

Uncommon means to
happiness:
overcoming social
barriers in 'the sound
of waves'



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In "The Sound of Waves", the possibility that individuals must break social norms and stay true to themselves in order to reach true happiness is explored across two distinct classes. Shinji and Hatsue, who belong to different classes, fall in love in a conservative town where marriage is reserved for two people of the same class. Despite many efforts to keep them apart, the young pair sticks to their instincts, with a helping hand from nature. If they had fallen prey to said efforts, their love would have been broken and they likely would not have been able to reach their optimal level of happiness.

The "Song Island" (Mishima 1) society in itself represents a dichotomy because of the vastly distinct social classes. All citizens of the island town participate in the collectivist society, with most of the women being abalone divers and most of the men being fishermen, and in fact, the people of this island are said to "always have the will to work truly and well and put up with whatever" (Mishima, 53). The use of this alliteration truly places an emphasis on the work ethic of the island as a whole. Nonetheless, the social classes draw a stark and polarizing divide between them. Hatsue and Shinji themselves epitomize this class structure. Shinji grows up in a poor household and with the dream of owning his own fishing boat, so that he can provide for himself and his family. Hatsue, on the other hand, is the daughter of a successful fisherman who is expected to follow her father's wishes by using her marriage in order to form an alliance with another powerful family. Hatsue has not dealt with any hardships throughout her lifetime, at least not to the extent to which those of the lower class on the island have. By

continuing their relationship, Hatsue and Shinji completely disregard the typical constraints of social class.

As soon as Hatsue arrives to the small island community, she catches Shinji's eye. Eventually, he catches hers as well and an unexpected friendship commences- which is the first of their rebellions against societal norms. After many flirty hang outs, " their dry, chapped lips touched" (Mishima 50), again breaking social norms; this time the one of saving oneself completely until marriage. Evidently so, this forbidden kiss eventually leads to a deeper relationship that extends past the physical dimensions- Hatsue and Shinji's romantic and spiritual connection deepens.

The couple weathers village rumors centered around their virginity, or rather lack thereof. Hatsue's father, who hopes that his daughter will conform to his wishes and marry Yasuo Kawamoto, the leader of the Young Men's Association, who comes from a wealthy family, eventually finds out. As soon as Hatsue's father catches wind of the rumors, he forbids Shinji from coming around the house, forces Hatsue to stay in the house while the boats are docked (which is when Shinji is in town and back from fishing), making every effort to prevent her from seeing him. This therefore becomes Hatsue and Shinji's new " norms". And surely, Hatsue and Shinji once again break these norms and expectations. Hatsue decides to write daily letters to Shinji, and Shinji has one of his friends pick it up every day- therefore maintaining a line of communication between them despite efforts to cut them.

In the above mentioned process of communication, Hatsue tells Shinji about an awful experience that she was subject to. In an effort to have Hatsue

forget about Shinji, and fall in love with him instead, Yasua Kawamoto attempted to rape her, “ taking advantage of her trustfulness” (Mishima 98). If Hatsue was a conforming girl, she likely would have accepted this as her fate, which likely would have led to her marrying Yasuo, like her father had hoped for, and the whole town was expecting. Instead, she stuck to her gut feeling. She didn't let the attempted rape phase her or influence her choice of partner.

There seems to be an overarching motif of nature being on the side of those justly seeking fated happiness- Hatsue and Shinji. In the recently mentioned rape attempt, Yasuo was undoubtedly halted because “ the hornet had stung him” (99), and inflicted pain beyond what he could handle. Hatsue was therefore liberated from his cruel actions. Nature also gave Shinji a chance to prove himself while out at sea, which allowed him to outshine Yasuo and win approval from Hatsue's father. It wasn't all nature's work, however. Shinji staying true to his values of leadership and initiative played an important role in this situation as well. In fact, Shinji even felt “ ashamed of himself for the way he had been squatting on the deck until now, practically cowering” (Mishima 169). This indirect characterization proves that staying true to himself eventually helped Shinji to be with Hatsue, which ultimately lead to his happiness.

It is of utmost importance to realize that if Hatsue or Shinji hadn't stuck to their ground, and, in the process, broken social standards outlined for them, they would not have been able to reach their happiness. However, it is also important to note that said happiness is questionable. While it was definitely the brave actions Shinji took during the treacherous fishing trip that granted <https://assignbuster.com/uncommon-means-to-happiness-overcoming-social-barriers-in-the-sound-of-waves/>

him approval from Uncle Teru, Hatsue's father, him and Hatsue have opposing opinions on what kept him safe during his time at sea. Hatsue firmly believes that " her picture had protected Shinji. But... he knew it had been his own strength that had tided him through that perilous night." (Mishima 191).

Indeed, by prioritizing their own sensations and visions, and subsequently breaking societal norms, Shiji and Hatsue effectively " protected their happiness and brought their love to this fulfillment" (Mishima 190). Their story suggests that to reach happiness, one must rebel against social norms. Hatsue and Shinji referred back to their true selves and self of identity constantly, not caving in to what was or was not expected of them. Undoubtedly, nature nudged them in the right direction. Taking into consideration a situation in which Hatsue and Shinji actually follow the unspoken rule of not crossing the class structure when marrying, it is clear that neither would be as happy as they are now. Through all of the struggles and village rumors, they managed to maintain their love for each other and their devotion to their true selves. Because of their foray into breaking social norms, Hatsue and Shinji were able to reach happiness, therefore implicating that one should break social norms (if necessary) to reach happiness.