

Noh Tamakazura 玉葛 (玉鬘)

(“Lady Tamakazura”)

This is based on the character Tamakazura (“jeweled chaplet”) from the Tale of Genji. Tamakazura, the daughter of Yûgao who died in the midst of a brief affair with Prince Genji, was taken to Kyushu as a child where she was raised. As a woman, she returned to the capital and by chance was reunited with her mother’s waiting woman, Ukon, when they both went to pray at Mt. Hatsuse near its famous twin trunked cedars.

In the noh, a travelling priest arrives at Hatsuse River sees a woman alone in a boat who slows him the two cedars. The priest quotes a well known poem about the cedars, to which the woman replies by telling the story of Tamakazura and her reunion with Ukon. Hinting that she is the same Tamakazura, the woman disappears. The priest prays for Tamakazura’s soul and her ghost returns. Filled with the burden of her obsession for this world, the ghost appeals to the priest for his prayers and she thus attains enlightenment.

Author: Komparu Zenchiku (1405?-1470?)..

Scene: Autumn, Hatsuse in Yamato Province, the present area of the Hasedera Temple in Sakurai City, Nara Prefecture. .

Category: Fourth category miscellaneous (infatuated woman) play, phantasm (mugen) noh in two acts, kakeri (anguish dance) piece, without taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools. Kanze writes the title as 玉鬘.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): a travelling priest.
- Maejite (first half shite main actor): a woman in a boat. Wears a middle-aged woman (fukai or zô) or young woman (ko-omote, waka-onna)’s mask.
- Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actors): Man at the gate of Hatsuse Temple.
- Nochijite (second half shite): the ghost of Tamakazura. Wears an anguished woman (masukami) or young woman’s (ko-omote, waka-onna) mask.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki entrance: A travelling priest enters to nanoribue solo flute and announces that he is on a pilgrimage to famous shrines and temples and is now on his way to Hatsuse Temple. He sings a travel song recalling Nara the capital, and referring to sites along the way, he arrives at the Hatsuse River.
2. Shite entrance: A woman enters to issei music carrying an oar to indicate that she is rowing a small boat down the Hatsuse River. Referring to poems in the Tale of Genji, she sings of her yearning for the past, her wandering soul, drops of water coloring her sleeves, tears and an autumn shower, and her sad loneliness like the drifting of a lost boat.
3. Waki/Shite exchange: The priest, surprised to see someone rowing on the swift mountain river,

questions the woman who replies that she is also on her way to the temple. Quoting a poem about “fishing boat moored by Mt. Hatsuse” with the chorus she sings of the splendid scene of the faintly tinted autumn trees bathed in gentle sunlight, the view and sounds of the winding river, and the mists in the valley which cause the distant houses to appear and disappear. Leaving her boat, the chorus sings of her coming to the temple, the exquisite view, and the twin-trunked cedar amidst the autumn colors.

4. Shite recitation: The woman points out the twin-trunked cedar to which priest quotes a famous poem. The woman replies that it is the poem composed when Tamakazura met her mother’s waiting woman Ukon here long ago, and she asks the priest to pray for them. With the chorus, she tells how Tamakazura’s mother, Yûgao, died young, how Tamakazura suffered in misery in Tsukushi (Kyushu) as a child, how as a young woman she returned by boat to Kyoto, and how wandering in despair like an unmoored boat she prayed at Mt. Hatsuse and here met Ukon by chance at the twin-trunked cedars. Saying that today’s chance meeting is also a gift bestowed by Buddha, she asks the priest the help to dispel Tamakazura’s delusion.
5. Shite exit: With the chorus, the priest tells how he stuck by the sadness of Tamakazura’s story. The woman asks him to have compassion and to pray for Tamakazura. Hinting that she is the spirit of the dead woman, she disappears. .
6. Ai’s interlude: A man at the gate of the Hatsuse Temple, in response to the priest’s questions, tells Tamakazura’s story in detail. Saying that the woman the priest had just met must be Tamakazura’s ghost, he urges the priest to pray for her soul and then exits.
7. Waki’s wait: Moved by what has happened, the priest prays for Tamakazura’s soul convinced it will receive Buddha’s infinite mercy.
8. Nochijite’s entrance: Tamakazura’s ghost enters to issei music and sings of her continued longing, her desire to encounter Buddha’s law, and her shame and embarrassment at revealing her now disheveled look of passion and hair white with age. She shows her confusion by doing a kakeri anguish dance, and then with the chorus tells of her continued haze of delusion which she is unable to brush aside.
9. Shite narrative dance, conclusion: With the chorus, Tamakazura compares her wandering in the world of delusion to the clouds and mist of Mt. Hatsuse whose harsh winds scatter dew and tears like the autumn leaves. Saying it is her own obsessions for which she is being punished, her repentance allows her to cast off her delusions and attains the jewel of enlightenment. [Richard Emmert]