

OCHIKUBO MONOGATARI

Or The Tale of the Lady Ochikubo
A Tenth Century Japanese Novel



ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS: JAPAN

OCHIKUBO MONOGATARI

OCHIKUBO MONOGATARI

Or The Tale of the Lady Ochikubo
A Tenth Century Japanese Novel

Translated by
WILFRID WHITEHOUSE

Volume 62

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1934

This edition first published in 2011
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011.

To purchase your own copy of this or any of
Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks
please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1934 Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or
utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now
known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any
information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the
publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-203-84350-9 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 13:978-0-415-56498-4 (Set)
eISBN 13:978-0-203-84317-8 (Set)
ISBN 13:978-0-415-59123-2 (Volume 62)
eISBN 13:978-0-203-84350-5 (Volume 62)

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but
points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would
welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

OCHIKUBO MONOGATARI
OR THE TALE OF THE LADY OCHIKUBO

A Tenth Century Japanese Novel

Translated by

WILFRID WHITEHOUSE, M.A.

JAPAN:
J.L. THOMPSON & CO. (RETAIL), LIMITED
LONDON:
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRUBNER & CO., LTD.

I DESIRE to express my great indebtedness to my colleague Mr. Eizo Yanagisawa for his invaluable assistance in translating this **monogatari** from the time when he first suggested its translation.

W.W.

Matsumoto,
May 12th, 1934.

FOREWORD

THE 'Tale of the Lady Ochikubo' dates from the last quarter of the tenth century. It is therefore one of the earliest of that long line of **monogatari** which are the special glory of Japanese literature of the tenth and eleventh centuries—the Heian Era. The earlier tales are fairy stories or accounts of wonderful and miraculous adventures or are strings of short and disconnected anecdotes and poems; there is nothing which could be called a novel. 'Ochikubo' is the first novel; here for the first time we have a vivid and realistic chronicle of life, related with a wealth of natural dialogue. In no story of the Heian Era, either earlier or later, are there so few poems; in none such a complete absence of descriptions of the beauties of nature. The author keeps close to the human story he is chronicling. Further, in this story, dramatic situations succeed one another continuously, yet throughout the plot is wonderfully consistent. Each incident has its place in the mosaic of the plot; there is not a detail inconsistent with another, with the chronology or with the characters he is portraying. 'Ochikubo Monogatari' also is the first which attempts any kind of characterisation. The author is strikingly successful in delineating the characters even of those who take but a minor part in the plot. As we might expect in a story of a 'wicked step-mother,' there is emotion and pathos but a more prominent characteristic is the wit and humour. Such are the marks of this masterpiece of Heian fiction; these are the merits which make it of outstanding importance in the history of Japanese literature.

CONTENTS

Foreword	vi.
The Tale. Book I	1
Book II	43
Book III.	82
Book IV.	107
Appendix I.	133
A Few Notes on the Tale—	
i. The Title,	
ii. The Author,	
iii. The Date,	
v. Ochikubo Monogatari and the Literature of the Heian Era.	
Appendix II	137
A Short Note on the Political Organisation in the Heian Era.	

BOOK ONE

OCHIKUBO MONOGATARI

THE FIRST BOOK

ONCE there was a Chūnagon¹ who had several daughters.

The two eldest had already married and were living in grand style in the east and west wings of his mansion, His third and fourth daughters were now near to the age of 'putting on the **hakama**'² and also lived with him, surrounded with loving care. Besides these there was in his mansion a daughter by a princess, who had since died, whom he had formerly been in the habit of visiting occasionally. The Kita no Kata³ of the Chūnagon was of a somewhat peculiar nature, and she always treated this step-daughter of hers as inferior even to the servants. She was made to live in a part of the mansion leading off from the main building where there was a small room on a lower level than the rest.⁴ She was not addressed as 'Lady,' still less was she allowed to be called 'Princess.' The Kita no Kata would have had her addressed as the servants were, but in deference to what the Great Lord might have felt had she done so, she had her called by everyone 'Ochikubo no Kimi.'⁵ Ever since her childhood not even the Chūnagon had treated her with affection, and moreover as the Kita no Kata had her own way in everything in the house, the Lady Ochikubo had had to suffer many indignities. She had never had a foster-mother; no one had ever cared for her except a very sharp-witted girl named Ushiromi who had been the Lady's special attendant since her mother's death. The Lady and this attendant of hers were very devoted to each other and were never apart.

Now the Lady far excelled her lovingly-cared-for step-sisters in beauty, but she had never been outside among people, and no one knew of her existence. As she learned more of the world, and understood the sadness of her situation, she composed this sorrowful poem.

As the days pass by,
Each brings me new troubles;
In this world of care,
How can I live on, when
Filled is my heart with despair.

It was unfortunate that the Lady Ochikubo had never had anyone to teach her to play the **kin**;¹ she would certainly have been an excellent player, as she was very sensitive and

¹ One of the three State Counsellors of Middle Rank. Personal names are rarely used, and individuals are referred to always by their titles. (See Appendix II.)

² The ceremony of First Putting on the Skirt at the age of twelve or thirteen.

³ The title of a noble's wife.

⁴ '**ochikubo naru tokoro.**'

⁵ The Lady of the Lower Room; but *kimi* was used of upper servants also.

¹ A **kin** had seven strings; a **sō no koto** thirteen.

intelligent. Her mother, however, had taught her to play the **sō no koto** until she was five or six years old, and as she played exceptionally well, the Kita no Kata allowed her own third son, a boy of about nine years old, to be taught occasionally by the Lady Ochikubo, as he had taken a great liking to playing this instrument.

In her spare time, the Lady Ochikubo had learnt to sew, and did this work very skilfully.

‘Good!’ her step-mother had said to her, ‘It is very good for people who are not pretty to learn to do things.’

She was kept busy making robes for the two sons-in-law and had no leisure at all, and as time went on, she had to work harder and harder until at last she did not even have time enough for sleep at night, and if she worked a little slower than usual, her step-mother would reprove her.

‘If you do even this trivial task in such a languid manner, what do you think you are here to do?’ she would say, and cause the Lady Ochikubo to burst out crying.

‘Why is it that there is no way for me to die?’ the Lady Ochikubo would say to herself.

The ceremony of ‘putting on the **hakama**’ was performed for the Third Lady, and soon afterwards she was married to the Kurōdo no Shōshō.¹ This caused infinitely more work for everyone, and the Lady Ochikubo had even less leisure now than formerly, and her existence became more and more dreary. How few the young and lovable people who have to work as hard as she! She was despised by all; she felt forlorn and she wept over her sewing.

No longer do I
Wish to live in this world, but—
I can find no way
To put an end to this my
Miserable existence.

As Ushiromi had long hair and was very pretty, she was forced to go into the service of the Third Lady. She felt very sad at this.

‘It was to serve you and you alone that I refused to be adopted by my aunt. Why then must I leave you and go to serve another?’ she said with tears.

‘What is that?’ exclaimed the Lady Ochikubo, ‘As long as we live in the same house, you must think that things are just the same as they were. And you will have much more splendid clothes than you now have; you should be very glad about that.’

As the Lady Ochikubo loved this attendant of hers very much, she felt very lonely without her, and Ushiromi being accustomed to serve her, she was very sorry to see her so sad and was always going to her room to see her; and the step-mother treated the Lady with infinite cruelty because of this.

‘Ochikubo is always getting that girl to go back to her,’ she would say angrily.

As Ushiromi¹ was now not an appropriate name, she was given the name Akogi.

¹ A Vice-Director of the Imperial Archives.

¹ Ushiromi, a guardian.

4 *Ochikubo Monogatari*

The Kurōdo no Shōshō's attendant, Kotachihaki,² a very sharp-witted fellow, had written letters to Akogi for several years, and now they became lovers. When they had an opportunity of intimate conversation, they were always speaking of the unfortunate situation of the Lady Ochikubo, her beauty, and her feelings at the cruel attitude of the Kita no Kata towards her.

'Oh, how I wish that I could persuade some ideal man to carry her off!' Akogi exclaimed with tears. So it was that they thought of her and spoke of her always in her unhappiness and loneliness.

Tachihaki's mother had formerly been in the service of the Sataishō³ as nurse to his son who was now Sakone no Shōshō.⁴ This son had not yet married and often asked people to tell him of suitable ladies. On one such occasion, when Tachihaki told him of the Lady Ochikubo, he was very interested and afterwards in private had an intimate talk with Tachihaki about her.

'How pitiful! What must she feel! And she is the daughter of an Imperial Princess too! Do enable me to meet her in secret,' the Shōshō said.

'At present she is not thinking of such things at all;¹ but I will do what I can,' answered Tachihaki.

'Do find an opportunity for me to visit her secretly,' the Lord said, 'You tell me that she lives apart from the rest of the household, so it should be easy.'

Tachihaki told Akogi of the Lord's desire, but she answered coldly, 'The Lady does not think of such things; and besides I have heard that the Shōshō is of a very dissolute character.'

However, in answer to Tachihaki's continued entreaties, she said, 'All right. I will see what the Lady says'

Akogi had been given two exterior rooms next to the Lady's room, but thinking it presumptuous on her part to live in rooms on the same level as the Lady's, she had furnished a room on a still lower level for herself.

It was about the First Day of the Eighth Month; and the Lady alone in bed and unable to sleep cried out, 'Oh, mother, come to me and take me away from this world. I am so miserable' And in the vain attempt to soothe her feelings, she composed this poem—

Like unto dew-drops
Falling on me from heaven,
Come back to me now;
And from this harsh world, let us
Then dry away together.

² Really a title, Bodyguard of the Crown Prince; his personal name is given later as Korenari.

³ Commander of the Bodyguard of the Left.

⁴ Major-General of the Bodyguard of the Left.

¹ The Lady was fifteen or sixteen years of age.

Next morning, in the course of conversation, Akogi told the Lady what Tachihaki had said about the Shōshō wishing to see her. ‘What shall I do about it?’ she asked. ‘You cannot continue to live all your life alone in this way.’

The Lady made no answer, not knowing what to say, and just then someone called out, ‘Bring the Third Lady’s washing water,’ and Akogi had to leave.

‘Whether I do this or not,’ thought the Lady, ‘what will be the good? My mother not being here, my sole desire is to die and end this my unhappy existence. To leave this house, even to become a nun, is impossible. And to live here is misery. Oli, how I wish to die and leave this world!’

When Tachihaki went to the Taishō’s mansion, the Shōshō asked him how he was progressing with the affair. Tachihaki told him what had been said, and added, ‘It seems that it will be a very long business. In these matters, it should be the lady’s parents who worry about bringing the matter to a successful conclusion. But the Chūnagon is so domineered by his wife that he will do nothing to help her to find a lover.’

‘It was for that reason that I told you to take me to visit her in secret; it would never do for me to become the son-in-law of that Chūnagon. If when I meet her, I find that she is beautiful, I will bring her here; if she is not, I shall stop going to see her on the excuse that there are rumours about.’

‘Then I ought to know more of what your intentions are before I do anything further,’ said Tachihaki.

‘I cannot decide anything about my intentions until I see her. How can I decide on hearsay alone? Exert yourself faithfully for me, and I shall not forget it perhaps.’

‘“Perhaps” is not a pleasant word to hear,’ said Tachihaki.

‘I meant to say “for ever,” but I said the wrong word,’ said the Lord with a smile. Still smiling, he handed a letter to Tachihaki who took it reluctantly and went to the Chūnagon’s house and gave it to Akogi.

‘No, I do not want to take it. What is the meaning of it? We ought not to allow the Lady to see anything improper,’ Akogi said; but she took the letter eventually.

‘However, persuade her to write an answer to the Lord. I do not think that any evil will come of it.’

Akogi therefore took the letter to the Lady with the remark, ‘This is a letter from the Lord of whom I was speaking the other day.’

‘Why do you bring me this? If my step-mother hears of it, will she approve of it?’ the Lady asked.

‘Does she approve of anything you do? You need not worry about what she will think of it.’

The Lady Ochikubo made no answer to this, so Akogi lighted the chamber-torch and read the letter. There was written only this poem—

When first I was told
Of the bitter life you lead,
Pity filled my heart;
It is filled with love for you
Even though yet we have not met.

‘What fine handwriting!’ commented Akogi, as if to herself, but seeing that the Lady took no notice of what she said, she rolled the letter up again and put it in the comb-box.

‘Well, what happened?’ Tachihaki asked her later, ‘Did she read the letter?’

‘Alas, she did not so much as answer me. So I left it there and came out.’

‘Well, she will be happier than she is now, if she consents. And we also will be better off.’

‘Well, if he remains constant in his love, the Lady cannot possibly refuse to——.’

The next morning, the Chūnagon, on his way from his sleeping-chamber, happened to look into the Lower Room. He felt very sorry for the Lady; her hair hanging down was most beautiful, but she was very poorly dressed.

‘Your clothes are very poor,’ he said to her, ‘I feel very sorry about it. But I have so many children to look after that I cannot care for you as I ought. If you should meet a man who falls in love with you, you can act as you think best. I am sorry to find you still living alone like this.’

The Lady, feeling shy, did not answer.

The Chūnagon went out. ‘When I looked into the Lower Room,’ he said later to the Kita no Kata, ‘I found the child clad in one thin white lined robe only. Have the other children no old clothes? If they have, give her some to wear. She must be very cold at night.’

‘She is always supplied with clothes,’ the Great Lady answered, ‘But she does not take enough care of them. She soon tires of them and then she does not wear them again.’

‘Very strange! However, she lost her mother when she was very young, and that seems to have made her very dull and stupid.’

The step-mother ordered the Lady Ochikubo to make a Court-**hakama** for her son-in-law, the Kurōdō no Shōstiō. ‘Sew this better than usual and you shall have a robe as a reward,’ the Great Lady said to the Lady’s infinitely great delight.

As the **hakama** was finished very soon and was very well made, the Kita no Kata was very pleased, and gave to the Lady as her reward some damask wadded robes of her own, but which were almost worn out. The cold winds were then beginning to blow and the Lady had begun to worry about what she could wear in the winter, and so this present, poor as it was, made her very happy—so humble of spirit had she become.

It was the Kurōdō no Shōshō’s nature to use exaggerated language either in praising or in blaming, and he praised the sewing of this **hakama** very much. ‘This is very well made, extraordinarily well sewn,’ he said.

The Kita no Kata, however, when she heard of this from the servants said, ‘What nonsense! Do not say anything like that to the Lady Ochikubo, or it will make her vain. It is better for such a person to be kept humble, for a humble spirit is most needful in one who must serve others.’

‘What a cruel thing to say! And she is such a nice girl!’ the servants said behind her back.

The Shōshō sent another letter to the Lady with this poem and a stalk of miscanthus grass—

If the desires that
I have expressed, have any
Hope of flowering,
Then like a miscanthus flower,
In gentle breeze, nod to me.

To this, he received no answer.

One rainy day, he sent another letter, chiding her for not being as sympathetic and responsive as he had heard that she was. Together with this letter he sent this poem—

In the autumn time,
Season of days of drizzle,
Gloomy skies and grey;
Overcast with gloom of doubt
Is the heart of one who loves.

Still he received no answer.

Next he sent her this poem—

The river that flows
Through the heavens may be crossed
By bridges of clouds;
But what bridge is there for me
To step across to meet you.

He did not write every day, but he did so frequently. And still he received no answer.

‘She is rather timid, and perhaps she does not know how to write an answer to such a letter,’ the Shōshō commented to Tachihaki, ‘I have heard from you that she is very intelligent, and so it seems very strange that she does not send me an answer, even if it is only a brief one. Why is it?’

‘I do not know,’ answered Tachihaki, ‘However I have heard that she is always very retiring, because she fears that the Kita no Kata would be even more cruel to her, if she did anything at all that would not be approved.’

‘Well, can you not take me to the Lady secretly?’ the Lord again urged him, and Tachihaki did all in his power to further the request.

No letter was sent for the next ten days, and then the Lord thought that it was time for him to send another. So he Wrote—

Lately,
No more do I find
It in my heart to write you;
I will write no more,
For when I have no answer,
It does but feed my sorrow.