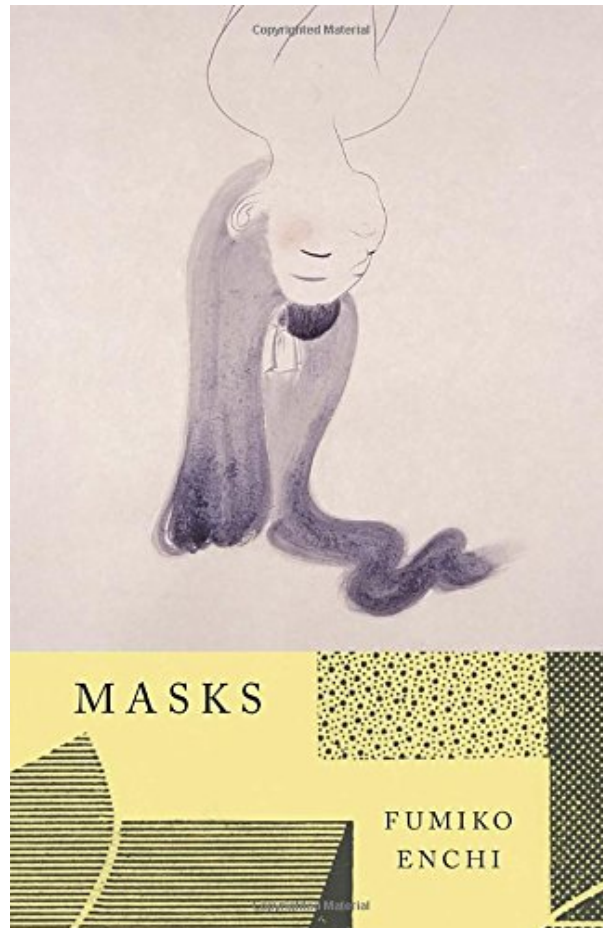
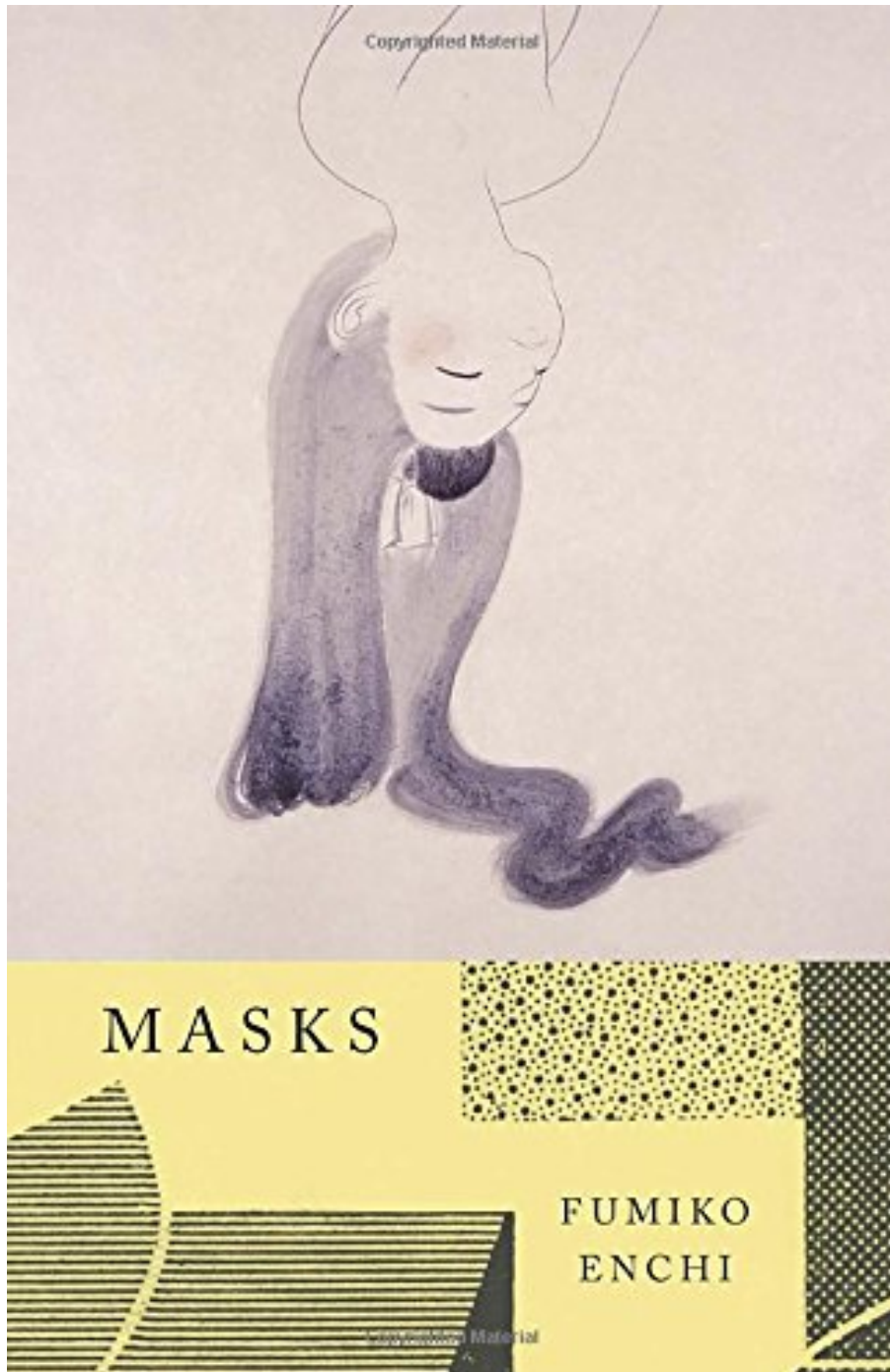


MASKS BY FUMIKO ENCHI



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Review

“A subtle examination of universal female behavior.” —People

“[Enchi’s] allusions to the masks of N? plays and to the classic *The Tale of Genji*, the brilliant way she layers and interweaves the ancient, the more recent past and the present are haunting and rich. A fictional enchantment.” —Publishers Weekly

“Enchi’s writing has some of the same amniotic fluidity as Tolstoy’s, an almost bodily, floating immersion into the effortless habitat of the story.” —The American Reader

“Clear and powerful. . . . Almost imperceptively woven.” —Kirkus

Language Notes

Text: English, Japanese (translation)

From the Back Cover

'Clear and powerful' (Kirkus), *Masks* is perhaps Fumiko Enchi's finest work and her first to be translated into English. In this stunning and subtle novel about seduction and infidelity in latter-day Japan and about the destructive force of feminine jealousy and resentment, Mieko Togano, a handsome and cultivated woman in her 50s, manipulates--for her own bizarre purposes--the relationship between her widowed daughter-in-law, Yasuko, and the two men in love with her.

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Following the death of her son, Mieko Togano takes an increasing interest in the personal affairs of her widowed daughter-in-law, Yasuko. Devastated by her loss, she skillfully manipulates the relationships between Yasuko and the two men who are in love with her, encouraging a dalliance that will have terrible consequences. Meanwhile, hidden in the shadows, is Mieko's mentally-handicapped daughter, who has her own role to play in her mother's bizarre schemes. In *Masks*, Enchi has crafted a stunning and understated novel of seduction and infidelity.

- Sales Rank: #463544 in Books
- Published on: 1983-09-12
- Released on: 1983-09-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .44" w x 5.15" l, .37 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 160 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Four Stars

By C. J. Rusko

A thrilling, enrapturing book.

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

An improbable page-turner, a chilly and alluring novel

By J. Holt

I read Enchi's "Masks" nearly ten years ago and knew I wanted to read it again. Having just completed reading Tyler's new translation of *The Tale of Genji*, I figured it would be a good time to return to it. You don't have to know much about *Genji* to enjoy Enchi's book -- but it helps. The world she describes is one that is her own: I have sensed characters something like this in other Japanese novelists, but Enchi's characters are really unique: they exist on cultural 'roids, making a deeper impression on one than they should. I'm not convinced that such characters exist in reality, but I do believe that Enchi believes they do.

Enchi uses *Genji*, *Tales of Ise*, Noh theater, and a bit of *Kojiki* as if it were still very much a part of the milieu these 20th century (circa 1958?) characters inhabit. However, instead of a "mythic" structure where the modern characters re-enact the personalities of the past, they are rooted in Enchi's world. The tragedy for many of the characters in the book is not so much that they are doomed to repeat the past, but that they will be doomed to repeat their mistakes in the future. As another reviewer suggested, the book ends with a lot of questions. It is a highly poetic novel without a clear sense of resolution, but it reads remarkably fast and is quite enjoyable. Bound to generate hours of discussion as one tries to look beneath its surface.

28 of 30 people found the following review helpful.

Fabulous...

By Jadepearl

Fumiko Enchi has a remarkable body of work including short stories, novels and a translation of the *Tale of Genji* from the Classical Japanese to modern (quite a task that legend speaks of her losing her vision partially to accomplish).

This is one of the most amazing novels that I have read. It is about the rage of women and to what extraordinary lengths that vengeance and love can call in a woman and in a manner through all women. The text is imbued with references and imagery from classical literature (Enchi is a classical scholar as was her father) but not knowing the references does not detract from the raw power of the text.

It is a short work and can be a dense read with some of the subtle references but the unmistakable cold anger that runs through it is markedly different from Enchi's other renowned work, *The Waiting Years*. The female characters are more dynamic and the male characters not as reprehensible as in her other works. The novel may make some men uncomfortable in reading it since men are a focus of anger and vengeance.

If you are familiar with Japanese literature and symbology the work provides an extra layer of meaning from the bare text. The blurring of real and dream is reminiscent of older tale literature and the use of various images such as, Noh masks adds further resonance. There are no footnotes nor explanatory notes so be prepared for that.

It is a pity that not much of Enchi's work has been translated but if you were to choose *Masks* and the *Waiting Years* you will not be disappointed.

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