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## On Women's Nightmares in Japanese Female Writings:

### The Forgotten Rebellion

Nightmares, according to Freud, are outward manifestations of challenges between psychological forces which may mostly be repressed while awake<sup>1</sup>. Psychologically, nightmares could be very realistic; they could also be absolutely bizarre and perverse. In this paper, a woman's nightmare specifically refers to a situation of suffering, a predicament that the woman longs to get out of, but often cannot. The situation may be generated by her cognitive processes, a dream in essence<sup>2</sup>; it could also be interpreted as the darkest corners of a woman's mind coming into being, like a nightmarish experience. Nevertheless, both evoke similar psychological distress, fear, anxiety, anger or helplessness<sup>3</sup>. The conception of a nightmare is often involuntary and most reflective of a woman's fears and desire, as the literary analysis below suggests. In most cases, a nightmare reveals the vulnerable side of a woman, and may trigger varied reactions: despair, uncontrollable outburst, retaliation or even shock. In other cases, in having her

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<sup>1</sup> See "screen memory". *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2013. Web. 09 Dec. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See "dream." *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2013. Web. 09 Dec. 2013

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Weidhorn, Manfred. "The Anxiety Dream in Literature from Homer to Milton." *Studies in Philosophy* 64.1 (1967): 65-82. *JSTOR*. University of North Carolina Press. Web. 08 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4173557>>. While the context of this paper is Western literature, the analysis on anxiety is broadly transferrable to the Japanese society and literary scene.

deepest woes actualize, a woman learns to embrace reality or her female identity. That said, not every undesirable event can be classified as such: a nightmare entails an extremely high level of disturbance, and are targeted in topic.

The theme of nightmare in literature has been around for a long time and explored in various genres from romance to folklore, most notably Gothic fiction and horror. In the gothic novella *Carmilla*, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu shows the female protagonist having nightmares of assault by a beast and being romantically pursued by a female vampire. In *A Sicilian Romance* by Ann Radcliffe, the main character Julia narrowly escapes a forced marriage by her father and discovers her long lost mother on the run. While not explicitly using the nightmare motif, Radcliffe arouses in every reader the same psychological disturbance with depictions of mysterious stairwells and dark chambers where the lady hides from her frightful pursuers. The authors of both novels deploy female characters who are put in suspenseful circumstances where their experiences are extraordinary all alike, as Tania Modleski observes: "...the Gothic heroine always feel helpless, confused, frightened, and despised", thus rousing the readers' interest and increasing the enigma of the plot. Even *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll contains several details that allude to a nightmare such as Alice almost drowning in her very own tears as she becomes smaller and smaller in chapter 2 "The Pool of Tears".

Stories like the ones aforementioned, according to Robert D. Hume, make use of "a particular atmosphere for essentially psychological purposes", immersing the readers in an "extraordinary world in which ordinary standards and moral judgments become meaningless", which could very much be likened to that of a nightmare. There are definitely more literary uses to the notion of nightmare than then discussed but they are not the focus of this paper. They do

show, however, that the theme and motif of nightmare is highly established in Western Literature.

Japanese literature too seems to have a long history of the theme of women's nightmares especially in women's writings that have been, unfortunately, underexplored. Individual literary reviews of women-centered novels and stories have only captured this motif or theme at a topical level and never across the entire spectrum of Japanese women's writing, at least not yet in English. A systematic understanding of this possibly major theme in women's writings in Japan allows us an insight of the evolution of female expression in Japanese literature. It also assists in our comprehension of the Japanese female expression in the literary, social and religious canvas as we proceed on the quest toward female liberation. This paper thus intends to validate the existence of the theme by analyzing representative texts by woman writers through time in Japan. It also suggests some broad categories of nightmares in Japanese women literature. Women's nightmares through a masculine lens are arguably less crucial to the understanding of the evolution of the female voice in Japan and are thus not discussed here.

In Gothic literature and horror fiction, women's nightmares are often a tool to generate fear. In Japanese women's writings, however, their role is more diverse: some of their uses will be illustrated below. The reasons behind this abundance of use of the theme deserve another paper, but some of them could be traced back to Japan's rich spiritual background with Shinto and Buddhism being the two principal religions, both of which endorse the existence of spirits.

Heian literary classics are among the earliest to make use of the theme of women's nightmares. Murasaki Shikibu has some of her female characters in *The Tale of Genji* (early 11<sup>th</sup> century) lead a life in this fashion. Lady Rokujo is perhaps the most analyzed character in this respect – the results of her actions while in love with Prince Genji are among the most traumatic

events described throughout the entire novel. A talented, beautiful woman with high ranking in court, Lady Rokujo should not be lacking on any front: material wealth, cultured birth, artful pursuits and respect from other people – she is capable of independent existence and while unable to climb further up the royal ladder, still maintains an honorable position.

However, from Shikibu's telling, she does not have anyone to rely on, often dwelling in her residence in loneliness. Genji's affair with her perhaps restores some of the security she lost. When he leaves, she feels stranded and angry, especially after her embarrassing encounter with Aoi – Genji's chief wife: 'There has been no release from the anger since the other lady [Aoi] had so insulted her, indeed behaved as if she did not exist' (Shikibu, Seidensticker 167, 1976). Her uncontrollable wrath indeed stems from her excessive jealousy; her spirit said to Genji in a dream before she killed Yugao – one of Genji's lovers: 'You do not even think of visiting me, when you are so much on my mind... It is cruel, intolerable' (Shikibu, Seidensticker 71, 1976). Such overwhelming jealousy must have bred from a deep, intense insecurity or an excessive high regard for self. Lady Rokujo is indeed a proud lady who understands herself and her position but she is not arrogant: the fear of abandonment and loneliness is the more likely answer. Such a deep-rooted fear triggers an emotionally violent reaction far beyond anyone's imagination:

More than once she had the same dream: in the beautifully appointed apartments of a lady who seemed to be a rival she would push and shake the lady, and flail at her blindly and savagely... Sometimes in a daze she would ask herself if her soul had indeed gone wandering off. (Shikibu, Seidensticker 167 – 68, 1976)

More often than not, we humans are taken over by negative emotions rather than positive emotions<sup>4</sup>. In this case, profound fear leads to extreme anger, which in turn breeds actions beyond even Lady Rokujo's control, to the point where her spirit continues to come back and haunt Genji's beloved Murasaki even when her body has long disintegrated with time.

Now that the true cause of Lady Rokujo's anger has been established in her profound fear of neglect, it is imperative to present this as proof of Shikibu's use of the theme of women's nightmares. In unconscious fear, Lady Rokujo cannot control her anger, which in Shikibu's literary world crystallizes into a malicious spirit. Lady Rokujo herself does not wish this to happen: "Though she had felt sorry enough for herself, she had not wished ill to anyone" (Shikibu, Seidensticker 167). Shikibu puts Lady Rokujo in a very chaotic situation where not only Lady Rokujo's victims (Yugao, Aoi) cannot escape her rage, but even she cannot run away from it either. Lady Rokujo attempts to avoid her own jealousy by going to Ise with her daughter, but distance from the capital cannot emancipate her from the emotional torture – a long-lasting nightmare that haunts Lady Rokujo herself and the people around her (Genji, Murasaki...) till later on. The background of the nightmare is culture-coded but the driving factor is universal – Shikibu has immortalized Lady Rokujo with one of the most basic yet powerful emotions of love: jealousy.

Lady Rokujo is not the last heroine of the novel *The Tale of Genji* to have part of her life a living nightmare. In the third part of the novel, Ukifune has her nightmare coming into being as well, albeit in a vastly different fashion. Unlike Lady Rokujo, Ukifune's nightmare manifests in numerous instants in her lifetime whose effects individually would not have pushed her to the

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<sup>4</sup> See Baumeister, Roy F., and Ellen Bratslavsky. "Bad Is Stronger Than Good." *Review of General Psychology* 5.4 (2001): 323-70. *Educational Publishing Foundation*. Web. 08 Dec. 2013.

brink of self-destruction. Yet together, they tell of a powerful external force driving Ukifune's life and bring to existence one of her deepest fear: the lack of agency.

Ukifune has a difficult life. Her birth and existence are denied by her own paternal father – the Eighth Prince. Her mother attempts to arrange a respectable marriage for her, but the arrangement is taken away by her stepfather to be given to one of his daughters. She runs away to Nakanokimi with her mother in an attempt to escape their harsh life in the governor's house, only to be separated from her mother. Her most traumatic experience yet is to be pursued by the courtiers Kaoru and Niou in which she is constantly shoved into new circumstances with a man she does not have either the opportunity or the calmness to learn about thoroughly<sup>5</sup>. Even her attempted suicide ends ironically with her being washed onto the shores and discovered by the monks who think she was a fox spirit. Her difficult life is not simply dictated by terrible fortunes – every single detail up to this point bears proof to her seeming inability to control her life. Her agency insulted time and again, her will to live smothered in despair, Ukifune lives a tragic nightmare in which her life events lend its occurrences to external forces rather than herself merely because she is a woman at the wrong time, in the wrong place. Her last few poems speak not only of bodily death but also of the prospects of the erasure of her being in this life:

Should I leave no trace behind in this gloomy world,

What target then would you have for your complaints? (Shikibu, Seidensticker 1001)

Interestingly, she also alludes to the notion of dream in her final poem to her mother:

We shall think of meeting in another world

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<sup>5</sup> In the novel *The Tale of Genji*, Kaoru moves Ukifune from Sanjo to Uji to keep her far from access of other men while reveals nothing of his designs on her; later in the story, he puts guards outside of her house to prevent her from seeing anyone else. Later on, Niou secretly takes Ukifune away to a foreign island despite her apparent reluctance.

And not confuse ourselves with dreams of this. (Shikibu, Seidensticker 1002)

Should this life of hers be a 'dream', the act of dying represents the awakening. By attempting suicide, Ukifune intends to wake up from the nightmare that is her current life to perhaps another life where her autonomy is no longer a matter of fate, but of surety. Shikibu has artfully embedded the spirit of woman retaliation in this very usage of Ukifune's nightmare and her yearning for the awakening from it.

After Heian, Japan saw a long time in which complete patriarchy dominated the country in all fronts, including the literary scene. Woman writers as a social and artistic force withered till its first reintroduction in the person of Higuchi Ichiyo (1872 – 1896). The silenced, painful hiatus did not dull female exhibition of the tragic and bizarre; rather, it added more dimensions to what a woman's nightmare could possibly be, and several literary works of the early modern to modern time reflected the evolution of this theme.

Kanai Mieko, in *Rabbits* (1976), allows her imagination to run wild with violent and graphic descriptions of the butchering and subsequent skinning of rabbits as well as the narrator's transformation into a 'real' rabbit. Kanai herself attributed the inspiration of this story to her sight of a rabbit's skin on a street and a dream about rabbits on a train. Using *Rabbits* as a form of Freudian free association<sup>6</sup>, Kanai exposes the darker, more unsettling areas of her unconscious mind that remains unresolved, with an inner desire for violence and even cruelty that appears atypical of a Japanese woman in her time. Kanai begins the story with the narrator recounting her troubles while strolling about; she sees a human-sized rabbit running past her, and, just like Lewis Carroll's Alice, follows it out of curiosity till she falls into a hole and learns of

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<sup>6</sup> "Of Serendipity, Free Association and Aimless Browsing:." *Free Association*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Feb. 2014.

another universe: a much darker, more perverse Wonderland. Gradually, this rabbit-girl's family and backstory is revealed to the narrator and the readers.

Throughout the story, the rabbit is portrayed as an animal pleasurable in every way sensible to the girl, from its "still-warm belly", its "palpitations of the beating little heart" to its struggles before death (Birnbaum 10). Killing the rabbit, to the little girl, becomes "a sensual pleasure replete with a sweet rapture" (Birnbaum 11), an excitement almost comparable to that of a sexual encounter. Her progression from mere killing to brutal butchering, to the ritualistic "bloody rabbit slaughter completely naked", insinuates beyond a tinge of sexual sadism and lust killing. In short, the rabbit becomes an object of sexuality, passivity and helplessness as the girl gains awareness of her powers over it. While portraying no cognitive dissonance in the narrator or in the girl, Kanai still causes the readers considerable confusion and disturbance because the details are so graphically conceivable to them.

Moreover, picking a young girl, usually a symbol of innocence, as the culprit intensifies the distress in the story. This is not a world any reader could possibly belong to, yet it seems so real that soon one may begin asking existentialist questions. More disconcertingly, despite being depicted as the weak and submissive, the rabbits eventually have their revenge on the girl and her father, the dominant subjects in the story: a man whose culinary preference is rabbits dies a horrifying death after witnessing his daughter become the animal he eats most gleefully; a girl fetishizes over rabbits to the point of embodying one and dies tragically while trapped between two identities such that the narrator herself cannot tell if she looks more like a rabbit or like a human. In this story, the girl seems an apparent allusion to the Japanese women, but the rabbit too can be perceived as a figurative representation of femininity. The shifting power dynamic between the girl and the rabbits could be interpreted as the shackled women collaborating in their



own victimization<sup>7</sup>. It is worth noting that the rabbits represent the majority throughout the story, whether they are the oppressed or the oppressors, suggesting that the power play occurs at a large scale: “A group of blind rabbits gathered around us” (Birnbaum 16)).

The ending does not help distinguish the narrator’s reality from the nightmarish world of the rabbit-girl; rather, it fuses the two worlds as the narrator removes the rabbit coat from the now dead girl, puts it on herself and “[waits] for a long time crouching there...” (Birnbaum 16). Whether the story is real is no verifiable matter, but what we concern about is the composite world of reality and dark fantasy that Kanai had crafted so successfully. This is a full-fledged nightmare, the kind that borderlines a schizophrenic consciousness in which Kanai drenches her readers’ minds in order to understand her own.

Another striking example of the theme women’s nightmares at work is in Fumiko Enchi’s works. Hardly does she approach the theme in a literal sense with haunting dreams; rather, she created a seemingly benign world where her main character (often female) was placed, and slowly uncovered the engulfing darkness under, be that darkness societal forces, a man, another woman, or simply a woman’s own woes, creating a nightmarish experience not only for the characters involved but also for the readers.

In *Masks* (1958), Enchi tells the tale of Mieko, an aged practitioner of spiritual possession. The story has only one incident of literal spiritual possession at the beginning, in which a woman medium summons a Frenchman’s soul, yet the metaphorical possession that Mieko has over all other characters is the more powerful representation of a woman’s power, which expands beyond comprehension. Aguri, once her husband’s mistress, intentionally leaves a stray nail, causing

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<sup>7</sup> I owe the inspiration for this perspective to my professor and mentor Susan Napier.

Mieko to miscarry. Mieko thus plots revenge on her husband<sup>8</sup> by ensuring that his lineage ends with him by bearing a pair of twins – Akio and Harume – with another man. Later on, when Akio dies of an accident, Mieko manipulates her widowed daughter-in-law, Yasuko, to remarry either of Akio's friends (Ibuki – the narrator – and Mikame) so that she could have another child in place of Akio. Harume, her retarded daughter, is also involved; it is her, not Yasuko that bears the child and dies after the delivery. Yasuko remarries; the story ends in Mieko looking at her self-image in the Fukai masks, shedding a single tear of repressed emotions over the years.

The entire story encircles Mieko's artful manipulations as part of her grand vengeful scheme on her husband. From the beginning, Enchi already attributed Mieko's suffering to a man and to the patriarchy of Japan, putting Mieko in the passive, vulnerable position of a victim. This victim indeed retaliates fiercely, but her vengeance does not heal her; rather, it sustains and expands the cycle of emotional pain that she has to endure. Yoko McClain, in her poignant review of the book *Masks*, summarizes the story succinctly as “a powerful novel in which readers are shown that a woman's deep-seated and long-suppressed resentment, directed toward the man who wronged her, is fiercely avenged”. However, the one vital component McClain does not address is the emotional prison that Mieko inevitably locks herself into the moment her scheme is conceived: nowhere before, during or seemingly after the story is told does Mieko seem to ever have the luxury to unload the burden of her darkness within. It is her lifelong predicament, resulted from her fears and suffering. Mieko has a choice to free herself from this tiring scheme, but her vengefulness disallows her escape, much like a dreamer unable to wake up from a dream – a living nightmare in effect.

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<sup>8</sup> Mieko's husband made his maid – Aguri – a mistress before marriage. Mieko's entrance into his life ends the relationship between him and Aguri.

Moreover, in manipulating the people near her, Mieko seems also to transfer her nightmare onto to them, most visibly the women. Yasuko senses Mieko's manipulation and wishes to break free from it through her marriage with either Ibuki or Mikame (Echi 29). Yet the young widow has grown too emotionally dependent on her husband's mother to leave at her own will; when having a nightmare about Akio her husband, Yasuko has to "[creep] over" to the adjoining bedroom where Mieko sleeps to be comforted (Enchi 62). Even after realizing Mieko's scheme and her role in it, Yasuko still cannot leave Mieko, citing emotional reasons, but how much of those emotions were not parts of Mieko's plan to tie Yasuko to her remains questionable.

The unfortunate Harume is not regarded remotely as a deserving daughter due to her mental retardation. Mieko does little as to take care of Harume herself, for most of the caretaking is done by Yu, the maid. In the end, Harume amounts only up to the human vessel that carries Mieko's wanted child and the continuation of her revenge on her husband. Yasuko and Harume, both women, are ironically harmed in another woman's plan to avenge her womanly pain: one is bait, the other a disposable tool. Such transference of suffering is arguably one of the most devastating manifestations of women's nightmares, indeed because it signifies not only the deepening of the predicament but also the broadening of its effects on other people, most disconcertingly the women.

The next model of nightmare to be discussed in this paper is embodied in Setouchi Jakucho's modern adaptations in the 1980s of *The Tale of Genji*, in which the entire story is retold through the eyes of its female characters<sup>9</sup>. The result is a fifty-volume long series of female monologues that portrays nothing short of a violent, torturing, but above all, candid

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<sup>9</sup> See Shirane, Haruo. "Sexuality, Gender, and The Tale of Genji in Modern Japanese Translations and Manga." *Envisioning the Tale of Genji: Media, Gender, and Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008. 329-57. Print.

emotional sphere of the woman, especially when her sexuality is concerned. To borrow Yuika Kitamura's words in her critique of sexuality in Setouchi's adaptations of *The Tale of Genji*, "Setouchi Jakucho re-created *The Tale of Genji* with a focus on "women's nightmares," stressing their malicious feelings and unfulfilled sexual desires through the monologues of her heroines." For the first time, a female writer completely breaks free from the societal and literary restraints, bringing to the Japanese literary scene perhaps the most overt and rebellious female voice thus far at that time. However, As Kitamura points out, "the sexual desires of these women are passive: they never initiate a sexual encounter", together with 'repeated phrases... and clichés... further diminish the sense of the heroines as individuals', overall reducing the strength of the woman's protests. Nevertheless, Setouchi's attempt is vital in moving the use of theme of women's nightmares forward as a literary tool for female retaliation.

The examples aforementioned are paragons of the traumatic, dreadful women's nightmares in Japanese women's writings. Realistic or fantastical, actual or mental, they serve similar purposes: to bring to surface the sufferings of women in the myriad forms that they come. At this point, it becomes clear that horror is not the ultimate goal of Murasaki Shikibu, Fumiko Enchi, and their fellow female writers when they adopt the theme of women's nightmares, consciously or otherwise: the bared truth behind such nightmares is.

That said, the theme of women's nightmares can be employed the other way round, as shown in the two selected examples below.

*The Smiles of a Mountain Witch* (1976) by Ohba Minako is a short story about a woman who can read other people's thoughts and expectations of her, and strives to satisfy all of them. In doing so, she is likened to a mountain witch, creating a distance between herself and her

mother, and compromises her personal identity for the satisfaction of her husband. When she finally falls sick and requires the caretaking of her children, the son does not stay behind for long, reasoning that his works need him. She commits suicide, with all the meager strength left in her, after reading her daughter's thought that she has "outlived her usefulness" (Noriko, Kyoko 208).

Ohba constructs this story around an irony that owes its origin to an old Japanese tale about the mountain witch. The woman in the story and the witch in the tale share the ability to read people's thoughts. In one case the ability leads to people's apprehension, in the other it leads to excessive self-suppression; in one case it gives a woman power, in the other, it drains her life. Unlike the mountain witch who wields her supernatural ability to serve herself only, too often must the wife give into her husband's selfish wants and needs, so as to maintain his high self-regard; other times, she forces herself to accommodate the wishes of their acquaintances. The incident most relevant to this paper, however, has to do with the woman's imagination of "a beautiful fairy, sprawled in the fields, naked under the benevolent sun", condescending upon her husband like a lowly being while at the same time showing her mercy upon him: "half her face was smiling like an affectionate mother, while the other half was seething with demonic rage" (Noriko, Kyoko 201). This has various characteristics of a typical psychological nightmare: unsettling elements, fantasy, concocted in an alternate state of consciousness. Yet this is far from the discussed woman's nightmare: it is the preferred image of herself and her powers which can never be but in a dream. Here is a brief incident of how the theme is loosely used for an aim opposite with what was presented above: the nightmarish alternate state of consciousness she has is her way of living the unsuppressed life; it is a rare instance that never occurred again to her till the end, but stays in the mind of the readers as a reminder of her quiet rebellion.

Perhaps the most striking example thus far is the short story *A Bond for Two Lifetimes* – *Gleanings* (1957), where Fumiko Enchi daringly depicts the poignant crystallization of a woman's carnal desires in a hallucinatory experience. In this story, a widow helps her old professor – Nunokawa – record his translations of Edo-time stories, one of which is *A Bond for Two Lifetimes*. The story tells of Josuke – a priest who revives from the trance but cannot retain any holy characteristics during his priesthood. The widow, while taking down the story, thinks about her dead husband<sup>10</sup> and her relationship with her professor. Her husband's death, by various societal principles that dictate a woman's role and characteristics, has already condemned her erotic nature to a premature death.

The widow's nightmarish experience does not come till the end of the story, when her contemplation on Josuke triggers her thoughts about her dead husband.

While I was thinking over these matters, I suddenly had an unexpected remembrance of the last time I had embraced my husband, the night before he died in the bombing... More than mere memory, those sensations suddenly all returned to my flesh. (Birnbaum 44)

The story she works on is a mockery of the Buddhist belief that priests could go into a trance and come out of it physically and spiritually unsullied. Yet the very carnal nature of Josuke's revival shines a light on her repressed desires overwhelmingly and unexpectedly. The man she kisses that day is the entirety of her sexual experiences and longing, crystallizing into a hallucination after years of unconscious self-suppression. Enchi cleverly interweaves two contradictory events in the most critical moment of her story: the widow's drifting from

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<sup>10</sup> She sometimes “embrace[s] [her] husband in [her] dreams” (Birnbaum 32), but in general she does not lust.

perceptive reality is also the awakening of her sexuality from a long hiatus. She, once more, is given a chance to come to terms with her womanhood when her very womb “[cries] out in longing” (Birnbaum 44) – a powerful, affective phrase to describe the poignant pain of a woman deprived of love in the most basic form: physical intimacy.

The dreamlike quality of the experience slips in when the widow realizes certain features of the hallucinatory man that are not her husband’s – they remind her of Professor Nunokawa. Her body “[springs] up convulsively like some stray dog” (Birnbaum 48). The hallucinatory episode is not strong enough to cause her severe trauma, like those in other stories discussed above. However, her curious agitation at her own sexual desires disturbs her greatly in a deeply emotional place: the inexplicable event “started [her] blood churning” and yet “warmed [her] heart” (Birnbaum 49). The experience is unsettling enough to be likened to a nightmare, though Enchi’s use of it is vastly different from that in *Masks*. Enchi made an important reference to dreams and nightmarish hallucination at two critical points: when describing the widow’s less than occasional dreams of her husband before her noting down of *A Bond for Two Lifetimes* and after it, when the sexual woman within her awakens. It seems as though Enchi only allowed the widow to come to terms with her womanhood when she is in an alternate state of consciousness and not when she perceives normally – a striking reminder of the limitations to Enchi’s individualistic and feminist expression at the time the story was written, either by social norms or her own reservations, much similar to Ohba’s employment of the dream about the mountain witch, as mentioned above. The quasi-nightmare, therefore, is Enchi’s way of circumventing those norms to get her message across, brazen and rebellious: the Japanese woman of her time has the right to and should learn to accept her sexuality much like her male counterpart, and should never be punished or reproved for it.

Though more limited, the two recent examples still prove women's nightmares an impressive and effective means of communicating the Japanese female resistance. This is not only because they, as a theme or a literary tool, inevitably attract more attention but also because unlike the interpretation mentioned above which is more descriptive, here they seem to be making an affirmative claim on the one realm women have control over, in contrary to what is determined by societal norms: the women's minds.

As far as the examples of this paper go, nightmares can be interpreted literally in the way that Shono Yoriko did with her protagonist's believable hallucinations in *Ise-shi*, *Haruchi* or Enchi Fumiko with the widow in *A Bond for Two Lifetimes – Gleanings*. Alternate states of consciousness are often involved, providing a sufficiently foreign though still persuasive set of experiences. They can also be hyperbolic and fantastical in the fashion that Kanai Mieko narrated her protagonist's bizarre experience with rabbits in *Rabbits*. Another way this theme could be adopted is through a symbolic and realistic approach, where the female characters' lives embody the very meaning and effect that a nightmare brings – *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu and *Masks* by Enchi Fumiko are among the more prominent examples of this interpretation. The rise of various interpretations of this theme may not be merely a product of stylistic evolution; it reflects the revolution of women's vocalization and liberation in which they as a combined force seek new ways to express their individuality and independence, breaking the traditional, religious and cultural barrier that has been locking them in.

The final point of this research paper owes its strength to the study of another theme closely related – fantasy, discussed in a research paper by Susan Bouterey mentioned above. There have been criticisms from scholars such as Lance Olsen that postmodern fantasy is submerged in “worlds of phobia, neurosis, entrapment and oppression... whose topography... is



filled with labyrinths of corridors, doors and stairs that lead to nothing ... signposts that lead to nothing ... innumerable signs that line the road and mean nothing”<sup>11</sup> that could be considered applicable to the use of postmodern fantasy in Japanese literature. Kathryn Hume offers an alternative way to thinking about postmodern fantasy that is applicable to both the East and West<sup>12</sup>: “[fantasy], by its very nature, can help the reader envision possibilities which transcend the present ‘reality’ and as such can provide a forum for promoting social change.” Bouterrey also references feminist critics who suggested that fantasy is possibly the only way to circumvent the dominant structure of genders and “[depict] a truly emancipated female subject”<sup>13</sup>. This critical point is highly relatable to the theme of women’s nightmares because of the similarities between the two themes: both are intricately linked to women literature; more importantly, both are powerful literary tools adopted by female writers in Japan with many shared purposes, one of which is to condemn and challenge the systematic oppression of women. This is the advisable mindset to have when embarking on the studies of women’s literature and on literary women’s nightmares to be specific. Regrettably, there has yet to be sufficient research about the theme of women’s nightmares in Japanese literature, and the length limitation of this research paper itself does not allow for further horizontal and in-depth analysis of other Japanese texts. This paper could thus only suggest the validity of the theme of women’s nightmares and hopefully opens up the area to further literary and social investigation.

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<sup>11</sup> Lance Olsen, *Ellipse of Uncertainty: An Introduction to Postmodern Fantasy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984)

<sup>13</sup> See Ellen Morgan, ‘Human Becoming: Form and Focus in the Neo-feminist Novel’, in Cheryl Brown and Karen Olsen (Eds), *Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose* (New York and London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), p. 77.

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