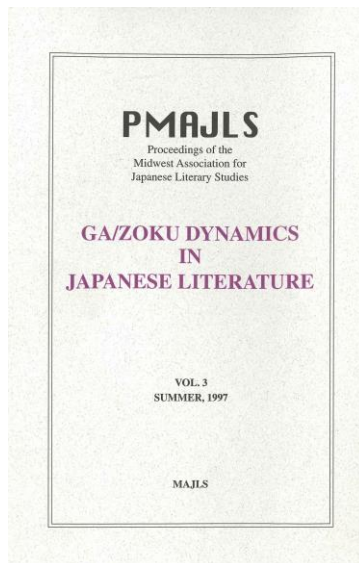


“Recreating the Legend of Ono no Komachi: Enchi Fumiko’s *Komachi Hensō*”

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Recreating the Legend of Ono no Komachi:
Enchi Fumiko's *Komachi Hensō*¹

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Modern writers often turn to the classics in search of a motif for their own creations. Emphasizing the tragedy experienced by a beautiful woman as she ages, the dramatic legend of the classical figure Ono no Komachi has indeed become the topic of many a literary work in Japan. The sad story of this famed poet losing her beauty in old age and becoming a beggar is depicted in the 14th century Noh plays *Sotoba komachi* and *Sekidera komachi*. It is then retold in such modern versions as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's play *Futari komachi* (*Two Komachis*), Mori Ōgai's novel *Sotoba komachi*, Kikuchi Kan's play *Ono no komachi*, and Mishima Yukio's modern Noh play *Sotoba komachi*. In addition, in recent years a number of studies on this legendary figure have been conducted and include Katagiri Yōichi's *Ono no komachi tsuiseki* (*In Pursuit of Ono no Komachi*) and Kobayashi Shigemitsu's *Ono no komachi kō* (*On Ono no Komachi*).

Writers and literary scholars alike continuously search for and try to define what they believe are Komachi's unique traits. But, what exactly is it about this legendary figure that attracts so many? As Kobayashi points out:

The existence of and the way Ono no Komachi should be has been glorified in so many successive literary works that one can say that throughout the history of Japanese literature Komachi is the axis around which the typical image of a woman revolves.²

¹ This paper is based on an article that was written in Japanese for the *Bulletin of the Institute for Women Studies* (Present name: Institute for Gender Studies) of Ochanomizu University under the guidance of Professors Asai, Hara and Tsutsumi.

² Kobayashi Shigemitsu. *Ono no komachi kō*. (Ōfūsha, 1981), 16-17.

Perhaps the main reason behind Komachi's evolution as this so-called "axis" is the fact that no historical evidence is available to verify the sad picture of a beautiful Komachi facing the unavoidable disaster of aging in her later years. To add to the mysterious quality of this legendary figure, even Komachi's own poems, which stand as the best source of information about her, have not, according to an article by Tanaka Kimiharu in *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō*, been sufficiently researched.³ It is indeed this cloud of ambiguity surrounding Komachi that continues to stimulate the minds of many and, moreover, to leave the doors of interpretation open.

An adventurous few have even set out to create their own version of the legend. Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986) is the first woman in modern literary circles to resurrect the legend of Ono no Komachi and one of the only writers to add a new and fascinating twist to the classical version in *Komachi hensō* (*A Ray of Komachi*). Written in 1965, this novel appears two years before Enchi begins translating *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) into modern Japanese and immediately after she completes the semi-autobiographical work *Ake o ubau mono* (*Stripped of Crimson*), a trilogy which closes, interestingly enough, with the protagonist sitting down to write a fictitious work about a classical figure. Although not yet studied in any detail in the few critiques of Enchi's literature, *Komachi hensō* illuminates themes and motifs that constitute the mainstream of Enchi's literature. Moreover, it demonstrates the skill of a writer who has mastered the technique of fusing classical, *ga*, and modern, *zoku*, elements into a harmonic union.

When considering the overall picture of Enchi's literature, two things become quite evident: the focus is on women and the thread that brings them together is the main theme of self-expression. To borrow the words of the writer Tsushima Yūko, "as Enchi's world evolves, so do the experiences of a variety of women".⁴ The majority of Enchi's women struggle in some way to find their inner "self" and *Komachi hensō's* protagonist, a modern actress named Ushirogu Reiko, is no

³ Tanaka Kimiharu. *Ono no komachi*. in *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō*. Vol. 51. No. 11. November 1986, 54.

⁴ Tsushima Yūko. *Enchi-san no biishiki*. in *Gunzō*. January 1987, 326.

exception. Although not married, Reiko suffers in her relationships with men just like the unhappy wives portrayed in *Himajii tsukihi* (1953, "Miserable Times"), *Onna zaka* (1957; translated as *The Waiting Years*, 1971), and *Tsui no sumika* (1962, *Last Residence*). And, in accord with the protagonists of such works as *Yō* (1956; translated as "Enchantress", 1961) and *Kikujidō* (1984, *Child of Chrysanthemums*), Reiko too tries to cope with the problem of aging.

What distinguishes *Komachi hensō*'s protagonist is the fact that she is physically beautiful, a characteristic rarely attached to Enchi's women. Yet, it should be noted that while her physical appearance enhances Reiko's career, it also acts as the source of her pain. Aging and beauty just do not seem to be compatible, and in trying to find a way for Reiko to cope with the natural process of aging, Enchi turns to the classical figure whose life is symbolized by the very same conflict -- Ono no Komachi.

While *Komachi hensō* is set in present-day Japan, woven into the story and Enchi's portrayal of the protagonist is her own original version of the Ono no Komachi legend. Enchi accomplishes this by first overlapping the lives of Reiko and Komachi, and then by elaborating on her own interpretation of this classical figure in two documents that are incorporated into the story: an essay entitled *Ono no komachi ni tsuite no shiken* ("My Own View of Ono no Komachi") and a play with the same title as that of the novel itself, *Komachi hensō*. Moreover, to further enhance her version of the legend, Enchi portrays the author of these works as being one of Reiko's admirers, the playwright Shigaraki Takami. Projecting her view of Komachi through a male perspective not only adds to the complexity of the story but superimposes the question of gender on Enchi's creation of a modern Komachi. Hers is a picture that boldly stands in direct opposition to that painted by male writers utilizing the same motif.

With Enchi's portrayal of the character Reiko central to her interpretation of the legendary figure, a comparison of the two women is inevitable. The list of the six "famous legends of Komachi" conveniently included in Shigaraki's essay *Ono no komachi ni tuite no*

*shiken*⁵ is ideal for that purpose. It should be noted, however, that these legends were not created for the sole purpose of this novel. The same list appears in the essay *Ono no komachi* included in the first volume of *Jinbutsu nihon no joseishi* (1977, *A History of Japanese Women*), a series edited by Enchi. In both the novel and this historical biography, Enchi explains that she turned to such reliable sources as Maeda Yoshiko's essay *Ono no komachi ni tsuite no shiken* (*My Own View of Ono no Komachi*)⁶ and Katagiri Yōichi's book for information about this classical figure. By referring to legends that have been recognized by noted literary scholars and thereby established in Japanese culture, Enchi is clearly emphasizing the authenticity of the picture of Ono no Komachi she is trying to present.

The initial similarities seen in Ono no Komachi and Reiko are striking and a comparison of the two characters begins with the most obvious: just as Komachi was "a paragon of beauty"⁷, Reiko is a woman of "extraordinary beauty" (21). While Komachi is "a poetic genius" whose talent is best exemplified in her love poems⁸, Reiko is "blessed with theatrical talent" (21) and spends her entire life acting out parts in a variety of love stories. Moreover, just as Komachi is said to have had many lovers, so does Reiko:

There were many men who wanted to marry Reiko, and there were many painters, politicians, entrepreneurs, and nobility of high rank who dreamed of being her patron without interfering with her theatrical work. (12)

And, although it is not clear if Komachi ever married, Reiko remains single:

⁵ Enchi Fumiko. *Komachi hensō* in *Enchi Fumiko Zenshū Vol. 13*. (Shinchōsha, 1978), 43-44. Note: Page numbers for quotes from this text are hereafter included in parentheses after the said quote.

⁶ Maeda Yoshiko. *Ono no Komachi*. (Sanseidō, 1943)

⁷ Enchi Fumiko. *Ono no komachi* in *Jinbutsu nihon no josei shi 1*. (Shūeisha, 1977), 123.

⁸ *Ibid.*

The one partner she had in this world was the theater and the stage on which she had, over the years, used the audience as a mirror to paint over her life with an exaggerated splendor, cruelty, and compassion. (16)

Enchi explains that at some point Reiko "left romance and affairs of the heart to her performance on the stage"(12) and with the loneliness she attaches to this character suggests a modern lifestyle for a Komachi type of woman.

Yet, loneliness is not simply a matter choice for either the classical or the modern Komachi. Both Ono no Komachi and Reiko settle into their lifestyles after unpleasant experiences that make it difficult for them to believe in love. According to Katagiri, the explanatory notes of *Ise monogatari* (*The Tale of Ise*) define Komachi as being the love of Narihira and "a woman who left on her own unable to believe in his love".⁹ Reiko, is portrayed as having lost the love of her youth, the scholar Shōgo, to another actress named Umeno who cleverly volunteered to become the domestic woman he wanted for a wife. As the legend presented in the play *Kayoi komachi* goes, Komachi "boasts of her beauty and poetic talents, ridicules men and causes the death of one of her suitors by promising that if he visits her for one hundred days she will grant his wishes".¹⁰ In a similar vein, Reiko is loved by the literary scholar Shigaraki when they are both young and she is in her prime. But, when one of his love letters to her appears in the newspaper she is appalled by the scandal, and he is subsequently "dispatched to Hokkaido". (20)

After a silent lapse of thirty years, Reiko announces her desire to play the part of Komachi, and to have Shigaraki write the play. Of course Shigaraki immediately agrees and this brings to mind the story of Fukasa Shōshō who persistently visits Komachi for ninety nights in the hope of making her his own. Katagiri explains:

In order to verify the sincerity of a man's love, intellectual women of the Heian period adhered, as a matter of course, to the practice of

⁹ Katagiri Yōichi. *Ono no komachi tsuiseki*. (Kasama Shobō, 1982), 11.

¹⁰ Enchi Fumiko. *Ono no komachi*. *Ibid.*, 123.

refusing a man. This is most obvious in the custom of saying they would only meet with those who were confident of their love.¹¹

He then goes on to say that women like Komachi first "turn men away due to their inability to trust them" and then once the man's love is proven, "burn with love" themselves.¹² Reiko acts in a similar manner and likewise uses what Katagiri describes as the easiest way for a Heian woman to test a man's love, the technique of "pushing a man away to see if he will come back again".¹³

Not only does Reiko deal with men in the same manner as Komachi, but she also holds similar views on love. Reiko's thoughts on her affair with the young man Natsuhiko, whose parents are none other than her former lover and his wife/her rival, best exemplify her feelings:

Although Natsuhiko was a young man with a youthful and refreshing physique, Reiko did not feel that she really loved him in the same way that her younger self had loved his father. She hoped for two different things in trying to bring Natsuhiko to herself: to take revenge on Umeno and to display her charm to Shigaraki Takami just as she had in the past. (97)

And, interestingly enough, near the close of the novel Shigaraki's existence becomes even more important to Reiko than her vengeful feelings towards Umeno. Right before the curtain goes up on the first performance of Shigaraki's play, Reiko dreams she is embraced by a man who "she thought was Natsuhikobut who turns out to be Shigaraki Takami". (109) Thus, Reiko is awakened to the fact that Shigaraki has the love she has been searching for. Yet, just as Fukasa dies before Komachi can reap the benefits of his pure love, Shigaraki ages before Reiko comes to this realization. Knowing that a relationship between two elderly people would be anything but romantic, Reiko accepts the fact that she can only enjoy Shigaraki's love in dreams. Hence, she becomes a woman like Komachi who, to quote Yamaji

¹¹ Katagiri Yōichi, 147.

¹² *Ibid.*, 148.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 157.

Magei's, "searches for, follows and sees dreams"¹⁴ -- dreams that eventually become the most important factor in uniting the two women.

Although Enchi's portrayal of Reiko overlaps with about half of the Komachi legends, it is also quite obvious in *Komachi hensō* that this writer objects to the remaining descriptions of the classical figure. To begin with are the pictures of Komachi as "a deformed being who could not have intercourse with a man"¹⁵ and as someone who was therefore "not a woman after all".¹⁶ Reiko is portrayed as a woman who, in accord with such characters as Shigeko of *Ake o ubau mono* or Tatsuko of *Mimi yoraku* (1957, "Earrings"), has suffered like the writer herself from "the type of cancer only a woman can know", and as a woman who has had "her uterus completely torn out of her body" (11). As a result, when friends first suggest she play the part of Komachi, Reiko finds the association of her name with that of one implying sexual incompetence to be a terrible insult.

Intuitively knowing the mental pain that Reiko is feeling and realizing that in order to keep his own dream alive he "must continue to look at Ushirogu Reiko as a woman until the end of time", Shigaraki decides not to "make Komachi a deformed person in the play he is writing"(72). His picture of Komachi, and Enchi's of Reiko, present instead that of a woman whose beauty and talent interfere with her ability to give herself to a man. And through Shigaraki's portrayal, Enchi is able to assert that while these women have perhaps "lost the physical proof of their femininity"(53), unlike the legends of Komachi that have been passed down to date, they still are and always will be women.

In the same respect, Enchi deals with aging in a manner quite different from that described in the plays *Sotoba komachi* or *Sekidera komachi* where Komachi is portrayed as "losing her beautiful features in old age and becoming a wandering

¹⁴ Yamaji Magei. *Ono no komachi*. in *Ōchō nyonin zō*. (Shunjūsha, 1980), 14-15.

¹⁵ Enchi Fumiko. *Ono no komachi*, 124.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

beggar".¹⁷ Reiko's maid explains to Natsuhiko that although Reiko is in her sixties she still has the ability to make others feel as if she is a young woman:

The reason she (Reiko) can play the part of a young and beautiful lover so splendidly is because of the love she had with your father (Shōgo). Reiko is able to rejuvenate herself by pouring all the pain she felt at losing your father into her acting. (40)

Though Reiko resembles the Komachi who lives for the memories of just one night in her desire to appear as a beautiful woman on the stage, the picture Enchi paints of this aging actress is quite different from the legends of Komachi withering away in old age. Instead of appearing as a fading flower, Reiko seems to be "ageless" (105) and, moreover, ready to bloom at any time..

In Shigaraki's essay *Ono no komachi ni tsuite no shiken*, Enchi asserts that men have a "subconscious fear of women" and that the ugly image of an old, decrepit Komachi was created by men who, along with this fear, have "a deep hatred for beautiful women who are without husband or child". According to Enchi, men first fear women "without designated husbands and who do not bear children as if they are phantoms, then long for them for a while and finally hate them with a deep passion" (45) In this connection, Enchi objects most strongly to the legendary tale of Komachi in which a monk passing by a skull with *susuki* grass growing out of the eye hears someone yelling "*Aname, aname*" and pulls the grass out only to find that this is the skull of Komachi.¹⁸ Consequently she creates her own version of the legend in Shigaraki's play *Komachi hensō*:

Hearing a skull in the *susuki* grass let out a cry, a traveling monk pulls some grass out of the eye of the skull, and Komachi appears in all her past beauty to once again enchant the traveling monk.
(90)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The composition of the play is evident. The monk represents Shigaraki and Komachi stands for Reiko. Yet, the meaning of the play does not end there. Through Shigaraki, Enchi asserts her conviction that "the monk's reaching enlightenment by merely pulling one stalk of grass out of the skull represents an insurmountable insult to Komachi". Not only does she feel that this version is "cruel and merciless" (47), Enchi also asserts that it probably is the "vengeful product of men who at one time longed for, dreamed of and adored Komachi like a goddess" (48). Completely dissatisfied with what she considers to be a male interpretation of the characteristics of Komachi, Enchi thus presents a new and contrasting picture of the classical figure. Interestingly enough, she accomplishes this through the eyes of the male character who adores Komachi's modern counterpart, the actress Reiko. While Enchi's portrayal of Reiko initiates the development of her version of Ono no Komachi, it is indeed Shigaraki who plays a vital role in unveiling the true essence of Komachi's characteristics -- just as it is the monk who pulls the grass out of the skull's eye.

In addition to the more obvious references made to Komachi throughout the novel, two underlying elements become essential in finalizing the connection Enchi is trying to make between Reiko and this classical figure. To begin with is the image of water, an image that plays a vital role both in the development of Enchi's version of Komachi and in the story itself. In order to write the play *Komachi hensō*, Shigaraki goes to see the Yu Waterfall and through this excursion realizes the true essence of both Reiko and Komachi's nature.

In the waterfall section of *Komachi hensō*, Enchi presents, together with the novel's central image, the process involved in Shigaraki's awakening to Reiko's feminine beauty. At first, Shigaraki is apprehensive about seeing Reiko after such a long lapse in time. He openly admits that "he is afraid that meeting the Reiko of real life might change the image of Reiko that he has kept inside of himself over the years". Nothing could be worse for Shigaraki than having the image of the woman he adores "turned into an ordinary woman". (67) Unfortunately, however, when they do meet, that is exactly what happens. "The image of Reiko he has created is destroyed" (65) and as a

result Shigaraki suddenly finds himself incapable of writing the play about Komachi.

Unable to resume his work until he can again find meaning in life, Shigaraki feels compelled to visit the waterfall where he hopes the answers to his questions lie. Preparing for his journey, he believes that everything will be okay as long as "the water of the waterfall has not dried up" (74). Though disappointed by his meeting with the woman he had once worshipped as "a sexual object" (65), Shigaraki does not want to believe that Reiko has actually lost her femininity merely because of the physical changes she has experienced. He consequently turns to the waterfall as "a motherly source" (78) for affirmation of the fact that Reiko is still a woman, and there he obtains the strength needed to create a new image of Reiko, and of Komachi -- the image essential to his own existence as a man.

Enchi's choice of waterfalls as the source of life is extraordinary. According to Kobayashi Shigemi's study of Ono no Komachi the family from which she came was associated with "beliefs in the water spirit". Kobayashi explains that the Ono family was a sub-division of the Wani family, or a family with magical powers and one that worshipped "the spirit of the ocean water".¹⁹ Moreover, she stresses that "having lived in Kyoto, Komachi inevitably went to the festivals celebrated in honor of gods important to the Ono family".²⁰ The preface of the *Kokin wakashū* (*Kokinshū*) also introduces Komachi as a descendant of women associated with the "goddess of water".²¹ Hence, Enchi's choice of images to intensify the story of *Komachi hensō* is clearly no coincidence. The connection between the waterfall and the "water spirit" worshipped by the Ono family is obvious, as is the reason Shigaraki can re-create the Reiko/Komachi image after visiting Yu Waterfall -- he too believes in the power of its water.

It should be noted here, however, that although Shigaraki seems to share the beliefs of the Ono family, mere water will not give him the

¹⁹ Kobayashi Shigemi, 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

²¹ Komachiya Teruhiko. Annotated translation of *Kokinshū wakashū*. (Ōbunsha bunko, 1985), 24. Kobayashi Shigemi, 34.

strength he needs to understand the essence of Komachi. Shigaraki has to witness the power of a waterfall and come to terms with the fact that even if a river has violent changes and even if it has a waterfall, it will always be a river. In the same respect, he has to accept the idea that Reiko will always be a woman even if she has an operation for cancer of the uterus and even if she ages. Once he realizes that this is true not only of Reiko but also of Komachi, Shiragaki acquires the strength to write the play *Komachi hensō*. And, Enchi's utilization of a "waterfall" to represent the image of the "water" associated with the Ono family thus proves to be but another manifestation of her skill at weaving classical elements into a modern novel.

A detailed description of the omnipotent waterfall is presented in the diary of Reiko's young lover, who ironically accompanies Shigaraki on this trip:

Compared to waterfalls like Kegon, Yu is not exceptionally high. The water that overflows out of Lake Yu descends the mountain as the Yu River, and then gushes downward after hitting the first wall of rock it comes to. The powerful force of the falling water is splendid and when it hits a rock that, about a third of the way down, juts out right in the middle, the river divides in two like a torn piece of silk with layers of its exquisite white threads hanging down.

.....

In the middle of the waterfall on the base of the rock that survived the force of the water, not only moss, but soil could be seen. And, from the stump of a fairly large, but already washed-out, tree grew a thin, Zelvoka-looking sprout with its young, light yellow-green leaves shaking in the water of the falls. (76-77)

The sexual implications here are explicit and although the young Natsuhiko initially has difficulty in comprehending the power of the waterfall, his eyes are opened to what Shigaraki sees in the flowing waters when he views the waterfall firsthand. Witnessing "a picture of sexual intercourse without the usual inhibitions of an extraordinarily beautiful woman", the young man too experiences "an unexpected sensual feeling permeate his own body" (77) and finally understands the enormous affect the waterfall must have had on his elderly travel

companion.

The power of the waterfall is unquestionable, as is the imagery used to portray it. Enchi's own interpretation of the waterfall symbolizing "a beautiful woman whose pure, powerful body cleanses men" (82) clearly suggests that it represents Reiko. In the same vein, the tree stump in the middle of the waterfall calls to mind Shigaraki's obsession with the paulownia tree in front of his house. Before his trip, Shigaraki swears that "he will not allow anyone to cut it (the tall paulownia) down as long as he is alive"(38). Yet, once he visits the waterfall, the old playwright knows how little the height of the tree matters. Recovering from 'an injury inflicted during his trip, Shigaraki reflects on the combination of a rock, a stump and a young sprouting tree seen in the middle of the waterfall and shares his interpretation with Natsuhiko:

Many years ago, this section (of the waterfall) was probably covered with more land and rocks and it is more than likely that numerous trees grew next to the only one standing there now. I imagine the land collapsed because of the force of the water and the wind and rain that comes with heavy storms, making the waterfall come down even closer to the cavity in the mountain and leaving little beneath its path except the rock and tree that now stand where the water divides. Although the tree had been knocked down and the stump eventually decayed in the force of the water, the roots stayed alive and from there a sprouting young tree was born....."
(78)

Shigaraki then suggests to his young friend that the "fairy tale" he has created is "symbolic of men and women" (78). The implications here are clear: the many men with whom Reiko has had relationships are the trees that have fallen with the current of the waterfall. The old, rotten stump that has given birth to a young tree obviously stands for Shigaraki showing that while Shigaraki has aged just like an old tree, only his love for Reiko has in no way withered. Instead, it has, over the years, stayed alive like the young tree that is growing under the force of the waterfall. Enlightened to the fact that his feelings for Reiko are greater than the tree that represents himself, Shigaraki is thus able to have the paulownia in front of his home cut down without any regrets.

Through his trip, Shigaraki also awakens to the importance of the image of Reiko that he has held in his heart. Looking at the waterfall, he immediately notices that it is quite different from what he remembered it to be. Compared to the small, gentle waterfall that Shigaraki had pictured in his mind, Yu is so powerful that it seemed highly improbable to him that "large trees had ever grown under a waterfall of this size and location". (78) In contrast to the disappointment felt at his reunion with the aged Reiko, feelings of ecstasy fill Shigaraki when he finds that the waterfall looks like "a noble woman whose beauty forces men to worship her". This is the kind of woman he adores, and although the aged Reiko does not have "the pure, robust body of the young and beautiful woman" (82) projected in the waterfall, the image Shigaraki has held of her certainly does. While Shigaraki's purpose in visiting the waterfall is to affirm that Reiko is a woman, what he finds is that the image he has created of Reiko (the present waterfall) is even more powerful than the actual person Reiko (the waterfall of the past). And so, Shigaraki goes home knowing that it is not the person but this omnipotent image that gives Reiko, and indeed he himself, their identity.

To appreciate the full impact of the imagery used in the waterfall, it is important to once again consider the rock that splits the water in two. If, as Hirabayashi Taiko points out, the waterfall is created in "the image of a woman's sexual organ",²² then the tree can clearly be viewed as a phallic symbol. Moreover, the rock and stump can be seen to represent Reiko's barrenness and Shigaraki's impotence, respectively. It should be noted, however, that the implications here are not only sexual. Just as the waterfall is divided into two, Shigaraki distinguishes between the Reiko of the past and Reiko of the present and then chooses the image he himself has created. By fabricating "memories of being loved" by Reiko, he is able to join her in a "dream" (80) and after "hallucinating that he himself acts out the part of the priest whose faith is shaken" (92) by Komachi's charm, Shigaraki completes the play *Komachi hensō*.

²² Hirabayashi Taiko. *Komachi hensō kaidai*. in *Enchi Fumiko Zenshū Vol. 13*. (Shinchōsha, 1978), 415-416.

Within the course of the novel, Shigaraki dies without ever witnessing a performance of his masterpiece. Yet, actually seeing the play is neither necessary or important for Shigaraki, for undoubtedly he could enjoy a more fulfilling experience by being "one of the characters that appeared in the play in the theater of his mind" (96). Dreams mean more to Shigaraki than reality and his ultimate goal is to keep his idealized version of Reiko alive. Knowing how detrimental it would be to see Reiko again in person, he avoids any kind of reunion even if it only means seeing her on the stage from a distance.

Dreams are likewise important to Reiko and with their strong association to Komachi's poems become the second element Enchi utilizes to finalize the connection between this modern actress and the classical figure. Reiko's desire to always be in a "dream" world corresponds to those feelings expressed in Komachi's poem:

I fell asleep thinking of him,
and he came to me.
If I had known it was only a dream
I would never have awakened.²³

The novel begins with Reiko dozing in bed and "wanting to entrust her body to a light and endless sleep"(7) where she can dream. Recalling the love scenes she has acted out on the stage, Reiko "innocently wanders into the illusion that she herself is the princess she had played the part of"(7) the previous night. Throughout the novel, the only place Reiko seems capable of experiencing love is on the stage, implying that, like Komachi, "dreams" are the sole answer to her search for true love. The climax of the novel comes when Reiko goes out on the stage with blood flowing from what Enchi calls "the empty hole of death" or "the sexual organ of a woman who has lost her uterus" (102) and, moreover, with the full realization that "she herself will probably be the next to die" (114). The indication is clear -- Reiko has chosen to live, not in the real world, but in the world of "dreams".

²³ Komachiya Teruhiko, 156 Rexroth Kenneth and Atsumi Ikuko. *Women Poets of Japan*. (New York: New Directions, 1977), 14.

By depicting the relationship of two people with little mutual contact in real life as being joined together in another world, Enchi shows that dreams are as important to Reiko and Shigaraki as they were to Komachi. The manner in which Reiko and Shigaraki confront each other and express their innermost feelings in a realm other than reality suggests that they have discovered an opportunity for self-expression that has existed for ages. For, like people of old, they seem to be participating in what Kobayashi defines as a "battle of spirits".²⁴ Yet, Enchi does not merely use dreams to provide this couple with a meeting place. Her objective is clearly to find a way to preserve the beautiful image of Reiko that is vital to the characters, the story and, most importantly, to the Enchi version of the Komachi legend.

Repeatedly emphasizing that reality and dreams are two different worlds, Enchi shows, through the young Natsuhiko, that Reiko's "youthful feminine beauty" (53) is only felt when one is away from the aging actress and when one's view is not obstructed by the decrepit body that encases her being. The image of a beautiful, energetic Reiko clearly exists only on the stage and in the world of dreams. Just as Reiko chooses to defy her miserable physical state by continuing to act the part of a beautiful woman even when she is on the verge of death, Enchi refuses to leave the image of Ono no Komachi tarnished in the legends that have been passed down over the ages. Knowing that it is legends and dreams that have the power to eternalize the beauty of a woman, Enchi becomes determined to create her own version of the Komachi tale. And, by focusing on a woman whose beauty is as constant as the flow of a river and who has the strength of a mighty waterfall, Enchi changes a nightmarish tale about Ono no Komachi into a splendid dream.

Yet, Enchi's infatuation with Komachi is not only rooted in the dreams so central to this classical figure's existence. A deeper meaning is found in the final words of Shigaraki's essay *Ono no komachi ni tsuite no shiken* which include Enchi's confession that her attraction to Komachi stems from her own identity as a barren woman who feels like

²⁴ Kobayashi Shigemi, 20.

one of "Komachi's blood relatives" (49). In 1946, Enchi, like Reiko, undergoes surgery for removal of the physical proof of her femininity. In the semi-autobiographical work *Ake o ubau mono*, she explains how all that remained inside of herself after the operation was "a deeply hidden monster".²⁵ And, here in *Komachi hensō*, Enchi comes to terms with this "monster" by using Ono no Komachi as the "axis" around which a woman like herself can revolve. Her portrayal of Reiko is exceptional not only because it contains a refreshing picture of a Komachi type of woman or because the novel presents a new view of the legendary figure. Most significant is the fact that by allowing Reiko and Komachi to retain their identity as women until the very end, Enchi frees herself from the "monsters" that dwell within and is able to assert her own femininity.

An overview of Enchi's literature shows that, as Tsushima Yūko states, "the framework of her world is solidly built on her aesthetic values",²⁶ values that are deeply rooted in the Japanese classics that she so loved. Six years (1967-1973) of devotion to the modern translation of *Genji monogatari* left Enchi almost completely blind. Her strong love for Heian literature is also manifested in translations of such classics as *Kagerō nikki* (*The Gossamer Years*) and, moreover, in her constant attempt to weave classical elements into her own modern works.

Classical elements flow throughout Enchi's literature but not only in those works directly tied to the classics like *Hanachiru sato* (1961, "Village of Scattered Blossoms"), a short story that takes its name from a chapter in *Genji monogatari*, or Enchi's own rendition of a Heian tale, *Namamiko monogatari* (1965, *The Tale of a Novice Miko*). Practically every piece written in Enchi's hand has classical tones with, for example, even the portrayal of a Meiji woman in *Onna zaka* enhanced by a traditional sense of the seasons. Exposed to the classics from a very young age, Enchi discovered something harmonious with her own literature in these ancient works, and eventually such elements became essential to her writing.

²⁵ Enchi Fumiko. *Ake o ubau mono* in *Enchi Fumiko Zenshū Vol. 12*. (Shinchōsha, 1977), 8.

²⁶ Tsushima Yūko. *Ibid.*

While mostly strongly influenced by her favorite classic, *Genji monogatari*, Enchi also found herself enchanted by Komachi's poems. With the legend of this classical figure at the core of *Komachi hensō*, Enchi skillfully incorporates into the story a variety of metaphors and images associated with the poet. The first chapter of the novel is entitled *Hana no iro* (*The Color of the Flowers*), words taken directly from Komachi's poem:

The color of the flowers fade
 as the long rains fall,
 as lost in thought,
 I grow older.²⁷

Enchi rejects the literal meaning of "the color of flowers" in this poem and instead insists that Komachi used these words to echo the cries of a woman's deteriorating body.²⁸ And, indeed in the novel's final chapter, entitled "*Susuki*", Reiko elegantly goes out on the stage while in her heart she is, just like Komachi, lamenting the deterioration of her own body. In short, Enchi reinforces the image of Komachi into the overall novel with words from her poetry -- especially with words, such as *susuki*, which cannot be separated from the legends of Komachi.

In concluding, the significance of the title Enchi has chosen for this novel and the numerous implications in the words *Komacchi hensō* should not be forgotten. The word *hensō* literally means "transformation" and that is exactly what happens in the novel. Shigaraki transforms Reiko into Komachi in his own imaginary world, and in her portrayal of a modern counterpart of the classical figure Ono no Komachi, Enchi transforms the legend of Komachi into a new and exciting story. Most importantly, by applying the cycle of river--waterfall--river to the Komachi legend, Enchi creates her own cycle of Komachi legend--*Komachi hensō* (Transformation of Komachi)--Komachi legend.

Uniting classical, *ga*, and modern, *zoku*, elements into a harmonious arrangement such as that seen in the novel *Komachi hensō* is a

²⁷ Komachiya Teruhiko, 56. Rexroth Kenneth and Atsumi Ikuko, 16.

²⁸ Enchi Fumiko. *Ono no komachi*, 117.

technique that enhances many of Enchi's works and one that has indeed become this writer's trademark. Through Reiko, Enchi tells us that she feels as if she is a "descendant of Ono no Komachi"(49). And, just as the blood of Ono no Komachi flows inside her body, the traditions of the classics flow through Enchi's literature echoing voices of women from the past and projecting the dreams of those in the present.