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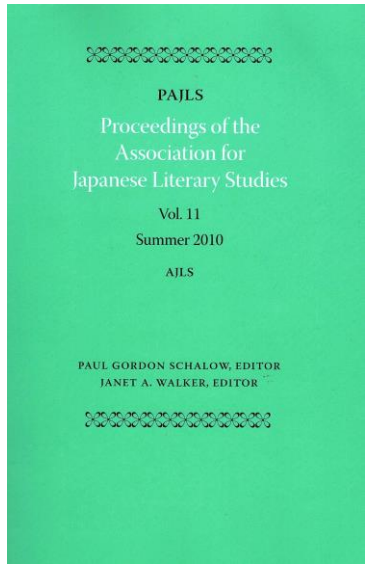
Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies 11 (2010): 233–258.



PAJLS 11:
Rethinking Gender in the Postgender Era.
Ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker.

Yoru no nezame and the Fictional Limits of Late-Heian Aristocratic Motherhood

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This essay explores the representation of "motherhoods" in *Yoru no nezame*, a late eleventh-century fictional tale of unknown authorship, whose female protagonist embodies, at least for part of the narrative, a character type I would like to provisionally term the "*onna aruji*" (female householder or mistress of the house). Her closest intertextual kin, as a fictional heroine, seems to be Tamakazura as she appears in the later chapters of the *Tale of Genji*, especially "Bamboo River" (Takekawa). Both Tamakazura and Nezame are presented at different points in their respective narratives as widows who privilege their own parental and household managerial identities over other possible roles, a preference that puts them in conflict with other characters. I argue elsewhere that the emergence of female householders as compelling figures in these influential eleventh-century fictions speaks to the fluid state of marital residence patterns among the mid- and late-Heian aristocracy, and in the case of *Yoru no nezame*, to anxieties in late-Heian court circles about the influence of imperial mothers and empress dowagers of various ranks (*taikôtaigô*, *kôtaigô*, and *nyôin*) on the imperial succession and other matters of court politics.[1]

[1] I address these issues in a longer study of *Yoru no nezame* included in my unpublished manuscript, "Wishful Thinking: Gender, Genealogy, and Fantasy in the Fiction of the Later Heian Court." For an informative discussion in English of empress dowagers and other, differently ranked imperial women as arbiters of influential decisions at court, see Fukutô with Watanabe 2007, pp. 66–101. My analyses in this essay and in the manuscript cited above highlight representations of (not yet normative) patterns of virilocal marriage in mid- to late-Heian fiction, the ideological conflicts they provoked in their fictional contexts, and the extent to which the sheer fluidity of aristocratic marital residence patterns enriched fantasies about modes of female power and agency. Wakita 1991, p. 83ff, has questioned whether the increased practice of virilocal marriages (*yometorikon*) in medieval Japan "invariably involved a corresponding diminution of the wife's authority." She argues that in comparison to the polygamous practices of the Heian period, medieval virilocal marriages in some ways provided a more stable position for the wife—whose legal status as the only wife (*seisai*), in fact, allowed her a modicum of authority that earlier uxorilocal (*mukotorikon*) and duolocal (*tsumadoi*) marriage patterns could not provide. The medieval virilocal wife's position on the death of her husband is the most striking example of this. As widow (*goke*) she acted as head of the household in her husband's stead.

Here, however, my analysis will be text-centered, focusing on the articulation of motherhood in those volumes of *Yoru no nezame* where the plot revolves around the competition between two mothers—one aristocratic, the other imperial—who are locked in an antagonistic relationship with each other.

The first of these mother figures is the heroine Nezame herself, whose attachment to her stepdaughters, niece, son, and daughter eclipses her passion for the children's fathers, one dead, the other very much alive. The second mother is an empress dowager (referred to in the text as Taikô no miya), whom the narrative presents in a markedly negative light as a malevolent schemer and antagonist to Nezame. The dowager is the wife of a retired emperor and mother of a sitting emperor who desires Nezame as a concubine; she is also the mother of an imperial princess (Ichi no Miya) who is the principal wife of the tale's hero, a man obsessed since the tale's inception with having Nezame as a second wife.[2] The dowager's actions center mainly around protecting her daughter's position as the principal wife of the hero who, as brother to the current empress and son of the current regent, is himself destined to inherit his father's position and rise to the highest ranks of the nobility. Though the dowager's primary focus is on securing the stability of her daughter's position as the principal wife of this regent-to-be, she does so by availing herself of strategies proper to an imperial mother: she attempts to manipulate the selection of the emperor's consorts and concubines.[3] Thus while her goals are clearly coded as maternal in origin, the strategies she uses to implement them foreground a set of aims that are not strictly maternal, having also quite overtly to do with the issue of imperial succession. Nezame as a daughter-in-law (via a liaison with her son the emperor) would render Nezame herself and any offspring she might produce quite vulnerable to the dowager's authority. Nezame as wife to the regent-to-be and recognized mother of his offspring puts both Nezame and her daughters beyond the dowager's reach and into direct competition with the dowager's own daughter and her potential offspring. Thus the dowager abets her imperial son's erotic interest in Nezame in an attempt to disgrace Nezame

[2]Sobriquets for the characters follow Japanese scholarly conventions, with a few exceptions. The tale's heroine is often referred to as Naka no Kimi in *Yoru no nezame* itself, and in much of contemporary Japanese scholarship (referring to her identity as her father's second, younger daughter). I use the sobriquet 'Nezame' in order to distinguish her as the protagonist, and to avoid confusion between her and the similarly named empress of volume three, Naka no Miya. The tale's hero is also referred to by different court titles throughout the tale itself, reflecting his shifting rank/position at court as the narrative progresses. In the interest of avoiding a sobriquet that would fix him in any one particular rank/court position, I refer to him consistently as the "hero."

[3]In this respect the fictional dowager of *Yoru no nezame* may have called up for late Heian readers the image of certain historical imperial mothers. See Fukutô, especially pp. 22–32, for a profile of how historical Heian empress dowagers (*kôtaigô*), senior grand empress dowagers (*taikôtaigô*), and imperial ladies or retired empress dowagers (*nyôin*) influenced decisions at court by this means, particularly during and after the time of Emperor Saga in the latter half of the ninth century, and, perhaps most pertinently for *Yoru no nezame*, during the regency of Fujiwara no Yorimichi in the eleventh century.

in the hero's eyes and thereby cool his ardor for her. Despite differences in their iteration of motherhood, both heroine and anti-heroine exhibit a high degree of agency and share a decidedly practical, status-conscious attitude toward men and polygamous marriage arrangements. Touching on precedents in *Ochikubo monogatari* (late tenth century) and *Genji monogatari* (first decade, eleventh century), this essay will demonstrate how elite maternal figures in *Yoru no nezame* embody a distinctive set of perspectives on the limits and possibilities of aristocratic mothers.

Analysis of the characters in *Yoru no nezame* is hampered by the fact that large parts of the tale are lost. Although the extant five volumes make up a substantial narrative especially rich in its nuanced tracking of individual characters' motivations, earlier, more complete versions of the text were even longer.[4] External sources point to the loss of at least two further volumes and likely more.[5] Perhaps the most regrettable loss, at least to this reader, is the gap between the first two existing volumes and the remaining three. This missing section seems to have covered a period of about eight years in the fictional world of the tale, and contained the story of the heroine's marriage to a much older man ("the former regent," or simply "the old regent"), and her early step-mothering of his children by a previous wife. This section perhaps narrated a transitional period in Nezame's development as a character, between her maidenhood and first pregnancy by the hero (chronicled in the first two extant volumes), and her later life as the former regent's widow, a mature but still compellingly attractive woman preoccupied with overseeing her stepdaughters' marriages, and with keeping her own suitors at a safe distance. This missing middle section, and another missing final section of indeterminate length following the last three extant volumes, can only be roughly reconstructed from other sources. We are thus left with a set of five volumes that contains a large gap of imperfectly disclosed plot and character developments, some of which may be surmised by the several flashbacks on the part of characters in volumes three through five, and by references to episodes from the missing volumes in external sources. Principal among these pre-Edo external sources are *Mumyôzôshi* (ca. 1200), *Gohyakuban utaawase* (ca. 1206), *Fûyôwakashû* (1271), and

[4]Current annotated editions of the text run to 530 pages. There are eight Edo-period manuscripts of the tale in total, plus an earlier manuscript, the so-called Nakamura-bon. All surviving manuscripts have lacunae in the middle and at the end of the tale. My readings are based on both the NKBZ and the SNKZ editions, hereafter documented internally as NKBZ 19, and SNKZ 28, respectively. Both of these editions are in five fascicles (*maki*). The missing fascicles follow extant fascicles two and five. At least one premodern textual lineage divides the tale into three fascicles. In those copies, the missing fascicles follow fascicle one and three. All translations mine unless otherwise noted. For a complete translation of the extant text into English, see Richard 1973. Carol Hochstedler published a translation of the third part of the tale (extant volumes three through five). See Hochstedler 1979. Both Richard's and Hochstedler's translations are based on NKBT 78, which is in turn based on the earliest Edo-period copy, the Shimabara manuscript.

[5]Suzuki 1996 estimates that the extant volumes may comprise not quite one half of the original text. See SNKZ 28, p. 561.

the *Nezame monogatari emaki* (late eleventh or very early twelfth century).[6] Some scholars have speculated that the missing middle section of the tale was either much longer than the surviving volumes (because it covers a period of eight years in the narrative) or more popular with medieval readers (or both), because of the disproportionate number of references to it in the external sources.[7]

Kinds of Aristocratic Motherhood: Interiority and Authority, Widowhood and Surrogacy

The result for the reader today is not only a temporal leap but also a characterological one, between volume two and the remaining volumes. Most striking is the fact that somewhere presumably in the midst of the missing middle section, Nezame—whose interiority in comparison to other characters remains relatively *unnarrated* in the opening volumes—has become the central figure, whose thoughts are probed by a narrating voice that shifts freely and at length between the perspectives of various characters, including minor ones.[8] A fascination with interiority permeates all of the extant volumes of *Yoru no nezame*.[9] In fact, the use of *shinnaigo* (interior monologue) and other forms for narrating characters' unspoken perceptions is so pervasive a means of characterization that it may be more instructive to note which characters' minds are *not* probed. Relatively hidden from view

[6] Suzuki Hiromichi 1977 provides a handy anthologization of external sources relevant to the reconstruction of missing episodes from *Yoru no nezame*.

[7] See Hochstedler, p. 8. Suzuki 1996 tabulates the waka from *Yoru no nezame* cited in *Mumyôzôshi*, *Gohyakuban utaawase*, and *Fûyôwakashû* according to the volumes from which they were drawn. In findings that run contrary to Hochstedler's assertion, Suzuki's tabulations reveal that all three sources cite significantly more waka from the tale's missing final volume(s) than from any of its other three parts (SNKZ 28, p. 571). If frequency of citation may be understood as evidence of popularity with readers, it appears that for early Kamakura readers, at least, the most popular volumes of the tale were the (now missing) final ones, rather than the (also now missing) middle section.

[8] Prominent among the minor characters whose thoughts are given voice in the tale's first volume is the figure of Tai no Kimi, a cousin of Nezame's mother who had "treated [Tai no Kimi] as her own child" (NKBZ 19, p. 47). After the mother's death, Tai no Kimi serves as an attendant to Nezame and acts—in several respects—as a surrogate mother to her. Several other of Nezame's female attendants and relatives also stand out, as does Shin no Shôshô, the daughter of a provincial governor and relative of Tai no Kimi whom the hero initially imagines to be the mysterious woman he spent the night with at the tale's opening.

[9] As to the frequency of "expressions of interiority" (*shinchû hyôgen*) in the tale overall, and in each of its five extant volumes, see the chart in Suzuki 1996, p. 576. The chart also compares usage of such expressions in *Yoru no nezame* with usage in *Taketori monogatari*, *Ochikubo monogatari*, *Genji monogatari*, and *Sagoromo monogatari*. By Suzuki's calculations, *Yoru no nezame* exhibits the greatest density of such expressions. On the exaggerated interest in interiority in *Yoru no nezame*, see Nagai 1993. Nagai notes—as have many readers—that a frequent resort to *shinnaigo* is one of the signature discursive methods of late-Heian monogatari in general. In her view, however, *Yoru no nezame* is distinctive for the relation it constructs between self-consciousness and consciousness of the other (*hito me*, or the "eyes of others") in its female protagonist's *shinnaigo*.

throughout the extant volumes are the thoughts of the hero's first principal wife, Oigimi (Nezame's elder sister), and Ichi no Miya, the hero's second, higher ranking wife, whose entrance into his life provokes the death (in childbirth) of Oigimi. Neither of these wives becomes a mother: Oigimi dies giving birth, and Ichi no Miya remains childless. Is the narration's lack of interest in their interiority connected to their childlessness, and/or to their unchanging roles as wives and/or daughters rather than mothers? Nezame herself, whose thoughts remain for the most part un-narrated in volumes one and two, is pregnant during most of this part of the tale—and thus not yet a mother. And although volume two closes with her birthing of a daughter, the child is immediately taken from her and given into the care of the hero's mother.[10]

At the opening of volume three, however, Nezame has morphed (presumably at some point in the lost middle section) from the extremely passive figure others brood about in volumes one and two, to a full-blown *subject* whose self-meditative reflections now drive the narrative. In volume three Nezame emerges, to borrow the words of Suzuki Kazuo, as "a full-grown female protagonist."[11] Is the increased foregrounding of her subjectivity linked to her assumption of motherhood? Or even more specifically to her identity as *widowed mother?* My hypothesis is that female subjectivity is linked to motherhood in this tale, and that Nezame's particularly powerful iteration of maternal subjectivity is enhanced by her status as widowed mother and default head of her late husband's household.

Where does this strikingly self-possessed mother live?[12] Nezame seems to have spent her earlier married life at the mansion of her husband, thus participating in a form of marriage that may or may not have been essentially virilocal (i.e., the house provided by the husband's family rather than the wife's).[13] To some degree,

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[10] The thoughts of Nezame's stepdaughters, niece, daughter, and son (who are children or young, still childless wives during the extant middle volumes of the tale) are also seldom narrated. One can only speculate on their development in the missing final volumes, but it seems possible that because these characters—especially the son and the second stepdaughter—figure largely in the lost final volumes of the tale, they may have increasingly become the subjects of interior monologue as they in turn become the principal adult characters in the narrative.

[11] The term is taken from the title of Suzuki's introductory essay for SNKZ 28, "Murasaki no ue to Nezame no ue: seichô suru onna shujinkô ni tsuite." Suzuki 1996, pp. 5–8. Richard 1973 makes similar points about the striking development of Nezame's character from passivity to "a singular determination to overcome her destiny and to provide secure futures for her illegitimate [sic] children," Richard, pp. 44–45. A *locus classicus* for this highlighting of Nezame's determination and strong will is the discussion of her character in *Mumyôzôshi*, where she is repeatedly praised for precisely these traits. See *Mumyôzôshi*, pp. 68–70 and 72–73.

[12] Nezame's pre-marital life (covered in volumes one and two) is extremely peripatetic, so much so that for this and other reasons many scholars see the narrative as largely a reprise of female exile plots (such as those of Kaguyahime in *Taketori*, and Ukifune in *Genji*). Nagai 1990 develops this interpretation in great detail. See especially pp. 156–72, and pp. 225–31. For a discussion in English of *Yoru no nezame* from this perspective, see D'Etcheverry 2007.

[13] Among the fugitive comments that provide evidence that Nezame's first marriage unfolded at her husband's house, see the reference in *Mumyôzôshi*: ". . . as the time neared for [Nezame's] move to the old regent's house . . ." *Mumyôzôshi*, p. 65.

the question of who provided the house—Nezame's father or her husband—may be somewhat moot (and not only because these details are obscured by the tale's missing volumes). Nezame and her first husband are at least equals, in terms of class, though it may be that Nezame's bloodlines are more noble than the old regent's. The old regent was in fact the hero's paternal uncle. Nezame's father had been a prince of the blood who was removed from the succession to become the head of a Minamoto lineage. Nezame's mother, too, the daughter of a "Prince Sochi," had kinship ties to the imperial family. In addition, Nezame brings her own wealth to the match. Though she is her father's favorite, her status as younger daughter had initially caused him to delay marriage arrangements for her. At the time Nezame's marriage to the old regent is arranged, her natal home is occupied by her elder sister and the hero, thus precluding, for Nezame, the uxorilocal marriage arrangement normally enjoyed by wives of high status and strong family backing. But since she was still unmarried at the point when her father was planning his withdrawal from the world to live as a lay priest, he had named her as heir to "all the goods he had inherited from his father the former emperor . . . even including all the family estates," in fact leaving little more than a "ceremonial sash and sword" to her already married elder sister (NKBZ 19, pp. 170–71).[14]

When volume three opens, with her own husband and her elder sister now dead, Nezame has moved her sister's daughter to live with her and her stepdaughters in the mansion she manages as the old regent's widow. Thus, Nezame now presides as the mistress (*onna aruji*) of a regental mansion, and as the widowed head of the former regent's family. As she now turns her attention to overseeing the careers of her three stepdaughters and her niece, her role as a surrogate mother takes center stage, though this is not the only kind of motherhood Nezame embodies. She is also the birth mother of a daughter and a son by the hero (the daughter conceived just as the hero was about to marry Nezame's elder sister, and the son around the time that Nezame herself was married to the former regent). Yet the narrative seems at some pains to underscore that Nezame's authority as a surrogate mother has more potency than her influence as a birth mother, since the latter is compromised by the competing authority of Nezame's father and the hero who is father to her birth children. We are told, for instance, that

[14] Historians of Heian marriage practices have associated both neolocal and virilocal marital residence patterns with a transition, beginning around the early twelfth century, away from uxorilocal and duolocal (or "visiting") marriages and toward increasingly patriarchal forms of marriage. More recent scholarship has complicated this narrative (which was based in part on the monumental scholarship of Takamure Itsue) of an orderly evolution of aristocratic marriage practices from uxorilocal to virilocal by pointing out that, in fact, marital residence patterns in both mid- and late-Heian had much to do with the status of the husband's and wife's natal families relative to each other, as well as the wife's position (as elder or younger sister, or as designated heir) in her natal family. Clearly, a mid-Heian nobleman with more than one wife might and often did practice two or more forms of marriage, depending on the status and power of his wives (the wife's power being based in part on her fecundity as well as the status of her natal family).

Nezame now shares her authority over her son—who had been adopted by the former regent and raised by Nezame in their house—with the boy's biological father (the hero). This later arrangement for the son seems to have been ordered by Nezame's father. The daughter had been taken from Nezame by the hero at birth and put under the care of the hero's mother. Yet given her wealth and her parental authority within two families, her position is, in effect, an unusually powerful one as mothers go, in Heian fiction.[15] The question I would like to pursue here is this: what might Nezame's peculiar embodiment of aristocratic motherhood reveal about the ideological and characterological systems of this late-Heian tale?

But before we can begin, another question presents itself. How are we to address what is specifically "maternal" about Nezame, given the context of a genre (and a society) in which motherhood is constructed as a kind of corporate rather than individual endeavor? In the real world of Heian court society, aristocratic birth mothers were regularly supplemented and sometimes displaced by substitutes of various kinds and ranks: wet-nurses, foster mothers, stepmothers, and the occasional elder sister who has usurped or inherited a parental role. Maternal surrogates were ubiquitous in Heian aristocratic families, given the prevalence of polygamous marriage practices and the high rate of mortality for women in childbirth. In Heian court fiction as well, aristocratic motherhood clearly participates in what H. Richard Okada has termed "the logic of the surrogate, that subtends Heian society." As Okada has shown, fictional texts like the *Genji* foreground linkages between issues of erotic surrogacy (the *yukari* theme, so prominent in certain parts of the *Genji*), modes of narration in Heian fiction (where middle-ranking narrators—wet-nurses prominent among them—often 'speak for' other characters), and parental surrogacy (the role of wet-nurses and other maternal substitutes in the construction of fictional images of Heian aristocratic maternity).[16] Okada's arguments handily encompass at a more theoretical level both Haruo Shirane's concern with pseudo-incest themes in *Genji*, and Norma Field's analyses of the *Genji* narrative's metonymic inscription of desire via the *yukari* theme.[17] Though my readings of late-Heian fiction take some of their cues from all three of these scholars, I want to hang back here from subsuming the maternal into a generalized "logic of the surrogate" in order to throw into relief certain distinctions—discernible in *Yoru no nezame* itself—that call attention to the specificity of its maternal narratives and the ideologically driven conflicts they precipitate among its characters. A closer look at these conflicts should begin to illuminate the relation between *Yoru no nezame* and other Heian court fictions regarding the

[15] Hochstedler comments similarly that the narrative seems to take pains to illustrate "not only Nezame's noble qualities in accepting her husband's family as her own, but also her power to draw the two [families] together, as though she herself were the head of two families." Hochstedler, p. 243, n. 4.

[16] Okada 2000, p. 10. See also Okada 1991, where these issues are treated at greater length.

[17] Shirane 1987, and Field 1987.

maternal. It should also help to establish grounds for a more nuanced understanding of the relation between *Yoru no nezame* and its late-Heian historical context, though I will not be pursuing that issue here except in passing.[18]

Turning briefly to a question of literary historiography, I would note that Okada's discussion—which is textually grounded as an essay on the *Genji*—centers on the figures of Ukifune, a marriageable and still childless heroine, and Tamakazura—but Tamakazura in her pre-marital youth—not in her later role as widowed matron in the Takekawa chapter. As unmarried women, these are characters whose positions represent roles that might be termed "daughterly" (Tamakazura) or "maidenly" (Ukifune). To the extent that it takes these figures as paradigmatic, Okada's essay participates in a not fully examined privileging of narratives that are non-maternal—a tendency that I would argue has long dominated both Japanese and western scholarship on Heian women's writing.[19] Though I do not have the space here to develop this argument at length, a few words are in order concerning the privileging of daughters and the "daughterly" in contemporary feminist criticism and its possible impact on current reconstructions of Heian literature and history.

In the late 1980s and early 90s, feminist critics pursuing the issue of the maternal in modern Euro-American fiction constructed a critique of the second phase of feminist criticism as "daughterly," that is, complicit with patriarchal ideology insofar as it tended to ignore the plurality and specificity of maternal perspectives on motherhood. Writing in 1989, Marianne Hirsch explored homologies between emerging Freudian psychoanalytic discourses and literary discourse in the late nineteenth century, noting within the latter an "insist[ence] on the incompatibility of creativity and procreativity . . . a contradiction, pervasive in nineteenth century fiction and ideology, between motherhood and authorship." Like many of the important feminist critics publishing two decades ago, Hirsch was writing about (and reading within) a Eurocentric tradition that, for much of its history, operated "within a sex-gender system . . . [that identified] writing as a masculine

[18] My thanks to Richard Okada for raising the question of historicity during the discussion following the panel at which this paper was originally delivered. *Yoru no nezame* seems to speak obliquely to the dynamic, unfixed nature of aristocratic marital residence patterns in late-Heian, as well as to emerging developments in court marriage politics, in general, and the authority of the imperial house, in particular. As historians have shown, the imperial family was gaining greater authority, in the late eleventh century, in decisions concerning the imperial succession. Fukutô has demonstrated the prominent role played by the retired empress dowager (*nyôin*) Jôtômon'in (988–1074), at the expense of the regency in the person of her younger brother Fujiwara no Yorimichi. Fukutô, pp. 31–32. Yorimichi's daughter and adopted daughters all failed to produce princes; consequently, Yorimichi enjoyed far less leeway in deciding the imperial succession than his father Michinaga had. Cameron Hurst has outlined the tensions between Yorimichi and his younger brothers Norimichi and Yoshinobu concerning succession matters in the imperial family and the regent's house. Hurst 1976, especially pp. 102–106.

[19] Kojima Naoko is one of the several *kokubungaku* scholars whose scholarship attempts to redress this tendency. See for example, Kojima 1996 and Kojima 2004.

pursuit."[20] The classic statement of this perspective had been outlined by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their groundbreaking study of Victorian English and American women authors, *The Madwoman in the Attic,* which famously begins with the question: "Is the pen a metaphorical penis?" Citing Said's meditation on how the word "author" activates homologies between the writer, the deity, and *paterfamilias*, Gilbert and Gubar explored the peculiar anxieties of authorship such metaphors generated in Victorian women writers, limning a process whereby, in order to "attempt the pen," the female author had first to destroy the (male-authored) aesthetic through which they themselves had been "killed" or rendered into "art": objects to be acted upon, rather than subjects capable of representing themselves in modes alternative to those produced by patriarchal ideologies of authorship.[21] According to Gilbert's and Gubar's formulation, women "who attempt the pen" transgress into masculine territory and behavior. To write successfully involved for late-nineteenth-century women a disidentification from the lot of "most women" which was perceptible not only in their actual lives and careers as authors, but also in the fictional heroines they created. Since "most women" became mothers, not authors, a pattern of disavowing the maternal emerges—not only among late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century women writers and the heroines they created, but also, Hirsch subsequently argued, among the second-phase feminist scholars who spotlighted their accomplishments.[22] I will touch again on Hirsch's critique of the daughterly bent of feminist criticism below.

Turning from such a framework to the relation between women and writing in the Heian tradition, I was, like other feminist scholars entering the field of Japanese literature in the late 1980s, acutely aware of the need for a theoretical model more attuned to the historical and social conditions of writers male and female at the Heian court. I need not remind my readers that in Heian discourse, femininity is *not* constructed as part of a binary that disallows women or the feminine subject position as agents of literary production. Whatever other constraints there may have been on their writing practices, Heian women did not have to struggle with a generalized anxiety of authorship *because* of their sexual identity.[23] But the Heian context presents different kinds of complexity and ambivalence. For example, distinctions of class and rank complicate issues of gender and genre by cutting across sex-gender categories, so that rank may trump gender as the

[20] Hirsch 1989, p. 8 and p. 44.

[21] Gilbert and Gubar 1979. See especially the first section of Part I entitled "The Queen's Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity." See also Said 1975, p. 83.

[22] "Second-phase" feminist scholarship refers to Susan Gubar's narrative of the trajectory of feminist criticism in late-twentieth-century academic circles. Gubar 2000, pp. 115–19.

[23] In fact, as Gustav Heldt has argued in the case of Tsurayuki (in *Tosa nikki* and elsewhere), one finds modes of writing marked as feminine (or masculine) not because of the sex of the actual writer but because of the writer's class and rank vis-à-vis his or her text's primary audience. See Heldt 2005, and Heldt 2008.

dominant category for regulating social interaction as well as cultural production.[24] In such contexts, authorship *per se* is clearly *not* linked to a particular gender. Although a certain secondary, subordinate positionality may suggest femininity in certain genres, femininity itself is not articulated as existing solely within an object position in relation to writing or representation. Nor were maternal perspectives and discourses entirely silenced, it seems. But how have Heian mothers as representations of maternal experience fared among post-Heian readers? How have their representations been treated in the critical literature, which shapes not only how we read Heian literature but which texts get read? I suggested above that the discourse of the maternal remains an under-investigated topic in studies of Heian culture, but clearly it has remained so for different reasons than those that second-phase western feminists identified for the Euro-American context. At the same time, however, it appears to me that late-twentieth-century critical treatments of Heian women writers in both Japan and elsewhere share with the feminist critics of the 1970s and 80s a tendency to privilege "daughterly" rather than maternal narratives, emphasizing especially spheres of female experience other than the maternal: especially courtship, seduction, and marriage.

Maternal Agency: Birth and Surrogate Mothers in *Yoru no nezame* and Their Intertextual Kin

Clearly, aristocratic birth mothers and surrogate mothers in Heian court fiction present a complex constellation of figures. On the one hand, birth mothers, often absent because dead and therefore existing as mere memories or even less in the minds of their fictional offspring, are frequently idealized. Nearly all the major heroines and often the heroes of early- and mid-Heian fiction are bereft of their birth mothers. Depictions of surrogate mothers are thus often more richly—if not necessarily more realistically—detailed, and stepmothers often become the objects of highly polarized portrayals. "Wicked stepmother tales are legion," Genji reflects, as he considers which tales to exclude from the collection he has made for Akashi no Kimi, his only daughter by birth.[25] And yet, even "good" stepmothers in *Genji*, aside from Murasaki, are ambivalently drawn (consider Fujitsubo as stepmother to Genji). *Yoru no nezame* reverses this pattern of idealized birth mother and wicked or ambiguous stepmother. As already noted, the tale's heroine, Nezame, is an unusually complex embodiment of different kinds of motherhood: birth and surrogate, stepmother and aunt, unrecognized mistress and publicly respected widow/matriarch, whereas her flamboyantly malevolent nemesis, the

[24] The use of conventionally feminine tropes in the homoerotic love poetry of *Sumô monogatari* provides a good example of a situation in which a feminine rhetorical position is assumed by a male writer. See Khan 2007. Stephania Burk has argued that an example of a situation in which rank trumps gender identity may be inferred from Empress Eifukumon'in's choice of the unusual genre of *jika awase* as a medium for self-writing. Burk 2009.

[25] NKBZ 14, p. 207; see also Tyler 2001, p. 463.

empress dowager, is first and last an over-protective and over-ambitious birth mother.

If we look at these various fictional mother figures in terms of the degree of agency they express, however, things become easier to sort out. In the *Genji*, maternal agency (whether birth or surrogate) is usually contained. Maternal attractiveness and the power to elicit reader sympathy is in direct proportion to the mother's ability to mask her agency or to express it by indirection, often by ceding the maternal role to a woman of greater status and prospects (consider the Akashi Lady with her daughter). When maternal agency operates openly and unchecked (as, say, Genji's stepmother Kokiden's does), it is judged within the world of the tale as unattractive and unsympathetic. I was reminded, while writing this paper, of a provocative essay by Catherine Ryu on the elaborate and exaggerated punishment of the "wicked" stepmother in *Ochikubo monogatari*—who, she pointed out, is also portrayed as an over-zealous birth mother.[26] Though I cannot respond here in full to her reading of the extended vengeance plot in this tale, I would suggest that the (step)mother in *Ochikubo monogatari* is punished not so much because she embodies maternal agency or the maternal erotic subject per se, but because she does so in an unattractively crude—although also incredibly comic—manner. A more attractive (if more ambiguous), and yet equally thwarted birth mother is the *Genji*'s Lady Rokujô, whose figure also inscribes a complex relationship to issues of maternal agency and a long-lived vengeance plot—though she seems to have been most often the agent, not the victim of vengeance. As a birth mother, Rokujô ultimately performs as other birth mothers in the *Genji* who are portrayed in a positive light: she cedes her child and her parental authority gracefully to Genji, though his spurning of her as a potential wife had been her great humiliation. Of course she only does so at death's door, and her ceding of parental authority is profoundly (indeed threateningly) equivocal. There are strings attached to the gifts of foster-daughter and of land she bequeaths to Genji—and implicitly dire consequences await him should he betray the promise she tries to extract from him on her deathbed.[27]

Writing in the wake of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, Hirsch pointed out that while "it is easy to grant that neither sex nor gender can be invoked as fixed or unproblematic categories, it is much more difficult to assert that [sexual] reproduction provides a radical arena of *difference* . . . and that it thereby challenges a positional, destabilized view of sex and gender more than perhaps anything else."[28] Despite the corporate, fluid nature of aristocratic motherhood in Heian fiction and elite society, certain late-Heian fictions offer images of motherhood that support Hirsch's perception that sexual reproduction inscribes "a radical arena of difference" between the sexes. Repeatedly, in these tales, pregnancy

[26] Ryu 2001.

[27] *Genji monogatari*, NKBZ 13, pp. 300–303; Tyler, pp. 293–94.

[28] Hirsch, p.12.

and birth motherhood form implacable limits to individual characters' destinies. While clearly not all late-Heian fictions present biological maternity as bearing a consistent ideological significance, it may be of interest to note when and where maternal figures in these tales catalyze conflicts between themselves and other characters over issues having to do with maternal agency and the significance of blood ties between mother and child. Sometimes, birth motherhood is represented as signifying a deep-seated, incontrovertible check on the over-privileging of male authority in aristocratic households. The mother's bond, as a mother, to her birth child—whether the child is legitimate or not—must be somehow acknowledged and accommodated within the world of the tale. This is the case, as I have argued in greater detail elsewhere, for *Torikaebaya monogatari*.[29] In *Yoru no nezame*, as we shall see, birth motherhood is privileged over maternal surrogacy cynically by male characters, as a means of rationalizing their domestication of a heroine whom they perceive as having exceeded the bounds of the aristocratic household as "normatively" configured.[30] The clearest form her transgression takes is her successful performance in the roles of female householder and surrogate mother—as opposed to recognized wife and birth mother.

It is worth lingering a moment over the unusual plot of *Torikaebaya monogatari*, because it takes the logic of surrogacy and tensions between surrogate and "real" or "original" identities to their logical extremes. This tale famously dramatizes gender difference as a matter of performance, thus exposing, along the way, the arbitrary, manipulatable nature of gender in the Heian context. Birth motherhood becomes a pivotal issue in this tale as the narrative concludes its female protagonist's trans-gendered interlude by confronting "her" (and the reader) with one of the most intractable features of sexual difference in both its physiological and its sociological dimensions: only females can become pregnant and give birth. On the one hand, the tale dramatizes how pregnancy and childbirth may unfold as a physiological/emotional event that originates outside socially recognized institutions of the aristocratic family, potentially breaching the boundaries of that institution. Yet *Torikaebaya* ultimately forecloses the possibilities it has thus raised via its hyper-conventional conclusion, which re-integrates and

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[29] Sarra 1990.

[30] I qualify the term "normative" with quotation marks in order to highlight the fundamental difficulty of defining norms for social arrangements like marriage in the late-Heian period. The ambiguity of these concepts holds true for both Heian society and its fictional representations of itself. As Hitomi Tonomura puts it, "marriage in twelfth-century Japan was a social process without a name." Tonomura 1994, p. 135. Despite the apparent prevalence of uxorilocal marital residence patterns for principal wives in mid-Heian aristocratic families, these practices co-existed with an emerging pattern of neolocal marriages, as well as the continued practice of "visiting" or duolocal marriages. Turning to late-Heian fiction, motherhood, and the place of the mother (both spatially and metaphorically) seem to become sites for increased contestation. Because characters frequently enter into conflicts with each other over these issues, any reference to normative configurations of the family or to marital residence patterns can only be made equivocally. The tales themselves seem to debate (from tale to tale, and even within individual tales) what the ideal configuration of the aristocratic household should be.

subordinates its maverick variety of maternal agency within the family order. The process of subordination is a dysphoric one from the perspective of the protagonist-cum-mother, beginning as it does with her forced separation from the child she conceived while she was cross-dressing as a man. Impregnated by her colleague and rival at court, she was first pestered by him into sequestering herself like any other woman about to give birth would. She found the unwanted lying-in discomfiting enough, but nowhere is this newly minted mother's unhappy relinquishment of her own agency more apparent than in her later abandonment of the child she delivered in seclusion and her return to court life as a woman.

What is at issue in the conclusion to *Torikaebaya monogatari* is not so much the re-reversal of gender roles between the tale's two formerly transgendered central characters, but actually something more specific and exacting—a process which forms a distinctly different development in the sub-narrative of the female protagonist's reversion to a feminine identity. She had begun "acting like a woman" at the time of her lying-in. She reverted to feminine dress, and submitted to the regime of living indoors behind standing curtains and screens. But in abandoning her child and the house where her lover had installed her, what she has returned to is not simply a feminine identity (in fact, she has already done that), but more specifically the role of *marriageable daughter*. Indeed, as further developments in the narrative show, her identity as a dutiful daughter must take precedence over her maternal role, so that her reproductive potential can be harnessed instead to the designs of her natal family. From her perspective, the abandonment of her first child puts her internally in conflict with her own return to conventional feminine behavior, so that she suffers emotionally because she has lost contact with her child. Aligning herself *as a daughter* within a family order headed by her re-gendered brother, she rejects the renegade family romance she had fallen into with the father of her child in favor of the legitimate and far more politically ambitious reproductive role she will now have as the consort of an emperor. She thus becomes the "daughterly" agent-by-proxy of her natal family's will to political success. As a result, her whole extended family prospers and lives happily ever after—except for her. She alone remains unhappy because her "real/original" gender identity as a woman/mother has rendered her vulnerable to an insatiable longing for the child to whom she gave birth but had to relinquish to others.

The conclusion of *Torikaebaya monogatari* underscores, at least for readers who identify with its female protagonist's perspective, how unhappy and how disempowering this mode of domestication may be for the daughterly mothers who are thus contained. Aesthetically, this move has the advantage of maintaining the sympathetic quality of the protagonist's character as a sensitive human being who suffers emotionally, and thus positively engages readerly identification and empathy in a manner familiar from *Genji* and many mid-Heian women's memoirs. At an ideological level, however, *Torikaebaya* offers a challenge, however qualified, to the *Genji*'s vision of the corporately established patriarchy of the *ie* system as a benign, as well as an aesthetically pleasing one.

Was there no alternative for fictional aristocratic women (aside from nunhood)? The tale told in *Yoru no nezame* seems to gesture toward one, though, like *Torikaebaya monogatari*, the narrative foregrounds its female protagonist's emotional suffering—both as the successful widowed head of a maternally-centered household, as well as later, when she reverts to a more daughterly role in which her wishes are subordinated to the wishes of her father and her new husband. But while aesthetic concerns remain consistent throughout the narrative—that is, the narrative is consistently at pains to foreground the sufferings produced by Nezame's situation, regardless of which social role she plays—an ideological conflict between two distinct modes of mothering plays itself out in the tale's plot. As head of her own blended family, Nezame is an unusually strong maternal figure whose mothering implies no distinctions between surrogate children and children she has birthed, thus also implying that she refuses to honor a hierarchy among the children's fathers. In fact, if Nezame can be said to exhibit a preference between her charges' fathers, it would seem that she favors the (dead) father of her stepchildren. And why shouldn't she? The logic of the narrative here is fairly clear: open marital ties with her birth children's father would reduce her status in society to that of a secondary wife. As widow she is mistress of her own extended family, though more vulnerable (she perceives) to the envy and malicious gossip of potential rivals. Status-related concerns, as opposed to romantic or sentimental ones, motivate all of Nezame's important choices in her dealings with men: she eschews open liaisons (with both the emperor and the hero) because neither coupling would provide her the secure position she once had as a cherished principal wife. What she rejects is not men or sexuality per se, but marriages that can offer her nothing that would rival the kind of status and authority she has as widow of a former regent, mother of a well-connected brood of birth and surrogate offspring, and successful mistress of a grand mansion.

As already mentioned, towards the end of the tale's extant volumes, birth motherhood is privileged over maternal surrogacy cynically by male figures as a means of domesticating Nezame's renegade version of maternal identity. Her identity as female householder will be finally subsumed by her marriage to the tale's hero. But before that happens, everything that makes her ideologically interesting as a character fills the narrative foreground. The delineation of the heroine's subjectivity as a mother who embodies the head of an extended family comprises the focus of the longer of the tale's two surviving segments. Indeed, both heroine and anti-heroine in *Yoru no nezame* perform—for a time—as mothers who act independently of the wishes of fathers, husbands, would-be husbands, sons, and brothers. To that extent, on the level of both aesthetic concerns and ideological ones, maternal figures in *Yoru no nezame* appear to challenge the move, familiar from the *Tale of Genji*, to render beautiful and appealing to the implied audience the image of birth mothers who willingly trade agency for a more mediated access to participation in the dynamics of family ambition and authority. This is not to say that maternal agency in its highest ranking embodiment—mothers of the

imperial family—is pictured in a rosy light in this tale. Nezame's foil as a maternal figure is the empress dowager. Both characters put their roles as mothers (whether birth or surrogate) before all other considerations, but the dowager's rendition of this behavior provides an object lesson in how *not* to engage the sympathy of other characters and the implied audience.

A Scheming Imperial Mother: The Empress Dowager's Maternal Plots

Soon after volume three of *Yoru no nezame* opens, the heroine is in the midst of a crisis: she is entrapped at the imperial palace, where she has come to present her stepdaughter as the emperor's new *naishi no kami* (mistress of staff; referred to in the tale as Kan no Kimi). Nezame's troubles here are twofold: the emperor's unwelcome pursuit of her, and his mother the dowager's efforts to detain her.

Considered from the dowager's perspective, an animosity toward Nezame is quite reasonable. Her husband, the retired emperor (Suzaku-in), her son the reigning emperor (Reizei), as well as her son-in-law (the hero and regent-to-be)—are all erotically interested in Nezame. It is no wonder that the dowager wants to champion her own daughter (Ichi no Miya) against Nezame, protecting the former's marriage and fashioning a liaison between Nezame and her imperial son that should work (so she imagines) to extinguish her son-in-law's passion for Nezame by defaming the latter as unfaithful.[31] Reasonable as these motives may be, there are other wrinkles to consider. Struck by her glimpse of Nezame's physical beauty, the dowager also desires a union between Nezame and her imperial son because *she herself* longs to make Nezame "her own daughter" so that she might "see her morning and night, and have her as a splendid plaything."[32] The empress dowager's scopophilic appreciation of Nezame in this passage would have reminded late-Heian readers of the evil stepmother in *Ochikubo monogatari*, who engages in a similar scene of erotic gazing at both the hero and the heroine, Ochikubo (her stepdaughter). While the object of this earlier stepmother's desire seems to be the hero—she wishes to have him as a son-in-law, but married to her birth daughter, not her stepdaughter—the episode also seems to suggest a displacement of the stepmother's homoerotic desire. Her peeping on the couple inspires her stratagem to "give" Ochikubo to her doddering uncle Tenyaku no Suke as a "wife"—a kind of proxy rape—designed to remove Ochikubo from the hero's erotic orbit. Catherine Ryu provides an extended close reading of the *Ochikubo* passage, noting how the

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[31] The emperor is her second choice as an instrument for neutralizing Nezame's erotic appeal. She had earlier tried to couple the heroine with her own husband, Suzaku-in. In this, the empress dowager demonstrates a trait she shares with her daughter-in-law Naka no Miya, the empress—a markedly unsentimental, status-conscious attitude toward men and marriage, including even her own marital interests. Margaret Childs has analyzed the fine distinctions Heian fiction and memoirs make between "jealousy" and "status anxiety," with particular reference to the female figures in *Yoru no nezame*. See Childs 2010.

[32] "*Waga musume ni shite, akekure mibaya, imijiki mote asobimono nari kashi.*" NKBZ 19, p. 279.

stepmother's performance of the *kaimami* topos feminizes the hero and masculinizes the stepmother.[33] *Yoru no nezame*'s reprise of the scene adds an interesting twist that complicates the characterization of the empress dowager. Like other female figures in this tale, the dowager's gaze is strikingly homosocial. But here, at least, it also borders on the homoerotic—and far more directly so than does the *Ochikubo* narrative. Consistent with the portrayal of her behavior in other kinds of interactions, the dowager's performance of female homosociality is negatively (or at least parodically) coded here. The negative (or parodic) quality of this image of the dowager stems from her assertion of the kind of gaze conventionally exercised by male characters in court fiction, which is to say, her look objectifies the woman she views. But perhaps the Heian reader would have registered her gaze as a matter of course rather than a matter of gender-bending. Does the dowager's exalted rank trump her gender here as regulator of her behavior, or is the reader meant to view her viewing as comically masculine (or malevolent *and* comically masculine), despite her august position as mother of the emperor?

Nor do the elaborations of plot and plotter end here. The dowager is a woman whose single-minded designs are fashioned to serve several ends simultaneously. Another resourceful woman whose power over her children she resents is Naka no Miya, her son's empress. She reasons that the alliance she dreams of making between the emperor and Nezame might also serve to loosen the hold Naka no Miya has on the emperor, and this strengthens her resolve to end by making Nezame her "*waga mono*" (her intimate; her darling)."[34] Unfortunately for her own chances of success, the dowager lacks skill as a reader of other characters' motives—a shortcoming driven by her excessive, un-self-censoring emotionality. Her passions render her crass in comparison to other powerful mothers in the tale—noticeable not only in her misreadings of other characters but also in a certain disorder of speech when she is enraged.[35] Unlike Naka no Miya, who possesses the same cool-headed perceptiveness that marks Nezame, the dowager is fooled by her imperial son's attentions to Kan no Kimi. She imagines he will eventually make Kan no Kimi his favorite and so she cozies up to the girl, smarmily telling her she would like to "bequeath her rank to her," assuming wrongly that this too might undermine Nezame's appeal (for Kan no Kimi).[36]

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[33] Ryu 2001. *Ochikubo monogatari*, pp. 154–57.

[34] "'*Kanpaku no ue wo, waga mono to nabikashi hatemu' no on-kokorodori ni. . .*" NKBZ 19, p. 287. Hochstedler's translation of *waga mono* as "ally" neutralizes the whiff of eroticism the term may connote. See Hochstedler, pp. 38–39.

[35] The angry speeches she unleashes at her son-in-law by the bedside of her allegedly possessed daughter are masterpieces of this.

[36] ". . . *ima shibashi arite, waga i o mo yuzuramu' nado notamawasete . . .*" (NKBZ 19, p. 287). On the bequeathing of rank by empress dowagers see NKBZ 19, p. 287, n. 32. Suzuki cites Sekine and Komatsu 1960, as offering examples of similar expressions to be understood not literally, but as expressions of affection, in *Eiga monogatari* (Retired Empress Dowager Jôtômon-in to her favorite granddaughter Nijô-in Shôshi) and in *Utsuhô monogatari* (Saga-in's empress dowager to her favorite daughter).

Nezame, fresh from the emperor's wordy (but failed) attempt to seduce her, tells all to her stepdaughter Kan no Kimi, now successfully presented (by Nezame herself, in place of herself) as the emperor's new *naishi no kami*. The move is characteristic of Nezame as a mother. She regularly takes her stepdaughters into her confidence. It is also an intertextual reversal of *The Tale of Genji*'s Tamakazura and her behavior with her eldest daughter (whom she also places—in place of herself—in the entourage of an emperor named Reizei). Tamakazura's mistake (which Nezame corrects) is to refrain from explaining the back-story to her daughter, with the result that the latter becomes alienated from both her mother and her younger sister and therefore increasingly vulnerable to the hostility of Reizei's other consorts. In stark contrast to Tamakazura, Nezame provides her stepdaughter a full disclosure of why she has chosen to place her in the Rear Court and explains how to understand the complexities of Reizei's attitude (toward both herself and Nezame). Nezame's tête-à-tête with her stepdaughter cements their mutual loyalty to each other. Far from resenting the emperor's preference for her stepmother over herself, Kan no Kimi appreciates the wonderfulness of Nezame as a surrogate mother. She thinks: "even if my real mother had been alive, she could not have watched over me the way Nezame does" (NKBZ 19, p. 318). This passage is followed immediately by a contrasting scene in which the disappointed but undaunted dowager similarly confides all (her "all" being all lies about an affair between Nezame and the emperor) to "a certain woman named Lady Sochi" (NKBZ 19, p. 321), who, she is sure, will blurt out the tale without any prompting to the hero. And so the dowager too, avails herself of a strategy of female bonding, but ham-handedly and with evil intent.

"The Measure of Her Greatness": Nezame As Maternal Mistress of the House

After various delays, Nezame is finally able to depart the imperial palace and return to her own house, though she must enlist the hero's help to do so. The departure narrative showcases Nezame's emotional parting from Kan no Kimi, and the joys of reunion with her other stepdaughters and young niece (who snuggles into her breasts to sleep next to her), once she is again under her own roof. Of particular interest is the late night conversation Nezame then has with her least fortunately married stepdaughter, Lady Saishô. This stepdaughter too has suffered disappointments in life, alluded to in Nezame's interior monologue—disappointments that, interestingly, resemble some of those that Nezame herself suffered in her youth. The girl's father (Nezame's late husband) had meant to present her as an imperial consort; instead, she had been abducted by Saishô no Chûjô, who mistook her for Nezame. Nezame subsequently gave the couple living quarters in her own house, hence the stepdaughter's closeness, both spatially and

psychologically, to her stepmother.[37] The episode referred to here culminates in a romantic, visually beautiful scene of the two women at dawn, stepmother and stepdaughter, and the poems exchanged between them after their sleepless night together—a night in which, it should be noted, Nezame has bluntly turned away from her door the hero himself, who, in the wake of his rescue efforts on her behalf, had come to reap the erotic benefits (NKBZ 19, p. 373). Nezame's handling of the hero is a sardonic, realistically motivated twist on the conventional behavior of rescued heroines. Exhausted by her ordeal at court, Nezame had fallen asleep with her stepdaughter and niece beside her. Awakened by her attendants (who, as female attendants conventionally do, feel sorry for the hero), she weighs her options deliberately and judges that no one could criticize her—at this late stage in their relationship—for not receiving him. She also has no wish to send her stepdaughter away. Instead, she sends the hero packing. She tells her attendant Shôshô " . . . 'I can't meet with him. Maybe tomorrow, if he has free time. . . . ' Her tone was flat and she spoke curtly" (NKBZ 19, p. 369). The scene that then follows, of Nezame at dawn on the veranda with her stepdaughter, appears to have been a favorite of medieval readers. Both *Gohyakuban utaawase*[38] and the *Fûyôwakashû*[39] single it out via the poems it generates (the former includes Nezame's poem, and the latter Lady Saishô's response).

Powerful mother figures in this tale (the empress dowager aside, for the moment) occupy at least three distinct social levels, beginning with Nezame's attendant Tai no Kimi in volume one, who acts as a surrogate mother or surrogate elder sister to Nezame, to Nezame herself as she emerges in volume three, widow to a former regent and mother or surrogate mother to a numerous brood, to Naka no Miya, the reigning empress in volume three and sister of the hero. Despite their differences in rank, all seem to be kindred spirits in their handling of the men in their lives. They are clear-headed about their own interests and calculated in their pursuit of them. They are possessed of great verbal agility—notably in their rebuffs of intrusive males (a trait especially noticeable among the attendant/wet-nurse class) or their ability to solicit confidences from them (this is Empress Naka no Miya's special talent). To a woman, none of them is especially susceptible to the seductive allure of romantic involvement with men. Non-imperial aristocratic women further empower themselves by consciously closing ranks and acting in concert with their children. As a mother, Nezame weaves an intimate web of shared secrets and sufferings between herself and her children and brothers,

[37] The identity of Lady Saishô as a second-generation repetition of her stepmother Nezame is further suggested by episodes from the lost final volumes of the tale, alluded to in *Mumyôzôshi*. Apparently, when Nezame fakes her own death and disappears temporarily from the world of the narrative, Lady Saishô, a widow herself now, is taken as a mistress by the hero as a replacement for her own stepmother. An allusion to this episode triggers some unkind remarks about the hero's loathesomeness by one of the speakers in *Mumyôzôshi*. See *Mumyôzôshi*, p. 72.

[38] *Gohyakuban utaawase* cites Nezame's poem. Higuchi 1987, p. 102.

[39] *Fûyôwakashû* cites Lady Saishô's response to Nezame. Included in Suzuki Hiromichi, p. 28.

thereby thwarting the attempts of outsiders to isolate her from her extended family members. As in the passage described above (and there are others like it), the narrative goes to great lengths to depict the aesthetic and emotional appeal of mother and (step)daughter bonds. These scenes seem to crystallize, both aesthetically and ideologically, a positive image of female-authored homosocial networks, in striking contrast to the tale's portrayal of sexual bonds between men and women. Because these scenes highlight women's pleasure in each other's company, they also contrast pointedly with male-authored configurations of women, like the hero's ultimately successful efforts to place Nezame in a polygamous extended household of his own making.

Powerful mothers in this tale occasionally work in concert unwittingly. Ironically, the dowager and Nezame both wish to prevent—for different reasons—the same thing: conclusion of an open, marital tie between Nezame and the hero. For awhile, they both succeed. The dowager continues to spread rumors about an affair between Nezame and the emperor, and then carries things a step further by blaming her daughter's possession by malign spirits on Nezame's jealous *iki-sudama* ("living spirit"). The rumor-mongering backfires on the dowager only to the extent that, instead of cooling the hero's desire, it hardens him to his mother-in-law, as well as, briefly, his wife (NKBZ 19, pp. 406–9). Nezame, for her part, will eventually be upset by the rumors themselves—not so much the rumor-monger (whose identity Nezame is fully aware of). The rumors have the unintended effect of strengthening Nezame's prior resolve to keep her relations with the hero a secret (NKBZ 19, p. 394 and p. 395). Nezame does not blame her would-be mother-in-law, though she is appalled by the latter's duplicity. Indeed, the tale blatantly idealizes Nezame as a sensitive and forbearing woman, especially in her relations with other women—most strikingly, the hero's principal wife, Ichi no Miya. I have searched but have not been able to find instances of Nezame harboring enmity toward *any* of the other female characters in the tale. She blames, instead, the hero, whom she has seen over and over again as the real source of her troubles, as well as herself, for the irresolution that causes her to call on him in moments of weakness (NKBZ 19, p. 413).

The hero's initial response to the combined crisis of Nezame's indifference to him, and the necessity to spend time at the bedside of his apparently possessed wife signals both his continued preference for Nezame and his suspicion that his wife's possession is a staged one. He takes time off from his sickbed duties to bring his daughter Ishiyama no Himegimi, Nezame's first and only birth daughter, to visit with Nezame. This is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that the hero uses their children as a way to temporarily bend Nezame to his will. The child's visit softens Nezame toward the hero, but only for the moment. Her blissful reunion with her birth daughter also stacks the cards in favor of interpreting Nezame as innocent of being the possessing spirit attacking the hero's wife. With her long-lost daughter beside her, Nezame now has even less interest in the child's father's affairs. She finds it entirely reasonable, too, that, given his wife's state, he

should not be in contact with her during this time (NKBZ 19, p. 410). Instead, she plunges into making up for lost time with her daughter, sensitively including her stepdaughters also in their joyful reunion. As usual, the absence of jealousy on Nezame's part discomfits the hero. Later, when the most tenacious of the spirits possessing his wife explicitly identifies itself with Nezame, the hero accuses it (and thus indirectly Ichi no Miya herself) of slanderously impersonating her rival (NKBZ 19, pp. 406–7). His ardor for Nezame is thus, if anything, heightened by his mother-in-law's machinations (as indeed also, apparently, by Nezame's indifference). So while the evil mother figure in this tale is never definitively "punished," she is not rewarded either. She is merely rendered irrelevant—which may be punishment enough for an empress dowager.[40]

For a brief while, the false rumors fail to penetrate Nezame's deep maternal bliss. And *bliss* it truly is: the passages describing the idyllic hours she spends playing with her daughter, companioned also by her equally affectionate married stepdaughters who live with her in the mansion over which she presides as mistress, are some of the most euphoric in the tale. As the rumors intensify, however, she realizes that her only unblemished memories are of "life with her late husband"—not because she was particularly attached to him, but because then her reputation was secure and unsullied. When the hero once more disrupts her euphoria by returning their daughter to *his* mother's care, he confirms Nezame's unfavorable comparison of him to her late husband. She then resolves to focus on "carrying out her late husband's wishes," and decides to move to the villa at Saga where her father has been living as a lay priest. She goes through the motions of consulting with her favorite brother about her decision, but it is her opinion that prevails in their discussion (NKBZ 19, p. 429). Emblematic of Nezame's peculiarly potent iteration of maternal authority is the image of her splendid entourage as she departs for Saga. It is also the climax of her trajectory as the woman in the driver's seat of the tale:

> Her brothers, the Major Counsellor and the Middle Counsellor, with their sons, and her son-in-law Saishô no Chûjô, and other relatives, were all present to accompany her. She had been granted two carriages in addition to the one in which she traveled. In Nezame's carriage rode Kohimegimi, who could never be separated from her dear aunt, along with her wet-nurses.

[40] Though she persists in her outrage at her son-in-law to the very end of the extant volumes, the empress dowager gradually fades from the center of action. Her husband the retired emperor dies, so that she and her daughter, the hero's wife, must go into mourning. She is perhaps mollified somewhat by the hero's attentiveness at the time of the funeral and during the mourning period (though this remains unclear, as this segment of volume five contains lacunae). When the hero does eventually take Nezame as a secondary wife, he maintains Ichi no Miya as principal wife, spending two nights with her for every one night he spends with Nezame—which also somewhat neutralizes his mother-in-law's protests. It is unclear whether the empress dowager has a role in the developments of the lost, final volumes of the tale, which include further efforts on Reizei's part (now a retired emperor) to win Nezame away from the hero or at least to punish her, indirectly, for her continued rejection of him.

> Nezame had hoped to keep it a private matter, without any extra flourishes. But since she always treated everyone in the most gracious manner, her family tree had grown many branches and was now widespread. She had shown each of them kindness and generosity, not a soul felt slighted, so now they all surged to follow her. The crowd of people who turned out made even a simple trip an impressive occasion—*all this was due to her remarkable standing.*[41]

Unfortunately, at Saga, Nezame's tenure as mistress of her own household starts to unravel. The catalysts are two-fold. She is, unbeknownst to herself at first, again pregnant with the hero's child. She imagines she is ill, and this makes her think of taking Buddhist vows, much to the alarm of her mid-ranking attendants, who tip the hero off to this danger to their shared interests. And secondly, the hero, finally availing himself of a homosocial strategy the women of the tale regularly use, confesses to Nezame's father the entire amorous history linking him to Nezame. The father, who had not only already given his approval to Nezame's wish to become a nun but even set the dates for the rites, abruptly becomes the hero's eloquent ally. The speech he delivers to his future son-in-law is extraordinary, given his ineffectuality so far as a figure of patriarchal authority is concerned. I will summarize the main points of their dialogue. The hero reveals to Nezame's father the existence of Nezame's only biological daughter, Ishiyama no Himegimi, whom he has again brought along with him as a bargaining chip. After some general remarks about the inadequacy and untrustworthiness of wet-nurses as surrogate mothers for daughters as they grow beyond childhood, the hero argues that Nezame should not be allowed to take Buddhist vows because *there is no worse fate for a woman than that of being a motherless daughter.*[42] In reply, Nezame's father sympathizes with the hero and lends his own authority to the latter's wish to take Nezame openly as a wife, blaming his daughter's negligence as a mother on himself as an inept father to Nezame, who had, after all, originally suffered from losing her own birth mother in girlhood.

This collusion of fathers is unprecedented in the world of *Yoru no nezame.* Ostensibly what they champion is the importance of birth mothers. What their combined agendas actually valorize, however, is the primacy of the woman's role (birth mother or not) *as a daughter.* In this respect, the motivations of these fictional men mimic those of their real-life counterparts—the family heads, particularly those of the regental lineages, to whom obedient, fecund daughters were the key to their fathers' own political success. Both father and hero now set about interpreting Nezame's characteristically resolute behavior as childlike, trivializing

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[41] Emphasis mine. I am quoting Hochstedler's translation of the passage with some modifications, the most notable being my more literal rendering of the final phrase, which reads in Japanese: *hito no on-mi naru.* I have used Hochstedler's translation of this final phrase ("This was the measure of her greatness") in the title of this subsection of my essay because I think it admirably captures the spirit of this key passage. See Hochstedler, p. 142, and NKBZ 19, p. 435.

[42] Emphasis mine. NKBZ 19, pp. 480–81.

this source of her psychological power as evidence of her essential girlishness. The end of her tenure as maternal head of household pivots on the father(s)' reassertion of Nezame's past identity as motherless daughter, and their ignoring of her current successes as the surrogate mother of her niece and her late husband's daughters. The flaw in their logic is glaringly obvious to the reader and to Nezame herself: none of Nezame's numerous children (real or surrogate) has so far suffered because of her absence as mother (Ishiyama no Himegimi, her only birth daughter, has been brought up in the current regent's household). The hero's primary aim has always been to have Nezame as wife. Nezame's father is the perfect ally for him in this because the unforeseen existence of a granddaughter by Nezame reawakens his old dreams of rearing a girl who might fulfill the wish he used to have for Nezame: that she become an imperial consort.

Nezame's pregnancy, that intractable aspect of birth motherhood—Hirsch's "radical arena of difference"—also serves to disempower her, shutting off for now the path of nunhood. The hero wants to take Nezame and her children back to the capital, to their daughter's former quarters at his parents' house. He secretly sets about having the place outfitted for her, hoping it will outdo her memories of her late husband's house (NKBZ 19, p. 513). In the meantime, he contents himself with visits to Saga. Nezame prefers this duolocal arrangement, but fears it will not continue. Indeed, the narrative will ultimately deny the heroine the fulfillment of her wishes, fulfilling instead those of both the hero and the heroine's father. Nezame returns to the capital for the birth of her child, and becomes in the process what she had so hoped to avoid becoming—the hero's openly acknowledged secondary wife. Nezame now lives with her daughter Ishiyama no Himegimi in the hero's parents' house, an odd arrangement by any standards, so far as I have been able to discover. As a form of virilocal marriage in an age when uxorilocal marriages were traditionally more appropriate to high-ranking and well-backed wives, the arrangement seems to signify, however ambiguously, Nezame's secondary status as a wife. What is clearly implied, however, is how sharply curtailed Nezame's authority and autonomy are under this arrangement.[43]

Concluding Remarks on an Unconcluded Tale

There are a few things we might tease out of the tale's resolution of its long subplot about Nezame's career as mistress of her own household and her own destiny. One is: a sentimentalized insistence, in the court monogatari tradition, on the primacy of the birth mother in the rearing of daughters, and on the tragic consequences that may ensue in her absence, regardless of the ubiquity of maternal surrogates.

[43] The hero also has a separate residence, which he occupies with his principal wife Ichi no Miya, a neolocal arrangement not unusual for nobility in late-Heian, and perhaps one from which the wife might more easily withdraw (regardless of whose family provided the house). Note that the empress dowager proposes to move Ichi no Miya back to her father's house, to relieve her of the continued humiliation of marriage to the hero (NKBZ 19, pp. 329–30).

This is the convention, presented by the tale's hero to Nezame's father as though it were a truth universally acknowledged, which authorizes Nezame's return to a more normative version of the aristocratic household. Yet *Yoru no nezame* undercuts and complicates this convention by inscribing *both* surrogate and birth motherhood as potential sources of feminine pleasure and authority. Its ideological "take" on aristocratic motherhood might be summed up in this way: Maternal agency and pleasure may coexist appealingly in a particular maternal figure only so long as that figure operates outside the normative aristocratic household or *ie*. Once brought back under paternal sway and persuaded to act as a daughter or a wife (or both) instead of as a mother and/or widow first, the mother must relinquish both authority and joy or else risk losing her sympathetic appeal for readers. By the same logic, strikingly powerful mother figures who exercise their agency within normative configurations of the aristocratic *ie* or the Rear Court lack sympathetic appeal and instead are coded by the text in various ways as malicious or unattractive, as is the figure of the empress dowager. *Yoru no nezame* shares with at least one other extant late-Heian tale, *Torikaebaya monogatari*, a hyper-conventional plot resolution in which the *ie* system, with father and son-in-law restored to their proper places, prospers via its domestication of the daughter's maternal potential. And like *Torikaebaya, Yoru no nezame* spells out how and why this domestication is so dysphoric from the perspective of the daughterly mothers it contains.

I hope this essay has suggested some of the distances—both ideological and characterological—that separate late-Heian fictional households from the *Genji*'s most elaborately idealized fictional house of beautifully contained mothers and daughters, birth and surrogate, built on premises once held by an undead lady householder who willingly ceded her ground to Genji. I leave to a later venue the question of why elite motherhood itself—in its various ranks and forms—seems to play so contested a role in the fictions of the later Heian court.

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