



Komachi
and the Hundred Nights

(KAYOI KOMACHI)

BY KANZE KIYOTSUGU KAN'AMI/TRANSLATED BY EILEEN KATO

INTRODUCTION

Komachi and the Hundred Nights, a fourth category play, was written by Kan'ami, but like other works attributed to him was probably revised by his son, Zeami. There is evidence especially that the passage in which Komachi describes the fruits and nuts she has gathered, a virtuoso example of the use of allusions, is by Zeami; other passages may even antedate Kan'ami.

According to popular traditions the famous poet and beauty of the ninth century Ono no Komachi was courted by a certain Fukakusa no Shōshō, or Captain Fukakusa, also known as Shii no Shōshō. Komachi promised him that she would yield if he slept one hundred consecutive nights before her house, on a bench used to support the shafts of her carriage: Shōshō came faithfully every night, and each time made a mark on the shaft bench. But the day before the hundredth night his father suddenly died and Shōshō had to forego his visit. Komachi accordingly set him a mocking poem, in which she offered to make the hundredth mark herself.

The play makes use of a variant of this legend and combines it with another story, which concerns Komachi's skull. The col-

lection of anecdotes *Kojidan* (c. 1215) relates that when Ariwara no Narihira (825-880, the hero of the poem-tale *Ise Monogatari*) was passing through the province of Mutsu he heard a voice crying:

Each time the winds of autumn blow,

The pain! The pain-racked holes that were my eyes!

Looking around, he saw only a skull lying on the ground, with pampas grass (*susuki*) growing through the eye sockets. A companion told Narihira that Komachi had died on this spot, and that this must be her skull. Moved, Narihira completed the verse:

|| Ono, my name, is mine no longer;

|| Only pampas grass grows here now.

Kan'ami shifted the scene of the play from Mutsu, in the far north, to Ichiwarano near Kyoto.

Of the five plays in the repertory dealing with Komachi, this is the only one in which she appears as a ghost. It is remarkable too for Shōshō's refusal to listen to the priest's teachings. His resistance to salvation is unique in Nō. *Not really -*

The play is performed by all schools of Nō.

PERSONS A PRIEST (*waki*)
 A YOUNG WOMAN (*mae-zure*)
 KOMACHI (*nochi-zure*)
 FUKAKUSA NO SHŌSHŌ (*shite*).

PLACE FIRST PART: Yasé in Yamashiro Province
 SECOND PART: Ichiwarano, also in Yamashiro

TIME THE NINTH MONTH

KOMACHI AND THE HUNDRED NIGHTS (KAYOI KOMACHI)

(The Priest enters and stands at the naming-place. He carries a rosary.)

PRIEST. I am a priest performing my summer retreat in the mountain village of Yasé. Every day a woman comes—I don't know where she comes from—to bring me fruit and firewood. If she comes again today I'll ask her name and ask her too what manner of person she may be. *(He goes to kneel at the waki-position. The Woman enters. She wears the tsure mask and in her left hand she carries a basket of leaves. She stands at the shite-position, facing the musicians.)*



WOMAN. The twigs I gather are for firewood,

The twigs I gather are for firewood;

How sad that the incense has left my sleeves!¹



(She faces front.) I am a woman who lives near Ichiwarano. A holy man has come to the mountain village of Yasé, and I always take him fruit and firewood. I intend to go again today. *(She kneels at stage center, indicating she has reached the Priest's hut.)* Forgive me for intruding. I have come again.

PRIEST. Are you the same woman who always comes here? Tell me what fruits you have brought me today.

WOMAN. What are all these fruits and nuts

I have gathered here?

Windfall acorns,

The easy prey of storms

That set them rolling

Like carriage wheels I used to know.²



CHORUS *(for Woman)*. And what fruits have I to evoke
The houses of the poets?

WOMAN. Persimmons from the hedge,
To recall Hitomaro;³

Chestnuts from the hillside,

A memento of Akahito;

CHORUS. Plums from the window

WOMAN. And peaches from the garden;

Pears from Ō-no-ura _

Where cherry-flax grows,

Named for the cherry blossoms;

Boughs of burning-oak

And twigs of fragrant beech,

Kindlings of the broad-leaved oak;

Oranges both large and small,

The mandarin and the cumquat,

And for sweet, sad remembrance

Of long-ago loves,

A flowering spray of orange blossom.

PRIEST. Now I have learned the names of all the fruits and nuts
you've brought me. But please tell me, what is your name,
and what kind of person are you?

WOMAN. Oh, no, I am too ashamed!

Ono, my name, is now

CHORUS. Mine to use no longer.

(She rises.)

I am an old woman and I live

Near the moors of Ichiwara

Where the wild pampas grass grows.

Pray for my repose, o priest!

And suddenly, as if blotted out,

She disappeared from sight;

As if dissolved into the air,

She vanished completely.

(She retires to the stage assistant's position.)

PRIEST. This is the most extraordinary thing that has ever hap-
pened to me! When I questioned the woman closely, she said
her name was no longer hers to use, and that she lives near
the moors of Ichiwara where the pampas grass grows. And
then she suddenly vanished. A man once passing through
Ichiwarano heard a voice cry from a clump of pampas grass:
Each time the winds of autumn blow,

The pain! The pain-racked holes that were my eyes!

Ono, my name, is mine to use no longer;

Only pampas grass grows here now.

That was a poem by Ono no Komachi. There can be no



57 *Komachi and the Hundred Nights*

doubt but that the woman I have just seen was the spirit of
Ono no Komachi! I shall go to the moors of Ichiwara and
pray for her repose.

Leaving my straw hut

*(He rises and takes a few steps towards the front of the
stage.)*

Leaving my straw hut

I journey now

To the long, deep grasses |

And the heavy dew

Of Ichiwara moor.

(He kneels.)

I spread my prayer mat

And burn incense for the dead.

(He presses his palms together in prayer.)

Namu yūrei jō tōshōgaku:

May this spirit gain

Perfect understanding;

Shutsuri shōji tonshō bodai:

May she escape rebirth

And know sudden enlightenment!⁴

*(He rises and goes to sit at the waki-position. Shōshō comes
through the curtain onto the bridgeway. He wears the yase-
otoko mask, but his face is hidden by the cloak he holds
over his head. At the same time, the Woman, now revealed
as Komachi, stands and leaves the stage assistant's position.
She faces the Priest from the naming-place.)*

KOMACHI. Blessèd am I, o priest,

That you should pray for my soul!

Instruct me, if you will,

In the Holy Commandments.

*(Shōshō faces the Priest
from the first pine.)*

SHŌSHŌ. No, you must not!

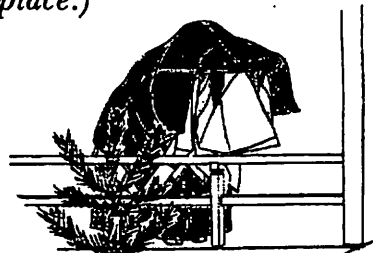
If you instruct her in the Law,

I will vent my fury!

Away with you, Priest, and quickly!

KOMACHI. Why should you prevent me?

Now that by rare good fortune



I have encountered the Teaching,
Would you still have me suffer
The tortures of hell?

SHÔSHÔ. Even when we suffered them together

The pains were grievous,
But if you alone attain
The Way of the Buddha
You will add to the weight I bear
Yet another cloak of sorrow,
Piling grief on grief.
If then I sink beneath the burden
Into the River of Three Fords,⁵
All the priest's instructions
Will not save you from my wrath.
Go away, at once, you priest!

(He lifts the cloak over his head a little, and glares at the Priest.)

PRIEST. You are still deluded,
Deluded and confused,
But if the Law's power
Takes hold in you,
You too will surely
Enter the Buddha's Way.
Both of you together
Receive instruction in the Law!

KOMACHI. I cannot speak for him,
But my heart is an unclouded moon;
I came before you, o priest,
Pushing aside the pampas grass
To entreat that you pray for me.

(She moves to stage center, facing the Priest.)

SHÔSHÔ. I was concealing myself,
But now I emerge from the grass:
(He removes the cloak from his head.)
The plumes of grass are beckoning,
Now I have beckoned too—desist!

(He makes beckoning gestures to Komachi.)

KOMACHI. My heart that seeks the light
Is like the mountain deer;



59 *Komachi and the Hundred Nights*

Even if you beckon

You cannot hold it back.

SHŌSHŌ. Then I'll become a hound of passion

(He starts towards the stage.)

You can beat but never drive away.

(He comes onstage.)

KOMACHI. What a horrifying sight!

(He comes up boldly behind Komachi.)

SHŌSHŌ. I'll take your sleeve

and hold you back!

(He puts his hand

on Komachi's shoulder.)

KOMACHI. My sleeve in your grip,

SHŌSHŌ. My own that pulls on yours,

(He draws back a little.)

CHORUS. Both are drenched

in a dew of tears.

Now you know me,

Fukakusa, the Captain!⁶

(He withdraws to the shite-pillar and faces the Priest.)

PRIEST. Then you really are Ono no Komachi and Shii no Shōshō?

Confess your sins and destroy them!

SHŌSHŌ *(to Komachi)*. Then you must tell him how I spent one

hundred nights on the shaft bench of your carriage, and I

will mime my hundred nights of journeying to your door.

KOMACHI. Of course I never suspected |

Such delusion lay in his heart.

(She sits near the Priest.)

SHŌSHŌ. That is absurd! She falsely promised her love if for one

hundred nights I visited the shaft bench of her carriage. And

I believed her! Every night before the dawn I set out stealthily

in my carriage, again and again, and made my way to the

shaft bench.

(He turns to Komachi.)

KOMACHI. I bade him draw his carriage blinds,

For fear that prying eyes might see him;

I told him he must come disguised.

SHŌSHŌ. So of course I ceased to use

My palanquin or carriage.



KOMACHI. I wondered when his love would end.

CHORUS. In Yamashiro,

In the town of Kowata,

There were horses to hire,⁷

(He takes a few steps forward and looks off into the distance.)

SHŌSHŌ. But I loved you so much

I walked barefoot all the way.

(He picks up the conical kasa hat provided by the stage assistant.)

KOMACHI. And how were you dressed?

SHŌSHŌ. A wicker hat and a straw cloak,

(He holds the hat before him and looks at it.)

KOMACHI. A bamboo staff, full of knots,

Like the skein of human grief.

SHŌSHŌ. On moonlit nights

The way was not too dark;

KOMACHI. And in the snow?

SHŌSHŌ. I brushed it from my sleeves.

(He mimes the action.)

KOMACHI. And on rainy nights?

SHŌSHŌ. I walked in dread of demons

—Invisible to the eye

Who might swallow me alive.⁸

KOMACHI. And what of the rare cloudless nights?

SHŌSHŌ. On me alone

(He lifts the hat and looks upward.)

There fell a rain of tears.

Ah, how dark the night is!

(He holds the hat before his face.)

KOMACHI. The twilight hour

Aroused particular longing.

SHŌSHŌ. What are you saying?

(He lowers the hat and stares at Komachi.)

CHORUS. The twilight hour

Aroused particular longings in you?

SHŌSHŌ. It must have been the moon you waited for!

You surely never waited for me!

A lunatic would not believe that lie!



1 *Komachi and the Hundred Nights*

(He thrusts the hat towards Komachi.)

us *(for Komachi)*. The break of day,
The break of day
Brought many, many thoughts of love.
Hō. But when you thought of me, you prayed,
us. "Let the cocks crow if they will!
Let the morning bell resound!
Let the night give way to dawn!"
Lying alone was no hardship.

*(He sits at the shite-pillar
and lowers his head.)*

Hō. Thus did I waste
And exhaust my heart;
us. Thus did I waste
And exhaust my heart.
But when I tallied up

(He mimes counting on the fingers of his left hand.)

The notches on the shaft bench,
There were ninety-nine nights.
Only one more now—
How happy I am!

(He rises.)

The longed-for day has come!

Hō. I will hurry to her!

us. How shall I attire myself?

Hō. This bamboo hat is unsightly—

(He looks at the hat, then tosses it away.)

us. I shall wear a folded court hat.

Hō. I cast away my coat of straw,

us. And in this flower-patterned robe

Hō. Richly I array myself

In fold on fold of color.

us. Purple-lined

Hō. My trouser-skirts,

Wisteria-hued.

us. I'm sure she must be waiting!

Hō. I can't wait to be with her!

At last the final day is here,

(He goes to the front of the stage.)



And it has drawn to a close.

I arrange with elegance

CHORUS. My crimson hunting cloak.

What shall we drink to celebrate?

Though the moon itself

Should be our wedding cup,⁹

(He holds out his fan as though offering wine.)

The Precepts order abstinence,

And I will observe them.

This instant of enlightenment

Obliterates a host of sins:

Ono no Komachi

And Shōshō the Captain

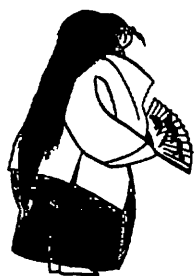
Together have entered

The Way of Buddhahood,

Together have entered

The Way of Buddhahood.

(Shōshō gives a final stamp of the foot, then exits, followed by Komachi and the Priest.)



Notes

1. There is a pun on *taki*, to burn, used in "firewood," and *takimono*, perfume. Komachi regrets that she no longer wears elegant robes with incense burnt into them.

2. A reference to Shōshō's carriage which visited her so often.

3. The following passage contains various allusions to the poetical associations of different fruits. Hitomaro's surname was Kakinomoto, interpreted as meaning "persimmon hedge." This occasioned later legends about connections between Hitomaro and persimmons. Akahito, another great *Manyōshū* poet, had the surname of Yamabe (hillside) and traditionally lived in a place noted for its chestnuts (*sasaguri*).

4. A formula for prayer for the dead, given in Chinese.

5. A river in the afterworld which must be crossed by the dead before they are sent into their future lives.

6. The name Fukakusa means "deep grass"; the association with the words "dew of tears," a natural property of "deep grass," leads to revelation of his name.

7. Quoted from a poem in the *Shūishū* attributed to Hitomaro: "There were horses at Kowata in Yamashina, but I came on foot, for love of you."

8. A reference to a passage in the *Ise Monogatari* in which a woman is abducted on a night of lightning and rain.

9. A wedding ceremony in Japan still involves a ritual drinking of saké. The transition from this line to the next is exceedingly abrupt and the text may well be faulty. But perhaps the passage means that in the instant of envisioning the consummation of his marriage with Komachi, the culmination of his worldly desires, he suddenly remembers the Buddhist prohibition on drink and this sudden recollection enables him to submit to the rest of the Buddhist discipline.