BEYOND ABSOLUTION: ENCHI FUMIKO'S *THE WAITING YEARS* AND *MASKS*

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> Just as there is an archetype of woman as the object of men's eternal love, so there must be an archetype of her as the object of his eternal fear, representing, perhaps, the shadow of his own evil actions.
>
> Mieko, *Masks*[1]

INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades of her life, Enchi Fumiko was heralded by critics as the most important living woman writer in Japan. Gender specificity is an integral part of the vocabulary of the Japanese literary world; since the tenth century it has recognized the special voice, concerns, and, in a highly gendered language of the modern world, the particular rhetoric of female writers. Yet, while often described as the "towering peak" among contemporary women writers "the likes of which we may never see again,"[2] the power of Enchi's writing—voluminous, erudite, rich in variety and scale—made her indisputably one of the very few giants of postwar Japanese literature, irrespective of gender. It was on these grounds that she was elected to the Japan Academy of Arts in 1970, was awarded the Bunka Kōrōshō or Distinguished Cultural Achievement Award in 1979, and in 1985 was decorated by the Emperor with the Bunka Kunshō or Order of Cultural Merit, the highest award a Japanese citizen can receive.

This eighty-one-year-old "giant" was tiny, plain, ladylike, willful, and spoiled. While innocent of the ordinary daily-life skills that

had always been performed by servants, she was nonetheless tough, unpretentious, and private. She had no use for Western-style logic or argument and no head for business. Voracious for knowledge and insight, she was a constant study. And she wrote all the time. "Write and then die, that's all there is," she'd say. "I never knew any other writer who worked so tirelessly and relentlessly," said the novelist Niwa Fumio.

It is no mere hyperbole to say that her likes may never be seen again. Born in the Meiji Period (Oct. 2, 1905), Ueda Fumi, as she was then named, was the third child of the eminent linguist, Ueda Kazutoshi (Mannen), nationally famous Professor of the Japanese language at the Tokyo Imperial University, and his wife Tsuruko (née Murakami), descended from the wealthy Hosokawa clan. Raised in an affluent and privileged academic household, surrounded by her father's magnificent library of classics, and exposed to a constantly renewed stream of modern literary and popular journals, she grew up an avid reader. Her paternal grandmother, Ine, also a member of the household, read to young Fumi from such late-eighteenth-century writers as Bakin, Akinari, and Tanehiko. She developed a passion for the Kabuki theater, which the family frequented with much pleasure throughout her childhood.

Her distinguished father was clearly a dominant presence in the formation of her interest in classical Japanese literature and was a support to her in all her undertakings until he died when she was thirty-two years old. She wore a jade ring he gave her throughout her lifetime until it broke a few months before she died. It became the subject of one of her last writings.

At age thirteen Fumi[3] entered the girls high school affiliated with Japan Women's University, and by the time she was sixteen she had read the complete works of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, and had almost finished reading through the hundred-some volumes of the *Yūhōdō Library of Classical Japanese Literature*. At the Ueno Public Library she poured over books on Western drama and Kabuki and became thoroughly absorbed in the world of theater. Precocious, dissatisfied with school, and wanting to study drama, with parental consent she left high school. Her father employed as her private tutors four professors from various Tokyo universities to teach her French and English language and literature as well as Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) literature, and a British missionary woman taught the young girl Biblical literature.

It was a heady time in the theater world of Tokyo. Osanai Kaoru (1881–1928), the playwright and drama critic, pioneered in estab-

lishing modern Western-style theater in Japan. He trained Kabuki actors to work outside their own tradition and to stage, in his newly-designed theater, adaptations of Western novels and plays. As early as 1904, when still a student, he had assisted in producing an adaptation of Alphonse Daudet's 1884 novel, *Sapho*, and went on to produce plays by Ibsen, Chekhov, and Gorky, as well as Chikamatsu. He had traveled to Russia, Germany, England and France to study their theater productions first hand.

One day in May, 1924, nineteen-year-old Fumi attended a public lecture by Osanai on the subject of modern drama and his soon-to-be opened Tsukiji Little Theater. Enthralled, she began to frequent the Little Theater, notebook in hand, and at home, determined to become a dramatist, she began secretly to write plays. When the magazine *Kabuki* solicited new plays for publication in 1926, she submitted a one-act play entitled *Furusato* (*Native Place*); it became her first published work. Emboldened, she gained permission in 1927 to become an auditor (and the only woman) in Osanai's drama seminar at Keiō Gijuku University. Impressed by the plays she had written, Osanai published several of them in his journal *Drama and Criticism*.

By Christmas Day of 1928, Ueda Fumi's career as a talented young playwright had been launched: her play *Banshun sōya* (*A Turbulent Night in Late Spring*) had not only been published, it had been produced and was just completing a successful run at the Tsukiji Little Theater. The Ueda family hosted a celebration party for their twenty-three-year-old daughter at a famous downtown restaurant, but there amidst the flowers and rustling silks, celebratory toasts and happy laughter, Osanai, only forty-seven, suffered a heart attack and died before her eyes.

Fumi's next months were markedly changed. She spent her time in the company of writers who were associated with the new proletarian magazine *Nyonin geijutsu* (*Women's Arts*) to which Osanai had recently introduced her, and which had published *A Turbulent Night*. Among them, the writer-activist Hirabayashi Taiko (1905–1972), the same age as Fumi, became her life-long friend; the novelist Kataoka Teppei (1894–1944), the most dynamic and politically active of the group, a married man with children, eleven years her senior, became the object of her passion.

It was an unsettling and exciting time. Socialism was in the air; Marxist thought represented for them a direct and hope-filled attack on all the authoritarian, hierarchical Confucian beliefs and feudal practices that had destroyed people's freedom and aspirations over the centuries, particularly those of women. Yet, like her

own heroine in *A Turbulent Night*, she was uneasy, feeling herself being swept into the emotionalism of the proletarian movement less from pure conviction than for love of Kataoka. And she could see the same happening to other women. But she reasoned that those who could easily abandon their parents' homes and lead a life of revolution must have little of value to leave behind. She could not easily shed her own heritage, which had much about it that was still dear to her. She felt herself feigning passion for Kataoka's politics when her real passion was for him, and she hated this falseness in herself. Further, adultery, in the case of a woman, was then a criminal act in Japan. Constantly aware that her own conduct could rebound to ill effect upon her father's distinguished reputation, bewildered and insecure, she made a calculation. She would accept an arranged marriage proposal. Marriage would set her life on an even keel; it would be a mooring from which she could protect herself from being swept into the activities of anarchistic movements. At the same time marriage would provide her with the quiet freedom to pursue her career and to go on loving Kataoka in a state of composed equilibrium. In short, as she recalled it, in "cowardice," in marriage, she decided to throw herself away.

On March 27, 1930, she married thirty-four-year-old Enchi Yoshimatsu, chief of the research section of the *Tōkyō Nichinichi* newspaper. Although she gave birth to a daughter two years later and she remained married to Yoshimatsu until his death at age seventy-seven in 1972, she realized at once that her move had been a great miscalculation, and she regretted the marriage, for everyone's sake, all her life.

Nonetheless, the greatest nonliterary influence on "Enchi literature" was her married life. It changed her from a playwright into a novelist. And in her loveless union she dealt with the phenomenon of marriage itself—one man and one woman under one roof for life—constantly over the years. It is startling, in Ibsen, to hear young Hedda Gabler say of her new marriage: "And then the most unbearable thing of all . . . everlastingly having to be together with—the self same person." But it is sobering and revealing to watch Enchi in later years, dedicated to almost brutal self-knowledge and to resolute truth, examine such a wife in middle age. In "Enchantress" (1957) Chigako faces old age under the same roof with a husband for whom she has come to feel only contempt and yet to whom she has grown accustomed. Seated next to each other on a train on the way home from seeing their daughter off to America, the aging couple, as usual, talk past each other; he is

oblivious to her sense of loss. As they talked "it gave Chigako the same feeling of impatience as when two foreigners ill-versed in each other's languages try to converse."[4]

For the next twenty years, married life sapped Enchi's energy and self-esteem as well as her dedication to literature; she all but ceased to write. Instead she joined study groups devoted to reading the ancient Japanese classics such as the *Kojiki*, *Nihongi*, and *Heike monogatari*. When she did write she turned to short stories and essays but found the shift from dialogue-dependent plays to descriptive and explicative prose excruciatingly difficult. Although a book of short stories, *Kaze no gotoki kotoba* (*Words like the Wind*), was published in 1939, it made no impression on the literary world.

Throughout the late 1930s and 40s, she endured the war, lost her breasts to surgery for tubercular mastitis, developed uterine cancer and nearly died of complications after a radical hysterectomy. During that period when penicillin was not available, she was hospitalized for many months in and out of critical condition. In the May 25, 1945, air raids, her home was burnt to the ground and she lost everything, including the entire treasured Ueda-Enchi library. Though in her heart a writer, she still wrote little, mostly juvenile literature and journal articles for the money she and her family needed simply to survive the war years.

When the war ended Enchi Fumiko, the writer, was born. In 1949, at age the age of forty-four, she began work on a long novel that was based on the adult life of her maternal grandmother—a story she had tried to write many times over the years but had been too close to its dilemma and the real people involved to turn it into fiction. Now slowly, bit by bit, in serial form she composed *The Waiting Years*. The original Japanese title *Onnazaka* means literally "women's-slope," a term that sounds somewhat like a place name but which implies the long uphill life journey of women.

In 1953, while still at work on *The Waiting Years*, Enchi published a collection of stories called *Himojii tsukihi* (*Days of Hunger*) that became her breakthrough in the postwar literary world. Vastly different from the somewhat sentimental, cloying style then associated with much of women's writing, it was greeted with acclaim.

The title story features Saku, who is considered unmarriageable due to an unsightly birthmark on her back. However, she is married off to Naokichi, a contemptible miser and lecher who makes her life a living hell. When he ultimately becomes bed-ridden,

their son proposes that they murder him to relieve her of this burden of a man. Instead of seizing the opportunity, Saku is shocked into realizing that now she alone is capable of protecting the life of this miserable man. In a kind of epiphany her long-lived hatred is transformed into "a kind of love" that transcends the helpless Naokichi and represents something of deep value inside her. The moment transforms her own opinion of herself and the meaning of her own life. She dreams that a black crow has become a phoenix.

"Stark realism," "gruesome," "superb depiction of human tenacity," were the adjectives critics used. *Days of Hunger* received the 1954 Women Writer's Prize. That same year Enchi was elected to the board of the Japan Writer's Association.

THE WAITING YEARS

Her first unquestionable masterpiece, however, which had taken decades to germinate and eight years to write, was *The Waiting Years*. Hardly noticed as it appeared piece by piece in a small journal, *The Waiting Years* was completed and published in book form in 1957. It was immediately acclaimed and received one of Japan's most prestigious awards for literature, the Noma Literary Prize. "A rare jewel among masterpieces of modern literature," wrote the novelist-critic Takami Jun.[5]

As a child, little by little, Enchi had learned the story of her maternal grandparents from adult whispers and comments. She was fourteen when her grandmother, Murakami Kin, died; the family's recollections of her grandmother's suffering voiced on that occasion made an indelible impression upon her. Her grandfather, Murakami Tatetomo, died ten years later, but it took her years to gain the objectivity and the perspective of age that she would need to create a masterwork of fiction from their lives.

Whatever occurred in her grandparents' household will never be known, but Enchi's fictional transformation of her grandmother's painful life goes far beyond a narrative of one woman's existential dilemma. *The Waiting Years* is a brilliant recreation of a Meiji period household between the 1880s and 1920s. It is a portrait of marriage and of all the devastating effects that this institution had on the women of that age.

The character Shirakawa Yukitomo is a wealthy bureaucrat in a prefectural office—arrogant, sexually self-indulgent—who lives "like a feudal lord in the prefecture where he worked." He gives money to his wife, Tomo, and sends her to Tokyo to select for him

a mistress—one whom, he wants to be sure, Tomo will find appropriate as a maid in their household and of whom she will approve. Having a mistress was an institution that had just been outlawed in 1882. The person Tomo consults privately in Tokyo tries nonetheless to be sensitive to the young wife's agonizing task, and comments kindly: "I suppose that when a man reaches his position—that kind of thing becomes a necessity, doesn't it?" Tomo, her smile "elusive as the smile on a Noh mask" replies, "It does seem so. People come to expect it, you see."[6] Young Tomo, in love with her husband and dedicated to serving him, begins her long climb up the woman's slope.

It is not long before a second mistress is required, and as the years pass Yukitomo turns even to his daughter-in-law. She is flirtatious and seductive and, repelled by her own boorish husband, enjoys her father-in-law's bed. During this time Tomo changes from a young wife eager to please to, first, a horrified sacrificial victim to his ego and will and, finally, to a perpetrator herself, of the crime of oppression. Tomo's pity is burned away by jealousy and humiliation, and she takes on a fearsome authority over all these women, including her own daughter.

She has no code of life conduct to guide her but the same Neo-Confucian one under which both she and her husband have been raised. This code required a woman to submit completely to the men in her family—and a wife, the complete submission of her "self" to her master's. Tomo spends her life proudly, and to her mind, successfully suppressing her natural wishes and passions. The idea of protest or rebellion never enters her mind.

Only on her deathbed does the seal of endurance rupture and her perceptions transcend the confines of family, society, and time. What has lain in her dormant all these years she utters aloud, half delirious. Her husband has treated her as non-human, as worse than refuse. How dare he now bury her with the ceremony and honor that implies she was a valued human being. In her dying words to her niece she discharges her one and only verbal volley against him:

> . . . tell him that when I die I want no funeral. Tell him that all he needs to do is take my body out to sea at Shinagawa and dump it in the water. . . . Tell him to dump my body in the sea. Dump it . . .

The message has a powerful effect upon Yukitomo:

> . . . his expression went blank . . . fear stirred as though he had seen a ghost. . . . His body had suffered the full force of the

> emotions that his wife had struggled to repress for forty years past. The shock was enough to split his arrogant ego in two.[7]

The power of this work lies less in the tale than in the mature mastery of language and of human psychology Enchi demonstrates in her depiction of character. She has the ability to see her own culture as if free of the shackles that immobilize her characters. As in drama, everything is vested here in human relations; each of Yukitomo's women is clearly differentiated with distinct personalities, motivations, and pain. The subtle interaction among them is one of the notable achievements of this novel.

Like Euripides, Enchi is sometimes considered so severe in her depiction of even the female victims who are her heroines that she is accused of being a misogynist, yet this is clearly not the case. Moses Hadas's defense of Euripides may be applied fruitfully to Enchi as well:

> The alleged misogyny, as anyone who reads the plays can see, is the reverse of the truth. . . . His sympathy [is] for all victims of society, including womenkind. . . . The main object . . . is to criticize the antiquated conventions of a constrictive social order which hamper and oppress contemporary life.[8]

In Enchi's novel *Masks*, Dr. Mikamé speaks a line that no misogynist could write. He says, "Even the sadistic misogyny of Buddha and Christ was nothing but an attempt to gain the better of a vastly superior opponent."[9]

Misogyny aside, Enchi has on the other hand also been accused of misanthropy or specifically of a contempt for men. Certainly in her most representative works the husbands she depicts are a sorry lot, and in most cases are abominable. Yet her stance is not anti-male. Love between men and women is of the greatest importance and is of the highest good.

Ibsen's women lived during the very same years depicted in *The Waiting Years*. Had he been alive (he died the year after Enchi was born) to read her works as she so avidly read his, he would have appreciated that their subjects were the same: "a married woman, trapped" in roles that are both devoid of meaning and demeaning. Both authors explore the nature of wife and mother, husband, and marriage, and the impact of social custom on these fundamental elements of human life. Ibsen would have profoundly agreed with the underlying premise of *The Waiting Years*. As he said in his notebooks:

> A woman cannot be herself in contemporary society; it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men. . . . These

> women of the modern age, mistreated as daughters, as mothers, as wives, not educated in accordance with their talents, debarred from following their real mission, deprived of their inheritance, embittered of mind . . . what will result from this?[10]

The partial victory and yet ultimate defeat of Helene Alving in Ibsen's *Ghosts* is not unlike that of Tomo in *The Waiting Years*. Both women wasted their lives protecting their debauched husbands; both had in the end a small vindication but a large defeat. Both are shackled by outmoded and unjust laws and mores. As we see in *Ghosts*:

> PASTOR MANDERS: Nobody can be held responsible for the way things turn out. But nevertheless one thing is clear: your marriage was arranged in strict accord with law and order.
>
> MRS. ALVING: Oh, all this law and order! I often think **that's** the cause of all the trouble in the world . . . I should never have kept it a secret, the kind of life Alving led. But at the time I didn't dare do anything else . . . what a coward I was!
>
> PASTOR MANDERS: Do you call it cowardice, to do what is quite plainly your duty?
>
> MRS. ALVING: The reason I'm so timid and afraid is that I can never get properly rid of the ghosts that haunt me. . . old defunct theories, all sorts of old defunct beliefs . . . . They are simply lodged there, and we cannot get rid of them.[11]

What is cowardice in a woman? This is an existential question. Enchi knew from personal experience the severe ramifications of cowardice. She also knew that its dimensions were different for a woman than for a man. Helene Alving accuses herself of cowardice, but after partially escaping, she sinks back into a sublimated life. Helene, however, is unusual among Ibsen's heroines. Tomo cannot find the answer to what cowardice is. Or rather, she proudly chooses a path she believes takes the greatest courage and strength, only to sense in the end, her energies spent, that it has been a useless choice.

By and large the heroines that attracted Euripides, Ibsen, Tolstoy, and other male writers were women who displayed the daring strength that united their emotions with definitive, often spectacular, action: Electra, Medea, Nora, Hedda, Anna. Brilliant though such writers' insights into the female psyche may seem, for Enchi, such women were more the products of men's romantic, ill-informed fantasies, than real.

An exchange such as Nora and her husband's in *A Doll's House* would have been unthinkable in Tomo's day, and undoubtedly still is beyond the approbation of most in Japan today:

> HELMER: Don't you care what people will say?
>
> NORA: That's no concern of mine. All I know is that this is necessary for **me** . . .
>
> HELMER: Isn't it your duty to your husband and children?
>
> NORA: My duty [is] to myself.
>
> HELMER: First and foremost, you are a wife and mother.
>
> NORA: I believe that first and foremost I am an individual.[12]

A Japanese woman who walked out would step not into the fresh air and onto a path to freedom, but off the edge of the human world into an empty abyss.[13]

Enchi's characters are instead women of endless, prideful endurance who would not take socially suicidal action no matter how unpardonably provoked. They are everyone's wife or sister or neighbor to whom overt rebellion seems not so much impossible as foolish. Had they merely resigned themselves to their "proper" roles, however, they would have seemed admirable to men and become merely secondary characters. Far from resignation, for Enchi's women it is a steel-like resolution to endure, and to endure at the center of things, that is the foundation of their lives. With careful design they never marginalize themselves by fighting back or fleeing. But neither do they ever absolve the men responsible for their oppression and pain. Behind elusive smiles like Tomo's, "enigmatic as a Noh mask," implacable rancor brews. Beneath the sheen of beautiful grooming, behind the light laughter, the flattering gestures, deep wells of pain, terror, and festering malice brew toxins that cause their psyches to split and take on a secret inner life.

Such Enchi heroines terrified male readers who were unaccustomed to encountering Japanese women who burned with secret and implacable hatred of male conduct. The outraged cries, noisy harangues, and definitive counter-action of women in Western literature were fascinating and made for enjoyable reading; they were after all a far distant species of humankind. Here was Enchi, however, steeped in the language and mores of Japan's own great

classical literature, herself, through and through, a "lady," with never a rebellious act or word, describing in elegant, rich prose, well-mannered, desirable, quiet Japanese women who silently nurtured their wrath against their oppressors and wordlessly plotted vengeance. It was chilling.[14]

MASKS

Representative of this type of Enchi heroine is Mieko, the central character in her 1958 novel *Onna-men* (literally Woman-masks; translated in 1983 as *Masks*). Whereas *The Waiting Years* is historical fiction, *Masks* is an extremely complex multi-layered novel about contemporary women. As if in double or triple exposure, they seem to reverberate with motivations, perceptions, and witch-like powers created out of some collective unconscious—characteristics which they share with the women in Lady Murasaki's eleventh-century *Tale of Genji*, particularly the character Rokujō.

In *Masks*, Mieko, the quiet, yet charismatic, middle-aged poetess of the *Shinkokinshū* school, "secretive as a garden of flowers at night,"[15] is a woman who "has a peculiar power to move events in whatever direction she pleases, while she stays motionless. She's like a quiet mountain lake whose waters are rushing beneath the surface toward a waterfall. She's like the face on a Noh mask, wrapped in her own secrets."[16]

Mishima Yukio, in his review of this brilliant novel, wrote:

> *Woman-Masks* is unique among all postwar novels; Mrs. Enchi's flawless blend of classical erudition and aesthetic consciousness create a fragrant, heady wine of superb quality. . . . To the theme of woman's deep resentment she adds a new terror that transcends time.[17]

Masks is divided into three parts, each named for a category of female mask used in the performance of Noh plays. Japan's oldest surviving form of choreographed and intoned drama, Noh had its roots in verbal, instrumental and choreographed rites involving the placation of demonic forces—often the restless vengeful spirits of those who had died full of rage or grief. Performed exclusively by male actors, Noh reached its perfection in the fifteenth century under the great playwright-actor, Zeami, many of whose plays have female characters in central roles.

In *Masks* we see one of the several archetypical Enchi heroines

that male critics found most chilling. Nineteen-year-old Mieko marries Toganō Masatsugu, only to discover that in his powerful, wealthy, provincial family, the old tradition of supplying male family members with housemaid-mistresses has been preserved, and that Masatsugu's mistress, Agui, is already ensconced in the bride's new home. Her idealistic hopes for her marriage dashed, Mieko nonetheless grows to feel pity for Agui, who she learns has already been forced by Masatsugu to abort two of his (and of course her) children. Her pity turns to hatred, however, when Agui's own jealousy leads her to cause Mieko to miscarry her first child. Silently Mieko plots revenge upon her husband and the family that made him what he was. She secretly takes a lover and bears twins believed by the Toganōs to carry their own blood. The girl, Harumé, is brain-damaged at birth and, mentally retarded, is sent away. The boy, Akio, in adulthood marries Yasuko but dies in a mountain climbing accident before producing an heir.

The novel begins at this point with Mieko and Yasuko, like two beautiful witches, both widows, inseparable companions, manipulating those around them to their own ends. Mieko, a silent force behind Yasuko, proceeds to use Yasuko (half-willing, half-afraid) to commit "a crime that only women can commit"[18]—to eradicate the Toganō family without their knowledge by breeding through Harumé a descendant free of their blood.

There is ample room for comparison between *Masks* and Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, both of which involve a woman's manipulation of others, and death. From *The Master Builder*:

> SOLNESS: Don't you believe too, Hilde, that you find certain people have been singled out, specially chosen, gifted with the power and the ability to **want** something, to **desire** something, to **will** something—so insistently—and so ruthlessly—that they inevitably get it in the end?
>
> HILDE (with an inscrutable expression in her eyes): If that is so, we'll see someday—if I am one of the chosen.
>
> SOLNESS: One doesn't achieve such great things alone. Oh, no. One has to have—helpers and servants—if anything's to come of it . . . One has to summon them, imperiously, inwardly, you understand.[19]

Mieko, as we learn through her essay on the *Tale of Genji* incorporated within the novel, is deeply influenced by the character Lady Rokujō from that tale (as undoubtedly Enchi herself

was). Rokujō, the woman whose jealousy was so great it walked the earth apart from her body and without her knowledge to wreak vengeance on other women, is seen by Mieko (and Enchi, as she later wrote in essays) not so much the victimizer, as the victim of Genji's ego and society's moral code. In the case of both Rokujō and Mieko, a demonic force to control others bursts forth from one whose existence had been at the pleasure of others, who had been deprived of all means of such control over others.

Ibsen understood this demonic archetype too. In his notes about *Hedda Gabler* he says: "The demonic thing about Hedda is that she wants to exert an influence over another person."[20] Hedda herself says, "I want to feel that once in my life I control a human destiny."[21] The point should not be lost that men's influence over women, overt and authoritarian, was considered normal, but the reverse (women's covert manipulation of men), from a male perspective, was seen so abnormal as to be demonic.

Enchi, like Jung, saw the spiritual realm as possessing a psychological reality that cannot be explained away. "We are so accustomed to the apparent rational nature of our world," wrote Jung, "that we can scarcely imagine anything that cannot be explained by common sense."[22] Enchi's use of this dimension goes far beyond the spirits and ghosts in Bakin, Akinari, or the Kabuki theater that influenced her. Nor was hers a Freudian world of suppressed subconscious desires.

Can two people actually be one dual personality? She explores this hypothesis in the relationships of Mieko and Yasuko and of the twins Harumé and Akio, as well as in other works. On the other hand, can one person really be two? For Jung this was not only possible, it was by no means pathological: the split occurs "spontaneously, without one's knowledge or consent and even against one's intention."[23] In *Masks* Yasuko confesses to this experience, of which Lady Rokujō in *Genji* is of course the prototype in Japanese literature.

There is as well considerable discussion in *Masks* about spirit possession and shamanism, which provides a rich source of comparison with shamanism as described in such Western classic studies as that of Mircea Eliade. Several of the characters in *Masks* are engaged in research on the subject. Professor Ibuki, who lusts after Yasuko, expresses views on shamanism that are merely stereotypical—no doubt set out by Enchi so as to give the reader an opportunity to see his naiveté and look deeper. He sees shamanistic activity as the average modern male might, as sexually fueled; the line between shamanistic practice and prostitution

is blurred.[24] "The state of inspiration itself is intensely physical, heightening a person's sexuality to the furthest degree (unlike intellectual labor which diminishes sexuality), so that the body of a medium in a trance comes to seem the very incarnation of sex."[25]

A true shaman however is merely a medium for the spirit that possesses her. Yasuko may act as medium but it is Mieko's spirit that mobilizes her, and the ultimate sexual act is relegated by their combined wills to their instruments, Harumé and Ibuki. The novel is an exploration of the ability of one's psyche to appropriate the will of another and affect the course of his or her actions. It is simplistic to interpret Enchi's works such as *Masks*, "Enchantress," "Bond for Two Lifetimes—Gleanings," and others as "shamanistic works," as some do. Her interest is less in the shaman or *miko* than in the demonic force of the human psyche or spirit in its attempt to control its own and other's lives.

CONCLUSION

Enchi Fumiko's interest in the Japanese classics was life-long, and she devoted years to translating many of them into modern Japanese. In 1967, despite illness and failing eyesight, she embarked on the modern translation of the *Tale of Genji*. It was published in ten volumes in 1972–73 and remains the most easily understood and enjoyed of several modern translations in Japan today. She is also the author of extensive essays devoted to character analyses of the women created by Lady Murasaki in *Genji*.

In a book introducing young people to the works of the great seventeenth-century playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Enchi translates into modern Japanese two of his plays that deal with the love suicide of a timid young husband and wife who are unable to endure the pressures exerted on them by their parents and society and who lack the ability or "courage" to flee and lead thereby a life of certain ostracism. In her introduction she writes:

> It is only the poet who can scale the wall of time and see such a state of human oppression as unnatural. Chikamatsu was one such genius. In his works about men and women whose freedom has been stolen from them and who are hounded to death, he offers not one word of refutation against that social order, but even these some hundreds of years later he succeeds in inspiring in the modern reader a deep empathy for these victims, these men and women mired in their unhappy fates. I believe that is what literature, indeed, what the classics are all about.[26]

Enchi's words about Chikamatsu may unequivocally be applied to the masterpieces of Enchi Fumiko herself. They contain no debates, no harangues, no pamphleteering. Only the brilliantly beautiful, terrifying depiction of social custom that crushes women and the chilling truth about what that does to humankind.

The great bulk of Enchi literature remains untranslated—most of her prize-winning fiction, notably her great trilogy *Ake o ubau mono* (The Thing Which Purloins Red), which draws heavily on her own life, and which won the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize for Literature in 1969; *Yūkon* (Frolicking Spirits), a collection of three novellas that received the Grand Literary Prize of Japan in 1972; and *Shokutaku no nai ie* (The Family with No Dining Table; 1979), a stunning fiction based on the highly publicized arrest for murder of a radical, militant student and the response of his father, a high-ranking employee of one of Japan's foremost corporations who refuses, despite custom, to take any responsibility for his son's actions. None of her plays has yet been translated.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. A familiarity with Lady Murasaki's masterpiece *Tale of Genji* and with the great tradition of Noh drama will enrich the reader's appreciation of Enchi's novel *Masks*, which resonates both substantively and visually with allusions, associations, and images from both *Genji* and the Noh repertory and staging. Under no circumstances, however, does a lack of such knowledge render her works inaccessible to the Western reader. It is no more necessary for the reader of Enchi to have seen a Noh play than for the reader of *Medea* to have seen Greek drama performed. It is of great interest, nonetheless, and adds to one's appreciation if, in conjunction with the novel, one looks at a book of photographs[27] of Noh masks with special attention to the masks after which Enchi has named her three chapters: *Ryō no onna*,[28] the face of the vengeful spirit of an older woman, her energies turned inward, associated with Mieko at the beginning of the novel; *Masugami*,[29] a young woman, blank of mind but frenzied in passion, the face associated with the beautiful, retarded Harumé in bed with Ibuki; and *Fukai*[30] or "Deep Well," the face of an older woman who knows the bitter taste of revenge and loss—Mieko at the close of the book. Other masks such as *Magojirō*,[31] a young woman at her peak of feminine beauty, and *Zō no onna*,[32] cold, cruel, and disdainful, also play key roles in the novel.

2. Interesting discussions arise from comparing Mieko to Lady Rokujō's vengeful spirit that punishes Genji by possessing and destroying his wife Aoi and one of his lovers, Yugao. Lady Rokujō became an archetype in the Japanese literary tradition, which is explored in the Noh play *Aoi no Ue* (Lady Aoi)[33] and in Yukio Mishima's modern theater adaptation, "The Lady Aoi."[34] The *Tale of Genji* is discussed elsewhere in this volume.[35]

3. Dreams play an important role in *Masks*. In an entirely personal, Jungian fashion Yasuko interprets her own dreams, and through this process attempts to individuate herself from her late husband Akio and his mother Mieko. There is no glossary of symbolic meanings to be decoded; rather, Yasuko's symbols have meaning only to herself and are her key to the restoration of balance in her own life.

4. One of the most difficult yet important aspects to a discussion of Enchi literature will lie in her relation to feminism. Her themes and her characters seem the obvious subject for such an examination. Enchi, however, had little or no interest in feminist theory. She was concerned that women writers be encouraged to write, that women be restored to the pages of Japanese history, and that there be amelioration, or at least greater awareness, of the wrongs which society, and in particular the family (its central symbol) perpetrate in discriminating between the rights and privileges of women and men. But she was not a feminist in any current Western sense of that word.

As we can see from the quote that opens this essay, her women define themselves always in obsessional preoccupation with the men who cause them pain. Questions may be raised as to whether Enchi's women conduct their lives as strategies for dealing with the sins of men or whether she saw in some women an autonomous agenda. Perhaps "Boxcar of Chrysanthemums" most clearly provides food for thought in this regard.

NOTES

1. Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*, trans. Juliet Winters Carpenter (New York: Adventura, Vintage Books, 1983), p. 57.

2. Takenishi Hiroko, "Enchi Fumiko," *Buritanika kokusai nenkan* 1986 (1987): 93.

3. The writer is called by her given name, Fumi, in the sections of the paper discussing her childhood, then by her married name, Enchi, which was the name she used as a novelist.

4. Enchi Fumiko, "Enchantress," trans. John Bester, in *Modern Japanese Short Stories*, ed. Edward G. Seidensticker, John Bester, and Ivan

Morris (Tokyo: Japan Publications Trading Co., Ltd., 1961), p. 92.

5. Kamei Hideo and Ogasawara Yoshiko, *Enchi Fumiko no sekai* (Tokyo: Sōrinsha, 1981), p. 39.

6. Enchi Fumiko, *The Waiting Years*, trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1971), pp. 13–14.

7. Ibid., pp. 202–03.

8. Euripides, *Ten Plays by Euripides*, trans. Moses Hadas and John McLean (New York: Bantam Classics paperback, 1981), p. viii.

9. Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*, p. 133.

10. Henrik Ibsen, *Four Major Plays*, trans. James McFarlane and Jens Arup (New York: Oxford University Press, The World's Classics paperback, 1981), pp. viii-ix.

11. Ibid., pp. 123–26.

12. Ibid., p. 82.

13. In 1912 the leading women's literary magazine *Seitō* (*Bluestocking*) had published an open letter written by Hiratsuka Raichō, the magazine's founder, and addressed directly to Ibsen's Nora. The letter expressed admiration for the power of Nora's intuitive act of leaving but focussed on concern for Nora's low level of self-awareness. It expressed doubt that her act could lead to any real kind of freedom or independence. In general the staff of the magazine viewed Nora with disdain as unreal and ignorant of reality. Cf. Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), p. 170 ff.

14. Virtually all male critics in Japan responded with admiration for her literary powers while using adjectives that revealed their sense of discomfort over the women characters she depicts. For examples see note 5, p. 50 passim.

15. Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*, p. 92.

16. Ibid., p. 30.

17. Kamei Hideo and Ogasawara Yoshiko, op. cit., p. 61.

18. Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*, p. 126.

19. Henrik Ibsen, op cit., p. 321.

20. Ibid., p. xi.

21. Ibid., p. 226.

22. Carl G. Jung et al., *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964 [Aldus Books]), p. 31.

23. Ibid., p. 8.

24. Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*, p. 78.

25. Ibid., p. 77.

26. Enchi Fumiko, *Enchi Fumiko ga kataru—"Chikamatsu monogatari"* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, *Kataribe-zōshi* books, vol. 8 [originally published in 1980 under the title *Kokusenya gassen—Chikamatsu monogatari*]).

27. One such book is Toru Nakanishi, *Noh Masks*, trans. Don Kenny (Tokyo: Hoikusha, 1983). For a short history of the Noh theater, with photographs, see Donald Keene, *Nō, The Classical Theatre of Japan* (Palo Alto and Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1973).

28. Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*, p. 25.

29. Ibid., p. 61.

30. Ibid., p. 141.

31. Ibid., p. 22.

32. Ibid., p. 23, 40.

33. *Japanese Noh Drama*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, 1959). This volume also contains a photograph of a Fukai mask.

34. Donald Keene, trans., *Five Modern Nō Plays by Yukio Mishima* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957).

35. For quick and useful access to the *Tale of Genji* plus a summary of each chapter see William J. Puette, *Guide to the Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1983) and Richard Bowring, *Murasaki Shikibu, The Tale of Genji*, in *Landmarks of World Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). The chapter about Yugao's death can be found translated in Donald Keene, *Anthology of Japanese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1955).

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Enchi Fumiko. "A Bond for Two Lifetimes—Gleanings" ("Nisei no en shui," 1957). Translated by Phyllis Birnbaum, in *Rabbits, Crabs, Etc.: Stories by Japanese Women*, pp. 25–47. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982. (See also the next item for another translation of the same work. The Birnbaum translation is recommended, but both translations are usable.)

Enchi Fumiko. "Boxcar of Chrysanthemums" ("Kikuguruma," 1967). Translated by Yukiko Tanaka and Elizabeth Hanson, in *This Kind of Woman: Ten Stories by Japanese Women Writers, 1960–1976*, edited by Yukiko Tanaka and Elizabeth Hanson, pp. 69–86. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982.

Enchi Fumiko. "Enchantress" ("Yo," 1956). Translated by John Bester, in *Modern Japanese Short Stories*, edited by Edward G. Seidensticker, John Bester, and Ivan Morris, pp. 90–117. Tokyo: Japan Publications Trading Co., Ltd., 1961.

Enchi Fumiko. "Love in Two Lives: The Remnant" ("Nisei no en shui, 1957). Translated by Noriko Mizuta Lippit and Kyoko Iriye Selden, in *Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction*, pp. 97–111. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991.

NOTE: As of this writing no critical work on Enchi Fumiko's writing has yet appeared in English.

THE WOMAN IN THE DUNES

John Whittier Treat

Abe Kōbō's 1962 novel *Suna no onna*—the story of a vacationing schoolteacher kept captive in a sand pit—created a literary sensation in Japan, earning its author not just that year's Yomiuri Prize but a secure place among the half-dozen most critically noted novelists to appear there since 1945. Ōe Kenzaburō, the Japanese writer with whom he is most often paired, has lauded Abe as "the most important postwar writer." Mishima Yukio, who never allowed his politics to interfere with his recognition of talent, praised Abe just as highly. Abe attracted attention outside of Japan with the 1964 translation of this novel, *The Woman in the Dunes*, and he briefly enjoyed near-celebrity status when the film version was awarded the Special Jury Prize at Cannes that same year. *The Woman in the Dunes*, like the six other of his novels subsequently translated, was reviewed widely, especially in the American press. Abe was enthusiastically welcomed as a Japanese novelist recognizably avant-garde and thus, perhaps somewhat oddly, readily fathomable. Abe was interested in such issues as freedom and existence, appropriating an idiom that seemed no more peculiarly Japanese than that of Poe, Kafka, or Beckett; and New York critics were pleased to discover a Japanese writer whose work demanded no extravagant exegesis, no Oriental hermeneutics. Niki Jumpei, that hapless thirty-one-year-old high-school teacher who disappears into the sand pit of an unnamed village, is familiar enough to readers acquainted with the biographies of Gregor Samsa or Nagg and Nell to dispense with the need for explanatory, intercultural footnoting. *The Woman in the Dunes* was fashioned plainly enough in the discourses of our modern crises that reading it could be a pleasant pastime rather than grueling schoolwork.

Indeed, one of the more attractive features of the book is the

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Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following for permission to reprint previously published material, which has been adapted for the present volume:

Columbia University Press for "An Account of My Hut" by Paul Anderer, "Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā*" and *"The Mahābhārata"* by Barbara Stoler Miller, and "The Poetry of Matsuo Bashō" and *"The Tale of Genji"* by Haruo Shirane, from *Approaches to the Asian Classics*, Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., copyright © 1987 by Columbia University Press.

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Stanford University Press, *Kokin Waka Shū: The First Imperial Anthology of Japanese Poetry*, translated by Helen Craig McCullough, copyright © 1985 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Masterworks of Asian literature in comparative perspective : A guide for teaching / edited by Barbara Stoler Miller.
p. cm. — (Columbia project on Asia in the core curriculum)
Includes index.
"An East Gate book."
ISBN 1-56324-257-5 (C).—ISBN 1-56324-258-3 (P)
1. Oriental literature—Translations into English. 2. Literature, Comparative.
3. Chinese literature—History and criticism.
4. Japanese literature—History and criticism.
5. Indic literature–History and criticism. 6. Asia in literature.
I. Miller, Barbara Stoler. II. Series
PJ409.M38 1993
809'.8895—dc20
93-24473
CIP

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z 39.48-1984.

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BM (c) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

BM (p) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1