

Noh Sotoba Komachi 卒塔婆小町

(Komachi on the Stupa)

This play features Ono no Komachi, one of the six great poets of the early Heian Period, also famous for her beauty and her many suitors whose infatuation she allegedly mocked. In the Edo Period, her name became synonymous with a “beautiful woman,” in particular used with regional names to indicate a beautiful woman of that region, a practice which continues to this day. There are five noh plays which feature her.

Here, two priests from Mt. Koya are on their way to the capital when they come across an old woman sitting on a ruined Buddhist stupa. The priests remonstrate her. In turn, she argues with them in what becomes a controversy on Buddhist doctrine. The priests, impressed with her knowledge, ask her name. She confesses that she is Komachi now 100 years old, and reminisces about her youth. In a fit of madness, she imagines that she is one of her suitors, Fukakusa no Shôshô, attempting to visit her one hundred nights to earn her love but dying after the 99th visit. But she at last emerges from her madness to set her mind on gaining salvation.

Author: Kan'ami (1333-84).

Scene: Autumn, the late 9th century; Toba in Yamashiro Province, the present Minami Ward in the southern part of Kyoto.

Category: Fourth category miscellaneous (old woman-*rôjo*) play, present-time (*genzai*) noh in one act, without *taiko* stick drum.

Performance Practice: Performed by all five *shite* schools.

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance):

Waki (secondary character): A Priest from Mt. Koya.

Wakitsure (accompanying secondary character): An Attendant Priest.

Shite (main character): A 100-year old woman, Ono no Komachi.

SYNOPSIS: Scene by Scene

1. *Waki/Wakitsure entrance* : Two priests enter to shidai music and sing of the secret places in the shallow mountains and the deep recesses of our hearts. The head priest introduces them as priests from Mt. Koya and together they sing of living between the times long after Buddha had died and long before the Buddha to come has appeared with only teachings to guide them to enlightenment. They sing a travel song telling of renouncing all ties to this earth and walking long miles but never leaving home, bust resting in hills and fields which are their home.
2. *Shite entrance* : Ono no Komachi enters to shidai music and sings of being

a drifting water-weed saddened by not having waters to beckon her. She sings of the her loveliness as a youth compared to her present wretchedness as years and months have piled their ravages on her head until she has be-come a 100-year old crone, of dreading to see people in the city for fear they would recognize her, of passing unchallenged by the imperial palace due to her miserable form, of passing the lover's mound at Toba and seeing a barge on the Katsura River and wondering who the rowers are before stopping and taking a rest on a decaying stump.

3. *Waki/Wakitsure/Shite exchange*: The priests see an old woman is sitting on a stupa and tell her that she must get off it. Thus begins a long exchange where they discuss the stupa as a symbol of the Buddha's body, Buddhism and the renunciation of the world as a thing of the mind and not the body, of contrary ways to reach salvation, of evil also being good, of passion being also enlightenment. The chorus continues singing of truth as nothingness, of Man and Buddha being no different, of sin leading to salvation, and of the priests realizing that this old woman is no ordinary beggar. The old woman then improvises a song in jest about the stupa and the chorus sings of the annoying sermonizing of the priests.
4. *Shite's confession*: Answering the priests' question, the woman admits she is Komachi. The priests exclaim about the once famed beauty and poet and the chorus sings of how her beauty has passed.
5. *Waki/Shite sung exchange*: The chorus singing for the priests ask about her garments. She tells of carrying rice and beans around her neck, soiled garments on her back, a broken sedge hat. The chorus for Komachi sings of sleeves not enough to wipe her tears, of her roaming the streets a beggar, and her suddenly being seized with madness.
6. *Shite's madness*: Komachi suddenly asks for alms to give to Komachi becoming in her madness the lieutenant Fukakusa no Shôshô who tried to win her love. The chorus describes how she is possessed by Shôshô's angry spirit and how he must make his nightly journeys to Komachi's home.

To monogi costume change music, stage assistants put on Komachi the clothes of Shôshô.

7. *Shite's madness continues*: Komachi and the chorus sing of Shôshô going nightly to visit Komachi in all kinds of weather, of missing important banquets and of being as faithful as the morning cock's crow, but lacking but one and dying in agony. Komachi is now possessed by Shôshô.
8. *Conclusion*: The chorus sings of Komachi now wanting to pray for salvation, of piling high the pebbles into stupas, and of making offerings in order to enter the Way of Truth. [Richard Emmert]