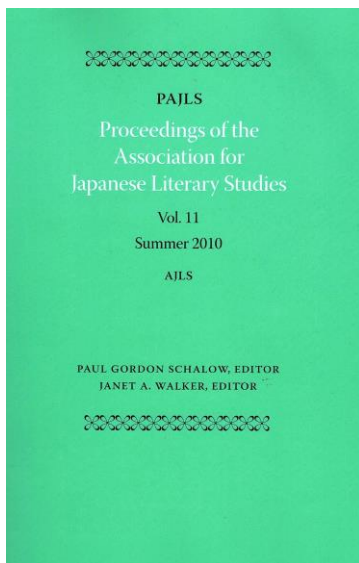


“The Fatal Charm of the ‘Real *Onnagata*’ in Enchi’s Works: An Analysis of *Onnagata Ichidai* from a Gender Perspective”

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The Fatal Charm of the “Real *Onnagata*” in Enchi’s Works

An Analysis of *Onnagata Ichidai* from a Gender Perspective

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The novel by Enchi Fumiko 円地文子 (1905–1986) entitled *Onnagata Ichidai: Shichisei Segawa Kikunojō-den* 女形一代: 七世瀬川菊之丞伝 (The Age of the *Onnagata*: A Biography of Segawa Kikunojō the Seventh) was serialized under a slightly different title in eight issues of the magazine *Gunzō* 群像 between January and August 1985. Though the serialization was supposed to continue, the author had a cerebral infarction in June of that year, and the novel was left unfinished. In November 1985, one year before her death, Enchi was decorated with the Order of Culture 文化勲章, and her serialized work was subsequently published in 1986 in the form of a novel, which I will refer to below as *Onnagata Ichidai*.

The novel’s protagonist is a *kabuki onnagata* 歌舞伎女形 whose life is narrated posthumously by a female dancer of *nihon buyō* 日本舞踊 who had performed with him from childhood. As is *de rigueur* for *kabuki* actors, the protagonist frequently changes his stage name during his life, becoming the seventh Segawa Kikunojō only after his art is completely mature.¹

An actor named Segawa Kikunojō VII 七世瀬川菊之丞 never appears in the annals of *kabuki*, but the plot contains more than a few references that enable us to link this figure to an historical *onnagata* named Nakamura Utaemon VI 六世中村歌右衛門 (1917–2001); in addition there are several allusions that link another character, Sawaki Noriyuki 沢木紀之, to the writer Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–1970).

While it would be interesting to analyze this novel from the perspective of Utaemon’s biography and explore how it was received while he was still alive, I will adopt a different approach. In this essay I wish to examine the contradiction between the narrative voice which seeks to reconstruct the events of Kikunojō’s life in order to form his identity as a “real *onnagata*,” and the narrative voice which

¹In order to avoid confusion he is referred to as Kikunojō throughout this essay.

simultaneously asserts that this identity was inherent in him from the very beginning. The narrator's viewpoint parallels the worldview espoused by essentialism, which presupposes an innate being or origin, alongside a view of gender identity as constructed through repetition enacted both in real life and in performance on the stage.

The narrator selects four events in Kikunojō's life which she interprets as the building blocks of his gender and sexuality. In chronological order these four events are:

1. Kikunojō's homosexual relationship with Yasu 安
2. the Second World War
3. his marriage with Teruko 照子
4. his homosexual affair with Sawaki 沢木.

The narrator ("watashi") implies that all these events are important steps in the perfecting of Kikunojō's *onnagata*, but at the same time represent an escalation in the corruption of his morality, which, she asserts, ultimately brings about the tragic demise of all those who are ensnared by the actor's fatal charm. Finally, I will examine the significance of Kikunojō's affair with his servant Haruko, which can be read as fundamental, even though the narrator attempts to minimize it.

In delineating these events of the protagonist's life which impact Kikunojō's gender identity dramatically both on and off stage, I seek to clarify how the narrative filter provides one interpretation, but simultaneously reveals another way of seeing the same event, using gender theories to further this interpretation. By referring to Enchi's other works and essays I will be able to shed more light on her perception of gender in the world of the performing arts, a topic that comes to the fore in many of her novels. In particular, I will refer to *Futaomote* 双面 (Double-face), a late 1950s piece which also focuses on the figure of an *onnagata*.²

As Enchi's final but uncompleted novel, *Onnagata Ichidai* is a significant work in her oeuvre because it offers a fresh look at the world of *kabuki* by this author, who had been infatuated with it since childhood. In this novel "watashi," while showing now and then a critical point of view, skillfully constructs a narration that conveys both fascination and sorrow around the figure of the *onnagata*, and inevitably arouses into the reader nostalgia for the glamorous world of *kabuki*. Moreover, since its perspective foreshadows contemporary gender theories, I think it is worth analyzing the *onnagata* figure emerging from *Onnagata Ichidai* from a theoretical point of view.

An especially significant aspect of Enchi's *Onnagata Ichidai* is her use of the oral register of the narrative voice. The novel is narrated in spoken form (*desu, masu* です・ます) solely from the narrator's point of view. It conveys the perspective of someone who is an insider in the "queer" world of *kabuki* and evinces a heavy

²Enchi 1959.

personal bias due to her friendship with the protagonist Kikunojō.³ This informal register of the narrative voice has a duality that can express intimacy toward the reader, but at the same time emphasizes the fact that the novel constitutes only the narrator's subjective point of view, rather than a historically accurate biography. Moreover, the narrative voice frequently relies on the end phrase "I think" (*to omoimasu* と思います) or "probably" (*kamoshiremasen* かもしれません), which emphasizes the narrator's subjectivity and encourages the reader to feel that the events described might have another interpretation. The reader is afforded an alternative glimpse of the characters' minds only through the dialogue; thus, the text gives us some margin to doubt the narrator's interpretation.

Since the novel was inspired by the popular actor Utaemon, who was still alive and performing when *Onnagata Ichidai* was written, one of the reasons why Enchi intentionally might have chosen this informal style, is to make clear that the narrator is not reliable, implying with it that the novel was not written with a biographical intent. Furthermore, although the narrator refers to herself as "watashi" 私 and writes from within the inner circle of acquaintanceship, she does not interpolate herself into the main events of the protagonist's life. Instead, she acts as a filter and shares only what she considers important in the construction of Kikunojō's sexuality, and in his lifework of being or becoming a "real *onnagata*" (*hontō no onnagata*).

I'd like now to turn to a careful examination of the five main events in Kikunojō's life. Kikunojō's first romance unfolds in his youth with Yasu, a man five years his senior. They go on a trip together, where the narrator reports that Kikunojō is serving Yasu "as a woman" (*onna no yō de* 女のようで). Today we might define their relationship as a homosexual one based on heterogendric role-playing, with Yasu as the "male" and Kikunojō as the "female." When their lovers' tryst is discovered, it is a huge scandal for his family and the relationship ends. We don't know what subsequently happens to Yasu until the last chapter, wherein Yasu's widow tells the narrator the whole story.

The wife reveals that Yasu and Kikunojō met in Hokkaidō fifty years after their relationship ended, and that Yasu had never overcome his feelings for Kikunojō even after all that time. Without offering any evidence for her assumptions, the narrator asserts that Kikunojō was more in love with Yasu than with his later par amour Sawaki, who, in the narrator's opinion, wanted Kikunojō to be more "male." The narrator implies that the strong emotional bond between Yasu and Kikunojō occurred because Yasu didn't expect Kikunojō to change or modify his gender identity. In doing this, she tries to rigidly define the protagonist's gender identity and sexuality. "Watashi" also suggests that Yasu's love for Kikunojō resulted in Yasu's suicide upon their meeting fifty years later, but this is ambiguous for the

³I use the term "queer" throughout the essay with the meaning of self-affirmation by sexual minorities as advanced by "queer theory," even though this concept was not current when Enchi was active as a writer.

reader. Yasu's suicide becomes the crux of the narrator's belief that Kikunojō is not only a "real *onnagata*," but also one that possesses a fatal charm.

Another event that the narrator considers important for the development of the protagonist's gender identity and his performing skills is the advent of the Second World War. As the narrator explains:

(. . .) I suppose it was his time wearing that baggy army uniform which really gave birth to his *onnagata*. From childhood he was of that bent, but nothing could easily upset the core to which he held strongly, deep within that frail body of his. One might say that certain incidents, such as the elopement with Yasu, made this original disposition even clearer.⁴

The narrator attributes the fact that Kikunojō could overcome both the scandal with Yasu and the horrors of war to the same adamant strong core inside his delicate body, the core which allowed him to become a talented *onnagata*. The narrator reports her father's words after a joint performance of the dance *Kakubei* 角兵衛 in which she played the male role and Kikunojō the female role:

"As a dancer, your ability to enter the role of a man is so-so, but when Kikujirō performs the part of *Onnadayū*, I feel that he is a real *onnagata*, because he is a woman and not a woman at the same time. There's no comparison," he said. At that time I still didn't understand the meaning of my father's words, but it is probably true that the perversion of sexuality that Kikujirō had in him originally was already coming to the fore.⁵

By using the phrase "real *onnagata*," "*watashi*" is underscoring the fact that the protagonist had attained perfection when compared to later actors, whom she felt had lost the true art of *kabuki*. But with these words "real *onnagata*," which are used throughout the novel, the narrator also refers to something deeply rooted within the protagonist's identity, something that she deliberately links to his charm and stage presence, and that she calls "perversion" (*tōsaku* 倒錯). From the excerpt above, it is apparent that it is the narrator and not the father who uses the word "perversion" and also that the word has a very ambivalent nuance: it can be pejorative, but we can also argue that it is used with a sense of admiration by a woman who is part of the "queer" world of traditional performing arts, especially if we consider that it is employed to express Kikunojō's unique charm.

The memory of the *Kakubei* performance permeates the novel and is recalled at every crucial moment of the protagonist's life. Many pages later "*watashi*" recalls:

Years and years ago, around the time that I danced *Kakubei*'s role and he danced the part of *Onnadayū*, he had become a woman quite naturally and was perhaps at his most blissful. After that, wearing a baggy army uniform, with a sword at his side, was a time when he was an unnatural man.⁶

⁴Enchi 1986, p. 30. All translations from Enchi's novels and essays are my own.

⁵Enchi 1986, p. 12.

⁶Enchi 1986, p. 90.

In this passage we come across the narrator's pseudo-essentialism. The protagonist's "inherent sexual perversion" and consequent development into a "real *onnagata*" is established, since performing as a woman is "natural" to him, just as living as a man is "unnatural."

In order to clarify the development of the gender perspective on the *onnagata* in Enchi's works, I will next examine the correlations between *Onnagata Ichidai* and the previously-cited *Futaomote*, which was first published in the literary magazine *Gunzō* in July 1959. Even though these works were composed in two completely different periods, the topic they deal with is strikingly similar, as both are related to the life of an *onnagata*, and both link his female-like gender on the stage with his private sexual and emotional life.

The story of *Futaomote* centers around a fictional protagonist, Segawa Senjo 瀬川仙女, who is a famous and especially talented *onnagata* of the Segawa family. The elderly Senjo has been hospitalized for an anal problem and his disciple describes his treatment in grotesque terms that depict the doctor's sadism and Senjo's own apparent masochism, implying homosexual attraction between the two. The narration describes explicitly the "perverted" atmosphere of the hospital room, which a medical staff member compares to the room of a brothel.⁷

Therefore, well before *Onnagata Ichidai*, the use of the derogatory concept of "perversion" as an almost intrinsic characteristic of a talented or "real" *onnagata*, was already present in Enchi's works. Moreover, the notion that being eccentric or "queer" enhances the power of a theatrical performance is also present in Enchi's works linked to the world of *noh*, as exemplified by the novel *Kikujidō* 菊慈童.⁸

This linking of "sexual perversion" to success and charm on the stage is not a concept that is unique to Enchi. It was actually one of the main arguments used by theater critics in favor of the *onnagata*, in the debate which arose in the Meiji period, when the theatrical world had to decide whether or not to introduce actresses instead of *onnagata* in *shinpa* 新派 and *kabuki*.⁹ The scholar Mitsuishi Ayumi 光石亜由美 suggests that the Meiji intelligentsia, who were morbidly fascinated by *onnagata* because of their "perverted beauty," would at the same time distance themselves from that "perversion." In other words they simultaneously exalted and denigrated the *onnagata*.¹⁰

Enchi admired the world of *kabuki* because of its "perversion" as well as the Meiji intelligentsia who supported the *onnagata* role, but her perspective on *kabuki*,

⁷ Enchi 1959, p. 173.

⁸ Enchi 1984. This work was first published in the magazine *Shinchō* 新潮 between January 1982 and November 1983. In *Kikujidō* a *noh* actor, disciple of the protagonist Yūsen 遊仙, says about his master:

"It is a little creepy, but I guess that monstrous quality (*bakejimita nōryoku* 化物じみた能力) is stored inside any performing art" (p. 220). This sentence also summarizes the main concept that emerges from *Onnagata Ichidai*: that the beauty on stage is directly connected to moral perversion.

⁹ For a detailed analysis of the debate, see Kano 2001.

¹⁰ Mitsuishi 2003, pp. 12–13.

which emerges also from her *oeuvre*, was fundamentally different from that of the Meiji intellectuals, because she didn't distance herself from that "perversion." Indeed, in a 1960 essay entitled *Kabuki no sekai* 歌舞伎の世界 (The World of *Kabuki*), Enchi analyzes the attraction to the *kabuki* actors' gender gap, which she had held from her childhood, due to her familiarity with the Edo-period tradition:

Sadaji was a completely masculine actor, who conveyed no femininity, and was a man of the heroic type. Now, when I recall my girlhood days, when I saw such a man who was supposed to be strong call out and cry in an effeminate manner, I guess the feeling I used to have was sadistic joy. I bet that was a manifestation of a kind of perversion in my sexual desire.¹¹

In contrast to the Meiji critics, who distanced themselves from the "beauty of perversion" (*tosaku no bi* 倒錯の美), Enchi embraced the "perverted" world of *kabuki* via her role as an ardent fan: she saw herself as a part of that world. Furthermore, there is correspondence between the use of the term "perverted" in both Enchi's fictional works and her essays, which shifts from defilement to attraction towards the double-gendered characters of the world of *kabuki*.¹² Her erotic orientation and her identity as a woman artist gave Enchi some kind of affinity with the "queer" members of the performing arts world, who lived in-between the boundaries of defiance and social respectability.

In her works, Enchi was as keen to explore the unique gifts bestowed by an artist's life as to express the pain and solitude which are essential for her protagonists to achieve success. In a 1941 essay entitled *Onnagata to onnagokoro* 女形と女心 (*Onnagata* and the Woman's Heart), Enchi describes an interview with a famous *shinpa onnagata*, Hanayagi Shōtarō 花柳章太郎 (1894–1965), and discusses the effort which an *onnagata*, who is born male, must make in order to perform a woman's role, much like the effort of being a woman writer, who must overcome her "femaleness" in order to write. She also adds that those two individuals are similar in that once they overcome the difficulties of the friction between gender and art, they attain a "particular tranquility" (*besshu no ochitsuki* 別種の落ち着き), exactly as have the women artists usually depicted in Enchi's works.¹³

Enchi's vision of the artist in gender terms comes to the fore here; she seems to suggest that even in the field of art, women or "queer" characters are part of a minority and thus must struggle more than the heterosexual male. Nevertheless, here I want to make a distinction between the relative status of the "queer" man and the woman. Even though both belong to traditionally marginalized groups,

¹¹Enchi 1960, p. 207.

¹²In another essay (Enchi 1964), Enchi writes about the *onnagata* Utaemon and explicitly stresses the fact that, for her, Utaemon's most charming point is his beauty which comes from both genders (or none in particular). She doesn't use the term "perversion," but it is easy to relate his double-gender to the idea of "abnormal sexuality" (*hentai seiyoku* 変態性欲) that she praised so much in *kabuki* and which became a key concept in her works associated to this performing art.

¹³Enchi 1941, pp. 548–49.

“queer” male artists still receive more respect than women artists in Enchi’s works. For example a woman artist like Reiko 麗子, the protagonist of *Komachi Hensō* 小町変相 (Komachi variations), who wants to succeed in art, must give up a satisfying private life in order to dedicate herself completely to her career.¹⁴

The romantic concept of art born out of pain in Enchi’s works also takes on a gendered nuance: men are more successful in art and society, as well as in love; they are always depicted as less emotionally involved and therefore stronger than women.¹⁵ Indeed, the conflict between art and private life for a woman seems sharper than for a man, not only due to the enormous amount of energy that Enchi’s female protagonists pour into their relationships compared to their male counterparts, but also because of societal gender norms which link the women to the family and to child care. We can therefore argue that there are two kinds of gaps between the men and women depicted in Enchi’s works: one in love, and the other in art, both of which can be interpreted in a broader sense as a reflection of societal disparities.

Returning to *Onnagata Ichidai*, the narrator recalls when her father refused to allow her to perform the dance *Renjishi* 連獅子:

“Maybe in another year or so, but you are not up to it yet,” he said. And I felt even more frustrated that he didn’t acknowledge my abilities. From my father’s point of view, he was more concerned about Segawa Kikujirō’s art and future than about that of a girl of fifteen or sixteen years like me. Compared to fathers nowadays, fathers in the early years of the Taishō era had very different ideas about sons and daughters.¹⁶

In this passage, the narrator’s feeling of rivalry that results from the artistic gap between her and Kikunojō is clear. Even if he is not part of the dominant heterosexual male-centered society, he was still born a man, and this automatically makes a difference in the world of performing arts, which was (and still is) hierarchical. Moreover, “*watashi*” is torn between repulsion and morbid attraction to Kikunojō. In the following emblematic passage, “*watashi*” remembers an incident when she met Kikunojō when they were both entertaining soldiers at a military camp during the war. When she saw his figure in uniform, the narrator thought:

(. . .) as I gazed at his figure, at odds with the baggy army uniform he was wearing, that image of him on stage was reflected in my eyes. At the same time, an unbearable emotion seemed to tear my chest in two. If I have ever liked Kikujirō as a man, it was definitely when I saw him—both man and woman—wearing that inappropriate army uniform.¹⁷

¹⁴ Enchi 1965.

¹⁵ See, for example, the male protagonists in Enchi 1953 and Enchi 1955.

¹⁶ Enchi 1986, p. 10.

¹⁷ Enchi 1986, p. 25.

In brief, the artistic rivalry towards Kikunojō that “*watashi*” feels is combined with a feeling of desire and frustration because of unrequited love. This mix of admiration and defiance might be the reason why she idealizes his androgynous character but tries through her narration to rigidly define his gender and sexuality. She finds a valid excuse not to excel as much as Kikunojō on the stage and at the same time can accept the fact that he, as a heterogendric homosexual, rejects her as a possible lover.

This “unnatural” man, Kikunojō, marries a woman named Teruko, but after a while we discover that he is having a homosexual affair with Sawaki Noriyuki, a painter and playwright who starts writing plays for Kikunojō and ends up loving him, thanks to his “perverted beauty” (*tōsakubi* 倒錯美). According to the narrator, Sawaki wants his lover Kikunojō to be more “manly” both on the stage and in real life, and begins composing plays which would only emphasize Kikunojō’s “maleness” (*masuraoburi* 益荒男振), in contrast to the “femaleness” (*taoyameburi* 手弱女振) of Sawaki’s previous plays. Here, the narrator explains that Kikunojō loves Sawaki, and initially makes an effort to break with his female-like behavior and lifestyle, but gives up after finding out how “unnatural” it is for him, and they finally break up.¹⁸

From another perspective, one can read this as the interpretation of the narrator, who insists on Kikunojō’s inherent female-likeness. Indeed, Sawaki’s speech reveals no insistence on enhancing Kikunojō’s “maleness” in their relationship, but only in his gender role on stage.

The narrator asserts that Kikunojō is responsible for Sawaki’s suicide, which bolsters her thesis that Kikunojō’s fatal charm leads those around him to commit suicide when the relationship fails. In reality Sawaki commits double-suicide with a woman years later, so it is unlikely that his death was due to his love for Kikunojō.

Kikunojō’s relationship with Sawaki brings to the fore his double-gender features—in other words, being both male and female-like. But this juxtaposition of two genders, which creates the “perverted beauty” to which Sawaki was attracted, is ultimately seen as an obstacle to reaching full “maleness.” In the narrative, it is elaborated that the role of an *onnagata* is inherited “through genetic lineage” (*daidai no chi* 代々の血), wherein “men change into women” (*otoko ga onna ni tenkan suru* 男が女に転換する).¹⁹ The narrator again asserts that this pattern is “natural” for the protagonist, ingrained, and therefore not easily altered. Here, then, the narrator’s use of the term “natural” (*shizen* 自然) to describe Kikunojō’s female-like gender after entering adulthood can be read as an “acquired nature,” and so something which *feels* (but is *not*) natural. It seems that in *Onnagata*

¹⁸For a convincing recent theoretical account of the gender of the *onnagata* see Mezur 2005. I borrow Mezur’s theory in defining the gender of the *onnagata* as “female-like,” as Mezur clearly differentiates it from the expression of pure femininity. Mezur’s definition is close to Enchi’s emphasis on the androgynous “nature” of the “real *onnagata*.”

¹⁹Enchi 1986, p. 41.

Ichidai, the term “natural” can be read in two ways which exist simultaneously but also seem to contradict each other. One is a form of essentialist reading which describes something the narrator perceives as original or genetically inherited, whereas another reading refers to acquired nature, in the sense of habit and repetition, and might be seen therefore as something constructed.

In the essay entitled *Onnagata to onnagokoro* mentioned above, Enchi describes the figure of the famous *onnagata* Hayanagi as follows:

(. . .) he was all soft lines in a kimono with neckband and with his rounded shoulders he naturally exuded the female-like glamour of a person who has spent a long time on the stage as a woman.²⁰

Not only in her fictional works, but also in her essays, we see Enchi using the word “natural” to describe something constructed with effort and time.

It is interesting to note that scholar Maki Morinaga, who has analyzed the gender formation of *onnagata* from a historical point of view, speaks of the concept of “cultivation” (*shūgyō* 修業) by following a religious or artistic path, which culminates after a long training in an “internalization of the technique in question as second nature.”²¹ In this sense, while maintaining an essentialist vocabulary, the narrative of *Onnagata Ichidai* can be given another reading, since these traditional concepts are very similar to Judith Butler’s theory, first expressed in *Gender Trouble*, that: “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”²²

The female-like “nature” of the protagonist Kikunojō can thus be seen as a step towards the construction of his androgyny or gynandrim, as in the following passage:

Even after the affair with Sawaki, his lifestyle as an *onnagata* didn’t change one bit; and as he moved with such grace on stage as an *onnagata*, it made one wonder where on earth his aspirations to assume the male role during that time had gone. From the point of view of beauty, *onnagata* more flawless than his would later appear, but as for holding a femaleness inside the body, while expressing an un-female-like strength, he appeared to have reached the pinnacle.²³

In this excerpt, the narrator stresses the fact that the special quality of Kikunojō’s *onnagata* is not due to his beauty, but it is because he maintains an “un-female strength” (*onna de nai tsuyoi mono* 女でない強いもの) at the foundation of his art, while simultaneously adopting female-like gender acts that result in a “graceful *onnagata*” (*taoyakana onnagata* たおやかな女形).

²⁰ Enchi 1941, p. 550.

²¹ Morinaga 2002, p. 268–69.

²² Butler 1990, p. 33.

²³ Enchi 1986, p. 48.

I would like to point out the essentialist worldview—female weakness and its opposite male strength—which was implied also in the first passage of *Onnagata Ichidai* I quoted above. Here, the narrator stresses a form of binary categorization which, in the end, confirms a patriarchal agenda. As I argued above, what makes a “real *onnagata*,” as far as *Onnagata Ichidai* is concerned, is not the beauty or the femininity of the actor, but the specificity of what “*watashi*” defines as “both male and female” (*otoko demo aru onna demo aru 男でもある女でもある*); that is, the double-gendered feature of Kikunojō’s performance.

In *Futaomote* too, the keyword “natural” appears, and is utilized to express the female-likeness of Senjo. The description of Senjo is similar to that of Kikunojō as an *onnagata*, who stands out because of his inclination to behave like a woman. The concept of constructed naturalness à la Butler, is therefore also valid even for a much earlier work such as *Futaomote*. In addition, the female protagonist obscures and controls the *onnagata* gender identity and sexual life on a narrative level in *Onnagata Ichidai*, and concretely in *Futaomote*. Indeed, in *Futaomote*, the recuperating Senjo meets a young female university student who is writing a thesis on the gender and sexuality of *onnagata*. She explains:

“In the thesis I am going to write, I would like to think about the figure of the man who lives inside an *onnagata*, while he makes the effort of performing the part of a woman. In other words, since the art of the *kabuki onnagata* lies in expressing both femaleness in men and maleness in women, it is a wonderful art, which can’t be compared to the performance of an actress, I think . . .”²⁴

Moreover, in underlining the “strength” and “beauty” of Senjo, the student’s words reflect the same essentialist categorization expressed by the narrator of *Onnagata Ichidai*, who links female to beauty and male to strength.

Even though Senjo had abandoned his interest in women after the painful end of a youthful love affair and has only had homosexual relationships from that time on, the female student succeeds in seducing him and they begin having a romance. Following this, she admits that she’s satisfied at having verified that “Segawa Senjo is a man too, just like the others.”²⁵

Here we can see the intrusion of the female character on the *onnagata*’s gender similar to that in *Onnagata Ichidai*, although in *Futaomote*, the intrusion occurs not only in the woman’s fantasies, but in concrete reality, because there is a physical relationship between the two. Following a long hiatus due to illness and after the love affair with the student, Senjo then returns to the stage and is said to have gained strength. As a result, he is praised even more than before by his fans.

Senjo himself is embarrassed by having his “maleness” come to the fore because of a love relationship with a woman, but he admits there is something

²⁴ Enchi 1959, p. 177.

²⁵ Enchi 1959, p. 180.

different in him. Here, as in *Onnagata Ichidai*, real-life emotions are linked to a shift in sexuality, and therefore in the gender of the *onnagata*, which ultimately influences his gender acts on-stage. The narrator explains Senjo's feelings after the performance:

(Senjo thought that) even if now a touch of maleness enhanced the vitality and beauty of his performance as an *onnagata*, that secret resounded like harmony breaking within him.²⁶

Senjo begins to realize that the love affair which added charm to his performance has also shattered the balance of the delicate gender identity which he has gained through years of effort on-stage as an *onnagata*. Here, we notice again how Enchi expresses a concept which we find also today in post-gender theories, considering Senjo's "natural" female-likeness and his fluid sexuality. Nevertheless, at the same time the narration reproduces a binary and hetero-normative way of seeing gender and sexuality, in which the male gender which emerges in him automatically leads him to be attracted to a woman.

In *Futaomote* as well as in *Onnagata Ichidai*, the androgyny of the protagonist is praised as the factor which enhances the beauty of the performance, but at the same time it creates a problem in rigidifying his identity and therefore is a cause of pain both for *Futaomote*'s protagonist, or for the people around him in *Onnagata Ichidai*.

Returning to the plot of *Onnagata Ichidai*'s once more, here I must introduce the fifth and final important event of Kikunojō's life. Kikunojō's wife, Teruko, tries to be a devoted wife, but she cannot have his heart, and she commits suicide.²⁷ According to the narrator, Kikunojō is devastated, even if he does not show it. Nevertheless, from that moment on, Kikunojō's talent is even more enhanced. The narrator explains this transformation with a supernatural explanation that Kikunojō has been possessed by Teruko's spirit. "Watashi" observes that:

It could have been due to the fact that a real woman, Teruko, hovered in the shadows of his *onnagata*. As far as I could see, as long as that real woman's shadow didn't detach herself, Kikunojō's *onnagata* could be nothing other than both man and woman. This dramatic reflection remained with Kikunojō until he turned sixty. Perhaps it was precisely this which lent the *onnagata* his particular charm.²⁸

²⁶ Enchi 1959, p. 184.

²⁷ It is curious that also in *Kikujidō* the wife of Yūsen commits suicide because she cannot bear their "unnatural marital life" (*fūshizen na fūfu seikatsu* 不自然な夫婦生活), referring explicitly to their sexless relationship. She strangles herself just as Teruko does, with the same light blue undersash *shigoki* しごき, and her husband keeps it in the *tokonoma* 床の間 as a memento exactly like Kikunojō (p. 226 in *Kikujidō* and pp. 63–68 in *Onnagata Ichidai*). It is as if both protagonists, involved in homosexual extramarital activities, want to remember their negligence as husbands in order never to forget the "monstrous" source of their art, which brings pain and death with it.

²⁸ Enchi 1986, p. 83.

"*Watashi*" qualifies the fact that Kikunojō's performances became even more charming and female-like with the explanation that the spirit of Teruko, a "real woman," is possessing him. Moreover, later in the novel, the narrator describes the scandal of Kikunojō having sexual intercourse with his servant Haruko 春子 as another act of Teruko's spirit after death. By "forcing" Kikunojō to have a baby with an "earthy" young country woman, to whom, "*watashi*" asserts, he would never have been attracted before, Teruko carries out her duty as the perfect wife by sacrificing her life.²⁹ As for what the narrator implies, Teruko's spirit, by possessing Kikunojō, brings him perfection as an *onnagata* and at the same time gives him a child, which she couldn't do while alive since it is implied that they had a sexless marriage.³⁰

Thus, in order to justify a gender shift which "straightens out" the protagonist, the narrator adopts a supernatural excuse, a typical device in Enchi's works, which the author herself refers to as "shamanism" (*miko-tekina mono* 巫女的なものの), and which represents a traditional motif used throughout Japanese literature from the Heian period on.³¹ This motif is used by Enchi to convey supernatural phenomena and spiritual possessions in general in her works. In *Onnagata Ichidai*, it allows the narrator to continue to assert Kikunojō's essential heterogenderic homosexuality whilst externalizing his heterosexual drives.

Generally speaking, the "shamanism" phenomenon in Enchi's works is often linked to socially proscribed feelings, including prohibited sexuality or sexual desire.³² However, in the case of *Onnagata Ichidai*, I would say it is linked more to a sexual taboo imposed on Kikunojō by the narrator, rather than by society. Moreover, as Susan Napier notes in her analysis of Enchi's *Onnamen* (Masks), the fantastic element is often not distinguishable from reality, and because of this, it conforms to Todorov's definition of the fantastic, "in that the events depicted (. . .) can have either a supernatural or a rational explanation, and this ambiguity intensifies the novel's eerie atmosphere."³³ In other words, the reader is aware that it might be just coincidence that Kikunojō's performances became more charming after his wife's suicide.

However, due to the construction of the narrative, the reader tends to believe in the supernatural explanation, and this is also true of the events leading to Kikunojō's sexual relationship with Haruko.

²⁹ Enchi 1986, pp. 84.

³⁰ Enchi 1986, pp. 85–86.

³¹ EFZ rensai taidan 連載対談 (13), p. 4.

³² One of the first scholars who wrote in English about Enchi's linking of eroticism and "shamanism" was Yoko McClain in McClain 1980. See also Saeki 1972. For the broader link in Enchi's works between social repression and "shamanism," see: Cornyetz 1999, Eddinger 1999, Bagen 1996, Pounds 1989, and Mikals-Adachi 1988.

³³ Napier 1996, p. 82 (on Enchi's *Onnamen*: Enchi 1958).

In this essay I have discussed the specific concepts surrounding gender which the narrator reveals through the protagonist's story in *Onnagata Ichidai*. The narrative voice that Enchi skillfully constructs assumes the "inherent sexual perversion" of the male-sexed protagonist due to his female-likeness based on an ambivalent concept of "nature" and on his androgynous qualities. She turns the hetero-normative fixity of sex, gender and sexuality upside-down, but then maintains them as equally fixed in reverse. Instead of adorning heterosexuality with "naturalness," she insists on using the term "nature" to describe homosexuality based on Kikunojō's heterogendric desire. This perception, which is consistent with the narrator's agenda of fixing the gender identity of the protagonist, stresses the binary ideals of a hetero-normative power-economy, while applying these within a homosexual context.

We can also read the construction of gender and sexuality in the opposite way. The narrator's construction posits the protagonist's identity and its development both on and off stage as consistent with an essential or inherent "nature." If we question the validity of this narrative, however, and regard it as overly contrived, we begin to doubt the "essential" identity of the protagonist as a heterogendric homosexual, and instead are able to perceive it as something fluid, with a greater potential for change than the narrator's interpretation allows. Moreover, the narrator's explanation of Kikunojō's "male's transformation into a female" (*otoko ga onna ni tenkan suru* 男が女に転換する) as a legacy passed "through genetic lineage," is a pseudo-essentialist way of explaining that which is obviously constructed as the art of the *onnagata*. It is easy to link this concept to the theory of the construction of gender maintained by Judith Butler.

In order to analyze the figure of the *onnagata* in *Onnagata Ichidai*, I compared it to the figure of another *onnagata* described by Enchi in a much earlier work, *Futaomote*. First of all, the female-likeness of the *onnagata* is already described as "natural," in contrast to a maleness acquired by having a love affair with a woman. Together with the binary categorization which fixes sexual desire only towards the opposite gender, in *Futaomote* it is already apparent that after a long stage career as an *onnagata*, the actor's "maleness" is almost contrived, embarrassing, and, finally, painful. Nevertheless, in *Futaomote*, the androgyny derived from the re-acquisition of a male consciousness in real life was already emerging as a way to achieve greater charm, linking the gender and the sexuality of the *onnagata* in life and on the stage.

I chose to present *Onnagata Ichidai*, even though it is a still little-known work, because it is representative of Enchi's late period, in which she shifts from female-focused writing, to the "queer" environment of Japanese traditional performing arts. Nobody knows why Enchi at the end of her life chose to focus on this world. From our present perspective, however, her works not only depict the figure of the *onnagata* in an extremely fascinating manner, but also allow us to rethink the world of Japanese traditional performing arts as a place of "gender trouble."

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