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**An Analysis and Interpretation of Shamanism  
and Spirit Possession in Selected Works**

**by Enchi Fumiko**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts in Japanese  
at Massey University**

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## Abstract

The *miko* (shamaness) has played an important role in the mythology and history of Japan and in the life of the people up until recent times. Critics have commented on the development of *mikoteki* (shamanistic or mediumistic) abilities in characters in fictional works by Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986). In works written in Enchi's middle years, such abilities arise in and empower suppressed, unfulfilled women who are motivated by revenge.

This thesis extends the existing analysis of Enchi's depiction of shamanistic women, investigating and interpreting her use of *mikoteki* abilities in women in four works by Enchi written during the 1950s, her middle years: *Onmazaka* (*The Waiting Years*), "Yō" ("Enchantress"), "Mimiyōraku" (The Earring) and *Onnamen* (*Masks*). The analysis of "Mimiyōraku" is the first to have been completed by a Western scholar. For all four works, a synthesis of the anthropological, sociological and historical studies on shamanism and the *miko* in Japan provides a basis for analysis.

*Onmazaka* contains allusions to latent shamanistic abilities in women and has links with spirit possession and shamanism in *The Tale of Genji*. Symbols, myths and elements of shamanism play an even more important role in the three other works. The development of shamanistic abilities in the main characters enables them to develop links with the spirit world, to empower and heal themselves and to effect changes in their own lives. While the manifestation of shamanistic abilities is connected to the need for revenge, more importantly, through such abilities Enchi connects the women to the creative force of life in these works.

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