“A Golden Needle, a Rabbit’s Tail, and the Density of Female Body Fat: An Analysis of Murō Saisei’s Metaphors for Enchi Fumiko’s Writing Libido”

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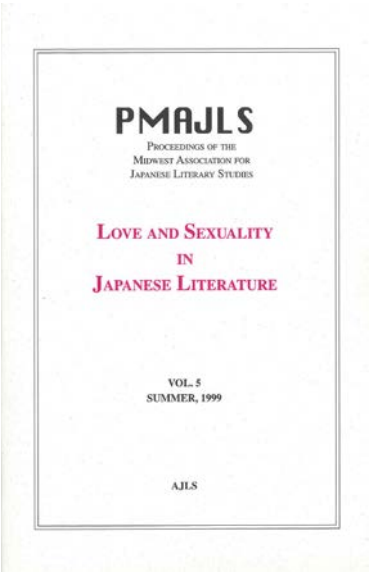

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A GOLDEN NEEDLE, A RABBIT'S TAIL, AND THE DENSITY OF FEMALE BODY FAT: AN ANALYSIS OF MURŌ SAISEI'S METAPHORS FOR ENCHI FUMIKO'S WRITING LIBIDO[1]

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This paper examines Murō Saisei's (1889-1962) essay, "Enchi Fumiko: The Person Who Writes with a Golden Needle (*Ōgon no hari mote bun o tsukuru hito*, 1960)."[2] The aim of the paper is to delineate how such disparate and incongruent entities as a golden needle, a rabbit's tail, and the density of female body fat can be transfigured into associative symbols in Murō's articulation of Enchi Fumiko's (1905-1986) position specifically as a woman writer (*joryū sakka*), and how Enchi's particularized female body literally carries his unusual rhetorical tropes as the signifier for her writing, her gender, and her female sexuality.

A brief discussion of Enchi and her work is in order before analyzing how the renowned male author Murō describes her, whom he considered as one of his close acquaintances and whose talent he recognized long before her name was on everyone's lips.[3] The year 1957 marked the beginning of Enchi's illustrious career as a writer. At the age of fifty-two, she

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[1]This paper is based on my discussion of Enchi Fumiko's *Komachi Hensō* (1965) in "Configuring Female Authorship in Japanese Cultural History: The case of Ono no Komachi" (Ph. D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999). The presentation of this paper at the MAJLS Seventh Annual Meeting at Purdue was made possible by "Students Specializing in Japanese Studies Conference Travel Fund" from the Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan.

[2]Murō Saisei, "Enchi Fumiko: Ōgon no hari mote bun o tsukuru hito," in *Takami Jun Enchi Fumiko shū, Gendai Nihon bungaku taikei* 71 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1972), 401-408. Originally published in *Fujin kōron* (January 1960) with the title, "Ōgon no hari: joryū sakka hyōden 1 Enchi Fumiko," and later included in Murō, *Ōgon no hari* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1961).

[3]For Murō Saisei's appraisal of Enchi Fumiko's literary talents and potentials, see Matsumoto Michiko, "Murō san no yogen" in the pamphlet insert, *Enchi Fumiko zenshū* 15 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1971), 3. This volume (15) also includes Enchi's four short essays on Murō. In "Murō sensei's no koto," Enchi relays her visits to his residence in Karuizawa. "Murō Saisei sensei no tegami" is mainly Enchi's reminiscence about the late Murō, reflecting her experience as a Kabuki script writer of his novels, *Shita wo kamikitta onna* (written and performed in 1956), *Yamabuki* (1945, performed in 1958), *Kagerō nikki ibun* (1959, performed in 1960). The other two essays are "Mare naru hito no shi" and "Onna no mittsu no tenkei."

received the prestigious Noma literary prize for *Onnazaka* (*The Waiting Years*, 1949-1957), a novel vividly portraying the injustice women suffered under by the patriarchal ideology of the early Meiji era and the resilient power of silenced women. By 1960, Enchi had already gained a reputation as a writer who took up traditionally suppressed and muted women's voices and gave them a new life imbued with vengeful power.[4] Even though she entered the modern literary scene relatively late in her life, Enchi became a legendary figure in her own right. Scholars, critics, and readers alike were in awe of the breadth of Enchi's knowledge, the profundity of her vision, the complexity of her literary language, and the seemingly inexhaustible energy that sustained her prolific writing.[5] The critical gaze turned towards this preeminent woman writer, however, transgresses the usual boundaries of desire and curiosity to unveil the "mystic" aura surrounding the figure of Author. The formidable power of Enchi's writing, literally visible in the substantive body of her oeuvre and numerous literary awards, required an explanation—how could Enchi, a female author, write as she did?

It has been said that Enchi felt compelled to write about female sexuality with such unprecedented audacity because, having undergone an unfortunate surgery in 1946, she was no longer a "woman."[6] It was this liberation from her female sex, as this account goes, together with her longing backward glance towards her lost "femaleness" that engendered the outpouring of her libidinal energy. Moreover, scholars and critics have pointed out the link between Enchi and her fictional female characters who speak freely of their sexuality and their aging bodies as convincing evidence that Enchi saw her fictional characters as reflections of herself. Enchi, in fact, became infamous for her bold expressions such as *shikyū ga dokiri* [emphasis author's] *to natta* (literally, "my uterus cried out, 'Ah!'") in *Nise no en-shūi* (1957) when the female protagonist recalls sexual intercourse with her late husband.[7] Enchi was again criticized for

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[4]By 1960, some of Enchi's major publications include *Himojii tsukihi* (*Poor Days*, 1954), *Onnazaka* (1949-57), *Nise no en-shūi* (*A Bond for Two Life Times-Gleanings*, 1957), and *Onnamen* (*Mask*, 1958).

[5]Wada Tomoko, "Enchi Fumiko nenpyō," in *Hirabayashi Taiko Enchi Fumiko shū, Chikuma gendai bungaku taikei* 41 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1978), 478-489.

[6]Enchi had a hysterectomy due to uterine cancer.

[7]S. Yumiko Hulvey renders this line as "my very womb cried out in longing." S. Yumiko Hulvey, "The Intertextual Fabric of Narratives by Enchi Fumiko," in *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, eds. Charles Wei-Hsun Fun and Steven Heine (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 1995),

her uninhibited literary imagination in *Komachi hensō* (*Komachi Transformed*, 1965) where the image of waterfalls is provocatively rendered as a figure of hyperbolic, sacred, and sensual female sex at the orgasmic moment.[8] In orthodox critical discourse, the dangerously "unfeminine" qualities of Enchi's writing—unfeminine precisely because of the obsessiveness and audacity with which she delineates the female gender—are thus reinscribed as the clearest expression of her irredeemable femininity.

Enchi's literary potency, however, cannot be simply explained away by linking to the loss of her uterus. What contributes to the general perception of Enchi as a daunting female writer—"a woman to be eternally feared," as one modern literary critic puts it,[9]—is not merely her foregrounding of the female gender in her writing. Rather, it is her remarkable linguistic facility and literary vision that shape her expressions of the female gender. In this regard, critics and scholars routinely underscore Enchi's position, the daughter of a preeminent Meiji scholar, Ueda Kazutoshi,[10] as the major determining factor for her phenomenal linguistic acquisition. Enchi's privileged and extensive training in classical Japanese, Chinese, French, and English appears to be almost "scandalous" in itself and more so because she mastered these languages in an unorthodox way. It is a well-known fact that she refused to go through the compul-

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189. For Enchi's own comment on this particular line, see Enchi Fumiko, "Araremo nai kotoba: sei o dō kangaeru ka." *Gunzō* (April 1965): 151.

[8]Enchi Fumiko, *Komachi hensō* in *Enchi Fumiko shū*, eds, Hirano Ken and others, *Nihon bungaku zenshū* 75 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1976).

[9]Okuno Takeo, "Enchi Fumiko ron: eien ni osorerareru onna," in *Takami Jun Enchi Fumiko shū, Gendai Nihon bungaku taikei* 71 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1972), 408-415. In this article, Okuno assumes that when it comes to rendering the image of women, female authors are no match for someone like *Murō Saisei* who has been continuously observing everything about Woman for a long time (女流作家の書く女は室生犀星のような女のすべてを永年にわたって見続けている男の作家のそれにかなうわけがない, 409). Okuno, however, finds Enchi "fearful" precisely because she depicts the Woman unbeknownst, detestable, and repugnant to men.

[10]Enchi Fumiko is the second daughter of Ueda Kazutoshi, one of the most prominent scholars and educators of Meiji Japan. He served as a professor in the Division of National Language and Literature at Tokyo Imperial University and was later appointed as the head of that division. Enchi is thus considered "well-bread" and upper-class. For Enchi's brief biography, see Yoshida Sei'ichi, "Enchi Fumiko: sakka to sakuhin" in *Enchi Fumiko shū*, eds, Hirano and others, *Nihon bungaku zenshū* 75 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1976). For a more comprehensive rendition of her life, see Kamei Hideko and Ogasawa Yoshiko, *Enchi Fumiko no sekai* (Tokyo: Sōrinsha, 1981). For a recent critical assessment of Enchi's life and her work, see Furuya Teruko, *Enchi Fumiko: yō no bungaku* (Tokyo: Chūsekisha, 1996).

sory education system, which is, again, "scandalous," considering her own father's role in instituting the education system of the time. She was subsequently tutored at home.

The critical attention Enchi's education has drawn cannot be separated from the fact that she was a woman. Not even too many male authors of her time enjoyed the privilege of receiving such a highly tailored education as did Enchi. Her access to the world of literature and intellect was clearly exceptional for a woman. Perhaps as a way of "naturalizing" Enchi's inheritance of her father's intellectual heritage, scholars and critics have also emphasized her connection with her grandmother, who cultivated and enriched Enchi's emotional sensitivity through her ongoing storytelling and their frequent outings to the Kabuki theater.[11] Thus, Enchi's extraordinary literary career has been explained away through her equally unusual upbringing, which already transgressed the gender boundaries of her time.

The critical interest in Enchi's training during her formative years can be interpreted as a meaningful reflection of scholars' and critics' urge to understand how Enchi came to write the way she did. It is a commonly-held notion that she did not write like other women authors who are expected to express themselves through "sentimental lyricism and impressionistic, non-intellectual, detailed observation of daily life."[12] In fact, the very being of Enchi Fumiko, a female writer without a uterus but with overwhelming intellectual prowess, has been perceived to be an anomaly within the established and available paradigm of the women authors. Viewed in this light, examining conventional scholarship on Enchi and her writing constitutes an epistemological enterprise of delineating how such critical issues as gender, knowledge, and power are played out in the modern Japanese cultural context. Thus, the rest of the paper will analyze several selected passages from Murō's essay (1960) as a slice of the dominant epistemology of modern Japan.

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[11]Enchi Fumiko's paternal grandmother, Ine (66 years old when Enchi was born), lived with her family. It is this grandmother who first introduced her to the world of Edo literature through the works of Takizawa Bakin (滝沢馬琴, 1767-1848) and Ryūtei Tanehiko (柳亭種彦, 1783-1842), as well as the theatrical realm of Jōruri and Kabuki. Enchi's first "indirect encounter" with the *Genji monogatari*, which she later translated into modern Japanese (published in 1972-1973), is through Ryūtei's masterpiece, *Nise Murasaki Inaka Genji* (*The False Murasaki and The Rustic Genji*, ca.1825). Wada, 478.

[12]Joan E. Ericson, "The Origins of the Concept of "Women's Literature," in *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, eds. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 75.

As the title of his essay indicates, Murō characterizes Enchi as "a person who writes with a golden needle." It is important to note that Murō refers to her as *hito* (person), instead of *onna* (woman), which is a more common way of addressing any female writer. But, he immediately adds a "feminine" gender marker by identifying her writing tool as a needle. In fact, Murō begins his essay by evoking two different kinds of needles as metaphors for "gendered" writing instruments:

> 女流作家は着物を縫い上げる手技の細かさを持っているから、小説をかくのにも一針も余さずに書く、男の作家はぷつりぷつりと畳さんの三寸針の心得で突っ撤して行く。女流作家の原稿紙は裏側から見ると縫目の例が揃い、男はがたがたである。小説というものは余りきちんと仕過ぎると面白くない、小説の秘法は小説を書くことを知らないふうで、小説を持って余してやっと書いている状態が好ましい。
>
> Since women writers possess the fastidiousness of sewing *kimono*, even when they write novels, they do so without sparing even a single stitch. Male authors, however, move along like a *tatami* maker, wielding a three inch needle with familiarity—snap, snap. If we look at the backside of manuscripts, stitches appear all orderly in women's, while they seem uneven in men's. The so-called "novel" lacks delight, if it is executed too neatly. The secret to writing a [good] novel is to do it as if one were not aware of one's own writing, and it is desirable that a novel appear to have gained its final form, while still leaving [certain things] unsaid (401).

Here, Murō likens male authors' writing to a *tatami* maker's rough stitches, carried out assuredly and expediently. When the efficiency of a *tatami* maker's needle is described in this way, the unusual length and the bursting energy attributed to this metaphor retain the significance of a more traditional and conventional writing tool, such as a brush or pen, whose image is unambiguously phallic. In contrast, women authors write with their tiny sewing needles. Murō seems to disparage their writing for being too much like intricate needlework, but without the *tatami* maker's needle, women's verbal stitches "naturally" lack a touch of self-assured looseness and freedom, the qualities of superior writing Murō finds in male authors' literary productions.

Now it is clear why Murō deploys needles as the metaphor for writing tools. He might not have chosen this particular metaphor at all,

if his concerns were with male authors only. But because he is talking about Enchi Fumiko and because he regards a sewing needle as a ubiquitous "feminine" tool, he seems to have conceived of the link between the needle and a female author's writing instrument. In order to underscore the inefficacy and unnaturalness of that feminine tool, it then becomes necessary for Murō to create a new association between men and the "masculine" needle of a *tatami* maker as the proper instrument of writing.

The image of a female author writing with a sewing needle is telling of the gender ideology to which Murō subscribes. What remains unarticulated but understood is his notion that a woman's "natural" task is taking care of domestic affairs such as sewing *kimono*. Thus, when she attempts to write, the only instrument in her possession is her inadequate "feminine" needle. Even though a woman's very gesture of picking up her needle to imitate men's writing constitutes an act of transgressing gender boundaries, she may be excused since her writing, by definition, cannot be as good as that of male authors. In fact, that is exactly what Murō says when he upholds the "uneven style" of male writers as the hallmark of superior writing. According to his definition, women are incapable of sewing rough verbal stitches required for good writing. Instead, they end up with measured and well-ordered stitches, which are only good for sewing *kimono*.

But what happens, if a woman is holding a golden needle? How does the adjective, "golden," modify the connotations of an ordinary "feminine" needle? Even though Murō himself does not explain the significance of this metaphor, the image of "gold" seems to refer to Enchi's privileged social, cultural, and intellectual background. As mentioned earlier, she is conventionally associated with the very image of *ojōsama*, who has been indulged and pampered in every conceivable way. Thus, the precious "golden" needle Enchi holds may also signify her ineptitude for performing ordinary womanly tasks such as sewing. In fact, by granting Enchi a golden needle, Murō differentiates Enchi from the rest of women writers: 併し円地文子にはまだがたがたがある (However, in Enchi's writing, one can still sense some unevenness, 401). In so saying, Murō makes Enchi as someone who transgresses the boundaries that he himself has drawn between female and male writers. He is, however, not quite willing to grant Enchi the full status of a male author with a three-inch needle. Thus, he equips her with a golden needle as her tenuous symbolic link with other female authors.

The "golden" needle, on the other hand, conveys an idea of excess. What can be done with a golden needle can certainly be achieved with an ordinary one. In other words, the intrinsic value of Enchi's needle clearly

exceeds the significance of the job she is about to perform. At the same time, there is something magical and extraordinary in the very image of gold. Perhaps, thanks to her golden needle, Enchi can write effortlessly, creating a verbal needlework that is out of this world. Or, perhaps simply by holding it, she can produce brilliant writing. This idea of excess and magic contained in the image of Enchi's golden needle becomes more explicit and fantastical, as Murō's imagination takes flight in his essay.

> あの骨に絡んでいる少ししかない肉の密度が普通の人の二倍くらいこくがあるらしく、あの肉が燃えるのだとかねがねおっもていたが、円地文子もやはりぽたぽたしたにくで何時も書くのだと思った。一昨々年軽井沢で円地さんとテニスコ—トわきの本屋の前を歩いていて、私は躓ずいてよろけて手を上げ何かのもたれを捜すふうに、じたばたやって円地さんのまるい肩先に手がさわったことがあった。勿論、掴まるまででではなくそのまま事無きをえたが、その折り、私の左のてにさわった円ち文子の肩先は円くて大変柔らかく、うさぎのような柔らかさであったと、後で家にかえってそう思い、どうやら、円地文子はうさぎをからだじゅうに放し飼いにして、そのうさぎの一尾ずつから何かを吐かさせて書いて入るのかしらと、閑な私という男は考えたのである。

> . . . The density of Enchi's meager flesh covering her bones seems to be about twice as dense as that of an ordinary person. I have often imagined that it must be that flesh, which burns itself [when she writes], and indeed I came to the conclusion that Enchi Fumiko must be always writing with that drippy flesh. Three years ago in Karuizawa, I was walking with Enchi in front of a bookstore by the tennis court. I tripped and was about to fall. In my desperate attempt to hold on to something to maintain my balance, I ended up touching one of Enchi's shoulders. Of course, I managed to pull myself without going so far as grabbing her shoulder. But at that time, Enchi's shoulder under my left hand was so round and extremely soft. The softness of a rabbit—that is how I recalled that touch after returning home. Somehow it seems to me that Enchi must be rearing rabbits all over her body and that she must be writing by making something come out of the tail of each of her rabbits. This is how I thought, a man with many idle hours on hand (404).

This passage reflects how Murō has come to perceive of the link between Enchi's body and her writing. His rumination on her body is not

that of a conceptual female body but a physical one that he himself came in contact with. The corporeal reality of her body and his own experience of it, however, lead Murō to create an imaginary female body, which he considers the source of Enchi's endless writing, or "her writing libido."[13]

In fact, Murō immediately refers to Enchi's female body as her writing instrument, thus replacing the original metaphor, a golden needle, with which he began the essay:

> 女の人のからだの構造が私などと違って、ねっとりした脂肪がみなぎっているので、そこを潜り抜けてでる思いにはやはりあぶらがあって、あぶらは原稿紙にしみ亘るらしい。小柄だが充ちわった円地文子さんはからだで書くというかたは、一応、とおらして貰いたいのだ。
>
> A woman's body, being structurally different from mine, overflows with viscous fat. That is why an idea that passes through such a body also carries grease, which seems to smear right on to the manuscript. Though small-statured, full bodied Enchi Fumiko writes with her body. For the time being, I want this idea to be accepted (404).

This passage reveals that Murō's fantasy about Enchi's writing life lies in his understanding of the biological differences between men and women. He reasons that a female body contains more fat than its male counterpart. From this scientific data, Murō seems to have built a notion that a female author, whose body has excessive "viscous fat," must be greasy. It is this notion that enables Murō to particularize Enchi's body as having the extraordinary density of female body fat.

Similarly, he links her seemingly inexhaustible writing energy with her female sex. Like rabbits, known for their fertile reproductive capacity, Enchi the female author produces writing at the drop of a hat, or more precisely, just by pulling the tail of her rabbits. Through his imagination, Murō can see rabbits inhabiting Enchi's own body, which itself has taken on the characteristic attributes of rabbits—her tiny body is covered with skin as soft as a rabbit's fur. In fact, his private discovery of Enchi's affinity with rabbits seems to have fascinated him. The same discovery appears again in the writing of Matsumoto Michiko who worked closely

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[13]Murō does not use this expression in his essay. It is my own reading of his obsession with Enchi's writing energy and her female sexuality.

both with Murō and Enchi for *Gunzō* (群像), one of the leading elite literary magazines of the time:

> そのころ室生さんにお会いして、円地さんの旺盛な仕事ぶりが話題になった。室生さんは上機嫌であった。「小柄なお体のどこにそんなエネルギーがおありかと思います」と私が言ったとこ、室生さんは、内緒ばなし、という感じにちょっと声をひそめて「いつか軽井沢で一緒に歩いていたとき、何かのはずみで円地さんの肩にさわってしまったことがあるんですよ。そのときびっくりしたんですが、円地さんはじつにヤワラカイ肩をしてますよ。丸くて少さいのに骨がないみたいで。あの肩が、円地さんのエネルギーの秘密を隠していたいへんな肩ですよ」と、まじめな顔でいわれた。
>
> At that time, I met with Mr. Murō and our talk touched on Enchi's vigorous way of working. He was in good humor. When I asked, "Where, in her small body, do you think she keeps her energy?," he lowered his voice as if revealing a secret. "Some time ago when I was walking with her in Karuizawa, by some accident, I ended up touching Enchi's shoulders. At that time, I was amazed. She has truly soft shoulders. They are round and small, but they seem to have no bones. Her shoulders—they are no ordinary shoulders—conceal the secret of Enchi's energy," said Mr. Murō with a serious face.[14]

Matsumoto's report of her conversation with Murō shows that his imaginary flight in his essay is not an isolated incident but a fantasy shared with others. More importantly, through the metaphor of rabbits, his myth making of Enchi's writing energy brings together her female sex, her female body, and her female sexuality. His discursive gesture of mysticizing is, however, simultaneously an act of exposing Enchi's female gender as the secret behind her extraordinary writing career.

To grasp the significance of Murō's essay within the broader context of how Japanese writing women and their work have been assessed in modern Japanese scholarship,[15] it is necessary to examine how Enchi

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[14]Matsumoto, 3.

[15]Chieko M. Ariga's, "Who's Afraid of Amino Kiku? Gender Conflict and the Literary Canon (1995)," illumines the narrow parameters of the male hegemonic notion that has constituted the acceptable image of women, both female fictional characters and female writers. Ariga's more recent publication, "Text Versus Commentary: Struggles over the Cultural Meanings of 'Woman'" is another thought-provoking analysis of the significance of

Fumiko herself negotiated and carved out her position and authority as a writer in the midst of a male-centered critical and literary establishment of modern Japan.[16] This paper is an effort to shed light on some of the assumptions behind such notions as *joryū sakka* (women writers) and *joryū bungaku* (women's literature) with which Enchi Fumiko and her writing have been conventionally identified in modern literary criticism.[17]

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kaisetsu (commentary) written by well-established male critics on women writers' literary productions. While Ariga's scholarship is significant for delineating the embedded gender-biases within critical discourses, it creates an impression that the voices of women authors can be completely erased at the hands of male interpreters. In this regard, Enchi Fumiko's "Arare mo nai kotoba: sei o dō kangaeru ka," her response to the *Gunzō* review of her novel, *Komachi hensō*, is an important corrective illustration of how male critics and scholars cannot unilaterally define and evaluate women authors, as they can with female writers of the past. Chieko M. Ariga, "Who's Afraid of Amino Kiku? Gender Conflict and the Literary Canon," in *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future*, eds. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda (New York: The Feminist Press, 1995), 43-60; Chieko M. Ariga, "Text Versus Commentary: Struggles over the Cultural Meanings of 'Woman'" in *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, 352-381.

[16]It is, for instance, important to consider why Enchi Fumiko decided to include Matsumoto Michiko's recollection of Murō Saisei's association between Enchi's shoulders and rabbits, when Enchi compiled her own *zenshū* (complete works). Enchi's relationship with Murō is not simply as that of a mentor and mentee. Even though she always referred to him as "Murō sensei," was encouraged by him, and worked with him, there is an undeniable ambiguity and ambivalence in the way Enchi depicted him in her own writing. In "Murō Saise sensei no koto (1962)," for instance, she mentions how she found it difficult to appreciate some part of *Kagerō nikki ibun* and even guesses that he himself must not have liked the work.

[17]Joan E. Ericson's reading of Hayashi Fumiko includes a thorough investigation of such terms as *joryū sakka* and *joryū bungaku* in modern critical discourses. Ericson, *Be A Woman: Hayashi Fumiko and Modern Japanese Women's Literature* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1997). A similar investigation pertaining to Heian writing women is long overdue. To a limited extent, I deal with this topic in my dissertation.