

## Noh Kayoi Komachi 通小町

(“The Nightly Courting of Komachi”)

A priest in his mountain retreat is visited daily by a woman bringing him fruits and nuts. After she reveals that she is the ghost of the 9<sup>th</sup> century poet and legendary beauty, Ono no Komachi. The priest goes to pray for her and both she and Commander Fukakusa, who had courted her for 100 nights before he died, appear. Still bitter at her, he at first does not want the priest to pray for her, but eventually they are both able to attain salvation together.

Author: Kan’ami (1333-1384) with partial revision by Zeami (1363?-1443?).

Scene: Late summer, Yase in Yamashiro Province, the present Yase, Sakyô Ward, Kyoto; then Ichiwarano in Yamashiro, the present Ichiwarano-cho also in Sakyô Ward, Kyoto.

Category: Fourth category miscellaneous (male obsession) play, phantasm (mugen) noh in two acts, tachimawari (stroll dance) or kakeri (anguish dance) piece, without taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Waki (secondary actor): a priest.
- Mae-zure (first-half tsure accompanying actor): a village woman. Wears a young woman (waka-onna or ko-omote) mask.
- Nochi-zure (second half tsure): the ghost of Ono no Komachi. Wears the same mask as above..
- Shite (main actor): the ghost of Fukakusa no Shôshô (commander Fukakusa). Wears an emaciated man (yase-otoko or kawazu) mask.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Waki entrance: A priest enters to nanori solo flute, tells that he is in summer retreat in the mountain village of Yase and that a woman comes daily bringing fruit and firewood for him. Today he intends to ask her who she is..
2. Tsure entrance: A village woman enters to shidai music and sings of the brushwood she gathers and how its fragrance does not remain in her thin and ragged robe. She tells how she has again today brought fruit and firewood to a priest.
3. Tsure/Waki exchange: The priest asks the woman about the fruit she has brought and she tells how even Siddharta (Buddha) picked herbs, drew water, and gathered firewood. With the chorus, she sings about persimmons, chestnuts, plums peaches, oranges and kumquats.
4. Tsure exit: The priest asks the woman her name. With the chorus, she says how she is embarrassed to reveal herself (ono) suggesting thus that her name is Ono. Saying that she lives in the moors of Ichiwarano where the pampas grass grows, she asks the priest to pray for her soul and vanishes, kneeling at the back of the stage.
5. Waki monologue: The remarks on the woman who suddenly disappeared ashamed to say Ono.

He recalls the story of a man passing through the moors of Ichiwarano who heard a voice from the pampas grass speak a verse telling of “the pain of the autumn winds blowing through these empty eye sockets”. It was a verse of Ono no Komachi and the priest realizes that the woman must be the ghost of Komachi. He decides to go to Ichiwarano and pray for her soul.

6. Waki’s wait: The priest sings a waiting song in which he tells of leaving his straw hut, going to the deep grasses of Ichiwarano, and of laying down a kneeling mat and lighting incense. He begins to recite a prayer asking that the spirit gain perfect understanding and become enlightened.
7. Nochi-zure / Shite entrance: To issei music, the ghost of Fukakusa no Shôshô enters hiding himself with a robe, while at the same time, the ghost of Komachi turns and stands. Komachi sings of how happy she is for the priest’s prayers, but Fukakusa protests saying that Komachi should not attain salvation and the priest should leave. Komachi says that she should no longer suffer now that she has encountered Buddha’s holy law, but again Fukakusa replies that if she only attains salvation, his heaviness in sinking into Hell will be multiplied. Again he tells the priest to go away. The chorus, speaking for the priest, sings of how far the heart has been deluded and says that through Buddha’s power both can attain salvation, Komachi sings that her heart is unclouded and asks the priest for his prayers. Fukakusa sings of revealing himself and begging her to stop, and stays that he cannot be driven away as he goes to pull on her sleeve, while Komachi remarks on his terrifying form. The chorus sings how both sleeves are drenched in tears.
8. Tsure/Shite narrative: The priest sees that it is Komachi and Fukakusa before him and asks them to tell of their 100-nights courtship. They tell how Fukakusa came by chariot nightly, how Komachi asked him to come disguised, and how Fukakusa then came barefoot in the snow, on a rainy night in dread of demons, and on cloudless nights in tears. Fukakusa dances a tachimawari “stroll” or kakeri anguish dance. The chorus describes with Fukakusa Komachi’s longings, of remembering the many dawns, how Fukakusa became exhausted, but at last the final night came and, putting on his court hat and patterned robe, he hurried to her.
9. Conclusion: The chorus sings of his beautiful robe, of wondering whether to drink sake in celebration but abstaining because it is against Buddhist precepts, of awaiting enlightenment, and how Komachi and Fukakusa together enter the path of Buddha.

[Richard Emmert]