bare title in the Tenshō kyôgenbon, which also contains the following plot of a similar play, *Inu-hiki zatô*, *The Blind Man and the Dog*:

A blind man (zatô) enters and looks for lodging. He is given accommodation. The daughter of the house is won over by his songs. They decide to marry and depart together. He binds her to the case of his biwa with a sash. They walk on mountain paths. They meet a falconer who sees them and beckons the woman to his side. She consents. Then he binds his dog to the blind man instead of the woman. The falconer takes her on his horse and elopes with her. The blind man recites long speeches by himself, then pulls on the rope. He is bitten by the dog and flees. Finis.<sup>24</sup>

*Saru zatô* was probably very close to this play. Both employ the cruelly comic ‘blind man chased by a beast’, a popular motif known from emaki scrolls as well.<sup>25</sup> Both rely on the comical substitution of an animal, a dog or a monkey, for a woman,<sup>26</sup> much in line with the misogynist taste of the time. And both are straightforward farcical kyôgen, based on cruel practical jokes played on blind men. Their high similarity probably made one of them redundant, for *Inu-hiki zatô* was dropped from all later repertoires, while *Saru zatô* witnessed a long evolution between its oldest versions – the earliest preserved dating from mid-seventeenth century – to late Tokugawa time, with distinct variations between the three kyôgen schools that coexisted up to Meiji times: the Ôkura, Sagi and Izumi-ryû. The changes occurred mainly in three areas: the treatment of the woman's part and implicitly of the married couple's relation; the elaboration of the party scene during which the wife is seduced – a pretext for dancing and singing numbers and sake drinking rituals; and, last but not least, the increasingly refined treatment of blindness – a chance for rich stage improvisation as well.

### The woman

The classical triangle of characters – a cheated husband (here blind in a double sense), his wife, and a stranger (a young man, here ironically a monkey trainer) – favored di-

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school, three of the Izumi school and “the reader's text” *Kyôgenki* (volume: *Zokukyôgenki*) They cover a span of about 150 years.

<sup>22</sup> The ‘model’ role of *Saru zatô* is generally accepted. Cf. *Kyôgen kanshō annai*, Iwanami kôza, *No-Kyôgen*, vol. VII, p. 370; also *Kyôgen jiten*.

<sup>23</sup> Similar plots: the ‘Sasayaki take’ in *Shasekishû*, chapter 2, as well as in *Zôdanshû*, chapter 4, possibly cognate to the fairy tale *Ushi no yomeiri* (The Bride changed into a Cow). Cf. Iwanami kôza, *No-Kyôgen*, vol. V, p. 167.

<sup>24</sup> TKB, p. 326–327.

<sup>25</sup> The ‘blind man chased by a dog’ appearing in *Rakuchû rakugaizu*. Cf. Iwanami kôza, *Nô-Kyôgen*, vol. V, Tôkyô 1987, p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> Also see the fairy tale variant, where the bride is mistaken for a cow (cf. supra note 24).

verging treatment of the woman's role.<sup>27</sup> The temptations of psychological interpretation make out for the contrasting differences in the two earliest versions of the Ôkura school. Whereas Ôkura Yaemon Torakiyo (whose *Torakiyobon* was written 1646)<sup>28</sup> leaves the woman's role ambiguous, as it probably was in earlier staging, his son Ôkura Yaemon Toraaki (*Toraakibon*, 1642) insists on the tension and irritation within the ill-matched couple from the very first scene, suggesting the blind man to be jealous, suspicious and egoistic and the woman irascible and dissatisfied. In Toraaki's version the old man knows his wife is cross with him for not being allowed to go out to parties (while in the other text he only supposes she might be dissatisfied); at Kiyomizu he then insists on looking for a place "far from other people" (where the father's text only mentions a "good place in blossom shade"). And whereas the young wife in the father's text invokes the longlasted bonds to her blind husband, the wife in the Toraaki text answers the stranger's question about their relationship with: "well, we're together since our childhood, so I have no choice [but stay with him]".<sup>29</sup>

The point of view technique is further developed in later texts. One of them stresses the wife's fickleness, letting her hypocritically affirm her devotion when called to the party by her blind husband: "I've been already invited by several people, but I never went out – it's of no interest to me as long as *you* cannot go." But later on, in her first words to the monkey trainer who beckons her aside, she suggests that her married life is a burden: "I'm ashamed to say the blind man is my husband". Her protest to the stranger's remark on their being an ill-matched couple is, like in the text quoted above, less than convincing: "I admit it's as you say, but as we have been together since our childhood, I have no choice but stay with him."<sup>30</sup>

Whereas the *Kyôgenki* (1700) lets the young wife surrender at the stranger's first attempt,<sup>31</sup> one later Sagi school version (1777) draws dramatic effect out of her steadfastness: it has the young man threaten her with his sword to make her surrender.<sup>32</sup> Several generations of *kyôgen* authors-actors have thus added their salt to the character of the 'stolen wife'.

### Hanami and sakamori: the party

While the seduction scene of *Inu hiki zatô* took place in a neutral scenery, the drinking party in *Saru zatô* gradually expands to an elaborate quasi-autonomous scene of central importance to the play. The earliest textbooks leave the party to the imagination of the

<sup>27</sup> The plot is close to the famous 'bamboo grove' episode in the *Konjaku monogatari*, that Akutagawa turned into the perfectly ambiguous 'multiple choice' story of *Rashômon*.

<sup>28</sup> The *Torakiyobon* (located in Furukawa Hisashi, *Kyôgen kohon nishu*, Tôkyô 1964) was handwritten by Torakiyo's second son Kiyotora, and meant to legitimize his succession against the elder stepbrother Toraaki, who had compiled his impressive corpus of texts (TA) four years earlier.

<sup>29</sup> The two early Ôkura texts are contrasted in detail in Iwanami kôza, *Nô-Kyôgen* V, p. 167ff.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the so-called *Torahirabon* (end of Edo period), in Iwanami bunko, *Nô-Kyôgen*, Tôkyô 1945, p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> "Well, I don't mind [going with you], but I feel sorry for him since we have been together since our childhood." Cf. *Saru-kae kôtô*, in *Kyôgenki*, op.cit., p. 454.

<sup>32</sup> *Hanami kôtô*, An-ei Moribon (1777), in: *Yôkyôku bunko daihachikan*, Tôkyô 1928, p. 28.



actors, indicating only one or two songs. Thus the first Izumi text gives the full text of one “number”, the conventional mock-Heike text in the appendix (see below), while the Toraakibon of the Ôkura-ryû quotes one folk song (*Hana no en*<sup>33</sup>) and mentions besides “party dances” (*sakana-mai*) and other songs (*ko-uta*), without further specification. In contrast to such free improvisation, late texts have specified dance and song numbers arranged in a balanced crescendo that reveals a growing routine of staging long drinking parties as vaudeville-like autonomous parts within the kyôgen. The choice of the songs and dances reveals a refinement of taste and the preference for contrasting numbers. In the Mitake text translated below the wife's folk song and dance is followed by the blind man's pathetic Nô aria (of course from *Kagekiyo* and depicting the pains of blindness), to end with the mock-Heike recitation, the conventional zatô number. The calm beauty of a serene spring day, repeatedly praised in the couple's calm conversation, enhances the atmosphere of celebration, a foil to the uncanny turn of the events.

Occasionally the taste for ornament ends in literary pedantry, as in the text variant where the monkey trainer's appearance is ‘echoed’ in the blind man's song:

BL.MAN (sings): The mountain river's swelling waters  
sweep along rotted trees  
they drag them off, and with them  
a monkey cub is swept away.<sup>34</sup>

The longlasting competition with contemporary kabuki, with its sophisticated and expanded vaudeville scenes, obviously left its traces in the sakamori parties on the kyôgen stage.

### Blindness enacted

But the evolution of the kyôgen is most prominent in the representation of blindness itself, which gradually shifts from the coarse mockery accompanied by the entertaining role of the biwa playing, reciting, and dancing zatô to a pathetic rendering of blindness as a liminal state, having a stage value of its own.

The blind men's world of displaced and deformed perception was given increasing attention as kyôgen staging techniques evolved to maturity. Late Edo texts dwell at length on scenes such as the blind servant enjoying a deaf man's dancing (*Mizu kikazu*); a large company of zatô who indulge in the delights of smelling varieties of tea, (*Chakagi zatô*, a play of the Sagi school, no longer performed); two blind men who try to find out the wading place in the river by the sound of stones thrown into the water (*Dobu katchiri*). Such episodes, originally parts of the farcical plot and sources of mockery, come to be appreciated on their own, deviating the spectator's attention from the plot to the depiction of blindness. Thus for instance the opening scene of *Dobu katchiri* – two blind men enjoying their travel through the fields – expands into an intense poetic evocation of autumnal scenery.<sup>35</sup> Whereas *Saru zatô* stresses the depiction

<sup>33</sup> The title puns on “flower banquet” and “flower bonds”. It is a popular song also performed in the kyôgen *Hanago* and *Kanawaka*. TA, p. 437f.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the so-called Andôbon of the Sagi-ryû, in *Nihon shomin bunkashi shiryô shûsei*, vol. 4 (1975), p. 426 (*Hanami kôtô*).

<sup>35</sup> See the Kentsûbon of the Sagi school, in: Nonomura Kaizô and Furukawa Hisashi eds., *Kyôgenshû*, chû, 1954, p. 275.

of a festive spring day in the capital (the scene that acquires a pendant in the ‘moon viewing’ of *Tsukimi zatô*). The lively noisy throngs of people on the Shijô and Gojô bridges and the excitement of the crowded place under the blossoming trees, vividly evoked in the blind man’s comment<sup>36</sup> are typical to the late Edo theatre culture with its fondness of local colour and picturesque detail.

The “modern” Izumi text translated below dwells at length on the blind man’s perception – his paradoxical ‘sight-seeing’ imposed upon the audience. The incongruity between his “vision” and physical reality sustains the drama, just as, say, the symbolic blindness of Beckett’s heroine of *Happy days* dominates the stage: buried in the sand up to her waist, then up to her neck, she is still chattering of trifling things and brushing her teeth impassively, as if nothing had happened. Very much like her, the *zatô* keeps indulging in his pleasant visions of a tranquil and secure life, and his wife never tires of endorsing his infatuation as they praise the chance of being born blind. The man’s self-complacency is the tenor of the *sakamori* scene. While the catastrophe occurs right beside him, he is stubbornly concerned with problems of intonation technique: “*How interesting! When you recite the Heike, this one note is most important.*” His wife offers the young monkey trainer a cup of sake, while her husband elatedly exclaims: “*What do you think? Can there be a luckier man than me!*” Such subtle counterpoint of the parallel gestures lends the modern version a symbolic dimension utterly missing in the old texts. The simple farce was gradually replaced by a tragicomic, melancholy parable spiced with that touch of metaphysical humor that is typical of *Tsukimi zatô*. This modern play copes to the taste of a modern audience who lost the memory of the cruel medieval laughter. With the right dramatic instinct, the author of the new play eliminated the most embarrassing moment – the disproportion between mockery and the hero’s deep misfortune – and replaced the irreparable shock by a comparatively trifling incident. After getting his thrashing from the whimsical stranger, the blind man in *Tsukimi zatô* can continue his journey as before. A major desiderate of the aristotelian concept of comicality – one which both the medieval *kyôgen* and the French farce ignored – is restated in its rights: that of the harmless nature of the comic hero’s misfortune.

It is no wonder that *Tsukimi zatô* eventually came to largely replace its model. Despite the text and stage changes in *Saru zatô*, it is prone to become an obsolete play. Sixteen years have elapsed since its most recent performance<sup>37</sup> and it is uncertain when it will be staged again. Its fate seems typical for the whole group of traditional blind man plays – the genuine *zatô kyôgen* so popular during the Middle Ages.

As for the ‘modern’ *zatô kyôgen* which replace them, they certainly belong to the finest plays of the repertoire. For never was human frailty depicted in more delicate hues within the *kyôgen* than in the character of the Blind Man.

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The following translations render two texts of the Izumi school of *kyôgen*. The left side column is based on the earliest manuscript, the *Kyôgen rikugi*, also known as *Tenribon* (property of the Tenri toshokan), a collection of 227 plays (in some instances only the text of songs performed within the plays), dating from 1645 or 1646 and probably com-

<sup>36</sup> Cf. the *Torahirabon* of the Ôkura-ryû, op.cit., ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Only two performances are registered after the war: by the Shigeyama of the Ôkura (1975) and the Miyake branch of the Izumi school respectively (1977).

piled by Yamawaki Izumi Motonaga, annotated edition by Kitahara Yasuo and Kobayashi Kenji, *Kyôgen rikugi zenchû*, Tôkyô 1991: 181–184.

The Tenribon generally preserves the medieval form of the kyôgen, being in some instances (*Saru zatô* is one of them) fairly near to the version of Torairi's father (Torakiyobon, 1646). Typical to its style are frequent abbreviations of the dialogue as well as an imprecise demarcation between dialogue and stage directions. Poems, recitation 'numbers' and songs occurring in the play are appended at the end of the text. The language is fairly close to the colloquial Japanese of the seventeenth century.

The second text translated in the right column renders the Mitake Shôichibon version, belonging to the Mitake branch of the Izumi school and dating from the end of the Edo period, printed in the popular edition of Nonomura Kaizô and Andô Tsunejirô, *Kyôgen shûsei*, Tôkyô 1931: 189–191.

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## The Blind Man and the Monkey

(Tenribon = *Kyôgen rikugi*: the oldest text of the Izumi school)

*(Blind man enters. He introduces himself as a kôtô<sup>1</sup> from the neighbourhood)*

B: As the realm is peaceful and felicitous, I hear that people are crowding this year as never before at the Western and Eastern Hills<sup>2</sup>. Everybody, men and women, old and young, are going out to view the blossoms. My wife is keen on going too, but she doesn't dare ask me. I'll call her to discuss it. We should go out together, as husband and wife, to enjoy the blossoms etc.<sup>3</sup> *(he calls for his wife)*

W: What's up?

B: It's nothing special, but [listen], it's a peaceful and felicitous time.

Haven't you heard that blossom viewing this spring is incomparable? this spring?

W: It is quite as you say.

B: I heard that you wish to go too, is that right?

W: Yes, everybody's going out blossom viewing and I was envying them, but then I thought you would not allow me to go out, so I didn't speak a word about that.

(Mitake Shôichibon. A late Edo text of the Izumi school. In: *Kyôgen shûsei*)

B: I'm a kôtô. The realm is peaceful and the reign felicitous. Every year it's the same, but never has there been a spring so calm as this one. Besides I heard that the cherry blossoms on the Western Hills are in full bloom, and there are tremendous crowds – men and women, old and young – blossom viewing. I understand that my wife is keen on going too. I'll call her and discuss the matter with her. I think we'll go out together, man and wife. Hey, woman, are you in?

*(woman enters from the backstage)*

W: What a fuss! Why are you calling for me?

B: I've got something to discuss with you. Come here first.

W: As you wish. I'm worried, so tell me first what it is.

B: Nothing to be worried about. But they say the cherry trees on the Western Hills are in full bloom – haven't you heard about that?

W: That's right: the cherries are in full bloom. And I heard there are tremendous flower viewing parties.

B: What about you, wouldn't you like go out too?

W: I too would love to go blossom viewing, but I thought you'd never let me, that's why I didn't ask.

<sup>1</sup> *kôtô*: second in the four rank blindmen' hierarchy (*zatô, kôtô, kengyô, sô-kengyô*), a fairly respected position.

<sup>2</sup> Nishiyama and Higashiyama, West and East from the capital, are popular places for picnic parties in the spring (*hanami*) and fall (*momijigari*).

<sup>3</sup> ... *shikajika*: the text does not reproduce all the details of the stage dialogue.

- B: Well, I thought we might as well go out together for blossom viewing.
- W: But blossom viewing is something to enjoy with your eyes – and yours are blind –
- B: You talk nonsense: smelling or viewing the blossoms – it's the same thing.
- W: Smell the blossoms – is that possible?
- B: The old poem goes: “This spring...” (*he recites the poem*) It's the appropriate time, so I'll take you along, and as you view the blossoms I will enjoy their perfume.
- W: That's perfect.
- B: Then have the sake-barrel be brought along.
- W: (*turns toward the bridge*): The kôtô is going out to smell the blossoms, so bring the sake-barrel.
- (*From stage right they start their journey to Kiyomizu. The blind man walks ahead etc. He stumbles on the way, so he lets his wife walk ahead holding one end of a pole, he follows, holding onto the other end etc.*)
- B: Now, I heard about that. Fortunately I've got some spare time today, so why don't we just go out together blossom viewing, as husband and wife. What do you think of it?
- W: Well, since your eyes are blind, what's the use of blossom viewing?
- B: Now, now – you talk nonsense. Do you think blossoms are there just for viewing! What about the poem of yore:
- This spring  
acquainted or strangers  
like beads on the string  
they cross their sleeves  
o, their blossom fragrance!
- That's how it goes. On this occasion you are going to view the blossoms, whereas I'm going to smell their fragrance.
- W: That's perfect. Of course I'll accompany you.
- B: Then order first the sake barrel be brought along.
- W: So I will. Hey, Master kôtô is going out today to smell the blossoms. Carry the sake barrel ahead. – I've ordered it.
- B: Now, where shall we go?
- W: They say the Jishu cherries<sup>4</sup> are in full bloom, so why don't we go to Kiyomizu?
- B: Well then let's go to Kiyomizu. Well, let's go. Hey, take my hand!
- W: So I will.
- B: Well, I think there's no better thing than to be born a human. Look, even a blind man like me goes out to smell the blossoms, to enjoy the

<sup>4</sup> Jishu no hama: famous cherry trees in the vicinity of the Jishu gongen, the shrine dedicated to the protecting deity of the place in the precincts of the Kiyomizu temple on the Eastern Hills of the capital.

cool breeze and listen to the cries of the insects in the summer or to the voices of departing geese in the autumn. There are so many pleasant things. And to think how pleasant it must be for those who have good eyes!

W: You're right indeed. But look: those who can see are bound to watch even things they would rather avoid. And looking at bad things spoils the heart. In such cases, you are privileged.

B: If we are to choose between the two, it's better to be a man with sight.

W: O, while talking we arrived at Kiyomizu.

B: Well, it's really a busy place.

W: It's a merry blossom party.

B: Are all the cherries here around in bloom?

W: Just as the saying goes: "Every one of them in bloom, and none scattered yet".

B: Oh! How they sing! Ei-ya, ei-ya! Well now, that's a lively party! Find a good place for us.

W: Well then, it would be nice here under these blossoms.

B: What a fragrance!

W: Let's first sit down.

B: I'll obey. Open that sake barrel first.

W: I obey.

*(She takes the wig case lid)*

B: When I think of it... I won't spend such spring days in a sullen indifference any longer. Just breathing that fragrance has already made my heart serene.

W: Everything is so fine! – Bring that sake first.

*(They arrive at Kiyomizu etc. The blind man sits down etc. They start the drinking party, using the cover of a drum case<sup>5</sup>. There are songs, the blindman should perform a dance etc.)*

<sup>5</sup> It is used as a sake cup, which points to a fairly early standardization of the stage props and

- B: Ha, hand it over. (*he drinks in the zato fashion*) That's nice. Now for you: have a drink with me.
- W: Thank you. (*she drinks*)
- B: Drink it all up. (*he sings a ko-uta*) Listen...  
... They are singing and dancing over there.. Let me also dance a round, just for fun. (*he dances "Me koso" from Kagekiyo*<sup>6</sup>)
- W: Well, well, isn't that nice.
- B: It's dangerous, I can't keep up, all this turning around.
- W: Here's for you.
- B: Thank you. (*takes the cup*) I'll take that one. Sing a song for me.
- W: Excuse me – I feel embarrassed.
- B: What embarrassment can there be between husband and wife! Sing just one song.
- W: Then I'll sing. (*she sings "The blossoms at Jishu"*<sup>7</sup>)
- B: Well, in so long I haven't heard you singing. It's so nice to listen to you. Let me have another cup (*he pours*).
- W: I want to ask you something: It's so long since I last heard you recite. Please perform for me a verse from the Heike.
- B: I never do it just like that. But as it is your wish – I'll let you hear a song. (*as he recites "Ichinotani"*<sup>8</sup>, *the monkey trainer enters*)

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conventional gestures.

<sup>6</sup> "These eyes, befallen by darkness...": 'aria' from the Nô Kagekiyo, which features the vanquished Taira warrior Aku Shichibei Kagekiyo as a wretched old blind beggar in his Kyûshû exile. Kagekiyo was celebrated as a patron by the blind biwa entertainers. Cf. NKBT, *Yôkyokushû*, ge, Tôkyô 1961, p. 421.

<sup>7</sup> *Jishu no sakura*, a popular folk song:

<i>Kiyomizu naru</i>	At Kiyomizu
<i>Jishu no sakura wa</i>	the cherries of the local god
<i>chiru wa chiranu ka</i>	will they scatter, will they not?
<i>chiru yara chiranu yara</i>	if they scatter or not

*(Monkey trainer enters)*

MT: I am a monkey trainer living in the capital. People are crowding on the Western and the Eastern Hills for blossom viewing. Today I will go to the Eastern Hill and have a nice time.

*(He starts walking etc, arrives at the Eastern Hill, sees the blind man making merry; retires to the bridge)*

Well, behold that! Such a pretty lass, and she's a blind man's mate! Isn't that a shame!

*(He binds his monkey to the bridge reeling, beckons to the woman, calls her. The woman comes)*

MT: Well, how could such a good looking woman as you be the mate of a blind man like him! Let me find you a good match, I'll be the gobetween.

W: You talk indecently. You may have a good match for me, but I've been with him ever since our childhood, so how could I do such a thing!

*(Woman returns etc. The monkey trainer<sup>9</sup> calls her again)*

MT: I'm a monkey trainer from the capital. These days the cherries are in bloom on all the hills and I heard people are crowding at cherry viewing parties. I'll go out to the Eastern Hills and have a good time. Really, I taught this monkey a lot of tricks ever since he was a baby. He's a first class monkey-artist. Oh, while talking, here I am in Kiyomizu. Well, isn't that a lively flower viewing party! Oh no, there's a blind man come out to view the blossoms. What's he going to watch? Ah, he seems to have brought his wife along. Well now, that's a pretty woman. Let me call her and have some fun. *(calls her)*

W: Do you mean me?

MD: Is that blind man your mate?

W: Quite right. He's my husband.

MD: You're not very smart. Such a good looking woman and married to a blind man! I'll do my best and find a good match for you. Come on.

W: You talk indecently. How could I leave my mate of all these years and go some other place. Don't even mention such a thing.

MT: O, that's too sad. Anyway, I'll win her over and take her along. *(he calls again. She shakes her head)*

B: Isn't that wonderful? With *Heike*, this note is most important. Listen – give me that cup.

W: Yes. *(she brings him the cup, pours the sake. The monkey trainer calls her again)*

W: What do you wish?

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*arashi koso shire*                      the storm wind alone knows

Quoted from the Torahirabon of Saru zatô (end of the Tokugawa era).

<sup>8</sup> The text of the mock-heroic *Heike*, cf. Appendix 2 to the Tenribon text, translated on the left column.

<sup>9</sup> The text has “zatô”, evidently an error.



- MT: Listen, that's empty talk. Whatever people may say, in this fleeting uncertain life, you cannot keep on looking after a blind man. You must get a good husband.
- W: Well, what about yourself, have you got a wife or not?
- MT: No, I reached this age and still have got no woman.
- W: So old and have no woman yet! Still, I feel sorry for the blind man. *(she returns to the blind man)*
- MT: She's quite given in. *(he rejoices).*
- B: What's up with you? You keep standing up and sitting down again. That's annoying.
- W: Oh, I'm not standing up.
- (She gets sake from the blind man and offers it to the monkey trainer, who drinks two cups. The monkey trainer calls her again)*
- MT: Come here, quick.
- W: Wait a moment.
- (The blind man scolds her, "Where are you going?" he says and gets upset)*
- MT: Just think it over: are you going to spend this short life at the side of that blind man? I pray you, come with me.
- W: What about you, have you got a woman?
- MT: I've got no wife as yet.
- W: Reached that age and still without a woman? Isn't that funny. *(she goes back to the blind man, who offers her sake etc.)*
- MT: Now – she's quite given in.
- B: The sake is especially delicious today. Hey, woman!
- W: What's the matter?
- B: Where have you been?
- W: I haven't been anywhere.
- B: But whatever I say, you don't hear. Listen – give me that sake. Have another cup.
- W: Well, I'll have one more. *(he has some more repliques. The monkey trainer makes several gestures on the bridge. He calls her again. She shows him the cup, he comes stealthily to her side, she lets him drink. He takes her along)*
- B: What do you think? Can there be a luckier man than me! True, I was born blind – but I can live as I please: I don't suffer from cold in the winter, or from heat in the summer. And now and then I enjoy such an excursion and drink as much delicious sake as I wish and have a good time. Isn't that a felicitous state? *(in the meanwhile:)*
- MT: Oh, you're stubborn. I pray you, come along.
- W: Well, I'll see after him and come with you later on.

B: I know how to deal with you.  
*(He draws a rope out of his garment, binds it to her waist and binds the other end to his own.)*

*The monkey trainer beckons her again, but the woman points to the rope attached to her waist. The monkey trainer finds a solution: he drags along his monkey, binds it to that rope and runs off, carrying the woman on his back. Exeunt etc. The blind man, after a time)*

B: Listen, woman, why don't you speak a word? Are you cross because I gave you that little scolding? Is that why you won't speak to me?

*(Draws the rope and the monkey cries. He is scared and tries to stroke it. The monkey scratches him; he hits it with his stick, but the monkey scratches him again. Assaulted by the monkey he flees off-stage)*

MT: Oh no, come along just now. *(the blind man searches his wife and calls her aloud)*

W: What's the matter?

B: Where have you been?

W: There are people over there and I went to have a look.

B: What kind of behaviour is that? You leave this blind man by himself and go other places? O, I can take care of that. *(he draws a thin rope out of his pocket, and fixes it to her belt).*

W: What are you doing? People will laugh at me.

B: Let them laugh. You haven't come here to enjoy yourself, but to take care of me.

MT: What, he is scolding her? *(there is more action; he calls her; she points to her belt; the monkey man exchanges the woman for his monkey and departs with her)*

MT: Listen: I lied when I said I would give you away to another. I'll stay with you myself for five hundred and eighty years from now on. Come along.

W: I'll obey you. *(exeunt)*

B: Hey, is it just because I'm blind that you scorn me like that? Well, take that cup. Come now, you won't speak a word. Are you cross because I scolded you? Oh no, you don't understand a thing. I don't speak like that because I dislike you. Even if I hurt you in front of all the people, does that mean you should be cross with me and stop talking to me! Must you turn sulky like that! Come on, I'll pull you to my side. *(pulls at the rope. The monkey scratches him)*

B: O, it hurts, it hurts! You've got some long nails! Is that suitable for a woman? Let me go! Shall all the people watch us? How can you scratch your husband? (*he pulls the rope; the monkey jumps at him with loud cries, scratches him again; chases him off stage*). Oh, what a shame! My wife's changed into a monkey! Is there nobody there? (*he does more of the kind: oral tradition*).

APPENDIX: 59, Saru-zatô<sup>10</sup>

Nr. 48 a:

SHITE: *Kono haru wa  
shiru mo shiranu mo  
tamaboko no  
yukikau sode no  
hana no ka zo suru*<sup>11</sup>

Nr. 48 b:

And when the battle of Ichinotani was over, the Minamoto and the Taira fled away in disorder. Among the fleeing warriors were some whose heels had been cut off, and others whose chins had been cut off; but as they were in a great hurry, they took the cut-off heels and stuck them to their chins; and they took the cut-off chins and stuck them to their heels... and as the cut-off parts grew [in their new places], they got beards growing thick on their heels and as winter came, they got deep cracks<sup>12</sup> into their chins.

<sup>10</sup> The original manuscript places the *Shinkokinshû* poem and the mock-Heike fragment into an appendix (as a memento for the actor)

<sup>11</sup> Poem from the *Shinkokin wakashû*, Spring, II, Nr. 113. *Tamaboko* (pearl-halberds) is a pillow-word, *makura-kotoba* for way, pilgrimage. Translation in the Kyôgen-shûsei version.

<sup>12</sup> The heels' cracks from cold.