

*The Tale of the Heike*

narrative performance of the Genpei  
War

















A poster for the musical Hamilton. The background is a textured, golden-brown color. In the center, a large black five-pointed star is positioned. A silhouette of Alexander Hamilton, wearing a top hat and a long coat, stands on the top point of the star, pointing upwards with his right hand. The word "HAMILTON" is written in a white, serif, all-caps font across the middle of the star.

HAMILTON



**COME  
FROM  
AWAY**



**A NEW MUSICAL**



Ἡ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ ΤΗΣ  
 ΠΡΟΦΗΤΕΙΑΣ

ΤΗΣ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗΣ ΤΗΣ  
 ΠΡΟΦΗΤΕΙΑΣ



ΤΟ ΤΟΝ ΛΑΓΙΑ ΤΗ ΠΟΛΟ ΦΥΤΑΓΟ ΔΑΚΥΧΟΝΤΑ  
 ΥΣΕΛΟΙΔΟΝ ΣΟΟΝ ΕΠΙ ΕΝΑΙΟΥ ΛΑΙΤΟΛΕ ΣΟΛΙ  
 ΑΛΛΙ ΕΤΟΝ Η ΚΕΙ ΕΛΙΟΤΑΙΟΝ ΗΤΕ ΕΤΙΝ ΣΩΝ  
 ΟΝ ΧΟΝΤΟΝ ΥΧΟΣΤΕΚΟΟ ΓΛΑΦΟΙΟΤΑ ΧΕΙΤΕ  
 ΛΙΟΟ ΒΩΙΟ ΗΤΕ ΚΑΛΑ ΕΚΑΒΒΑΛΕΝ ΕΤΟΝ  
 ΤΑΝ ΟΥ ΦΑΙΟΤΕ ΗΝ ΤΕ ΧΕΚΟΝ ΑΛΛΙΟΙ  
 ΕΟΥΝ ΕΙΔΟΝ ΟΟΤΑΙ ΕΚΛΙΟΟ ΕΙΛΥΟΟ ΕΝΟΤΗΤΕ





सत्यमेव

वदमी

सीता

वामदेव

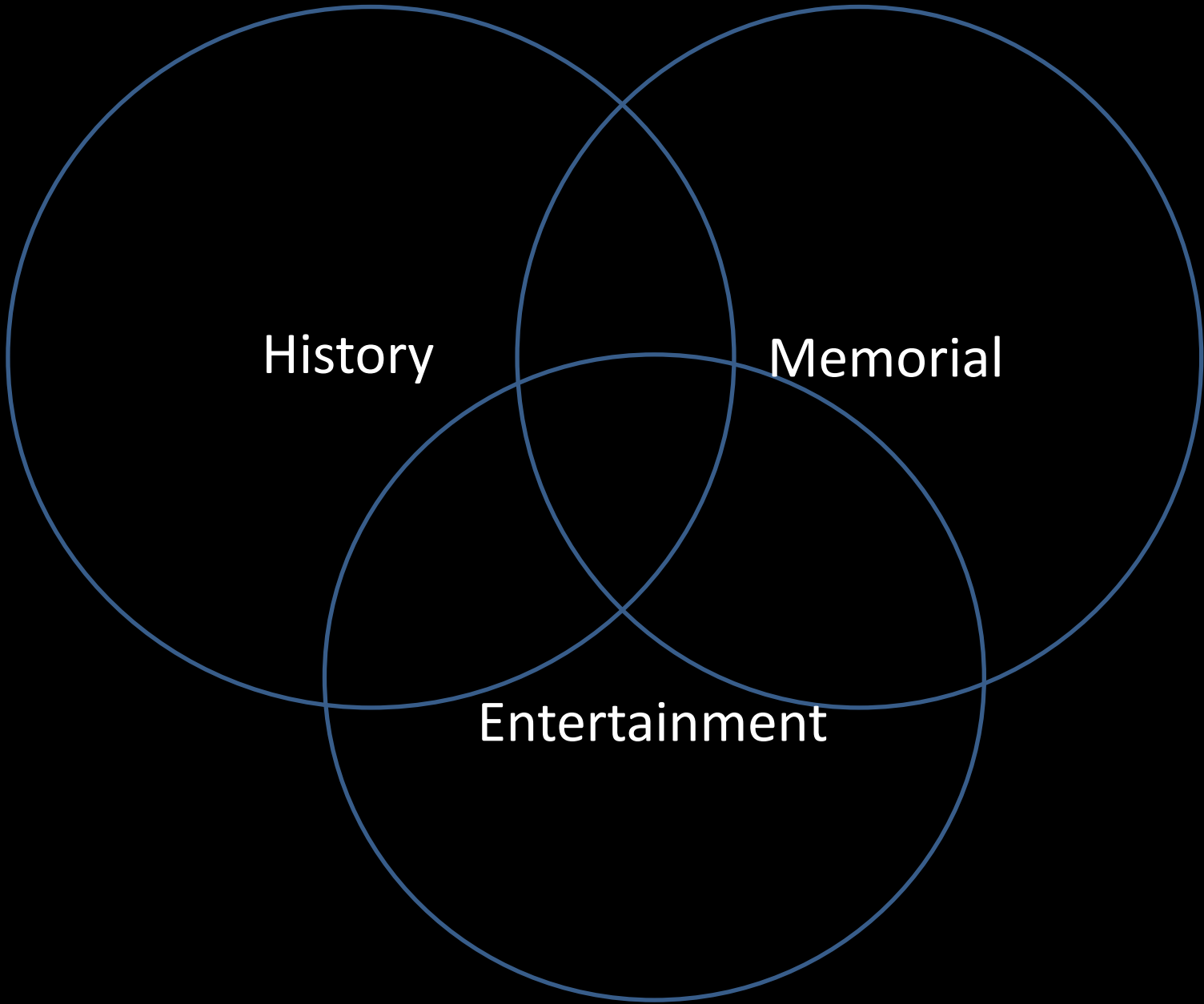
सीता



平家物語卷第一

祇園精舎の鐘の音もよけしきよに  
むくまわらぬ所はゆくも春の朝は又さす  
ちやぶすいろのまもりとわづらひをいかに  
とあも久しかりとも春はあけぬは  
やうらむけにともほのふとほろひぬも  
とく風のまはらうふかりとけく美事と  
とくるる夏の巻はあけの越高のひのまはらう





History

Memorial

Entertainment



# Genpei War (1180-1185)

Taira (Heike) clan vs. Minamoto (Genji) clan

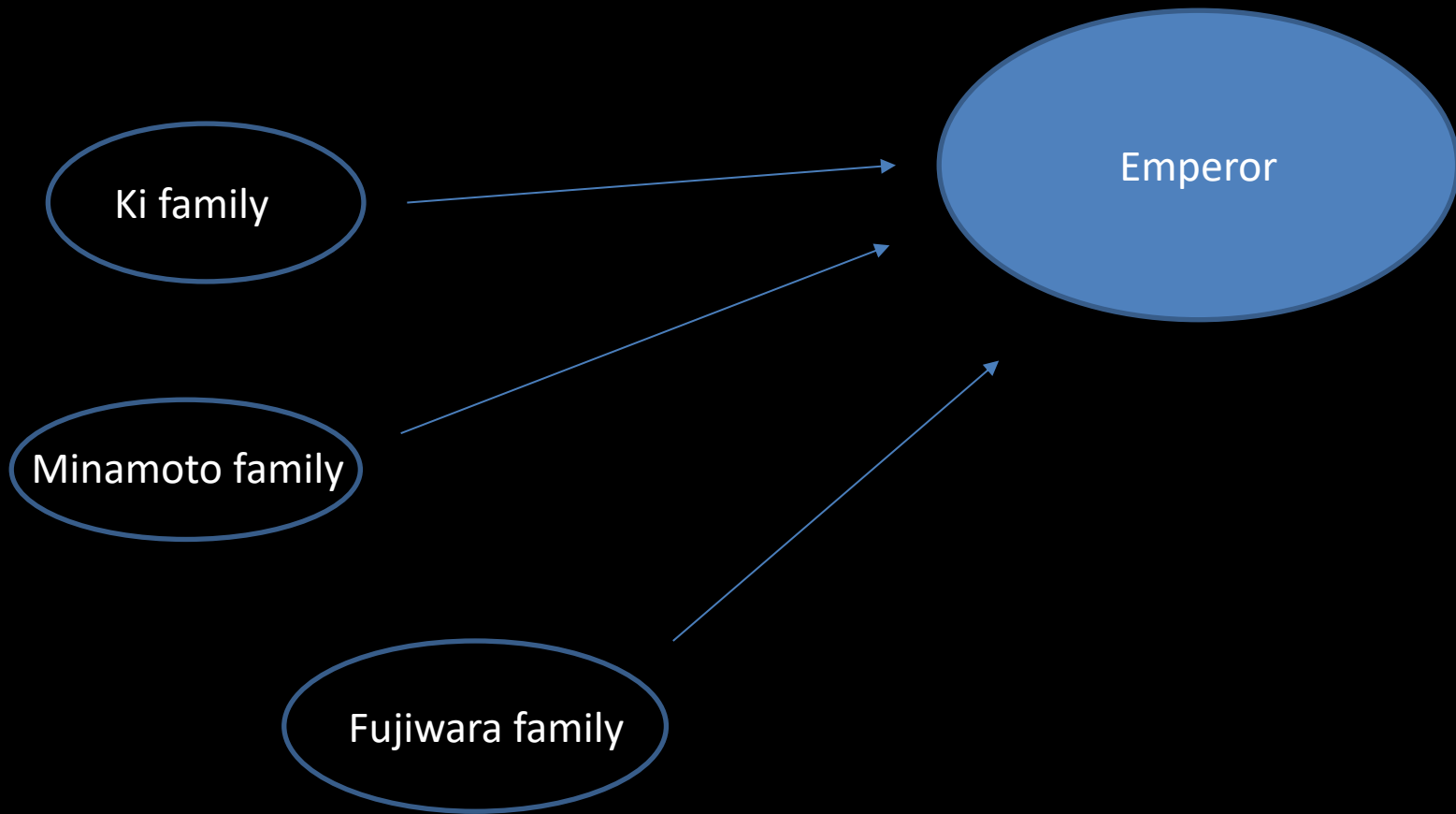
Taira: originally provincial warriors, rose to power in capital

Minamoto: opposed Taira in battle in 1159; vestiges are exiled to provinces





# Heian Period (794-1185) Marriage politics







# Crisis point: Heike descendent on the throne





# Mochihito's rebellion (Book 4)





# Battle of Kurikara Ravine (Book 7)





# Battle of Ichi-no-tani (Book 9)



# Battle of Dan-no-ura (Book 11)





# Results

- Many aristocrats, warriors die
- Child emperor drowns
- One of three imperial regalia lost at sea
- First shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo, appointed.

# Heike Monogatari

- Tale (or Tales) of the Heike
- Long war tale (gunkimonogatari) in approximately 80 variant texts
- Variant lines:
  - Yomihonkei (read line)
  - Kataribonkei (recited line)



# Setting the tone: mujō 無常

*The Jetavana Temple bells  
ring the passing of all things.*

*Twinned sal trees, white in full flower,*

*Declare the great man's certain fall.*

*The arrogant do not long endure:*

*They are like a dram one night in  
spring.*

*The bold and brave perish in the end:*

*The are as dust before the wind.*

祇園精舎の鐘の声

諸行無常の響きあり

娑羅双樹の花の色

盛者必衰の理をあらはす

おごれる人も久しから

唯春の夜の夢のごとし

たけき者も遂にはほろびぬ

偏に風の前塵に同じ

# Origin of the text 1: shomyo

[recording](#)





# Origin of the text 2: itinerant performers (biwa hoshi)



# Heike biwa





一既  
記

祇園精舎

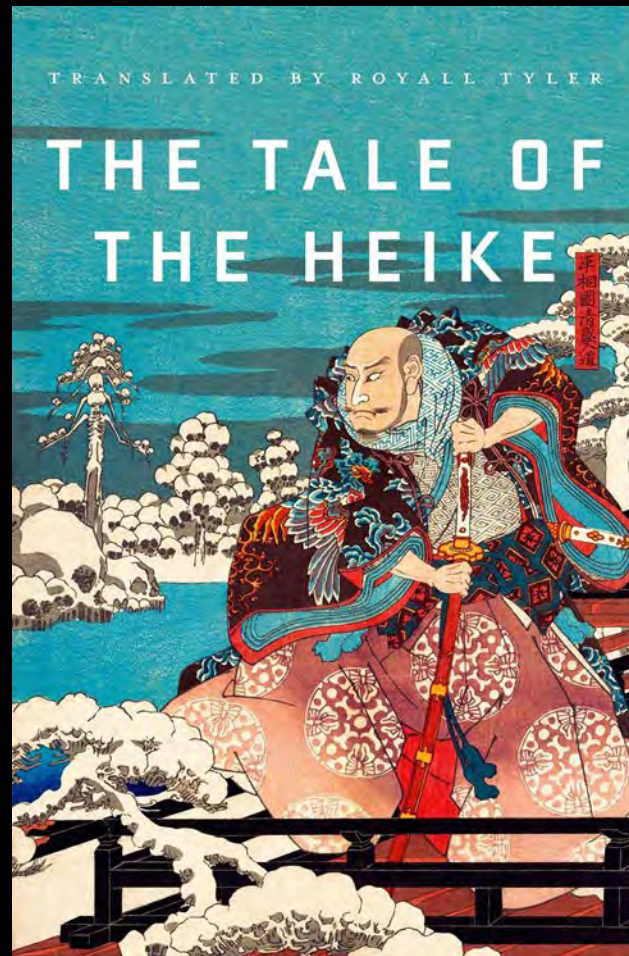
中音 祇 袈 精 舎 の 鐘 乃 あり

諸 行 無 常 此 響 亦 あり 沙 塵

双 樹 の 花 乃 色 聲 者 必 衰 此

亦 与 日 俱 新 此 亦 亦 あり 奢 也

# The Kakuichibon (variant), 1371





# Narrative Arc

- Rise and fall of the Heike/Taira clan
- Exile: first unjustly by Taira, and then justly, of Taira
- Restoration of order: return of imperial regalia in hands of new emperor
- Destruction of Taira clan

## But ...

- Lost of one of three imperial regalia
- Death of child emperor
- Battlefield deaths of so many

All contribute to the potential for angry ghosts (onryō) to wreak havoc in the here-and-now



# Ways of thinking about Heike

- Representative of epic tradition (world literature)
- Historical narrative (world history, world literature)
- Placatory tale (world religions, world literature)
- Basis for art, theatre, narrative in later periods (world art, theatre, literature, music, culture)

# Characteristics of Narrative Style: Battle Scenes

- Setting the scene: one-on-one combat
- Dressing the warrior
- Name-announcing
- Order of battle
- Noble death
- Tears shed by all for loss of a true warrior



# Case Study: The Deaths of Tadanori and Atsumori at Ichi-no-tani



# Death of Tadanori (pp. 500-502)





# Death of Atsumori (pp. 504-506)



# Kozaishō drowns (pp. 511-517)





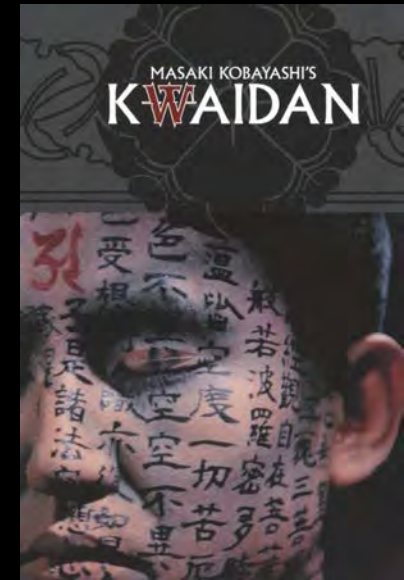
# Afterlives



# Film resources

Kobayashi, Masaki, *Kwaidan* (1964)

“Earless Hōichi” segment



Yamada, Naoko,  
*Heike Story* (2021)

Yuasa, Masaaki, *Inu-oh* (2021)







<https://edblogs.columbia.edu/worldpics/2023/02/17/teaching-world-epics/>

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-epic-world-pamela-lothspeich/1142965745>

*Essays in Idleness and Hōjōki* (1212), by Kamo no Chōmei,  
tr. Meredith McKinney, Penguin Classics, 2013

*Confessions of Lady Nijō* (late 13<sup>th</sup> c.), tr. Karen Brazell,  
Stanford University Press, 1973