

From Harsh Stare to Reverberant Caress

Queer Timbres of Mourning in “The Flute”

What styles of attachment does mourning solidify or dissolve? In this chapter, I explore the link between queer gestures and the portrayal of mourning in the *Genji* narrative and its twelfth-century illustrated handscroll version. Examining the rhetorical and artistic techniques through which male bonds and dead bodies are rendered in the “Kashiwagi” (The Oak) and “Yokobue” (The Flute) chapters, I argue that *Genji*’s spectacular depictions of deathly encounters foreground mourning’s queer contour. I take up texture as a useful concept through which to theorize the aesthetic, spatial, and affective dimensions of this melancholic terrain, suggesting that mourning in *Genji* hinges on queer intimacies that surface most palpably in death’s wake. Furthermore, I argue that a queer reading of mourning foregrounds how these dimensions destabilize patriarchal aspirations for clear-cut legacies, suggesting richer forms of affection and affiliation.

Why focus on Kashiwagi—the eldest son of *Genji*’s rival, Tō no Chūjō—along with mourning, and the multisensory negotiations portrayed? Kaoru Hayashi explains Kashiwagi’s genealogical significance:

As first son of the household, Kashiwagi is supposed to be heir to the family name, if not property and family enterprise. However, I argue that he oscillates and transgresses boundaries between several families. It is only through his experiences of being possessed, dying, and then possessing others that he is finally able to establish a kinship that is closely related to that of the Fujiwara ancestry and that he will pass down to his descendants. Kashiwagi’s episodes embody the hybridity of kinship that refuses to be sorted out in merely one line of genealogy.¹

Extending Hayashi’s argument, we might ask what shape that hybrid kinship takes, especially when exceeding straightforward lineage. This tendency, with the multimodal mourning accompanying it, leads me to read Kashiwagi’s episodes

as queer. “Yokobue” demonstrates how musical mementos come to embody the hybrid kinship often overshadowed by monolithic lines. More than sight, sound, and touch offer sensory means of apprehending the nature of latent traces surrounding Kashiwagi’s life and haunting legacy. In this vein, attunement to the phenomenological dimensions of homosocial intimacy, mourning, and inheritance helps us gather a fuller sense of these veiled ancestries and apparitional attachments.

Specifically, I delineate a movement from visual toward aural sensation to demonstrate how sonic texture, or timbre, indexes degrees of posthumous intimacy and pleasure inaccessible in life. A poignant act of observation plays out in the deathbed encounter between two courtiers: the dying Kashiwagi and Yūgiri, the companion who mourns him. Analysis of this primal scene sets the stage for a discussion of “Yokobue,” in which hearing displaces vision as the dominant sense through which queer contact persists beyond death. Here, the illustrated handscroll rendition of the scene provides an illuminating counterpoint as one especially spectacular response to the original *Genji* text. By considering the portrayals of “Yokobue” beside those of “Kashiwagi,” I perform a transmedia reading that supports art historical analysis with textual evidence to demonstrate how melancholic attachments pose questions through their queer timbre. Finally, I develop this engagement with timbre to theorize the queer reverberations of touch as a disorganizing yet generative sense.

THE ENTICEMENTS OF A DYING BODY

Genji is tainted by his mother’s problematic status and her father’s death, inheriting her insufficient political backing at court. This precarious position represents a form of contingency that propels the narrative. *Genji*’s pursuit of imperial dominance—in deed if not in name—consumes him, with consequences for those in his way. Enter Kashiwagi, who seals his fate by conceiving a child with one of *Genji*’s wives, Onna San no Miya. To cuckold *Genji* like this is a fatal affront. I want to theorize the homosocial intimacy that accompanies Kashiwagi’s demise and the fraught longing that ensues.

How might the stylized spectacle of death queer the confluence of intimacy and loss that emerges in mourning? In this final chapter, I incorporate visual art into my examination of queer textuality by reading between the narrative text and the illustrated handscroll that reenvisions it. *Genji* has inspired countless commentaries, translations, imitations, and visual reproductions over the centuries. The most famous is the *Genji monogatari emaki*, or the *Illustrated Handscrolls of The Tale of Genji* (ca. 1160). Constructed roughly 150 years after *Genji* was composed, these handscrolls represent the oldest extant text of the narrative.² Orchestration of the *Genji Scrolls* represented a nostalgic enterprise, as they reproduced an impression of *Genji*’s world that commemorated a lustrous bygone era both intimately



FIGURE 1. *Genji monogatari emaki*, “Kashiwagi 2 Original Painting.” Tokugawa Art Museum.
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familiar to the cloistered Heian nobility and increasingly illusory as their court collapsed during the late twelfth century.

Although most are now lost, sections corresponding to each of *The Tale of Genji*'s fifty-four chapters probably existed at one point. Each scroll section consists of a painting of at least one scene from a *Genji* chapter. Each painting was originally preceded by a calligraphically rendered narrative excerpt (*kotobagaki*) that primed readers for the painted scene.³ The alternating format of lavish tracts of calligraphic text followed by multilayered paintings illustrating the text formed, in Melissa McCormick's words, “a pictoliterary object of unusual sophistication that provided customized viewing experiences for its audiences.”⁴

I consider the “Kashiwagi 2” painting to be the most compelling of all those in the *Genji Scrolls*. It captures an intimate deathbed encounter between male aristocrats while provoking a host of questions about the nature of spectacle, intimacy, and the repercussions of desires to approach a body visibly more vulnerable than one's own. The painting beckons the beholder in a fashion that parallels Yūgiri's lingering gaze at his beloved companion (see figure 1).

The handscroll painting capitalizes on Yūgiri and Kashiwagi's tender deathbed moment to make the extent of the men's closeness unmistakably clear. I have argued elsewhere that at key moments like this, the *Genji Scrolls* highlight the spectacular aesthetic possibilities available in rendering bodily decomposition and performing the work of mourning through virtuosic calligraphic or painterly techniques.⁵ The cultural plotting of grief includes beliefs about seclusion to combat death's polluting force; a metaphorical and material emphasis on darkness in poetry and clothing; the experience of emotional distress and physical enervation; and feminization, such as when the Kiritsubo emperor mourns Genji's mother.⁶ Importantly, I demonstrate that “*The Tale of Genji* represents mourning as a spatiotemporal interval of concentrated textual investment.”⁷ Here, I expand

on that notion to emphasize the queer potential of that interval, primarily as a space wherein melancholic attachments are wrought and rewritten.

Although the verbal exchanges quoted below indicate the emotional turmoil Yūgiri feels, what recedes in the narrative when compared to the image is the striking physical proximity between male bodies foregrounded by the painters; Yūgiri's domineering posture toward Kashiwagi; and the impression of an urgent if not oppressive masculine voyeuristic desire to scrutinize a dying male body.

The scene depicted in the "Kashiwagi 2" painting derives from the moment Yūgiri visits Kashiwagi, cries about not knowing why his friend is so ill, and tells Kashiwagi, "You're looking so much more handsome than you usually do!"⁸ Yūgiri adds to this flattery a rueful accusation: "We promised ourselves that neither of us would go before the other."⁹ Beyond wanting Kashiwagi to stay by his side, Yūgiri also wishes to know why his companion is dying: "I can't even make sense of what's made this affliction of yours so severe. We share such an intimacy, and yet I have only the vaguest idea what's wrong!"¹⁰ By framing his ignorance of the cause of Kashiwagi's illness in terms of "closeness" or "intimacy" (*kaku shitashiki hodo*), Yūgiri implies that increasing proximity to the enigmatic object would resolve this mystery.¹¹

Residing momentarily in this space with Kashiwagi and getting so close to him highlights a thinly veiled desire to make his dying body produce responses Yūgiri craves. Ostensibly, Yūgiri's frustration stems from secrets kept about an illicit liaison Kashiwagi has shared with Genji's wife. And yet the desire to know more exceeds a wish for mere verbal confession; it spreads into a desired exposure whose physical vibrations generate resonances irreducible to gossip or pillow talk. As we will see in the subsequent analysis of the "Yokobue" chapter and painting, the implications of this desire for proximity emerge as Kashiwagi dies and Yūgiri begins the volatile work of mourning him.

Consumed by illness, Kashiwagi's disintegrating body captivates Yūgiri. The text recounts the details of Kashiwagi's appearance partly from Yūgiri's point of view: "Kashiwagi wore more or less a court cap, his head pushed into it, and although he tried to sit up a little, this proved too fatiguing. He lay with the covers pulled over him, wearing numerous layers of pleasingly supple white gowns. In and around the room was pristine, with sweet hints of incense, and he lived in an elegant fashion, seeming to have kept his wits despite his wilted condition."¹²

The mention of incense and soft gowns lends an erotic tinge to the men's encounter, as Kashiwagi's inability to right himself emphasizes his physical vulnerability relative to the inquisitive Yūgiri: "They had long been so close that nothing could come between them, and no parent, brother, or sister could have felt greater pain at the prospect of parting [*wakaremu koto no kanashiu kohishikarubeki nageki*]. . . . 'Why is your health failing this way? I thought that the congratulations due you today would make you feel a little better.' [Yūgiri] lifted a corner of the standing curtain. 'Unfortunately, I am no longer the man I was.'"¹³



FIGURE 2. *Genji monogatari emaki*, “Kashiwagi 2 Original Painting” (detail). Yūgiri at Kashiwagi’s deathbed. Tokugawa Art Museum. © Tokugawa Art Museum Image Archives / DNPartcom.

These companions share an intimacy that transcends blood ties. In this vein, one man’s concern for another man’s suffering and the hidden reasons behind it presses customary notions of familial closeness into queer relief. Endō Kōtarō notes how elegiac homosocial exchanges can eclipse the logic of gender itself.¹⁴ As a later response to the *Genji* narrative, the handscroll painting capitalizes on Yūgiri and Kashiwagi’s tender moment to make the extent of the men’s closeness unmistakable. The bamboo blinds to the deathbed dais are raised, and the curtain past it has been pulled to the right to allow both Yūgiri and the scroll viewer unimpeded looks at the prostrate Kashiwagi. By contrast, we see that five women line the leftmost third of the painting; they are clearly cordoned off from the bed and not privy to the degree of access Yūgiri enjoys (see figure 2). A standing curtain separates the women from the tender scene (visually, at least, but not aurally), partitioning the bedchamber to give the men at least the impression of some privacy.¹⁵

This juxtaposition of gendered spaces reveals how furnishings like standing screens or curtains focus sensory attention or filter stimuli. Exposed visually and to some degree aurally, Kashiwagi dies in this scene. The subsequent transition from “Kashiwagi” to “Yokobue” portrays Yūgiri’s multimodal negotiation of unaccustomed sensations as mourning intensifies his sensorial experience.

READING MOURNING’S SENSATIONS

How might we apprehend affect in *Genji*? The following scene, which recounts Yūgiri’s visit to Kashiwagi’s widow following his funeral, helps solidify the link between mourning and the sensations attending it:

The funerary observances were unusually impressive. Naturally, the Commander’s wife, but especially the Commander [Yūgiri] himself, added to the scripture readings deeply fond touches of their own. The Commander called often at the Princess’s Ichijō residence. The skies of the fourth month somehow lifted the heart, and the color of the budding trees was lovely everywhere, but for that house, plunged in mourning, all things fed a life of quiet woe, and he therefore set off there as he did so often. The grounds were filling with new green, and here and there in shadowed places, where the sand was thin, wormwood had made itself at home. The near garden, once so carefully tended, now grew as it pleased. A spreading clump of pampas grass grew bravely there, and he made his way through it moist with dew, mindful of the insect cries that autumn would bring. The outside of the house was hung with Iyo blinds, through which he caught cooling glimpses of the new season’s gray standing curtains and of pretty page girls’ hair and dark gray skirts—all of which was very pleasant were it not that the color was so sad. . . . He looked out sorrowfully on the trees that grew in the grounds, indifferent to human cares. There stood an oak and a maple, fresher in color than the rest and with their branches intertwined. “I wonder what bond they share, that their mingling branches should promise them both so happy a future?” he said, and he quietly went to them.¹⁶

Genji’s portrayals of affect help us reconsider poetic motifs and scenic descriptions we’ve come to take for granted as stock emotional metaphors. We should energize its botanical motifs with a phenomenological awareness—not just a sensitivity to the four seasons. Doing so lets us rethink simplistic notions of feeling that bypass the sensate body to praise the yearning heart. The absence of scattered cherry blossoms notwithstanding, this passage could seem like a stereotypically rhapsodic Heian literary depiction of nature: Kashiwagi has died; people are sad; the landscape reflects this sadness. However, we might notice sorrow while responding further to the physicality of perception portrayed.

Mourning alters sensation: it accentuates the panoply of stimuli surrounding the bereaved, amplifying perception of otherwise unremarkable details. Yūgiri had “called often” at the residence he now visits after the funeral. Yet this routine’s character has changed “somehow,” slipping past conscious deliberation

to lend this familiar place uncanny tinges. Echoing Sedgwick's contention that touch undermines "any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity," Yūgiri moves voluntarily but out of habit, seeming to relent to an unaccustomed susceptibility to his immediate surroundings' stimuli.¹⁷ This reorientation—which is also behind Yūgiri's impulse to add "deeply fond touches" to the funerary observances' scripture readings—magnifies how he perceives the surface of familiar environs. The color of freshly budded branches prickles against the downcast household's austere blinds and gray curtains. As he moves, the "quiet woe" of his paces arises from the *mélange* of textures flickering unevenly across the residence grounds: flora draped in patches of shadow, wormwood surfacing where the garden's sand has thinned.

Though still charming on this mild summer day, the garden, "once so carefully tended," approaches disarray as it "[grows] as it please[s]," literally "following its heart" (*kokoro ni makasete*), disregarding customary strictures.¹⁸ The image also highlights the mourning subject's porosity as he walks, proprioceptive sensation heightened by his trousers passing through unkempt tracts of moist grass. That Yūgiri is "mindful of the insect cries that autumn would bring" as he makes his way through the damp grass suggests a temporal overlap of season—this melancholic scene shares more of a traditional poetic affinity with autumn than summer—but it also implies a synesthetic experience not dominated wholly by the visual: the dewdrops transferred from static grass to moving fabric exceed the sense of touch to stimulate an aural imagination, "transform[ing] the effects of one sensory mode into those of another," in Brian Massumi's words.¹⁹ Like the braided branches of the oak and maple trees, Yūgiri treads forward silently as the passage closes, with sound interlacing touch as he drifts through a landscape refashioned in death's aftermath.

Finally, Yūgiri's walk over to those trees culminates an apprehensive sensibility Kashiwagi's death has nurtured. This sensibility involves a tentative willingness to acquiesce in unaccustomed ways to surrounding phenomena. The passage chronicles an unhurried wondering about newly perceived textures of once-familiar surroundings. Details like trousers weighed down by dew-thickened grass pinpoint elements of the materiality conferring this ambience. In approaching the trees to get a better sense of what has brought their branches so close, Yūgiri's question about the bond they seem to share is transformed from a rhetorical gesture of supposition to an embodied physical action performed to resolve it. The way the branches of different tree species entwine compels the mourning subject to "quietly approach them" (*shinobiyaka ni sashi-yorite*), with the prefix *sashi*- adding soft emphasis. The branches beckon toward something other than "their mingling edges promising a future," something Yūgiri can't quite place and feels drawn to pursue as he contemplates their bond. The feel of the tree's mesh intrigues him, coaxing him into reciprocating contact.

FROM VISION AND TOUCH
TO A QUEER EROTICS OF TIMBRE

Even as we unpack the visual politics of Kashiwagi's exposure, the garden scene reminds us that other sensations activate Yūgiri's function as an intermediary for viewers. Sound (accompanied by scent and touch) is a pivotal medium through which bereavement transpires. Yūgiri joins the majority of court in mourning Kashiwagi on the one-year anniversary of his death. Yūgiri's sense of duty to his beloved friend outweighs even that of Kashiwagi's siblings, to the extent that Kashiwagi's parents "had never expected to find [Yūgiri] more devoted than their son's own brothers."²⁰

Following Kashiwagi's request, Yūgiri visits the family of Kashiwagi's widow, Ochiba no Miya, and reminisces: "The residence felt quite silent and forlorn, with a slightly ramshackle air about it."²¹ Amid insect cries that remind him of the absence of human noise, Yūgiri tries to lighten the mood by adding sound of his own making to the desolate scene:

Yūgiri pulled the *wagon* [Japanese zither] close. It had been tuned to the *richi* mode, and having resonated with copious playings, was suffused with a human aroma that stirred fond reminiscence [*hitoga ni shimite natsukashiu oboyu*]. *In a place like this, a man boasting a lustful heart prone to heed its own whims might well discard restraint, exposing uglier qualities, and end up making an abysmally tarnished name for himself.* He continued musing about such things as he strummed. This was the *wagon* his dead friend had usually played. Playing a little of a charming piece, Yūgiri said, "Alas, what a truly sublime tone he used to pluck forth! I gather some of that must be stowed within that instrument of Ochiba no Miya's, too. How I'd love for her to grant me a thorough listen!"²²

Yūgiri accesses scents and sounds evocative of Kashiwagi by touching the stringed instrument. "Suffused with a human aroma" (*hitoga ni shimite*), Kashiwagi's favored instrument sparks "fond reminiscence" (*natsukashiu oboyu*) that coaxes Yūgiri's thoughts toward his dead friend.²³ In plucking the strings himself, Yūgiri fastens those thoughts to something tangible, even as their vibration calls to mind a fuller resonance that Kashiwagi's passing has deprived him of.

Yūgiri enjoys inklings of arousal as he strums the cherished instrument, toying with the notion of unleashed longing. His perished companion's instrument resounds with an insistence that drowns out the distinction between bereavement and libido, prurience and prudence. Although chastened by mourning's prescribed decorum, Yūgiri nonetheless has his passions piqued by the bleak tenor of the residence, not to mention its untended, downbeat women. Inexpert and apprehensive as it is, what reverberates as most queer in this sounding gesture is how the musical object's multisensory breadth can transpose and sustain otherwise partitioned or dissonant desires. Echoing in the wake of losing Kashiwagi, intimate contact with the resonant memento thus bestows a fuller frequency range: a bandwidth brimming with potentialities barely discernable until loss took its toll. Alone, neither

intimacy nor loss could imbue such a transformative vibration. Rather, they work in concert; their proximate remove from one another is what activates the disorienting refusal of finitude I consider queer.

Touching this memento, Yūgiri accents the way this “truly sublime tone” (*ito medurakanaru ne*) seems to have waned—unlike the surviving scent.²⁴ Recognizing the insufficiency of what remains, Yūgiri scours for a supplement: some remnant of Kashiwagi’s idiosyncratic contact with the strings that lingers hidden in the echoing wood (*komorite*).²⁵ “It is the middle string that would convey his touch and yield a truly remarkable tone,” Yūgiri says. “That is what I myself was hoping to hear.”²⁶ Importantly, he touches Kashiwagi’s instrument in search of some reciprocal caress, and not for its sound per se. Yūgiri hopes to hear Her Highness’s rendition only insofar as her playing might bring him closer to the touch he longs for. In this sense, she’s just a conduit—like the musical instrument itself—for the two men to sustain their posthumous affinity.

When the Second Princess finally plays something, Yūgiri is moved to stroke strings again: “Hoping to hear more from her, Yūgiri took up a *biwa* [lute] and, with quite a tender tone [*ito natsukashiki ne ni*], played ‘So Adored Is He.’”²⁷ The Princess’s performance prompts Yūgiri to continue his timbral pursuit, this time with a lute, expressing his heartache in an idiom that outstrips verbal communication.²⁸ The lute boasts a sound chamber held against the torso; as Yūgiri’s ardor burgeons, he thus transitions from a floor-based instrument to one that is more resonant against his body. As if transposing his sonically manifested desire to a visual canvas, “the moon shone in a cloudless sky while lines of geese passed aloft, wing to wing.”²⁹ We saw this motif at Suma as Tō no Chūjō prepared to part with Genji at dawn. Here, geese highlight the scene’s devotional tenor, their patterned movement symbolizing transmission of a message across untold distance.

Yūgiri’s melancholic progression through instruments culminates with receipt of Kashiwagi’s beloved flute:

[The Haven, Ochiba no Miya’s mother,] gave him a flute as a parting gift. . . . The Commander examined it. “I am unworthy of such an attendant,” he replied. Yes, this instrument, too, was one that [Kashiwagi] had always had with him; he remembered him often saying that he did not get from it the very finest sound it could give and that he wanted it to go to someone able to appreciate it. He put it to his lips, feeling if anything sadder than ever. “I could be forgiven for playing the *wagon* as I did in his memory,” he said, stopping halfway through the *banshiki* modal prelude, “but this is beyond me” [*kore ha mabayuku namu*]. The Haven sent out to him as he was leaving, “Here beside a home sadly overgrown with weeds a cricket now sings in that voice I knew so well in those autumns long ago.” He replied, “Nothing much has changed in the music of the flute, but that perfect tone missing ever since he died will live on forevermore.”³⁰

Putting lips to his friend’s flute need not carry homoerotic connotations. And yet, the flute’s shape and status as token of patriarchal inheritance mark it as a phallic

symbol, a fetish for sublimating desire for intimacy. To blow through it, placing his mouth near its tip, Yūgiri must make more intimate contact than with the previous instruments. Making deeper physical contact with Kashiwagi's most prized instrument ends up being "beyond" Yūgiri (*mabayuku namu*).³¹ Whereas plucking the strings of a *wagon* or *biwa* takes dexterity, the flute demands more of the player's body. Mouth as well as fingers must be used, and he must impart breath, literally conveying energy from his body's cavity into the wooden rod's. It is not just the intimacy of physical contact that taxes Yūgiri, then, but the fuller somatic commitment made in investing one's life force.

Breath defines the flute's tone. The texture of mourning shifts with the timbre of each particular instrument. Yūgiri moves through devotion, affection, curiosity, hope, and fond remembrance with the *wagon* and *biwa* to feelings of inadequacy when he realizes his inability to do his friend's flute justice. It is arguably this extra respiratory effort that proves too much for Yūgiri; besides any question of musical skill, the very shape and modality of the instrument foregrounds a hollowness that hurts. Compared to the once warm bedchamber, the perforated hollow object, which Kashiwagi "always had with him," evokes his absence more cruelly than taut strings. The flute drills home Yūgiri's inability to fill the hole that opened since Kashiwagi expired. As such, Kashiwagi's admission that he "did not get from it the very finest sound it could give" only amplifies Yūgiri's recognition of his own insufficiency, signified by the admission, "I am unworthy."

Yūgiri's confession reveals a classic symptom of melancholic mourning: "The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale."³² Here, Yūgiri experiences a masochistic pleasure in disparaging his own skill while underscoring the merits of the deceased as he tries to recapture some trace of his companion through touching abandoned instruments.

THE SOURED DREAM

Having been conjured incrementally by Yūgiri's instrumental remembrances, Kashiwagi rematerializes:

[Yūgiri] dozed off a little and dreamed that the late [Kashiwagi,] Intendant of the Gate Watch, dressed exactly as he had been then, sat beside him and that he picked up the flute and examined it. He wished even in his dream that the departed had not come to its sound. "I would have the wind, if I may indulge that hope, blow upon this flute a music for generations to pass on down in my own line. I had someone else in mind," the figure said. The Commander was about to ask a question when he woke up to the crying of a baby boy.³³

Yūgiri mourns not just Kashiwagi's absence but, moreover, Kashiwagi's unwillingness to reciprocate affection in the style Yūgiri prefers. While this could be tolerated immediately following Kashiwagi's death, it galls Yūgiri now that even

his own fantasies betray him a year later. The restless spirit of Kashiwagi returns, but only to ensure his line survives, not to grant Yūgiri the pleasure of his presence. This haunting moment displays how the sheer amplification of affective resonances can conjure queer alternatives.

Yūgiri's vision of Kashiwagi revives the ailing courtier in perfect form, "dressed exactly as he had been then," with "then" denoting a point prior to his atrophy: "Yūgiri found it hard to forget the lingering image of Kashiwagi [on his death-bed] and felt intensely saddened—more so than Kashiwagi's own brothers."³⁴ Not mentioning illness suggests a fantasy of wish fulfillment on Yūgiri's part, wherein Kashiwagi's appearance is restored along with clear, audible communication—not the faltering script or hoarse whispers offered as he died.³⁵

Confronting the dead even in a dream's diaphanous space brings discomfort despite all the desire Yūgiri has poured into summoning his friend. This might explain his wish "that the departed had not come to [the flute's] sound." Here, the apparition's statement, "I had someone else in mind," intersects the feeling of melancholic deficiency Yūgiri felt in trying to do justice to the displaced flute he knew to be "beyond" him. Kashiwagi's reemergence to deny Yūgiri ownership of the prized flute manifests a melancholic self-reproach that lodges the conscious sentiment of his earlier "I am unworthy" comment into the unconscious.

Yūgiri's rejection fantasy is a melancholic symptom: "The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies . . . a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self."³⁶ In putting Kashiwagi's flute to his mouth, Yūgiri tries to incorporate the lost love-object, attempting to fuse the external physical object that exudes Kashiwagi's presence to Yūgiri's cherished internal image of him. Music replaces the words he longs to share with Kashiwagi but can't, anticipating the dream in which Kashiwagi returns to tongue-lash Yūgiri.

But before Yūgiri can respond to Kashiwagi's voice or move from trepidation to savoring his friend's apparition, an infant's scream snatches it away. Yūgiri thinks back on his dream after the baby drama subsides: "Recalling his dream, Yūgiri thought, 'My, but this flute has such a troublesome aspect to worry over [*wadurashiku mo aru ka na*]! It's an object that commanded his ardent concern, and I am not the one it should go to [*yuku beki kata ni mo arazu*]. A woman's passing it down is worthless [*onna no ontsutahe ha kakinaki wo ya*]! What could Kashiwagi have been thinking?"³⁷ Yūgiri's vexation about what to do with the flute suggests meanings and functions outside conventional use. As a symbol of paternal connection, the instrument should have been passed down to Kashiwagi's son, though Yūgiri isn't yet sure Kaoru is the rightful heir.³⁸ However, the abundance of feeling aroused by the redolence of precious instruments and Yūgiri's longing for his dead friend marks the flute as an erotic symbol of nonsexual masculine love.

We hear hints of baffled complaint in Yūgiri's question. This slight speaks to the melancholic ambivalence Yūgiri feels toward Kashiwagi. As Freud notes,

“The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open.”³⁹ Yūgiri is angry with Kashiwagi for leaving him, but the death’s anniversary and his affinity toward his companion don’t permit him to chide the dead man outright. The question, like the dream, signals conflicting feelings regarding lost love that simmer without being articulated fully.

At the same time, Yūgiri’s question also carries a more jealously misogynistic edge, implying that business between men should have been delegated to him, free from female interference. The direction of this precious inheritance matters; Yūgiri balks at the idea of a female custodian for this bestowal. For him, its value can be preserved only through patrilineal—and, failing that, male homosocial—transmission. This prejudice has deep intertextual roots. Susan Mann explains that sonic understanding is a symbol for male friendship and emotional accord, but also that all-male exclusivity has a long history in Chinese letters ranging from the third century BCE through the Qing dynasty. Invoked obliquely through the Chinese tenor of Genji’s Suma rendezvous with Tō no Chūjō, this trope is encapsulated by the phrase someone who “knows my sounds” (*zhi yin*).⁴⁰

Sound’s ephemeral performative nature makes it less stable in transmission than calligraphy or concrete objects that leave a visible, tangible trace. Tone amplifies contingency outside more circumscribed, linear, and knowable markers of succession. This indeterminacy underpins the notion of success or failure to produce the same sound—despite using the same instrument. Such transience underscores how ineffable Kashiwagi’s perished sound becomes. The multimodal poignancy of that lost tonality consequently drives Yūgiri to vicariously restore—in part, at least—Kashiwagi’s material legacy to his true son, Kaoru. By entrusting Kashiwagi’s flute, a resonant symbol of paternal inheritance, to Genji, Yūgiri facilitates multiple overlapping intimacies through a single gesture. He solidifies a fragile trust with his own father, Genji, in not acknowledging Kashiwagi’s cuckoldry; he fulfills his duty to his friend; and he symbolically plays surrogate father to Kaoru—for the span of a few sour notes.

As Kaoru Hayashi notes, “Similar to skill in *kemari* [kickball], musical skills and instruments tended to be inherited within members of family. Only by dying and becoming *mononoke* [a possessing spirit] is Kashiwagi able to ensure a continuation in his descendants.”⁴¹ Notably, this desired legacy is sought through a male homosocial sonority. Kashiwagi’s ghost asserts its wishes in poetic form: “Would that I could have the wind blow through this flute bamboo, bestowing lengthy tones/roots for generations to come” (*fuetake ni / fukiyoru kaze no / kotonaraba / sue no yo nagaki / ne ni tsutahenamu*).⁴² The emphatic *-namu* underscores the seriousness of Kashiwagi bequeathing the flute to his male heir. The dual valence of *ne* links Kashiwagi’s sound to his son, Kaoru, who earlier in the chapter “clutched a bamboo shoot and mouthed it, drooling,” while playing with Genji.⁴³ Moreover, as Melissa McCormick notes, “Phallic connotations are also implied, with the word



FIGURE 3. *Genji monogatari emaki*, “Yokobue Original Painting.” Tokugawa Art Museum. © Tokugawa Art Museum Image Archives / DNPartcom.

for ‘root’ (*ne*), a term for genitalia, reflecting the paternity anxiety inherent in the Kashiwagi storyline.”⁴⁴

Given this preponderance of paternal anxiety for preserving long “roots” through the ages, Yūgiri’s own shifting melancholic desires and nebulous fears about inadequacy add some spite to his appraisal of women’s unfitness. This resembles a classic case of projection. Were he himself more worthy, he wouldn’t view a woman’s transmission of this object as repellent. For the melancholic Yūgiri, the flute’s value evaporates outside an exclusively male relationship, and “a woman’s passing it down is worthless.” It must be shared between men—passed from father to son, customarily—and symbolizes an inheritance intended for the deceased’s son that veers astray because of Kashiwagi’s tragic tryst with Genji’s wife.

But the intimacy Yūgiri shared with Kashiwagi suggests the flute’s possession of sentimental value beyond hereditary logics. The flute continues to bring poignant pleasure despite its genealogical misplacement, which speaks to its capacity to exceed any heterosexual reproductive legacy. Reunited through the flute, Yūgiri and the spectral Kashiwagi momentarily indulge melody in lieu of adhering to ancestral lines. Though their encounter lasts only a dream’s length and pressure to entrust the flute to the proper recipient mounts for Yūgiri, this brief interval lets Yūgiri consummate a hunger for fuller contact with his dead companion, which he previously sought through song.

Sensual reminiscences on sound precipitate a dream of Kashiwagi. But Yūgiri is wrenched awake by the screams of a retching baby. In this way, the human product of heterosexual reproduction fractures the sweet fantasy Yūgiri entertains for another man through the phallic wooden object. The handscroll painting elaborates and magnifies the physicality of Yūgiri’s mournful homosocial attachment—the

subtle gestures of which are imperceptible in the original text. When he appears in the “Yokobue” painting, sound recedes as sight and touch burst forward: Yūgiri clutches a pillar as he locks eyes on a baby suckling at Kumoinokari’s bare breast (see figure 3).⁴⁵ This painting portrays a scene rife with queer vitality, despite—or indeed, *because of*—the transfixed gesture embodied by the melancholic voyeur.

THE VALUE OF PILLAR CLINGING

At Kashiwagi’s deathbed, Yūgiri’s actions highlighted the men’s intimacy and Yūgiri’s dominant vitality. The “Yokobue” chapter immediately follows “Kashiwagi,” and its scroll painting—like “Kashiwagi 2”—features Yūgiri as a voyeur. The scene in which Yūgiri views the nursing of his infant son runs as follows:

[Yūgiri] was about to ask a question [*tohan wo omohu hodo ni*] when he woke up to the crying of a baby boy, frightened in his sleep. The boy was crying very loudly and retching up milk [*tsudami nado shitamaheba*]. His nurse arose in haste while the lady of the house had the lamp brought near, tucked her hair behind her ears, wiped and tidied the baby, and held him in her arms. She bared a beautifully full, rounded breast for him to suck. He was a very sweet baby, ever so white and pretty, and she enjoyed comforting him this way even though she had no milk. “What is the matter?” [Yūgiri] asked, going to her. The commotion of the women scattering rice must have completely dispelled the mood of his dream. . . . The way he looked at her made her shy, and she fell silent after all. “Now, stop that. I am not fit to be seen,” she said. Her bashful figure in the bright lamplight made quite a nice picture.⁴⁶

The *Genji* narrative makes numerous references to sights—like Genji’s fashionable figure, or blossoms at their peak—being “like a picture” (*e no gotoshi*) and thus well worth seeing, or striking enough to compel the viewer to illustrate it: “It is often not simply that something *resembles* a picture, but that the speaker would actually like to *make a picture of it*. This implies a degree of fashioning and of control.”⁴⁷ This desire to shape the scene to the viewer’s whim arguably matters more when the act of picturing potentially involves not just the objectification of observed phenomena but the exploitation of vulnerable bodies.⁴⁸

While he doesn’t bring the lamp, Yūgiri nonetheless frames and focuses the scene by vicariously guiding the viewer’s attention. He is the first character encountered by the viewer in moving leftward along the scroll’s horizontal axis in “Kashiwagi” and the character in the “Yokobue” scroll painting who is situated most stably, at a perpendicular angle to the painting’s grounding plane. Perched at the edge of the frame within this domestic tableau, Yūgiri stares, engrossed, standing as though fused to the pillar. This central structure anchors the interior pictorial scene, serving as a rectilinear boundary between it and the larger frame that embeds it. Yūgiri’s figure presses the inner spectacle’s border into relief by buttressing the scene from the left-hand side, his right hand palmed parallel against the vertical edge of this stage-like dais. The contact of the male courtier’s hand against the architectural scaffold activates the frame of viewing through

touch. Vision inspires a craving for direct physical contact that is gratified at least partially by the hard pillar.

But what does Yūgiri reach for? His adherence to the structure can be read in at least two ways. First, it marks his reliance on the larger architectonic systems within which it sits; second, it suggests his susceptibility to the sway of spectacular bodies. The nursing woman seems his most obvious focus in “Yokobue,” but we mustn’t forget the rapport Yūgiri shared with Kashiwagi just a chapter ago. There, both the painting and the calligraphic preface betrayed a suffocating desire to touch Kashiwagi’s spectacular dying body.

That desire resurfaces in this “Yokobue” painting, in Yūgiri’s hand touching the pillar. Touch registers a proximate remove by embodying a simultaneous inclination and restraint. Yūgiri’s contact with the pillar as he stands transfixed highlights both desire’s expression and its limit, troubling a boundary between activity and passivity. The pillar stands as a phallic symbol against which Yūgiri might steady his balance, maintain a fantasy of control, or imagine suppler textures. This touch is ostensibly oriented toward Yūgiri’s full-bosomed, seminude wife. However, as Yūgiri has just woken from a dream of Kashiwagi, it might instead by proxy betray a lingering desire for the gaunt companion at whose deathbed Yūgiri wept. Rajyas-hree Pandey resists an erotic reading of the scene, noting that “what is noteworthy . . . is not the breast as a sexual object. . . . It is the image of [Kumoinokari] as an ordinary wife, comforting her own baby rather than relying on the wet nurse, that the text draws our attention to.”⁴⁹ Hence what looks like a spectacle of heterosexual lust in fact evokes homosocial longing and a notable exception to the standard aristocratic system of child-nurturing labor.

Yūgiri’s scrutiny aims to remedy the grief he feels for Kashiwagi—or at least distract him from it—as he rejects morbid portents for the baby embodying life. By staring hard, Yūgiri can deflect the unresolved attachment he harbors for his beloved companion. That Yūgiri’s dream of Kashiwagi fractures to lead him here, only after he’s waxed poetic about yearning to hear his dead friend’s tender tone again, accents the utility of different sensory modes. Where instrumental mementos allow a sensuous aural engagement with Kashiwagi in the form of posthumous echoes of the past, vision concretizes a connection to the living present, a space in which old ties must be reined in or severed for the surviving witness to move forward. For Yūgiri, vision would thus appear to operate as a compensatory sense through which he attempts to save himself from sinking further into reverie: sight tries to eclipse the call to mourn and curb the prospect of further loss. So Yūgiri swoops in after hearing the baby’s scream, straightens himself against a pillar, and turns to stare at the woman to both renounce sorrow and bolster his commitment to a less precarious style of manhood.

Yet in its phenomenological richness, the gesture of touching proves ambiguous at best. For instance, the pillar seems extreme as a support. Why rely on this enormous object to confront the eerie scene? What’s more, Yūgiri’s eyes consume the baby and the breast it suckles in vain. On spying a lamp-lit bosom lent to

soothe the crying child, the scene of breastfeeding promises a surface impression of comfort. And yet whatever consolatory function is served by the sight of an infant suckling at an empty breast is undercut by an ominous unnamed presence infiltrating the scene.⁵⁰

Whereas the infant seeks simple comfort, Yūgiri wants to expel his discomfort to rid himself of grief, attraction, and doubt—like so much puke. But as an adult, his relief must assume other forms. This occurs first musically and now visually. The transition from stringed to wind instruments matters, not just in terms of timbre but also symbolically. We move from plucking to blowing, charting a progression in Yūgiri's yearning imagination from Kashiwagi's fingers to his mouth, only to end—once Yūgiri's dream breaks—at the mouth of a baby suckling in vain from an empty breast.

The baby's futile suckling thus concretizes an unfulfilled desire to be satiated by intimate contact with another human body. The infant symbolizes Yūgiri's melancholic predicament of being unable to derive a full pleasure from the desired object he's lost. Handling the flute allows the melancholic Yūgiri to express his longing in a sublimated though ultimately unsatisfying form. The stare at the baby's own frustrated mouth-work only literalizes Yūgiri's own yearning for succor.

Yūgiri chokes back his desire for Kashiwagi. His effort to manage this emotion aligns with his desire to stand straight—at a calibrated distance from the scene's locus—and stabilize himself more than when faced with Kashiwagi's dying, tempting form. Compared to his solicitous lean in the preceding "Kashiwagi 2" painting, here Yūgiri looks like a new man. He is standing, not sitting, and thus his vantage is now less vulnerable. This gesture seemingly allows him to recover whatever he may have surrendered during Kashiwagi's deathbed vigil.

Yūgiri's standing with his hand against the pillar and his stare thus become gestures through which to recuperate a compromised masculinity and to approximate a closure of the wound opened by Kashiwagi's death. Together, the two gestures signal a desire to retrospectively redress these losses indirectly. This exertion of pressure rightward also pushes against the leftward temporal unfurling of the scroll. "Tangled-script" passages in the *Genji Scrolls*' calligraphic prefaces make this counter-movement most visible, but this specific instance shows that the gesture can materialize within painted images as well.⁵¹ Yūgiri's push backwards, against a movement forward stresses the difficulty of severing ties; clinging to the pillar thus parallels the folding calligraphic columns as a melancholic gesture designed to defer the work of mourning.⁵²

QUEER ATTACHMENTS AND THE REFUSAL TO MOVE FORWARD

Yūgiri's clinging enacts a melancholic gesture of refusing to release Kashiwagi. Since he cannot keep Kashiwagi with him or draw him close enough to know him



FIGURE 4. *Genji monogatari emaki*, “Yokobue Original Painting” (detail). Yūgiri transfixed at pillar, staring at nursing baby. Tokugawa Art Museum. © Tokugawa Art Museum Image Archives / DNPartcom.

fully, Yūgiri must settle for surrogates, clinging to the surface of concrete proxies, frustrated that his dream of deeper contact vanished too soon. By staring at his own son, Yūgiri keeps knowledge of Kaoru’s true paternity at bay. Revising Edelman’s view, Yūgiri looks past painful memories of loss to focus on the child not as an emblem of the future but as a distraction from the past.

Several elements complicate this picture. For example, the shift in Yūgiri’s posture from the “Kashiwagi 2” painting to the “Yokobue” painting signals a reorientation toward time and space. Before, Yūgiri leaned unstably leftward, overlooking his dying friend and literally facing, if not confronting, the grim future that awaited. But now, braced rightward against the sturdiest vertical boundary in the frame, Yūgiri installs himself against the forward horizontal vector of the handscroll, his palm extending in a gesture toward the past, not the future (see figure 4).

This orientation indicates Yūgiri's reluctance to release his attachment to Kashiwagi, expressed at the deathbed when Yūgiri laments, "We promised ourselves that neither of us would go before the other [*wokure sakidatsu hedatenaku to koso chigiri kikoeshika*]. This is a terrible thing!"⁵³ What sounded like compassion there rattles here as what Lee Edelman calls compassion's "morbid obverse, paranoia."⁵⁴ Now that Kashiwagi has preceded him in death, Yūgiri reaches backward in an anxious yet futile gesture to mend that broken vow to stay together.

Yūgiri's posture therefore expresses, if not a death wish, then at least a disinterest in moving forward, insofar as it would mean leaving his beloved Kashiwagi behind. To promise "that neither of us would go before the other" is to pledge to die in sync.⁵⁵ According to this vow's logic, the simultaneity of the men's demise attests to the sincerity of their devotion. This does not constitute a suicidal willingness or even fatalism but rather refuses any future apart. By having vowed to share the same instant of their deaths, the men reciprocally affirmed their unconditional commitment, insisting moreover on a mutual denial of futurity itself. Without reading it as necessarily homoerotic, this refusal can be read as an act of affirmative queerness precisely to the extent that it negates the promise of reproductive futurism.

If we recall Lee Edelman's formulation, the figure of the child represents the linchpin of a compulsory heteronormative regime bent on optimistic, reproductive injunctions. By contrast, "queerness names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children.'"⁵⁶ For Edelman, queerness aligns itself with the death drive and is directed against the "presupposition that the body politic must survive."⁵⁷ This notion of queerness reframes our impression of Yūgiri's postures and gestures. He is preoccupied with Kashiwagi's survival, which overshadows any concern for the long term.

Expanding his theory to argue against a ubiquitous narrative of procreative heterosexuality, Edelman states that "far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning's eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity."⁵⁸ This description of an obstructed futurity aligns queerness with an orientation against procreation and epistemological reassurance. Recall Yūgiri's lament: "I can't even make sense of what's made this affliction of yours so severe. We share such an intimacy [*kaku shitashiki hodo*], and yet I have only the vaguest idea what's wrong!"⁵⁹ The same intimacy stoking his need to understand his companion's fate demands the secret be buried. If Yūgiri's search for rationales when Kashiwagi dies situated him in pursuit of meaning, his later position against forward temporal progression—and against the "fantasy of meaning's eventual realization"—halts this course.

Lodged against the pillar, Yūgiri stares at the bare but empty breast, itself a symbol of a tempting expectation of fulfillment that in fact grants no sustenance, no true comfort, no realized meaning. In this light, Yūgiri's ostensibly licentious stare might in fact bypass heterosexual lust to instead relish an icon of reproductive

futurity's interruption. And Yūgiri's rightward push against temporal progress gestures even further. Inasmuch as it follows his leftward lean toward Kashiwagi in the earlier "Kashiwagi 2" painting, it presses beyond an interruption of futurity to figure the retrospective consummation of a desire to touch left unfulfilled by Kashiwagi's premature death.

Although we can read this motion as a gesture of refusal insofar as it thirsts for the past and symbolically staves off untimely death, such a backward inclination simultaneously manifests queer feelings. In theorizing the possibility of queer history in relation to the politics of loss, Heather Love outlines the concept of "feeling backward," reading "figures of backwardness as allegories of queer historical experience."⁶⁰ Yūgiri's pose, situated in opposition to the handscroll's forward vector, embodies a style of feeling backward. Opposing the future, the disconsolate survivor opens his palm to touch the most reliably tangible object available: a pillar that in its sturdy materiality vows not to abandon the grieving man riveted to its side. With the pillar now situated behind Yūgiri in the scroll's spatiotemporal configuration, we watch the mourner literally feeling backward. Yūgiri performs a push rightward—against the handscroll's leftward temporal advancement—attempting to apprehend some more substantial trace of his dead friend than dreams or echoes offer. Yūgiri's pillar touching signifies as doubly queer: it both flouts normative time to disavow the future and sublimates the disorienting pain of melancholic attachment through the stabilizing sensation of nonhuman contact.

CARESSING THE INCALCULABLE

One way to understand the utility of a queer orientation toward the world would be as a means of undoing one's habitual subjecthood and reshaping it in relation to other objects and organisms. For Yūgiri, debts to his family and the crying baby in particular represent the constraints of everyday life. But the dream, instruments, and touching of the pillar introduce new relations toward nonhuman others and objects. These are not just mementos—mere indices of enduring past attachments—which is why the pillar matters so much: it demarcates an interval of tangibly queer instability amid quotidian limits. This gesture of touching the pillar is infused with melancholic desires; these desires trigger an irruptive moment in which the visual vectors of both heterosexual lust and homoerotic longing are pressed into question. Yūgiri's turn to touch embodies a queer gesture consonant with José Esteban Muñoz's notion that the promissory nature of queer politics and queer politics of life "is most graspable to us as a *sense* rather than as a *politic*."⁶¹ This formulation leads us toward "an understanding of queerness as a sense of the incalculable and simultaneously, the incalculable sense of queerness."⁶²

We fathom slivers of this "sense of the incalculable" as Yūgiri samples instruments, indulges dreams, and caresses a pillar. For indeed, while all of these phenomena convey something of Kashiwagi, his irreparable absence means that

Yūgiri's melancholic pursuit must continually confront mortal loss. The very inability of such depletion to reside firmly within a single perceptual realm makes its impact felt across multiple sensory registers. More of Kashiwagi than what was cremated persists in perceptible, if incorporeal, form. Yūgiri's search for solace reads as an attempt to comb an archive of past sensations, tangible and imagined, to locate some more livable future.

Yūgiri's gesture recalls Lauren Berlant's notion of world-making as a reimagining of the political in terms of a "lateral exploration of an elsewhere."⁶³ It can be hard to distinguish between melancholy and hope here, because both would appear to inspire the same gesture of lateral exploration: an outstretched palm inclined toward something that doesn't wholly exist—like Kashiwagi's desired presence. To call the gesture utopic would overlook the lingering caution that surrounds heartache. Rather, Yūgiri's persistent, desirous tentativeness—the earnest explorative disposition accompanying his melancholic plight—qualifies as queer.

Mourning enjoins a process of hypothesizing one's way through varied sensations to ask: Where do I belong now, and where should I turn? This unmoored, querying stance recalls Sara Ahmed's attention to disorientation's inescapable banality and its queerness. Her phenomenological emphasis becomes especially pertinent in this context of melancholic mourning. What does melancholic male desire for male bodily presence produce? For one, it excites a heightened affection toward substitute objects and a search for the proper surface along which to impart one's hopes and dreams.

In Yūgiri's case, he tries to make contact with Kashiwagi through musical instruments. These arouse poignant memories of the deceased, incurring unsavory sensations by accident. Instrumental music is meant to fill the vacant spaces death leaves. Whether as an atmospheric resonance as strings ring out or as nervous notes on a flute to which one lacks proper claim, the desire to sublimate the loss makes sense. But what stands out in these scenes are the ways in which those sensible grasps for solace largely fail. Something's always off: the breast milk is spent, or the timbre is unbecoming. Despite these frustrations, residues persist that blunt grief's pangs. A plucked string punctures the numbness of autumn nights. Its frequency can't shatter mourning, but the act of laying hands on reverberating wood can grant seconds of reprieve. Similarly, the breast comforts not with its contents but with the fleshy cushion it provides a gaping mouth.

These male mouths go searching as loss echoes. They make a contact with objects that only intimates the true tenor of abandonment. And still, this insufficient touching has its place. It doesn't resolve the feelings of loss but does allay its pain. The survivors are allowed to introduce a bit of distance between themselves and grief's leaden everyday.

This gap can spur fantasy, and Yūgiri's dream gushes from the rift caused by straining to caress what's absent. He touches the pillar and mouths the flute and plucks the lute, all because he cannot touch his dead companion. We see Yūgiri

crave closeness with Kashiwagi; when that doesn't pan out, scrutiny from his phantom suffices. Yūgiri's desire surfaces as self-reproach for his poor playing and deficient tonality. Yūgiri translates the unobtainable ideal touching for which he yearns into self-flagellation, which still counts as contact despite its sting.

While Yūgiri's dream may materialize out of mourning, it conveys pleasure at having the lost love return and reprimand him. This pleasure comes partially from Yūgiri being designated as insufficient. After all, whatever hurt comes from having one's failings noted nevertheless allows for the possibility of further contact. Having the chance to improve his tone and be of use as a mediator between Kashiwagi and Kashiwagi's son, Kaoru, allows Yūgiri to fulfill commitments to his dead companion.

As Yūgiri stares at the baby, its pliant white skin becomes a screen that reflects some partial semblance of Kashiwagi. The suppleness of the infant's willowy skin beckons to Yūgiri as a surrogate body for the one he so misses. The child's suckling shows Yūgiri an image of a closeness whose transposed terms allow him to see himself as part of that intimate equation that Kashiwagi's death had otherwise foreclosed. Like the bawling baby, Yūgiri produces sounds, trying to externalize the bitter remnants of his grief. Whereas the baby's purer bile materializes literally as vomit, Yūgiri is mature enough to encase his hurt in melody. Taking up the flute, Yūgiri is able to sublimate loss through musical abstraction. Like the instrument itself, though, Yūgiri's consolatory abstraction proves porous: the strings' vibration is found lacking; the flute's new tone doesn't measure up. Akin to the son attached to the milkless teat, Yūgiri seeks succor from a hollow vessel.

And yet there's something earned, something intuited—not total satisfaction, but some sliver of relief. This is where Yūgiri's posture at the pillar and the baby's cradling at the barren teat mirror one another as queer questions. Why cling to an object that doesn't yield what you yearn for? Both males here do so because some shred of intimacy survives, enveloped in that contact's lack. While far from perfect, contact with stolid wood or sagging skin nonetheless grants a whisper of solace. Given the stony finitude of death, the textures of hollow flutes, empty breasts, or sturdy columns all offer incalculable comfort despite what they withhold.

Lag is central to these efforts at impracticable closeness. For as much as timbres matter, the temporality of waiting in vain hope pervades them all. Call it cruel optimism's queer spell. Even ambivalent contact with objects relinquished by the dead unlatches tiny optimistic intervals. Little anticipatory possibilities percolate as Yūgiri positions his fingertips along the bamboo apertures, fills his lungs, and readies his embouchure before blowing. On instinct, the anxious infant tries to draw sustenance from a breast that is not his wet nurse's. No milk dribbles out, but even so, he stops crying because the nipple can still occupy his vacant mouth. Empty breast in empty mouth—two intervals of absence overlap.

Whether with breast or flute or pillar, the fit is off—askew of an ideal. However, these objects deposit impressions of density for now, and that counts for much

when so much has already been taken. All this suggests that when maneuvering through mourning's proximate removes—its vibrant vacant spaces—taxonomies of timbre, texture, or flavor matter infinitely less than the question of how unas-similable presence brushes skin.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS OF THE REVERBERANT CARESS

In the wake of Kashiwagi's death, Yūgiri's circuitous quest for consolation queers mourning. The ways in which Yūgiri struggles to make sense of his attachment to his dying companion or to resolve the pain of loss pulse along a continuum of homosocial and homoerotic tendencies.⁶⁴ From staring to leaning, to listening, to plucking, to strumming, to blowing, to dreaming, to clutching, to staring again, Yūgiri's behavior accentuates a range of tactics fumbled through to recoup some facet of what's absent—and no single sense proves sufficient to the task. Yūgiri's actions suggest that to mourn is at some level to apprehend the texture of the lost object through a host of interrogative gestures. Touching proxies reanimates what has perished—partially. To the extent that the object itself can't be regained, the next best thing is to caress remnants whose tactile impressions suppress the object's absence. Encountering these textures prompts a host of unsettling desires to lean in, stand upright, or turn one's back to the future. Such contact queers with the questions it poses.

Given all this, what might an attention to queer timbres, textures, and gestures lend our critical work? For one thing, they sketch a frame for apprehending stimuli and spatial practices that fall outside a strictly heteronormative telos. These queer moments intensify synesthetic leakage, such as when touch, sound, scent, and taste meld once Yūgiri samples his dead companion's instruments. We notice the text's granular sensitivity to sensorial perception materializing at such junctures of post-humous intimacy, homosocial or otherwise. To read these touches reparatively is to delineate the affective fringe along which queer movements meet mourning. Such a practice suggests the outline of a method cognizant of the intimate interdependence of sensory experience—especially in death's aftermath.

During Yūgiri's exercise in managing attachment to the absent object of affection, the work of mourning emerges as a queer process of mediation and reorientation. This iterative labor escalates as it recurs, with Yūgiri drawing surrogate matter into mouth or grasp to produce for himself a richer sense of presence in the wake of Kashiwagi's demise. The "Yokobue" chapter underscores the extent to which mourning's labor can be beset by failure to achieve resolution or complete detachment. Even so, Yūgiri's movement from flute to pillar suggests that the failures accrued in the midst of handling mortal loss compel the mourner to seek a steadied position within a space of loss rather than to escape it—to brace oneself alongside the most resonant or rigid objects available in the hope that one might

reside in perennial contact with something vibrant and sound. Yūgiri's gesture reads as queer insofar as he reaches back to embrace the ambivalence animating his rapport with humans, ghosts, and material and immaterial objects. He stares at his sexualized wife, but he also looks past her; he identifies and disidentifies with his own son in the same glance; he longs to touch the flute but accepts that he can't rightly possess it. In this sense, his melancholic labor takes embodied shape in a queer gesture "that signals a refusal of a certain kind of finitude."⁶⁵

In reading this account of Yūgiri's negotiation of the anguish that follows Kashiwagi's death, I have tried to depict the work of mourning as a practice of reorienting attachments that reverberate—against skin, strings, air, hollowed cylindrical wood or its dense rectangular counterpart. I have stressed a queer erotics of mediating loss orally, aurally, and haptically. Kashiwagi's death produces a queer texture of loss that should be felt within the context of the homosocial intimacy he shares with Yūgiri. What this episode suggests, then, is that the work of mourning involves not just severing enduring interpersonal attachments but also reorienting perception to remediate loss. This remediation alters the materiality and position of both the mourning subject and the mourned object, transposing them to make loss more palatable, more sonorous, and more smooth, as the lost object is simultaneously coveted and disavowed.

These pivots gesture toward queer attachments that push longing subjects askew of futurity's telos, orienting them in the here and now to magnify what Merleau-Ponty called "the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency."⁶⁶ Such contingency suffuses Yūgiri's melancholic scenario as a constitutive element whose "vital experience" is played out aurally and haptically as a queer practice of turning to reckon with loss and feel one's way past it.

The sense of contingency that resonates throughout both scenes of Yūgiri's voyeurism draws Yūgiri toward the bedridden Kashiwagi and makes him reach for support as he stands and tries to reside stably within the space left vacant by Kashiwagi's death. Allure couples with repulsion in that mournful space of visceral contingency. However, we nevertheless observe here how death enables a posthumous queer intimacy to take hold.

Through the remnants of Kashiwagi's life, Yūgiri satisfies desires for a closeness that was unattainable when his companion lived. Specifically, the sensuous contact Yūgiri indulges in with Kashiwagi's cherished instruments was formerly withheld. But now, within extended intervals of reminiscence, their timbre can be savored at will, and amply, albeit with the risk of phantasmic reprimand lurking. Even as the dream of Kashiwagi seems to spoil Yūgiri's reverie, the aural, oral, and tactile stimuli he absorbs exceed the scopic fixity enforced at his companion's deathbed. These sensations contribute to a more disorienting—and indeed more *vital*—impression of Kashiwagi's postmortem resonance.

An awareness of this type of phenomenological contingency should make us rethink how we oversee our scenes of analysis. Our goal should not be to unify

readings but rather to find ways of letting them unspool in less foreseeable ways. Hence a heightened sensitivity to Heian cultural production's queer texture might allow us to perceive gestures that surface only to flee our grasp—like restless apparitions—leaving traces whose refusals of finitude encourage us to pursue a vibrant contact without capture.