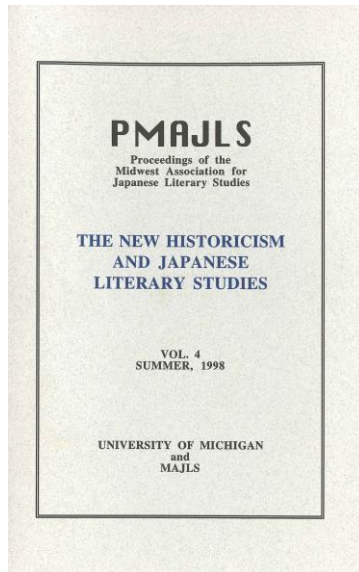


“Reading the ‘Court’ in Courtesan: The
Historicization of the Role of *Yūjo* in Some
Muromachi Tales”

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*Proceedings of the Midwest Association for
Japanese Literary Studies* 4 (1998): 234–253.



PMAJLS 4:
The New Historicism and Japanese Literary Studies.
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

**Reading the 'Court' in Courtesan:
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in Some Muromachi Tales**

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そもそも清和のころ、内裏に、小町といふ、色好みの遊女あり (once, in the days of Emperor Seiwa, there was in the palace a courtesan, fond of love, whose name was Komachi) (Ichiko 1958: 86). Thus begins the Muromachi tale "Komachi sōshi," an at times sentimental, at times touching narrative that purports to tell the life-story of Ono no Komachi, a ninth century *waka* poet whose career already lay roughly five-hundred years in the storyteller's past (Sasaki 1995: 60). Considering that virtually nothing of a verifiable nature is known about the historical Ono no Komachi beyond the fact that she was the author of eighteen poems in the *Kokin waka shū*, (or, more popularly, *Kokinshū*), the confidently declarative ring of this opening line is striking. Clearly, verifying claims and documenting facts is not to be an issue; we as audience are being asked to put ourselves and our credulity firmly in the hands of this self-assured narrator and accept in good faith the reality of the Komachi presented.

But at once, within this same opening line, a fact is put forward that might have struck audiences at the time as surprising and certainly has shocked readers of the tale in the twentieth century, namely that Komachi was/is a courtesan (*yūjo*), a woman whose livelihood involves entertaining and giving pleasure (including sexual pleasure) to men.¹ Previous

¹ For example the Teeles, who have translated several plays and stories about Komachi including the "Komachi sōshi," are concerned enough by the text's assertion to reassure readers in a footnote that Komachi "was certainly not a

Komachi narratives, circulated in the early medieval period, had identified Komachi as a poet, the daughter of a local provincial governor, as a love-loving (*irokonomi*) woman who served at court and who had had romantic relationships with several different men (including the emperor) (Strong 1994), but no account had termed her a courtesan. As far as I have been able to determine "Komachi *sōshi*" is the earliest surviving narrative to make this claim about her.

Much of the practice of the new historicism in contemporary academics has directed attention to the historical relationship between literary texts and society. While it seems unlikely that any single, systematic theory will emerge to account for all aspects of this complicated relationship (Greenblatt 1989: 4), many practitioners of new historicism have led us to question the assumption that literary texts mirror a unified and coherent world view and they have quickened our awareness of the prestige and power at stake as individuals, groups and institutions define and present themselves through the manipulation of diverse and at times competing sets of codes and customs. Literary and historical texts, we now realize, are the property of specific individuals and groups who are able through them to assemble and construct worlds of meaning or to reorganize a received world of meaning towards definable ends.

It is my purpose with this paper to examine the world of meaning created by "Komachi *sōshi*" in its representation of Komachi, particularly in its representation of Komachi as a courtesan. I will include in this examination one other Muromachi tale, "Kamiyo Komachi" in which the same identification of Komachi as a courtesan is made and a similar

representation of the ninth century poet is presented. My project is made more difficult by the fact that virtually nothing is known about the group or groups of artists whose efforts produced these two texts. We do not know who compiled the narratives or who presented them (or indeed to what extent they were orally presented) or how they were first written down. While my primary objective in investigating Komachi's identity as a courtesan in "Komachi sōshi" is to extend and deepen our reception of this text by reading it within a social context, a secondary objective is to use suggestions that emerge from this material to formulate a tentative hypothesis about the storytellers' social identity and outlook. In other words, I hope to use the text, not as an mirror of the ninth-century Komachi or some abiding notion of an on-going, essential Komachi, but, rather, as a means of approaching her late medieval raconteurs.

Before beginning, I would like to point out that Komachi shares her medieval identity as a courtesan with another Heian period woman poet, Izumi Shikibu. The Muromachi tale bearing Izumi Shikibu's name declares her to be an "elegant courtesan" (*yasashiki yūjo*) in its opening line (Ichiko 1957: 312). While I feel that similar social factors were at work in the production of both sets of tales, because of time constraints and because some thoughtful studies of the Izumi Shikibu/*yūjo* connection already exist in English (Marra 1993a: 49-65; 1993b: 96-105), I would like to limit the present study to a consideration of Komachi narratives only.

In order to understand what it means for the Muromachi narrator to declare Komachi to be a *yūjo*, we need to be aware of who the *yūjo* were, something of their history, and how they were viewed in medieval society. This in itself represents a topic of great interest, complexity and consequence. My treatment here must of necessity be brief. I direct those interested

in the subject to recent studies by Amino Yoshihiko, Ōwa Iwao and others.

The *yūjo* as a reading for the characters 遊女 does not appear in texts until the Heian period. Prior to that there were a number of terms--*ukareme*, *asobime*-- as a reading for 遊女 and the related *yugyō nyofū* 遊行女婦--that appear to refer to women whose social roles were similar to those of the later *yūjo*. We know that women called *yūgyō nyofū* and *asobime* attended at court banquets where, in addition to serving wine, they intoned *waka* and sang popular songs (Ōwa 1993: 154). There are a number of poems by *yugyō nyofū* in the *Man'yōshū* and the association between the *yugyō nyofū* and poetry is strong enough that one scholar, Fukutō Sanae, has termed them poets specializing in the female tradition (Ōwa 1993: 172).

More difficult to pin down, but of equal importance to our understanding of the cultural values and meanings adhering to the *asobime/yūjo* are their connections to the ancient tradition of the *miko* (shrine maiden of shamaness). This has been a topic of perennial scholarly interest and debate ever since Yanagita Kunio raised it in his well-known essay "Imo no chikara" (1962: 1-219). While much remains unresolved about the topic, the existence of at least some correspondence between these two traditions, a correspondence that lends some sacral status to the role of *yūjo*, seems difficult to refute (Ōwa 1993: 13, 34, 175-176).

Turning to the Heian period, we know that there were *yūjo* working as prostitutes in port towns such as those at Kawaguchi and Kanazaki at the mouth of the Yodo River in 10th century Japan (Ōwa 1993: 172). Some of these *yūjo*, most notably those of aristocratic birth, were active within court circles at the same time. There are a number of examples that could be given of these courtly *yūjo* during the Heian period. One of the most well-

known is Shirome daughter of Ōe no Tamabuchi. Shirome's poem of farewell, addressed to Minamoto no Sane, appears among the poems of parting in the *Kokinshū* (Saeki 1958: 179). The *Kokinshū mokuroku* identifies Shirome explicitly as a *yūjo* residing at Kawaguchi (cited in Ōwa 1993: 199). While hardly credible as factual accounts, the poem-tale collection *Yamato Monogatari* presents us with two narratives about Shirome that afford a brief but tantalizing glimpse into contemporary cultural attitudes concerning the *yūjo*'s role at court. In both stories Shirome is summoned to the presence of the Emperor (in this case Emperor Uda) when he is banqueting during an excursion near the Kawaguchi area. In both instances he commands her to compose a poem on a specific topic related to the occasion and is delighted by her wit in responding with promptness and sophistication. Shirome's role is that of a temporary attendant. She is said to be attractive and to have a lovely voice, but it is above all for her skill as a *waka* poet that she is praised (Abe and Imai 1957: 309-311; Tahara 1980: 91-92).

The reforms of the *ritsuryō* system made during the 9th and 10th centuries diminished the role and financial support of the women officials of the inner palace, most especially those whose service involved artistic or sacred performance. Amino feels that female palace officials displaced by this process probably joined the growing number of independent female professional guilds that were gaining prominence at this time (Amino 1994: 219). In addition to the female guild of the *yūjo* who worked in boats in the port towns of the western provinces there were also the *kugutsu*, known for their skill at singing popular songs (*imayō*), who operated from, and often owned, inns along the eastern highway. Both of these groups as well as the *shirabyōshi*, specialists in dance, probably found their numbers and their art enriched by the female palace attendants displacement by the

ritsuryō reforms.

The early medieval or Kamakura period is noted among other things for the growing professionalism and indeed possessiveness of aristocratic court poets regarding their exclusive rights to produce and interpret *waka* (court verse). The aristocratic Nijō, Rokujō and Reizei families are famous, if not indeed infamous, for the intensity of their rivalry, and the passion with which they guarded family rights to this prestigious cultural property. This background of accentuated awareness of class and family ownership of poetic tradition makes the *yūjo* and *kugutsu*'s involvement with *waka* at the time all the more striking.

The Tsurugaoka Hōjōe Shokunin Utaawase is a Kamakura Period scroll in which members of the different professions are paired. The scroll affords a valuable glimpse into the various trades practice at the time. The pictorial sets include a duo of female entertainers, one identified as a *shirabyōshi* the other as a *yūjo*. The *shirabyōshi*, her long, flowing hair tied loosely at the nape of her neck, dances in white male robes that are her hallmark. The *yūjo*, on the other hand, sits quietly in the so-called twelve-layered robes of a court lady (Ōwa 1993: 280). She is posed in an iconographic style that is unmistakably that used for the female *kasen* or "sage" of court poetry. The *kasen* genre depicting the thirty-six most venerated poets of the court tradition originated in the early Kamakura period and remained popular thereafter. Both Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu were among the thirty-six poets traditionally portrayed. A look at a representation of Ono no Komachi as a *kasen* indicates how thoroughly the representation of the *yūjo* in the Tsurugaoka scroll is linked to the *kasen* tradition. Within the context of the visual coding of the scroll the *yūjo* is exactly equated with a female court poet.

In the Kamakura court diary *Towazugatari*, the aristocratic woman author, Nijō, gives an account of a journey she made in 1289 from the capital to Kamakura. She tells of staying the night at an inn in Akasaka in Mino that is owned by two sisters whom she identifies as young *yūjo*. The sisters entertain her by playing the *koto* and *biwa* and by serving her wine. Significantly, they also engage her in an exchange of *waka* (Amino 1994: 237, Brazell 1973: 182). The scene in which the older sister conveys a sense of concern and sympathy for her guest through a *waka* presented on a sake cup stand seems at first unexceptional, so similar is it in tone to other elegant moments in court literature involving the exchange of poetry. But when we recall that Nijō's partner in the exchange is not an aristocrat, and thus a privileged proprietor of the poetic art, but is, rather, a *yūjo* operating a commercial concern far from the capital, the scene becomes, I believe, culturally, if not aesthetically, noteworthy. While members of other powerful but non-aristocratic groups found themselves coldly excluded from the courtly poetic tradition during the Kamakura period, *yūjo*, were apparently accepted without question in at least some dimensions as its legitimate practitioners.²

Women in general and the *yūjo* in particular suffered severe

2 The fact that classical *waka* is so frequently termed "court poetry" by scholars writing in English (see Brower and Miner, 1961) is evidence of the wide recognition of the aristocratic nature of its practitioners. While the growing power and financial might of the military class during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods and the concomitant decline of the aristocracy put a strain on the aristocracy's power to maintain exclusive control over its poetic legacy, the practice of secret transmission of poetic scholarship (*denju*) within the aristocratic houses as well as strict control over whose poems were published in the imperially commissioned anthologies (*chokusen-shū*) allowed the aristocrats as a class to maintain considerable control over proprietorship of the art form.

setbacks in terms of social prestige and personal power during the late medieval period. The Buddhist teaching on the impurity of women had been circulating for centuries, but during the Muromachi this teaching percolated broadly through all layers of society (Amino 1994: 222). At the same time, the related notion of the ingrained impurity (*kegare*) of certain social and professional groups gained in currency. Because of their association with sexuality and the arousal of male desire, both the *yūjo* from both eastern and western (*kugutsu*) traditions came to be classed within a broad group the anthropologist Ohnuki-Tierney has called the special status people (Wakita 1987:59; Ohnuki-Tierney, 1987). While as special status people they were able to claim certain privileges, they increasingly suffered a decline in prestige and acceptability owing to the perception on the part of the larger society that they as a group were defiled. The *yūjo* retained traditions of courtly dress and appearance; we know that they shaved their eyebrows, grew their hair long and wore the red hakama of the female court attendant (Ōwa 1993: 168). They were no longer, however, invited to attend at court functions and we have no record of them as companions to the emperor. We can see this loss in prestige, both for women in general and for the *yūjo* in particular, registering with some irony in the use of language itself. In the Muromachi period the word *nyōbō* 女房, once used exclusively to refer to a high-ranking female court attendants, came to refer generally to any woman who was a wife, while *jōrō* 上臈a designation for the highest rank of court *nyōbō*, was used in reference to *yūjo* “who were clearly prostitutes” (Ōwa 1993: 351).

It was into this late medieval world so seemingly inhospitable to the *yūjo* that the story we will consider today was born. “Komachi sōshi” begins by establishing Komachi’s past reputation as a poet and her desirability in the eyes of “more or

less a thousand men." These men, we are told, "met with her but did not in fact meet." In other words, they did not have sexual relations with her (Ichiko 195: 88). As the story opens, Komachi's days of glory are already in the past. The first real event of the tale is the visit of her former male companion, the elegant Ariwara no Narihira, to the humble hut in the village of Ono where she is living in her old age. Reminded by Narihira of the depth of women's sin, Komachi makes a confession to him which in fact turns out to be a *fumi-zukushi*, a virtuoso recitation of all the poetic correspondence she received in the past from love-sick courtiers. Narihira then responds to Komachi's poetic confession with a briefer one of his own, whereupon he disappears.

Narihira's disappearance prompts Komachi to leave her hut for a career of wandering. She begins by begging door-to-door in the capital but, ashamed at being recognized in her current state, she flees the capital and begins a journey that soon becomes a poetic *michiyuki* leading her first past the poetic sites (*utamakura*) of the east country and finally to the north and the remoteness of Michinoku. In Michinoku she clings to life for a few years before dying alone and unburied on a grassy plain.

The story does not end with this troubling and seemingly terminal event but instead sends the still vital Narihira back into narrative action. During his own tour of famous poetic spots, we are told, Narihira is somehow drawn to the grassy field in Michinoku where, unbeknownst to him, Komachi's bones lie unburied in the thick grass. Here he hears the first lines of a poem carried to him on the wind. He immediately completes this half-poem with two lines of his own. As he completes this poetic exchange, the apparition of a beautiful *nyōbō* appears before him. The illustrations of the woodblock edition make it clear that this female figure is a *nyōbō* in the traditional sense of the word.

Her twelve-layered gown and train, together with her long hair are all unmistakable signifiers of her courtly status. This beautiful apparition turns out, not surprisingly, to be the ghost of Ono no Komachi. The ghost apparently does not recognize her poetic companion to be Narihira, for she addresses him as a stranger, requesting that he locate Narihira in the capital and tell him that Komachi has died in this desolate spot so that he will visit it and perform final rites. We are given to understand that Narihira fulfills her wishes. The story then closes with a promise of the religious merit to be accrued by listening or, still more, by reading the tale that has just unfolded. It confidently reveals the true identity of Ono no Komachi to be a manifestation of the wish-granting Bodhisattva Kannon while Narihira is said to be a manifestation of the eleven-headed Kannon. The final words of the text extort the audience to pray for the dead by invoking Kannon's name.

Temporally the story is organized along three planes; there is the distant past of Komachi's youth at court, the near past of her time of decline and wandering, and the present time of her posthumous existence as a ghost. All three periods, but especially the last, are complemented by our understanding of her own-going transcendent identity as the wish-granting Kannon.

The fact that Komachi is/was a *yūjo* involves us most especially and obviously with the most distant layer of narrative time. In describing Komachi's past, the text pays tribute to those qualities that we would expect to be of most central importance to a courtesan and necessary for her success; we are told of Komachi's physical beauty, her extreme attractiveness in male eyes, of the large number of her suitors, as well as of her access to court and proximity to the Emperor. But all of these attributes pale in importance in comparison to the central concern of the

text to establish the youthful Komachi's reputation as a *waka* poet, someone who negotiated with consummate skill both the formal production and the social exchange of poetry. Poetry, the text makes it clear, is Komachi's most salient quality, constituting both her greatest triumph and her most serious sin.

This text's discussion of poetry involves two lines of discourse, an older stand of traditional *waka* criticism that draws heavily upon the language of the *kana* preface to the *Kokinshū*, and a newer line of specifically Buddhist interpretation drawn from the medieval commentaries on the *Kokinshū* and other classical poetic texts. Buddhist concerns about the vanity of worldly activities had led medieval culture to question (or, at least, to take up a defense of) the value of its non-religious artistic production including the composition of poetry. Early medieval aristocratic authors of secret commentaries on *waka* had developed a polemics to deal with the charge of frivolity by asserting the hidden, esoteric Buddhist meaning of verse. The narrator of "Komachi *sōshi*" makes use of this line of argument in order to defend the value of *waka* in the face of charges of its apparent non-Buddhist, this-worldly nature.³

This two-pronged polemics concerning the value of poetry is echoed in the text's construction of the youthful Komachi as

³ For example, in a passage that is based on the early medieval commentary know as *Waka chikenshū* (Ichiko 1958: 88 note 5, 486, note 7; Katagiri 1968; 97), we are told that the thirty-one syllables that comprise the formally correct *waka* verse in fact represent the special marks (*laksana*) of a *nyorai* (*Tathāgata*), a self-realized Buddha. According to traditional Buddhist scripture, these marks should number thirty-two not thirty-one. The apologist/narrator, however, still relying on the earlier commentary, navigates around this problem by pointing out that mention of one of the marks (the *ushnisha* atop the Buddha's head) is taboo. Thus, the narrator is able to assert that "when one composes a verse well it is as though one had created a Buddha and made offerings to it" (Ichiko 1958: 88).

well. After informing us emphatically about her most salient characteristic, her ability to compose poetry (*kono Komachi wa uta o yomu koto suguretari*), the narrator lets us know that she is reputed to be both in the tradition of Sotōri Hime (an early, supposedly fifth century, woman poet mentioned in the preface to the *Kokinshū*) and also to be a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Kannon (*Sotōri Hime no nagare to mo mōshi, Kannon no keshin to mo mōshi*). The disclosure of her true identity as a manifestation of the merciful Bodhisattva Kannon, works neatly to cancel out the more this-worldly connotations suggested by Komachi's association with a woman poet purported to be of exceptional physical beauty.⁴

Given what we know of the *yūjos'* circumstances in the late medieval culture as well as their past history, we can see how their association with the youthful Komachi as portrayed in "Komachi *sōshi*" works to the advantage of the group as a whole, creating as it were a pro-*yūjo* discourse. While underlining the *yūjo's* traditional claim to courtly prerogatives, most especially to the production of *waka* poetry, the two-fold nature of the identification also offers the *yūjo*, via Komachi, a form of redress to charges of sinfulness, impurity and even to sexuality itself. The practice of laying claim to a transcendent identity as a seeming antidote to the problems of sexual pollution was not unique to Komachi; we know that many *yūjo* adopted the name and symbolic attributes of Buddhist sacred beings even as they practiced their this-worldly trade (Ōwa 1993: 296; Marra 1993a).

Komachi is clearly most the courtesan and most the courtier

⁴ According to the *Nihongi*, Sotōri Hime was so good looking that her beauty quite literally "shone through her clothes" (Sakamoto and Ienaga 1967: 440).

in her portrayal as a young woman. Her lack of beauty and sexual appeal as well as her remoteness from the court in old age do much to distance her from both roles, although she still, we should note, retains her ability to compose *waka* poems. This ability is indeed her most indelible quality, becoming the thread that links the aged Komachi to her past.

But even as she steps out of the palace and the exaggerated luxury of her life among "flowery brocades and strings of jewels" (Ichiko 1958: 89) to the second time-frame of the story, her penurious old age, Komachi seems to move closer to her audience. We know little for certain about the Muromachi audience of tales such as "Komachi sōshi," but several prominent scholars taking up the subject have argued for a non-aristocratic audience of towns folk, the so-called *machishū* (Araki 1981: 9-10). While not themselves members of the outcast populations, the urban citizenry of medieval Japan would have been familiar with figures like the one "Komachi sōshi" presents of the aged Komachi as she wanders through the town standing first at one gate and then another as she spreads out her sleeve and calls out begging for food (Ichiko 1958: 94). In becoming an old crone, Komachi is able to span an even greater period of time than the traditional sum of one hundred years customarily assigned her; in shifting from the idealized and misty ninth-century past of the time of Emperor Seiwa she seems to race forward to a time and place very close to the audience's own.

Today the standard version of "Komachi sōshi" is based on woodblock editions of the story published in the early Edo period as part of a thirty-two story *otogizōshi* set. There are, however, a number of earlier hand-written editions of the tale, each with its own particular textual differences. In one of these earlier handwritten editions, a manuscript owned by Tokyo

University and copied down in 1545, there is a brief but particularly interesting variant passage that does not occur in the standard woodblock edition and that is worth our notice.⁵ Both Suzuki Kōji (1995: 65) and Akegawa Tadao (1987: 128) have drawn attention to this passage that occurs at the point in the story when Komachi is nearing the end of her travels in the north. Here, describing the aged Komachi's appearance as she roams the highways, the Tokyo University text tells us:

At her side she stretched a catalpa bow. On her head were piled the white snows of the peaks while her brow was furrowed with the waves of the four seas. Her ears were hard of hearing and her eyesight dim (Yokoyama and Matsumoto 1977: 115).

What is most striking about this passage is the opening line. The catalpa bow, as Carmen Blacker has noted in her study by the same name (1975), was the professional tool and hallmark of the shaman. Thanks to a note in the eleventh century *Shin sarugakuki* we know that as early as the mid-Heian period guilds of itinerant female shamans known as *azusa miko* were active. The *azusa miko* offered to the public for a fee her skills at fortune telling, divination, and necromancy conducted through the twanging of the sacred bow (Akegawa 1987: 128). The *azusa-miko* and the *yūjo* were closely linked; both groups enjoyed a relative freedom from the constraints of patriarchally defined reproductive roles and in medieval society both were members of the special status populations.

Both Suzuki and Akegawa maintain, and I would concur, that this brief but unmistakable portrayal of the aged Komachi as

⁵ See Yokoyama and Matsumoto 1977: 106-117 for a transcription of the Tokyo University text.

a white-haired *azusa miko* gives us a valuable glimpse into the possible identity of “Komachi sōshi” storytellers themselves. In this textual moment, the image of the past, historical Komachi fuses with that of that of a Komachi contemporary to the audience and manifest in the person of the glimpsed *azusa miko*.

The case for a fused identity between subject and storyteller that I (with the backing of Suzuki and Akegawa) am trying make here raises a number of thorny questions that are worth noting. Not the least of these is the contradiction between the assumption that a storyteller was necessarily present to tell the tale and the tale’s own coda which refers to “those who might read” the tale (*yoman hito*) (Ichiko 1958: 101). It seems likely that the act of reading referred to here was understood to be silent (not orally performed) and private. With such an understanding, it would indeed be difficult to make any sure claims about a presenter, or performing reader, of the story. I would point out, however, that the earlier handwritten version does not include the coda with its line about readers. While we can not make any certain claims, it is possible to conjecture that the story began as performance, only later to become a conventional written text capable of being read by any literate person with access to a copy. This understanding of its genesis would leave open the possibility for a direct role of an *azusa miko* or similar itinerant figure in the telling of the tale.

Another problem that emerges from the assumption of a storyteller’s presence in the narrative is the ambiguous nature of the role of the narrator vis-à-vis that presence. The *azusa miko* glimpsed in the Tokyo University manuscript seems to speak in the voice of the character of the aged Komachi herself rather than in the voice of the more distanced narrator. The narrator describes Komachi but does not assume her identity, he (or she) steps aside at times to let the character of Komachi speak in her

own voice. We simply do not have enough information to know how the Muromachi tales such as "Komachi sōshi" might have been performed. If we held open the possibility that the stories were sometimes performed by two or more raconteurs working together--a strategy that would account for the dramatic dialog that one encounters so often in them--we would have a way of accounting for the aged Komachi's presence in the tale together with (but separate from) that of the narrator.

It would be a mistake, I feel, to limit the identity of the hypothetical storyteller(s) of "Komachi sōshi" too strictly to that of the *azusa miko*. Other cultural types present themselves as possibilities. Most prominent among these are the *bikuni-hijiri* couples, quasi-Buddhist religious, who, according to Akegawa, told Komachi's story to medieval audiences as a husband and wife team (1987: 112). Certainly the exchanges between Narihira and Komachi in the central and closing sections of "Komachi sōshi" suggest such a performative format as do the graveyard conversations between the Priest Saigyō and the ghost of Komachi in another Muromachi tale, "Komachi monogatari." The medieval *hijiri*'s connections with the polluting tasks of caring for the dead, as well as his access to the marked power of the supernatural, would help to explain the ghostly and even macabre tone of the closing passages of "Komachi sōshi."

If we are willing to accept on a hypothetical basis that at least one of the tellers of the tale possesses the lineaments of the tale's subject (i.e. the aged Komachi), we find the discourse on poetry in the tale taking on an additional significance, one that suggests strongly a role for the text as performance. While we can see a display of considerable poetic knowledge in the two-pronged discourse that comprises most of the opening section of the story as well as in the list of *utamakura* or poetic place names that emerges from the *michiyuki*, it is above all in the

fumi-zukushi recited as a confession by the aged Komachi in the central section of the story (a confession carried out in her own voice) that he can see evidence of what was obviously intended as a virtuoso display of poetic expertise. Without seeming to need to pause to take a breath Komachi rushes out a list of forty-four different poetic correspondences she received. She begins her list significantly with a poem from the Emperor himself. The constructions at first appear to be classically simple as we are told of a poetic letter "tied to blossoms" (*hana ni musubi*), and another "kept from prying eyes" (*yosome o tsutsumu*), but they soon become more deeply involved with poetic language as Komachi, using established pivot expressions, boasts of receiving a poetic letter about "a mandarin duck resenting gossip" (*unkina wo oshidori*) and one on "the resentment of the underside of the kudzu leaf" (*urami no kuzu no ha*). She goes on to display her knowledge of the traditional associations of poetic place names with such constructions as "wasting away like the channel markers at Naniwa Bay where the narrow road ends" (*Naniwatsu no hosomichi taeshi miotsukushi*). She brings up the list with poetic diction so elaborated and particular that commentators are able to trace references to specific classical poems (Ichiko 1958: 92-93). By the forty-fourth poem we are willing to concede her her expertise. The *fumi-zukushi* surely seems more a form of showing off than it does a heart-felt confession. Through it the aged Komachi, so humble in other respects, is able to lay claim to elite cultural property that must have dazzled her audience as much as any talk of past access to bejeweled palace chambers.

A very similar *fumi-zukushi* appears in "Kamiyo Komachi," this time in the mouth of the narrator who substantiates claims to the young Komachi's seductive powers though appeal to the elegance and volume of the poetic correspondence she received.

The plot of "Kamiyo Komachi" places the aged Komachi in the role of poetic mentor to a young courtier who is advised by a messenger of the Tamatsushima divinity to seek Komachi's advice in order to gain success at a poetry contest (Fujii 1967: 91-113). This narrative structure allows for the character of the aged Komachi to discourse at length and in her own voice on the history and practice of poetry. Her lecture, ostensibly directed to the young courtier, moves from an examination of the nature of poetry via the *Kokinshū* preface, to an esoteric reading of well-known poems attributed to Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, Sarumaru Dayū and Ariwara no Narihira. In the manner of the narrator of the introductory passage of "Komachi sōshi," Komachi here constructs a two-pronged discourse that blends traditional courtly material with later Buddhist apologetics. Indeed, with utter aplomb she draws on secret traditions of the Reizei and Nijō families citing passages similar to ones found in early medieval *denjū* commentaries.⁶ Just as Komachi's confession in the sōshi seemed more a bravado display than an act of contrition, here, too, her offering of supposedly helpful advice seems suspect, much more a display of arcane knowledge than practical instruction. Her performance dazzles, not only because of the extent of her knowledge, but by its very nature as well; how, the audience might well have asked, could an *ordinary* person come by such lore? The answer can only be that she is indeed extraordinary, every inch the fallen courtier she claims to be.⁷

⁶ Ishikawa Tōru has done a study of these textual correspondences (1990).

⁷ Her performance highlights a larger phenomenon of public presentation of heretofore private, aristocratic cultural property that was taking place not only in the telling of Muromachi tales such as this but on the *nōmu* stage and elsewhere, a phenomenon that, I hasten to point out, merits more scholarly

In Komachi the aged and contrite lover, Komachi the erudite but dottering beggar, the lines between the reality of the former courtesan and the fiction of the former courtier are deliberately and irretrievably blurred. The cultural collateral Komachi lays claim to with such emphasis is hers by right through both affiliations. For the medieval courtesan, and other related special status female performers of the late medieval period, I would argue, the art of *waka* poetry was a tremendous cultural treasure. Through claims to knowledge of and legitimacy within its traditions, made in stories such as these, they stood a chance of restoring the "court" in "courtesan" and winning for themselves a favorable identity in an otherwise hostile world.

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