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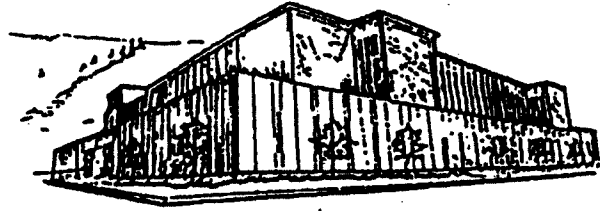
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**THREE STEPS AHEAD: REDEFINING ROLES FOR WOMEN
IN JAPANESE FICTION**

by

Tracy T. Koncilja

B.A., Pennsylvania State University, 1988

B.S., Pennsylvania State University, 1988

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

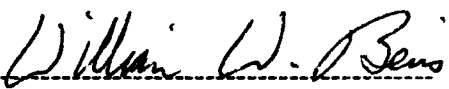
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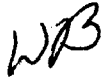
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Director: William Bevis



This thesis examines the recent progression from idealized roles which defined the social and individual situation of women in Japanese fiction, toward an assertive female literary voice which demands the right of self-definition. The novels by Fumiko Enchi, The Waiting Years, and Masks portray antithetical archetypes and then present their limitations as representations of real women. Contemporary fiction shows modern women writing against these roles to redefine themselves and their place in society.

In The Waiting Years, written in 1957, Enchi presents the model of nineteenth century feminine virtue, while in Masks, written in 1958, she portrays the vengeful manipulative side of women. A quote from Masks sums up this antithesis: "Just as there is an archetype of woman as the object of man's eternal love, so there is the archetype of women as the object of his eternal fear."

Contemporary short fiction moves beyond archetypal representations and resistance toward self-definition. These female writers resist the oppression of defined roles in the home, the workplace, and the society. Sexual conduct is presented as an expression of values, world views, and self-images. Women are seen rejecting traditional maternal roles and refusing to sacrifice womanhood to motherhood. Freeing oneself of traditional social and psychological constraints can create a crisis of identity, but whatever the cost, these modern writers are attempting to deconstruct the male-centered culture to redefine female sexual and societal roles.

The roles women are claiming for themselves are also accompanied by new fictive techniques. Enchi's works are presented within a straight historical narrative, but contemporary authors make use of dreams, fantasies and the subconscious mind. Some of the other techniques apparent in modern fiction include surreal settings, sexually explicit language, and international characters, settings, and phrases. The themes and narrative techniques found in later works, when compared to Enchi's earlier novels, reflect the new roles and options available to women in Japanese society, and the changes in women's perceptions of themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Women writers in modern Japan must look to the past in order to rewrite their present. Many contemporary Japanese authors are writing against traditional scripted roles and redefining their place in society, but to understand contemporary fiction, one must explore the link between women's literary tradition and women's contemporary writing.

Fumiko Enchi (1905-1986) is widely regarded as one of Japan's most important women writers, and Van C. Gessel, a professor in the department of Oriental Language at Berkeley, credits her with the "revival of the feminine voice in fiction." Her writing provides an important link between literature of the past and literature of the present, and she weaves a literary thread through history by incorporating elements from classical Japanese literature like the masks of the traditional Noh drama and allusions to Murasaki's eleventh century masterpiece The Tale of Genji. She has published plays, essays and literary criticism, but she is most acclaimed as a novelist and short story writer. She is recognized for her subtle symbolism and her understanding of the female psyche and of female sexuality, and her novel The Waiting Years (1957) won Japan's highest literary prize, the Noma. This novel was based on true stories told to the author by her maternal grandmother, and one sees Enchi's concern with the historical pattern of male oppression. In an essay, she wrote:

Perhaps my words are haunted by the bitterness and resentment of Japanese women oppressed by men long ago, from the era of The Waiting Years and before . . . I cannot escape the feeling even now that

this novel is not mine alone but was produced jointly with numbers of women who lived in the past, women having no connection to literature . . . It is the secrets of Meiji women, passed on in a thin stream of hushed voices for dozens of years in novel form . . . The spirits of women of long ago seemed to urge me on as I wrote, taking hold of the brush. (Carpenter 352-3)

Further motivation for this work lies in Enchi's own unhappy marriage. She published her first play in 1926, and in 1930 she married the journalist and political commentator Yoshimatsu Enchi, with the express condition that she be able to continue her writing. In theory he was supportive of her career, but that support did not carry over into practice. Enchi writes about her husband: "One might approve of one's wife's work in the abstract, but in fact be put out if she behaved too freely." (Carpenter 348) She goes on to say that she and her husband quarreled often, and admits: "The only reason I never divorced my husband was that I lacked the courage to make the leap and live on my own." (Carpenter 348) As a result of her own experience, in part, loveless marriages in which the husband and wife are barely on speaking terms became a common theme in her writing.

Enchi's first novel translated into English, The Waiting Years, examines the restrictive patriarchal social organization of Japan and one woman's moral resistance to the oppressive social codes of the late nineteenth century. The Waiting Years presents the archetype of the good wife and wise mother embodied in the Japanese term "ryosai-kenbo." The female protagonist was raised to "yield to her husband's wishes in every respect," and following that code she endures her husband's transgressions with stoicism and passivity. Her only outer resistance to his oppression occurs within the confines of the feudal code with which she had been raised, and it

this brilliant maneuver which brings her vindication, and final victory over her husband. Amy Heinrich, a professor at Columbia University, notes that "the modern concern with defining the female experience is in large part a response to imposed roles, standards, or even idealizations." (411) Both of Enchi's novels examined in this thesis concern women confined by imposed roles and archetypes, and they examine the complexities of the female psyche and its response to male oppression.

Van Gessel writes in the article "Echoes of Feminine Sensibility in Literature," that "one of Enchi's greatest virtues is her ability to portray women who are trapped within the social structures created by men but who are able to dig down within themselves and find resources of great vitality, strength, passion, revenge--a flowing river of potential that has resisted and overcome whatever restrictions may have been placed upon them in the external world." (412) For the most part Enchi's protagonists display an outer passivity which corresponds to society's strictures, but which belies their inner strength. This dichotomy between the inner being and the outer appearance is the primary theme of Enchi's next novel, Masks (1958).

When Masks was translated into English in 1983, it received stunning reviews. Jonathan Burnham of the Times Literary Supplement refers to it as a "a tour de force which fuses intellectual rigor with weird sensuality in a wholly confident and seductive manner." John Lowell calls it a "virtuoso performance," and Publishers Weekly noted that "Fumiko Enchi writes of betrayal and sensuality, of the psychology of women, with astonishing insight and great beauty."

Masks presents the antithesis of the image of the good wife and wise mother

found in The Waiting Years, and revolves around the archetype of the witch who is the embodiment of woman as the object of man's eternal fear. The novel is about a woman's oppression and retribution, and the consequences of silence. Enchi asserts that if a patriarchal society does not allow women to speak or act openly against their oppression, their anger and resentment will be channeled into another subversive response. In this novel the protagonist resorts to spirit possession to exert her will. By casting her into the role of a shamaness, Enchi critiques the archetypal representation of the witch, and illustrates its limitations in defining real women. The protagonist is enigmatic and manipulative, but as this is a tale of retribution, her role as a victim of a patriarchal crime casts her ultimately in a sympathetic light.

Enchi united the literary past and present, and represented women whose lives were defined by external roles. The female response to imposed roles in her novels was necessarily subversive because moral and social codes denied women access to any direct power. Contemporary female authors are still writing against imposed roles, but women of the postwar generation are no longer confined by limited education and economic dependence, and they are free to claim new roles and a direct voice in society and in fiction.

To understand contemporary Japanese fiction it is important to examine it in light of what has come before. The Enchi works show traditional and archetypal roles which were assigned to women, and contemporary fiction shows how modern women are writing against these roles to redefine themselves and their place in society. The final chapter of this thesis examines women's changing roles in society, and the

manner in which contemporary female authors are documenting and creating these new identities. Women of this generation were raised with a new moral code emphasizing the individual, and their fiction claims the right of self-definition and self-representation.

The final chapter focuses on short fiction in which female authors examine the changing roles of women. In the contemporary fiction discussed in this section, one sees women rejecting the confines of traditional roles in the home, the workplace and the society, and inventing roles and lifestyles to accommodate their individual needs and desires. Women no longer need to marry to be economically stable, and the working woman has become a common literary figure. The freedom women have gained has far-reaching repercussions in relations between the sexes, and it is clear that economic independence has granted women an independent voice.

One also sees contemporary fiction reflecting the current social context when dealing with issues of divorce and single parenthood. The breakdown of the traditional family, however, produces both independence and isolation, and many authors, particularly Yuko Tsushima, explore this tension in contemporary fiction. One also sees women rejecting idealized maternal roles and writing against the coercive glorification of motherhood. Women are affirming the importance of the individual, and questioning the very validity of the maternal archetype. In addition, sexual conduct is closely examined and female authors are attempting to free it from its traditional psychological constraints to portray it as an expression of a woman's values and self-image. In all the short works examined in the final chapter of this

thesis, contemporary female authors deconstruct the male-centered culture to redefine female sexual and societal roles.

The short stories examined in the final section of this thesis are contained in three different collections: Unmapped Territories (1991), Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction (1991), and The Mother of Dreams and Other Short Stories: Portrayals of Women in Modern Japanese Fiction (1986). Other collections in English translation which provide insight into the modern Japanese woman include The Shooting Gallery (1988), a collection of short stories by Yuko Tsushima, and The Showa Anthology (1985), which spans the years from 1929 to 1984, edited by Van C. Gessel and Tomone Matsumoto.

CHAPTER I

THE ARCHETYPE OF THE GOOD WIFE AND WISE MOTHER: SOCIAL CODES AND MORAL RESISTANCE IN FUMIKO ENCHI'S THE WAITING YEARS

In The Waiting Years, Fumiko Enchi portrays the model of the traditional woman represented by the expression "ryosai-kenbo" which is translated as "the good wife and wise mother." This role is defined by its obligations to family and society with the ideal of self-sacrifice at its very core. It is a role which has been glorified by a patriarchal society because it embodies the archetype of woman as the object of man's eternal love. Enchi resists this idealization in The Waiting Years by presenting a realistic female assessment of this traditional role.

The female protagonist of The Waiting Years, Tomo Shirakawa, accepts the model of the good wife and wise mother as her ideal. She spends her life sacrificing her individual happiness for the sake of her family in accordance with the moral and social codes with which she has been raised. By the end of the novel, after much suffering and humiliation at the hands of these codes, Tomo moves toward a feminist awakening. She questions her unflinching obedience to an ideal which has only served to oppress her. Her experience negates the image of idealized family life, characterized by love, happiness and harmony, which was to be the reward of women's sacrifice. The members of the Shirakawa household are self-centered and self-absorbed, particularly the patriarch, Yukitomo. Tomo's final evaluation of the hierarchical family unit as an oppressive, confining entity presents the role of the

matriarch as closely corresponding to the role of an exploited servant, and hence rewrites the idealized image of the good wife and wise mother.

Tomo's position as a member of the samurai class is important in understanding the ethic which controls her actions throughout the novel. The novel spans the transition from the Tokugawa era (1603-1867) to the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). Enchi writes that Tomo was born into a low-ranking samurai family and married early "in the social turmoil just preceding the Meiji Restoration." (14) Previous to the Meiji Restoration, women of the lower classes, the farming, fishing and merchant classes, enjoyed freedom, equality, and power because they worked under nearly the same conditions as men. (Iwao 5) Young women of the samurai class, however, were raised with an entirely different ethic. Sumiko Iwao, a professor of psychology at Keio University in Tokyo, describes the difference in her book The Japanese Woman Traditional Image and Changing Reality:

The lives of women of the elite (primarily samurai) classes were defined throughout many centuries by the Confucian ethic (in which women's lives were bound by the "three obediences": obedience to fathers when young, to husbands when married, and to their [male] children in old age) and were subject to many other constraints. In the Meiji era (1868-1912), marking the beginning of Japan's modernization, however, the samurai class culture of premodern times penetrated throughout the entire society as rigid class distinctions were officially abolished. As a consequence, women as a whole lost the power and equality they had enjoyed. . . .

With modernization, the integration and centralization of Japanese society progressed, and the male-dominated, vertical structured society became firmly established, leaving women out of the mainstream

(5)

Even though most scholars agree that women's rights had reached a nadir in the Tokugawa period, Iwao contends that the collapse of the feudalistic structure in the Meiji era increased the overall oppression of women, and increased the power of a hierarchical patriarchy which was reproduced in microcosm in the family structure.

The Meiji Restoration brought an end to the shogunate, and granted a constitution to the people. Joy Paulson in her essay "Evolution of the Feminine Ideal," supports Iwao's position, and notes that the Meiji Civil Code did not improve the status of women, but condoned existing customs and provided additional sanctions to the oppressive family system. She points out that many of the rights given to women were voided by the very code which granted them:

Rights given to women in the civil code include[d] the rights to become the head of a household, to inherit, own, and manage property, and to act as guardian to children. These rights were, however, subject to major qualifications. A wife was not a juristic person in the same sense that her husband was; she had to have his consent to transact business. Without it, her contracts were voidable. Though she "owned" the property which was hers before marriage, he had the right to possession and management and could easily convert it by selling it and buying something else in his name. A woman could succeed to headship only if there were no lineal heir. . . . Succession of property and succession to headship were separated under Meiji law. A daughter could succeed to property but her claim to the family headship came after that of all male heirs including a recognized illegitimate son. Thus, though "owning" the property, she was subject to the family head, whose authority was recognized by Meiji law. (15)

Similar examples of discrimination existed in areas of adultery and divorce. For women, adultery was a civil and criminal offense, while for men it did not even constitute grounds for divorce. In Tokugawa times women had no right to divorce, but even in the Meiji era when women were granted that right on the grounds of

cruelty, desertion or serious misconduct, social disapproval was so strong that women seldom exercised that right. (Paulson 15) In addition, Iwao notes that it was during the Meiji Restoration "that women lost their previous power and producer/worker status," and it follows that as women were deprived of any significant public or economic power, their oppression was more easily institutionalized. (5)

In Meiji Japan, as during the Tokugawa period, the basic unit of society was the family, and a stable family was cultivated as the foundation of a stable society. (Smith 31) It was therefore in the government's best interest to maintain the existing family structure which was essentially a hierarchal oppressive force controlled and exploited by its male members. Robert Smith further notes in his book Japanese Society: Tradition, Self, and The Social Order that during the Meiji period, "the oligarchs took a bold step and as if by sleight of hand converted filial piety from a private duty into a civic virtue." (31) This established a mental connection between the household and the state which exacerbated the oppression of women. Enchi writes in her novel:

Toward the Emperor and the authorities [Tomo] showed the same vaguely submissive attitude as to the feminine ethic that had taught her to yield to her husband's wishes in every respect, however unreasonable they might seem. Born in a country district of Kyushu near the end of the feudal period and barely able to read and write, she had no shield to defend herself other than the existing moral code. (43)

Disobedience to one's husband in some sense became disobedience to the state, thereby rendering any action outside the moral code an impossibility for most women of this time period.

Tomo's feminine ethic is based on the neo-Confucian code adopted during the Tokugawa shogunate to unify the country. This ethical system defines the "virtues of the subject" which center on cultivating relationships among members of society.

(Smith 16) When implemented by all members equally, this system should protect every member of the household, from the strongest to the weakest. Ideally, an individual within a group,

is expected to pursue personal interests only to the extent that the other members of the group agree that such a course does not contravene principles of harmony and effective performance. The individual cannot act out of self-interest that violates the consensus of the group. The usual alternatives are to suppress personal desires, to modify one's preferences in acceptable ways, or to leave the group altogether. Yet the general preference for consensual decisions does leave the system extremely vulnerable to those who seek to impose their will on the majority. The insistent dissenters often get their way simply because others will not employ like tactics to oppose them. (Smith 90)

This ethic of group harmony, combined with the remnants of the feudal code, is exactly what puts the women of the Shirakawa household in such a vulnerable position. Yukitomo Shirakawa does not fulfill his moral obligations of loyalty to the group, and imposes his will on the household no matter how much it may demean the other members:

Within his home, Shirakawa reigned as a despot, like the clan lords of the feudal age just past; neither his wife Tomo nor his concubines Suga and Yumi could have enjoyed a day's peace of mind in this house had they not adapted themselves to his ostentatious, irascible temperament. (83)

Yukitomo brings to his marriage the feudal tradition of female subservience to males, a self-indulgent sexual appetite, and an overwhelming arrogance; traits which are

supported by a civil and social code which clearly asserts the superiority of men and endorses the oppression of women through the family system.

Tomo's responsibility for her fate as the wife of a despot lies in her upbringing and lack of education. She was raised to be the model of nineteenth century feminine virtue and to take as her ideal "the chaste wife who grudged no sacrifice for her husband and family." (52) Enchi's critique of this code lies in Tomo's fate. If Tomo had ended up with a husband who loved her and respected her, this code may have served her well. It does not, however, provide any alternate course of action if one ends up with a husband who is selfish, immoral, and arrogant. Strict adherence to this code remains the sole avenue even if suffering is the sole reward.

Following this code, Tomo suffers greatly throughout the novel as a result of her husband's outrages. The novel opens with her visit to Tokyo to personally select a mistress for her husband. Yukitomo has presented her with this task as a compliment to her abilities and in deference to her position in the household. He tells her: "I don't want to lower the tone of the household by bringing in a geisha or some other woman of that type. I trust you, and I leave everything to you, so use your good sense to find a young . . . inexperienced--girl." (16) Yukitomo is, in a small degree at least, acting in accordance with the Japanese ideal of harmony. Because his wife must live with the concubine (and her eventual successors) in the same house, Yukitomo elicits her cooperation, and doing so, he ensures harmony in the household, at least on the surface. By choosing the girl herself, Tomo becomes responsible for the success of her choice in her husband's eyes, as well as for the fate of the girl herself. If her

choice does not fit in well with the household, Tomo will not only incur her husband's anger, but she must deal with the havoc a strong-willed concubine could wreak.

Caught in this double bind, Tomo "felt almost gratified that her husband had left the choice to her." (21) Tomo plays the role of the good wife and performs this duty with great deference to her husband's tastes. The emotional humiliation she endures during the selection, however, is a powerful critique of this imposed role.

Social reaction to Yukitomo's decision to take a mistress differs, and Enchi speaks through her characters to denounce his behavior. Kin, who helps Tomo search for a concubine, espouses the feudal view of concubinage:

Kin was well acquainted with the manners of the wealthier merchants and samurai of the old feudal era and was not in the least shocked by the idea that a man who had got on in the world should keep a concubine or two. As she saw things, the jealousy of a wife in such a situation would be modified by a natural pride in such a sign of the family's increasing prosperity. (17)

Kin displays an unquestioning acceptance of the social order and illustrates the deep-seated conditioning which encouraged women to condone their own oppression.

Others, however, are scandalized at Yukitomo's behavior. Although the male geisha, Zenko, helps the women find a suitable girl: "Privately he was wondering with disgust just what part of the provinces had produced the kind of man who would have his legal wife search for a concubine for him." (20) Shirakawa's young attendant, Ono, is also shocked: "Being . . . a conventional man himself, the idea of his wife going to Tokyo and using her own judgment in finding a concubine to bring home astonished him." (32-33)

Tomo undertakes the task of finding a suitable mistress in keeping with "a strict rule of conduct that gave first importance in everything to husband and family."

(15) She fulfills his request, in part, because her commitment to the household sublimates her own desires and jealousy. Despite her resentment, she also fulfills this request because she genuinely loves Yukitomo and longs for his understanding:

The pain of having publicly to hand over her husband to another gnawed at her within. To Tomo, a husband who would quite happily cause his wife such suffering was a monster of callousness. Yet since to serve her husband was the creed around which her life revolved, to rebel against his outrages would have been to destroy herself as well; besides, there was the love that was still stronger than that creed. Tormented by the one-sided love that gave and gave with no reward, she had no idea, even so, of leaving him. It was true that Shirakawa's money and property, their daughter Etsuko, and their son Michimasa . . . were bonds that held her, but still stronger was the longing, whatever the sacrifice, to have her husband understand through and through the innermost desires and emotions of her heart. The longing was something that no one other than Shirakawa could fulfill. (28)

Tomo had entered this marriage a naive, young bride who was easily impressed by her worldly, powerful husband, and the novel opens with what appears to be the first of Yukitomo's outrages. In their early years together it seems that Yukitomo carefully cultivated his wife's love: "Tomo remembered the husband who had once so carefully selected hair ornaments, neckbands and the like and sent them home to the young wife whom he had left behind in the country." (42) As his sexual interest in Tomo wanes, however, Yukitomo exploits the love and social code which restricts her to the role of the good wife. He rejects his moral obligations as a husband, and as Tomo waits silently for understanding, he callously pursues his own gratification.

Tomo's compliance with an oppressive social role silences her public voice and forces a split between her interior and exterior lives. On the surface she fulfills her duties flawlessly, but as a person she cannot help but resent Yukitomo's lack of love and appreciation. Also as a woman, she is tormented by his sexual rejection:

The night after she received his reply conveying approval of the photograph of Suga she had sent, Tomo dreamed that she killed her husband and woke in a fright at her own cry. Even after she awoke, the force that had gone into her hands to strangle him was still vividly apparent in her clenched fists (28)

This violent split between her inner desires and outer behavior characterizes her for the rest of the novel. By installing a concubine into their household, Yukitomo publicly announces his rejection of his wife. Tomo's only recourse, in light of this public humiliation, is to maintain an impenetrable facade of dignity and composure despite any inner turmoil.

Van Gessel writes: "The contrast between the calm socially acceptable exterior of Enchi's women--often described in terms of masks . . . and the hot emotions bubbling beneath the surface create a dynamic tension in her writing." (412) One of the most compelling tensions in the novel surrounds Tomo's repressed sexuality, and Enchi symbolizes the split between her public role and her private desires in the imagery of the Noh mask:

[Tomo] was thirty, and the fact that her husband . . . should make no move towards her tormented her spiritually and physically all the more after a separation of three months. Whether the torment that seethed within her was love or hatred she could not tell, but a calm determination not to leave the crucible of doubt gave her features the tranquility of a Noh mask in her unhurried progress along the corridor. (37)

Masks of the Noh theater, an ancient form of Japanese stage art, are often used symbolically in Enchi's writing. In The Waiting Years they are always associated with repression of emotion and outer control. Toki Zemmaro notes in his book, Japanese Noh Plays that "the Noh actor's movements are restricted, by convention, within extremely narrow limits." (8) This is also true of Tomo who is forced by convention to play the restrictive role of the good wife and wise mother; a role which forbids the expression of her seething emotions or frustrated sexuality.

In the nineteenth century a woman's sexuality and passion had no acceptable outlet beyond marriage. Even within marriage, sex remained the prerogative of the male-- women could neither claim nor refuse it as a marital right. Social convention then forced women to assume the passive role in sexual relations. If the sexual attention was unwanted, as in the case of Miya, Tomo's daughter-in-law, the woman was required to submit to her husband. Michimasa reminded his wife of this fact when she refused his advances: "[He] . . . told her among other things that a wife who disobeyed her husband's commands was punishable by law." (99)

If sex, on the other hand, *was* desired, convention demanded that women not pursue it, but that they wait passively for male attention. Women certainly did not have the equivalent legal recourse to demand that their husbands satisfy their desires. Because Yukitomo rejected her, Tomo is condemned to a life of sexual repression by social convention, a moral and civil code which forbids her to take a lover, and a strong sense of personal dignity.

Retaining one's dignity in the face of another's outrages is largely what this novel is about. Yukitomo continually devalues his wife as a person in her own right, and his sexual rejection of her clearly shows the general dismissal of female sexuality in any capacity but to serve men. To maintain her dignity, Tomo attempts to repress her passionate nature. Her failure to feign indifference when her husband does sleep with her, is the source of great humiliation: "And the knowledge that she had betrayed a certain passion with the husband who had rushed to her when he was wounded only heightened her hatred for him, heightened it to the point where she could have clawed to shreds the face that seemed to sneer its perception of her foolishness." (46)

The hatred Tomo feels toward her husband here indicates the amount she feels toward herself for betraying this repressed passion. His sexual rejection of her demands an equal rejection, or at least an indifferent response, in order to maintain her dignity. Tomo's failure to achieve this level of indifference is evidence that Enchi is rewriting the male tradition which grants desire as the sole property of men, and is instead granting it as the volatile possession--and burden--of women: "As the two concubines formed an increasingly impenetrable barrier between herself and Yuki-tomo, physical relations between them had ceased altogether . . . [Tomo] was only just forty and healthy still in mind and body, so that fight it though she might the desire for the warm contact of a human body welled up in her irresistibly." (93) Tomo's unfulfilled passions act as an eloquent condemnation of a system which accords sexual prerogative exclusively to men, and the extent to which Tomo's sexual desire has

become a burden instead of a pleasure is a powerful critique of the patriarchal culture.

Enchi also highlights the oppressive nature of a system which pits attraction to men against loyalty to women. The patriarchal system forces women to oppress one another and discourages the formation of bonds between them. This is most clearly seen in the relationship between Tomo and Suga. Because Tomo purchased Suga as an innocent girl to be Yukitomo's concubine, she shares in the responsibility for Suga's fate. The patriarchal system has forced her to play a part in reducing another woman to the status of property for a man. This responsibility weighs heavily on Tomo's conscience throughout the novel:

It was wicked. They were giving a girl still of an age to be playing with dolls to a man a full two dozen years her senior . . . much as the throat rebels at the idea of swallowing in cold blood the flesh of a bird killed before one's eyes, Tomo felt a vague sense of guilt, shared with her husband, for having gone to buy Suga. Why must she contribute to this cruelty that was little better than slave-trading? (40)

This guilt however, is tempered with "hatred at the thought that eventually this innocent girl might turn into a devil that would devour her husband and sweep unchecked through the whole house." (40) By pitting women against one another in competition for a man's affection, the system effectively renders them powerless to form bonds to alter their situation.

Suga also holds Tomo to be more responsible for her unhappy fate than Yukitomo himself. Not comprehending the victimization both women have suffered at Yukitomo's hands, Suga blames her fate more on Tomo than on the man who wields ultimate authority in the household: "Tomo was aware of the accusation in Suga's baleful gaze which seemed to say, 'It's you who brought me to this fate'. . . Suga's

resentment toward Yukitomo was not so strong as toward herself." (129) Suga does not hold Yukitomo morally culpable for her fate. It is true that Yukitomo, unlike Tomo, does not fully understand the realities and frustrations of Suga's position, but Suga's failure to direct her resentment towards the true cause of her suffering reflects the power of the patriarchal system which has become so ingrained that Suga cannot even call it into question.

The relationship between Suga and Tomo is full of tension and conflict, and it characterizes the way a patriarchal system undermines relations between women. Suga is the primary object of Yukitomo's affections, but she feels unavoidable envy and resentment of Tomo as the legal wife--a position which Suga will never obtain:

However she might be cherished in private, Suga could never be really free and open, never feel the bright sun's rays upon her so long as she lived under the same roof as Yukitomo's legal wife. She must lurk forever in the background behind Tomo, waiting with watchful eyes and neck craned greedily forward. (138)

Embedded in this description is a powerful condemnation of the feudal practice of concubinage, and of the civil codes and social mores established by men with little concern for their effect on women.

Suga's position is in many ways worse than Tomo's. Makoto Ueda, a professor of Japanese and Comparative Literature at Stanford University notes: "In general, a concubine's social status kept going down as centuries passed, until finally in 1882 keeping a mistress was prohibited by law. The law did little to eradicate the practice, however, and indeed had the effect of lowering the status of a kept woman still further." (11) As a concubine, and an adopted daughter, Suga has no legal right

to leave the household even if she could muster the courage: "Although . . . Shirakawa lavished affection and advice on this girl . . . his cruel nature made him careful to tie her down with official restraints lest she run away." (60) In this way Yunitomo claims Suga as his property and isolates her from her own family--the only people from whom she could expect genuine sympathy and understanding. Her position within the Shirakawa household is slightly higher than that of a servant, but she has no real power. Michimasa feels free to treat her "as though she were some domestic animal," and essentially that is an accurate representation of her position. There is a close connection between self-control and concealment for all the women in the novel, and Suga's only response to her situation is passive acceptance. If she causes trouble or complains, she faces the possibility of being turned out of the house with no means of support but common prostitution, and her health is much too delicate for that. She, like Tomo, must mask her true feelings to survive within a system intent on suppressing the female voice.

Suga's only form of rebellion is her attempt to create dissent between Yunitomo and his wife. She consistently undermines her relationship with Tomo who could have been a compassionate ally:

At first Tomo had echoed sympathetically Suga's indirect complaints, but realizing that at such times Suga later confided Tomo's half of the conversation to Yunitomo, whose bad temper was thereupon vented upon her own unsuspecting self, she had taken of late to brushing aside any tales that Suga came bearing. (114)

Suga's attempt to vent some of her inner frustration only increases her isolation in the household, and prevents any real communication between the women. Suga sacrifices Tomo's friendship in an attempt to bind Yukitomo's affections closer to herself.

Suga's relationship with Konno, a young pharmacology student who works for the Shirakawa's as a houseboy, is a vivid example of how a male voice can speak what a woman cannot. To ingratiate himself with Suga, Konno flatters her and calls her mistress. He also slanders Tomo and voices all the hidden resentments and malice that Suga herself feels but can never voice. He confides to Suga: "I hate hearing that old woman talking to you as if you were a maid. They keep on calling her the 'mistress,' but nowadays she has nothing to do with the master, does she? Surely it's you who's the real mistress?" (133) Konno is generally a despicable character, cowardly and malicious, but he provides some relief for Suga by providing a voice for her inner frustrations. He expresses what convention demands she suppress.

Silence plays a very important role in this novel. The characters are all trapped within themselves and do not communicate with one another. In this way Enchi critiques a culture which suppresses women's voices. For all the women in the novel, but most particularly for Suga and Tomo, silence brings nothing but additional suffering. What is interesting, however, is the way Yukitomo also suffers from the silencing of the female voice. Yukitomo has access to a public voice as a government official, but within the household he cannot transcend this voice of command to make any personal connection with the women around him. He experiences a "loneliness that [sweeps] through him like a chill, dark wind." (79) Yukitomo has silenced the

women in his life by reducing them to servants and playthings. In doing so he can control their actions, but he cannot connect with them and so he condemns himself, as well as the women, to spiritual isolation within the household.

Suga and Yumi are the only two characters in the novel who are able to break through their isolation to form bonds of sisterhood, and they do so in spite of their social positions as Yukitomo's rival concubines. This is attributed in part to the fact that they are both young enough to be his daughters, and also to Yukitomo's skillful manipulation of Suga. She tells Kin: "The master takes great care of me. He says I'm not as strong as most women and I shall die young if I overdo things . . . That's why that happened to Yumi . . . I've always looked on myself as a daughter, so I've never felt jealous or anything." (66) Yumi and Suga do forge a strong bond of friendship, and Yumi's light-hearted approach to her situation provides some relief for Suga. Nevertheless, Suga remains spiritually isolated because she cannot share the frustrations of her heart with Yumi because it is not in Yumi's shallow nature to understand them.

Yumi is the only character who "escapes the wheel of fate" in this novel and enters a relatively happy marriage even after being Yukitomo's concubine. There is some suggestion, however, that Yumi achieves a measure of happiness because of her superficial nature. She does not have the depth of character or tendency toward self-reflection that Tomo and Suga share. She does not understand the nature of her victimization nor feel the confines of her position. Enchi suggests that within this

system, women can achieve a measure of happiness only through an intellectual or emotional deficiency.

Miya is the only female character to act outside of the bounds of her social role, but her rebellion is orchestrated by Yukitomo for his sensual gratification. Miya's own husband, Michimasa, is a virtual monster, and Yukitomo's skill with women quickly wins Miya's heart. As much as Tomo condemns Miya's actions, she also realizes that the blame rests ultimately with Yukitomo, and suggests that Miya's "frustration with her loutish husband had been taken advantage of by her father-in-law." (147) Miya is willing to sacrifice her moral responsibility and familial respect for a taste of happiness, but the guilt and remorse she experiences on her deathbed clearly indicates that this price for happiness was ultimately too high.

Another important thread which runs through the novel is the gradual transformation which leads Tomo away from the traditional feminine ethic toward a feminist awakening. As Juliet Winters Carpenter, an associate professor of English at Doshisha Women's College in Kyoto, writes:

Outwardly, [Tomo] appears compliant and meek, a model of what passed in her day for feminine virtue: total submission, total suppression of oneself on behalf of one's husband and his family. But gradually as incident piles on incident, Tomo is transformed; she becomes inwardly cold and critical, losing all faith in such conventional morality as well as in her husband. Still she keeps her silence, the dignity of her unspoken protests underscoring her husband's depravity and the crushing weight of family in traditional Japanese society. (352)

The first sign of this transformation occurs when Tomo does not return the extra money Yukitomo gave her to purchase Suga: "The idea . . . saddened her, and at the same time gave her a new sense of resilience, as though her body had been reinforced

throughout with fine wire." (50) This small violation of her moral code is motivated by the instinct to preserve herself and her children. For the first time she takes action against her husband to protect herself.

Enchi also takes this opportunity to comment on the general plight of women at the time of the Meiji Restoration, and to make an ironic statement about how the feudal system protected the wife:

Before the Meiji Restoration, the family code had drawn a dividing line between wife and concubine that was not easily crossed, but now that the lesser retainers of remote country clans had come overnight to reign in the halls of power, the idea of the geisha house as a kind of antechamber to those halls had taken hold among men who aspired to high office, and the position of the wife, which depended on her husband's skill in public affairs, had become as vulnerable as a fragile, clinging vine. (51)

The Meiji Civil Code broke down the rigid class structures of feudalism, but as noted earlier, it actually deprived women of some of the security and power they maintained in the Tokugawa era. Tomo's tenuous, humiliating position within the household, however, is not enough for her to take the drastic step of leaving the family. She does consider it, but her sense of obligation toward her daughter is stronger than that toward herself:

Tomo even considered taking Etsuko and the money and going back to her home in far-off Kyushu. Yet each time her resolve was weakened by the thought of the future awaiting her daughter, now growing into such a beautiful young woman. . . . If only Tomo herself could bear it, Etsuko would certainly be happier growing up in comfort as the daughter of a man of rank than in poverty in a remote country district of Kyushu. (51)

Here Tomo fulfills the obligations of the "wise mother," but her sacrifice does not bring the close, rewarding relationship between mother and daughter that one expects.

The mask that Tomo wears to conceal her suffering also shuts out her daughter: "To Etsuko, Tomo's desperate determination merely made her mother seem forbidding."

(38) Later, after Etsuko is married herself, Tomo felt "discouraged by the lack of complexity and sensitive appreciation of her own feelings in her daughter" (192)

For Tomo, the archetypal roles of the good wife and wise mother have brought nothing but solitary suffering. This suffering finally engenders a feminist awakening as she realizes that the code she was raised with has betrayed her:

She had already ceased to be the wife who obeyed her husband with implicit faith in his judgment, and was gradually acquiring the ability to view him dispassionately, as another human being. Innocent of learning, she had never been taught how to understand a person intellectually and was constitutionally incapable of letting her actions follow the natural dictates of her instincts. Only this had made it possible for her to live in unswerving allegiance to the feudal code of feminine morality and to take as her ideal the chaste wife who grudged no sacrifice for her husband and family. But now an unmistakable mistrust in that code that had been her unquestioned creed was making itself felt within. (51-52)

This conflict, however, remains an internal one between an inner self of private value and an outer, conventional self afforded no social value. Living by a code which she no longer believes in widens the split between her interior and exterior selves. She has now not only lost any love or respect for her husband, but she is trapped by a moral code she cannot believe in.

The cruelty of this situation is very clear to Tomo: "How could she respect or love the husband who in his conceit and self-indulgence saw nothing more in the self-sacrifice and burning passion of over a dozen years than the loyalty of a faithful servant? Such a husband was no object for her love, such a life no more than an ugly

mockery." (52) The realization that her life has become a mockery, and her willful compliance with the confining social roles that made it so, creates a paradox for the modern reader. Contrary to modern feminist values, however, Tomo's real strength is to be found in her ability to endure and submit.

Tomo's decision to bear such a burden in the face of her realization is testament to great inner strength. As Edwin O. Reischauer notes in his book, The Japanese:

The cooperative relativistic Japanese is not thought of as the bland product of a social conditioning that has worn off all individualistic corners, but rather as the product of firm inner-self-control that has made him master of his . . . anti-social instincts. . . . [S]ocial conformity . . . is no sign of weakness but rather the proud, tempered product of inner strength. (152)

Throughout the novel Tomo maintains an impenetrable facade of dignity and composure which belies her inner frustrations and loss, and her ability to withstand Yuki-tomo's outrages with dignity is presented as a victory in itself.

The superiority of women is another strong theme in this novel. Despite their social inferiority women are consistently portrayed as morally superior to men:

[Tomo] was appalled at her own naivete in assuming, despite her countless bitter experiences on account of Yuki-tomo's lechery, that within himself he still maintained the same moral code as herself. Without so much as a second thought he had trampled into the forbidden territory of his own son's marriage. (104)

The shock of this realization leads Tomo away from her role as the wife who must compete for her husband's affections. When Suga brings news of Yuki-tomo's affair with his daughter-in-law, Tomo moves firmly into a position of feminist solidarity:

It was with a seething indignation quite different from the jealousy she had experienced when Yukitomo had first turned his affections to Suga and Yumi that Tomo now listened to Suga's complaint. The feeling was equally remote from marital love and marital hatred, a fierce wrath that stood up to Yukitomo, the ungovernable male, and took beneath its protective wing, Suga, Yumi, and even the offending Miya herself.
(104)

This is the flowering of Tomo's feminism. Her sympathies bond with the other women of the Shirakawa household against her husband, and she undertakes to protect them to the best of her abilities.

Tomo accepts her complicity in the oppression of the concubines and works to free them from their subservience. After all, if women are to be passive in their relations with men and repressed in their emotional lives, the only avenue of action remaining open is to be of service to others. Pursuing this course, Tomo arranges a marriage for Yumi and looks after her even after she has left the household:

It was Tomo and not Yukitomo who, come rain or shine, had looked after Yumi and her children since she had been left a widow . . . to put herself out so on behalf of a former mistress of Yukitomo's was not something to be dismissed lightly. Shin knew that the prosperity of the Shirakawa's was really founded less on any ability of Yukitomo's than on the thankless labors of Tomo (182)

Tomo also seeks to help Suga, but there the damage cannot be undone. At one point Yukitomo suggest that they try to marry off Suga, but Tomo clearly sees the impossibility of such a course and aids Suga by protecting her role in the household. She tells Yukitomo: "But Suga is different from Yumi, . . . Her periods aren't normal, and even if she got married she probably couldn't have children. For myself too, I'd prefer that she should always be here to look after you" (128) Tomo realizes

that Suga would be incapable of filling any other role than her present one because her life of unfulfilled aspirations has drained her energy, her health, and her spirit.

Tomo's inner strength, on the other hand, has secured for her the position of thankless martyr. Throughout her life she has exercised control within the limited sphere of her family by taking care of others. She performs this role of manager of the family and estate so well that while others are completely dependent on her, they take her utterly for granted. In fact, she has so successfully repressed her emotions for forty years that her very humanity is ignored. This becomes most evident as her health declines:

Tomo was if anything relieved by this lack of attention, which was preferable to having somebody show concern about her lack of appetite, thus drawing Yukitomo's attention to her, yet the failure of the assembled family to turn on her a single glance made sensitive by love, though nothing new, gave her the same sense of isolation as the deaf feel in their silent world. (187)

The romanticized version of the feminine hero who toils and sacrifices for her family is exposed to the harsh light of reality. A lifetime of struggle and sacrifice have resulted only in isolation and neglect.

The most resounding denunciation of Tomo's commitment to self-sacrifice is expressed by Tomo herself. As she stands midway on the "long, gentle slope that led home," she evaluates the meaning of her efforts and declares them to be futile:

Everything that she had suffered for, worked for, and won within the restricted sphere of a life whose key she had for decades past entrusted to her wayward husband Yukitomo lay within the confines of that unfeeling, hard and unassailable fortress summed up by the one word "family." No doubt, she had held her own in that small world . . . but

now . . . she had suddenly seen the futility of that somehow artificial life on which she had lavished so much energy and wisdom. (189-190)

Tomo realizes there is no earthly justice or reward for a lifetime of suffering. Her only hope for justice or happiness lies in the afterworld: "At the end of it all a brighter world surely lay waiting, like the light when one finally emerges from a tunnel. If it were not there waiting, then nothing made sense." (190) This suggests that the best that women can hope for within the confines of a patriarchal system is an ephemeral moral victory and vindication after death.

The personal victory that Tomo envisions for her life is to outlive her husband. As Wayne Pounds writes in his essay "Enchi Fumiko and the Hidden Energy of the Supernatural": "In The Waiting Years, . . . Tomo stoically endures her condition, waiting throughout her life for the only vengeance her Confucian upbringing allows her to imagine: for her husband to die first." (170) To some extent this is true. Tomo is filled with "an intolerable sense of indignation" that she might become an invalid and die before her husband. (186) At first her revenge does lie in outliving her husband, but when she realizes this is impossible, her upbringing allows her another form of revenge.

In her final act, Tomo appropriates the moral and social codes which have controlled her life and uses them to crush Yukitomo in a stunning moral victory. Tomo claims the power of the powerless--abject apology--as she asks Yukitomo to read her final will in which she expresses regret for keeping the money she had saved a secret:

Again and again as he read, Yukitomo felt himself reeling before a force more powerful than himself. There was not a word of complaint from Tomo against the outrageous way he had oppressed her: nothing but apology for not having trusted him fully and for always having kept a painful secret from him. Yet the words of apology bore down on his heart more heavily than the strongest protest. (200)

Divided by social convention from the deepest part of herself, Tomo finds that in death she is not divided. Death has freed her from the confines of social convention, nevertheless she decides to express her final wishes within those confines. The heavy irony of this scene acts as a powerful indictment of the family system itself. Tomo finally achieves the understanding that she has longed for since the beginning of her marriage, but it is not something that her husband has given her--she has wrenched it from him by breaking the female code of silence.

After a lifetime of public humiliation, however, Tomo is not satisfied with this private revenge. Her final request, communicated through her niece, Toyoko, becomes her public revenge: "Tell him that when I die I want no funeral. Tell him all that he need do is to take my body out to sea at Shinagawa and dump it in the water." (202)

The power of this request lies in its public acknowledgement of Yukitomo's treatment of her. The effect it has on Yukitomo is devastating:

The veil cleared instantly from Yukitomo's eyes. The old man's mouth opened as though to say something, then his expression went blank. In the newly bathed, watery eyes, fear stirred as though he had seen a ghost. The next moment, the unnatural effort of the muscles to restore a natural expression wrought havoc with the regular features of his face . . . His body had suffered the full force of the emotions his wife had struggled to repress for forty years past. The shock was enough to split his arrogant ego in two. (203)

Yukitomo has spent his life comfortably blind to the suffering he has inflicted, and his ego cannot withstand the force of Tomo's moral indictment.

What is so masterful about Tomo's revenge is that she achieves it within the confines of the social system. She claims the only power available to her without violating the moral code she had built her life upon. Nevertheless, Tomo's personal victory has no social equivalent. It occurs within the rules of the patriarchal culture and the existing social order has not been changed or even threatened by her actions.

If one thinks in terms of social oppression, it becomes clear that Tomo is a failure. Perceiving the injustices of women's position, she still voluntarily relinquishes her claim to a life of independent personal happiness and willfully chooses to persist in a situation of painful oppression. But as Patricia Spacks notes in The Female Imagination, "to think only in terms of social oppression is . . . a dangerous limitation." (46) For Tomo, selflessness is not merely a submissive response to the dominant patriarchy, but rather a dignified moral reproach of it.

Enchi critiques the idealized archetype of the good wife and wise mother by exposing it to the light of genuine female experience. Tomo's suffering and oppression can be traced directly to codification of this archetype both legally and socially. She travels throughout the course of the novel from unquestioning acceptance of the social codes which confine her to an inner moral resistance to them, and demonstrates that suffering can provide a medium for insight and development. While Enchi brings the social injustice of women's position into the foreground, and

Tomo's example suggests that individual effort within the confines of the family system produces a moral victory which has an intense power of its own.

Social pressure, however, continues despite individual revelation and in today's society moral victories seem less important than social advancements. Fumiko Enchi presents a compelling moral character in The Waiting Years, but Tomo is hardly the role model most modern women would wish for their daughters. Part of the power of this novel therefore lies in its representation of how far women have come in the past one hundred years.

CHAPTER II

THE ARCHETYPE OF THE VENGEFUL WITCH: RETRIBUTION AND SUBVERSION IN FUMIKO ENCHI'S MASKS

Masks creates an antithesis to the image of the good wife and mother found in The Waiting Years. Like The Waiting Years, this novel examines the crushing oppression of women, but it then maps a completely different response to it. Yukio Mishima once wrote that "Enchi was possessed simultaneously of a moral side and a deeply immoral side," an assessment with which she unhesitatingly agreed. "She herself suggests that The Waiting Years sprang from her virtuous, moral side, while Masks depicts the darker, decadent, immoral half." (Carpenter 353) Instead of portraying the long-suffering archetype of the good mother revered by Japanese society, Enchi works from the archetype of the vengeful woman who has been cast into the role of the witch throughout the ages. As the protagonist of Masks writes in an essay: "Just as there is an archetype of woman as the object of man's eternal love, so there must be an archetype of her as the object of his eternal fear, representing, perhaps, the shadows of his own evil actions." (57) Masks is a story of vengeance, and of an alliance of women who embody the archetype of the witch because they accomplish the "crime" of retribution against men and against a patriarchal society. (Pounds 169)

This novel has strong roots in the tradition of the Noh theater, and its theme is paralleled in a number of early Noh plays. In the introduction to Mother of Dreams, Makoto Ueda gives some examples:

In the noh play The Crown of Iron Spikes . . . a woman deserted by her husband becomes a demoness and tries to kill him and his second wife. In "The Caldron of Kibitsu". . . by Akinari and The Ghost Story of Tokaido Yotsuya . . . by Tsuruya Nanboku, the anger of the wives is all the greater because, until the time they discover they have been betrayed, they have served their husbands with the utmost love and devotion; subsequently they set out to take revenge in the most frightful way imaginable, and they succeed. (10-11)

Enchi grounds her novel, set in the present of 1958, in allusions to these earlier literary works.

Following the tradition of the Noh theater, masking is naturally the most important symbolic concept in the novel, and it works to unite the disparate strands of action. Doris Bagen, a visiting professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst wrote an article about masking, "Twin Blossoms on a Single Branch: The Cycle of Retribution in Onnamen" [Masks]. In this article she notes that "symbolically, masking can hide or disguise the self; it can also be a form of self-disclosure or revelation." (149) The three sections of the novel are characterized by noh masks which can each be said to represent one of the central female characters. Ryo no Onna, the mask of the spirit woman, represents Yasuko; Masugami, the madwoman, represents Harume; and Fukai, the mask of a middle-aged woman of great depth and sorrow, represents Mieko. The noh masks associated with each character illuminate dimensions of their personalities and call up allusions to a classical past. The masks also represent a facade which covers motivations and emotions, hence facial expressions in the novel are frequently described as mask-like. This imagery is further extended to include make-up as a form of masking which both disguises and illuminates.

Much work has been done analyzing the narrative structure of this novel, and the theme of triangulation which is embedded in that structure. John Lewell writes about Masks in his book Modern Japanese Novelists: A Biographical Dictionary:

It is a virtuoso performance in construction and in this respect could be described as an exercise in triangulation: themes, characters, scenes, and narrative being woven together as a series of interlocking triangles. The novel itself has three sections, each entitled with the name of a female mask from the Noh theater . . . Events within the story take place in three eras: ancient, recent past, and present, and even the relationships of the characters can be interpreted in sets of three, for this is the pattern in which they have been conceived. (76)

Triangles are superimposed upon triangles and the relationships between the characters, both past and present are very complex. In the ancient past Murasaki described a love triangle in The Tale of Genji between Prince Genji, his wife, and one of his lovers, Lady Rokujo. In the recent past of the novel, this triangle and its consequences are mirrored in the triangle formed by Togano, his wife, Mieko, and his lover, Aguri. The novel resonates with the consequences of these earlier triangles until the cycle of retribution closes with the final triangle formed by Ibuki, Harume, and Yasuko. It seems that in this novel triangles beget triangles and other instances of three-sided relationships abound. The novel opens with a classic love triangle between Ibuki, Mikame, and their love interest, Yasuko. This reflects an earlier triangle which existed between Mieko, her husband, Togano, and her nameless lover. One of the most vital, powerful triangles in the novel is formed between Mieko, her daughter, Harume, and her daughter-in-law, Yasuko. Other characters move in and out of triangular relationships. One forms between Ibuki, his wife Sadako, and Yasuko, and another forms temporarily between Mikame, Mieko, and Yasuko. The triangles are

constantly shifting and at one time or other all the major characters are caught up in one or more of these associations.

Wayne Pounds elaborates on the importance of the novel's structure by asserting that the key to the novel lies in the character of Mieko, and the three characters which make up her name in Japanese. In his article, "Enchi Fumiko and the Hidden Energy of the Supernatural," he notes that:

A clue to her nature is the three Chinese characters of her given name, Mieko. Read literally, they suggest a three fold personality structure . . . First, she is an incarnation of that spirit of vengeance whose images are preserved in classical literature (especially certain noh plays and The Tale of Genji) and which constitute part of the cultural inheritance of Japanese women . . . Second, she is woman-as-victim, woman reduced to brute physical nature by patriarchal denial of her humanity . . . Third, Mieko is an individual person and as such is to some degree unknown to herself (171)

Pounds sees the three sections of the novel as embodying certain aspects of Mieko's personality. This is certainly true in that Harume and Yasuko are instruments of Mieko's will, and it is helpful to read the sections both as representations of each of the main female characters, and as layers in Mieko's complex personality.

The classical allusions to Murasaki's The Tale of Genji, written during the Heian period from 794-1186, form much of the subtext of the novel and are pivotal to understanding Mieko's character. Enchi's allusions to this work are firmly grounded in a life-long love of the classic which she translated into modern Japanese. Carpenter notes:

This translation was indeed the crowning achievement of her career, bringing together all sorts of disparate strands; her lifelong love of the classics and of Genji in particular; her understanding of the depths of

the female psyche, and of female sexuality; her ability to bridge the gap between the Heian and the modern feminine psychic world. (355)

In many ways Murasaki's writing has enabled Enchi to write. Murasaki established a female literary voice during the Heian period that all subsequent Japanese women writers have inherited. Enchi establishes a relationship between the classical past and the literary present, and weaves the thread of continuity through the collective psyche of women.

In the first section of the novel, Mieko's identification with the Rokujo lady from The Tale of Genji sheds light on her personality, her motivations, and her interest in spirit possession. In this section one finds an essay, which is sometimes published separately from the novel, that Mieko wrote entitled "An Account of the Shrine in the Fields," asserting that critics have been mistaken in their evaluation of the significance of the Rokujo lady in The Tale of Genji. As Amy Heinrich notes in her article, "Double Weave: The Fabric of Japanese Women's Writing": "Fumiko Enchi conducts a kind of retrospective resistance in her novel Onnamen by revising inherited views of the fictional character Lady Rokujo from The Tale of Genji." (411) Lady Rokujo, who became one of Prince Genji's lovers, is frequently considered the personification of jealousy and vindictiveness. Genji preferred a woman "who had learned to mold herself to a man by dissolving her identity in his," but he was powerless to diminish the intensity of the Rokujo's lady's ego and their relationship was characterized by grief and strife. (50) When Genji abandoned Lady Rokujo, her jealousy was so overwhelming that her spirit left her body to attack Genji's wife and his other lovers. Mieko writes: "As passion transforms the Rokujo lady into a living

ghost, her spirit taking leave of her body again and again to attack and finally kill Genji's wife Aoi, the commentators see in her tragic obsession a classic illustration of the evil karma attached to all womankind." (51) This interpretation of events is characteristic of a patriarchal system which would rather blame Rokujo's acts on fate than accept responsibility for the consequences of its oppression.

Mieko writes against this interpretation in a reading which accounts not only for male oppression, but also for female psychology. She intuits that the key to Lady Rokujo's character is "a spirit of such lively intensity that she was incapable of surrendering it fully to any man." (50) This strong personality, combined with societal restrictions were the cause of her subconscious violence. Mieko states: "Inhibited by the upbringing given to all young Heian princesses (one firmly discouraging any sort of direct action), the Rokujo lady turned unconsciously to spirit possession as the only available outlet for her strong will." (51) Tracing the line of historical oppression, Rokujo's situation is mirrored by Tomo's in The Waiting Years which was set in the nineteenth century, and it is mirrored in Mieko's situation in the twentieth century. All these women were subject to a restrictive upbringing, suffered unjustly at the hands of men they had trusted, and were possessed of very strong wills. Mieko's strong interest in spirit possession further aligns her with the Rokujo lady and prepares the reader for the course of her vengeance. Due to the parallel development of their stories, this woman from classical literature and her counterpart in contemporary fiction, form a bridge between those two worlds and bring to light an ongoing pattern of male oppression.

Enchi asserts that male oppression affects not only women, but turns back to manifest itself in the subconscious of the oppressors themselves. The subconscious awareness of the oppression of an entire segment of humanity creates a burden of guilt which then rests upon the collective male psyche. Mieko writes that the ghost visiting the sickbed of Genji's wives might not have been Rokujo, but "might instead be seen as the spontaneous workings of Genji's own conscience (the 'devil in his heart'), the consequences of his failure to make suitable reparation to [Rokujo] for her sufferings." (52-53) Mieko's husband also never makes suitable reparations to his wife or his mistress for their sufferings, and Enchi seems to suggest here that Mieko's revenge against her husband and the patriarchal system is being fed by the collective unconscious guilt of the patriarchy itself.

Enchi further suggests that the oppression of women results from a primal fear deep in the male psyche. Mieko writes that the archetypal woman is not only an object of man's eternal love, but can also be the object of his eternal fear. Not long before her death Enchi referred to this essay as "a statement of my own opinion," and added, "in general my idea has not changed." (Pounds 175) Wayne Pounds discusses her view:

But for Enchi the vengeful spirit or any other fearful image of woman is the nether pole of her idealization and aestheticization in more "positive" images; and both the dark and the light images result from the projection of male emotion onto the female, psychological manifestations of that "otherness" which is the core of the feminine in a patriarchal society. For Enchi, the vengeful spirit of the literary heritage is first of all what men have made of women, and the attraction of the supernatural story is in part the opportunity to reclaim suppressed energies from the past (179)

Enchi forms a link between the image of the shamaness who influences powerful spirits, the supernatural phenomenon of spirit possession itself, and a woman possessed by powerful emotions such as jealousy and vindictiveness. Mieko writes that Murasaki "was able to combine women's extreme ego suppression and ancient female shamanism, showing both in opposition to men." (57) Enchi is writing in response to imposed roles and idealizations, and against the tendency to categorize and denounce a woman's actions with no examination of the female psychology which results from male oppression.

The theme of shamanism and spirit possession is brought to the fore through Yasuko. On the surface, the Ryo no Onna mask for which the first section is named, represents Yasuko. As the chapter progresses, however, one soon realizes that Yasuko is acting as a mask for Mieko. It is Mieko's interest in spirit possession which inspired her son's research, and it is Mieko who motivated Yasuko to continue the research after Akio's death. As Ibuki notes: "If Yasuko is the medium, Mieko is the spirit itself." (13) Mieko controls the action of the novel by controlling the overt acts of the people around her. She never takes direct action herself, but imposes her will on others as a ryo no onna, or spirit woman. Mieko describes the Rokujo lady as a ryo no onna "who can carry out her will only by forcing it upon others--and that only indirectly, through the possessive capacity of her spirit." (53) The character of the Rokujo lady works as a mask which illuminates rather than disguises Mieko, and Ibuki later suggests that Mieko used the Rokujo lady as a pretext to write about her own psychic powers. (58)

Yasuko describes Mieko as having "a peculiar power to move events in whatever direction she pleases, while she stays motionless." (30) Yasuko states that all his life Akio, her husband, had been under his mother's power, that Ibuki is a pawn in Mieko's hands, and that her own will is paralyzed. She would like to dissolve her ties to Mieko, but she finds it impossible. Spirit possession is inherently a manipulative force, and as Amy Heinrich notes:

Although her relationship with her daughter-in-law is warm, even intimate, apparently contradicting traditional expectations of conflict between a mother-in-law and her son's wife, it is in fact as controlling and manipulative as any in traditional literature. Mieko has grown into power and subsumes Yasuko's will under her own (411-412)

As the novel progresses, however, Yasuko's collusion in Mieko's revenge becomes more voluntary until she sees herself as an accomplice in "a crime that only women could commit." (126)

The second part of the novel is entitled Masugami, which is the noh mask of a young madwoman. The headnote to the section defines the mask as "that of a young woman in a state of frenzy." (61) Pounds notes that at some moment during the novel, this description fits any of the female characters: Mieko, Yasuko, Harume, Aguri, and Sadako. (172) The one character, however, for whom madness is inescapable is Harume, the twin who suffered brain damage from her brother's feet while she was still in the womb. Bergen sees her as the "image of brutalized womanhood. Because she lacks rational intelligence, she is woman reduced to physical being." (Bergen 173) That physical being then is associated with bestiality. During menstruation Harume becomes "like a wild animal" and attacks the people who

try to help her. (72) The significance of these attacks during her periods "shows that what is at issue here is feminine physiology, which Harume shares with all women." (Pounds 171) The cultural attitude toward menstruation as unclean and even dangerous further serves to oppress women. In his letter, Mieko's lover clearly expresses this view. He writes: "I admit to the unreasonable fastidiousness of the Japanese male, to whom the blood of menstruation is of all blood the dirtiest." (104-105) This cultural attitude is inscribed in both Buddhist and Shinto religions which view menstrual blood as defilement. Using women's own physiology to oppress them is one example of the "sadistic misogyny" of religion which Mikame refers to near the end of the novel.

Mikame also acknowledges the superiority of women which is a recurring theme in the novel, and condemns centuries of female oppression institutionalized through religion. He states: "A man may try as hard as he likes, but he'll never know what schemes a woman may be slowly and quietly carrying out behind his back . . . Even the sadistic misogyny of Buddha and Christ was nothing but an attempt to gain the better of a vastly superior opponent." (133) As Rachel Blau Duplessis writes in her book Writing Beyond the Ending, modern religion has been a powerful force in the oppression of women, as it encouraged "the loss of connection with matriarchal religion, and disgust at the sensuality and independence of women." (120) In her essay Mikame refers to the ancient rituals of a matriarchal religion when she explains the historical significance of the Shrine of the Fields. She notes: "The system of sending high priestesses to Ise disappeared in the Middle Ages, and with it the need for a

temporary shrine where a life of preparatory abstinence might be led." (48) In a lecture, Ibuki notes that a shamaness viewed sex as something intrinsically sinless, but reflecting the influence of modern religion and the disregard of matriarchal religion, Ibuki degrades this sacred ritual and presents a lecture to his students on the "shamaness as prostitute." (78)

Denying a voice to women and defining defilement as synonymous with female physiology, religion has become another tool of the patriarchy to suppress female power and sexuality. Pounds asserts that in the past women have been reduced to brute physical nature by patriarchal denial of their humanity. He explains that female karma is "a Buddhist notion that historically excluded women from nirvana on the grounds that their bodies were too bestial for them to escape the wheel of reincarnation." (Pounds 171)

In addition, the word "unclean," which carries particular power in a Japanese culture renowned for order and cleanliness, becomes a leitmotif in reference to women and their relationships. A clear contrast is created between the unclean world of women and the ordered, clean world of men. The open, rational mindset of men is threatened by the impenetrable murkiness of women, yet it is inexorably drawn to it: "Ibuki recognized the viscid flow of emotion between Yasuko and Mieko as, he felt, unclean, yet he was aware also of his own paradoxical desire to enter that unclean moistness." (81) Mieko's lover also refers to her as "incomprehensible and unclean." (104) Ibuki refers to Harume as "the beautiful idiot whose flesh was as if steeped in uncleanness." (136) The word unclean, used solely in reference to women in this

novel, evokes an association with menstrual blood and centuries of religious and cultural oppression which branded women as unclean by appropriating the right to define menstruation and female physiology as profane.

Menstruation has further resonances in this concept of feminine karma which weighs upon Mieko. It is most clearly illuminated through Mieko's vision:

A vision came to her of an ancient goddess lying stretched out in the underworld, prey of death. Her flesh was putrid and swarming with maggots, her decaying form covered with all manner of festering sores that smoldered and gave off black sparks. The luridness of the sight sent the goddess's lover reeling in horror, and the moment that he turned and ran, she arose and swept after him in fury, all the love she had borne him transformed utterly into blinding hatred. A woman's love is quick to turn into a passion for revenge--an obsession that becomes an endless river of blood, flowing on from generation to generation. (127)

Bargen notes that this vision,

repeats in precise detail the famous scene in the Nihongi in which the god Izanagi pursues the goddess Izanami, his sister and wife, into the land of the dead. Mieko is thus tracing back her karma to a prehistorical stratum in which the primal male flees from female physiology, envisioned as death and defilement . . . the male revulsion which rouses the female wrath has its roots in the man's fear of his own mortality--sickness, old age, and death--which he denies by pursuing a younger woman. (173-174)

This suggests that because women menstruate and have the ability to bring forth life, they are also tangible reminders of man's mortality. This reminder motivates man's fear and desire to control women, and symbolically the life force itself.

As the original tragedy which motivates Mieko's revenge unfolds in section two, the mask of the madwoman, generally associated with Harume, is also seen to fit both Mieko and Aguri. Masatsugu Togano married Mieko when she was nineteen and

brought her to his estate where he had already installed his mistress. This estate operated along the lines of the outdated feudal code: "Domestic servants were recruited from tenant families, and by custom, every Togano male of a certain age was entitled to choose a good-looking tenant girl to serve him as maid and mistress" (84-85) Before the marriage, Aguri had conceived two children, but each time Togano forced her to have an abortion to save appearances. "However much Aguri might have wanted to bear children, she had no choice but to obey when given an order from her lover and master." (85) Pounds notes that the original crime here is that done to Aguri, "a crime compounding class and sexual oppression, and we may take this incident as a shorthand notation for the brutal suppression of women during the medieval and feudal periods." (170)

In accordance with a male tradition of privilege, Togano saw "no inconsistency between his marriage to Mieko . . . and his love for Aguri" (85) The consequences of his blindness resonate throughout the novel and encompass three generations. When Mieko becomes pregnant, Aguri, "a woman of desperate wounds," consumed by jealousy, takes direct action. (85) She places a nail on the stairs to cause Mieko's fall and subsequent miscarriage. The worst part of the ordeal for Mieko was her memory of Aguri watching her from the bottom of the stairs as she dangled helplessly, and the sudden realization of the hatred her unknown rival had harbored. Following her action, Aguri was sent back to the countryside. As Bergen notes, "her action was too unambiguously malicious and public, and hence her overtly aggressive strategy resulted in her instant exile." (158) Aguri, reduced and degraded by the

remnants of feudal patriarchy, was powerless to act against her true oppressor, Togano. Her jealousy motivated her revenge against Mieko, whom Aguri saw as a rival, not as a fellow victim. Her inability to recognize or act against the man who orchestrated her humiliation is a direct result of her feudal upbringing, and a patriarchal system which deflects any attacks on the status quo by pitting women against one another and expending their energies in suppressed or misdirected rage.

Ibuki excuses Togano's initial crime against Aguri and Mieko by citing tradition: "Still, if it was in the family blood for generations, you can't very well blame him either. Men are susceptible to that sort of thing. Our society gets so worked up over it now, always siding with the woman, that no one dares examine the matter fairly" (87) His resentment here reflects a common backlash against a feminist stance which threatens the tradition of male power and privilege. A crime based on male patriarchal tradition seems acceptable to Ibuki, but by the end of the novel, he is jarred out of this narrow interpretation of the world when he is drawn into the mind and schemes of violated women. He mocks his own naivete: "I fell headlong into the role they gave me: not the hero, but the fool." (130) Ibuki who easily justified his own infidelity with Yasuko, pays for Togano's earlier infidelity by being drawn into the consequences of Togano's transgression against Mieko many years before; hence the cycle of retribution comes full circle.

Mikame is the one who understands the constraints of Mieko and Aguri's position in the Togano household, and he is set up as a foil for Ibuki's more traditional, domineering character. He lays the blame squarely on the original male

crime: "The real villain is Masatsugu Togano, then." Earlier Mieko had come to the same conclusion, and her decision to have an affair was an indirect attack on her husband and the entire patriarchal system. She saw little chance for success in openly challenging the patriarchal system, so she attempted to recover her lost child and redress her husband's crime by having an affair. The course of Mieko's revenge reflects a clear understanding of the limited realm under her control--namely her own body. The products of this affair were the twins Harume and Akio.

Barred from direct action, humiliated by institutionalized oppression, women are left to seek revenge through the only realm over which they do have power--their own bodies. For men the instinctive desire to continue their own bloodline results in the need to control female sexuality. Control of female sexuality then becomes institutionalized in laws and mores composed and enforced by a patriarchal society. As Mikame notes: "Children--think what endless trouble men have gone to over the ages to persuade themselves that the children their women bore belonged to them! Making adultery a crime, inventing chastity belts . . . but in the end they were unable to penetrate even one of women's secrets." (133) The ability to bear children places great power in the hands of women and great need to control that power in the hands of men. By silencing women's voices, however, and endorsing a double standard, men frequently sabotage their own efforts to control reproductivity.

The birth of Mieko's twins is looked upon as being vaguely beastly and unpleasant, and Bergen notes that twins are "tabooed in Japanese as in many other cultures because they represent, in a frightening way, the illusion of two persons as

one." (153) There is also a suggestion of androgyny in the essence of male-female twins that is mirrored in the tradition of the Noh theater. The Noh theater traditionally has an all-male cast, and when Yasuko is in the Noh master's house, she sees the mask of the Zo no onna, the face of a cold, cruel beautiful woman. In this mask Yasuko sees the face of her dead husband, Akio. She says: "It was as if something dead had come to life, or as if male and female had suddenly become one" (25) She later notes that the mask had made her see "the two faces of Harume and Akio coming together as one before her eyes." (73) This technique of twinning blurs the line between the sexes and connects the living and the dead, Harume and Akio. In addition, the illusory presence of her dead husband in his living twin works to bind Yasuko even more firmly to the Togano family.

The fact that the identity of Mieko's lover is never established, and is never even questioned by the other characters, suggests that the purpose of her affair was to establish a matriarchal bloodline. Mieko's intricate revenge surely cannot have been orchestrated to pay homage to a man who does not even rate a name in the novel. The ability to establish a matriarchal bloodline was originally denied Mieko by the death of her son, Akio, who was killed in an avalanche on Mt. Fuji. Mieko is now left with no one but a retarded daughter to carry her blood through the generations. As a result, she orchestrates a chilling solution, which fittingly, takes the form of a masquerade.

A matriarchal bloodline, which seems most natural considering the eternal uncertainty of paternity, suggests that the male contribution to reproductivity is

secondary at best, and one can easily support this conclusion by examining Ibuki's unintentional collaboration. Yasuko plays on Ibuki's carnal desires, drugs him, then she and Mieko substitute Harume as his lover. The make-up Mieko puts on Harume disguises her true nature, but later it is the remnants of lipstick on Ibuki's torso which unmask her identity as the woman who shared his bed. In a cloud of confusion, Ibuki, believing he is in bed with Yasuko, impregnates Harume. In this way Mieko reconstitutes her lost female reproductivity, because Harume's baby acts as a substitute for Mieko's first baby which was lost in the miscarriage. Bergen supports this theory by noting that it is "no accident that the same doctor attends Aguri's two abortions, Mieko's miscarriage, and Harume's baby. By contrast, the twins are conceived and delivered outside the norm, thus constituting the sacrificial agents and instruments of revenge within the cycle of retribution." (163) Due to Ibuki's unwitting collusion, Mieko's bloodline will be continued through Harume's son. Mieko's subversion places the matriarchal line and female power at the center of reproduction.

Another overwhelming threat to the patriarchal system is lesbianism. The relationship between Mieko and Yasuko is repeatedly referred to by Mikame, Ibuki, and Sadako as characteristic of that of lovers. Early in the novel Mikame discounts this threat and affirms the importance of the male figure in sexual relations. "Once [Yasuko] falls in love with someone else, Mieko's influence will disappear. It stands to reason. A woman can't help being attracted more to men than she is to other women." (14) This attitude springs naturally from a collective male psyche which places itself at the center of the universe, unable to envision a world of women where

men are neither needed nor desired. Enchi, however, allows this statement little power. Ibuki responds:

"You think so?"

"Absolutely." Mikame nodded firmly, as if to convince himself. (15)

Enchi immediately undermines Mikame's statement with the words, "as if to convince himself." In fact, Enchi has created a realm in which women are at the center, and men are merely the instruments they wield to achieve their ends.

One does see progression throughout the novel, however, in the male protagonists' understanding of the world and their relationships to women. Early in the novel Ibuki voices his concern about Yasuko's relationship to Mieko: "'Are you sure you weren't in love with her?' Ibuki spoke half-scornfully" (34) The scornful tone implies that Ibuki, like Mikame, cannot imagine a world of women which does not rely on men. In the middle of the novel, Ibuki is less confident and brings the question of lesbianism into the open. He states:

"There's something awfully suggestive to me about the relationship between those two."

"They're lovers you mean? Lesbians? Hmm, I doubt it," Mikame shook his head skeptically.

"Never mind that," Ibuki said. (89)

The abruptness with which Ibuki drops the subject is somewhat jarring. This is the first time the topic is openly discussed and a label attached to his suspicions. Ibuki's sudden change of subject is somewhat suspect. Perhaps it is in response to his friend's lack of receptivity, but more likely, I think, the reason lies in the jarring effect of the word "lesbian" in reference to Yasuko. Things have been hinted at regarding the bond between Mieko and Yasuko, but faced with the reality of the label lesbian,

Ibuki retreats and changes the subject. By the end of the novel, however, it is clear that Ibuki has come to a new understanding of the bonds between women and tells Mikame: "It hardly surprises me that Yasuko should be more in love with Mieko than she is with you or me." (133)

While the relationship between Mieko and Yasuko is not an openly lesbian one, Enchi seems to convey the conviction that intimacy between women is more profound than any bond possible between the sexes. The bond between Mieko and Yasuko is both spiritual and physical. The other characters often note the "private and wordless communication between the two women." (34) Yasuko even makes a reference to her body belonging to Mieko: "You know as well as I do that my body doesn't belong only to Akio anymore--or to you either" (65) This comment refers to her affair with Ibuki, but it is most telling in the obvious physical connection Yasuko feels toward her mother-in-law.

The image of Mieko and Yasuko in bed together, with all its sexual ambiguity, also suggests the special intimacy of the bond between women: "[Yasuko] lay encircled in Mieko's arms, her chest heaving so that it brushed with each sharp intake of breath against the round swelling of Mieko's breasts . . . at the same time [Mieko's] legs began a smooth, rotary motion like that of paddle blades, softly stroking and enfolding Yasuko's curled up legs." (62) This scene, full of nurturing, tender physical expression, contrasts sharply with images of sexual dominance and violence characterizing Ibuki's relationship with Yasuko.

Ibuki's fantasies and actions revolve around domination. On the train from Kyoto Ibuki looks at Yasuko and thinks "with her chest thrust slightly forward, her head twisted at an odd angle, she had a look of cruel eroticism like a woman wrapped in chains." (27) Later, Ibuki recreates their love-making in images of violence and control. "With a tremor he recalled the pliant smoothness of her waist and the backs of her hands, the way she had withstood positions so contorted that he had feared her wrists or arms might pull apart" (43) He also admits to "seeking by force to make her his." (43) These images of overt domination underscore the violence inherent in traditional sex roles and contrast sharply with the nurturing physical relationship between Mieko and Yasuko. In light of other events in the novel, especially the way Mieko and Yasuko manipulate Ibuki, it also contains heavy irony. Men may have overt sexual power, but in the novel, true power lies within the covert realm of women.

Ibuki's relationship to his wife also presents another aspect of male sexual dominance. As in The Waiting Years, the wife is relegated to a position of sexual passivity and the initiation of sexual relations remains a male prerogative: "'Aren't you coming to bed yet?' Sadako called . . . peevishly . . . He knew very well the reason for her ill humor: since the trip to Kyoto he had felt no desire for his wife" (58) Desire rests equally in the bodies of men and women, but it is still men who exercise control over its expression.

Relationships between the sexes are often orchestrated by men in response to a desire for power. As Mikame points out to Ibuki, a man's love often arises from an

affirmation of his superiority: "I think ultimately a man's love for a woman is based on a kind of instinctive yearning for smallness and fragility . . . that's why you prefer to see Yasuko as a child." (13-14) Mikame also later refers to Yasuko as "soft and clinging as a pussycat." (88) Both men are attracted to Yasuko as an idealization of passive womanhood who affirms the superiority of men.

Men do not feel this superiority in Mieko's presence, and so they feel a vague revulsion toward her. Mikame characterizes her as "a slightly vulgar background of some sort--a heavy, ornate tapestry or a large blossoming tree" (17) Mikame senses Mieko's power and subconsciously acknowledges it as overwhelming or heavy, hence threatening. Mieko's own lover responded to this latent power with increasingly overt attempts to control her: "Perhaps your very leniency brought out the tyrant in me . . . It even gave me a sadistic pleasure, of which I was quite aware, to imagine how much I had hurt you." (104) Mieko's power and passionate nature instilled fear in his heart. He wrote to her: "You are a woman of infinite passion in hate as well as in love. Therefore I have at times feared you and even tried to get away from you." (105)

If Yasuko is admired as the soft feminine ideal, and Mieko as the powerful feminine threat, Sadako, perhaps the most psychologically and socially balanced female character in the novel, is derided by her husband as too rational and aggressive. When Sadako believes her husband is having an affair, she hires a private investigator to gather proof, and so takes direct steps to end it. By taking overt action and stepping over the bounds of female passivity, she is condemned as vulgar. Ibuki

complains: "I have such an idiot wife . . . a rational woman is as ridiculous as a flower held together with wire . . . Whatever may have happened between Yasuko and me, I never flaunted it in front of my wife." (129) Ibuki views his affair as acceptable because of his discretion, and condemns his wife for her aggressive, rational, "unwomanly" behavior. Mikame agrees with this assessment: "Sudden crises . . . did . . . seem to bring out the least attractive side of a woman. He found himself coming to the absurd conclusion that Ibuki was entirely justified in preferring Yasuko over his wife." (118) By condemning women for direct action, men prevent honest, straightforward communication and immediate redress for transgressions. The devastating consequences of this silencing are clearly seen in the subversive course of Mieko's revenge.

Sadako claims a direct, male voice and does not coddle her husband's ego: "She was delighted with the unexpectedly positive effects of her investigation; that the sheer aggressiveness of her actions should have undermined her husband's pride was to her no cause for shame." (135) Her overt behavior achieves the desired results at a relatively small price--her husband's pride. Mieko's path also yields the desired results, but at tremendous cost--her daughter's life. Despite this contrast, Sadako does not come out as an admirable character. Sadako is condemned for her direct action by the male characters, and the female protagonists, Mieko and Yasuko, find her behavior questionable as well. Yasuko refers to her as a "peculiar sort of woman," and she and Mieko, so caught up in their own machinations, seem unable to relate to Sadako's direct, aggressive style. The unflattering perception of Sadako in the novel

results from the contrast between the coarseness of Sadako's attack and the "fine web of intrigue spun by a woman of Mieko's sophistication." (Bargen 161) The devastating course of Mieko's intrigue, however, highlights the consequences of silencing a woman's voice instead of accepting a strident, public challenge such as Sadako's.

The double standard inherent in language also seems to prevent men from accurately assessing their own behavior and encourages the degradation of women and the repression of their sexuality. The power with which men have infused language itself to degrade women becomes evident in this novel. When Ibuki's ego is threatened by Yasuko's invitation to his rival, Mikame, he immediately bolsters his pride by mentally reducing her to a harlot: "To Ibuki her soft smile was repugnant, seeming to reveal within her an unconscious hint of the harlot." (16) Most languages are rife with terms condemning female sexual desire, and these become the easiest response of the male ego to protect itself. There are many words inherent in the Japanese language to degrade female sexuality, just as there are equivalent terms in English: whore, slut, harlot, etc. These words encourage a thoughtless, defensive male response to any form of sexual threat or rejection. In another telling manipulation of language, Ibuki takes a completely opposite moral position and implies that Yasuko will be acting like a whore if she marries Mikame and *doesn't* sleep with him: "Only what? You don't like committing yourself without a promissory note, is that it?" (29) After their tryst, when Yasuko does not call Ibuki, he again refuses to examine the situation and retreats to a superior moral ground to protect his ego: "Her attitude was not that of an innocent and moral woman, but, indeed, that of an experienced whore--

one who had mastered every skill." (91) The moral reality of the situation--Ibuki is a married man cheating on his wife, while Yasuko is a widow sleeping only with Ibuki--does not seem to enter his mind. As a man, Ibuki is not bombarded with terms to restrict and degrade his sexual instincts, so he dismisses his own immorality without a second thought.

On the other hand, the strongest, clearest, feminist statements in this novel are spoken through Mikame, which seems to point optimistically to a growing awareness among men of the societal oppression of women. Mikame holds no sexual double standard and relinquishes the traditional male dominance over the female body. He states: "A wife who has her little adventures now and then might not be so bad," and even goes on to say, "after all, jealousy is a great aphrodisiac!" (121, 133) Mikame has recognized and rejected the double standard, and even when presented with proof of Yasuko's affair with Ibuki, he does not resort to calling her a harlot or a whore as Ibuki so quickly does when his ego is threatened.

This novel also reflects changing attitudes toward sex and marriage. Yasuko states: "The marriage ritual has no intrinsic appeal for me at all." (29) The ability to pursue sex outside of marriage has become more accepted, and a woman's right, or even obligation to abandon an unhappy marriage is alluded to by Ibuki. He wonders about Mieko's behavior: "To have once been a victim of a ruse by her husband's mistress--one that had caused her to suffer a miscarriage, no less--and then to stay tamely on with the same man and bear him another child, showed a want of spirit that any modern woman would find scandalous." (91) This contrast between Mieko and

modern women, while emphasizing Ibuki's lack of insight, highlights the changing attitude toward female independence which is emphasized in this novel.

Throughout the novel, one also finds contrasts between the male world of rationality and order and the female world of emotion and chaos. As Mikame prepares to propose to Yasuko and step into the closed circle surrounding Mieko and her daughter-in-law, he looks out the window and perceives the collapse of order: "Viewed from the bathroom window, overlapping rooftops on a steep and narrow alleyway formed a succession of triangles tumbling down to where the sea (this, too, a triangle standing on its head) lay softly blue and sparkling." (96) Enchi appears to be writing on a symbolic level here. The imagery of triangles is prevalent in the novel and represent not only the series of triangular relationships, but geometrical order and rationality as well. This predictable, rational world, inhabited by men, is tumbling down into the sea--a universal symbol of womanhood.

The contrast between the ordered male world and the chaotic one of women is highlighted as Ibuki feels himself beginning to lose control: "He was glad Mikame had shown him this geometric neighborhood with its neat files of silent office workers whose lives were measured so precisely by the clock; in his obsession with Mieko and Yasuko Togano he had lately grown fearful of losing his sense of time completely." (84) This creates the impression of time folding back on itself as Mieko manipulates Ibuki's affair to redress the consequences of Togano's affair a generation earlier. Ibuki's lack of control is further emphasized as he stumbles upon Harume, pregnant, sitting on the veranda of the temple: "He felt a swift sense of peril, as if the ground

beneath his feet were not to be trusted" (136) Only in his ordered world can Ibuki function effectively, faced with the complexities of the female world he loses his footing. The image of the ground itself as unstable calls forth an answering impression of the female world as a series of tunnels built to undermine male oppression and weaken the patriarchal foundation of society.

The final section of the novel focuses on the mask Fukai, which represents the "sunken cheeked, sorrow stricken" face of a middle aged woman. Toe, the Noh master's daughter, presents Mieko with the Fukai mask and explains that the word fukai can be written with either the characters for deep well or deep woman. She also tells Mieko that her father described this mask as "a metaphor comparing the heart of an older woman to the depths of a bottomless well--a well so deep that its water would seem totally without color." (139) This description mirrors the individual heart of Mieko which none have been able to fathom.

Throughout the novel Mieko's revenge has seemed amoral, but in the closing pages the reader glimpses the emotional toll it has extracted from her. Her daughter, Harume, died of heart failure after giving birth, and Yasuko notes: "Mieko must feel a keener blend of anguish and joy at Harume's death than any of us." (141) The innocent new life, however, which has arisen from destruction and vengeance is a symbol of hope. The course of his creation began with a crime of the patriarchy, but his actual existence is a tribute to the power of the matriarchy.

The argument that the purpose of Mieko's revenge was to establish a matriarchal line is reinforced as Mieko and Yasuko move away from the Togano

residence to Kamakura. Yasuko states that "it's a healthier environment for the baby."
 (139) It will be a healthier environment physically, perhaps, but more importantly, it will be symbolically healthier as well. The child will be removed from the taint of the patriarchal crime which engendered his creation. This move also symbolizes a closure to the cycle of retribution which has defined Mieko's existence up to this point.

The final scene of the novel is both powerful and ambiguous, and there are a number of contradictory interpretations of Mieko's final epiphany:

The mask seemed to know all the intensity of her grief at the loss of Akio and Harume--as well as the bitter woman's vengeance that she had planned so long, hiding it deep within her . . .

The crying of the baby filled her ears.

In that moment the mask dropped from her grasp as if struck down by an invisible hand. In a trance she reached out and covered the face on the mask with her hand, while her right arm, as if suddenly paralyzed, hung frozen, immobile in space. (141)

In this final scene Pounds believes Mieko is struck with remorse. He states: "She understands the crime she has perpetrated, and drops the mask in shocked or sorrowful recognition of the price of the vengeance she has taken and its effect on herself."
 (174) Interestingly, in her review of the novel, Yoko Mclain, the only native Japanese woman quoted here, also interprets Mieko's final gesture as a realization of guilt and shame. (94) Bergen, however, holds a different interpretation. She notes that "Mieko's unorthodox behavior in response to her past rules out any sudden concession to conventional moral judgment." (170) Masks certainly is a very unconventional novel, and it does seem unlikely that Enchi would use the final paragraph of the work to impart a conventional moral lesson about the price of vengeance.

Bergen writes: "In accord with the unfinished quality of noh performances, which present a never-ending cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, Onnamen too 'ends' with the suggestion of a new beginning." (169) Mieko reflects on her bitter vengeance, and her maternal grief is juxtaposed with the sound of the baby she created. This supports Bergen's view of the novel as a cycle ending with a new beginning. Also, much of the novel has revolved around an interest in spirit possession, and I believe that the key to the last scene lies in what appears to be a clear incident of spirit possession. Throughout the novel, Mieko has controlled the other characters, but ironically the novel ends with a force much stronger than Mieko's subsuming her will. The mask falls as if "struck down by an invisible hand," and Mieko falls into a trance. One hand covers the face of the mask, suggesting a rejection of the mask and the sorrow it embodies, and the other remains curiously suspended in midair as if paralyzed. This final image is quite jarring, and the awkward position of Mieko's arm in itself attests to a state of spirit possession.

The identity of this spirit is a mystery, but the only other woman associated with spirit possession in the novel, besides Lady Rokujo, is Aguri. Mikame once suggested that Akio's death was caused by Aguri: "But just think for a minute of the power of a woman's hatred! It's frightening. I don't know what became of the woman called Aguri, but it's almost as if her bitterness sent poor Akio to his grave." (87) I believe the spirit possessing Mieko here is that of Aguri, who, through Mieko's creation of this child, has also been able to relinquish her bitter woman's vengeance.

For Aguri, this child closes the cycle of retribution which began when Togano forced her to have an abortion, and reconstitutes her lost reproductivity as well.

Mieko's frozen state in the final sentence stops time and unites past, present and future. The uncertainty of life and the mystery of the future are fully contained in this single, timeless moment. With no tidy, conventional ending, the reader is left with an ambivalent response to Mieko's success. Is her active response to patriarchal injustice preferable to Tomo's stoicism and passivity in The Waiting Years? Their responses inhabit opposite ends of the spectrum, and Enchi makes the point that denied a direct voice, and forced to suppress their egos, women are pushed to extremes. Denied a healthy environment, there can be no healthy response. The responses of Tomo and Mieko represent a polarity that highlights the destructive force of male oppression on both the individual level and the societal level.

By uniting past, present, and future, Enchi traces the course of male oppression and the female response to it. She portrays women who resist the social structures created by men through inner "resources of great vitality, strength, passion, revenge . . ." (Gessel 412) Enchi's message of resistance was clearly heard by other female writers of the postwar generation, and one recognizes the changing social roles for women in new dimensions of the feminine response to oppression. Defining themselves as individual moral beings, in later works women are openly acknowledging their inner strength, and claiming for themselves a direct female voice which challenges the patriarchal system to accommodate it. Just as Murasaki enabled Enchi's tale of retribution, so Enchi has empowered the modern female literary voice

to challenge imposed roles and idealizations and redefine the individual and societal roles of women.

CHAPTER III

RESISTING THE ARCHETYPES: SELF-DEFINITION IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S FICTION

This final chapter examines the way in which roles for Japanese women are changing and how contemporary female authors not only document these changing roles but forge a new feminine consciousness through their writing. The focus is on short fiction, which allows an exploration of a variety of themes. As Lippit and Selden write in the introduction to Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction: "Since literary journals constitute the major medium for Japanese writers, authors have generally developed their major themes in short fiction, which is much more significant as a form than in the West, where full-length novels typically occupy the central place in a writer's works." (xvii)

During the 1980s, the United Nations-sponsored Decade for Women brought women's issues into the foreground and was an "important impetus for the sociopolitical changes concerning women in Japan." (Iwao 25) Most of the stories analyzed in this chapter were published during the 1980s, and they join in the social debate by examining the social and sexual assumptions of both men and women. Lippit and Selden note that contemporary female authors "write about the possibilities for women in the new life-style, seeing it as a means of freeing themselves from the confines of the traditional socio-sexual roles assigned to women." (xvi)

One can find common themes running through the works of contemporary Japanese women which focus on a concern for self-definition and self-representation. Women write against the traditional image of the good wife and wise mother and question the existence of the maternal instinct. They examine both the freedom and isolation which result from the breakdown of the traditional family, and portray women whose outer lifestyle or inner desires place them outside the mainstream of society. One also sees the emergence of the modern career woman as a literary figure, and a rewriting of traditional female sexual roles.

Accompanying these themes are new literary techniques. Yuko Tanaka writes in the introduction to the collection Unmapped Territories:

Dreams thread through the stories by Ohba and Saegusa, but the state of dreaming, of wandering through an unmapped region, is also a central experience of the protagonists of the other stories. This can be seen as a reflection of Japanese women's increased freedom to envision new experiences. It is also a sign of these women writers' willingness to be innovative in their literary techniques, to dream outside the old forms.
(xvi)

Female authors still allude to the classical Japanese arts such as the Noh theater and ancient mythology to enrich their texts, but they are also exploring new fictive techniques. Eimi Yamada, for example, uses English expressions and profanity in her writing, and Tanaka notes that "the intrusion of incorrectly used English into Japanese conversation is a frequent occurrence, and no other Japanese writer has so extensively used this original and ironic stylistic approach." (xii)

Most of the stories examined in this section are contained in the collection Unmapped Territories (1991) with the exception of "Congruent Figures" which is

contained in the collection Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction (1991), and "Pheasant," "A Woman to Call Mother," and "Lady of the Evening Faces" which are in the collection The Mother of Dreams and Other Short Stories: Portrayals of Women in Modern Japanese Fiction (1986). Accommodating the lag between published Japanese fiction and its English translation can be difficult, but these stories are representative of the types of issues and themes that female authors are confronting in modern Japanese society.

Women who question and resist the archetypal images of motherhood are recurring characters in contemporary Japanese literature. Sumiko Iwao writes in The Japanese Woman: Traditional Images and Changing Reality: "The model of the traditional woman is embodied in the old expression "ryosai-kenbo" [the good wife and wise mother]." (19) Makoto Ueda further notes that traditional Japanese authors have largely portrayed the mother as "tender and merciful and always ready to sacrifice herself for her child's welfare." (13) In contemporary writing, however, one sees authors resisting the glorification of motherhood. They are less concerned with presenting the ideal model of motherhood revered by a patriarchal society as they are with exploring the ambivalence many women feel toward fulfilling this role.

Iwao writes that "even today, what it means to be a good mother in Japan is measured by how much a mother does for the sake of the child." (138) Further, once children are born a married couple no longer call each other by their given names, but rely on the family centered titles "otoosan" and "okaasan," meaning father and mother, which "reflects the dominance of the parental role over their identity as individuals or

as husband and wife." (Iwao 135) Modern women, however, have been influenced by the rise of individualistic thinking, and in literature one finds a conflict arising between womanhood and motherhood. One finds women unwilling to subsume their individual identities to fulfill the maternal role, and one story in which this resulting tension is relentlessly examined is "Congruent Figures" by Takako Takahashi.

In The Waiting Years Tomo sacrificed her individuality and happiness to inhabit the role of the good wife and wise mother. She decided not to leave the Shirakawa household for the sake of her daughter: "If only Tomo could bear it, Etsuko would certainly be happier growing up in comfort as the daughter of a man of rank than in poverty in a remote country district of Kyushu." (Enchi 51) In "Congruent Figures," on the other hand, Takahashi asserts the primacy of the ego and rejects the archetype of the mother who would sacrifice everything, even her own identity, for her children.

"Congruent Figures" focuses on the relationship between Akiko and her daughter, Hatsuko. Akiko comes to view her daughter as a miniature of herself, and far from bringing a sense of pride, this resemblance fills her with resentment. Hatsuko's handwriting, voice, mannerisms, and even her smell seem to Akiko to be imitations of her own. Akiko's unspoken thoughts and feelings are voiced by Hatsuko, and her role as mistress and even her sexuality are unwittingly usurped by her daughter. Akiko narrates: "Hatsuko's behavior was completely unintentional. . . . But Hatsuko had stolen from me the woman whom although longing for I had locked up, the woman who applied lipstick but later wiped it off. . . . and I had no way of

taking back my self which was taken away by Hatsuko." (188-89) Hatsuko's genetic similarity undermines Akiko's tenuous sense of identity, and she reacts with an instinctive, jealous urge to protect her individuality.

The intensity of her resentment is shocking in the light of traditional impressions of maternity. The threat to Akiko's identity is so strong that she fantasizes about the death of her daughter. When Hatsuko fell into the sea Akiko recounts her own reaction: "The vision of a shark springing up to break that surface crossed my sight bewitchingly. I could see before my eyes a vision of Hatsuko's body, swallowed by its sharp, wide-open mouth, shining more vividly red than in reality." (180) Another time she imagines shooting Hatsuko herself. Her desperate fantasies stem from the powerful instinct of self-preservation. She feels her identity, and therefore her very existence, threatened by her daughter. Akiko relieves her stress by sending Hatsuko away to a distant college, thereby removing the constant reminder of her dwindling individuality.

Allusions to the Noh theater, also found in Enchi's works, are an integral element of the story. In "Congruent Figures," as in Masks and The Waiting Years, the female protagonist is associated with an expressionless Noh mask. Hatsuko describes the last family outing she remembers in a letter to her mother: "Your face was like that of a Noh mask. As the boat swayed, your face tilted slightly and a certain vivid emotion seemed to appear on it, but your face kept its overall expressionlessness." (169) Akiko then compares herself with the Shakumi mask which expresses the middle aged woman: "While the mask looked as if it were smiling, sad,

angry, afraid or mad, it neither smiled, nor was sad, nor angry, nor afraid, nor mad. The mask itself was expressionless. The reason why it had to be so expressionless is that it contained overflowing emotions inside." (170) Like Mieko and Tomo, the protagonist's strong emotions threaten the existing social fabric so she chooses to suppress them rather than openly challenge archetypal roles.

While uncomfortable with her son, Akiko does not feel the animosity toward him that she does toward Hatsuko. Only the bond between mother and daughter, cemented by a shared anatomy and sexual destiny, is essentially imitative and therefore threatening. Gessel writes: "Each new resemblance between them causes Akiko to feel herself stagnating--it is as if her own lifeblood is being drained from her in order to bring vitality to her daughter." (414) The jealous protection of one's identity is also found in the sister-in-law who recoils from an association with her mother. When Akiko suggests the sister-in-law's eyebrows resemble her mother's, she replies defensively: "I don't look like anyone else." Bonds so close can be suffocating.

Chieko Mulhern writes: "In a brilliant analysis of the deadly effect of self-knowledge, Takahashi Takako exposes the instinctive abhorrence, repudiation, and animosity that a sophisticated woman feels toward her married daughter who so inexorably mirrors her own idiosyncrasies." (758) Takahashi asserts that this animosity is a universal condition of motherhood. Akiko wonders: "Was my feeling about her abnormal? No, . . . It was an emotion which all the mothers of this world must have felt about their daughters." (170) The crazy old woman, an ominous figure

who sees into the depths of Akiko's heart, describes the fate of women's sexuality in a chilling passage. The old woman cuts her artery and blood soaks the earth and sky:

The old woman stretched out her hands and scooped it up saying it was the blood of women, look there is a limitless amount . . . it is transmitted to the woman who comes out of your stomach, then to another woman who comes out of that woman, and what is transmitted is woman's karma, here try to scoop it, where can you find maternal love? It is nothing but an illusion manufactured by men. Look, look, there is only blood, why is there such a thing? (191)

Takahashi discounts the existence of any innate maternal instincts and asserts that the entire concept of the maternal instinct has been created by a male patriarchy intent on providing caretakers for their offspring.

Akiko meets her daughter again after six years when Hatsuko brings her own daughter home to visit. Akiko's husband shows "the uncontrollably happy face of a grandfather," but Akiko feels suffocated by this incarnation of the imitative life force.

When Hatsuko extends the daughter to her grandmother, Akiko narrates:

I was forced to take that heavy, damp, warm thing in my arms. Because I happened to bear Hatsuko, my blood ran in her, and since Hatsuko bore Misako, my blood continued to run even in Misako. I am not able to relax with Masao either. When Masao marries soon and has a daughter, I will be transmitted there and will be relived in her. In this way, from next to next, I will continue to expand limitlessly into the dark space of the future. The thought gave me an ominous feeling.

. . . "You too bore a girl," I said, smiling thinly. I checked my impulse to say that it will begin with you now. (193)

Takahashi takes the conventional image of motherhood and turns it inside out. Akiko refuses the role of motherhood to define herself, but claims the role of individual. Her honest appraisal of herself and her maternal feelings is shocking as it flies in the face of an accepted archetype, but Takahashi, like other contemporary authors, questions

the validity of the maternal archetype. In the story "Pheasant," Harumi Setouchi reiterates this rejection of motherhood: "As she grew older Makiko developed a dislike for children. Unaccountably, whenever they came coaxing and twining around her, she reacted with an instinctive aversion, as though some disgusting animal had lunged out at her." (199) In the story "A Woman to Call Mother," Taiko Hirabayashi presents a woman who drives her daughter away by sleeping with the daughter's fiance. These authors assert the compelling human need for individuality and independence, and their writing reflects the increasing freedom women feel to express their egos and act on their desires.

In contemporary literature female authors also examine the stresses of single mothers who resist the traditional concepts of marriage and motherhood. These women are independent and autonomous, but existing outside the mainstream, they frequently suffer from isolation and loneliness. This theme is grounded in reality as more people come to see divorce as a viable option. The divorce rate in Japan is still the lowest among the advanced nations, in 1990 it stood at 1.26 percent per 1000 persons as compared to 4.8 percent for the United States, but there is a trend toward increasing acceptance of divorce. (Iwao 113) Sumiko Iwao notes that in a poll conducted by the Prime Minister's Office in 1972, 70 percent of men and women opposed the idea of divorce. She goes on to note, however, that "in a survey conducted in 1987 the trend was reversed, signaling the recent change in attitudes, with over 60 percent indicating agreement that a divorce should be sought if a marriage was not going well. A generational difference is manifest, with more

acceptance of divorce found among the younger generations, especially single women." (Iwao 114)

In addition, in modern Japan marriage is no longer necessary for social and economic survival, so women have options and freedom they never had before. (61) Yuko Tsushima, one of the most well-known female authors in Japan, explores both the positive and the negative aspects of this freedom. John Lewell writes:

The figure of the solo mother with young children appears frequently in her stories not only because her mother was such a figure but also because she herself was faced with similar circumstances shortly after she began writing. Tsushima married in 1972, but separated from her husband after they had already started a family. She raised two children by herself while continuing to write, and she naturally drew upon this experience for her short stories and novels. (451)

The majority of the stories in her collection The Shooting Gallery portray single mothers no longer bound by traditional values, but struggling nonetheless with loneliness and the heavy burdens of single parenthood.

A story which exemplifies this theme is "The Marsh," which was published in the collection Unmapped Territories. In this story Tsushima writes about the solidarity between two single mothers outside the conventions of society. These women, responding to both internal and external pressures, come to view themselves as aberrant spirits. The marsh, which is the central image of the story, is connected to a legend which identifies it with the female nature: "The guardian spirit of the marsh fell in love with a man, and in order to live with him it changed its appearance to that of a woman. After the marsh spirit gave birth to a child, her true identity was revealed to her husband, and she was forced to return to the marsh, leaving her child

behind." (154) The narrator sees herself and the other women who act outside the norms, her friend who gave birth out of wedlock, and her father's mistress, as "evil spirits of the mountains and rivers." When the nameless protagonist becomes pregnant by her married lover, she writes: "I thought that if he, who had a life with his wife and child elsewhere, was a normal human being then I, whose existence was unknown, unseen and unacceptable to his family, had to be a creature without human form, like an evil spirit that inhabits the mountains and rivers." (156)

Tsushima also depicts the social pressures which still serve to marginalize women who do not conform to societal norms. The narrator states: "More than a few people stopped being my friends when I had my second child." (160) In addition to external pressures, women must also contend with internal restraints which result from a lifetime of social conditioning. The fear and guilt imposed on women's sexuality by a patriarchal society causes the narrator's friend to have a minor breakdown: "She began feeling anxious about her sexuality, and started acting strangely. She became afraid of the evil spirit of the mountains and rivers, which she felt was stirred up inside her as various men came in and out of her life." (159) This woman is temporarily committed to a psychiatric ward because she cannot resolve the conflict between the reality she experiences and the social ideal of womanhood which was created to control and suppress female sexuality.

The images of motherhood in this story emphasize the isolation of a single parent and the stresses attendant on that role. The narrator's friend states: "Nowadays, I guess I'm what people call an education mama." (161) Her life is so wrapped up in

her child's that she lives vicariously through him with little personal fulfillment. On the other hand, this woman is far from the patient self-sacrificing ideal of motherhood generally associated with an "education mama." Tsushima grounds her resistance to maternal idealization in the mundane realities of daily life. The mother states: "I make my son take piano and swimming lessons. I nag him to study, although I myself watch television a lot. It somehow feels good to shout at your kid, you know." (161) Tsushima deconstructs the myth of the perfect, patient Japanese mother to take an honest look at single parenthood.

Tsushima also describes the resentment of women who are confined and alienated by social convention and their desire to rebel against those constraints. The narrator's friend says, "once in a while I just have to let my true self out." (161) She does so and utterly scandalizes the P.T.A. They had been discussing how to explain where babies come from to their children, and the narrator's friend intentionally makes up a scenario to confront their narrow-minded conventionality:

So I went ahead and told them how I would open my legs to let my kid see what's between them. I let him see the hole and told him that he came out of it, I told them. It's the same hole where men stick their penises and pour in this thing that makes babies. It's the hole that blood comes out of when babies are not made. I said I told my son all these things. They looked at me with shocked faces. (161)

The graphic description of this passage illustrates the freedom and willingness of contemporary authors to deal explicitly with sexual issues in literature, and it forces the reader to question his own conventionality. Because this explanation would have been directed at a child, the reader shares the P.T.A.'s shock and may see the narrator's friend as deviant. The shock and initial condemnation which registers with

the reader then encourages a closer examination of the woman's motivations for telling such a story. Tsushima forces the reader to confront the stifling conventionality which silences and oppresses women on the margins, and she depicts the resentment and alienation which would arouse a woman's desire to shock the social mainstream.

In the final paragraphs of the story the narrator returns to the image of the marsh. She wonders: "Why is it that the spirit's true identity must be revealed? I don't understand why she has to leave. Besides, why does she have to leave her child behind? You and I keep our children, I want to tell my friend." (162) This is the clearest association between the marsh creature and the women who live outside the norms, and it suggests that women must hide their true, aberrant female nature in order to get a man. The story reflects contemporary female concerns, but despite shocking passages and unconventional characters, it is conventional in its assertion that men bring happiness. The women of this story have all built their lives around the absence of men, but it is clear that that absence is keenly felt. The women do not find real happiness in their solidarity, but still "long for a human male." (154) They see themselves as society sees them. They internalize society's view of them as "evil spirits," and this alienation from society and from one's inner self resulting from such a perception is at the core of much of Tsushima's writing.

One of the most compelling images of freedom and alienation in this collection is that of the yamanba found in "Candle Fish." The narrator states that sometimes when she cannot sleep at night she is transformed into a yamanba which, according to legend, is the old witch of the mountain. This creature chases young men through the

mountains and devours them, and "Candle Fish" opens as the yamanba pursues a young man stripped to his underwear: "Regardless of what is beneath the waist girdle, this naked young man looks quite loveable to the yamanba. But it is what is inside that is precisely what she must eat. It is this that sustains her life, and it is because of this need that she has been chased away from the world of humans to live deep in the mountain." (19) This woman has the power to assert her will, but her urge to destroy men places her far outside the acceptable norms and she is forced to exist in social isolation.

This image of a woman devouring male genitals contains a powerful critique of male social and sexual dominance. It suggests that the urge to destroy men and the root of their sexuality exists deep within women. The yamanba is an embodiment of the resentment and power which have grown within women denied equality by a patriarchal society. The legend of the yamanba, however, also suggests that this destructive response is not sufficient:

But what she finds in the young man's waist girdle when she tears it away from him is something difficult to describe--it resembles the candle fish that have washed up on the moonlit shore, limp and shriveled. When she tears it to pieces and begins to eat, she finds it to be tasteless. . . . After devouring it in one gulp, the yamanba feels sad. It hasn't given her the satisfaction she gets from tasting other foods, nor has it given her a sense of fulfillment. (19)

The yamanba is free to act, but she suffers the pain of isolation. This story is about women on the margins, and about the opposing forces of freedom and acceptance.

Tanaka writes that the yamanba, like the marsh creature in the previous story, "articulates repressed desires, and is the embodiment of all women who defy the

constricting rules of society." (xii) Ohba's other fiction also explores the image of the yamanba, and Tanaka sees the tension contained in this figure as a dialectic "between a woman's desire for independence and self-expression on the one hand, and the psychic pain resulting from her solitary existence on the other." (xiii)

In addition to the realities of single parenthood, divorce and the reasons for it are increasingly brought into the foreground. Sumiko Iwao writes that women born between 1946 and 1955 are in the vanguard of social change: "Their experiences have been molded not by the old framework of obedience, self-sacrifice, passivity, and resignation but by the framework of the postwar period, which stresses equality, freedom, self-fulfillment, and optimism." (28) The stoicism which allowed Tomo to endure an oppressive marriage sharply contrasts with the pride and independence exhibited by women in contemporary works. In "Candle Fish," the Japanese narrator is impressed with her friend's self-sufficiency: "'How could you do it? Divorcing your husband with two children to look after?'. . . I was impressed by her courage. Twenty years ago divorce was quite rare in Japan, and no one would hire a single mother with small children." (27) Iwao notes that "in urban settings at least, people no longer regard divorce as shameful, and divorced men and women and their children are generally not looked down upon as they once were." (114) She further notes that the reasons for divorce are changing: "Research shows a change in the reasons cited by women from the very tangible, like drinking and physical abuse, to the more cerebral, like differences in ways of thinking (e.g., the wife's desire for companionship vs. the husband's attachment to his job), the importance of which men have not

sufficiently grasped." (117) This change is evident in contemporary fiction as female characters give different reasons for leaving their husbands. In "Candle Fish" Olga states: "I remembered what he'd said to me, that he'd almost killed me with those words. So I left. . . . By putting his hand around my neck, he slowly strangled himself. . . . There's no doubt that a man who would kill a woman will be killed by her." (28) Olga's sense of pride and self-worth recoil at her husband's verbal insult and that is enough to motivate her to divorce. In "The Rain at Rokudo Crossroad" the older man's wife considers leaving her husband because she finds little personal satisfaction in taking care of a grown man, and in the story "Lady of the Evening Faces" by Yumie Hiraiwa, the female protagonist becomes dissatisfied with the "one-sided service of a wife to her husband" and decides to leave him to "live just for herself." (276-277) Women have become more self-confident and assertive and it is evident that the changing roles for women and the possibility for social and economic independence have permanently altered the institution of marriage and the relations between the sexes.

Kazuko Saegusa writes about women who reject traditional roles, and much of the story, "The Rain at Rokudo Crossroad," focuses on the reaction of men to the changes in women. Tanaka writes:

Saegusa eerily describes the transformation of an ordinary housewife into a strange and powerful woman. But the story is also based in the realities of contemporary Japanese life, . . . The increasing independence of women is experienced by the male character in this story as a bad dream--an event outside his control. And the woman, too, experiences her freedom with a kind of dread and vertigo; while she's freeing herself of the past, she's also moving toward a future she can't predict. (Tanaka xiv)

This story is based on an old legend that names Rokudo Crossroad as the place "from which Lord Ono Takamura used to depart for his journeys to Hades." (9) This supernatural setting, combined with the rain and the mysterious female protagonist create a dreamlike quality. Nothing is certain, even the city in which the man has lived for many years has become a labyrinth and he cannot find his way home. This confusion represents the uncertainty surrounding relations between men and women. As women gain assertiveness and independence, men struggle within the confines of traditional sex roles. Sumiko Iwao notes: "The men of the first postwar generation born between 1946 and 1955 have very mixed feelings about the changes in women." (277) They see women as somewhat threatening and Iwao attributes the flourishing sex industry in Japan to "the stirrings of psychological problems engendered in men who are confused and unmanned by women who are aggressive, desire gratification of their own, know their own minds, and can express themselves clearly." (269)

Early in the story the male character meets the female protagonist on the street and is intrigued by a modern woman who can keep pace with him: "The woman walked along neither too fast nor too slow. Even his wife of nearly twenty years couldn't walk like this. His wife always complained that he walked too fast, that she always had to hurry not to fall behind." (4) This intrigue, however, soon turns to confusion and fear. She propositions him and he realizes that "he'd picked up someone he shouldn't have." (5) He later thinks she must be a ghost--real women in his experience do not behave as she does.

The nameless protagonist does not fit into any traditional female role, and when the man chooses to accompany her to a hotel, he sets out on a journey which alters his consciousness forever: "He remembered making a U-turn away from his house, and since then everything had grown strange." (10) His assumptions about his wife are shaken by this strange woman who has abandoned her husband, her apartment, and her traditional role as a wife. She asks him: "Suppose you go home . . . you find the rooms empty. There's a telephone sitting all by itself. What would you do then?" (13) The man had never examined his own situation until his encounter with this woman, and had lived secure in the assumption that his wife could never leave him. He thinks of her: "'I shouldn't have married,' she'd said repeatedly, often right to his face. She'd had a good job at the city kindergarten but when the child was born she quit. . . . 'Not only do I look after the baby but another person as well,' she used to say, referring to him." (14) His daughter also mocks his traditional male behavior and says that she would gladly leave with the mother because if she stayed, her father would make her cook every day. For the first time this man honestly acknowledges his wife's dissatisfaction. The sudden shock of understanding engenders the desperate response "it must be a joke," but the final scene of the story implies that his "torn-out consciousness" has left room for a new understanding.

The female protagonist of "The Rain at Rokudo Crossroad" also faces an unknowable future--full of freedom but also threatened by isolation and uncertainty.

As the man and woman walk they become lost. She states:

"I'm sure we can go on walking."
"But I can't see the way."

"The way?" asked the woman, looking straight into his face and shaking her head. "There isn't any way. That's why we can go on walking forever." (8)

Society is in flux and while traditional roles are no longer valid, there are no new clearly defined roles to replace them. As the man and the woman sit by the river and watch the rushing water they realize that there is no bridge to help them cross--it has disappeared. There is no bridge to navigate the uncertain future, and both men and women are left to map new roles for themselves in a changing society.

Single working women have also made their appearance in contemporary Japanese literature. Iwao states that the mass media now glorifies the single life "as the destined path of the independent self-reliant woman of the 1990s." (62) Yukiko Tanaka notes that the character of an independent young working woman was rarely found in earlier Japanese fiction and that the lifestyle was widely frowned upon just twenty years ago. The terminology used to refer to a working woman in her thirties who is still unmarried reflects this changing attitude. The words have changed "from 'oorudo misu' (old maid) to 'hai misu' (high, or advanced maid) to, today, 'shinguru' (single). The current term implies a lifestyle . . . free of family intervention and the meddling of others." (Tanaka x)

Professional women wanting greater independence and respect are increasingly common figures in contemporary Japanese fiction, and Mizuko Masuda describes the frustrations working women frequently face in the story "Sinking." The protagonist of "Sinking," Noriko, has to constantly monitor her actions in order to be taken seriously by her male colleagues: "From her experience at work, she knew that even the

slightest display of irritation or anger might cause her to be labelled a hysterical woman." (41) This social pressure in the workplace is cross-cultural, and Iwao writes that there is a "lag between women's attitudes, which have drastically changed, and social norms which remain largely unchanged." (62) Women are not permitted access to legitimate, justified displays of anger without threat to their standing as professional adults. A man's irritation or anger is taken seriously, whereas a woman's anger is dismissed as hysterics, hormonal moodiness or outright bitchiness. As a result, Noriko is constantly monitoring her reactions and this pressure causes her to resent the easy audacity of men. Her resentment and feelings of inferiority bubble to the surface over the practice of serving tea.

Iwao writes: "Working women in Japan put up with much discriminatory treatment, such as being expected to serve tea to male colleagues and not being given jobs or positions of responsibility in the office." (202) In Noriko's office each employee helps himself to tea which reflects a trend in many companies in modern Japan. Tsukamoto, the only male colleague in Noriko's division, violates this custom. He frequently asks the women in his section to make him tea and never washes his own cup. "Once when [Noriko] called his attention to the rules, he appeared genuinely puzzled. He said he had never made tea in his life." (45) His behavior symbolizes to Noriko the sweeping professional and personal discrimination against women, and she stubbornly refuses to accept his dependency on female subservience. She repeatedly returns his unwashed cup to his desk, and feels "everyone staring at her, silently accusing her of once again giving someone a hard time." (46) She is censured by the

stares of the other women in the office for not accommodating Tsukamoto. This highlights another problem that career women face. Many women in Japan work in order to meet a suitable husband, and then upon marrying, they promptly quit. This practice, which is encouraged by many companies, causes management to view a woman's commitment to her job with some suspicion and further limits women's opportunities for advancement.

Another prevailing theme in this story is that of separateness. Masuda writes: "Ever since she found herself alone, Noriko experienced moments when she felt unconnected to the rest of the world, swinging back and forth like a thread hanging in the air." (55) She, like the other female protagonists in this collection, is adrift in the confusion surrounding relations between the sexes and her uncertainty engenders fear. Noriko wonders: "What will Tsukamoto do when he finds out he has been stood up? Will he come to my apartment? What will I do then? Will Sugio [her neighbor] come out of his room to rescue me? She suddenly felt shaky, as if there was no solid ground under her feet." (61) She is fearful of male aggression, but she appears to fear unpredictability even more. Masuda portrays the difficulty and frustration both men and women face when they are forced to act according to new, undefined gender roles.

In contemporary fiction female sexuality has also been released from the bonds of traditional morality. Many writers are using sexually explicit language and are placing their female heroes in sexual roles traditionally reserved for men. Tanaka discusses Eimi Yamada's writing: "Much of [her] work is sexually explicit, . . . and her female characters hold a remarkably liberated view of sex; they are openly

aggressive and take the initiative in sexual relationships. Sexual conduct is seen as a direct expression of the values, world-views, and self-images of her characters." (xi)

Two stories which clearly portray changing perceptions of female sexuality are "When a Man Loves a Woman" by Eimi Yamada, and "Straw Dogs" by Taeko Tomioka. In these stories sexuality is stripped of its traditional moral codes and women take an aggressive interest in sexual relations.

Ueda writes: "Traditionally in Japanese culture, as in most other cultures, the husband is the initiator and aggressor in the sexual act . . . while the wife is relegated to a more passive, submissive role." (9) This was clearly seen in The Waiting Years and Masks as Tomo and Sadako were forced to wait passively, and often fruitlessly, for their husbands' sexual attention. The woman in Tomioka's story, however, openly discusses and pursues sexual gratification, and the protagonist of "Straw Dogs" pursues sexual encounters with a single-minded intensity. Tanaka describes the protagonist of "Straw Dogs": "Stepping aggressively into a traditional male role, she pursues sexual encounters one after another in an attempt to understand the true meaning of love-making. Neither romantic nor hedonistic, the 'affairs' of this woman are more like voyages into truly unknown territory." (xiv)

"Straw Dogs" is the most sexually explicit story in the collection. It does not justify sex through romance, but portrays the act itself as a mere bodily function. The story also explores the social and spiritual isolation which often accompanies the sexual act. The narrator writes:

I've always been amazed by how easily and quickly that part of the male body can enter the female body. It seems almost comical the way

it so smoothly slides inside me, and momentarily appears to achieve physical unity. Although this unity happens quickly and with amazing ease, most people expect connection to continue on through the dramatic stages of conflict, cooperation, ecstasy, and so on. I did not expect any of those dramatic experiences with Eikichi or, for that matter, with any other young men. (121)

This woman does not require the trappings of love and romance to justify sex, and does not expect her lovers to require them. When intercourse is finished she immediately loses interest in the man, and as a rule never sees the same man twice. Sex is not glorified in this story, but is rendered in its lowest physical form. She describes her lover Eikichi: "When he was done, he stood up like a person who's just finished moving his bowels and he put on his clothes, returning to his original self." (122)

Reflecting the alienation and loneliness of many women in modern society, the protagonist uses sex as a means of self-exploration. She examines each lover carefully to see if she can gain some insight into the human psyche:

Through sex I try to discover something metaphysical about my and my partner's body. This is why I allow my body to be completely exposed, like a bag being turned inside out, with my sex organ as the opening. I'm curious to know if there are such things as spirituality and maliciousness hidden in the corners of this bag, waiting to be revealed when the bag is turned inside out by a stranger's sex organ. (135)

As society changes, old values are rejected and people must search for new meaning in personal experiences. This woman does so by stripping sex of its emotional elements to use it to search for meaning within herself.

Men are confused and shocked by her aggressive sexuality. The young waiter Rin'ichi says that she is too blunt and that she insults a man's pride. She narrates:

"Rin'ichi had wanted to enjoy not the intercourse itself, but the ritual surrounding it, an affair." (144) Tomioka switches traditional gender roles here to highlight the expectations surrounding and confining female sexuality. Later a married man whom the woman approaches in the park is also shocked by her proposition: "He looked away as if trying to avoid a light glaring in his eyes. Then he looked at the ground like a child who didn't know what to say." This woman's aggressive behavior, which at one time defined traditional male sexuality, contradicts the passive restrained "feminine" attitude toward sex that men have become comfortable with. Women who take control of their sexuality are encroaching on a male domain. Retreating from the woman, the man in the park dismisses her as crazy.

This selection of stories shows new thematic and stylistic trends taking shape in contemporary Japanese fiction. The stories work to correct misapprehensions about Japanese women and the "vision of the exotic that seems to be so enticingly realized in projections of Japanese femininity by certain widely translated male writers." (Vernon 211). They also reflect the current social context of modern Japan, and document changing roles for Japanese women. Iwao writes:

Fifteen years ago . . . a typical 35-year-old woman was most likely a professional housewife with two children who devoted her life to serving the needs of husband and children. On the basis of the fixed set of roles (e.g., shopkeeper's wife, schoolteacher, mother) she assumed, each of which was clearly and narrowly defined, it was relatively easy to visualize how she lived. Today it is not so easy. Every role (even that of wife or mother) is much more loosely defined. She is equally likely to be single, married, living with a partner, or divorced; to have children or be childless, and to be working part- or full-time. And she is as likely to be a person who seeks self-fulfillment and devotes herself to personal goals as an "education mama," who pursues vicarious fulfillment through the accomplishments of her children. (6)

The contemporary fiction examined here not only documents these changing roles, but is also a medium through which women can examine the roles they are claiming.

Tracing a line from The Waiting Years and Masks to contemporary fiction one sees a consistent pattern of resistance to male oppression, but the most significant change centers around the movement from silent submission to verbalized self-assertion.

Women are no longer silently resisting idealized female roles such as the good wife and wise mother or the vengeful witch, but are actively creating new identities and roles for themselves in society and in literature.

Ueda writes: "Since literature not only records what has happened but also forecasts what will, and should, happen we can be sure that Japanese writers, men and women both, will continue to play an important role in determining the kind of life that Japanese women lead." (16) The inner and outer transformations of women have engendered profound changes in Japanese society, and the stories examined here provide valuable insight into the mind of the modern Japanese woman as she creates new identities for herself and attempts to understand the implications and possibilities inherent in these changing roles.

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