THIS TOO, TOO SOLID FLESH: THE REPRESENTATION OF ONO NO KOMACHI AS AN OLD WOMAN IN NOH PLAYS

by

Anthea Lea Murphy

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Abstract

Ono no Komachi, the ninth century Heian poet, features in five Noh plays from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that are still in the repertory, the most of any woman, as her reputation for skill in poetry and the many legends about her made her an excellent choice for a main character. Most of the plays overtly feature poetry as a main theme, while often depicting her as an old woman. These plays pick up on themes which were already common in the legends about Komachi, including her destitution in old age and her use as a symbol of mujō, or impermanence. However, the ways they deal with these themes differ considerably from their precedents. This thesis examines three plays, Sotoba Komachi, Sekidera Komachi, and Ōmu Komachi, that deal with Komachi as an old woman and the ways in which they construct the relationship between women’s bodies, their poetry, and medieval Japanese Buddhism. Far from being celebrations of Komachi’s skill, the plays in fact control, degrade, and otherwise marginalize Komachi’s poetry through constructing her body as vulnerable, powerless and incapable, and controlling her relationship to areas and people of poetic power, particularly Tamatsushima shrine, the capital, and Sotoori-hime. By examining the revisions and changes made by the playwrights to the sources used in the plays, the thesis suggests that these three plays create a Komachi who acts as symbol of the impermanence of women’s poetry and of poetry-based social mobility for women.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“The seed refers to the choice of a subject based on appropriate traditional sources, the actions of which are both appropriate for theatrical expression and especially effective in terms of the Two Arts of dance and chant. This is, of course, because these Two Arts form the fundamental basis of our whole art. If the subject chosen for the play concerns a character who cannot be manifested using these Two Arts, then even if the character to be portrayed is a famous person in the past or a person of prodigious gifts, no theatrical effect appropriate to the nō is possible... In terms of women's roles, Lady Ise, Ono no Komachi, Gō and Gijo, Shizuka, and Hyakuman are all famous for their artistic accomplishments in poetry or dance. All of these historical or literary characters, if chosen for the central figure of a nō drama, will of themselves bring an appearance of artistic elegance to the play.”

Zeami wrote this in his Noh treatise Sandō (三道) in 1423. The treatise deals with how to write an effective Noh play. The first qualification Zeami writes about is the importance of having an effective seed, or subject, which he uses as equivalent to the shite of the play. He stresses the importance of choosing a character who can utilize dance and chant believably, and suggests that those famous for their accomplishments in poetry or dance are especially good choices. Amongst women characters, he includes the ninth-century poet Ono no Komachi as a particularly good choice. The rest of the Noh world seems to have agreed with him. Komachi features in the most Noh plays of any female character, and the third-most of any character. There are five plays about her still in-repertory, and over ten ex-repertory plays dating from the Muromachi period up till the twentieth century.

1 Rimer and Yamazaki, 148-9.
2 According to Yasumura, who has Yoshitsune as the character who appears most often in Noh plays with fourteen plays, and Narihira as second with six. However, he seems to count plays in which the character is mentioned but does not feature (i.e. Yoshitsune in Kagekiyo). Benkei ties with Komachi for third place. Yasumura, 34.
Yet this quote also hints at the contradiction at the heart of Komachi's representation in Noh. Although she is an appropriate character precisely because of her accomplishments in poetry, onstage she is very rarely allowed to display or be in control of her poetic talent. Instead it is obscured, overwritten, degraded, and interrupted. This controlling of her poetic talent is frequently coupled in the plays with her representation as an aged, decrepit figure. The image of an aged and down-on-her-luck Komachi had been present in Japanese literature since at least the mid-Heian period, as can be seen in the tenth- or perhaps eleventh-century kanbun work *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sosuisho* (*The Prosperity and Fall of Tamatsukuri Komachi*, discussed below). However, as I will argue throughout this thesis, Komachi's aged body is made to work in a very different way in the Noh plays than in any of the previous literature depicting her old age. Specifically, the depiction of an aged Komachi in Noh plays focuses on the tensions and conflicts between women, Buddhism, and poetry, and the ways in which the ageing female body acts to domesticate the threat of both women and their poetry.

The threat of women fell along a Buddhist axis in medieval Japan. Women's bodies were dangerously impure, they themselves represented a lure to keep men attached to the illusory world, and it was believed that they faced five obstructions (specifically, five types of rebirth they could not experience directly from a woman's body, including buddhahood) which essentially prevented them from gaining enlightenment in their lifetimes.\(^4\) For this reason

\(^4\) There were countercurrents to this idea, some of which can be found in the story of the *naga* girl in the *Lotus Sutra*, discussed in the *Sotoba* chapter, but the general view of women in medieval Japanese Buddhism was a highly misogynist one.
they were prevented from entering certain sacred spaces under the so-called *nyonin kinsei* (women forbidden) rules, as well as a host of other restrictions.

One of the ways in which women could fight against these restrictions was poetry. Poetry was held to have powers ranging from the persuasive to the miraculous. In *katoku setsuwa*, or “tales of the miraculous benefits of poetry”, poetry allows its author to do anything from the erotic, such as convincing the object of their affection to enter a relationship, to the miraculous: bringing rain, saving a life, or convincing gods. In some of these stories, poetry comes up against the hard line of Buddhist doctrine and softens or subverts it. An anecdote from a 1359 collection has Izumi Shikibu sending a poem attached to an *ommeneshi* or maidenflower (the pun is the same in Japanese) to a *nyonin kinsei* space. Another has her reciting a poem that causes a Buddhist priest, reluctant to defile himself by spending time with women, to take her on as a disciple. Yet poetry, and more broadly writing, was often held to be a snare and a delusion. The *Genji ippon-kyō* (*One sutra on Genji*, ca. 1168) condemned Murasaki Shikibu to hell for writing *Genji monogatari* and encouraging lust amongst men and women. Contradictions and tensions about women and poetry's power and their place abounded in medieval Japan. These tensions, though not as overt as in didactic texts such as the *Genji ippon-kyō*, can be seen in the Noh plays featuring Komachi.

Of the five old women plays (*rōjomono*, 老女物) currently in-repertory, Komachi features in three, namely *Sotoba Komachi*, *Sekidera Komachi*, and *Ōmu Komachi* （卒塔婆小町、関寺

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6 This anecdote exists in multiple versions in multiple works. See Kimbrough 2008 for a thorough discussion of it.  
7 Kimbrough 2008, 7.
小町、鸚鵡小町). This thesis will examine the representation of Komachi in these three plays, with the caveat that ex-repertory plays are a valuable and much under-utilized resource, and that I hope to return to the ex-repertory Komachi plays in a future study. The choice to exclude ex-repertory plays is partially due to the existence of numerous annotated editions for the in-repertory plays and the lack of same for ex-repertory. It is also due to available scholarship. The five in-repertory plays have each been translated into English before, some of them several times, as with the perennial favourites Sotoba Komachi and Kayoi Komachi, and have similarly been dealt with to a certain degree in both English and Japanese scholarship. This allows me to make my argument for a different reading of the plays against prior scholarship rather than attempting to advance a new argument for undealt-with sources from scratch. The sole exception is Ōmu Komachi, which has been translated into English but not yet dealt with beyond passing mentions in scholarship. 8

Komachi was a ninth-century Heian poet. The first imperial waka anthology or chokusenshū, Kininwakashū (古今和歌集, Collection of waka, old and new, ca. 905: hereafter Kininshū) contained no fewer than eighteen of her poems. This is the second-highest number for a woman, making her one of only two women represented by more than five poems. She was also chosen as one of the rokkasen, or “six sages of poetry” in the kanajo (仮名序, kana preface) to the work written by Ki no Tsurayuki. A great number of her poems were placed in strategically prominent places in the books of Love, and their placement encouraged the

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8 In regards to the other two plays, Kayoi Komachi is a mugen Noh and deals with the ghost of Komachi, while Sōshi arai Komachi is a genzai Noh that deals with Komachi as a young woman. Although both of these plays would be fruitful sources, they will be excluded from the bulk of this thesis and only referred to in passing.
reader to consider Komachi the representative woman of love poetry. This may have contributed to the flowering of legends and tales about her that began shortly after her death and continued for the rest of literary history.

Soon the legendary Komachi had very little in common with the Kokinshū poet. In the late Heian period, she appeared in a Buddhist kanbun work (the aforementioned Tamatsukuri) as a Buddhist object lesson on the impermanence of worldly beauty and fortune; in the twelfth century she showed up (amongst other places) in a picture contest, showing the impermanence of the world through the process of decay of her corpse rather than the slow slide down into decrepitude shown in Tamatsukuri; in the thirteenth she appeared in the Mumyōzōshi (無名草子, The nameless book, 1200) as an exemplar of women's poetry. She appeared in the medieval Kokinshū commentaries, particularly the more esoteric ones.

Similarly, she was read into Ise monogatari (伊勢物語, Tales of Ise, ca. 10th century) in the medieval commentaries on this work through identification of unnamed female characters with Komachi herself. All this occurred well before her first appearance on the Noh stage.

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9 Briefly, she opens Book 2 of Love and is prominently close to the beginning of Book 3. She is the first and last named woman poet in the Books of Love, and when the lovers' arc traced out by the books reaches its culmination in the meeting of the lovers, it is a poem of Komachi's that represents the woman's voice.

10 Strong has examined this reading strategy in-depth in “The Making of a Femme Fatale: Ono no Komachi in the Early Medieval Commentaries.” The first identification in Episode 25 springs from the fact a Komachi poem is used by the female character, but later identifications depend on more tenuous connections. For information on the impulse behind such reading strategies, using Todorov’s conception of interpretive triggers, see Klein, Allegories of Desire: Esoteric Literary Commentaries of Medieval Japan.

11 Medievalization took place with many Heian-period luminaries, including Ariwara no Narihira, Izumi Shikibu, Murasaki Shikibu, and Semimaru. See Matisoff’s work on Semimaru and Kimbrough’s recent work on Izumi Shikibu for examples. Apocryphal stories, many involving supernatural elements, were added to the canon of these figures. In the new apocrypha, the characters gain new characteristics, some of which appear entirely unconnected to the historical figures they are meant to represent. However the symbolic value of these medievalized characters was not scattered or internally unconnected. Instead, each figure tends to accrete stories centered around a finite number of themes. For Murasaki Shikibu, the stories tend to center around the Buddhist conflict with literature, and opponents on both sides of the argument enlist her participation in their cause, alternately assigning her to Hell or declaring her to be a Bodhisattva who used
Once she appeared there, there was a veritable fad for plays featuring Komachi, with over a baker’s dozen of plays about her from the Muromachi period on. Seven of these (the five in-repertoire and two now ex-repertoire) formed the nana Komachi or “seven Komachi”, which were the inspiration for many ukiyo-e prints in the Edo period. The plays fed otogi-zōshi, kanazōshi, and setsuwa, and these all fed kabuki and jōrūri plays. A host of new “Komachis” appeared in the Edo period in ribald poetry and ukiyo-e. Nor did her appeal fade in the modern period. New plays are written and old ones adapted, while famous novelists such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Enchi Fumiko take her legend as inspiration. She even appears in pop culture. The recent use of Komachi as a motif or symbol in a large number of murder mysteries attests to the staying power of her reputation as a femme fatale, and the existence of products such as Akita Komachi rice, a Komachi Hello Kitty, and Komachi beauty products testify to her position in the Japanese consciousness.

All this, and that only briefly hits the high points of over a millennium of Komachis. Each Komachi takes her shape from the needs and fears of her age and the genre she is placed in. Although these vary wildly, there are certain broad trends that can be seen. One is the use of Komachi as a symbol of impermanence or mujō (無常). Tamatsukuri Komachishi sosuishō offers a stark Buddhist parable in which Komachi represents the impermanence of both beauty and economic stability and acts as an object lesson for other women. The same process occurs with Komachi. For her, these themes include the impermanence of worldly glory and karmic retribution for an unsavory past, and are often anchored and depicted through the use of Komachi’s physicality.

See for example Sotoba Komachi satsujin jiken, Ono no Komachi satsujin jiken, Komachi koi densetsu de daiya satsujin, etc. (by Saitō Mio, Yamamura Misa, and Yamaura Hiroyasu, respectively)
field legend, which turns up in various different versions across medieval literature, deals with impermanence again. In this anecdote, Komachi wanders Japan in her destitute old age, eventually dying alone and becoming nothing but a skull in a field. When Ariwara no Narihira passes by, he hears her skull declaiming the first three lines of a waka, *Akikaze no/ fuku no gotoki ni/ aname aname* or “When the autumn blows, ah my eyes hurt, ah my eyes hurt!”\(^{13}\) He pulls out strands of *susuki* (pampas-grass) that are growing through the skull's eyesockets and finishes the poem with *Ono to ha ihaji/ susuki oikeri.* “Do not say it is Ono/a small field: it is just the pampas-grass growing.” In this anecdote, Komachi's skull displays the impermanence of life, but also the sad end of a female poet, who ultimately cannot complete her own poem, but requires a male passerby to do so for her.\(^{14}\)

The reasons for her destitution vary. In *Tamatsukuri,* she loses her family and has no one to rely upon. Sometimes no reason is given at all. The *Mumyōzoshi* gives a fairly positive representation of Komachi, in which her skill as a poet and her beauty are lauded: “From time immemorial, there have been many people who have written poems and loved emotiond, but I think that everything about Ono no Komachi—her appearance, character, and behaviour—is quite wonderful...[quotes three Komachi poems]... I feel deeply impressed when I think that a woman's poems can be like these.' A lady remarked, 'Her old age was most unhappy. I don't believe anyone has experienced such wretched last years as Komachi.' Another lady said, 'I find the impermanence of this sad world very moving.”\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) That is, the protagonist is normally Ariwara no Narihira. The *Fukurozōshi* merely has it as “a person” while a later version has it as Izumi Shikibu, who gains her skill in poetry from helping Komachi's skull be freed of pain.

\(^{14}\) See Kawashima, 175-215, for an extended analysis of the skull legend in its various incarnations.

\(^{15}\) Marra 1984, 423.
Komachi’s old age is not taken as karmic retribution for her past deeds, and indeed her character and behaviour are pointed at as exemplary. Three of her poems (iro miede, wabinureba, and omoitsutsu)\(^{16}\) are quoted in full and lauded. In stark contrast, the Heike monogatari (平家物語, Tales of the Heike, ca. 12\(^{\text{th}}\) century) has Komachi’s sad old age as being directly due to karmic retribution for her rejecting suitors who were in love with her.

“In the not very distant past, Ono no Komachi’s surpassing beauty and remarkable cultivation tormented every man who saw or heard of her. But in the end, she found herself with no shelter from the wind and no means to keep out the rain, suffering in retribution for the accumulated miseries of her suitors. (Perhaps it was because she had acquired a reputation for excessive cruelty that she failed to find a husband.) With tear-filled eyes, she gazed at the moonlight and starlight filtering through the roof of her ruined dwelling; plucking field herbs and marsh parsley, she sustained her dewlike life.”\(^{17}\) We will see how the treatment of Komachi as a symbol of mujō varies in the Noh plays.

Why focus on the Noh Komachi amongst this unwieldy mass of literature, which spans over twelve hundred years and every possible genre? Historically speaking, the Noh Komachi is an important secondary stage in the representation of Komachi. It displays the solidification and the spread of a particular image of Komachi, one that fuses divergent threads from the prior legends, anecdotes, and stories and becomes the primary image of Komachi for centuries afterwards. It also offers particularly valuable insights into contemporary social and artistic tensions circling around the images of old women and women poets which are not

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\(^{16}\) Kokinshū 797, 938, and 522 respectively.

\(^{17}\) McCullough 1988, 324.
seen in the earlier versions. The lack of any sustained comparative analysis of these plays is a further inducement.

All five Komachi plays are commonly ascribed to either Zeami or Kan'amī, although scholars agree that only three of them are likely to be these playwrights' work. As will be argued throughout this paper, we cannot be deceived, either by this common ascription or by the apparent chronological arrangement of the plays, into viewing the plays as a kind of theatrical Voltron, where the individual parts fit together to form a greater whole, a la *Henry VI* Parts I, II, and III. Although they share a name and (broadly) a biography, the “Komachis” of the plays are discrete and the plays do not relate to each other, but stand as independent episodes with different authors and aims, more like the various incarnations of Godzilla seen onscreen throughout his six-decade history. Terasaki suggests that *Kayoi Komachi* can be read as a sequel to *Sotoba Komachi*, perhaps due to their authorship being established as Kan'amī. However, this is unlikely for two reasons. *Kayoi Komachi* was adapted from a text used by Tendai priests on Mt. Hiei. Kan’amī revised this text, and Zeami revised it again. *Sotoba Komachi*, however, is ascribed entirely to Kan'amī, and later revised by Zeami. Nor does the internal chronology of the plays encourage such a reading. As *Sotoba Komachi* ends with a movement towards enlightenment, it is unlikely that *Kayoi Komachi*,

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18 *Kayoi Komachi* and *Sotoba Komachi* are both established as Kan'amī's plays, revised by Zeami: *Sekidera Komachi* is considered to most likely be a Zeami work.

19 Except for (perhaps) *Ōmu Komachi*, which picks up themes and phrases from *Sotoba Komachi* and *Sekidera Komachi*. It is the only Komachi play to display this intertextuality.

20 Terasaki, 139.

21 *Sarugaku dangi* says, “In the case of *Kayoi Komachi*, the basis for the present composition was written by the preaching monks at Mt. Hiei, and that version was performed by the troupe of Komparu Gon no Kami [for a festival] at Tōnomine. Later, the text was revised [by Kan'amī].” Rimer and Yamazaki, 222.

22 If anything, it is tempting to see *Sotoba Komachi* as later than *Kayoi*, with Kan'amī deciding to adapt the basic story of *Kayoi Komachi* in his own fashion. Such speculation is entertaining but cannot, of course, be proven.
which opens with a decidedly non-enlightened Komachi still tormented by Fukakusa no shōshō, would have been considered a sequel. The disjuncture between the two is too severe.

When we look past the fact that the plays share a protagonist, we see that these plays do not fit together neatly because the Komachis of the plays each take their origins from different sources. Rather than being based on the general legend of Komachi, each play has a separate literary source. The Komachi of Sōshi arai Komachi, as Ryu has shown, is adapted entirely from the *Kokinshū kanajo*.\(^{23}\) It is not an exaggeration to say that the entire play takes place within a discursive space drawn wholly from that work. The otherwise anachronistic act of having Ki no Tsurayuki brush shoulders with Komachi, who predated him by several decades, makes perfect sense when this is taken into consideration. In a similar manner, the Komachi of Kayoi Komachi takes her origins from two anecdotes: a previously-existing anecdote about the hundred nights' visit or *momoya-kayoi* which had not been associated with Komachi before this play, coupled with the skull in the field anecdote, which had. *Sotoba Komachi* develops the story of the *momoya-kayoi* with lashings of *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sosoisho*. *Ōmu Komachi* adapts an anecdote about a kind of poem called an *ōmu-gaeshi* and replaces the main character with Komachi, using quotes from *Tamatsukuri* to establish Komachi's decrepitude. *Sekidera Komachi* draws primarily on a medieval *Kokinshū* commentary.

Individual sources will be dealt with in detail in each play's chapter, but a basic introduction to the two most common sources in this introduction should prove useful to the reader. The

\(^{23}\) Ryu 1999, 144-5.
commonest sources amongst the plays are the *Kokinshū kanajo* and *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sosuisho*. Quotes from the *kanajo* can be found in three of the Komachi Noh (*Sōshi arai*, *Sekidera*, and Ōmu, with non-Komachi quotes found in *Sōshi arai*) while direct quotes from *Tamatsukuri* can be found in two of the plays (*Sotoba, Ōmu*) and its general conception of Komachi can be said to have influenced another (*Sekidera*).

The *kanajo*’s brief lines on Komachi can be safely said to have resounded down throughout history. They can be found embedded in a section dealing with six poets of the past, later known as the *rokkasen*, or six poetic sages. While the *kanajo* suggests that these poets were skilled, it also offers criticism of their poetic techniques. Ariwara no Narihira is described as having too much heart and not enough words, and Ōtomo no Kuronushi is vulgar, like a peasant resting with a load of firewood underneath a cherry tree. Komachi is the only woman to be included in this group, and the terms the *kanajo*’s criticism is couched in make reference to her gender: “Ono no Komachi belongs to the lineage of the ancient Sotoori-hime. Her poems are moving in their form but without strength. To compare them to something, they are like a well-bred woman who is suffering from an illness. That they are not strong must be because they are the poems of a woman.”

The line “Ono no Komachi belongs to the lineage of the ancient Sotoori-hime” developed alternate readings in later commentaries, in which Komachi was believed to be a descendant of Sotoori-hime rather than simply the inheritor of her style: however, this interpretation is not found in any of the Noh plays. The plays do, however, deal with the relationship between Komachi and

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24 SNKBT 5, 14. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. For a discussion of the way the *kanajo* creates a certain impression of Komachi, see Ryu 1999, 107-122.
25 Klein, 203.
Sotoori-hime. As Sotoori-hime had been enshrined as a god of poetry at Tamatsushima Shrine, the Noh plays' treatment of this relationship and how it delineates the plays' attempts to control Komachi's poetry is an important feature of this thesis, one which has not been previously given attention.

There is much to be said about *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sosuisho* (hereafter *Tamatsukuri*). The work can be placed with accuracy only into the mid-Heian period, perhaps tenth or eleventh century. What is clear is that the unnamed female protagonist of this *kanbun* text is *not* Ono no Komachi. Whether the title refers to another woman named Tamatsukuri Komachi, or whether it does refer to Ono no Komachi and was added later, is not known. The name Komachi only shows up in the title, and the differences between her life story and that of the old woman in *Tamatsukuri* are too great. One other thing is equally clear: this does not matter. For over a millennium, the two have been conflated in Japanese literature, and *Tamatsukuri* has materially contributed to the development of the Komachi legend. The image of an aged, decrepit Komachi, begging by the roadside, clad in rags and starving, equally hideous and pitiable, informs much of the medieval literature concerning Komachi. This can be seen as early as the *Hōbutsushū* (宝物集, ca.1179), and the *Jikkinshō* (十訓抄, 1252), whose short entries on Komachi marry details directly taken from *Tamatsukuri* with one of her *Kokinshū* poems.

26 By 'life story' I refer to the common perception of Komachi's life extant in the later works about her. Very little is known about the poet's actual life beyond her name and the eighteen poems she has in the *Kokinshū*. Even this does not gel with either protagonist of *Tamatsukuri*, for whom poetry is not a defining characteristic.

27 Kawashima, 140-4.
*Tamatsukuri* is a challenging text, full of internal inconsistencies and difficult language, and an apparent split personality between preface and poetry that has led some scholars to consider the current text as a Frankensteinian hybrid, due to the large amounts of both repetition and discrepancy between prose and poetry.\(^{28}\) The text is divided into two parts, prose preface and kanbun poem. The prose preface is a long section, roughly equivalent in length to that of the poem, which essentially tells a slightly altered version of the story of the poem. In both, a narrator meets an unnamed old woman on the side of the road and she tells him her life story. In both, the old woman is shown as a marginalized figure. Aged and decrepit, with no economic capital, she wanders throughout Japan. Her aged form and poverty is constantly compared with her lost youth and wealth, signifying the fragile nature of economic and social capital. However, the discrepancies between the two parts are striking. In the preface, the woman is not married: in the poem, she marries a hunter and becomes his concubine. In the preface, the woman has no children: in the poem, she has a son. The differences are so great that some scholars have argued that the two were not originally a single text, but were added to each other at a later time.\(^{29}\) However, scholars who subscribe to this view have been unable to determine which came first. Perhaps this is why most scholars who work on this text content themselves with pointing out the differences and similarities, rather than analyzing them. And there are many similarities. In both, the woman loses her family and is left destitute. She rapidly ages and loses all of her looks. In the preface, there is no reason given for her loss of beauty; in the poem, it is ascribed to her care for her son. Alone, penniless, and homeless, she realizes the vanity of life

\(^{28}\) Tochio, 30-2.  
\(^{29}\) Ryu 1999, 195.
and wishes desperately to become a nun. In the preface, she has not succeeded by the end; in the poem, she does.\textsuperscript{30}

Broadly, \textit{Tamatsukuri} is a text concerned with the lifetime of a court woman rather than a poet. Her life trajectory is a feminine one: she loses family, leaving her destitute, she bears a child and marries (in the poem at least), and her eventual sad fate is specifically used as an object lesson for other women. The prose preface concludes, “Thinking of that, fortune and nobility are something that Heaven gives, and the colours of the clouds in the earth, west, south and north are unfixed. Love and enjoyment are something that people feel, and the voice of the winds of birth, age, sickness and death\textsuperscript{31} is that of impermanence. I say to the old and destitute woman/women\textsuperscript{32}, who is it whose wealth lasts forever? I want to explain to the lonely and aged widow/widows, what child for many years can have health and peace?”\textsuperscript{33}

Although the work mentions that she wrote poems, it gives this fact a scant two lines, whereas descriptions of the old woman's past luxuries take up lengthy sections of the work. References to \textit{Tamatsukuri} in Noh plays take exclusively from the prose preface, most

\textsuperscript{30} For further information on this text, see the two English translations available, from Fischer and Kawashima. Each translate \textit{Tamatsukuri}, yet their analysis of the text is brief, and there is no full-length work on the text in English. Fischer follows the trend of analyzing \textit{Tamatsukuri} intertextually, and is more concerned with what parts of the text are adopted in later medieval literature. Kawashima does the same, as she considers \textit{Tamatsukuri} to be first in a line of texts that marginalize Komachi by constructing her as an aged, decrepit woman. Ryu is both the most recent scholar to work on this text and the one who gets farthest into it, in her dissertation on female authorship and Ono no Komachi. Her close analysis of how the text treats female authorship is detailed and thorough.

\textsuperscript{31} The four sufferings in Buddhism.

\textsuperscript{32} Fischer's translation has 'woman', Kawashima's has 'women'. It is impossible to tell as there is no grammatical marker. From context, “women” seems to be a more likely reading, as the narrator wishes to tell his audience about how life is impermanent- something the old woman certainly does not need to be reminded of. The reference to a child is also strange, as the old woman in the preface has no children. However, at the same time, it is odd to identify a work in Chinese poetry as being aimed at women who, due to their gender and socioeconomic status, would be unable to read it. Rather than pick one single reading, I have put both terms in to highlight this lexical ambiguity.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Tamatsukuri} preface, lines 242-53. Tochio 53-55.
frequently from within the first thirty lines. Quotes are relatively few (a handful in Sotoba and Ōmu), but the pattern of what is not quoted is striking. There is no reference to the deaths of her family, no reference to childbearing. From this we may conclude that quotations from the work are generally used to give images of Komachi’s decrepitude, but the biography given in Tamatsukuri does not carry over into the Noh play. We must look elsewhere for the reasons behind her destitution in this medium.

The Komachi of Noh plays is certainly a figure of mujō, but in a qualitatively different way from the old woman of Tamatsukuri. She is first and foremost depicted in relation to poetry. Although there is a strong focus on her physicality, often displayed through quotes from Tamatsukuri, this physicality has a relationship to poetry not found in that work, and the marginalizing effects of old age do not affect her social status (as in Tamatsukuri), or her sexual powers (as in later works in the Tamatsukuri line). Rather, they affect her ability to compose poetry. This important difference has not been acknowledged by scholars to date. There is, instead, a tendency to see the two as separate: that the plays both celebrate Komachi for her poetry while simultaneously using her as a symbol of mujō. This thesis will suggest that the two are more deeply embroiled than has been previously acknowledged.
Approaches

My broad approach to each play will be a close textual analysis of the treatment of Komachi`s body and her poetry. I will situate both *Sotoba* and *Sekidera* with reference to Zeami`s treatises. As *Sekidera Komachi* has questionable authorship, I will spend a greater amount of time exploring its relationship to the treatises than with *Sotoba*, whose provenance is well-established. In contrast, *Ōmu Komachi* cannot be reliably regarded as a Zeami play. Rather than compare it to the treatises, which the author would not have had access to unless he were a member (most likely the head) of the Kanze school, I shall compare it to its predecessors and read it as a reaction to these two plays. For each, I will consider the sources the plays take their subject from and examine the changes made by playwrights. Throughout, I will deal primarily with the texts as much as possible as they would have been performed and appreciated in their immediate time. At points it will be necessary to untangle six hundred years of retrospection in an attempt to read the plays divorced from the usual preconceptions.

Although I have consulted previous English translations of each of the plays, specifically Brazell and Tyler's translations of *Sekidera*, Tyler and Waley's translations of *Sotoba*, and Fischer and the Teeles' translations of *Ōmu*, I have chosen to do my own translations. My reasons for this are manifold. I prefer all translations to be in a similar style, which allows both congruencies and differences between plays to be clear. I therefore wish to use translations by the same translator. Although the Teeles have translated all five plays in their book *Ono no Komachi: Poems, Stories, Noh Plays*, I am dissatisfied with their translation,
particularly with their translation of Ōmu. For Komachi's first spoken line “Mi ha hitotsu,” the Teeles give “One old woman I”, which is a prime example of overtranslation missing the mark. This ignores the fact that Komachi’s first spoken word is mi or body and interpolates an idea of “old woman” that is not present in the Japanese.34 This section of their translation also misses two important kakekotoba and wholly glosses over the equivalence created between the Kyoto landscape and Buddhist cosmology, discussed in the Ōmu chapter. More broadly, as my approach is informed by close reading, I focus on features of the original Japanese which are not fully captured in any available English translation. At times I argue for the importance of word order, which necessitates an English translation that follows the original Japanese. I also wish to foreground the large number of allusions and kakekotoba in the plays, while translators may try to subsume these for a smoother result in English. For these reasons, I believe using my own translations is the most appropriate choice.

There are several different styles of translation available for Noh plays. One style is to translate by lexical phrase, or 5 or 7-syllable segment, with each phrase given its own line. This is the most common style, and can be seen in Keene's Twenty Works of the Noh Theatre. Royall Tyler is the most extreme proponent of this style, as he translates phrase-by-phrase without modifying his translation to link the phrases together. This allows him to maintain the phrase (and often word) order of the original and to give a sense of the plays as an interlinked series of images rather than a narrative, which accords well with his contention that “nobody, whether courtier or peasant, understood such poetry analytically. What the audience ‘got’, with more or less refinement of detail according to sensitivity and emotion,

34 Teeles, 172.
was emotion.”

Brazell follows a modified style in her translation in Keene's anthology, translating poetic sections by lexical phrase and giving each its own line, but keeping non-poetic sections in a prose format. Unlike Tyler, she converts the language into a slightly more natural-sounding English to keep the narrative clear.

My own approach is more towards the narrative-driven side of the spectrum than either of these approaches. Although I agree that the imagistic warp and weft of these plays should be highlighted, the text is not merely a series of images or allusions but a story, one that Zeami was quite clear in his treatises was to be privileged above all else. When discussing the relationship between chant (the text) and the movement of the actor, he says “the chant provides the substance of which the movements of the actor serve as a function. This is because functions grow out of substance and not the other way around. Thus, at the time of an actual performance, the actor stresses the importance of the chant.”

I wish the reader to understand this play as a narrative rather than a poem. For that reason, I have chosen to follow a scheme of translation in which I break up the phrases of the original Japanese into coherent English sentences and format them so they read as prose. However, in order to give a full sense of the extent of poetic quotations and allusions, I have enclosed these in sets of quotation marks, and their full provenance is given in the attached footnotes. Similarly, when I wish to draw the reader's attention to a series of images or phrases they are placed in bold. Kakekotoba are dealt with by the use of /s, and the attempt where possible to find English equivalents for both possible meanings and place them close to each other. For example, in Ōmu Komachi Komachi uses a kakekotoba on the proper noun “Sekidera”, where the first

35 Tyler 1978, 3.
36 Rimer and Yamazaki, 46. This section is from Fūshikaden, the first of Zeami's treatises.
two syllables are elided with a previous phrase *kohienu toki wa namida no sekidera*, which causes the audience to expect *namida no sekiaezu*, “I cannot suppress my tears.” I have translated this sentence as “When I cannot beg anything I return, crying/to Sekidera.”

One common word which is not a *kakekotoba* per se is *mi*, or “body”: it could also be used to mean “self” in classical Japanese. Where it is clearly being used to mean body it will be translated as such, but where either body or self is possible it is translated as body/self or body/person. I hope the reader will forgive this small infelicity for the sake of thoroughness.

I have generally not included stage directions, as these may have changed within the six hundred years of the plays' performance history, except to indicate where dances begin.

In translating sections of these works, I have relied on previous English translations, as well as annotations in *yōkyokushū* (collections of *yōkyoku*, or plays), as my guides. The primary *yōkyokushū* used are SNKBT, NKBT, SNKBZ, and Itō Masayoshi’s *Yōkyokushū*. Itō's annotations are particularly thorough. If I have managed to capture the web of allusions and quotations in these plays, it is due to these scholars' hard work. Although I am grateful for the modern Japanese translation given in SNKBZ, as the volumes do not include Ōmu Komachi I have chosen to use a series that has all three plays available. I use Itō’s *Yōkyokushū* as my main source for this reason, and for the excellence of his annotations and capturing of textual details such as *kakekotoba*. Similarly, I use Tochio’s annotation of *Tamatsukuri* for its wide availability and the presence of line numbers, *kakikudashi* for each *kanbun* line, and extensive annotation.

[37] Itō 中,217, note 24.
All translations are mine unless specifically noted. One notable exception is my use of Rimer and Yamazaki's translation of Zeami's treatises. I have chosen to do this because the treatises are such difficult works with such a specific vocabulary that I feel it is wiser to depend on scholars who have spent a significant amount of time with the work rather than create my own translations. For a similar reason, where translations of poetry from works I am not overly familiar with are available, I will use them.

Japanese words will be italicized each time they appear in the text, with the exception of terms that I use frequently throughout all the chapters, namely “shite”, “waki”, and “waka”. Although I use shite and waki rather than translate these terms into English, I have translated ji as “chorus”, as I do not feel the English term misrepresents the term ji the way any use of “protagonist” or “secondary protagonist” would for shite and waki. I have not adopted Tyler's literal translation of “Doer” and “Sideman” for these terms as I believe they are well-known enough not to require it. The plays will be referred to by their full titles the first time they appear in each chapter, and by the first word afterwards (e.g. Sekidera, Sotoba, Ōmu.)

A note on romanization: I will use whichever kanazukai was used in the primary sources when transcribing them, e.g. A quotation of Komachi's poem wabinureba in the Noh plays would be romanized as wabinureba/ mi wo ukigusa no/ ne wo tahete/ sasofu mizu araba/ inamu to zo omofu. However, when referring to the poems in other contexts, I will use standard romanization, as this is the form in which they are best known in English, i.e., I will refer to Kokinshū 522 as omoitsutsu rather than omohitsutsu.
Chapter 2: How Do You Solve A Problem Like Komachi?: The Danger of Poetry in Sotoba Komachi

It is not an exaggeration to say that *Sotoba Komachi* is the best-known of the Komachi plays. No *yōkyokushū* is complete without it. It can be found in NKBT, SNKBT, NKBZ, SNKBZ, and SNKS. This is quite notable, considering that there are approximately two hundred and fifty plays in the repertory, not all of which can fit in a given *yōkyokushū*. Its consistent inclusion argues for its perceived status. It also appears in every major English translation of Noh plays, including Pound, Waley, Keene, Tyler, and Shirane, and has been translated into French, Italian, and German. The play was also rewritten by both the early Edo-period monk Suzuki Shōsan and noted modern author Mishima Yukio. Its reputation rests not only upon the artistry of its language, but upon its technical demands. In the world of Noh, actors must work for long decades to earn the right to play Komachi in this play, as their performance of Komachi first as an arrogant old woman, then possessed by an angry male spirit, and finally humble, must be convincing. Such a role must be authorized by the head of an actor’s school.38

*Sotoba*, along with *Kayoi*, is the most overtly Buddhist of the Komachi Noh. Both were authored by Kan'ami and later revised by Zeami, though *Kayoi* was based on an earlier version by Tendai monks. Although all Noh plays are informed by the medieval Buddhist worldview, *Sotoba* focuses more closely on Buddhist themes and tensions. In particular, this

38 Teeles, 74.
play grapples with non-dualism in a way that no other Komachi Noh play does. *Sotoba* is a *genzai* Noh, promising to be something that “actually” happens (as opposed to *mugen* Noh, in which dream and reality mix). Despite this, it follows the basic structure of *mugen* Noh fairly closely. A typical *mugen* Noh runs like this: a travelling priest comes to a certain place and meets someone. After conversing regarding a legend associated with the place, the stranger is revealed to be the ghost of a character deeply associated with the legend. The stranger disappears, and reappears in a different costume in the second act, where they retell the legend and seek salvation with the help of the priest. Apart from the lack of disappearance, *Sotoba* is almost the same, with the caveats that the 'place' the priest stops at is not a famous temple but a simple stupa on the side of the road, and that Komachi is not a ghost. Because it is a *genzai* play, the exact timing of the play is uncertain. Is it set in the Heian period in which Komachi is a hundred years old, around 950 or so? Or is the audience meant to consider it a contemporary play, and the hundred years is merely a phrase used to indicate Komachi's extreme age? The use of allusions to poetry that would not have existed in 950 argues that time is flexible in the world of Noh.

The play is built on two separate sources: the *momoya-kayoi* or “hundred nights' visit” anecdote and *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sosuisho*. The *momoya-kayoi* is present in such early medieval works as *Ōgishō* (Fujiwara Kiyosuke, 1104-1177), and in early *Kokinshū* commentaries such as *Bishamondō-bon Kokinshū-chū* and *Kokinwakashū tona jochū*. In these, however, the woman is not explicitly identified as Komachi, nor is she necessarily

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39 There may not have been such hard and fast divisions between *genzai* and *mugen* Noh during this early period of its history.
heartless.\textsuperscript{40} The rough outline is the same in all: a man is in love with an extremely beautiful woman, but she says that she will only sleep with him if he visits her house once every night for a hundred nights, and make a mark on a carriage-bench outside her house to prove it. He comes faithfully every night, whether raining or snowing, but on the final night calamity strikes. The calamity varies depending on the version. In one version, one of his parents dies; in another, he becomes ill and ends up dying. In some of the early versions of the legend, the woman takes pity on him and makes the final mark herself, or indicates her regret by composing a poem.

It is notable that this does not happen in either \textit{Sotoba} or in \textit{Kayoi}. Strong indicates that it is the Noh playwrights who first linked the \textit{momoya-kayoi} with a version of Komachi characterized by cruelty and heartlessness who already existed in medieval commentaries about \textit{Ise monogatari} and the \textit{Kokinshū}, and theorizes that this was done primarily through blending the \textit{momoya-kayoi} with another anecdote about a man made to count to a hundred before a woman would sleep with him.\textsuperscript{41} However, as he was asked to mark his tally on the surface of a flowing stream, there was no record of his success once he had finished, and he realized that the woman had never had any intention of sleeping with him.\textsuperscript{42} Katagiri agrees that the legend of Fukakusa no shōshō and Komachi “cannot be found in any work earlier than \textit{Kayoi Komachi}”, although he believes that there would likely have been some extant

\textsuperscript{40} See Strong 1994, 405-406, for a discussion of the history of the \textit{momoya-kayoi} anecdotes and their connection to Komachi, including translations of the relevant passages.
\textsuperscript{41} As discussed in the introduction, the image of a cruel Komachi can also be found in such diverse early medieval works as the \textit{Hōbutsushū}, \textit{Jikkinshō}, and \textit{Heike monogatari}.
\textsuperscript{42} Strong 1994, 407-09.
story or tale before this that has not been preserved. This being the case, we cannot safely assign the concept entirely to the ingenuity of Kan'ami, given that Kayoi is established in Sarugaku dangi as a play revised by Kan'ami but originally written by priests from Mt. Hiei. This may indicate that a version of the momoya-kayoi with Komachi as the main villain was already circulating, and the priests capitalized upon it. Certainly, both Kan'ami and Zeami developed the theme in the revision of Kayoi and, most poignantly, in Sotoba. It is tempting to see Sotoba as a later play than Kayoi, as Kan'ami's own version of a story he had already adapted.

Whichever play came first, they are the first sources we have record of that marry the momoya-kayoi to Komachi. Both plays follow the same basic backstory. Rather than simply being delayed, the male character, now named Fukakusa no shōshō, dies on the final night, and in a complete departure from the previous anecdotes, his ghost torments Komachi afterwards. The plays diverge in their treatment of the ghost. In Kayoi both Komachi and Fukakusa no shōshō are ghosts, and there is no indication that he possessed her while she was alive. In Sotoba, however, his ghost torments her during her lifetime. The plays create a new framework for the story, in which karmic retribution for fickleness in youth leads to destitution and madness in old age. The original anecdotes have no bad fate befalling the woman. The addition of overt punishment is a feature of the plays.

43 Katagiri 1975, 139.
44 Rimer and Yamazaki, 222.
45 Certainly Katagiri thinks so. In his discussion of the momoya-kayoi and Noh plays, he repeatedly cites Kayoi as the first place that Komachi's name was attached to the momoya-kayoi anecdote. Katagiri 1975, 135-144.
The plays achieve this karmic effect by blending the *momoya-kayoi* story with the destitution and decrepitude found in *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sosuisho*, discussed in the introduction. This presumably eleventh-century work is a Chinese-style poem, or *kanshi*, with a *kanbun* prose preface. It deals with a nameless old woman whom the narrator meets on the side of the road. She is old and hideous and weak, barely able to walk. She tells him the story of her life and her decline from a proud court beauty to an old destitute beggar. The trope of Komachi as old and destitute later in life owes much to this document. Even if the work itself was inaccessible to all but a handful of people due to its *kanbun* format, it gave rise to many popular legends about an aged Komachi. Its influence can be seen in such various works as the *Sanjūrokunin kasanden*, *Hobutsushū*, *Jikkinshō*, etc, in which very often her decline is linked to her sexual fickleness. In *Tamatsukuri*, however, her decline is due to the general state of *mujō* or impermanence, or due to transgressing against Buddhist strictures. In the poem, she loses her beauty due to giving birth and (perhaps) for marrying a hunter, both sins in the Buddhist worldview. But the direct link to loss of beauty and livelihood due to sexual fickleness is not seen in *Tamatsukuri* itself. *Sotoba* is therefore drawing not just on *Tamatsukuri*, but on the *Tamatsukuri* line of texts, which had already added a sense of karmic retribution for past sins, and adding the story of the *momoya-kayoi* as an example of Komachi’s heartlessness.

*Sotoba Komachi* begins with two priests on their way to the capital. They come across an aged woman resting on a decaying tree stump. The priests identify the stump as a *sotoba*, or stupa, which may be either a wooden carving that symbolizes the Buddha’s body and the five

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46 Kawashima, 38-44.
elements, a grave-marker, or perhaps a mixture of both.\footnote{That sotoba could also refer to grave-markers can be seen in the word's use as such in other Noh plays such as Tomoakira. Thus Tyler translates the title as “Komachi on the Gravepost” and Weber-Schäfer as “Komachi am Grab” (Komachi at the grave). However, within the play it is constantly referred to as the Buddha's body rather than as a marker of a grave.} The priests say she should not sit on a sacred object. The woman then questions the priests about what makes the stupa sacred, and defeats all their arguments using Buddhist doctrine. Feeling cocky after completely routing the priests, she creates a poem that relies on a semi-blasphemous pun on the word sotoba. Having won the argument, she reveals herself to be Ono no Komachi, and bewails her sad and aged state, mentioning that she occasionally has spells of madness. She is suddenly possessed by the spirit of Fukakusa no shōshō and re-enacts the momoya-kayoi, up until the point that Fukakusa dies, when she realizes who has been possessing her. With this knowledge, she swears that she will dedicate herself to the Buddha and work towards reaching enlightenment. The play ends on this statement.

There is a distinct disjuncture between the argument Komachi has with the priests and her sudden possession. Terasaki, who wrote a Lacanian psychoanalytical study that remains the only sustained scholarly analysis of Sotoba and Kayoi in English, argues that the apparent unconnectedness of the two halves of the play conceals a throughline, where the “abstract and rational doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism (enlightenment) that permeates the first part” stands in contrast to “the irrational and psychical phenomenon of spirit possession (desire) that dominates the second part.”\footnote{Terasaki, 82.} While I agree with Terasaki that the play's two halves are inherently connected, the throughlines I see are different. One is a debate the play holds
about the acceptable boundaries of non-dualism. Another is a debate about the dangers of poetry. Both debates are mediated through Komachi’s aged body.

The extent to which bodies are the centre of tension in *Sotoba* has not been sufficiently recognized. The *sotoba*, or stupa, that represents Buddha’s body, and Komachi’s body in contact with it form the crux of the argument between Komachi and the priests. The play’s name is often translated as “Komachi on the stupa”, but an alternate reading of “Komachi the stupa” is also possible.\(^{49}\) This lexical uncertainty points to the centre of the play’s debate: whether or not Komachi can claim affinity with the stupa. Bodies crop up with unfailing regularity throughout the play. Consider the opening section, in which the appearances of the term “body” (*mi, 身*) have been bolded:

*Waki/wakitsure:* The mountains are shallow, this hidden dwelling. The mountains are shallow, that this hidden dwelling is deep is surely due to the depth of the heart.

*Waki:* I am a monk who has travelled from Mt Kōya. I wish to travel to the capital. The previous Buddha has already departed, the next Buddha has not yet appeared in the world, *(with waki-tsure)* Born in the middle of a dream, what should we believe to be reality? Having by chance received a **human body** (*人身*), so difficult to receive, to be blessed with the future Buddha's teaching, so difficult to meet with, this will become the seed of enlightenment. So we think in our hearts, placing the single-layered ink-black robe about our **bodies**. When one knows **the body** from before birth, when one knows **the body** from before birth, then there are no parents that one should pity. As I have no parents nor do I have a child who detains my heart. Going a thousand miles is not far, for a **body** who lies in the fields and sleeps in the mountains, this is the true dwelling, this is the true dwelling.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{49}\) Though I would not advocate extending this reading to the Noh repertory as a whole, as this would end with Benkei The Boat and even Komachi the Seki Temple.

\(^{50}\) Text taken from Itō 中, 253-4. Although the translation is my own, I am grateful to both the *gendaigo yaku* provided in SNKBZ and previous English translations, particularly Tyler’s.
Already within the opening sequence the primacy of the body is clear. For the priests, a human body is something “difficult to receive” (ukegataki) and therefore precious. However, their bodies are those of priests, and as such they are somewhat divorced from the regular human experience of the body. Their bodies are contained by the ink-black robe of priesthood, and can exist beyond the limits of parents and children.

With this opening, too, the time period of the play is set. Although its exact time still cannot be determined, the question loses its importance. The overridingly important thing is that the play is set during mappō, the stage of Buddhist teaching in which the Buddha has gone and even his teachings have been corrupted. The world sinks down into degradation and filth. Mappō was commonly held to have begun in 1052, and was meant to last for 10,000 years. A large part of the pessimism of medieval Japanese Buddhism can be attributed to mappō.

Next, the shite Ono no Komachi arrives on stage. She opens her introductory speech with an adaptation of one of her poems. “Water that invites a floating, duckweed body, water that invites a floating, duckweed body, it is precisely because there is none that I grieve” (mi ha ukigusa wo sasofu mizu, mi ha ukigusa wo sasofu mizu, naki koso kanashikarikere).

This is an adaptation of Komachi's poem, Kokinshū 938, wabinureba/ mi o ukigusa no/ ne wo taete/ sasou mizu araba/ inamu to zo omou (My body is like grieving, floating duckweed, roots cut off. If there were inviting water, I believe that I would go). However, it has been recast to be

51 SNKBZ’s annotated edition has the line, “Because we have hurried, we have now arrived at Abeno in the land of Tsu. We will rest here for a while” before the introduction of the shite. Apart from the place-name, this exact formula can be found in any number of mugen Noh. Itō’s version does not include this line, but passes straight on from “This is the true dwelling” to Komachi’s opening speech. Given the formulaic nature of this line, it is likely a later interpolation.

52 Itō 中, 254.
more pessimistic than the gentle denial of the poem. Notably, the first introduction of Komachi centres itself on her body, and the very first word she speaks is “body”, specifically referring to her own. In order for Komachi to introduce herself with the word *mi*, the entire first line of Komachi’s original poem has been discarded. The discarded phrase would still make sense with the adapted version, making it seem as though the playwright discarded it in order to emphasize the primacy of Komachi’s body. Not only does this force Komachi’s body to the forefront, the editing of the allusion to this poem—including the clumsy *naki koso kanashikarikere*, which does not fit any 5 or 7 syllable line pattern—means that it does not scan as a poem at all.53

Similarly, the following lines focus on her body, this time its past state:

shite: How pitiful. In the past, “I was truly proud,”54 “my kingfisher-shining hair was supple, I was like a willow swaying in the spring wind.”55 Again, my “nightingale”56-tongue's trilling was more beautiful than bush-clover flowers covered in dew, than a flower that has just begun to fall from the tree. Now I am treated as filthy even by common women of no rank, my shame apparent to many. Unhappy days and months gather in my body. I have become an old woman of a hundred years.57

Komachi’s characterization is clear from these opening lines. For her too the body is a floating, unconnected thing, but it is also a dangerously unstable one. Time can change her body until it is unrecognizable. In her degradation she reminds the audience of mujō (無常),

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53 Terasaki scans the lines as *mi wa ukidusa o/ sasou mizu naki koso kanashikere*, creating three seven-syllable ku, but as *mi ha ukidusa no/ sasofu mizu* is repeated in the script, arguing for a 7-5 split of this phrase, this breakdown does not seem to fit. Terasaki, 89.
54 Allusion to Tamatsukuri, preface line 47. Tochio, 33.
55 Allusion to Tamatsukuri, preface lines 67-8. Tochio, 35.
56 Itō marks this as an allusion to Tamatsukuri, preface line 172, but I am not convinced. The Tamatsukuri line reads “At the beginning of the three springs when the *uguisu* chirps.” Apart from the mention of the *uguisu*, there is nothing else to indicate an allusion to this line, and this section of Tamatsukuri does not refer to Komachi’s beauty, but to her luxurious lifestyle. Itō 中, 254, note 6.
57 Itō 中, 254
or impermanence. In this, the play follows a regular practice of using women's bodies as symbols of mujō, one that occurs both within Noh plays and outside of it.

Perhaps the most graphic use of women's bodies as symbols of mujō is that of the kusōshi, or “nine pictures of death”. This series of nine pictures tracked the decomposition of a corpse through the nine stages traditionally assigned by Buddhism. Kusōshi appear from the thirteenth through to the nineteenth centuries. They were based on an earlier practice in Indian Buddhism of monks viewing actual corpses on the charnel ground in order to rid themselves of attachment to the world and recognize the foulness of the body. As Wilson notes, the corpses tend to be female ones, lending a highly misogynistic tone to the proceedings. There are anecdotes of the Buddha conjuring up an attractive female body for a lustful monk and then causing it to rot in front of the monk’s eyes. In this tradition, female bodies express the foulness of both the world and womanhood. Kusōshi expand on this practice. Instead of viewing actual corpses, the Buddhist practitioner can now consult a kusōshi scroll, which graphically displays nine distinct stages of decay. The names of the nine stages are deliberately grotesque, including “the blood-oozing stage” and “dismemberment,” while the pictures are graphic and visceral. The corpse in kusōshi is invariably that of an attractive woman, usually dressed as an aristocrat. Chin argues for a straight interpretation of kusōshi as representing general mujō, saying that “in kuso painting the female body is a fixed epithet, or ‘pillow image,’ used to evoke the concept of evanescence, playing out the theme of the mutability of existence with references to the

58 Occasionally a picture of the subject prior to death was included and the ninth stage of bones being parched to dust omitted. See Kanda, 26-7 for an example.
59 Chin, 277.
60 Wilson, 2.
natural world in which the human condition is analogous.”  

However, the use of a gendered and classed body in these paintings adds a secondary layer of meaning. Although the female corpse may represent the general impermanent state of humanity/society/the world, when she is explicitly drawn as an attractive aristocratic woman, she inevitably also becomes a symbol of the impermanence of physical attractiveness, an implicit condemnation of women's bodies, and a silent testament to the social instability that affects aristocratic women. When she is identified with a historically powerful or skilful woman, such as Komachi, she also becomes a marginalizing process by which powerful women are cut down to size.  

And *kusōshi* pictures had been identified with Komachi for at least a few centuries before Kan'ami and Zeami, judging from a passage in *Azuma kagami* that remarks that a painting, apparently of Komachi in the nine stages of death, was exhibited in 1212. This leads Chin to argue that “it seems that by the early thirteenth century Komachi was identified with the image of a female corpse in gradual dissolution.” However, *kusōshi* present Komachi as a young and beautiful female corpse, at least in the first stage, while Noh plays have Komachi as an old, hideous woman. Both speak to the impermanence of female beauty as well as a more general impermanence, but *kusōshi* exist mainly for the contemplation of Buddhist monks, in order to overcome their attachment to both the lusts of the body and to the world. In this way, “horrific figurations of the feminine instantiate the Buddha's teachings in such a graphic and compelling manner that only a fool would be oblivious to the lessons about life

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61 Chin, 295.  
62 She is also occasionally identified with Empress Danrin. Kanda, 33.  
63 Kanda, 28.  
64 Chin, 297.
and death that they teach.”\(^6^5\) In contrast, the Noh plays do not generally have such a strong didactic purpose, and even those that do must leaven the bitterness with entertainment. Nor are Noh plays centered on curing the lusts of male Buddhists. In both *kusōshi* and Noh plays Komachi undergoes a hideous bodily change, but whether the *kusōshi* is a punishment for specific sins is not made clear, and she is only seen after death. Although the nine stages are dreadful, she herself does not experience them, and the point of the *kusōshi* is that each human body will, after death, go through this process. In the Noh plays, however, she experiences her own degradation, and it reads as a punishment for her specific sins rather than a general state which could and will befall everyone. So it is that the play has lines such as “Protestations of love came from here, letters from there, like the rain that falls in the fifth month. But it was fruitless, she never replied even once. Now she is one hundred and justly punished by it.”\(^6^6\)

Komachi was not the only woman to stand as a symbol of mujō in Noh. Similar passages can be seen in *Eguchi*, where the body is that of an attractive prostitute, and in the vivid use of an aged shirabyōshi dancer in *Higaki*. *Eguchi* may be the best comparison, as it is similarly a Kan'ami play later revised by Zeami. *Eguchi* is a courtesan, who mourns the impermanent nature of the world and speaks of the sadness of a courtesan's life. However, at the end of the play, she turns out to be the bodhisattva Fugen Bosatsu, and her performance is therefore an expedient means to display the truth about mujō to the waki. In *Higaki*, the shite performs a dance she had performed in her youth while masked and dressed as an old woman. The play gives graphic descriptions of the change in her state from beauty to age. Her dance is a

\(^6^5\) Wilson, 9.  
\(^6^6\) Itō 中, 259.
graphic reminder of the impermanence of the body and the inevitable march of time.

However, her skill has not declined. Again, her performance is done for the benefit of the waki. But for Komachi, the body is not only aged but also made vulnerable, and any lessons the waki draws from watching her suffer are surely secondary to the moral retribution her possession represents. Komachi is the only character of these three whose representation of a state of impermanence is a punishment. Komachi's representation of mujō has a separate and special valence all its own.

After talking of how she has snuck out of the capital due to her fear of being scorned, Komachi declares that she is tired and will rest on a tree-stump by the road. It is here that the priests find her, and here that the play begins to delve into the dangers that both Komachi's body and her poetry represent. For Komachi's sitting on the stupa is not only blasphemous, it is also an attempt to claim affinity with the stupa, which the text repeatedly reminds us is another body: buttai, (仏体), the body of the Buddha. When the priests scold her for sitting on the stupa, she begins to question their doctrine:

shite: You say that it is a representation of the Buddha's body, but I cannot see the characters, or any trace of carvings. It only appears to me to be a fallen tree.
waki: “Even a fallen tree deep in the mountains will not be able to hide itself when its flowers bloom.”67 Certainly, when such a thing is a tree carved into the Buddha's body, how could there be no sign?
shite: I too am “a lowly buried tree”68 (umoregi), but if I still have the flowers of my heart, why couldn't they be offerings? Now, why do you say it is the Buddha-body?
wakitsure: The stupa is Kongosatta, his vows in action.
shite: How did he take shape?
waki: From earth, water, fire, wind and sky.

67 Allusion to Shikashū, Spring poem 16. Miyamaki no/ sono kosuwe to no/ miezarishi/ sakura ha hana ni/ araharenikeri.
68 An allusion to the Kokinshū kanajo.
**shite:** The five great elements make up the human body, too. Why then should we separate (human body from stupa)?

**wakitsure:** Even if the shape is not different, the powers and virtues of the heart are.

**shite:** Well, then, what are the virtues of a stupa?

**waki:** “See a stupa but once, leave forever the three Ways of evil.”

**shite:** “One thought creates enlightenment in the heart.” Is this of less value?

**wakitsure:** If you have a heart that desires enlightenment, why do you not scorn this fleeting, grief-filled world (and become a nun)?

**shite:** It is not the outer appearance that despises the world. It is the heart.

**waki:** It is because you are “a person/a body with no heart” (kokoro naki mi) that you did not know it was the Buddha's body.

**shite:** It is because I knew it was the Buddha's body that I approached it.

**wakitsure:** Then why did you sit on it without making any obeisance?

**shite:** Is it so wrong for me to rest on this lying-down stupa?

**waki:** That goes against correct connections.

**shite:** Reverse connections also lead to floating. (i.e. salvation)

**wakitsure:** Daiba's evil also

**shite:** Is Kannon's mercy.

**waki:** Handoku's idiocy also

**shite:** is Monju's wisdom.

**waki:** What we call evil

**shite:** is good.

**waki:** What we call passion

**shite:** is enlightenment.

**wakitsure:** Enlightenment too

**shite:** Is not a tree.

**waki:** Nor is the clear mirror

**shite:** on a stand.

**chorus:** Truly, when originally there was not one thing, buddhas and living things were not differentiated. This is an expedient means to save the foolish average people. It is because of the wish of a deep vow that one can be saved, even with reverse connections. Politely saying this, “What an enlightened non-human! (hinin)” they exclaim, and the priests put their heads to the ground and bow three times.

**shite:** At this time I have gained power, and will compose a mocking (tahabure) poem. “It may be evil if we were on the inside of paradise, but on the outside/ on the stupa (sotoha), what is there to be ashamed of?”

**chorus:** How hateful the priests' teaching, how hateful the priests' teachings.

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69 Itô considers this to be a quote from a kuyô poem offered at the dedication of a stupa. Itô 中, 256, note 7.

70 Kokoro naki mi: an allusion to a Saigyô poem, kokoro naki mi/ ni no ahare ha /shirarekeri / shigi tatsu saha no/ aki no yûgure. “Even a body without a heart knows ahare. A snipe rising from the marsh at autumn twilight.”

71 Gokuraku no/ uchi naraba koso/ ashikarame/ soto ha nani ka wo/ kurushikarubeki. Itô 中, 257.

72 Itô 中, 255-7.
As should be obvious from the large amounts of doctrine quoted in this section, *Sotoba* is a highly Buddhist play, and one of its primary focuses is non-dualism, the doctrine that Komachi asserts, in which apparent opposites are actually the same thing. For a long section she and the priests act as counterpoints, bringing up opposites and asserting their fundamental relations: evil and mercy, good and evil, passion and enlightenment. That Komachi is herself a site of non-dualism is frequently marked in the text when she asserts that the human body and the stupa should not be differentiated, and that she too is a buried tree like the rotting stupa. Finally, the priests note her non-dualism in the line “What an enlightened non-human!” A *hinin* (literally, a non-person) was the lowest of the low in Japanese society, making it difficult for them to achieve enlightenment. As well, Mahayana Buddhism is equivocal about whether women are capable of reaching enlightenment in their lifetimes, a concept often referred to as *sokushin jōbutsu*, or “enlightenment in the body” (即身成仏). A key text, the Lotus Sutra, had a story in which a naga-girl (a kind of mystical serpent) reaches enlightenment despite being female. However, in order to do so, she has to first transform herself into a male, even if only momentarily. She is also eight years old, which means she has not begun to menstruate, further weakening her possible use as an example of normal human women reaching enlightenment.73 Similarly, stories in which girls with strong Buddhist faith are turned into boys abound in many sutras.74 For Komachi to be acknowledged by priests as their superior in her ageing female low-ranking outsider body is stunningly out of the ordinary.

73 Faure 2003, 99-103.
74 Ibid, 100-1.
The play also manipulates the conventions of Noh to create an effect of cascading non-dualism, particularly in the division of dialogue between Komachi and the priests in the first part of the play. Though the dialogue begins as a confrontation, with speech clearly divided between question and answer/refutation, it ends as a shared speech with Komachi and the priests completing each other’s sentences. The form thus mimicks and emphasizes the content, a linked series of non-dual concepts. The scene is capped by the chorus speaking for Komachi. In and of themselves, neither having characters trade lines nor having the chorus speak for a character is unconventional, but the particular use made of these speech constructions amplifies the play’s feeling of non-dualism. Hare notes that in a passage from Takasago with a similar trading of lines that “the distinction between speakers is blurred.”

Here the apparent distinctions between Komachi and the priests fade away. Not only in her speech, but in her actions, Komachi constantly transgresses on the sacred. While her speech equates her body with the stupa, her actions also encroach upon it. Her sitting on the stupa is a literal overlapping of the sacred and the profane.

At the same time, Komachi's transgression is couched in decidedly poetic terms. There is a hidden substratum in this section composed of poetic references that has not been sufficiently appreciated. Even Itō, whose annotations are otherwise excellent, does not mark the references to umoregi, kokoro naki mi, or tahabure as being poetic references. When she refers to herself as an umoregi, or buried tree, she is making reference to the kanajo, as this

75 Hare, 95.
76 Perhaps even, at times, overenthusiastic when ascribing allusions to Tamatsukuri.
document contains the line “Poetry has become a buried tree in the houses of the amorous.”77

The priest's accusation that Komachi is a body without a heart reads as a reference to a Saigyō poem about how even one without a heart feels *ahare* when a snipe rises from an autumn marsh.78 There have been various readings of the phrase *kokoro naki mi*, or “a body without a heart,” ranging from referring specifically to monks, as in Brower and Miner's translation, as being free from passion (again, with the implication of Buddhist monkhood) or as one lacking in sensitivity. As the line is voiced by a priest, the reading is probably not one of monkhood, but rather one who lacks appropriate poetic or religious sensibility.79 This line represents a challenge to Komachi's abilities in both religious doctrine and poetry, both of which she meets with aplomb.

Similarly, Komachi's description of the poem she composes “after gaining power” as *tahabure* or mocking calls to mind a section of the *kanajo* in which Ki no Tsurayuki describes a famous poem: “The Asaka mountain words were composed by a waiting-woman in *tahabure*.” A later interpolation by an unknown commentator which passed into the general textual line adds, “When Prince Katsuraki was sent to Michinoku, the governor of the province was negligent in providing for him, and a serving-woman took his earthenware glass (i.e. poured sake for him) and composed this poem. With this, she quieted the prince's heart.”80 A *tahabure* poem is therefore a light-hearted or joking one, as the dictionary definition of *tahabure* suggests, yet it is also, in the interpolated commentary, a poem that

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77 SNKBT 5, 9.
78 It is not annotated as such in SNKBZ, NKB, or Itō, perhaps due to the shortness of the phrase, as it comprises only a single *ku*. However, knowing the intricate web of allusions that forms a Noh play, it would be foolish to discount the use of the exact same phrasing as a mere coincidence.
80 SNKBT 5, 6.
has power, used by a woman in order to manipulate a man of a higher rank.\footnote{Kadokawa kogo daijiten vol. 4, 190. The four definitions given for tahabure are 1. To play as one likes. 2. To do something playfully. 3. To speak in jest. 4. Bawdy things.} As this poem and another are said in the kanajo to be the father and mother of poetry, Komachi's use of a \textit{tahabure} poem points to her poetic skill and to her ability to manipulate the priests (who are, after all, higher than she in the Buddhist hierarchy) using that skill. \textit{Tahabure} is not a common word to be used with waka, and its use here strongly suggests the theme of women using poetry in the face of male power. Recognizing the charge these three terms have and rereading with that in mind provides a fuller picture of the tensions between poetry and Buddhism that are playing out in this section.

Komachi's \textit{tahabure} poem is not in the Komachi canon or apocrypha outside of the play. It is highly situation-dependent, punning on an alternate reading of \textit{sotoba} as “outside.”\footnote{Sōshi arai Komachi also makes up its linchpin poem out of whole cloth—another way in which Komachi is not allowed to compose or recite her own poetry on the Noh stage. In fact, there are only two plays where Komachi refers to her own \textit{Kokinshū} poetry (Sotoba, Sekidera). This will be dealt with in greater detail in later chapters.} Given this, and the lack of any known precedents for the stupa debate, most likely it was written by the playwright specifically for the play. It pivots around the word for stupa, \textit{sotoba/sotoha}, which also reads the same as \textit{soto ha}, the word for “outside” plus the subject marker \textit{ha}. “It may be evil if we were on the inside of paradise, but on the outside/the stupa (\textit{soto ha}), what is there to be ashamed of?”\footnote{A possible alternate \textit{kakekotoba} is between \textit{sotoba} (卒塔婆) and the homophonous \textit{外場}, “outside place.” This is the \textit{kakekotoba} that Terasaki reads. Both are essentially the same.} Technically speaking this is not a very good poem, nor is it particularly “Komachi-like”, as it lacks the hallmarks of her poetry such as multiple \textit{kakekotoba} and \textit{engo}, an emphasis on the body or the use of a passionate register.\footnote{That is, it is not “Komachi-like” in comparison to her \textit{Kokinshū} poems. The apocryphal personal collection the \textit{Komachishu}, which collects over one hundred poems and ascribes them to Komachi, gives a slightly}
the play it gives a sense of poetry as being dangerously verbally dexterous and opposed to Buddhism. The text is very clear about the opposition of this poem to Buddhism. Directly after composing it she expresses her annoyance with the priests with the repeated line, “How hateful the priests' teaching!”

When we examine what it is that makes the poem so irreverent, we find two effects. The first is the overall meaning of the poem itself, which is an argument that as they are outside of paradise there is no harm in sitting on a stupa. The poem achieves this by using stupa as a kakekotoba, or pivot-word, where two homophonous meanings of the word are in play at once. “Stupa”, which has been pronounced as sotoha at certain places throughout the play, perhaps precisely to enable this pun, becomes both “stupa” and “outside” (soto ha). This forces the word sotoha to be simultaneously something sacred and something profane, as “outside” in the poem clearly refers to “outside paradise,” in contrast to the “inside paradise” line in the first ku. After using Buddhist rhetoric to argue that she should be allowed to sit on a sacred symbol, Komachi now switches to waka and uses a mere thirty-one syllables to do the same. While doing so she forces the stupa to be a site of non-dualism by turning it into a kakekotoba.

In this way the play explores the tensions between Buddhism and poetry. Medieval Japanese Buddhism considered poetry to be part and parcel of kyōgen kigo or “wild words and specious phrases” and devotees of Buddhism who wished to write poems were hard-pressed different view of her. In this work, however, her poems are generally concerned with ageing, passion, abandonment, and the like. The Sotoba poem still does not fit in with the perception of her poetry evident in this collection.
to come up with justifications for doing both, as “the act of writing poetry in and of itself could be viewed as a deflection of purpose from the path of religious vocation.” The strain of eroticism present in waka did not help the case. At the same time, drawing on the ancient idea of kotodama, or the idea that words could have magical efficacy, there was a long tradition of waka being imbued with the mystical power to cause things to happen. The stratum of setsuwa known as katoku setsuwa told tales of the wondrous powers or benefits that waka could have. Kimbrough discusses a sixteenth-century work containing an anecdote about Izumi Shikibu and an amagoi (rain-beseeching) waka. By providing a kakekotoba on ama (meaning both “heaven” and “rain”), Izumi's poem “challenge(s) the validity of the god's appellation.... Confronted with Izumi Shikibu's semantic manipulation and its own dying tree, the deity is compelled to make it rain.” Kimbrough goes on to cite other amagoi setsuwa wherein a pun on ama/ame forces rain to fall. Clearly, kakekotoba in a sacred context hold more than simply the power to amuse.

At the same time, there was a line of anecdotes regarding women's use of poems in order to gain access to Buddhist teachings. The star of these anecdotes was often Izumi Shikibu, who alternately used a poem in order to meet with a revered priest who had intended to turn her away for being a woman, and who sent an ominaeshi, or “maiden-flower” up to the sacred Buddhist space of Mt. Hiei, which was restricted to men. Izumi's poem enables a figural

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85 Klein, 125.
86 LaFleur, 7.
87 Komachi was also associated with amagoi in the medieval period. The last non-extant Noh of the nana Komachi, Amagoi Komachi, is said to deal with Komachi composing an amagoi. The play now only exists in manuscript, though a synopsis can be found in Sekiya, 50.
woman to travel to this space along with her own words. Poetry could also be an opportunity for women to hold their own against priests. The poem exchange between Saigyō and Eguchi the courtesan in the *Shinkokinshū* (poems 978, 979) is such an example. Saigyō requests shelter for the night in Eguchi’s house with a poem, and she refuses with a satirical reply poem. Komachi’s poem must be understood in this wider context. It is not simply a poem that caps her debate, but an integral part of the debate itself. With her *kakekotoba*, she is striking at the very heart of the debate she holds with the priests. She is not just questioning whether the stupa is sacred. In effect, she is forcing it to be profane.

Having traced out the relations to poetry found in this section and the challenge inherent in the *tahabure* poem, the possession that follows this scene now reads neither as an unconnected second half nor as an opposition to Mahayana doctrine, but rather as a punishment for Komachi’s transgressions on the stupa, both physical and literary. A telling indication of which of these actions is seen to be most transgressive can be seen in the fact that it is her poem and not the act of sitting on the stupa that is the final impetus to her punishment. It is Komachi’s use of the stupa as poetic fodder that is the most dangerous of her actions.

90 Several adaptations of this anecdote that dilute the charge of this exchange exist. In the Noh play *Eguchi*, the shite argues that her poem, far from being satirical, was in fact a gesture of respect to a holy man as her dwelling was not fit for him to stay in. In the *Senjūshō* (撰集抄, 13th century) the anecdote is expanded and has Eguchi becoming a nun by the end. These rewritings indicate the extent to which the original exchange troubled the medieval Japanese imagination.
Before discussing the possession scene, however, we should consider another of Komachi’s transgressions—this one far more subtle, and layered underneath the surface of the text rather than floating upon it. This is her resemblance to the priests. As Terasaki has noted, the priests and Komachi stand in an uneasy relationship of opposites. Even after we consider the obvious binaries—clergy/lay, male/female—there remains the fact that they travel toward the capital while Komachi travels away from it.\(^{91}\) Yet at the same time there is an undoubted resemblance between them. Komachi seems to be very like not only the stupa, but also the priests: consider again their introductory lines: “As I have no parents nor do I have a child who detains my heart. Going a thousand miles is not far, for a body who lies in the fields and sleeps in the mountains, this is the true dwelling, this is the true dwelling.” Komachi similarly has no living parents, and no children are mentioned in the play. The poem half of *Tamatsukuri* says that Komachi did have a child. The playwright avoids drawing on this biography, although he is happy to mine the prose preface for juicy quotes about Komachi’s current state.\(^{92}\) She herself is constantly travelling and sleeping in meadows and the fields in the legends about her, and the audience would presumably be aware of the skull legend (itself the source for *Kayoi*), in which Komachi’s deceased body lies in a field after a period of rootless wandering. She wanders about like a priest, has no home, and begs for food like priests do. She holds her own in conversations with the priests, and receives respectful acknowledgement from them. How then is she different from them? The play, after

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\(^{91}\) Terasaki, 163.

\(^{92}\) Although the authorship is indubitably Kan’ami’s, Zeami revised the text, and we do not know with absolute certainty which parts each was responsible for. Hence, “the playwright”.
constructing a situation in which Komachi trespasses upon the priests' territory, answers this question by punishing her and showing how she is vulnerable in a way the priests are not.

First, there is a real fixation on the degradation of her body:

waki: Now, what sort of a person are you? State your name.
shite: While I am ashamed, I shall introduce myself. This is the remains of the daughter of Ono no Yoshizane, governor of Dewa Province, Ono no Komachi.

waki, wakitsure: How painful! Komachi, long ago was a yūjo, her flower-like face shining, her katsura-eyebrows blue, “the white powder never running out,” her gauze and silk robes numerous, piled up in her chambers of laurel wood.”

shite: I recited Japanese poems and wrote Chinese ones.

chorus: “The cup filled with wine, the full moon lay quietly on my sleeve.” A truly elegant appearance, when did I change so greatly? “On my head, frost-covered weeds,” my once-beautiful sidelocks stick limply, inkily to my skin, “my curved brows have lost the colour of far mountains.” I am “one year less than a hundred, with disordered hair.” With these thoughts at dawn I/my body (wagami) is ashamed of its shadow.

chorus: What is in the bag around your neck?
shite: “Not knowing the extent of my life today,” but to help with tomorrow's hunger, I carry dry beans and millet placed in the bag.

chorus: “In the bag you carry on your back?
shite: Stained clothing.”

chorus: “In the basket on your arm?
shite: White and black fiddleheads.”

chorus: Torn cloak

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93 Allusion to Tamatsukuri preface line 59. Tochio, 34.
94 Allusion to Tamatsukuri preface lines 75-6. Tochio, 35.
95 Allusion to Tamatsukuri preface lines 182-3. Tochio, 46.
96 Allusion to Tamatsukuri preface line 7. Tochio, 29.
97 Allusion to Wakan roeishū poem708.
98 Allusion to Ise monogatari dan 63 poem, momotose ni/ hitotose taranu/ tsukumogami/ ware o kourashi/ omokage ni miyu.
99 Itō has this as an allusion to a poem from Rakushoroken: tsuki ha min/ tsuki no ha mieji/ho zo omofu/ ukiyo ni meguru/ kage no hazukashi. Of note is the reframing done in Sotoba, adding "my body/ wagami". Itō 中, 258 note 10. However, as this work is ca. 1412, it is possible that the poem was sourced from an earlier text.
100 Allusion to Tamatsukuri preface line 18. Tochio, 30.
101 Allusion to Tamatsukuri preface lines 16-7. Tochio, 30.
102 Allusion to Tamatsukuri preface lines 22-4. Tochio, 31.
103 Allusion to Tamatsukuri preface lines 19 and 28. Tochio, 30-31. Slight adaptations in language, but the allusion is still clear.
This section draws a large number of descriptions directly from Tamatsukuri’s preface. The extended comparison of past vs. present uses Komachi’s body to illustrate mujō in a similar way to its use in Tamatsukuri, and in fact in a fairly standard way. Although there are several poetic allusions mixed in with the allusions to Tamatsukuri, they are descriptive and not related to the abilities or dangers of poetry. We see the mixture of body and social standing, where Komachi’s past beauty is partially composed of her economic standing, while her current state is comprised of both bodily and economic degradation. “One year short of one hundred,” in the context of the Fukakusa no shōshō legend, marks Komachi’s closeness to death— Fukakusa died on the ninety-ninth night, and Komachi is symbolically coupled to him through this repetition. It also sexualizes her body, as the line is from an episode of Ise monogatari in which Narihira sleeps with an extremely old woman who is “hungry for love.” When he fails to visit again, she sneaks to peer in on him, and he spies her face at his window. He composes the poem. Not only does this add a layer of grotesquetry to Komachi’s body by intimating that she may be sexually active even at her advanced age, it also references an old woman who does not stay in her proper place but goes wandering, much as Komachi does. As disordered hair is also a sign of mental turmoil and “unbound

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104 Itō 中, 257-9.
105 Mostow 2010, 134-5.
hair indicates an uncontrollable passion, a frustrated love, or great psychic and physical
distress,” this allusion does triple work.106

After discussing her past beauty, the play moves into discussing Komachi's current state:
what she carries with her and how useless her clothing is. Not only does this construct her as
a marginalized body on the boundaries of acceptability, it also shows the extent of her
vulnerability. She is penetrable, permeable, and her body is wholly exposed to the elements.
Her defencelessness against the frost, snow, rain, and dew echoes her defencelessness against
possession by Fukakusa’s ghost. Komachi’s body is weak, porous, open, vulnerable to the
elements: all key arguments Buddhism makes about women’s bodies to explain why they are
worse than men’s bodies. This description of the general Buddhist conception of women's
bodies from Faure should suffice. “Corporeality renders women particularly vulnerable: they
can be— and often are— penetrated, and cannot help overflowing their bodily limits... Their
body is therefore open, passive, and expansive.”107

The play then passes directly into the possession scene:

_shite_: Now I wander upon the road, begging for food from the people who come and go.
When I do not gain anything, I become angry, my disordered heart snaps, my voice changes.
Now, give me something. Now, priest, now!
_waki_: What is this?
_shite_: I am travelling to see Komachi.
_waki_: You are Komachi. What nonsensical thing are you saying?
_shite_: No, the person called Komachi is of deep sensuality. Protestations of love came from
here, letters from there, like the rain that falls in the fifth month. But it was fruitless, she

106 Ebersole, 95.
107 Faure 1998, 57.
never replied even once. Now she is one hundred and justly punished by it, oh how I love her! How I love her!

*waki:* You love her? Now, what spirit has possessed you?

*shite:* Amongst the many people who gave their hearts to Komachi, the one whose thoughts were truly deep is Fukakusa no shii no shōshō.

*chorus:* The number of my grudges has come round. I shall go to the carriage-bench. What time of day is it? Sunset. The moon itself is my friend. On my path there are watchmen, but they shall not stop me.

*shite puts on an eboshi.*

*shite:* I lift my spotless hakama

*chorus:* I lift my spotless hakama, fold my tall eboshi, pull the sleeves of my hunting robes about me. Hiding from people's eyes on the path, I go when there is moonlight, I go when there is darkness. On rainy nights, on windy nights, showers of rain on the leaves, deep snow.

*shite:* The jewel-drops on the eaves drip and drip.

*chorus:* Going only to return, returning only to go again. One night, two nights, three nights, four nights, seven nights, eight nights, nine nights. I do not attend on the night of the harvest banquet, instead I go. The rooster always crows at the same time. I write on the shaft-rest, I go till the hundredth night, and it has become the ninety-ninth night

*shite:* How painful! My eyes waver!

*chorus:* My chest is painful, sadness, I have died without waiting for one night. Fukakusa no shōshō.... his grudge has possessed me, and drives me mad in this way. (*calms*) For this as well, my hope is the next world. Piling sand into a tower, polishing the golden skin, offering the flower(s) to the Buddha. I shall enter the path of enlightenment, I shall enter the path of enlightenment.

*end of play.*

The dance Komachi performs is called a monogi, a dance where the shite puts on clothing on stage to represent their state of mind. In this case, Komachi wears Fukakusa’s clothing to signal that she is possessed by him. Terasaki reads this monogi scene as Komachi performing her own possession in an attempt to heal a psychic split. For Terasaki, when “the chorus relates that the body of Komachi has been invaded and her mind is ‘possessed’ by the vengeful spirit of Fukakusa[,] the chorus’s voice thus represents the traditional view, which perceives a separate hostile entity taking hold of and tormenting her body and soul...Komachi

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108 Itō 中, 259-60.
is capable of ‘speaking’ through [Fukakusa's] consciousness while maintaining her own.”

However, although reading Komachi's possession as a psychological strategy on her part is tempting, as it restores some of her agency, Terasaki does not offer enough proof to show that this is a defensible reading. Although it seems to be in line with the depiction of possession in Matsukaze, another Kan'ami/Zeami-authored play that Terasaki mentions, the two are not analogous. In Matsukaze, the shite is already a ghost and therefore not a candidate for possession. There are also straightforward haunting scenes in other Noh, such as Aoi no ue, which have an uncomplicated spiritual reading in which the possession is definitely a phenomenon caused by a resentful ghost.

Similarly, Thornton sees the play as “overcoming the binary opposition between the genders”, particularly in the cross-dressing monogi dance in which Komachi is possessed by the spirit of Fukakusa. However, he has not taken into account the way the play constructs the possessed Komachi as a terrifying hybrid, or how it reasserts binary oppositions between Komachi's body and the stupa at the end of the play. My reading is more pessimistic. I read Sotoba as the corralling and controlling of non-dualism—far from an unchallenging concept in medieval Japanese Buddhism. Although it contained the power to synchronize apparently disparate traditions, shown in its adept use in reconciling Buddhism with the native poetic tradition, by its very ability to break down difference it also contained a threat. Non-dualism was one of the best weapons for Buddhist women to argue for their ability to reach

109 Terasaki, 110.
110 There is also the question of how much validity a psychoanalytical reading has when there is no psyche there to be analyzed. Komachi is a cipher, a character drawn by others, and the play does not seem interested in investing her with a high level of psychological complexity.
111 Thornton, 223.
enlightenment in their lifetimes and their bodies and thus was a potent threat to the established Buddhist order.

The possession displays the dangerous side of non-dualism, as Komachi’s possession is a horrific example of non-dualism gone wild. She combines many opposites, uneasily cohabitating—sanity and insanity, female and male, life and death, all mix and mingle in her body. She becomes overdetermined, bowed down by the weight of too much symbolic freight. The non-dualism of Komachi’s body is anything but peaceful, and she must be freed of it before she can proceed towards enlightenment. The priests in Sotoba function as limits on non-dualism, and the stupa which Komachi mocks in her poem becomes the representative of this contained, safe non-dualism. Freed from her possession, Komachi is also freed from her dangerous non-duality. The stupa remains both a piece of wood and the Buddha’s body, but Komachi’s body, which begins draped over the stupa and identified with it, is decisively separated and made singular. She no longer argues that she and the stupa are similar. Similarly, Komachi’s vow to make more stupas by piling sand into towers is a vow to re-enact the separation, to acknowledge the sacred nature of the stupa while disowning it for her own body. Ultimately the play rejects nonduality, favouring a hierarchy where otherwise unstable elements are corralled and controlled.

Unlike Kayoi, which ends on the enlightenment of the two characters, in this play enlightenment is deferred. It is mentioned, promised, but never achieved. The last lines promise that she will enter the path to the Buddha, but no more (satori no michi ni hairau yo). Sotoba deals with the possibility of female enlightenment by delaying it: although
Komachi promises to work towards it, she remains unenlightened at the end of the play. This is a good way to work around the problem of women and *sokushin jōbutsu*, as it allows the play to say that female enlightenment within one’s lifetime may be possible, but not be called upon to prove it. It also means that the play does not have to show a woman who is responsible for a man's death attaining enlightenment.112

After reading the play, few would argue that *Sotoba* presents a positive picture of Komachi, or that her triumph over the priests is not hollowed and made meaningless by her toeing of Buddhist doctrine at the end of the play. What has not been sufficiently appreciated is that Komachi is not only a woman who is humbled, but a woman poet. Her poetic talent is ultimately controlled and the peril of *kyōgen kigo* is avoided in the last words of the play, in which Komachi promises to “offer her flower” (here to be read as meaning her poetic talent, as well as actual flowers) to the Buddha. Komachi also refers to flowers earlier in the play, when she declares, “I too am ‘a lowly buried tree’, but if I still have the flowers of my heart, why couldn't they be offerings?” As the *kanajo* has poetry as something that “takes the heart of people as its seed” (*hito no kokoro wo tane to shite*), reading *kokoro no hana* here as referring to poetic talent makes more sense than any other possibility, and encourages the reading of *hana* in the final lines as referring to poetic talent rather than physical flowers. Indeed, English translators of this play take it this way. Keene has “Before the golden, gentle Buddha I will lay/ Poems as my flowers/ Entering in the Way.”113 Waley has “I offer my

112 Women in Noh plays who cause men's deaths are generally on the receiving end of very harsh punishment, as in *Motomezuka* or *Aya no tsuzumi*. Kayoi is a rare exception, although she is punished by Fukakusa for a long time before the beginning of the play.

113 Keene 1993, 1012-3.
flower (note: Her ‘heart-flower’, i.e. poetic talent).” Komachi’s poetry has been subordinated to the Buddhist order.

To simply analyze Sotoba as it is would ignore an important area of study; namely, the edits and revisions made to the play. Given the solidified tradition of contemporary Noh, it is easy to view Noh as a timeless and therefore changeless artifact, but to subscribe to this idea would be to subscribe to an anachronism. In Kan’ami’s and in Zeami’s time, not only was Noh not changeless, it was an expanding artform, plucking strategies from other kinds of performance and literature while discarding those elements of its own past that it found unfit for its new aesthetics. Performers frequently wrote new plays and revised old ones. Zeami’s treatises include a section where he encourages the head of the troupe to perform only plays that he himself has written during competitions, as doing so will draw out the best of his performance. Plays whose form in the modern theatre has been petrified by tradition may have initially had a turbulent history of change. Unfortunately, records of these changes have rarely survived.

We are lucky in that we know that Sotoba has such a history, and that we have some idea of the changes. They are briefly catalogued in Sarugaku dangi. As with many early Noh, these scant details are all we have to compare the original version of Sotoba with the current version; however, they are sufficient to show that the original complicated and strengthened Komachi’s position by allying her with Shinto tradition and a deity of waka: “Originally the nō play Sotoba Komachi was an extremely long play. From the line “who is that who passes

114 Waley, 160.
115 Rimer and Yamazaki, 21-2.
by?” the actor chants at great length. Later in the play, Komachi, because the god of
Tamatsujima [sic] (the deity of poetry) is enshrined nearby, makes an offering to that spirit,
at which point a raven, representing the deity of the shrine, appears. An actor in the Hie
troupe was so skillful at performing this role that he was given the name ‘Master Raven.’
These days, however, the entire scene has been eliminated.”

The most notable revision is the deletion of Komachi’s offering to Tamatsushima.
Tamatsushima was the home of several female deities associated with poetry— one of whom
was Sotoori-hime. As Klein notes, not only was Sotoori-hime enshrined as a patron deity of
waka at Tamatsushima Shrine in Waka Bay, Waka Hirume no Mikoto and Empress Jingū
were also enshrined there, making it a veritable stronghold of female and female poetic
power. Removing this scene removes Komachi’s connection to the shrine. The revised
version follows a typical Zeami-esque bare-bones approach by allowing only Komachi and
the two priests on the stage. This also allows for the previously mentioned powerful dualist
imagery of woman/man, priest/layman, Buddhist/poet to come to the forefront, where it is
challenged by Komachi. But that the revisions also remove the connection between Sotoori-
hime and Komachi is telling, especially considering that we will see a similar pattern of
obscuring this connection in Sekidera and Ōmu.

Tracing out the connections to poetry— some acknowledged by translators and annotators,
some more obscure— we can balance the heavily didactic reading of Sotoba as a meditation
upon mujō and Buddhist doctrine with a reading of how the play creates an image of

116 Rimer and Yamazaki, 215.
117 Klein, 199.
dangerous female poetry and ultimately controls it, by strategies of punishment and omission. This also allows us to heal the perceived split between the two halves of the play. Other Komachi Noh do not have the same emphasis on the dangers of poetry in a Buddhist context, nor do they have her explicitly punished for her poetry, but they explore ways in which Komachi's body prevents her from fully utilizing her poetic talent. In *Sekidera*, Komachi's aged, weakened body acts as a brake upon her poetry.
Chapter 3: The Remains of Komachi: Destruction of Identity in Sekidera

Komachi

Sekidera Komachi focuses more clearly on the potential difficulties and tensions inherent in an aged woman writing waka than Sotoba does. Here we see the melding of Komachi’s aged body with her poetry. In previous Komachi-mono, it is rare for Komachi’s skills in poetry and her eventual sad end to be linked. The old woman of Tamatsukuri mentions that she wrote waka when she was younger, but does not say whether she still writes poetry or if this has greatly changed in her old age.118 This is no surprise: after all, Tamatsukuri is a heavily didactic Buddhist text, more concerned with using the tale of a court woman’s fall from grace than that of a woman poet’s. Mumyozōshi mentions her skill in poetry and her sad old age, but not whether she wrote poems into her old age. This is in contrast to the treatment of other Heian period women poets, who often star in anecdotes in which they gracefully compose poems despite their age.119 One strand of the legend that does meld the idea of age having an effect on Komachi’s poetry in some form is the legend of the skull in the field: Komachi’s skull recites half a poem which is then completed by a traveller. The traveller, who is often Ariwara no Narihira, in a sense usurps Komachi’s poetic powers.120 But Komachi is dead, not merely old, and the production of poetry within her last living years is not touched upon.

118 “I waited for the time of flowers, and took my jewelled brush: I composed waka on the crimson cherry-blossoms and the purple wisteria.” Tamatsukuri preface lines 176-7. Tochio,45.
119 Higaki in Higaki and Yamato monogatari composes poems despite her age, and Sei Shonagon in book 2 of the Kojidan similarly does so.
120 See Kawashima, 177-190 for a reading of the marginalization of Komachi. performed by the skull legend, and 177-215 for more on death and literary production.
However, *Sekidera* puts the relationship between the aged female body and the production of waka, particularly the passionate *irogonomi onna* style, at the forefront.

*Sotoba*, or at least its first version, must have been written by 1384, the year of its author Kan'ami’s death. *Sekidera* dates from at least 1416, as we know from its mention in Zeami’s treatise of that year, *Ongyoku kuden*. These are respectively the latest possible and earliest known dates for the plays, but both may well have existed several years previously. Questions of authorship and dating will be dealt with in greater detail later in this chapter.

The play opens with a priest who lives at Sekidera Temple. This is the same setting used for Ōmu Komachi. The priest explains that it is Tanabata, and that he is going to visit an old woman who lives in the woods nearby, who is said to be knowledgeable about poetry. He takes *chigo* (young acolytes) from the temple with him. The old woman discourses on famous poems, basing the greatest part of her speech on the *kanajo*. The priest then says that women's poems are rare, let alone poems by old women. As the old woman displays knowledge of the compositional context of Komachi's poem *wabinureba*, the priest divines that she must be Komachi. She admits to her identity but seems ashamed of it as she relates several waka of her own from the past. The children and the priest invite Komachi back to the temple for the festivities. Drawn by the music and the beauty of the children's dance, she too attempts to perform a dance, but her uneven and awkward motions show she cannot overcome the ravages that age has wreaked upon her body. At the end of the play, she returns to her thatched hut, alone and ashamed.

121 *Kokinshū* 938: wabinureba/mi wo ukigusa no/ ne wo tahete/ sasofu mizu araba/ inan to zo omofu. “My body is like grieving, floating duckweed, roots cut off. If there were inviting water, I believe that I would go .”
The play is a genzai Noh, but in its structure it shows great similarities to mugen Noh: it features a priest who goes on a journey, meets an apparently common village woman who turns out to be a famous person from olden times, who discourses on her life and then performs a dance before disappearing. But there are differences from the formula of mugen Noh. The priest is not a traveller, but one based at Sekidera, and his journey is a brief one. The village woman is not based at a famous place, but in a miserable hut near the temple grounds. Like the ghost of a mugen Noh, she must be correctly identified by the waki before she can proclaim her own identity and perform a dance relating to olden times. Yet, perhaps because she is a living character, her dance fails in recapturing the past. Like the ghost of a mugen Noh, she quietly disappears after performing her dance, but there is no disappearance, no miracle—just an old woman stumbling back to her hut.

As in Ōmu, the play quite literally marginalizes Komachi by placing her at Sekidera, or “Border Temple,” a temple on the outskirts of Kyoto. But it is the temporal setting that does the most work. Autumn is commonly used as the temporal setting for rōjomono (老女物, plays with old women as the shite), but specifically setting the play during the Tanabata festival allows the play to focus on the concept of building a poetic lineage for young poets. Tanabata is generally understood as the one night during the year when the Weaver Maid can cross the river of Heaven in order to spend time with her lover. However, there is also a strong emphasis on poetry that had been extant since the festival's importation in the Heian period, as can be seen in the number of Tanabata poems in the Manyo'shū. From the medieval period on there was an established practice of writing poems on pieces of paper and
tying them to the branches of trees, or writing poems on mulberry leaves during this
festival. Tanabata also had a relationship with the desire to become a better poet: Tyler
notes that the bamboo wands tied during the festival “are prayer sticks, to pray for various
blessings including skill in poetry.” The apparent disconnect of the priest taking the chigo
to see Komachi at this time, one more usually associated with unrequited love and longing, is
solved if we consider the poetic aspect of Tanabata as well as the more standard references to
the weaver maid. The cyclical time of the weaver maid is replaced by the linear time of both
poetic generations and of Komachi’s own ageing mortal life. There is a great emphasis on
linearity, seen in the use of natural metaphor.

Sekidera is one of the “three old women plays” (三老女, sanrōjo: the other two are Higaki
and Obasute, discussed below), three plays with aged female characters as shite which are
considered to be at the very apex of difficulty for actors to perform. This term incorporates
the treatment of Sekidera as a “hidden play” (秘曲, hikyoku), one whose performance
contains secrets within it that can only be performed by an initiate into their mysteries. The
treatment of Sekidera as a hidden play has occurred since the end of the fifteenth or
beginning of the sixteenth centuries. In fact, Hodaka indicates that the formation of the
sanrōjo is probably a consequence of Sekidera being considered a hidden play. Even now,
actors often must be in their sixties or seventies before they may attempt the play. The
difficulty inherent in performing this role is often related to the fact that the shite must sit still

122 Kadokawa kogo daijiten, vol. 4, 179.
123 Tyler 1978, 104.
124 NKBT 41, 288
125 Hodaka, 22.
126 Ibid.
for over an hour at the beginning of the play, yet still in this motionlessness manage to convey Komachi's age and dignity. Tyler trenchantly disagrees with this received wisdom—“As though loftiness were measured by the obligation to tolerate, toward some esoteric end, intolerable boredom.”127 As this indicates, the play is seen as something of sublime dramatic value but relatively little dramatic interest.

It is true that Sekidera does not offer the dramatic possibilities of Sotoba, with its tense confrontations between Komachi and the priests or the monogi scene in which Komachi is possessed by Fukakusa no shōshō and reenacts the highly dramatic final visit of the momoyakayoi. Instead, it has many moments of quiet reflection and stillness. However, we must be particularly careful to disentangle the play as it was, from the play as it has been read and performed in the six centuries since it was first performed. The long period the shite must sit for is partially a function of time. Since the Edo period and the institutionalization of Noh as the national theatre of Japan, performance times have been steadily increasing. Noh plays in Zeami’s time would have been much shorter. Sekidera likely took no more than the average of forty minutes or so.128 This is true for all plays, but given the stress placed upon Sekidera’s running time as a reason for its hikyoku nature in contemporary scholarship, it should be highlighted here. With this compressed timeline, performances of Sekidera would have been much livelier than the version seen upon the stage today.

127 Tyler 1978,106.
128 For a discussion of the average time of Noh plays in the medieval period, see O’Neill, 88-90. He concludes that during Zeami’s time the average was forty minutes and approximately forty-five minutes in the late sixteenth century. Koyama, performing a similar calculation, concludes that Noh plays took between thirty and fifty minutes. Koyama, 13-5. Nowadays, this time has nearly doubled for most plays.
We must also inquire into the reasons why *Sekidera* became considered to be a hidden play, rather than accepting this as based purely on the play's artistic merit. Otherwise, we run the risk of falling into circular reasoning: it is a hidden play because it is of great artistic merit; it must be of great artistic merit because it is considered a hidden play. This conceptual framework obscures the play as it was in Zeami's time, before the imposition of the framework of *hikyoku* approximately a century later. It turns it into a thing of bloodless elegance, and it papers over the very real notes of dissonance in the text.

As in *Sotoba*, the twin focuses of the play are Komachi's poetry and her body. However, unlike *Sotoba*, the shite's opening lines do not focus on her body, but rather on her current state:

*shite:* In the morning, though I have not gained a single bowlful of food, I cannot go out to beg for it; in the evening, though my grass-robes cannot conceal my skin, I have nothing with which to fix them. “The flower's crimson colour ages with an abundance of rain, the willows, blown by the wind, finally lose their green.”*129* People never become young again, they age finally. So too with the aged *uguisu*.130 Though the spring in which it makes a hundred cries may come, there is no autumn in which it can return to the past. Ah, I long for the past, ah, I long for the past.131

While *Sotoba* grounds its depiction of Komachi's age in a modification of one of her poems, which both provides a pithy encapsulation of her current state while also reminding the audience of her status as a poet, *Sekidera*'s first image of Komachi focuses on her economic

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129 Itō places this as an allusion to a poem from the *Hyakuren shōkai* (百聨抄解), and notes that it is also quoted in *Kasa sotoba*, another early Noh. Itō 中, 216, note 5
130 Evidently a popular image, as Itō has several possible sources for this to be an allusion to.
131 Itō 中, 216
state, with no reference to her poetry. She is a beggar, her robes in tatters. The image of tattered robes is one seen also in *Sotoba*, and here, as there, it signifies her vulnerability. In *Sotoba*, this vulnerability is to weather and to possession, but here the vulnerability is to the natural process of decay, which cannot be held back or prevented. Kōmachi is seen as decaying, degraded, and overlain with natural imagery, including not only the flower, which was a regular symbol for both beauty and impermanence, but also the willow. In the allusion, both flower and willow decay not in and of themselves, but because they are acted on by natural forces. The cyclical nature of the seasons, in which *uguisu* cyclically appear to herald spring each year, is replaced by the singular linear lifetime of a singular aged *uguisu* in much the same way as the cyclical time of the weaver maid, which repeats every year, is replaced by the linear time of poetic generations, which may go on forever but whose individual members will, like Kōmachi, age and die.

The priest explains:

*waki:* I have something to say to you, old woman.
*shite:* Who is it who passes by?
*waki:* I am one who lives at Sekidera. The *chigo* of this temple are learning poetry. I heard about you, so in order to have you compose poems, to ask about the kinds of poetry, and to hear your own story, I have brought the *chigo* and come here.
*shite:* This is a truly unexpected thing. I have become “a sunken log, unknown to people,”\(^{132}\) and not “one who should bloom like the flowers of pampas grass.”\(^{133}\) “If you take the heart as a seed”\(^{134}\) and dye it in the flowery colours and scents of words, you shall attain that skill. Let the young people's hearts be attached to it!\(^{135}\)

\(^{132}\) Allusion to the *kanajo*. SNKBT 5, 9
\(^{133}\) Allusion to the *kanajo*, ibid.
\(^{134}\) Allusion to the *kanajo*, ibid, 4.
\(^{135}\) Itō 中, 216-7.
As in *Sotoba*, Komachi refers to herself as an *umoregi* or sunken log. Here she uses a slightly longer phrase from the *kanajo*, which does the doubled work of both establishing her decrepitude and referring back to the *kanajo*. However, the meaning has changed. In the *kanajo*, it is poetry itself that has become an *umoregi*, unknown to people due to the decline of court-based quality poetry in favour of amorous poetry. Here it is Komachi who has gone into decline, but her decline is linked to age-related non-productiveness: because she is an *umoregi* she cannot be expected to “flower”. Similarly, her decrepit state is the reason why she should not “flower like the pampas grass”, although in the *kanajo* it is poetry that is not openly brought out into public places, again because of its amorous, fallen state.\(^\text{136}\)

Although it is not explicitly mentioned again, the decrepit *umoregi* will be the defining symbol of Komachi throughout the rest of the play. The *umoregi* represents something that has lingered on in the world past its productive stage and is now unknown. But what sense would the author have had of *umoregi*? There are two possibilities: one, that he is using or adapting the understanding of *umoregi* from the *kanajo*, discussed in the *Sotoba* chapter, and the other that he is drawing on the popular medieval *kanajo* commentary *Kokinwakashū jo kikigaki* (古今和歌集序聞書, ca. 1286: hereafter *Kikigaki*), which, as discussed below, is the primary source for this play. In *Kikigaki*, there is a section devoted to explicating this very quote. After discussing the phrase *like a sunken log, buried in the houses of the amorous* in an attempt to gloss it more positively, the *Kikigaki* considers the meaning of *umoregi*:

\(^{136}\) Rodd's translation of this section runs, “Poetry has become a sunken log submerged unknown to others in the houses of lovers. Poems are not things to bring out in public places as openly as the opening blossoms of the pampas grass.” Rodd, 40.
For **umoregi**, there are three kinds. First is that when it is written **mumoregi** [buried tree], it does not necessarily refer to those sunk into water. It refers to trees that are sunk into the midst of leaves, brambles, and grasses. Secondly, when it is written **teiki** [sunken tree], it refers to a tree at the bottom of a body of water. Third is an old tree that is still standing but is withered and old (**karete furetaru**).\(^{137}\)

All three definitions of **umoregi** refer to trees that are no longer productive: either sunken logs in water, trees that are covered by other grasses (and therefore defunct), and finally dead trees that still stand. Nowhere do we find the more positive idea hinted at in the **kanajo**, where it refers to poetry, of a tree lying fallow but ready to give birth to new life, a goal implicit in the very writing of the **Kokinshū** itself. If we consider that this **umoregi** may refer to the petrified wood kind, as Kamens takes it in his study of allusions to **umoregi** linked with the poetic topos of Natorigawa, it is something that has changed its form and nature as well.\(^{138}\) In either case, it completely lacks “creativity” in the broadest, most literal sense of the word. Komachi’s referring to herself as an **umoregi** tacitly acknowledges that she is not able to compose poetry.

**Sekidera** presents a very different attitude towards poetry than **Sotoba**. Poetry is not dangerous, and the possible clash with Buddhist orthodoxy is not treated in this play at all. Instead, poetry and Buddhism blend together harmoniously, as **chigo** must learn poetry and as the Tanabata festival, with its deep connections with poetry, is held at Sekidera itself. Conversely, the social aspect of poetry is more deeply considered, although here too we see differences from **Sotoba**. The play treats poetry as a radical equalizing force that binds people together without affecting their class: “Without distinguishing between noble and

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\(^{137}\) Katagiri 1973, 254.

\(^{138}\) Kamens, 9-10.
commoners, city and country, and countryfolk from far provinces, and even commoners (shomin) such as us, our poetry-loving hearts meet."139 This passage is passed between waki and shite: the phrase “commoners such as us” is spoken by Komachi. The theme of poetry allowing social inclusion is echoed in the structure of the play, as it is purely to discuss poetry that the priest comes to visit Komachi, an old woman who otherwise certainly could not expect such a visit.

Although the composers may be frail, poetry itself is an immortal being in this play. After a discussion of the Naniwa and Asaka poems, drawing on the kanajo, there is a long section of felicitous metaphors for the longevity of poetry. This section is also drawn from the kanajo, in this case its last paragraph. “Even if the grains of sand on the beach run out, the words of poetry never will, the green willow does not lose its colour, the pine needles do not fall, (poetry is) as unending as bird tracks.”140 After this, the priest begins to converse with the old woman on a particular form of poetry—women's poetry.

waki: Thank you. There are many words by the poets of old, but women's poems are rare, and examples of those of old women are very few. “My love shall come, the movement of the spider is a sign.”141 Is this a woman's poem? shite: This is a poem of Sotoori-hime of old, Sotoori-hime being the wife of Emperor Ingyō. Even if only in form, I have learned her style.

139 Itō 中, 217.
140 Allusion to the kanajo. SNKBT 5, 17. Itō 中, 217-8.
141 Full quotation of Kokinshū 1110. waga seko ga/ kubeki yoi nari/ sasagani no/ kumo no furumai/ kanete shirushimo.
“this is the night when
my beloved will come to me--
already I know
for the spiders are weaving
the webs that will seize his heart.” Rodd, 378.
waki: Ah, you have learned Sotoori-hime's style. Ono no Komachi, who one hears of in recent years, is said to be of Sotoori-hime's school. “My body is floating, grieving duckweed. If only there were inviting waters, I believe I would go.” This is a poem of Komachi's.

shite: That is when Oe no Koreaki had a change of heart and she found the world to be full of sadness. When Fun'ya no Yasuhide became the governor of Mikawa and went down to accept his post, “console your heart in my country dwelling,” he invited me, and that is how the poem was composed. Forgetting, years have passed. Listening to it, tears—aged tears—and the sadness of thinking upon it again.

waki: How strange! You say that you are the one who wrote the wabinureba poem. The one who is heard to be of Sotoori-hime's school is also Komachi. When I consider the time, you, old woman, are said to be a hundred years old. If Komachi had lived on, and was still in this world—now without any doubt, you are what remains of Komachi! Do not hide yourself away.

shite: No, I am ashamed to be Komachi, “iro miede/ the colour that fades...” to have written this, “that which fades is the flower of the heart of men in this world, I see”, how shameful, “my body grieving, floating duckweed, roots cut off, if there were inviting waters...” even now, I believe I would go, how shameful. Truly, “though I try to hide, these white jewels that stop in sleeves are the rain from the tears of eyes that cannot see their love,” falling, thinking only of the past/ like memory-grass, at the very end of my body, wilted like a flower, only the name of white dew/unknowing remains. “Longing on and on, when I fell asleep I saw my love,” I composed, but now, it is as if it didn't happen to this body. The springs and autumns that welcome and farewell the passing months and years. The dew goes and the frost comes, the grasses and leaves change and the noises of the insects die away. My life has come to its limit, like a flower that blooms for just one day.
This section blends several poems that are by Komachi as well as one that is not by her, but associated with her. The treatment of her poetry is notable for several reasons. First, this play quotes the most from Komachi's *Kokinshū* poems of any of the aged Komachi plays: Ōmu is notable for not quoting any, and Sotoba only quotes wabinureba.\(^{149}\) This is the only play that quotes one of Komachi's love poems, *omoitsutsu* (*Kokinshū* 522). Second, the priest recites both Sotoori-hime's poem and wabinureba in their entirety, but Komachi adapts her recitations slightly to refer to her current situation. When she does so, the scansion of each poem is changed so that they do not fit the 5-7-5-7-7 waka format. Wabinureba becomes

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\text{wabinureba/ mi o ukigusa no/ ne o taete/ sasofu mizu araba/ ima mo inan to zo omofu (5-7-5-7-10, or 5-7-5-8-11 in some counts).}
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This adds a sense of Komachi’s repurposing of this poem with the addition of “even now I believe I would go.” *Iro miede*’s changes are more drastic, as it has an interpolated line and a changed final *ku*, becoming *iro miede/ (to koso yomishimono o) utsurofu mono ha/ yo no naka no/ hito no kokoro no/ hana ya miyuru* (5-interruption-7-5-7-6). The change in the final line from *hana ni zo aikeru* to *hana ya miyuru* makes the poem less emphatic. Even *tsutsumedomo*, which is not a Komachi poem, has a change in the final *ku* from *namida narikeri* to *namida no ame*, changing it to 5-7-5-7-6. The change to *ame* allows a *kakekotoba* in the next line of *furukoto* (old things/ rain falls). Indeed, there are many *kakekotoba* in this section, including *furukoto, omohigusa, shirazu/shiratsuyu, nagarahe*, and *yuki*, creating a run of extended and intricate wordplay. While on one level the change in the poems displays Komachi’s adeptness at reusing poems from her past in reference to her present, the same way the use of multiple *kakekotoba* displays her linguistic

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\(^{149}\) Neither *Kayoi* nor *Sōshi arai* quote any of Komachi’s poems, though in both she is allowed to display her poetic talent in other ways. In *Kayoi*, she gives a long poetic monologue consisting of a string of *kakekotoba* on names of fruits. In *Sōshi arai*, she composes an (apocryphal) poem that is praised by the entire court before she is accused of plagiarizing it by Kuronushi.
skill, it is curious that she is not allowed to speak any of these, some of her most famous poems, in their regular form, and that in each case the scansion is disrupted. Contrast this with Nonomiya, in which the spirit of Rokujō recites one of her poems from the Sakaki chapter of Genji monogatari in its entirety. The priest replies, “What a truly fascinating poem!”; a display of approbation not given to Komachi in Sekidera. Similarly, the shite in Higaki recites her own poem in full after being requested to introduce herself by the waki, saying plainly, “There is a poem in the Gosenshū ...[recites poem]... and it is a poem that I composed.” Here we may see another instance of the contradiction at the heart of the representation of Komachi in Noh mentioned in the introduction.

Third, and central to the concept of poetry in this play, Komachi's poetry is seen as no longer fitting. Komachi repeats three times that to be herself and to have composed these poems is “shameful” or “embarrassing” (hazukashi ya). When the play does quote one of her love poems (omoitsutsu), it immediately references this to her current body (mi no ue) and how it is unfitting for an aged body to be the one who once composed love poems. In this section we can see the priest's contention, “Then you are what remains of Komachi” (Komachi no hate), as it has been internalized by Komachi. She is no longer the irogonomi poet; therefore, to both the priest and to herself, she is hardly Komachi at all. Komachi also refers to herself as “the remains of Komachi” in Sotoba (Ono no Komachi ga nareru hate), similar to the phrase Komachi no hate found in both Sekidera and Omu. However, Komachi still retains her

150 SNKBZ vol. 58, 301. The poem is Kami-gaki ha/ shirushi no sugi mo/ naki mono wo/ ika ni magahete/ oreru sakaki zo. Later in the play, she recites an adapted version of another poem, Suzukagawa/ yaose no nami ni/ nurenurezu/ Ise made dare ka/ omohi okosemu, with a change in the final ku to omohan no. Although this does destroy the scansion of the poem, the shite goes on to say, “These words describe her journey and the unprecedented event of a mother and daughter going to the Take Palace. Her heart was full of only regret.” SNKBZ vol. 58, 304. Evidently this is meant to be regarded as a full poem.

151 SNKBZ vol. 58, 438.
identity in *Sotoba*. The waki later refers to her as Komachi (“But you are Komachi!”). In contrast, in *Sekidera* she is only directly referred to as simply Komachi once, by the chorus in the final scene of the play. When the priest refers to her, it is as *rōjo*, “old woman”. In the brief section in which the priest invites her to the festivities, she demurs, and he insists, this phrase is used four times.

The use of the *shiratama* poem (tsutsumedomo/ sode ni tamaranu/ shiratama wa/ hito wo minume no/ namida narikeri, or “though I try to hide, these white jewels that stop in sleeves are the rain from the tears of eyes that cannot see their love.” *Kokinshū* 556) is particularly intriguing, as it is not by Komachi, but part of an exchange between her and Abe no Kiyoyuki. The *Kokinshū* relates how Abe no Kiyoyuki sends her this poem after a lecture on a Buddhist parable about a hidden jewel sewed into a sleeve. Komachi responds with a poem (*Kokinshū* 557) that mocks Kiyoyuki’s expression of jewels with tears: Oroka naru/ namida zo sode ni/ tama ha nasu/ ware zo sekiaezu/ tagitsu se nareba, or “Foolish are tears that stop in sleeves like jewels— mine overflow, a torrent that cannot be stopped.” Komachi’s reply poem is a brilliant piece of poetic conceit that completely destroys Kiyoyuki’s trite sentiments; yet here she is, in her old age, parroting them and giving them validity. It destroys some of the iconoclastic quality of Komachi’s poetry to have her quote this poem without referencing her reply.

More broadly, the play does not include any of her more arch poetry. Indeed, none of the Komachi Noh quote the most passionate of Komachi’s poems, and *Sekidera*’s limited inclusion of them is the most found in any Komachi Noh, but even here the play refrains
from adding other, equally well-known passionate Komachi poems such as mirume naki, any of the yumeji sequence, or the ubatama poem.\textsuperscript{152} No poems that had a common reading as Komachi playing the heartless flirt were included by the playwright. Rather than the rejecting coquette, here Komachi has become the one who longs for a lover (in the shape of the past), and rather than the iconoclastic poet, she has become a conventional one.\textsuperscript{153} This is echoed in the way she passes on the view of poetry given in the Kokinshū and later validates its none-too-positive appraisal of her.

Although it is true that her most passionate poems are not quoted or alluded to, in this play Komachi is constructed as a love poet. Although a great number of her Kokinshū poems were placed in the books of love, she had poems in other books, and a number of her love poems could support philosophical rather than passionate readings. However, in Sekidera it is the passionate reading that is stressed. Even poems that had been given alternate readings in the medieval period, such as wabinureba, which in Kokinshū commentaries is occasionally said to have been written when she had begun to age, or iro miede, which can be given a philosophical gloss, read purely as love poems when Komachi quotes them, as she repeatedly refers to them as hazukashi. Similarly, poems that do support a more philosophical reading, such as the extraordinarily famous hana no iro ha, the poem included in Fujiwara Teika's Hyakunin isshū, are not quoted.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{152} Kokinshū 623, 656-8, and 554, respectively.
\textsuperscript{153} Omoitsatsu is by far the most passive of Komachi's love poems. The yumeji poems and ubatama all have her being active in some way, whereas omoitsatsu merely has her dreaming of her lover and wishing she had not awakened. The choice of quoting omoitsatsu may be because it is the only one of her love poems quoted in Kikigaki, but it is an interesting choice nonetheless.
\textsuperscript{154} Nor, in fact, is it in either of the other two plays under consideration.
The only non-love poem of her own she quotes is an apocryphal one from the *Shinkokinshū* (*新古今集*, *New Kokinshū*, 1205). It is also the only poem she quotes in full throughout the entire play, and it serves to introduce the play's lengthiest meditation upon the difference between Komachi's past and present:

> shite: “In a world where those who are here, die, and the dead increase in number, until what sad day must I go on grieving?”

Although the one who composed this is myself, till what time/ the *itsumade* grass flower falls, and the leaves fall, what remains is nothing but the life of dew. Ah, I long for the past. I recall, when I was middle-aged I thought only of my body in the past. Now I only long for when I first began to age. How pitiful, truly in the past even in rooms where I would only stay for one night, they were covered in tortoiseshell. The fence was hung with golden blossoms, crystals dripping down the doorway. Like the Emperor's carriage's jewelled robes, decorated colourfully the pillow, inside the bridal chamber was flower-brocaded covers, and I was one/a body who lay upon such splendour. Now a clay hut— is this my bejewelled room? The voice of the bells of Sekidera call, 'all life is impermanent,' but it has no value to my aged ears, from the mountain wind from Ausaka 'all life dies.' With the flying blossoms and the falling leaves, I take my beloved path to the thatched door. Making the ink stone ring, dyeing my brush, gathering seaweed to make salt, I write withered leaves of words. *(She looks at her writing.)* “Weak, without force, weak because they are the poems of a woman”... an unbearably old body's gradual weakening towards the end, how sad.

Although Komachi cannot take pride in her *Kokinshū* poems, which the play suggests were written in her youth, she can recite in full this lugubrious offering. The *Shinkokinshū* poem is entirely apocryphal. It takes its source from the *Komachishū*, an apocryphal collection of poems ascribed to Komachi. The poem suggests both bereavement and lingering on in the world, doubtless why the ascription to Komachi was made when the compiler of the

155 Full quotation of *Shinkokinshū* 850. *aru ha naku/ naki ha kazu sofu/ yo no naka ni/ahare izure no/ hi made nagekan.*

156 A quotation of the *kanajo*’s valuation of Komachi’s poetry in the *rokkasen* critique. SNKBT 5, 14.

157 Itō 中, 220-1.
Komachishū went looking for poems which could feasibly be considered Komachi’s.\(^{158}\) This poem is not treated as hazukashi. Evidently this form of poetry is the only suitable one for Komachi in her current state.

The body is not as central as in Sotoba, but as the bolding in the above quotation shows, it still crops up with some regularity. Sekidera is alone in the plays in suggesting a middle stage between youth and old age, as Komachi looks back on her middle-aged self, ironically amused that then she longed only to be younger, but now she would be content with returning to that “old age.”\(^{159}\) Komachi’s current body, somewhat paradoxically, prevents her from understanding the concept of mujō despite being the very symbol of it, as her aged ears prevent her from understanding the Buddhist message of the bells at Sekidera. At the same time, Komachi’s poetry reflects her body. Both are withered. She deprecates her own work with the phrase “gathering seaweed to make salt,” a low-class, menial job. When looking at her own poems, she quotes the kanajo's famous criticism of her— “weak, without force, weak because they are the poems of a woman”— accepting the criticism as valid and tying this weakness both to her gender (in the context of the original criticism) and to her body's ageing in the following line, “an unbearably old body's weakening towards the end.” The priest's observation has been accounted for. There are very few poems by old women because old women, in the world of Sekidera, either cannot write good poems at all or cannot write in the acceptable passionate register for women's poems. In both cases their inability to write is directly attributable to their ageing bodies.

\(^{158}\) See Katagiri 1975, 126-31, for a discussion of the formation of the Komachishū.

\(^{159}\) This section is tangled and confusing and I am grateful for and guided by Brazell's translation.
Komachi's body has one more effect on her reputation during the scene at the festivities. The priest invites Komachi to come observe the festival, and after demurring, she accepts. At the festivities, the chorus laments the decline of Komachi in strong language: “The bamboo threads woven at Tanabata to offer, their offering-grass. How many years have passed, ageing/darkening? For Ono no Komachi's hundred years the stars in heaven meet. She was familiar with those courtiers who live above the clouds, but her sleeves are now of rough hemp (asagoromo). How dreadful, how painful, we cannot even look at her.”

Although it is occasionally unclear who the chorus is speaking for, here they appear to be giving the reaction of those at the festivities who are watching Komachi. Not only her age but her current uncertain financial and social situation is lamented.

As Komachi watches the dancing, she muses:

_shite:_ When a madman runs even the non-mad run, so they say. Drawn by the sleeves of the children's dance, now the mad one will run. A hundred years— (she begins to dance) A hundred years, living in a flower, the butterfly's dance

_chorus:_ How pitiful, how pitiful! Flowers on an aged branch. The pointing sleeves have forgotten their ways. Her skirt's steps weak, standing waves— her dancing sleeves, returning to the past. If there were sleeves that could turn back to the past...

_shite:_ Ah, how I long for the past.

_chorus:_ The short nights at the beginning of autumn. Dawn comes quickly. The bell at Sekidera

_shite:_ the bird's cry

_chorus:_ says dawn has come

_shite:_ The Hazukashi Forest

_chorus:_ The Forest of Shame, she cannot hide within the trees. As she returns, leaning on her staff, staggering, she has returned to her original thatched hut. What we hear of as the

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160 Ito 等, 221.
161 Komachi’s return to her hut is almost a parody of the traditional Heian lover's departure, from the shortness of the night to the cry of the bird indicating dawn to her shameful return during which she would like to hide herself.
hundred-year-old crone is the name of what remains of Komachi, is the name of what remains of Komachi.

*end of play.*

The phrase “what remains of Komachi” and “the hundred-year-old crone” are, at the end of the play, all that remains of Komachi’s fame. She is no longer known for her wisdom in poetry, as she was at the beginning of the play, but only for her physical infirmities. Not only do they prevent her from writing acceptable poetry, they also prevent her from dancing properly in the climactic scene. The dance scene deserves particular attention, as it provides the last definitive construction of Komachi’s body as obstacle and simultaneously overwrites any claims Komachi has to being remembered for her knowledge of poetry.

Komachi’s *jo no mai* dance at the end of the play gives the most detailed and lengthy examination of her aged body of the play. Examining other *jo no mai* with old women shite should allow us to see the ways in which old women’s bodies are treated in Noh plays, and how the treatment of Komachi’s body in *Sekidera* conforms to or differs from these practices. As Hodaka mentions, there are only five *rōjomono* remaining in the current repertory of 250 plays. These are *Sekidera, Sotoba, Ōmu, Obasute,* and *Higaki.* Of these, three are called the *sanrōjo,* and treated as hidden plays: *Sekidera, Obasute,* and *Higaki.*

*Higaki* is established as one of Zeami’s plays. *Obasute* is often attributed to Zeami but has not been established as unequivocally his. *Sotoba,* which Hodaka excludes from being a *rōjomono* proper due to

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162 Iō 中, 222-3.
163 Hodaka, 21. *Obasute* and *Higaki* are both *mugen* Noh, making *Sekidera* the only *genzai* play amongst the *sanrōjo.*
164 Hare, 44-6.
its switch into a monogurui-like play in the second section, has a monogi dance rather than a jo no mai, as does Ōmu. Proper jo no mai with old women shite can therefore only be found in the sanrōjo. As all three date from approximately the same period, a comparison of their jo no mai should prove enlightening.

Obasute, as a mugen Noh, has a ghost as the main character. She appears first as an old woman who lives in Sarashina village in the first act, and then as her true self, the ghost of the old abandoned woman, in the second act. The original story, retold in the ai interlude, relates how she was abandoned by her son on the mountain at the urging of his jealous wife. As the name suggests, she was abandoned precisely because of her age, yet there is little emphasis on her current bodily state. The play establishes her as being ashamed of her current appearance: she says “my aged appearance... though I am ashamed of it, I have come” and “To be seen by moonlight, how shameful!” However, there is no description of how she is different from her younger self. Perhaps this is because, in the original story, she was never a young woman; perhaps because she does not stand as a symbol of impermanence in the same way that aged women who used to be beautiful do.

She dances for a fairly lengthy period of time with the chorus speaking for her, describing the wonders of Amida's paradise. There is absolutely no mention of her appearance as being aged or her dancing being unskilful or weak during the dance. After describing paradise, the tone shifts:

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165 i.e. All are mentioned in Zeami's treatises and must therefore have been extant during his lifetime.
166 SNKBZ vol. 58, 455.
167 SNKBZ vol. 58, 456.
shite: Consoling my heart, looking at the moon shining on Mt. Sarashina, looking at the shining moon. Familiar with the moon, fluttering amongst the flowers, amongst the dew of the autumn grass, what have I appeared for? The butterfly's play. The fluttering sleeves of the dance.

chorus: Return them, return them, the autumns of the past. My heart, remembering, is bound by delusion. Tonight's autumn wind. Pierces my body. I long for the past.  

The shite of Obasute is bound to the past in a similar way as Komachi is in Sekidera. We see again a reference to butterflies and to sleeves that can be turned back or that turn back to the autumn of the past in a kakekotoba on kaesu, to turn back. However, in a striking difference, the dance is graceful.

The dance that occurs in Higaki, a play loosely based on a popular anecdote about Gosenshū poem 1220, is much closer in some ways to that of Sekidera. A travelling priest comes to a ford, and meets an old woman there. She discloses that she is the ghost of Higaki no onna (the woman of the cypress fence, no proper name given; hereafter Higaki), who once wrote a poem about ageing when she unexpectedly met someone who had known her in her youth. She then performs a shirabyōshi dance, disclosing that Fujiwara no Okinori had once seen her as an old woman and asked her to dance. Although she demurred on account of her age,

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168 SNKBZ vol. 58, 458.
169 Toshi fureba/ waga kurokami mo/ shirakawa no/ mitsu hagumu made/ oinikeru ka na. In Misc. Book III (Book 17) “Because I have aged in years, my black hair is white/ as the White River's water/my teeth have fallen out but are growing in again/ I fetch water there/ how I have grown old!” There are multiple kakekotoba on shirakawa, mitsu, ha kumu/ hagumu. Author is given as “Higaki no onna”, with a headnote that reads, “When she lived at Shirakawa river in Tsukushi, and Fujiwara no Okinori wanted to cross, he stopped and said that he wanted some water, so she brought him the water and composed this poem.” There is a more elaborate version in Yamato monogatari, chapter 126. See Tahara,77-8, for a translation of this anecdote. For a discussion of both versions, see Kawashima, 149-50.
he insisted. She replicates this dance for the jo no mai. The play deals with mujō lengthily, and Higaki is a textbook example of impermanence.

The treatment of the old woman's body is more similar to that of Sotoba than Sekidera. There is a focus on the physicality of her ageing. The chorus mourns: “The preparation of the rouged face— the dancer's fame. The unbearably beautiful rouged face— the kingfisher-shining hair. The flower has withered, on the eyebrows like the katsura tree frost has settled. The reflection shown in the water sinks in the shadow of ageing. The black hair which looked blue is filthy weeds covered in mud. My changed body, ah how sad it is.”

This draws to mind the description of Komachi in Sotoba: “How painful! Komachi, long ago was a yūjo, her flower-like face shining, her katsura-eyebrows blue, the white powder never running out... A truly elegant appearance, when did I change so greatly? On my head, frost-covered weeds, my once-beautiful sidelocks stick limply, inkily to my skin, my curved brows have lost the colour of far mountains. I am one year less than a hundred, my disordered hair, with these thoughts at dawn I/my body is ashamed of its shadow.” Both focus primarily on the degradation of the body as told through common points of feminine beauty such as the eyebrows and the hair.

There are certain points of congruency with Sekidera. As in Sekidera, Higaki is ashamed of her old age. When she appears as the ghost in the second part of the play, she conceals

170 Neither the Gosenshū nor the version of this anecdote in Yamato monogatari mention her as being a shirabyōshi dancer. This may be Zeami's invention. Higaki is a fascinating play and deserves further study, which unfortunately cannot be done in this thesis.
171 SNKBZ vol. 58, 444
172 SNKBZ vol. 59, 123.
herself within a hut until the priest convinces her to show herself. She then begs the priest not to tell anyone how she looks:

waki: How mysterious, when I hear her voice it must be (that) person, you should also show your form. I will visit you.
shite: Then I shall show my form, to receive the law from you, priest. Do not tell of it to people.
waki: I certainly shall not tell it to people. Quickly show your form.
shite: My face, clouded with tears, my age, who would know it? Scooping water from the White River, I am ashamed of my old form.
waki: Ah, how painful an appearance.173

However, the jo no mai dance is quite different to that of Sekidera.

shite: When Fujiwara no Okinori asked me to perform a shirabyōshi dance of the past, I replied, my flowery sleeves of the past are now colourless hempen robes (asagoromo), I cannot turn back the short sleeves. My heart is sore. My short Michinoku hunting robe would not close properly, how can I perform a shirabyōshi? I should have the proper appearance. chorus: “No, no, even so, as it is a dance you learned long ago, it cannot be that now you cannot dance it,” Okinori replied firmly, and though it was shameful, my hempen sleeves shook the dew off and I danced...
shite: Higaki no onna
chorus: her remains.
Jo no mai dance.174

Despite her shame at having lost her beauty, a beauty that is predicated on both youth and socioeconomic standing—note the reference to sleeves made of hemp, also found in Sekidera—Higaki has not lost her ability to dance, either in her actual old age when asked to by Okinori, or in her (still aged) afterlife when performing for the priest. More, her ability to

173 SNKBZ vol. 58, 442.
174 SNKBZ vol. 58, 445.
reproduce this dance may lead to her salvation, as the performance of a pivotal moment from
the shite's life for the priest waki in *mugen* Noh can lead to their enlightenment. The play
ends with her pleading for the priest to wash out her sins.

Higaki's dance is a *shirabyōshi*, a cross-dressing dance soaked in sexual allure, as can be seen
in the various *shirabyōshi* dancers found in *gunkimono*. At first, Higaki refuses to dance
precisely because her current appearance would not be fitting for the performance of a
*shirabyōshi*. She says she “cannot turn back her sleeves,” which is yet another use of the
*kakekotoba kaesu* to express a desire or inability to turn back to the past. Yet when she yields
to Okinori's entreaties, she dances well and there is no judgement passed on her dancing
within the play. Compare this to Komachi in *Sekidera*, in which her changed appearance
makes it no longer fitting for her to compose poetry at the same time as it robs her of her skill
in dancing. Interestingly, Higaki describes herself as “the remains of Higaki no onna”
(*Higaki no onna no mi no hate*), the same phrase used to describe Komachi in *Sekidera*, yet
she retains more of her skills and arguably her identity than Komachi does.

All three *rōjomono* associate ageing with autumn, “return to the autumn/past,” particularly in
regards to their sleeves, and shame. Yet in *Obasute* and *Higaki* aged bodies do not affect the
shite's dancing skill, while in *Sekidera Komachi* it does. Moreover, the shite of *Higaki* and
*Obasute* exit the play with their identities intact. The shite of *Obasute* remains the famous old
woman abandoned on Mt. Sarashina; similarly, Higaki remains a famous *shirabyōshi*.
However, Komachi has become merely “a hundred-year-old-woman,” no longer fit to be
associated with the poetry of her youth.
The sources for Sekidera show surprisingly little overlap with Sotoba. There is no overlap with the tale of the momoya-kayoi found in Sotoba and Kayoi. Omote and Yokomichi argue that the idea of a beautiful woman who has fallen into a hideous old age is drawn from Tamatsukuri. There are two sections that bear a certain resemblance to passages in Tamatsukuri, namely Komachi’s introduction and a section on her rooms from the past, and these sections are generally marked as being drawn from Tamatsukuri in both translations and annotations. However, there are no direct quotes and the language and details are slightly different from the sections of Tamatsukuri that they resemble. The Sekidera quote reads, “In the morning, though I have not gained a single bowlful of food, I cannot go out to beg for it. In the evening, although my grass-robes cannot conceal my skin, I have nothing with which to fix them.” However, the closest equivalents in Tamatsukuri are “Her food was exhausted, it was difficult to gain meals in the morning and evening” and “On her body, rarely does she wear flying-leaf robes; in her mouth, she rarely eats the dew of flowers.” Although the parallelism found in the quote from Sekidera is extremely reminiscent of kanbun, there is no direct line in Tamatsukuri which parallels morning/food with evening/robes in this way.

Similarly, the second section of Sekidera that is marked as based on Tamatsukuri reads, “How pitiful, truly in the past even in rooms where I would only stay for one night, they were

175 NKBT vol. 41, 288.
176 Itō 中, 216.
177 Tamatsukuri preface, lines 15-6. Tochio, 30.
178 Tamatsukuri poem, lines 264-5. Tochio, 56. If this were the source, it would be the first time the poem half of Tamatsukuri has been used. Other quotations are all drawn from the prose preface.
covered in tortoiseshell, the fence was hung with golden blossoms, crystals dripping down the doorway.”

But the closest Tamatsukuri equivalent reads, “The house was decked with jewels and jade, the room covered with crimson jewels, white powder painted on the wall, the fences were painted crimson and blue, amber crystals floated on the eaves, pearls hung from the screens. Kingfishers decorated the curtains, purple swallows embroidered on the coverings. Mica flowed on the windows and crystals floated on the door.”

Although these quotes are closer than the first example, there are major differences. Tamatsukuri describes Komachi’s permanent residence, and each new phrase follows an exact structure, giving part of house plus noun plus associated image. The images come in pairs: type of jewel, colour, type of jewel, type of bird, type of jewel. Parallelism is strictly maintained. In contrast, Sekidera describes a temporary residence and gives three images, none of which displays the parallel structure found in Tamatsukuri. The language is also quite different. The closest equivalent is the image of the crystals on the door, and the verbs are different— ukabu for Tamatsukuri, kayofu for Sekidera. The section in Sekidera is undoubtedly using kanbun vocabulary, but they are simply not close enough to Tamatsukuri’s to identify this as the source.

Moreover, by the period that the plays were being written the legend of Komachi’s decline had long since spread into various other sources, including Fukurozōshi, Mumyōzōshi, etc. Furthermore, the similarity in language between the descriptions in Higaki and Sotoba implies there was a common vocabulary for descriptions of the degradation of previously beautiful court women. Compared to Sotoba, which quotes directly and relatively lengthily

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179 Itō 中, 210.
from Tamatsukuri in its description of Komachi in the past, Sekidera shows no conclusive evidence that the author was drawing directly from Tamatsukuri. The common reference to Tamatsukuri as a source, which can be found in Yokomichi and Omote, Itō, Keene/Brazell, Strong, etc., can be explained by its use in the other aged Komachi plays and its status as the ur-text of Komachi's degeneration.

The section of the play that deals with Komachi's poetry draws on the previously-mentioned kanajo commentary Kikigaki. This commentary was used as a source for many Noh plays, including Takasago by Zeami. The quotations are not always exact, but the closeness in phrasing is conclusive. We can safely surmise that the playwright had access to Kikigaki and to a copy of or fairly detailed knowledge of the Kokinshū during the writing of Sekidera. Kikigaki is one of the more esoteric Kokinshū commentaries. It deals with phrases from the kanajo and explicates their “hidden meanings.” It is roughly divided by subject headings and often uses a question/answer format. The relevant section explains the line in the kanajo about Komachi being of the lineage of Sotoori-hime. The phrase about Oe no Koreaki having a change of heart is taken directly from the text:

"Omohitsutsu nureba ya hito no mietsuran yume to shiriseba samezaramashi wo. This poem was composed when she loved Narihira and saw him in a dream.

Iro mihede uturofu mono ha yo no naka no hito no kokoro no hana ni zo aikeru. This poem was composed when she had become Oe no Koreaki’s wife, Koreaki had a change of heart.

181 Itō notes that the line regarding Oe no Koreaki is drawn from the Kikigaki, but does not appreciate the extent to which the Kikigaki influenced this play. He does not mention that the three Komachi poems quoted (and only those three) are found in the Kikigaki. Itō 218, note 8.

182 Esoteric in this case refers more to the commentary's difference from what could be considered a regular commentary, such as commentaries that work to clear up uncertain etymologies. The more esoteric commentaries narrativize the work by assigning explicatory passages and giving “the true story” behind the Kokinshū. See Klein 2002 for more on esoteric commentaries.
and became Fujiwara no Asayuki’s son-in-law. This poem refers to another poem. The poem says “the heart of a skyperson (sorabito) that does not cling to sadness is like the mountain flowers that fall so easily.” A skyperson is a person with a fragile heart. This work is about a person called Ryūchin who was passionate and resentful. Greatly moved by his lamenting for his wife, Bai Juyi wrote this and sent it to Ryūchin's place.

Wabinureba mi wo ukigusa no ne o tahete sasofu mizu araba inan to zo omofu. This poem was sent as a reply when she had been thrown away by Narihira and suffered. Fun'ya no Yasuhide, when he became the governor of Mikawa and went down there, said “Come down to my country dwelling and enjoy yourself here.”183

The relationship between Oe no Koreaki and Komachi is only found within poetic commentaries.184 The Ise commentaries put Oe no Koreaki/Koreakira (the romanization varies) as Komachi’s lover/husband whom she turns to after Narihira is unfaithful to her. In Kokinshū commentaries, Koreaki is often Komachi’s husband. Of note is the fact that all three of these poems, as well as one of Sotoori-hime's that is given immediately after this section, are quoted in Sekidera in the section where Komachi laments her current body:

shite: No, I am ashamed to be Komachi, “iro miede/ the colour that fades...” to have written this “that which fades is the flower of the heart of men in this world, I see,” how shameful, “my body grieving, floating duckweed, roots cut off, if there were inviting waters”... even now, I believe I would go, how shameful. Truly, “though I try to hide, these white jewels that stop in sleeves are the rain from the tears of eyes that cannot see their love,” thinking only of the past, like memory-grass, at the very end of my body, wilted like a flower, only the name of white dew remains. “longing on and on, when I fell asleep I saw my love,” I composed, but now, to this body (it relates badly), the springs and autumns that welcome and farewell the passing months and years, the dew goes and the frost comes, the grasses and leaves change and the noises of the insects die away. My life has come to its limit, like a flower that blooms for just one day.185

This suggests that the author drew heavily on this section, and confirms that it is the primary

185 Itō 中, 219-20.
source of the play. This has not been sufficiently acknowledged in scholarship to date: Itō notes that the line regarding Oe no Koreaki is drawn from the *Kikigaki*, but does not appreciate the extent to which the *Kikigaki* influenced this play. He does not mention that the three Komachi poems quoted (and only those three) are found in the *Kikigaki*, nor does he compare the differences between the two.

The playwright does change and adapt the *Kikigaki* section to fit his needs. Narihira's presence has disappeared, the story of Oe no Koreaki has been assigned to the *wabinureba* poem rather than the *iro miede* poem, and in the play Fun'ya no Yasuhide offers that Komachi should come down and console herself (*kokoro wo nagasam eru*) rather than enjoy herself (*asobitamafu*), as he does in the *Kikigaki*. This editorial change assigns Komachi the lion's share of the grief: the *iro miede* poem can be taken as grieving over someone's fickleness (as well as a more philosophical acceptance of it), but by putting *wabinureba* with the story of being abandoned by Oe no Koreaki, the play creates a Komachi who is completely undone by her grief and left literally floating and unsupported (as in *ukigusa*, where *uki* means both “floating” and “sad”). The change in verb of Fun'ya no Yasuhide's offer strengthens this impression.

The playwright may or may not have had access to other commentaries. Examining the two *Kokinshū* commentaries Strong singles out as also mentioning Oe no Koreaki, we find in the *Kōan junen kokin kachū* (1287) a comment on poem 988, an anonymous poem, that

186 As with most Noh plays, the author was familiar with *chokusenshū* poems, quoting poems from the *Wakan roeishū* and *Shinkokinshū*. But in terms of sustained use as primary source material, *Kikigaki* is far and away drawn upon the most heavily.
attributes it to Komachi: “Ono no Komachi, after she had parted with Oe no Koreaki, composed this living around Osaka.”\textsuperscript{187} Yokomichi and Omote give the source of Komachi as living around Sekidera as coming from oral tradition, but cannot give any dates of when this tradition might have come to life.\textsuperscript{188} The author could conceivably have had access to the idea of Komachi settling around Osaka or at Sekidera from a \textit{Kokinshū} commentary rather than from oral tradition. Conversely, oral tradition could have affected the commentaries. Regardless, it is clear that the idea of Komachi living around Osaka/Sekidera dates back to at least 1287, or at least a hundred years before this play was written.

In the earlier chapter, Zeami's revision of \textit{Sotoba}, which deleted a subplot in which Komachi offered a poem to the god of Tamatsushima and met a servant of the shrine, was discussed. Tamatsushima is not mentioned in \textit{Sekidera}, but this in itself is a kind of deletion, this time by omission. We know that the author was drawing on \textit{Kikigaki} as one of his main sources for the play, and particularly the section that explicates the sentence “Komachi is of the lineage of Sotoori-hime of old.” It is through Sotoori-hime, who is identified with the god of Tamatsushima Shrine in the medieval imagination, that Komachi too had a connection with Tamatsushima, and indeed Tamatsushima and Sotoori-hime form a large part of the \textit{Kikigaki} section.

That “Ono no Komachi is of the lineage of Sotoori-hime” is that she has received the lineage of Sotoori-hime's poem and composes (in that way). It is not that she is her descendant. Komachi is the descendant of Middle Captain Yoshizane, the daughter of Ono no Tsunetaka, governor of Dewa. Sotoori-hime was the descendant of Emperor Ōjin, the daughter of Wakanuke-Futamata no Miko. She was the consort of Emperor Ingyō. This person is said to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[187] \textit{Chūsei kokinshū chūshaku kaidai}, vol. 2, 423.
\item[188] NKB\textit{T vol. 41, 288.}
\end{footnotes}
be Tamatsushima-myōjin\textsuperscript{189} in various houses. This too is not without reason. According to what we learn in our lineage/school, when Emperor Kōkō was troubled, and when various prayers were made, at dawn a woman wearing a red *hakama* stood at his pillow and said, “Returning again in this world, its footprints unending. That name so auspicious, the waves at the Bay of Waka.”\textsuperscript{190} When in the emperor’s dream this was seen, in his dream he asked “Who are you?” and she replied “Sotoori-hime.” According to this, in the third year of Ninna on the thirteenth day of the ninth month, as an imperial messenger, Controller of the Right Minamoto no Takayuki was sent to Tamatsushima in the Bay of Waka and built a shrine. With Nobuyuki, a man of high rank, he worshipped there, and she was worshipped as Shōkannon. That this princess left her traces in the Bay of Waka is according to the idea in the poem of the waves standing and returning. It is thought that this is called the Bay of Waka because here she left her traces.\textsuperscript{191}

Immediately after this comes the section on Komachi previously translated, beginning with the *omoitsutsu* poem. The *Kikigaki* acknowledges Komachi’s connection to Sotoori-hime as mentioned in the *Kokinshū* and provides proof that Sotoori-hime's poetic powers were literally godlike as it establishes Sotoori-hime's identity as the god of Tamatsushima. At the same time it denies any direct genealogical relationship between them. This can be said to be a rebuttal to those other commentaries in the medieval period in which “the graph for *nagare* (流れ) was read as ‘lineage’ or ‘school’ (*ryū*), and Ono no Komachi was understood to have literally received Sotoori Hime’s secret teachings on poetry.”\textsuperscript{192} Nevertheless, the *Kikigaki* acknowledges Komachi’s connection to Tamatsushima. The connection is, however, entirely obscured in *Sekidera* as the playwright chooses to only draw from the latter half of the section on Komachi. It is an interesting congruency that Komachi’s apparently well-known connection to this shrine, which itself was associated with divine female and poetic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{189} I.e. the god of Tamatsushima.
\item \textsuperscript{190} *Tachikaeri/mo kono yo ni/ ato taren/ kono na ureshiki/ waka no ura nami*
\item \textsuperscript{191} *Chūsei kokinshū chūshaku kaidai*, vol. 2, 280-1.
\item \textsuperscript{192} Klein, 203.
\end{itemize}
powers, should be obscured in both these plays. We will see a similar strategy of obscuration in Ōmu.

We come to a key question: who wrote Sekidera? There is no conclusive evidence, but a weighing of the circumstantial evidence can establish much. Authorship of the play is commonly attributed to Zeami, mainly due to its mention in Ongyoku kuden, but not conclusively established. In its mention in Zeami's Ongyoku kuden, under the name “Komachi,” a section of it is quoted, but the authorship of the play is not touched upon.

Zeami did mention plays in his treatises that were not his own: there is a list of plays in Sandō given with no authors, and later rewritten in Sarugaku dangi with authors given, showing that they were a mix of Zeami's, Kan'ami's, and other contemporary playwrights. On the other hand, Zeami also writes in Sandō that Komachi is an ideal subject for a Noh play along with various other talented women; given this, it would be odd if he had never written a play about her, and Sekidera is the only contender.

Stylistically speaking, there are certain congruencies. Hare places Sekidera as a work that can reasonably be considered Zeami's, noting a common use of noriji in Zeami plays that is also found in Sekidera. There is ample evidence that Zeami had access to the main source of the play. Takasago, a Zeami play, also uses Kikigaki as a source. Zeami's first treatise, whose first part is dated 1400, is also very much patterned after the style of Kikigaki, indicating he had already read it by this point and used it as a model for his own hiden, or “secret

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193 NKB T vol. 41, 288.
194 Quinn, 141.
195 Hare, 45 and 171.
transmission.” Finally and most convincingly, a phrase is paraphrased in Sekidera that is also used in Zeami's first treatise, which does not appear to be a quotation from any previous source. Given this, it seems reasonable to accept Zeami as the author of the play. However, there are still many striking dissonances between the play and Zeami's own stated aesthetics that raise questions about the dating of the play.

The portrayal of Komachi as infirm in her dancing is the most striking difference, not just between Sekidera and the other two sanrōjo, but between the play and Zeami's aesthetics as stated in his treatises. In Fūshikaden, (風姿花伝, 1400), his first treatise, Zeami discusses three kinds of “body” or “modes,” as Hare translates them: the woman's mode, the aged mode, and the warrior's mode. Although Hare speaks about the aged mode as referring only to old men, the phrases used is either rōjin “old person” (老人) or toshiyori (年寄り), and there is no evidence to say that Zeami's strictures on playing these “old people” should not also refer to old women. In this treatise, Zeami argues that elderly characters' dancing should not be staggering or unskilful.

In terms of stage deportment, most actors, thinking to appear old, bend their loins and hips, shrink their bodies, lose their Flower, and give a withered, uninteresting performance. Thus there is little that is attractive in what such actors do. It is particularly important that the actor refrain from performing in a limp or weak manner, but bear himself with grace and dignity. Most crucial of all is the dancing posture chosen for the role of an old man. One must study assiduously the precept: portray an old man while still possessing the Flower (i.e. Grace and novelty). The results should resemble an old tree that puts forth flowers.

196 The original word is toshiyori, which is gender-neutral. Konishi, 43.
197 Rimer and Yamazaki, 12.
This section is dated 1400. Zeami's ideas are expanded and repeated in a later addition to the text in 1418:

It is important, first of all, to make no attempt merely to imitate the external attributes of old persons. When speaking in general of dance and movement, it can be assumed that these will be performed in time to the rhythm of the music, and the actor’s gestures and movements will be attuned to that mutual rhythm. In the case of an old person, however, when the beat sounds from the taiko, the chant, or the tsutsumi, his feet will be just a bit slow in responding, and his gestures and movements as well will follow an instant after. Such movements surely represent the best way to show the character of an old person. Keeping this concern in mind, the role must otherwise be performed with the kind of expansiveness that an old man would wish to show... One should basically play the role in a youthful manner such as that which an old person would wish to assume... Here, for the spectator, the sense of novelty comes from the fact that an old person dances like a young one. This is a flower blooming on an ancient tree.198

This expanded version makes it clear that the old person will not dance quite correctly, but still there is a gap between Zeami's aesthetics and Sekidera's jo no mai. Komachi is more than simply one beat off the measure; the placement of her limbs and her movements are all entirely wrong. The most striking thing about these passages is the repetition of the phrase “a flower blooming on an ancient tree” or oiki ni hana no sakan ga gotoshi,199 as a very similar phrase— “flowers on an aged tree's branch”, oiki no hana no eda200—is used to describe Komachi's dancing by the chorus. However, in Zeami's treatises the phrase refers to an old person successfully performing the dance of a young person with only minor deviations and still possessing a quality of grace, whereas in the play the phrase seems to refer to the incongruity of Komachi's dance, a dance that is faltering and indeed shameful, considering the attitude with which she returns back to her hut afterwards. If we are to accept Zeami as

198 Rimer and Yamazaki, 55-6.
199 Konishi, 43 and 105.
200 Itō 中, 222.
the author for Sekidera, we must either accept that this quote is a case of “do as I say, not as I do” or place the writing of Sekidera pre-1400, at a time when Zeami's precepts on the correct kind of dancing old characters should perform had not yet been fully codified in his mind. Despite the fact that the dance is plainly described by the chorus as faltering, ungraceful, and weak, the dance is often characterized as graceful in scholarship. Fischer describes Komachi as “forgetting herself and performing a beautiful dance,” while two of three English translations choose the most graceful and positive reading of ahare nari, ahare nari, the line expressing the chorus' response to watching Komachi dance, which I have translated as “how pitiful, how pitiful”. They respectively translate it as “Oh touching sight! Oh touching sight!” and “How deeply moving, how deeply moving.” Brazell, in Keene's anthology, is the sole exception, translating this line as “How sad it is! It breaks my heart!” The following line “Flowers on an aged tree's branch” provides fewer differences in the translation but rather more in the reception. Itō reads it as “Zeami's expression for the yūgen of an old person.” Omote and Yokomichi, in their gloss, suggest that though Komachi is trying to dance like a young person, she is incapable of it, but they do not tie this to the use of the phrase in Fūshikaden nor mention the inherent contradiction. I believe it is the understanding of the phrase as it is used in Fūshikaden that motivates the positive translations of the previous line ahare nari, ahare nari. However, I suggest that ahare nari should be understood in this line as something pitiful and sad, given the chorus' description of the dance and Komachi's own embarrassed reaction at the end of it, while the “flowers on an aged tree's branch” line, as

201 Fischer, 45.
203 Keene, 76.
204 Ito 中, 223, note 10.
argued above, does not support the reading it is given in Fūshikaden. I suggest that the cause of this mis-reading lies in the understanding of the play as a whole as a masterpiece, fed by Sekidera's hikyoku status. Viewing the play as a hikyoku necessitates viewing it as a superlative work of art, and encourages scholars to overlook any evidence to the contrary. This has prevented any consideration of Sekidera as an early play or of its deviations from Zeami’s treatises.

My insistence upon this reading of the line is not merely the dogmatic assertion of a pedant: it is central to correctly understanding Komachi's treatment within the play. Although the play seems nominally kinder in its treatment of Komachi than in the Kan'ami-authored plays, such as Sotoba, where she is not only homeless and destitute but also possessed, or Kayoi, where she is a ghost unable to escape from her past, Sekidera is in reality much crueler to Komachi, as she ends the play divested of her identity. She began as an old woman who was rumoured to know much about poetry, before being identified as Komachi. But this identity is stripped from her in the course of the play, and in the end she is nothing but “the hundred-year-old crone” who is not deeply moving, but pitiful in the truest sense of the word: a pitiable, lonely figure. We will see a similar trajectory in Ōmu.
Chapter 4: Parroting Words: The Anxiety of Poetry in Ōmu Komachi

Like Sekidera Komachi, Ōmu Komachi is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between body and poetry. As the waki is an Imperial messenger rather than the more usual priest (even in genzai Noh, priests are quite regular), the relationship between poetry and Buddhism is not present in the same way as it is in Sotoba (combative) or Sekidera (co-existent), although as in all Noh plays, Buddhist attitudes inform the play in many ways. Instead, the play highlights the relationships between poetry, social mobility, and the body. We have seen this to a certain extent in Sekidera, but it has much more space devoted to it in Ōmu. A related focus is the relationship between poetry, Komachi, and the capital.

Ōmu, although it remained in the repertory throughout the six hundred odd years since it was written, suffered from a progressive lack of interest by both Noh actors and audiences. It was not performed, but only recited, up until the end of World War II.²⁰⁶ Although it has been brought back into the active repertory, it is rarely performed. Like Sekidera and Sotoba, it is a rōjomono, but does not share in these plays' high reputation, and is rarely treated as a hikyoku by any of the schools.²⁰⁷ Amongst the three Komachi plays devoted to poetry, it is certainly considered the least important. Not only has it not yet been evaluated independently in English scholarship, very little attention has been paid to it on the Japanese side as well. Part of the reason for its relative obscurity may be the sense that it is “the least dramatic and

²⁰⁶ Teeles, 169.
²⁰⁷ Koda notes a move towards hikyoku treatment in the seventeenth century, which she theorizes is connected with the play's similarity to Sekidera. Koda 2, 44.
least demanding of these old woman's roles." Sotoba has the monogi possession scene, while Sekidera, as discussed in the last chapter, requires a lengthy period of stillness from the shite in contemporary performance. Both of these plays, moreover, have received accolades since very early on in their history, whereas Ōmu has been relatively ignored. However, if we untangle the play from its reception, we find that Ōmu provides a fascinating new angle on Komachi in Noh, and adds to our view of the anxieties surrounding women’s poetry in the medieval period.

Although Ōmu is ascribed to Zeami, as are all three in-repertory Komachi plays not authored by Kan’ami, scholarship has concluded that it is not a Zeami play. There are compelling reasons to dispute the common attribution to Zeami. There is no mention of Ōmu in any of Zeami’s treatises. On the level of language, while the poetic sections of Zeami plays fit the 5-7-5-7 syllable pattern with rare variation, and those always used to effect, Ōmu scans bumpily, with frequent extra syllables leading to the regular appearance of eight-syllable lines. The frequency goes beyond what can be excused as ji-amari or for artistic effect. In addition, the author may not have had access to Zeami’s treatises, or he may have disagreed with their strictures, for he makes choices that Zeami would not approve of: for example, he repeats a key kakekotoba, “namida no seki/dera” or “tears passing down/ Sekidera”, although Sarugaku dangi has the argument that “it is important never to repeat verbal devices within a single play.” Koda has concluded it was likely written later than both Sotoba and Sekidera, perhaps by a playwright of the generation after Zeami. As such, the play offers a unique

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208 Teeles, 74.
209 Rimer and Yamazaki, 220.
210 Koda, 23.
opportunity to trace out the ways in which Sotoba and Sekidera influenced later imaginings of Komachi in Noh.

The name of the play, Ōmu Komachi or Parrot Komachi, derives from the use of the ōmu-gaeshi (鸚鵡返し), the “parrot-answer poem” that drives the plot. However, as with Sotoba, we can discern a buried tension within the title itself. With its implied equivalence, the title collapses a poet who uses the parrot answer technique into a poet who is a parrot, denying Komachi’s poetic ability. Though the Teeles see Komachi’s use of ōmu-gaeshi as a positive attribute, arguing that “though it seems that Komachi’s advanced years might lead her to answer expending as little energy as possible, without her extensive knowledge of poetry such a choice would be unimaginable”, this is an overly-optimistic reading when the text itself is taken into consideration.²¹¹

Ōmu deals with an aged but still human Komachi, similar to her depiction in Sekidera. Unlike Kayoi or Sotoba, she has no connections to the spirit world. The plot is simple. A courtier named Yukiie has come with a poem from Retired Emperor Yōzei to test Komachi’s poetic skills. He announces that if she succeeds in composing a skilful reply, she will be given more topics for poems. Rather than responding with a new poem, as is customary, Komachi rewrites the Emperor’s poem by changing one syllable out of the poem’s thirty-one. This change inflects the poem’s meaning and gives it a new reading. She explains that this kind of poem is called a parrot-answer poem, or ōmu-gaeshi, and gives a brief overview of poetic knowledge. Yukiie then asks her to perform the sacred dance that Ariwara no Narihira

²¹¹ Teeles, 167.
danced at Tamatsushima. Once she has done so, he leaves. In the last lines of the play, Komachi returns to her brushwood hut.

Ōmu, like Sotoba, focuses on both the power of poetry and Komachi's decline, but has a much more positive attitude towards poetry's powers. The primacy of poetry as a theme is clear from the opening lines:

waki: I am the New Counselor Yukiie, in service to Retired Emperor Yōzei. Now, my lord has thrown his heart into the Way of Tamatsushima, and is trying to extensively choose poems, but there are no poems that are suitable for his heart's desire. The daughter of Ono no Yoshizane of Dewa province, Ono no Komachi, is unparalleled in her poetic skills, but has now become an old woman of a hundred years. He has heard she is in the area around Sekidera and has created a sympathy poem for her. Entrusted with my lord's pronouncement that based on her reply she may be given more topics for poems, I am hurrying to the area around Sekidera, to Ono no Komachi.

shite: **My body/self is alone.** who do I pine for on Pine Hill? Only death. The plain of the Four Temples, the four crossroads, when shall I again be on the six streets? “Long ago I was a body/person like a flower, now I am like pigweed grass,” “my face is slumped and emaciated, my skin is like a frozen pear,” I have no power without my staff. Resenting people, deploring my body/self, crying and laughing without any peace, people say that I am mad. (monogiruhi to hito ha iu) Even so, I am attached to this body/self of a life I cannot throw away, even so, I am attached to this body/self of a life I cannot throw away. My face—the ninety-nine white hairs.  “If I had not done (those) things this would not have happened.” Longing for the past, the creeping sound, I awake from my dreams in the long night. My worn-out heart, my worn-out heart.  

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212 Reigned 876-884, lived 869-949.
213 The phrase used is natsu no chimata, which seems to simultaneously refer to city streets and to the *rokudō,* six paths of Buddhist rebirth.
214 Itō pinpoints this as an allusion to a *kanshi* from *Ritaihakushishū,* (李太白詩集) or “The Collected Poems of Li Po.” Itō, 216, note 1.
215 Allusion to *Tamatsukuri,* preface lines 5 and 8. Tochio, 29.
216 Allusion to *Goshuishū* poem 1019. (Book 17, poem 3): *miru tabi ni/ kagami no kage no/ tsuraki ka na/ kakarazariseba/ kakaramashiya ha.* “Each time I look at it, the shadow in the mirror is so painful! Had I not done these things, this would not have happened.”
This introduction bears strong resemblances to that of Sotoba. Like Sotoba, the first word that Komachi speaks on stage is mi or “body” (mi ha hitori), and bodies crop up regularly throughout the introduction. Here, the body is alone, despicable, degraded, yet also something that Komachi cannot detach herself from. Komachi situates herself spatially and cosmologically. She begins with Pine Hill, utilizing the common poetic kakekotoba of matsu, meaning to wait/pine tree. From there, she passes into situating herself in regards to death—the “plain of the four temples” (shinomiyagahara) contains homophones for only death (shi nomi). Moreover, the six streets that she refers to (mutsu no chimata) could refer to both the rokudō or six kinds of Buddhist worlds as well as referring to actual Kyoto streets. This section mixes Kyoto landmarks with Buddhist cosmology and linguistic play on numbers, counting up from one body, four temples, four crossroads, five (hidden in the itsu mata of “when shall I again”), and six streets. Although Sekidera is also set on the outskirts of Kyoto, Ōmu has much more of a sense of a concrete and detailed spatial setting. This extended section also allows Komachi to establish her linguistic bonafides through the use of poetic techniques such as kakekotoba in non-poetic communication.218 There is also the suggestion, with the allusion to the Goshuishū poem 1019, of a karmic situation, suggesting that her current appearance is due to something that she herself did in the past. Here we may see again the idea of Komachi’s age as a punishment for misdeeds in the past.

The introduction uses quotations from kanshi and from Tamatsukuri to establish Komachi`s decrepitude. These bear some similarities to the quotations used in Sotoba. Both juxtapose

218 By “non-poetic” I mean merely communication not in waka form. Stylistically the section is very lyrical. A section similar in technique if not subject matter occurs in Kayoi in which an old woman (later revealed to be Komachi) recites a long string of fruit names with multiple poetic references and kakekotoba buried within the prose.
Komachi’s past with her current situation. However, Sotoba’s references tend to draw upon features that are part of the body and yet peripheral, particularly focusing upon hair, including hair, eyebrows, and sidelocks, and upon a more general simile in which the actual condition and appearance of the body is subsumed in metaphor (“I was like a willow swaying in the spring wind”219). In contrast, the quotations Ōmu draws out are jarringly physical: the reference to her skin as being “like a frozen pear” is stunningly concrete, if not grotesque.220 Sotoba’s quotations from Tamatsukuri also tend to mix the physical state with the socioeconomic one, following the formulation seen throughout Tamatsukuri. Yet Ōmu stitches a sentence from Tamatsukuri together with one from a kanshi from Ritaihakushishū, creating a stronger focus on the physical and breaking the connection between body and social standing. The phrase that immediately comes after this (“I have no power without my staff”) is not a direct quote from Tamatsukuri, where the old woman has no such support, though it does work to create a picture of her as decrepit and powerless that fits in well with the general Tamatsukuri rubric.221

Although Komachi’s introduction situates her in a variety of ways, the waki’s speech should not be ignored, as it does much to establish the stakes of the play and to fix its concern with poetry firmly in the minds of the audience. Retired Emperor Yōzei (869-949, r. 876-884) is said to be “choosing” poems (erabu), which inevitably brings to mind the chokusenshū, or imperial poetry anthologies. Yōzei was a poet but had no connection with chokusenshū,

219 Itō 中, 254.  
220 And certainly not something one would expect to find in a Zeami play, with their emphasis on yūgen and appealing to the refined senses of the court.  
221 Tamatsukuri’s prose preface does say that the old woman “cannot walk”. Tamatsukuri preface line 14. Tochio 30.
although the *Kokinshū* was compiled within his lifetime and the *Gosenshū* finished a mere two years after his death. He sponsored poetry competitions after his abdication, but was not directly connected with the compilation of any *chokusenshū*.²²² Yōzei had only one poem in the *Gosenshū*, which was later included in the *Hyakunin isshū*.²²³ This poem and Yōzei's reputation as an emperor roughly contemporaneous with Komachi with an interest in poetry may have led the playwright to choose him as the emperor in the play.²²⁴ The play also hints at a connection to *chokusenshū* through the name of the waki: a Fujiwara no Yukiie of the Rokujuō faction was a compiler of the *Shokukokinshū* in 1265.²²⁵

Similarly, the possibility of Komachi being given more topics (*dai*) if she performs well is a huge opportunity for any poet. It constitutes the possibility of official recognition from a Retired Emperor, and an invitation to take part in the elite world of *uta-awase*. The use of the words *erabu* and *dai*, with their allusions to *chokusenshū*, holds out the promise of poetic immortality. Simultaneously, the possibility of entering into poetic correspondence with the Retired Emperor is essentially an opportunity for Komachi to escape from her marginalized existence at Sekidera—as mentioned in the previous chapter, itself literally a “temple on the

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²²³ *Tsukuba-ne no/ mine yori otsuru/ mina no kaha/ kohi zo tsumorite/ fuch to narinuru.*
“Like the Mina River that falls from the peak of Mount Tsukuba, so my longing has collected and turned into deep pools.” Mostow 1996, 181.
²²⁴ Yōzei appears to have suffered from some form of mental illness. He was forced to retire as emperor after a series of violent outbursts, and after he became a Retired Emperor his illness recurred at times, possibly involving murder. Brownlee, 81. However, apart from the mention of his name there is very little development of the Emperor’s character in the play, and it seems unlikely for this to be a form of criticism of the imperial family, given Noh’s need for patronage and general lack of socially subversive statements.
²²⁵ Itō 上, 215, note 3.
border/boundary”—back to the centralized cultural space of the court, whether physically or by proxy through the transmission of poems.

The Komachi of Sekidera is reluctant to admit to her identity, but the Komachi of Ōmu shows no such compunction:

waki: How is it, are you Komachi?
shite: That is correct, I am Komachi. Looking at you, it seems you are one of those from above the clouds, but what business do you have with Komachi? To speak of Komachi, what business do you have with me?
waki: Now then, where is it that you have been living recently?
shite: Although no one makes me stay, I simply pass my days in the vicinity of Sekidera.
waki: Truly, truly, Sekidera is not far from the capital, and it has interesting places for living a life of retirement.
shite: With the road for carriages and oxen to pass in front
waki: Where the noble go and the common pass
shite: With the mountain of spiritual experiences high in the back
waki: And with no road
shite: Spring is
waki: The spring haze
chorus: rises/rising and watching, in the area around the deep mountains, rising and watching in the area around the deep mountains. The white clouds caught in the branches look like flowers, how beautiful! The pine wind is fragrant, borrowing a flower on the pillow— and not knowing that/white clouds, what beautiful scenery in colour and scent! If one goes to the north there is the lake, and the single pine of the Shiga promontory is like me/my body. If one turns to the east, how thankful! The Kanzeon226 at Ishiyama and the long bridge at Seta is like the long, pitiless existence of the mad— I am/it is such an example.
shite: So it is when I long for the capital, with no friend to stay with me in my brushwood hut, with no one to depend upon/clinging to my unreliable staff, I go to the roads of the capital and beg. When I cannot beg anything I return, crying/to Sekidera.
waki: How is it, Komachi, do you still compose poetry even now?
shite: Long ago because I mingled with a hundred officials at the palace I composed poetry to fit the occasion, but now “I am like the pampas grass that flowered and goes to seed”227 and am merely carried along in this floating/melancholy world

226 Does the reference to Kanzeon perhaps indicate that the author was from the Kanze troupe? Later in the play, during the climactic dance, the shite will use the phrase kataonami— perhaps together forming a cheeky signature from Kanze On'ami? This is by no means definitive or even necessarily persuasive, as the same phrase turns up in Tomoakira, Matsukaze, and Ashikari, which are not On'ami plays. However, the phrase does not occur in any of these plays with mention of “Kanze.”

227 Allusion to the kanajo.
waki: Truly it is natural that my lord should have graciously given you a poem of commiseration. Look at this
shite: What is that you say? Your lord has graciously given me a poem of commiseration? I am truly grateful. Aged eyes cannot distinguish the characters correctly, please read it out to me.
waki: Then please listen
shite: Please read it out very loudly
waki: “Above the clouds”
shite: “Above the clouds”
waki: “Above the clouds, nothing has changed from long ago, yet wasn't life pleasant inside the jewelled blinds?”
shite: Oh, how fascinating a poem! How sad, though I am trained in “an old stream (of learning)”229, and wish to properly follow the flow, I cannot think of a poem to compose. Again, I am fearful of what would happen if I do not reply, therefore I will give a reply poem of only one character.
waki: You say a strange thing. A poem is thirty-one linked syllables. Although there may be “poems whose heart is insufficient,”230 to speak of a poem of one syllable must be because you are mad. (kore mo kyōki no yuwe yaran)
shite: No, the character “zo” is my answer poem.
waki: Whatever do you mean, the character “zo”?
shite: Now, repeat the emperor's poem.
waki: Though it is strange, I will do so. “Above the clouds, nothing has changed from long ago, yet wasn't life pleasant inside the jewelled blinds?”
shite: Now, if you take out the line “uchi ya yukashiki”, for “wasn't life pleasant?” and read “uchi zo yukashiki” or “life was so pleasant!” , that is the answer poem that Komachi wishes to compose.
waki: Now, I wonder if there were such poems in the past?
shite: That is called a “parrot's reply,” to speak of the kind of this poem. To steal the emperor's poem and compose it, Heaven shall probably be angered, but as it is for the Way of Poetry, the gods may pardon it. That I, who am not noble, mixes with those of high station, is all due to the virtue of poetry, is all due to the virtue of poetry.231

Of particular note in this exchange is the unproblematic way in which Komachi lays claim to her identity. Although not all schools include the line “How is it, are you Komachi?...That is

228 Kumo no ue ha/ arishi mukashi ni/ kaharanedo/ mishi tamadare no/ uchi ya yukashiki. The mishi adds a sense of the blinds that were seen.
229 An allusion to the kanajo reference to Ono no Komachi being of the “stream of Sotoori-hime” (inishie no Sotoori-hime no ryū nar) This reference is more elliptical than usual, using the phrasing furuki nagare wo kunde.
230 A reference to the criticism of Narihira in the kanajo.
231 Itō 上, 216-9.
correct, I am Komachi,” all of them include the line “This is the poem that Komachi wishes to compose.” While Komachi never refers to herself as Komachi in Sekidera, the Komachi of Ōmu is much more straightforward, both here and at the end of the play where she uses her name instead of a first-person pronoun. Similarly, the spatially liminal placement of Sekidera is played upon more so that, rather than being primarily a Buddhist space, its status as a place connected to but simultaneously distanced from the capital takes precedence. Within this space the codes of social stratification are relaxed. Just as noble and commoner mix in poetry, so too do they mix on the roads near Sekidera. Komachi herself can return to the capital when she longs for it, although, notably, she returns as a beggar rather than a poet.

Poetry itself is seen as bound to the capital and specifically to the court. Komachi says that she could compose poetry when she mixed with nobles in the court, but now she cannot. Unlike Sekidera, where Komachi could compose poems, but only ones that were withered and sere, Ōmu has a Komachi who can only compose when in the context of the court. She composed poems when she lived there and again, for a certain value of “composing”, when she receives the poem of commiseration from the Retired Emperor. In this way cultural capital is bound to the culture of the capital.

The exchange of poems that Komachi and Yukiie take part in, far from a simple display of poetic talent, is an act by which the play determines Komachi’s proper place in society and in the poetic tradition. The significance of the ōmu-gaeshi in particular must be explored. Komachi resorts to the ōmu-gaeshi not because it is a superior poetic technique, but because her ageing body has rendered her incapable of using any others. The play suggests that
Komachi’s body functions as a limit on her poetic ability. As she says, “aged eyes cannot distinguish the characters correctly.” Similarly, she must ask Yukiie to read the poem out “very loudly” (ika ni mo takaraka ni), suggesting she may have hearing problems as well. But it is her fading eyesight that affects her poetic ability the most, as it prevents her from reading the poem the emperor has sent to her, and presumably prevents her from writing her reply. Instead she delivers it orally to the emperor’s messenger.

This prevents Komachi from writing the poem on stage, and strips Komachi of one of the possible dimensions of waka writing— the physical presentation, including calligraphy, which ideally would harmonize with the poem and add an extra layer of nuance, and the choice of paper. Komachi’s aged body requires Yukiie to act as an intermediary both in delivering the Retired Emperor’s poem and in relaying her response. In this way, her words become depersonalized. Moreover, the way that Komachi’s reply is structured means that technically Komachi does not compose a poem, but instead simply informs Yukiie of where the poem should be changed, effectively giving instructions for its assembly by Yukiie when he relates it to the Retired Emperor.

Why does Komachi use the ōmu-gaeshi? The play suggests it is because she has lost her ability to compose. Despite Komachi being of Sotoori-hime's lineage, she cannot do justice to her illustrious forebear by composing a full poem. The Teeles, who remain some of the very few people to have written on this play in English, view Komachi's ōmu-gaeshi as a

232 Komachi is deprived of her writing in Sōshi arai as well, when she is forced to wash the old manuscript in which her poem has been inserted to prove that she has not plagiarized. While this action does prove her innocence, it also literally erases her writing. Ryu 1999, 168.
triumph, but in fact, far from “show(ing) how even in her old age Komachi’s brilliance as a poet remains undiminished,” her poem is rather an admission of defeat, precisely because it represents a trick rather than a technique.\textsuperscript{233} Komachi’s \textit{ōmu-gaeshi} is also morally suspect, as she refers to it as “stealing” the words of the Retired Emperor. The parrot-answer poem is not only an appropriation of words, but also an act of \textit{lèse-majesté}, for the words she appropriates are the Retired Emperor’s. Komachi coopts the very voice of the Retired Emperor himself, an action the play plainly describes as stealing, which may bring down divine punishment.\textsuperscript{234} The play offers no praise of her poem, further suggesting that the poem is not highly-regarded.\textsuperscript{235} Furthermore, Komachi appears to be a one-trick pony. She will not be able to parlay this poem into a means of receiving more poems from the Retired Emperor.

It should be noted here that the \textit{ōmu-gaeshi} could be a very successful poem. As Strong notes, by changing only a single syllable, “she is able to turn the Retired Emperor’s solicitous poetic inquiry into a sigh of nostalgic remembrance.”\textsuperscript{236} By radically changing the poem with one simple substitution, Komachi highlights the mutability of language and her grasp of the fine nuances of waka writing. Yet the play emphatically refuses to notice whatever creative possibilities the \textit{ōmu-gaeshi} has, instead emphasizing its subversive properties and characterizing it as an act of theft. This is a massive change from the original anecdote on which the play is based. Like \textit{Kayoi} or \textit{Sotoba}, which were the first to wed Komachi with the

\textsuperscript{233} Teeles, 167.
\textsuperscript{234} The original phrase is 奪ひ参らせて, “steal.” Itō 上, 219.
\textsuperscript{235} The later medieval story \textit{Komachi uta arasohi}, which faces the task of sewing the Noh plays into a coherent whole, has Yukiie appear “deeply impressed” by her poem. Teeles, 67. However, there is no textual basis for this in \textit{Ōmu}.
\textsuperscript{236} Strong 1997, 5. From electronic file.
idea of the *momoya-kayoi*, anecdotes of which had been associated with other notable women before, Ōmu adapts a previously-extant anecdote and replaces the original protagonist with Komachi. In Ōmu's case, the original anecdote can be found in the *Jikkinshō* (十訓抄), a 1252 collection of edifying tales, and an earlier variant in a late eleventh or early twelfth century *waka* manual called the *Etsumokushō* (悦目抄) by Fujiwara Mototoshi.²³⁷

The *Jikkinshō* version is as follows:

Lord Shigenori, due to certain events, had been called back and came to the palace. He had been able to enter freely into the court ladies' quarters, but as that was no longer so, a poem was sent from the court ladies, thinking of the past, saying, “Above the clouds, nothing has changed from the past, although you have—do you long for the inside of the jewelled curtains?” Wanting to give a reply, as he stood beside a lantern, Taira no Shigemori arrived, and Lord Shigenori was to leave quickly. With the point of the stick used to rake up the fire, he erased the character “ya” and at its side wrote the character “zo”, inserted it inside the bamboo blinds, and left. The court ladies, taking it and looking at it, were extremely moved by it having been returned with only one character, the “zo”. ²³⁸

The *Etsumokushō* version is as follows:

A person of recent times for certain reasons went down to the country and was called back. When he was in the imperial palace, seeing how coldly he was treated by the court ladies with whom he had once mingled, from the court ladies, a poem was sent, saying, “Above the clouds, nothing has changed from the past, although you have—do you long for the inside of the jewelled curtains?” Wanting to give a reply, as he stopped and stood for a moment, the Chief Advisor to the emperor passed by. Therefore, standing at the side of a lantern, he took

²⁳⁷ Fischer notes that there is a version of the ōmu-gaeshi anecdote with Komachi in the *Abutsushō*, but as this collection is no longer extant and there is no definitive date for it, it is impossible to establish precedence. The poem given is also slightly different to the version seen in the *Jikkinshō* and *Etsumokushō*. In the version given, the poem is sent to Komachi by court ladies. Fischer, 42-3.

²³⁸ SNKBZ vol 51, 67-8.
the stick used to rake up the fire, and turned the character in “uchi ya” to “zo”, offered it to the inside and left, when all the court ladies shed tears.²³⁹

The two anecdotes are extremely similar and there is no way to tell which version of them the author of Ōmu was working from, or if he could have run across the anecdote in another place. But their similarity makes the changes apparent in Ōmu even more compelling. In both original anecdotes, the important factor leading to the use of the ōmu-gaeshi is the time constraint that forces the author to immediately write a reply without time to prepare. The author uses the original paper of the poem and physically makes changes to it with the materials at hand, as a stick used to rake up the fire in the lantern becomes a makeshift brush. The use of the ōmu-gaeshi is thus a response to external constraints, and one which succeeds brilliantly, as the reaction of the court ladies indicates. But Komachi is at home and at leisure when Yukiie calls upon her, and though there is a certain time constraint, in that she must reply during Yukiie's visit, it is not as pressing as that of the protagonist of the Jikkinshō or Etsumokushō anecdotes. Nor does she have the problem of materials: Yukiie would be capable of remembering an original waka and returning with it to the Emperor. Rather than a response to outer constraints, the ōmu-gaeshi is a response to internal failure. She uses it because she is incapable of composing anything else. Its success is muted. Yukiie is certainly not moved to tears, nor does he offer any approbation of her poem.

Another important difference seen between the original anecdotes and the play is the gender of the actors within the anecdote and their reactions. The Jikkinshō version declares the

²³⁹ NKT vol. 4, 170.
protagonist to be a man. The *Etsumokushō* simply says “A person of recent times” *(chikagoro no hito)*, but given the circles that the protagonist moves in (having to leave when the chief advisor arrives), and their inability to trespass upon the court ladies, it seems more natural to read this as a man.\(^{240}\) In both cases, it is court ladies who write the original poem and who ask the protagonist if he misses his time among them, and it is these same court ladies who will be moved to tears by his response.

The final change between anecdotes and play is in the version of the poem given. Both anecdotes use *koishiki* in the final *ku*, making the question “Do you not long for?” But *Ômu* uses *yukashiki*, or “pleasant”, which does not show up in any of the anecdotes. This helps de-eroticize the poem, as *koishiki* is associated with longing for a lover as well. This may have been done to make the poem more fitting to its new context, as it is no longer from a court lady to an eligible male asking if he longs for the time he spent in the women's quarters, but now from a retired emperor to an ancient old woman, asking if the time she spent in the women's quarters was pleasant.

Not only does Komachi never actually recite the poem that she has “composed”, she does not recite or allude to any of her own poetry. Both *Sotoba* and *Sekidera* quote from Komachi’s poems when introducing her character. The quotations are far from extensive and tend to concentrate on the best-known of her poems. In *Sotoba*, only *wabinureba* is quoted, although

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\(^{240}\) Interestingly, the *Etsumokushō* anecdote is embedded in a section on response poems which use the intent or vocabulary from the original poems. One example given a short while before the discussion of the *Ômu-gaeshi* is the exchange between Komachi and Abe no Kiyoyuki (*Kokinshū* 556-7). This does not seem, however, to be sufficient reason for the anecdote to have been related to Komachi, however, especially as there is also an anecdote in this section about Narihira.
Komachi also quotes from *Ise monogatari* and composes a poem on the stupa *extempore*. In *Sekidera*, as was discussed in the last chapter, a relatively large number of her poems are used, and she adapts them on the spot to refer to her current state. She is also said to still write poems, although they are lacklustre and withered. Ōmu, however, does not quote any of the Komachi poems. As quotation of related famous poems was believed to be an important part of creating appealing Noh plays, at least in the Kanze school of the time as shown in Zeami’s treatises, the refusal to use such an effective technique is striking.\(^{241}\)

Significantly, the final poem that Komachi quotes is one by Narihira, despite the fact there were many poems either by or attributed to Komachi on the same topic (ageing) which could equally well have served.\(^{242}\)

The lack of quotation of Komachi’s poems serves to draw attention away from Komachi’s ability to compose poetry while her recitation of poetic history draws attention to her knowledge of poetry. This odd balancing act is one that can be seen throughout the Komachi Noh and is indeed one of the most striking features of the plays. The play does mention her fame for poetry towards the end of the play:

*chorus:* Truly, truly, the kinds of poetry— speaking of them reminds us of the fleetingness of the past. Among the great throng of poets who have been collected in the past ages was this

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\(^{241}\) Zeami says in *Sandō* that “If the artistic interest of a play centers around a famous place or an historic site, a well-known song or poem about the place should be chosen and included... This moment is the most crucial in the entire play. In addition, one must include a quotation from a famous poetic source for the shite to recite.” Rimer and Yamazaki, 150.

\(^{242}\) *Hana no iro ha* (*Kokinshū* 620), included in the *Hyakunin isshu* and arguably Komachi’s most famous poem, deals with ageing. Moreover, the *Komachishū*, an apocryphal collection of Komachi’s poetry, included many poems on ageing as the image of an aged Komachi had already become a fixed part of her identity in Japanese literature by its compilation. Although the author may not have been familiar with the *Komachishū*, no educated author in this age could have been unaware of *hana no iro ha*, or Komachi’s other poems from the *Kokinshū* which could read as being on ageing, such as *ima ha tote* (*Kokinshū* 782).
Komachi, a rare flower and amorous (irogonomi) in her poetry,\textsuperscript{243} which itself was like a woman, and composed weakly. In the records of the households this is recorded.

\textit{shite:} Asking of the six kinds of poetry

\textit{chorus:} One of Komachi's poems was taken as the example of the plain style of poetry,\textsuperscript{244} and her beauty excelled above others in the world, like an eight-petalled flower—“a peach flower in the rain, pliant like the willow in the wind,”\textsuperscript{245} “flourishing as the purple bamboo,”\textsuperscript{246} and the pear blossom was nothing but a name next to her, but now “she has withered, her body is exhausted”\textsuperscript{247}—Komachi is now pitiful (ahare).\textsuperscript{248}

According to Itō's annotations, this section blends paraphrases from the kanajo and Tamatsukuri with quotes from alternate kanbun sources. The first description of Komachi as a “peach flower in the rain, pliant like the willow in the wind” mixes a phrase from Tamatsukuri (“Her peach-face bloomed in the dew, her willow-hair flowed in the wind”) with a description from the \textit{Song of Eternal Sorrow} (長恨歌, ca. 9\textsuperscript{th} century)\textsuperscript{249} (“One branch of pear blossoms in the spring rain”), while the following description of the purple bamboo is drawn from the kanbun work Hakushi bunshū. The final lines describing her withering are based quite closely on a Tamatsukuri phrase. Of note is the way the playwright

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{243}] The line can simultaneously be read as Komachi being irogonomi and her poetry being so.
\item[\textsuperscript{244}] Itsuwari no/ naki yo nariseba/ ika bakari/ hito no koto no ha/ ureshikaramashi.
\item[\textsuperscript{245}] “if this world of ours
were a world without falsehood
how greatly i would
rejoice to hear burgeoning
words of new love unfolding.” Rodd, 39. The poem is quoted in the kanajo and is poem number 712 in the Kokinshū, where it is author unknown, topic unknown.
\item[\textsuperscript{246}] Itō marks this as a mix between a line in Tamatsukuri “Her face was like a peach blossom blossoming in the
dew, her hair flowed in the wind” (Tamatsukuri preface lines 60-61, Tochio 34) and a line from the Song of Eternal Sorrow “She was like a branch of pear blossoms in the spring rain.” Itō 上, 220, note 9.
\item[\textsuperscript{247}] Allusion to a line from the Hyakushi bunshu, 24. Itō 上, 220, note 10.
\item[\textsuperscript{248}] Allusion to Tamatsukuri, preface lines 5-6, Tochio, 30.
\item[\textsuperscript{249}] Itō 上, 220. In this context, the meaning of ahare as pitiful rather than moving is even clearer than the use of the word in Sekidera's dance scene, discussed in the previous chapter.
\item[\textsuperscript{249}] As this title is regularly used in English scholarship, I will refer to it as such rather than by its Japanese title.
\end{itemize}
has created parallels from these disparate sources, moving from peach to willow to bamboo to pear, and creating a colour palette, red to green to purple to white.250

This section is the most positive of all the remarks on Komachi’s poetry in this play, yet it focuses on Komachi’s sexual appeal over her technical grasp of poetry. The sole non-sexual comment on Komachi’s poetry is that one of her poems was chosen as an example of the plain style (tadakoto, one of the six kinds of poems discussed in the kanajo) poem. Yet, though this is mentioned, the poem itself is not quoted. Her talent is never put on display. The reference to the plain-style poem is the first time that that particular poem has been mentioned in any of the Komachi Noh, possibly due to the fact that the poem is not attributed to Komachi in the Kokinshū, but given as “author unknown.” The attribution to Komachi presumably came later and may even be specific to this play: it is not found in the Komachishū. Mentioning only this poem and no other also misrepresents Komachi’s poetic skills, as very few of her eighteen poems in the Kokinshū fit the plain style. Rather, her canonical poems have a strong focus on poetic technique, with multiple kakekotoba. Hana no iro ha, the poem included in the Hyakunin isshū, is a masterpiece of kakekotoba, with multiple possible meanings for hana, iro, utsuru, yo, furu and nagame.251

Even where Komachi’s talent is acknowledged, the praise is flanked by comments on her sexual appeal, and what the chorus laments is not the loss of Komachi’s poetic talent but her beauty. And it is a particularly kanbun--esque beauty, at that. Although Ōmu does not contain the references to Chinese characters and places found in such profusion in Tamatsukuri, it

250 Itō, 220 note 10.
251 McCullough, 223.
uses focused bursts of *kanshi*-based description from this work and from others to refer to Komachi. Rather than transliterate the phrases into a more colloquial Japanese, it keeps the two-character sets of kanji such as 桃花 (*tōka*) and 柳髪 (*ryūhatsu*), which would be more difficult for the common members of the audience to parse when hearing them. The reference to the pear is particularly interesting, as the pear blossom was not highly regarded in Japanese aesthetics but does appear quite frequently in Chinese poetry. The use of these snippets of *kanbun* within the play in relation to Komachi adds a suggestion that she, or perhaps her poetry, is somehow foreign.

There is another suggestion of foreignness found in the *ōmu-gaeshi* itself. The *Jikkinshō* anecdote does not discuss the origins of the *ōmu-gaeshi*, or even name the technique in the text, although the term is given in the heading. The *Etsumokushō* has more of an introduction: “Again, there is a thing called an *ōmu-gaeshi*. It is a reply poem that does not change the intent of the original poem. It was named in the past after the bird called an *ōmu*, which imitates the voices of people. It should be used when one cannot think of a reply.” Compare this to the play's introduction:

**shite:** Considering the kinds of poetry, there are long poems, short poems *sedōka*, *oriku*, *haikai*, mixed poems, *ōmu-gaeshi*, and *kaibunka*. Among them, the *ōmu-gaeshi*. There is a bird in China

**chorus:** Its name is *ōmu* (parrot). It takes the words that people say and uses them for its own chirping. If you say “What?” it replies “What?” Like the *ōmu* bird, when the reply to a poem is the same as the original poem, it is called *ōmu-gaeshi*.

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252 Literally, the heart (*kokoro*).  
253 *NKT* vol. 4, 170.  
254 Itō 上, 219.
The list of the kinds of poems is usual in poetic treatises of the period, with the exception of the ōmu.gaeshi, which seems to have been added to the list by the author.\(^{255}\) The addition of the ōmu.gaeshi to this list suggests that the technique is worthy of inclusion. But, from the lack of praise given to the poem within the play and by Ōmu's carefully mentioning that the parrot is a Chinese bird, there still seems to be some equivocation about whether or not this technique belongs to Japan. The Etsumokushō does not underline the Chinese origin of the parrot, instead choosing to focus on its antiquity. Making this technique the substitute for the ability to compose a Japanese poem almost reads as a strike against Komachi’s right to be included in the Japanese tradition. Instead of displaying true poetic talent in waka in her exchange with the Retired Emperor, she only proves that she is adept with a foreign technique.

However, in order to construct Komachi as an outside element in the poetic tradition, the play must deal with her connection to Sotoori-hime and Tamatsushima, a point seen already in Sekidera and Sotoba. These previous plays dealt with this connection by obscuring it, with Sotoba cutting out the references to Tamatsushima in its revision, and Sekidera simply not mentioning it. Ōmu is the only of these plays that incorporates Tamatsushima into its narrative. However, instead of acknowledging the connection between Komachi and the shrine, the play tries to control and reduce this connection in a number of ways. The first comes early in the play. Subtly suggesting that Komachi is unfit to belong to Sotoori-hime’s tradition by her mournful admission in her introduction that she is unable to preserve the

\(^{255}\) Itō 末, 219 note 12.
source of her poetry. Ōmu both acknowledges and defuses Komachi’s connection to Sotoori-hime. But it is in the use of Tamatsushima that the most obvious example of the play's interruption of Komachi's relation to Sotoori-hime and to waka as a whole comes. At the end of the play Yukiie requests that Komachi perform the apocryphal “dance that Ariwara no Narihira performed at Tamatsushima Shrine.” This is an opportunity for a monogi dance sequence in which Komachi dons masculine attire and dances.

waki: Now, Komachi, imitate the offering dance that Narihira performed at Tamatsushima.

shite: Now, hearing that Narihira was to go to Tamatsushima, I said “I shall go too.” Leaving the capital when night still covered it, Mt. Inari, and the village of Kuzuha lay close to the bay, poetry rising on the wind/ arriving at Fukiage

chorus: Arriving at Tamatsushima, arriving at Tamatsushima, I recall Narihira's dancing sleeves, his “moss-fern”257 hunting robes the colour of the rushes, drawing up the bottoms of his hakama patterned with large crests, the kaza-ori eboshi beckoning.

shite: The light of harmony at Tamatsushima

chorus: The twirling sleeves alone/the waves return

shite: At the Bay of Waka, one man alone when the salt waves rush in with the tide, his legs on the reedy shore, the cranes cry as they pass by, cry as they pass by. So the names (of those I loved) rose (to the skies), creeping sounds—

chorus: So the names of those I loved rose to the sky. “I do not praise the moon”258 which sleeps so secretly.

shite: “It is this, this [i.e. the moon]

chorus: Piling up, that becomes people's

shite: Burden of age”259

chorus: So quickly, the light of the rays lengthen— time does not wait for people. I did not know it/ white waves

shite: rage. Oh, how I long for the past!

chorus: So as this day darkens, “Farewell” says Yukiie and returns to the capital

256 i.e. unable to compose poetry.
257 Allusion to Ise monogatari dan 1. Mostow and Tyler 2010 14-5.
258 Allusion to Narihira poem given in both the Kokinshū 879 and Ise monogatari dan 88. ohokata ha/ tsuki wo mo medeji/ kore zo kono/ tsumoreba hito no/ oto to naru mono.
259 On balance I see no reason to praise the moon:
yes, there’s the one who comes round and round again month by month to make us old.” Mostow and Tyler 2010, 193.
259 Completing the allusion to the Narihira poem mentioned in the previous line by quoting the final three ku in full.
shite: And Komachi now too, says farewell and
chorus: Clutching her staff, wavering and weak, stands and leaves, her sleeves wet with tears
on leaving. Her sleeves, wet with tears of farewell “passing” down/ To her brushwood hut at
Sekidera, she has returned.  

Komachi no longer has a connection with Tamatsushima. Instead, she goes there only
because Narihira does. Narihira's offering a sacred dance to the god of Tamatsushima is a
proof of his connection to the shrine, especially as this dance seems to have passed into waka
lore, considering that Yukiie knows about it.  

In comparison, Komachi can only watch his
dance in the past and imitate it in the present. The female space of Tamatsushima is now
occupied by men, both Narihira and the allusion to the solitary man (kataonami) who stands
at the Bay of Waka while the waves rush in. This masculinification of Tamatsushima should
come as no surprise, as it was foreshadowed in the very opening lines of the play, when
Yōzei is said to be putting his heart into “the Way of Tamatsushima”.

The dances in both Sotoba and Sekidera are key to the marginalization of Komachi: in
Sotoba, because her possession by Fukakusa no shōshō cuts the arrogant Komachi down to
size, and in Sekidera because her faltering dance overwrites her poetic fame. It should come
as no surprise, then, that the monogi dance in Ōmu performs a similar role. Monogi, whether
they involve cross-dressing or not, are far from unusual in Noh plays. Not only can they be
seen in plays such as Matsukaze, Kakitsubata, Izutsu, and Hagoromo, there is a similar
monogi dance in both Sotoba and Sōshi arai, both of which involve Komachi adopting
masculine clothing. The symbolism of monogi is not singular, and in different plays they

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260 Itō, 220-2.

261 Here, it should again be stressed that no precedent to this apocryphal dance has been found.
have wholly different effects. Broadly, the monogi displays concrete evidence of a change in mind of the shite by having them change clothing on stage and then dance in these clothes. In Matsukaze, Matsukaze is overcome by her longing for the past to the point she convinces herself she is “possessed” by her former lover Yukihiro. She puts on the eboshi and hunting cloak he gave her and dances as if she were he. Similarly, in Kakitsubata the spirit of the kakitsubata flower dons clothing that belonged to Narihira. Both are moments fraught with psychological significance in which women262 dress as the men they love in an attempt to revive or relive the past, in the process becoming the objects of their own desire in a fraught psychological tapdance. This is not always the case, as can be seen in Sotoba, where the monogi signals the moment in which Komachi is possessed by Fukakusa no shōshō. This appears to be a straightforward possession rather than a psychological one.263

Yet there are monogi that have no connection to actual or imagined possession as well, and Komachi’s dance in Ōmu falls into this category. There is no deep emotional connection shown between Narihira and Komachi, despite the fact that such a connection was popularly supposed to exist in medieval Ise commentaries, nor is she possessed (or thinks herself possessed) by his spirit. Instead, the monogi is more similar to the monogi of Sōshi arai, in

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262 Or, in Kakitsubata’s case, female entities.
263 Zeami did not approve of having female characters possessed by male spirits, as he mentions in Fūshikaden, saying “When it comes to playing a madwoman possessed by a warrior or a demon, for example, the circumstances are made quite difficult for the actor. Thinking to act out the true nature of the being who possesses such a character, the actor will show masculine wrath while playing a woman, and his performance will seem quite inappropriate. On the other hand, if the actor concentrates on the womanly traits of his character, there will be no logic to the possession. Similarly, when a male character is possessed by a woman, the same difficulty arises. In sum, to avoid plays with such characters represents an important secret of out art. Those who compose such texts simply to [sic] not understand the nature of our art.” Rimer and Yamazaki, 14. Clearly, given the amount of attention Zeami gives to denigrating this practice, such plays were fairly common. His disapproval may be what led him to the complicated portrayal of “psychological possession” of elegant women by even more elegant male courtiers in Noh plays such as Izutsu.
which Komachi dons a *kaza-ori eboshi* and dances. In this *monogi*, she is explicitly dressed by the members of the court who had suspected her of plagiarism. Her dressing is thus a symbol of her rejoining the court, yet it also turns her into the equivalent of a *shirabyoshi* dancer, at the same time as it overwrites her own gender and turns her into a male courtier. Paradoxically, performing this dance in masculine attire both highlights and obscures her femininity.264 Ryu, writing on the *monogi* in *Sōshi arai*, says: “The headgear is a double signifier: once Komachi puts it on, she is simultaneously a *shirabyôshi* dancer and a male courtier. In other words, Komachi’s unique position as a female poet at the male-dominated imperial court requires her to take on the guise of a female entertainer who cross-dresses as a male courtier.”265 Ōmu's *monogi* does not have the same sexual *shirabyôshi* charge to it, as Komachi is an old woman, but the process by which her femininity is overwritten is the same—and perhaps the reasons behind this as well.

Komachi is literally replaced by Narihira in this dance. She remarks early on in the play that she cannot pass on or preserve her own style of poetry, but here she can pass on the dance of a famous male poet to a male courtier. Her body is also completely defeminized when she puts on the *eboshi* and the hunting-robe. To be able to pass on poetic knowledge, it seems that one must have (at least symbolically) the body of a man. More subtly, Narihira co-opts the narrative in the refocusing of poetic allusions. Rather than being drawn from a wide net of *chokusenshū* and *kanshi* collections, as has been the practice throughout the play, in this section allusions now focus exclusively on works that either are Narihira's or refer to him, as in *Ise monogatari*. The final poem that Komachi alludes to is one of Narihira's.

264 Ryu 1999, 189.
265 Ibid.
After this the play passes into an ending modelled on Sekidera, if slightly more positive. In Sekidera, Komachi attempts to hide herself on the way home, and the play mentions her shame. Here, Komachi does not display the same amount of shame in regards to her appearance or to her past of writing amorous poetry. But the play is careful to mention her marginality, both in her weakened body that must depend upon her staff, and in her lowly brushwood home.

An important congruence across all three plays is the depiction of Komachi as mad. Although neither Sekidera nor Ōmu have graphic depictions of Komachi’s madness to the same extent that Sotoba does, all three mention madness in conjunction with Komachi at some point. Ōmu is not classified as a madwoman play, and Komachi’s madness is more textual than performative. It is the repeated statements about her madness that mark her off from normal society, and not any acts of her own. Strong, considering the monogurui aspects of the play, suggests that “Komachi in some very literal sense performs madness, rather than being mad,” and sees the final dance as a kind of monogurui dance. This performative aspect is key, and points to one important respect in which Komachi’s madness differs from that of madwoman plays. Madwoman plays give a material exterior cause for madness, generally the loss of a child or a loved one, as in Sumidagawa and Hanjo. When the cause is neutralized through reunion, the madness is lifted. Sumidagawa ends with the mother weeping at her child’s grave. Although this is a tragic ending, it is likely that her madness has been lifted, and Hanjo’s protagonist regains her sanity when she meets with her lover again.

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Similarly, the cause of Komachi’s madness in *Sotoba* can be traced to the exterior cause of the vengeful ghost of Fukakusa no shōshō, and more indirectly to her own karmic debt. Once that is removed, her madness lifts, and she vows to work towards enlightenment. However, in *Ōmu*, there is no one singular incident which can be identified as the cause of her madness. Her madness becomes natural and therefore incurable. Here the exact placement of the mentions of her madness becomes significant. In *Sekidera*, Komachi’s madness is linked to her dance. In *Ōmu*, it is linked unambiguously to her age and her poetry. Komachi’s madness is mentioned three times: first in her introduction, “Resenting people, deploiring my body/self, crying and laughing without any peace, people say that I am mad”, then during her long poetic monologue that sets the spatiality of Sekidera, “The long bridge at Seta is like the long, pitiless existence of the mad—I am/it is such an example”, and finally by Yukiie during the ōmu-gaeshi discussion, “A poem is thirty-one linked syllables. Although there may be “poems whose heart is insufficient,” to speak of a poem of one syllable must be because you are mad.” Yukiie’s linking of the ōmu-gaeshi to her madness reflects the play’s belief that Komachi’s madness is connected, not to an outer condition such as spirit possession or the loss of her beauty, but to her poetry.

If the madness of the shite in *Sumidagawa* is the marker of a world gone wrong, a terrible proof that separating mother and child causes a tear in both the social order and in the very foundations of the self, then the madness of *Ōmu* is a proof of poetry’s own terrible dangers. The chicken-and-egg conundrum around Komachi’s madness speaks to this. The play does not define whether it is that her madness allows her to transgress the rules of waka by using one syllable to form a new poem, and to transgress social boundaries by reappropriating the
words of the Emperor, or if it is that her transgressions themselves mark her as/ make her mad. The play suggests that her ability to transgress poetic and social barriers puts her beyond proper cultural boundaries. Komachi’s madness is the final key to reading the play as the staging and ritual exorcism of anxiety about poetry, specifically women's poetry. The ending bears this reading out. As in Sekidera, Komachi must return to her brushwood hut, alone, and resume her exile on the edges of the capital, after having passed on male words and male poetic traditions, but failed to pass on any of her own. There is no intimation that Yukiie will return.

Ōmu overwrites Komachi’s life and body in order to rewrite her placement within the waka tradition. She becomes a reassuring marker of the natural placement of poetry in the court and the capital, seen as a wholly male preserve in the play, and of the impermanent, fragile nature of women's poetry. The result is a play that relentlessly marginalizes Komachi. To be sure, it does not have any overt scene of punishment as does Sotoba, in which Komachi is forcefully cut down to size by being “made to suffer the karmic result of her past offences by being possessed by the spirit of her former lover.”267 However, considering that the play places Komachi in the margins, half-blinds and cripples her, refuses to allow her any connection to her own poetry, twists the ōmu-gaeshi anecdote to denigrate her use of it, and finally leaves her alone and powerless, the conventional reading of Ōmu as “dramatiz(ing) her superior poetic talent” is far from adequate. 268 Like Sekidera, while it is ostensibly a play

267 Faure 1998, 131. Though her punishment might be for her treatment of Fukakusa within the play, it comes right after Komachi has thoroughly trounced the priests by relying on her superior linguistic skills.
that celebrates poetry, Ōmu is actually concerned with setting boundaries, rules, and regulations for poetry and for the women who practice it.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has offered an analysis of three plays that have received surprisingly little individual attention in scholarship to date and essentially no comparative analysis. Although Sotoba has been analyzed more than the other two, the amount of sustained textual analysis remains relatively small, and the ways in which Komachi's poetry is constructed as dangerous and ultimately controlled has not been analyzed before. Similarly, Sekidera tends to be viewed as a masterpiece, and Komachi within it as “enlightened” or “transparent”, while the pitiable and marginalized side of her is ignored. Perhaps this is due to its high reputation in performance as a hikyoku, dating from the sixteenth century, and perhaps also to the legitimatizing desires of both English translators and Japanese commentators, whose anthologies of Noh plays wish to stress the artistic and poetic quality of this art form. Ōmu has received the least attention of any, but it certainly deserves more. It is a highly hybridized play that draws on an astonishing array of sources: direct quotations from Tamatsukuri; adaptation of a story from Jikkinshō/Etsumokushō; and sections drawing on what would have been very popular texts, including the kanajo and a medieval poetic treatise. It also draws on and writes against both Sotoba and Sekidera. Its playwright, whoever he may have been, was not content with weaving quotations into the texture of the play. Instead, he tended to reframe and requote allusions. In the sections that overlay the landscape of Kyoto with allusions to both the Buddhist worldview and numbers, or when he takes multiple quotations from various sources to create a set of four colours/flowers in the discussion of Komachi's former beauty, his skill at this synthesis of sources is apparent, and his switch between waka
and *kanshi* allusions support his thematic concerns with subtlety and skill. It is to be hoped that this thesis has helped redress these lacks in some small way.

It has been my contention throughout this thesis that the Komachi Noh plays must be considered, not as simple re-enactments of the Komachi legend, but as independent texts that distort and reshape, edit and rewrite, and pick and choose elements of the already extant Komachi legends in order to serve their own purposes. The Noh Komachi represents not the Heian period of her own lifetime, but the Muromachi period in which she was (re)written. Having followed the subset of plays that place Komachi as an old, yet still living, woman, we have seen a variety of ways in which Komachi undergoes marginalization, punishment, and exile. *Sotoba*, which is likely the earliest play of the three,\(^{269}\) deals with the uneasiness of poetry in the Buddhist worldview. These tensions are not as evident in either *Sekidera* or *Ōmu*, which focus instead on the general uneasiness regarding women's poetry.

There has been a tendency to view the five in-repertory plays about Komachi as a set, a tendency exaggerated by the fact that all five have been attributed to either Zeami or Kan'ami. This tendency no doubt springs in part from the grouping of these plays, plus two ex-repertory plays, into the *Nana Komachi*, a grouping that remained popular well into the Edo period and inspired countless series of paintings and *ukiyo-e* prints. The existence of the late sixteenth or early seventeenth-century *kanazōshi Komachi uta arasohi*, which weaves three of the five plays into a singular chronological tale, no doubt strengthened the tendency

\(^{269}\) Whether the play predates *Kayoi* is a matter for debate.
again. In modern scholarship, the desire to read the plays together comes from the nature of the scholarship. Fischer and Weber-Schäfer both wish to give an overview on the many ways in which Komachi has been reimagined and rewritten over the centuries, and so the Noh plays, naturally enough, form a subset in this reception history. Ryu has a similar approach, though she deals with only one of the plays. Terasaki takes a slightly different approach, focusing purely on the Noh plays, though she only considers two of them. She also occasionally succumbs to the desire to narrativize by describing Kayoi as a “sequel” to Sotoba. Still, for both Terasaki and Ryu, individual plays receive individual readings.

I am more attracted to the individual reading of an individual play than to the treatment of the five plays as a whole, primarily because, as I hope I have shown, the three plays I have considered in this thesis each have different authors, take different approaches, and most importantly deal with different sources. The idea that simply having Ono no Komachi as the main character in the play means that each play must be related is simplistic. Instead, I consider Komachi’s representation to be similar to that of Lady Rokujō, whose characterizations in Aoi no ue and Nonomiya are so different as to essentially be polar opposites. The reasons behind this excessive difference can be found for both Komachi and Lady Rokujō in their authors being different people in different periods. Aoi no ue is Kan’ami’s, Nonomiya Zeami’s son-in-law Zenchiku’s, while the three Komachi plays under discussion in this thesis may well span three generations. But there is another important reason, and this is that the primary source of a play helps determine the characterization of the main character. Aoi no ue is based on the Aoi chapter in Genji monogatari in which

270 Sōshi arai, Ōmu and Sotoba.
271 Terasaki, 139.
Rokujō possesses (or seems to possess) Genji’s wife Aoi, while Nonomiya is based on the Sakaki chapter, which is characterized by gentle regret. An even greater breadth of sources is apparent in the Komachi plays. Although I have not considered Sōshi arai in this thesis, its characters and its characterization are primarily drawn from the kanajo with essentially no attention given to the legends or sources that deal with Komachi’s later life. The other plays have multiple sources, but one can generally still be identified as the primary source: for Sekidera, this is Kikigaki, with possible input from other Kokinshū commentaries in regards to Komachi’s later life. Similarly, for Ōmu the primary source is the ōmu-gaeshi anecdote, adapted to refer to Komachi. All three plays use the image of a decrepit beggar-woman found in Tamatsukuri.

Tamatsukuri Komachishi sosuisho is certainly one of the more prevalent sources about Komachi, with direct quotations from it found in both Sotoba and Ōmu, but it is not the only available source that deals with her degradation. This had already passed into the common fund of knowledge by the time the plays were being written, and the document only directly influences two of the plays. It does not influence Sōshi aria—the only play of the five that deals with Komachi as a young woman—at all, nor does it influence Kayoi. It may influence Sekidera in a general sense, although, as discussed in that chapter, there are no direct quotations from it. Although the Tamatsukuri line of texts, as Kawashima terms them, is certainly a major influence on the Komachi mythos as a whole, we must be careful in identifying which of the plays Tamatsukuri has directly influenced in order to maintain our conception of the discrete nature of the plays.
We must also be sure to draw out the differences in the treatment of key terms and themes. The correct translation of terms such as *ahare* in key moments of the play is essential, as seen in *Sekidera*. Nor is iteration of certain themes the same. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that there is a difference in the treatment of *mujō* between *Tamatsukuri* and the Komachi Noh. In *Tamatsukuri*, her loss of beauty and her future as a decrepit beggar become a cautionary tale of how the inexorable march of time causes all to fall. Komachi's loss of beauty and economic stability is linked to the passage of time: in the prose preface she loses her family one after the other, while in the poem she loses her beauty due to childbearing. In *Sotoba* there is an added sense of karmic retribution for sins of sexual fickleness attached to Komachi's wretched age. In *Ōmu* and in *Sekidera*, this standard Buddhist storyline of *mujō* is tweaked to allow a stronger focus on poetry. Komachi rises from her natural position due to her abilities in poetry and it is the loss of her ability to compose it or compose it well that causes her to fall. Although Komachi’s image is often taken as a representation of *mujō*, in these two plays she deals more with the boundaries of women's poetry, which becomes a fragile thing alternately dependent on youth (*Sekidera, Ōmu*) and to proximity to the capital (*Ōmu*). The plays believe that poetry allows a temporary transgression of social boundaries, in that common and noble can mix together freely in its pursuit, but ultimately this is a temporary situation, and poetry will return to being the preserve of males. In *Ōmu*, this poetic preserve is codified as belonging specifically to male courtiers, and although Komachi steals the Emperor's poem, it is not entirely successful. Later her own body becomes merely a tool to pass on Narihira's knowledge. In *Sekidera* Komachi passes on her knowledge to priests and *chigo*, all of whom would have been male. Both plays are certain that eventually time will control the danger of women's poetry through its effects on their bodies.
More similarities are the centrality of bodies and the ability of poetry to allow Komachi to trespass upon space, both the sacred space of the stupa and the social space of the court. Poetry is transgressive in both Sotoba and Ōmu in that it allows Komachi to trespass on the stupa and to 'steal' the Emperor's words. But poetry is also something that, for Komachi at least, disappears or is weakened with time in Ōmu and Sekidera. The body is a graphic representation of impermanence—not of beauty alone, but of beauty and female poetry combined. For Sotoba, although Komachi's poetry is not weakened by her body, because she is vulnerable to possession she is made to subordinate her poetry to her faith and offer it to the Buddha. Ultimately, all three plays set up the ageing female body and poetry in an opposing relationship. They suggest that although the transgressive power of poetry is a force to be reckoned with, any social upset it causes will only be temporary. Ultimately, it will be overcome by the prescribed and proscribing reality of the ageing female body and safely controlled.

One of the most fascinating similarities seen across all three plays must be the way in which Komachi's connection to Tamatsushima has been interrupted or otherwise obscured in each of the plays. In Sotoba, all mention of Tamatsushima was cut out during the revisions. In Sekidera, despite the fact that Sotoori-hime's connection to Komachi and her status as god of this shrine are both mentioned in close proximity to the section quoted in Sekidera in the source text Kikigaki, only the connection to Komachi is mentioned, and Sotoori-hime's status as deity of Tamatsushima is completely ignored. Ōmu has the most obvious manipulation of this relationship, as Komachi's relationship to Tamatsushima is interrupted by Narihira, and
the entire shrine is recoded as masculine throughout the course of the play. The plays display a reluctance to allow the relationship between Komachi and a poetic deity to stand.

Although I believe that this thesis has broken some exciting new ground, there still remains much to be done. Partially this is a function of the limited space of the thesis, as I have chosen to concentrate on textual analysis without adding much historical context beyond some key terms in Buddhism. Studying such historical context, particularly the actual conditions of women and women poets in the period the plays were written in, would be an important next step. Similarly, adding consideration of Kayoi and Sōshi arai would help complicate our picture of the depiction of Komachi in Noh during this period. Kayoi constitutes a strongly Buddhist play, similar to Sotoba, while Sōshi arai controls Komachi’s poetry in a different way.272 Adding in ex-repertory plays, particularly those dating from slightly later in the Muromachi period, would similarly help provide a fuller picture of Komachi’s representation in Noh plays in this period. Some ex-repertory plays make Komachi into a bodhisattva or a messenger of the gods (as in the ex-repertory play Kamiyo Komachi). Suzuki Shōsan's Edo-period rewriting of Sotoba as Omokage Komachi, based on his belief that Komachi had already reached enlightenment and therefore her representation in Sotoba was unfitting, is also a fascinating area which is too far out of the time period covered to receive attention in this thesis. Finally, analyzing later works influenced by these Noh plays would also be of great interest, particularly an analysis of Komachi uta arasohi, which stitches three of these five plays together into a cohesive whole.

272 Significant work on this aspect has already been done by Ryu in her dissertation.
I have argued throughout that there is a contradiction at the heart of Komachi's representation in Noh. Because she is an elegant Heian period poet, she is fitting as a shite according to Zeami's strictures. But she is rarely allowed to display her poetic talent fully. She is given lines filled with *kakekotoba* and other poetic devices, yet the poems that she herself speaks are rarely the ones that made her famous, when she is allowed to recite poetry at all. In one play, her poetry ends up subordinate to Buddhism, while in the other two her poetry is withered and powerless at the end of her life. Yet even as these plays marginalized Komachi's poetic talent, their high reputation meant that Komachi continued to appear on the Noh stage for the next six centuries. Perhaps this is the perfect encapsulation of the uneasy and conflicted attitude shown towards Komachi during the medieval period, alternately glorifying and degrading her, but never quite capable of looking away.
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