

Example of the love suicides at amijima essay

[Life](#), [Love](#)



The Love Suicides at Amijima is a play produced in 172, written by Chikamatsu. It is one of the finest of jôruri (puppet) plays, and is perhaps the best out of fifteen other plays written by Monzaemon of the shinjûmono (love suicide) genre. The play represents the first popular culture of Japan that flourished during the Genroku period. Chikamatsu is recognized as a colossal figure of Japanese theatre. Conflict that was common to every one of the shinjûmono and many kabuki and jôruri plays of the Edo era is splendidly portrayed in the play. In Japanese theatre, it was uncommon to sympathize for a pair of lovers, but the michiyuki “[final] journey” in the poetic closing act of the play arouses such intense emotions.

The michiyuki allows to lovers to go on a voyage that that leads them to their death. A dance journey is created by Chikamatsu where the lovers continue to find release from giri “ moral obligations” or everyday concerns so they may finally reach paradise. However, Chikamatsu makes it apparent in the play that the path for paradise for the two lovers will not be simple. Did they really find paradise? They committed suicide, which according to the beliefs of Buddhism would disqualify them from rebirth! They do not even die together. This paper will be a critical analysis of the play and an attempt to decipher the significance of ‘ suicide’ in the play.

Historical Background

Somewhat like Europe, during the emergency of the merchant class, 17th century Japanese culture was experiencing its own Renaissance. Japan had a feudal society at that time, with a strong warrior tradition where loyalty was pledged to a warlord and the servile labor was done by the peasants. The samurai warriors followed Bushidō, “ the way of the warrior” that required

them to always act honorably or save face. As depicted in Chikamatsu's play, committing ritual suicide by taking their own life in the act of "seppuku" was the price samurai warriors paid of redemption for dishonor. In our Western society, suicide is viewed quite differently, and there is a completely different concept of suicide in the Japanese culture.

Cultural Perspective

The rising of the merchant class reflects a disruption in the social order because a person can gain status in society and wealth even if they are not a warrior. Rather than being the apex of proper society, the Samurai must contest with a new social class whose values do not conform to the code of bushido. The Samurai code is evaded by the new merchant class and prefer to allow their measure of respect and status conform to their success in business.

Genre

Originally, Love Suicides at Amijima was a puppet play. The cultural shift in Japan at that time was reflected by popular entertainment such as this play. During that time, the theatre genre of "Noh" was very common among an audience comprises largely of the elite or samurai. Puppet Theatre was for a wide audience that now perhaps had more time because they were not busy in the field working from for the local warlord working from dawn to dusk.

Synopsis

Love Suicides at Amijima depicts the voyage of a paper merchant who falls in love with a prostitute in the New Quarter. The problem is that Jihei is already married to his cousin Osan and has two young children, while Koharu

is bound by a contract that she cannot hopefully pay off. Before the play starts, the audience is told that Jihei and Koharu had made an oath to commit suicide the first opportunity they get. Jihei attempts to raise enough money to free Koharu but fails, and he ends up immersing his family into debt. Magoemon, Jihei's brother tries to reason with him, tries to show him what he apparently believes are Koharu's true feelings. For a while, Jihei appears to snap back to normal and things become at ease.

Magoemon and Osan's mother hears rumors that Jihei is returning to the New Quarter, and ten days later she pays a visit to check if it is true.

However, they are put at ease when they discover that the rumors are false.

After the visit, the contents of the letters that Osan and Koharu wrote to each other are revealed. Osan has plotted to end the relations between Jihei and Koharu, which shows and proves that the impression that Magoemon had of was false. She knows that her husband was being slowly carried away towards suicide, and she wished to save his life. Osan wrote the letters to Koharu to get her to agree to give Jihei up.

Although Jihei is precious to her more than her own life itself, she is so moved by the letter that she agrees. When Osan's father comes back he seems to be full of rage, and he angrily orders Jihei to give his daughter a divorce. Jihei tries to stop Osan's father from taking his wife but fails and he takes her away. That night, Jihei and Koharu sneak out and travel to Amijima crossing many bridges, where they both commit suicide.

Analysis

The strife in Love Suicides at Amijima originates because Jihei is morally bound to his family, yet he also longs to be with Koharu, his lover. To

preserve the family, his family members take every possible step to stop Jihei and Koharu from committing suicide. The act of suicide that the two lovers commit does not reflect the devotion of lovers to each other but rather an act of ineffable selfishness that hurts both of their families. Due to this, Jihei's family struggles to protect their family unit and the dignity of their family. Jihei's wife understands how passionately he loves Koharu. She also does all that she can in order to protect the dignity of her family. She even pawns the clothes off of the backs of her children in order to redeem her husband's lover, so that her husband's rival, Tahei does not humiliate him.

The play also addresses social order when Magoemon secretly meets with Koharu while wearing the Samurai's swords. It becomes apparent that he detests them when he says, "dressed up like a masquerader at a festival or maybe a lunatic! I put on swords for the first time in my life, like a bit player in a costume piece! feel like an absolute idiot with these swords" (Damrosch 55). Here Chikamatsu evades his upbringing in order to favor the life of the merchant class. It is a sharp insult to the warrior class. The subtle cycle of Buddhism is also reflected by the suicides (Damrosch 47).

Genre and Literary Tradition

Mon'zaemon's play is a modern-life play that concentrates on an ordinary urban person of Osaka. Half of the 24 plays that he has written are also of the modern -life nature. These plays of his always had young men of a low social standing as the leading man, the women these men fell in love with would usually be a low level prostitute. It might seem that 'suicide' is the focus of the play but what separates The Love Suicides of Amijima for the

rest of Mon'zaemon's plays is that it actually focuses on those who are trying to prevent the suicides.

The audience is not shown when and how the lovers make the suicide decision. They have already made it before the play starts. As a result, the play is actually a story of the events that unfurl to ultimately lead the lovers to committing suicide. Like the rest of his plays, Chikamatsu concentrates on the conflicts between *giri* and *ninjô* in the *The Love Suicides of Amijima*. Jihei's *giri* tends to clash with his *ninjô*. The complicated *giri* that the play is surrounded by is quite astonishing. Not only does conflict emerge between his obligations and his desires, but eventually his two obligations end up clashing.

Ultimately, fate gets ahead of him, his obligation to his family crumbles down, and leading him to Koharu. *Giri* is ethically based on Confucianism, while its spiritual aspects come from Buddhism. It is shown in the play that the lovers are believers of Buddhism and they accordingly believe that they will be reborn in paradise. Chikamatsu's characters often get anxious with thoughts of salvation and karma. Chikamatsu started writing plays during the Tokugawa period, which was a revolutionary period of Japanese theater. Since he had aimed his *yoruri* towards the broad audience, it quickly gained popularity.

Conclusion

It is natural to feel tempted to compare *Love Suicides of Amijima* to *Romeo and Juliet* ("goldstar.com"). However apart from the passion of a two young lovers, both of whom do not wish to live without each other and would rather die, there are more differences between the two stories than there are

similarities. Firstly, the deaths of Romeo and Juliet are based on a misunderstanding, while the two lovers in Chikamatsu's play deliberately decide to end their lives by committing suicide. Moreover, both the audience and also the other characters are already aware of the pact that they have made. The critically acclaimed film *Double Suicide* (1969) was inspired from this play. 'Love suicides' was a subject that was prohibited in Japanese theater for quite some time and *Love Suicides of Amijima* is a superb example of a play that depicts the subject really well.

Work Cited

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