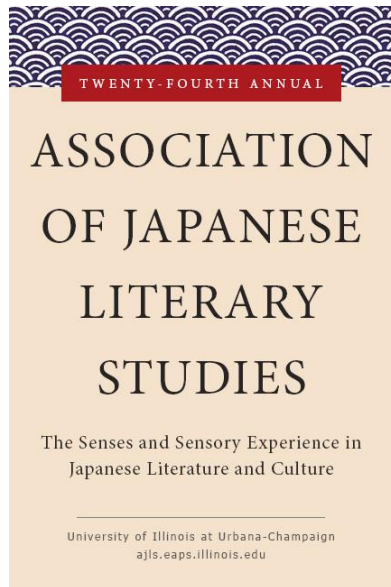


“Emperor on Exhibition: Representation of Kingship in *Yoru no Nezame* and *The Nezame Scrolls*”

Joannah Peterson 

Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies 17 (2016): 31–43.



PAJLS 17:
The Senses and Sensory Experience in Japanese Literature and Culture.

Ed. Robert Tierney and Elizabeth Oyler

EMPEROR ON EXHIBITION: REPRESENTATION OF KINGSHIP
IN *YORU NO NEZAME* AND *THE NEZAME SCROLLS*

Joannah Peterson
Smith College

How was his likeness captured?
He, who left us
like the light of the moon
regrettably hidden
high above the clouds.¹

Composed on a portrait of Emperor Go-Ichijō that was commissioned by his daughter in 1088, fifty years after his death, this poem has received scholarly attention as documentation of the first known portrait of an emperor in Japan. It explicitly asks how one can capture the likeness of one whose light had gone out so long before. It also raises questions that lie at the core of this paper. How is the august figure of an emperor, one who exists “high above the clouds” (雲居 *kumoi*), represented in a contemporary work of court fiction, *Yoru no Nezame* (夜の寝覚 *Sleepless at Night*)? How in turn, is the verbal representation of this fictional emperor pictorialized in the late twelfth century *Nezame monogatari emaki* (寝覚物語絵巻 *The Nezame Scrolls*)?

Prior to the rise of the genre of painting known as *nise'e* (似絵 likeness pictures) in the twelfth century, portraits of emperors and court nobles were nearly non-existent. The exceptions were portraits of Buddhist monks and paintings commemorating the dead. Unlike China, where portraits of emperors had been common since at least the Tang dynasty (618-907), in Japan there were scruples about capturing the emperor’s likeness explicitly.² Many theories have been put forth

¹ Yamanaka Yutaka et al., eds., *Eiga monogatari*, Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 33 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1998), 524. Hereafter SNKBZ. Translations by the author unless noted.

² Murashige Yasushi, “Tennō to kuge no shōzō,” special edition, *Nihon no bijutsu* 387 (August 1998): 20. An example of Chinese portraiture of emperors is 歷代帝王圖卷 (*Lidai diwang tu juan*, “The Thirteen Emperors”), attributed to Yan Liben (ca. 600-673). In Japan, the only extant painting of a court noble before the *insei* period (院政 1086-1185) is the portrait of Shōtoku Taishi (572-620), who became an object of worship for his role as the first great patron of Buddhism in Japan.

to explain this avoidance of overt visual representation of the high-ranked.³ A similar tendency has been observed in verbal representations of imperial figures in *monogatari* (物語 court fiction). Takahashi Tōru notes a clear distinction in the *Tale of Genji* (ca. 1010) between high ranked characters, who are described in abstract terms, and lower ranked and/or “peripheral” characters, who are described in a more concrete manner.⁴ The treatment of emperors and empresses in the *Genji* is even more guarded. Not only are their physical descriptions limited to a small number of conventionalized terms (e.g. 生めかし *namamekashi*, “a youthful charm,” 清ら *kiyora* “a pure beauty”), but the narrator also maintains distance from their thoughts as though her knowledge of them is limited.⁵ This epistemological distance sets characters of exalted status apart from characters of lesser rank in the *Tale of Genji*.

The narrator of *Yoru no Nezame* acknowledges no such epistemological distance, but relentlessly probes its fictionalized emperor’s psyche. Peeling back the layers of feigned ignorance, the narrator paints an unflattering portrait of the emperor. His obsessive love for the heroine, Nezame, a woman who does not reciprocate his passion, is portrayed as not merely misguided, but absurd. In this paper, I shed light on this departure from convention through a comparative analysis of the emperor in *Yoru no Nezame* with two figures in the *Tale of Genji*: Emperor Reizei and Kaoru. Though the *Nezame* Emperor shares many similarities with Emperor Reizei of the *Tale of Genji*, in terms of narrative exposure he is very much the textual descendent of a character of lesser rank, Kaoru, *Genji*’s putative son and main protagonist of the last third of the *Tale*. Importantly, both Kaoru and the *Nezame* Emperor are cast as victims of irony: their worst fear, that others will see them as foolish, is actualized by the narrator, who intrudes into their thoughts and lays their absurdities bare. I argue further that Image IV of *The Nezame Scrolls* acts

³ Pointing to the use of portraits for *chinkon* (鎮魂 repose of souls), Akamatsu Toshihide argues that portraits were avoided for fear that they could be used for sorcery. Akamatsu Toshihide, “Kamakura bunka, nise’e,” in *Nihon rekishi: chūsei* 1, vol. 5 of *Iwanami kōza Nihon rekishi*, ed. Ienaga Saburō et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1962), 316-327. Other arguments revolve around comments found in *Tsuki mōde wakashū* (月詣和歌集 “Collection of Poems Composed at Monthly Rituals”), compiled by Kamo no Shigeyasu (1119-1191) and the diary of Kujō Kanezane (1149-1207), *Gyokuyō* (玉葉). Specifically, in *Tsuki mōde wakashū*, one commentary on a screen poem states: “High-ranked figures are not appropriate (for painting), it is best to show reserve and not paint them.” See Yamamoto Yōko, *Emaki ni okeru kami to tennō no hyōgen* (Tokyo: Chūei kōron bijutsu shuppan, 2006), 142. The diarist Kanezane seems to have shared this opinion. Upon seeing a painting of other court nobles in the style of *nise’e* on a sliding door in Go-Shirakawa’s Saishōkō’in, Kanezane comments that it is his greatest joy that he was *not* pictured. For a discussion of arguments surrounding these two textual sources see Yamamoto, *Emaki ni okeru kami to tennō no hyōgen*, 141-143.

⁴ Takahashi Tōru, *Genji monogatari no shigaku: kana monogatari no seisei to shinteki enkinhō* (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku shuppansha, 2007), 573-574.

⁵ One example is the Fujitsubo Consort, later empress to Emperor Kiritsubo, whose illicit affair with the emperor’s son, Genji, is told primarily through Genji’s point of view. Later, when Genji himself is cuckolded by Kashiwagi, he wonders whether his father had known about his own indiscretion. The reader, along with Genji, is left to assume that he perhaps did, but the emperor’s thoughts on the matter are passed over as if in deference to his exalted position.

as a visual analogue to the verbal representation of the emperor as a victim of irony in *Yoru no Nezame*.

The departure from the idealized image of the emperor in *Yoru no Nezame* comes into high relief through comparative analysis of the *Nezame* Emperor's fictional predecessor, Emperor Reizei from the *Tale of Genji*. Beyond sharing the same sobriquet (Reizei), these two fictional emperors also share in the disappointment of being rejected by "the one that got away"—that is, Tamakazura and *Nezame*, respectively. Scholars have argued that *Nezame*'s close encounter with the emperor at court in *Yoru no Nezame* is modeled on the *Genji* episode in "Makibashira," (真木柱 "The Handsome Pillar") where Emperor Reizei visits Tamakazura during her brief (and never repeated) stint at court—arguably one of the most poeticized rejection scenes in Heian court fiction.⁶ The *Genji* scene is parodied in *Yoru no Nezame*, which appropriates it in order to cast the *Nezame* Emperor in an ironic light.

We see this parody in the way that both emperors grapple with their frustrated desire for the rejecting woman through self-identification with historical-cum-literary figures. For the *Genji*'s Emperor Reizei, his situation recalls the figure of Taira no Sadafun, also known as Heichū, the tenth-century courtier mythologized in tales and poetry collections as a sensitive poet, oft-spurned lover, and ridiculous clown.⁷ According to the fourteenth-century *Genji* commentary *Kakaishō* (河海抄 *Rivers and Seas Commentary*), his conversation with Tamakazura Emperor Reizei alludes to the incident where a woman Heichū had been secretly seeing is stolen away by Fujiwara no Tokihira and made his wife. Unable even to send her a letter, Heichū summons the woman's son and sends her a poem written on the boy's arm.⁸

Despite the difference in rank between Emperor Reizei and Heichū, a courtier of middling rank, the emperor's humiliating loss of Tamakazura to another man makes his identification with Heichū an apt one. Tamakazura and the implied reader can only admire Reizei's subtle gesture of self-deprecation. In contrast, the *Nezame* Emperor identifies with Emperor Xuanzong of Bo Juyi's "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow." Bo Juyi's poem on the love affair between the historical Tang Emperor and his favorite consort, Yang Guifei, became a staple in the Heian literary imagination as a story of mutual love that ended tragically. However, for the *Nezame* Emperor,

⁶ See Fujioka Sakutarō, *Kokubungaku zenshi Heianki hen* (Tokyo: Kaiseikan, 1903), Suzuki Hiromichi, *Nezame monogatari no kisoteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shoten, 1965), and Nihei Michiaki, "Nadoshitsu okogamashisa zo: *Yoru no Nezame* no mikado to sono yukue," in *Yoru no Nezame oyobi Nakamurabon Nezame*, vol. 18 of *Kōza Heian bungaku ronkyū*, ed. Heian bungaku ronkyūkai (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 2004).

⁷ Heichū's escapades are found in *Heichū monogatari* (平中物語 *Tales of Heichū*, tenth century) in which he is the main protagonist, *Yamato monogatari* (大和物語 *Tales of Yamato*, tenth century), and *Konjaku monogatari shū* (今昔物語集 *Tales of Times Now Past*, mid-twelfth century) in which he features in several stories, as well as *Gosen wakashū* (後撰和歌集 *Later Collection of Japanese Poems*, 951). Reference to Heichū is also found elsewhere in the *Tale of Genji*, in "Suetsumuhana" (末摘花 "The Safflower").

⁸ This incident is found in *Gosen wakashū* (後撰和歌集 *Later Collection of Japanese Poems*) 11:3. See Tamagami Takuya, *Genji monogatari hyōshaku*, vol. 6 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1966), 275-276.

there is no love to be lost. The parallel he envisions between the couple in “The Song of Everlasting Sorrow” and his relationship with Nezame is based on one-sided obsession rather than mutual passion. Furthermore, it does nothing to elicit Nezame’s sympathy, as the text makes clear: “Horror is too weak a word to express her feelings.”⁹ In his histrionic misidentification with Emperor Xuanzong, the *Nezame* Emperor unwittingly parodies Emperor Reizei’s deliberate self-parody. The contrast between the two highlights what the *Nezame* narrator is quick to underscore: “The emperor had lost all touch with reality.”¹⁰

Importantly, Emperor Reizei, like other emperors in the *Tale of Genji*, is treated to the narrator’s respect. His bitter resentment is contained within a narrative structure that employs distancing conventions for characters of the highest ranks.¹¹ The reader encounters Reizei’s resentment later in “Takekawa” (竹河 “Bamboo River”), but it is seen through the perspective of other characters. A young Kaoru impressed by Tamakazura’s enduring youthfulness reflects, “That is why His Highness is still angry about her. He could make trouble over her at any time.”¹² Reizei’s lingering regret may smolder behind the scenes, but it never takes center stage. The *Nezame* Emperor’s interiority, on the other hand, is freely probed by the narrator. As a result, the reader gets an overdose of his bitter resentment. The emperor’s self-pity over Nezame’s rejection continues unchecked throughout the extant chapters. As we will see in *The Nezame Scrolls*, the emperor’s interiority and all its inanities are on full display in the missing final chapter(s) as well.

It has been argued that the *Nezame* Emperor emerges as the textual descendent of Kaoru, the protagonist of the last third of the *Tale of Genji*, due to the fact that the two share the same signature trait: foolishness (痴がましさ *okogamashisa*).¹³ With 45 instances of this term in *Tale of Genji*—roughly a third of which refer to Kaoru—there is plenty of “foolish” behavior in the tale. However, it is never once used to describe an emperor.¹⁴ Conversely, in *Yoru no Nezame*, it is the emperor who accounts for nine of the sixteen examples. Scholars also point to examples of near quoting from the *Genji* text, as lines from Kaoru’s interior monologue in “Agemaki”

⁹ Suzuki Kazuo, ed., *Yoru no Nezame*, SNKBZ 28 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1996), 270; Carol Hochstedler, trans., *The Tale of Nezame: Part Three of Yowa no Nezame Monogatari*, Cornell University East Asia Papers 22 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University China-Japan Program), 43.

¹⁰ SNKBZ 28, 282.

¹¹ It is true that compared to Emperor Kiritsubo, whose interiority is rarely plumbed, the narrative periodically divulges Emperor Reizei’s thoughts in the form of *shinnaigo* (心内語 interior monologue). However, this narrative intrusion is not sustained. Rather, it appears primarily in “Usugumo” (薄雲 “Wisps of Clouds”) when, having just learned that Genji is his real father, Emperor Reizei worries about how to honor his true lineage while keeping such a catastrophic secret under wraps.

¹² Abe Akio et al., eds., *Genji monogatari*, SNKBZ 24 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1994), 108; Royall Tyler, trans., *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Viking Press, 2001), 823.

¹³ Takahashi Masae, “Okogamashi no keifu: *Yoru no Nezame* no mikado shiron,” *Kokugo kokubun kenkyū* 103 (May 1996): 25.

¹⁴ By my count, the term is used the most by or in regard to Kaoru (14), followed by Genji (6), Yūgiri (5), Kashiwagi (2), Niou (2) and Hachi no Miya (2). The remaining instances are used only once to characterize others.

(総角 “Trefoil Knots”) appear in the *Nezame* Emperor’s thoughts.¹⁵ However, scholars have not considered the intricate linkage between instances of near-quoting involving interior monologue, and the characterization of the *Nezame* Emperor as “foolish,” a term not used for emperors in the *Tale of Genji*. In terms of narrative exposure and the foolishness that this treatment reveals, the *Nezame* Emperor is less the textual descendent of Emperor Reizei than he is a descendant of Kaoru, a character of lesser rank. Both Kaoru and the *Nezame* Emperor are subjected to the criticism of an unsympathetic narrator, and their interiority is consistently revealed to the extent that, as heroes, they suffer from over-exposure.

This facet of Kaoru’s characterization provides the key to understanding the use of a “Kaoru-type” in the construction of the emperor in *Yoru no Nezame*. Takahashi Masae asserts that, despite many shared characteristics, the *Nezame* Emperor differs from Kaoru in that the emperor does not elicit the reader’s sympathy.¹⁶ It is clear that the *Nezame* Emperor is not sympathetically drawn, but I argue that this feature is supported by the reference to Kaoru’s characterization as a fool. Furthermore, counter to Nihei Michiaki’s assertion that *Yoru no Nezame* draws on the character of Kaoru in order to cast the *Nezame* Emperor as a dark figure, I argue that the image of Kaoru is used for purposes of entertainment: the combined attributes of narrative exposure and abundant foolishness cast both Kaoru and the *Nezame* Emperor as victims of irony.¹⁷

Kaoru has been aptly described as “layered alteration of tact and petulance, generosity and self-pitying anger,”¹⁸ and it is this multi-faceted quality that has led to multiple interpretations of Kaoru’s character throughout the centuries, as well as multiple images from which later characters could be constructed. I would argue that the image of Kaoru that forms the basis for the emperor’s characterization in *Yoru no Nezame* is the foolish ineffectual lover, a parody of the image of the idealized hero. While lacking awareness of how foolish they appear, both Kaoru and the *Nezame* Emperor are also preoccupied with appearing foolish to others. For instance, after being rejected by Nezame, the emperor confides to his mother, the Empress Dowager: “How foolish I am. Wagging tongues will charge me of frivolity, so you mustn’t let word of this spread among the ladies-in-waiting.”¹⁹ Likewise, after being rejected by Ōigimi for the second time, Kaoru confides in the lady-in-waiting, Ben: “What a fool I am. You mustn’t let this leak out to others.”²⁰ The ultimate irony of Kaoru’s character, and the *Nezame* Emperor’s as well, is the fact that their worst

¹⁵ Specifically, like Kaoru in his awkward pursuit of Ōigimi, the *Nezame* Emperor: first, reflects back on his posture of lassitude in his early pursuit of Nezame and second, defers action when presented with the opportunity to have her, thinking a future opportunity will present itself. See Nihei, “Nadoshitsu okogamashisa zo,” 217-219 and Takahashi Masae, “*Yoru no Nezame* ni okeru chin’nyū bamen no hōhō: teizō no henyō o megutte,” *Kokugo kokubun kenkyū* 104 (October 1996): 34.

¹⁶ Takahashi, “*Yoru no Nezame* ni okeru mikado chin’nyū bamen,” 36-37.

¹⁷ Nihei, “Nadoshitsu okogamashisa zo,” 219-222.

¹⁸ Royall Tyler, *The Disaster of The Third Princess: Essays on The Tale of Genji* (ANU E Press, 2009), 172.

¹⁹ SNKBZ 28, 296.

²⁰ SNKBZ 24, 256.

fear, that others will see them as foolish (痴がまし *okogamashi*), is actualized by the narrator, who intrudes into their thoughts and exposes their absurdities.

There is no shortage of heartache in court fiction to draw the reader's sympathy, but the characterizations of Kaoru and the *Nezame* Emperor produce another type of enjoyment. As D.C. Muecke explains:

The ironic observer's awareness of himself as observer tends to enhance feelings of freedom and induce a mood of satisfaction...His awareness of the victim's unawareness leads him to see the victim as bound or trapped where he feels free; committed where he feels disengaged; swayed by emotions, harassed, or miserable, where he is dispassionate, serene, or even moved to laughter...²¹

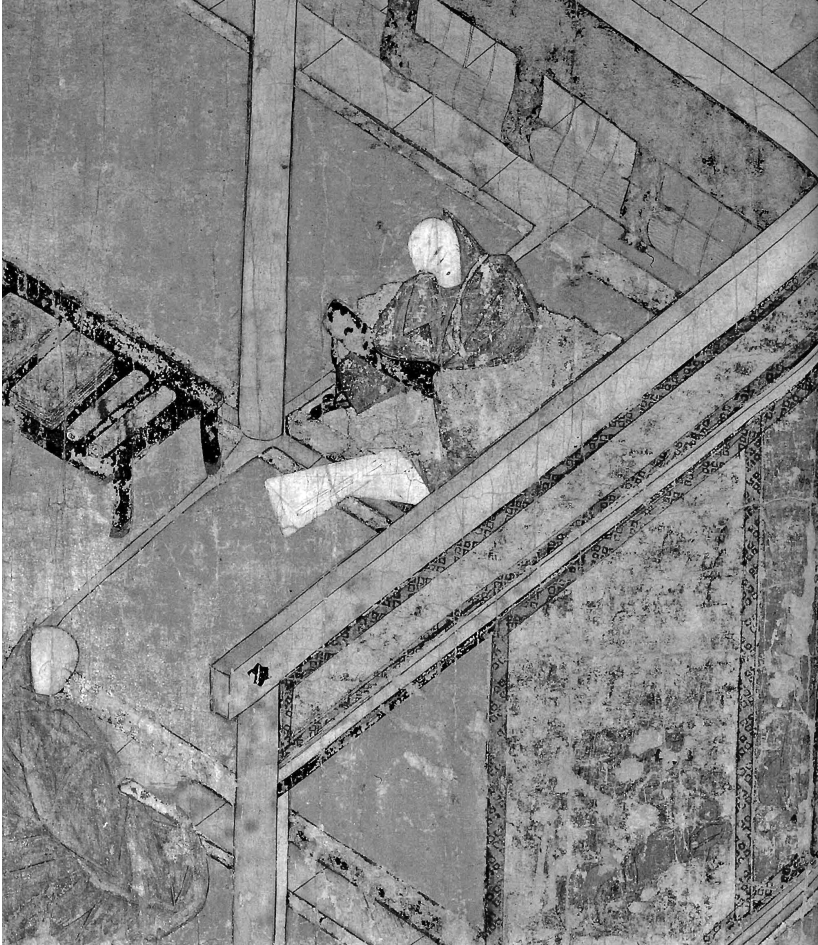
It is possible that the image of Kaoru as “a victim of irony” was so enjoyable to the implied reader that it was recycled to similar effect in later tales, notably in the construction of the *Nezame* Emperor.

The late twelfth-century scroll illustrating *Yoru no Nezame*, *The Nezame Scrolls*, presents a striking example of how ironic characterization of the emperor finds visual expression. Image IV of *The Nezame Scrolls* (fig. 1) and its accompanying textual description offer a glimpse of the *Nezame* Emperor in a somewhat changed guise: in chapters now missing from *Yoru no Nezame*, he abdicates the throne and enters the Buddhist path as a monk. In the missing scene illustrated in Image IV, *Nezame's* cousin, the Abbot, visits the retired emperor in order to deliver the unthinkable, a letter from *Nezame*—unthinkable because although presumed dead, *Nezame* had in fact faked her own death and gone into hiding in order to escape the retired emperor's unwanted affection. It is for the sake of her son Masako, who had incurred imperial disfavor, that *Nezame* reveals her existence in a letter pleading for his pardon. The painting and accompany text capture in detail the retired emperor's emotional collapse, as he forsakes the path of enlightenment and reverts back to one of his most persistent self-delusions—his misidentification with Emperor Xuanzong of “The Song of Everlasting Sorrow.”

The painting of the retired emperor in his grief stands out from all the other paintings of the scroll in two key respects: the visibility of the main characters and the manner in which their emotions are conveyed. In stark contrast to the other images in the scroll, where central characters are seen from behind or partially hidden behind screens and doors, in this image, the emperor's face is fully visible. Secondly, in the scroll's other paintings, the characters' emotional states are expressed indirectly through psychologically symbolic landscape scenes that occupy half of the long horizontal picture frame.²² Conversely, the width of Image IV is

²¹ D.C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, vol. 13 of *The Critical Idiom* (New York: Methuen and Company, 1970), 48.

²² For a discussion of psychologically symbolic landscapes in *The Nezame Scrolls* see my dissertation, “Re-envisioning the Workings of Text and Image: *Yoru no Nezame* and Late Heian Literature and Art” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2016).



©Yamato Bunkakan. Reproduction without permission prohibited.

Figure 1: *The Nezame Scrolls* (寢覚物語絵巻 *Nezame monogatari emaki*),
Image IV, late twelfth century.

Collection of Yamato Bunkakan 大和文華館. Nara, Japan.

considerably shorter. No garden scene is used as a proxy to convey the emperor's emotion, as the artists opted for a strikingly direct form of representation.²³

²³ At a little less than half of the length of Image I, Image IV is considerably smaller than the other paintings. Scholars believe that Image I, the longest of the paintings (52.9 cm), is nearly if not entirely intact and that Images II and III were originally the same size. This line of reasoning has led scholars to assume that Image IV (23.8 cm) has been cropped substantially. Nonetheless, Sawada argues that Image IV could not accommodate an outdoor scene based on the fact that the figures occupy an inner room of the residence. Sawada Kazuto, "Nezame monogatari emaki ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu" in *Nezame monogatari kekkanshu shiryō shūsei*, ed. Tanaka Noboru (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 2002), 219.

In the Heian period, there emerged an aesthetic of class differentiation whereby high rank was equated with great beauty and became linked to extremely conventionalized forms of representation. In court fiction, narrators use abstract and conventionalized terms to describe high-ranked characters; in picture scrolls, the use of *hikime kagibana* (引目鉤鼻), a method of representing the facial features of aristocrats by reducing them to “a line for an eye, a hook for a nose,” achieves analogous effects.²⁴ This representation of high rank/beauty through anonymity parallels techniques whereby the emperor is partially hidden from view. The oldest extant example of a Japanese emperor hidden by blinds is seen in the Hōryūji wall painting (1069) that illustrates the legend of Shōtoku Taishi. By the second half of the twelfth century, the technique is seen in *Nenjū gyōji emaki* (年中行事繪卷 *Scroll of Annual Observances*, Edo copy of the 60 scroll set from 1157~1179), which showcases a significant expansion of techniques.²⁵ Techniques for hiding the emperor include showing him from behind, obscuring the upper half of his body, or hiding him behind a pillar. Many of the techniques utilized by the artists of *The Nezame Scrolls* to depict high-ranking characters draw from these methods (fig. 2). Image IV is a glaring exception: although the retired emperor outranks all of the other main characters, he alone is shown in full view.

The inverse relationship between visibility and rank observed in the other paintings is subverted in Image IV.²⁶ The figures are all arranged well within the picture frame, with the retired emperor positioned at its center. The blinds are fully raised, leaving no place to hide. Though lower-ranked than the retired emperor, the Abbot (lower left corner) is positioned with his back to the viewer, allowing only a small portion of his face to be seen. Conversely, the retired emperor faces the viewer

²⁴ Murashige, “Tennō to kuge no shōzō,” 22-25. In contrast to the undifferentiated facial expressions of aristocrats, low-ranking figures show a higher degree of individualization. This distinction is particularly clear in *Shigisan engi emaki* (信貴山縁起繪卷 *The Miraculous Origins of Mt. Shigi*, ca. 1175) and *Obusama saburō ekotoba* (男衾三郎繪詞 *The Story of Obusama Saburō*, thirteenth century), which employ both forms of pictorial representation.

²⁵ Yamamoto, *Emaki ni okeru kami to tennō no hyōgen*, 159-161.

²⁶ Images I, II, and III of *The Nezame Scrolls* employ a visually encoded ranking system such that characters of the lowest rank are the most visible, those of higher rank/status are less visible, and those of the highest rank/status are the least visible.



©Yamato Bunkakan. Reproduction without permission prohibited.

Figure 2: Example of hidden figures in *The Nezame Scrolls*

The *Nezame Scrolls* (寢覚物語絵巻 *Nezame monogatari emaki*), Image III, late twelfth century. Collection of Yamato Bunkakan 大和文華館, Nara, Japan.

note: Lady-in-waiting seen from behind (upper left);

Nezame's son, indicated by a sleeve, is drawn behind the open door (far left)

at a 45° angle, a position that, in the *monogatari-e* (物語絵 illustrated tales) repertoire of poses, allows for the highest degree of visibility.²⁷

By putting the retired emperor's tears on display Image IV employs a more direct method of representation in the sense that it does not communicate the emperor's thoughts through the poetics of landscape imagery (which imparts human feelings indirectly through nature as signified by literary convention). However, it is in conversation with other literary images, specifically the image of a monk's grief in "Kashiwagi I" (柏木 "The Oak Tree") of the earlier picture scroll, *The Genji Scrolls* (mid-twelfth century, fig. 3). Like Image IV of *The Nezame Scrolls*, "Kashiwagi I," it features the struggle of a retired emperor who has become a monk, but is pulled from his devotions by worldly attachment. Clear visual and textual similarities link the two paintings. A deeper examination of a shared pictorial formula in Image IV and its predecessor "Kashiwagi I" reveals discrepancy and dissonance, factors that guide the possible significations produced by the use of a common template in *The Nezame Scrolls*.

²⁷ Figures in *monogatari-e* are never shown facing the viewer head-on. Of the positions in the limited repertoire of poses—that is, back to viewer, back to the viewer at a 135° angle, in profile, and facing the viewer at a 45° angle—the latter allows for the most exposure.



©Tokugawa Bijutsukan. Reproduction without permission prohibited.

Figure 3. *The Genji Scrolls* (源氏物語絵巻 *Genji monogatari emaki*),
 “Kashiwagi I” (柏木 “The Oak Tree”), mid-twelfth century.
 Collection of Tokugawa Bijutsukan 徳川美術館. Nagoya, Japan.

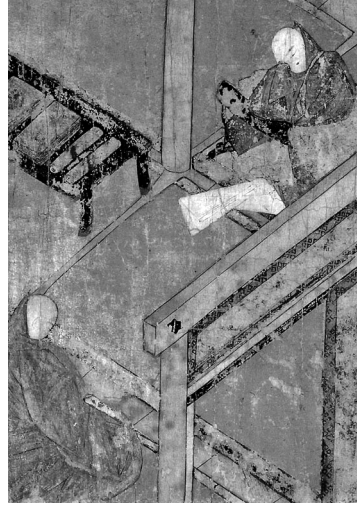
“Kashiwagi I” illustrates the climatic scene in which Retired Emperor Suzaku leaves his mountain temple to rush to the bedside of his daughter, the Third Princess. Gravely ill after the birth of her son, the Third Princess begs her father to make her a nun. Secrets loom as the Third Princess and her husband, Genji, must hide the fact that the child is the result of an illicit affair, while Suzaku, unaware of his daughter’s indiscretion, secretly blames Genji for his daughter’s unhappiness. The central figure in the painting, Retired Emperor Suzaku, bears a striking similarity to the retired emperor in Image IV of *The Nezame Scrolls*: both are drawn large in the center of the painting, with a sleeve raised to indicate falling tears.²⁸ Additionally, both retired emperors engage in conversation with figures to their lower left, who sit with their backs to the viewer.²⁹ As a testament to the importance of this pictorial template in Image IV, the artists of *The Nezame Scrolls* overturned the inverse relationship between visibility and rank observed in the other paintings. This was necessary in order to conserve this highly recognizable configuration of figures in “Kashiwagi I” (fig. 4).

²⁸ Unlike *The Nezame Scrolls*, in which hidden figures are a defining feature, the majority of the main characters in *The Genji Scrolls* are drawn large and in full view regardless of rank. This treatment includes a sitting emperor (seen in “Yadorigi I” 宿木 “The Ivy”) and retired emperors in the aforementioned “Kashiwagi I,” as well as in “Suzumushi II” (鈴虫 “The Bell Cricket”).

²⁹ Both of these figures—Genji in “Kashiwagi I” and the Abbot in Image IV—find themselves in a compromising position: they bear uncomfortable secrets and are at risk of provoking the ire of a retired emperor. The Abbot’s discomfort in revealing Nezame’s secret is documented in the textual inscription for Image IV: “Though the Abbot sensed that [the people serving the retired emperor] were far beyond earshot, he still glanced around the room in order to ensure that they were gone. It was with hesitation and uneasiness that he presented his Highness with [Nezame’s] letter.” Tanaka Noboru, ed., *Nezame monogatari kekkanbu shiryō shūsei* (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 2002), 198.



a. *The Genji Scrolls* (源氏物語絵巻 *Genji monogatari emaki*), “Kashiwagi I” (柏木 “The Oak Tree”), detail, mid-twelfth century. Collection of Tokugawa Bijutsukan 徳川美術館. Nagoya, Japan.



b. *The Nezame Scrolls* (寝覚物語絵巻 *Nezame monogatari emaki*), Image IV, late twelfth century. Collection of Yamato Bunkakan 大和文華館. Nara, Japan.

Figure 4: A monk’s grief, the use of a common template in *The Nezame Scrolls*

There is much cause for grief in the scene illustrated in “Kashiwagi I.” Genji loses a wife (the Third Princess) as she turns her back on secular life, but the source of Suzaku’s pain is “darkness of the heart” (心の闇 *kokoro no yami*)—that is, the most difficult attachment to sever—a parent’s love for a child. In leaving his mountain temple to see to his daughter, Suzaku succumbs to darkness of the heart. As he explains in the textual inscription: “I understand that it was wrong to succumb to worldly affections...but the hardest delusion of all to renounce is the darkness in a father’s heart.”³⁰ Not surprisingly, “darkness of the heart” makes an appearance in the textual inscription of Image IV as well: “I sought the bright road of enlightenment/Only to be tied to this world/By love for a child,/A darkness of the heart/That cannot be dispelled.”³¹ However, these are not the words of the figure whose image draws to mind Retired Emperor Suzaku; rather, they are Nezame’s and appear in her letter to save her son. The retired emperor’s grief is ironized by the overlay of “Kashiwagi I:” for the retired emperor, the hardest delusion to renounce is not love for a child, but rather his self-serving fantasy of embodying Emperor Xuanzong and having Nezame as his Yang Guifei.

³⁰ Abe Akio et al., eds., *Genji monogatari*, SNKBZ 23 (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1994), 304; Tyler, *The Tale of Genji*, 680.

³¹ Tanaka, *Nezame shiryō shūsei*, 198.

Compared to the other paintings of *The Nezame Scrolls*, Image IV zooms in on the figure of the emperor, effectively focusing attention on one man's folly. Likewise, the *shinnaigo* (心内語 interior monologue) in the accompanying text "zooms in" on the emperor's thoughts, which reach the pinnacle of absurdity in the last paragraph:

Remnants of his love for Nezame consumed him so strongly that now, seeing her letter, he was unable to subdue a swarm of emotions despite every effort to do so. *This is precisely how Emperor Xuanzong must have felt*, the retired Emperor thought, recalling the moment when Emperor Xuanzong finally received the broken half of Yang Guifei's comb from that far off land of Mt. Hōrai. Tears gushed forth, and although His Highness found it all the more shameful to have the Abbot see him make a spectacle of himself, there was no stemming the flood.³²

Trapped by his own fiction, the retired emperor once again mistakenly identifies with Emperor Xuanzong of "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow." The inaptness of the retired emperor's identification is compounded by the false parallel between the comb Emperor Xuanzong receives from the departed Yang Guifei (a promise that when the two meet again, halves would become whole) and Nezame's letter (which promises no such thing).³³ The retired emperor's over-the-top interior monologue is matched by the narrator's hyperbolic description of his tears: they "spilled forth in large drops" and "there was no stemming the flood."³⁴

The retired emperor's full disclosure in the painting reinforces his treatment in the textual inscription. Just as no blinds or doors shield his body from the viewer's gaze, the emperor's thoughts are plumbed by the reader. The retired emperor's fear that the Abbot will see him "make a spectacle of himself" is actualized not only by the intrusive narrator, but also by the artist's choice to put his grief on display. In this way, Image IV of *The Nezame Scrolls* works as a visual analogue for the ironic portrayal of the emperor in the verbal narrative of *Yoru no Nezame*. The two works also bear similarities in their use of verbal and pictorial allusions. *Yoru no Nezame* makes use of the poeticized rejection of Emperor Reizei by Tamakazura from the *Tale of Genji* to cast the emperor in an ironic light. The artists of *The Nezame Scrolls* stay true to this feature of the original tale, achieving a similar effect through the use of a pictorial template. The overlay of "Kashiwagi I" and its associations with "darkness of the heart" serve to ironize the retired emperor's attachment to Nezame:

³² Tanaka, *Nezame shiryō shūsei*, 198-199.

³³ In "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow," along with the hairpin and inlaid box, Yang Guifei instructs the wizard to relay the following message to the emperor: "Of the hairpin I will keep a leg, of the box I keep a panel; the gold of the hairpin is sundered, the box's inlay divided. If only your heart can be as firm as the inlay or gold, in Heaven or among mortal men we will someday meet again." Stephen Owen, trans, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 447.

³⁴ Tanaka, *Nezame shiryō shūsei*, 198-199.

such worldly attachments as a parent's love for a child pale in comparison to the retired emperor's more absurd delusions.

In this paper I have examined the ways in which *Yoru no Nezame* departs from convention in its unique treatment of the fictionalized emperor. Unlike fictional emperors in previous tales, The *Nezame* Emperor is not granted the privacy of epistemological distance afforded to characters of the highest ranks; rather, he is treated more like characters from the class of court nobles. Specifically, the *Nezame* Emperor is a close textual descendent of Kaoru in terms of narrative exposure and the foolishness that this treatment reveals. This construction allows for a degree of narrative voyeurism not seen in idealized images of the emperor in previous tales. Tales are built around the loves, disappointments, triumphs, and shortcomings of court nobles, but *Yoru no Nezame* opens up the possibility of exploring those of the very emperor. Casting the *Nezame* Emperor as an ironic hero gives the reader "the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity,"³⁵ offering a radically different vantage point from which to view an imperial figure. The artists of *The Nezame Scrolls* recreated this perspective in their portrayal of the emperor, thus providing the reader/viewer with a privileged vantage point. No longer shielding the emperor's position "high above the clouds," both visual and verbal texts lift the protective veil that surrounds him; he cannot escape his role as the victim of irony.

³⁵ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 34.