

**The Love Suicide at Amijima as a Performance: the construction of
Chikamatsu's characters.**

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Introduction

Art exists in the thin margin between reality and illusion.¹

These words are ascribed to Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725), the most famous playwright for the Japanese puppet theatre. Chikamatsu was born as Sugemori Nobumori,² in Fukui, Echizen.³ He was the second son of a family that was quite prominent until his father became a *rōnin* (a masterless samurai) – the reasons for which are still unknown – which robbed Chikamatsu of nearly every chance he might have had to make a career as a samurai.⁴ Thus, he became a “fallen” samurai, lying at the margins of his social class. Even though his options were limited, Chikamatsu’s career choice presumably left his family upset with him, because of the humble status of the theatre’s performers.⁵ Despite this status, the aristocracy served as the patrons of the art of the puppet theatre.⁶

Of the three dominant forms of Japanese theatre – *kabuki*, *nō* and *jōruri* – Chikamatsu wrote the most for *jōruri*, the puppet theatre. *Nō*, which is all about symbolism and not so much about plot, was too poetic and *kabuki*, which is all about plot and not so much about symbolism, was too naturalistic.⁷ Of the three, *jōruri* is the one that falls through the cracks between reality and illusion for it couldn’t reproduce life and create realism – since it uses puppets instead of human actors – but did imitate human actions and thus avoided pure symbolism.⁸ At first he wrote five-act *jidaimono* (‘history plays’) in which he often ignored accurate historical data to make room for creative input. Chikamatsu created more plot structure, with increasingly more complicated storylines and more astonishing plot twists⁹, and used a rich literary style for the rhythmical narrative parts of the plays.¹⁰

In the beginning of the eighteenth century he launched a new genre, the three-act *sewamono* (‘domestic plays’), with the first performance of *Sonezaki Shinjū* (‘The Love Suicides at Sonezaki’)

¹ Makoto Ueda, “Chikamatsu and His Ideas on Drama,” in *Educational Theatre Journal* 12, no. 2 (1960), 108

² “ちかまつ-もんざえもん【近松門左衛門】”, The Biographical Dictionary of Japan, JapanKnowledge, <https://japanknowledge-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl>, (accessed Oct.23,2018)

³ Donald Keene, *World within walls: Japanese literature of the pre-modern era 1600-1868*, New York: Colombia University Press, 1999, 245

⁴ Keene, *World within walls*, 245

⁵ Keene, *World within walls*, 245

⁶ Keene, *World within walls*, 245

⁷ Ueda, “Chikamatsu and His Ideas on Drama,” 110

⁸ Ueda, “Chikamatsu and His Ideas on Drama,” 110

⁹ Donald H. Shively, “Popular culture,” *The Cambridge History of Japan* (1991): 756

¹⁰ Shively, “Popular culture,” 755

in 1703.¹¹ While this play's often seen as having outstanding literary quality – especially in the poetic *michiyuki* scene, when the lovers travel to their final resting place – *Shinjū ten no Amijima* (“The Love Suicide at Amijima), first performed in 1721, is generally viewed as Chikamatsu's masterpiece¹² and more mature than *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*.

It has been the subject of extensive research, especially in Donald Shively's book “The love suicide at Amijima (*Shinjū ten no Amijima*) : a study of a Japanese domestic tragedy by Chikamatsu Monzaemon” published in 1953. In his research Shively analyzes the text of the play and seemingly criticizes Chikamatsu's characters for being shallow, indistinctive and not living up to Western standards, which I think is too simplistic. Shively's view on these characters bears assumptions of Western theatrical realism and appears to be limited to the text. However, a distinction must be made between ‘realistic’ and ‘believable’ characters, in which case the latter is always better for a story. Moreover, a play isn't merely a text, but a performance that uses music, puppet heads, costumes, décor, light, and more for a complete theatrical experience; thus, the play should be interpreted as such.

Consequently, this thesis will look at Chikamatsu's play as a multi-leveled performance. It will include the visual and musical aspects as well as the textual. In doing so it attempts to answer the question: how are the characters constructed in Chikamatsu's play *The Love Suicide at Amijima*?

To start this quest, the story and its characters will be introduced, followed by an explanation of current interpretations. After this literature review, the second chapter will provide an analysis of the way in which the visual, musical and textual aspects of *The Love Suicide at Amijima* serve to direct the empathy of the audience and make them emotionally invested in the characters. Lastly, the third chapter will discuss possible interpretations, as well as the object, of Chikamatsu's critique. It will also aim to show that Chikamatsu's class influenced his emphasis on ethics in his plays, and put him in the position to criticize – from within – the system his class created by exploring the grey areas where the ideal world clashed with reality.

¹¹ Chikamatsu, Monzaemon, “The Love Suicides at Sonezaki,” *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, translated by Donald Keene (Columbia University Press, 1990): 39

¹² Chikamatsu Monzaemon, “The Love Suicide at Amijima,” *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, translated by Donald Keene (Columbia University Press, 1990): 387

1. Interpretations of The Love Suicide at Amijima

The Love Suicide at Amijima revolves around the financially troubled paper-seller Jihei, who is deeply in love with a prostitute named Koharu. Unlike the protagonists of most other domestic plays like The Love Suicides at Sonezaki, however, Jihei has a wife and two children, which is the main reason for The Love Suicide at Amijima's praised maturity.

The play is divided into three acts. In the first act the characters are introduced and their struggles are established. The second act is the act of escalation in which different events drive the protagonist and his lover closer to their death. The third act contains the *michiyuki*, the road towards death, which has been interpreted by Andrew Gerstle as a journey through Hell and rebirth as Buddha.

The first act takes place in the pleasure quarters. The setting is established and the characters and their struggles introduced through dialogue, after which Koharu goes to the teahouse, where she meets a samurai. She asks him questions about suicide and tells him that she promised Jihei to commit love suicide, even though she doesn't wish to die. Jihei, who heard every word while hiding, is angered by her deception. When Jihei strikes her with his sword, he misses and is tied up by the samurai, after which a crowd gathers and kicks Jihei, encouraged by his rival, Tahei. The samurai comes to his aid and is revealed to be Jihei's older brother, Magoemon, who intended to open Jihei's eyes to the mess he has made. He finds a letter written by Osan, Jihei's wife, and addressed to Koharu, which contains the truth about Koharu's feelings and which Magoemon promises to keep secret. The act ends with the brothers leaving the quarters and Jihei's trust in Koharu still broken.

The second act takes place in Jihei's home. Osan takes care of all the responsibilities, when Jihei's aunt and brother show up. They think that Jihei intends to redeem Koharu in ten days, due to a rumor they heard about a great spender. However, Jihei denies this, claiming that Tahei must be the great spender and he writes a vow not to redeem Koharu. Magoemon and his aunt leave content, but as soon as they're gone, Jihei cries because of Tahei's victory despite Koharu's promise to commit suicide if she were to become Tahei's. Realizing that Koharu will die, Osan reveals to Jihei that she wrote a letter to Koharu pleading her to sever her relationship with Jihei to save his life. Osan grabs money she put aside for the business and garments to sell, so Jihei would keep his honor in front of Tahei. However, when they intend to leave, Gozaemon – Osan's father – arrives, discovers their plan and beyond rage takes his daughter away from Jihei. Thus, the act of escalation ends with Osan's despair and Jihei pressed into a corner.

The third act starts back in the quarters. Jihei leaves after giving a payment to the proprietor and telling him he'll be in the capital for business and is uncertain whether he will return in time for the "interim payment". Instead of going home, he hides and is confronted with the sight of Magoemon who brought Jihei's son to make Jihei reconsider his suicide plans. When they can't find him and leave, Jihei goes to the side door where Koharu slips out. They leave together talking about their misfortunes and the ones they abandon by committing suicide. However, Koharu had promised Osan that she wouldn't let Jihei die, so the pair cut off their hair and turn into a monk and a nun, releasing them from the obligations of their past lives, and they choose to die on different locations and with different methods. Jihei cuts Koharu's throat after which he hangs himself, and when the morning comes fishermen find their bodies.

So far, the most influential Western scholars in the field are undoubtedly Donald Howard Shively, Donald Keene and Andrew Gerstle. Whereas Shively and Keene have interpreted the play as a text, Andrew Gerstle has added to this interpretation by discussing the musical score. However, regarding Chikamatsu's characters' struggles, these three scholars all agree with the most prevalent interpretation: the idea of *giri* ('duty'/'honor') versus *ninjo* ('human obligation').

According to Shively, *giri* always triumphed in the history plays which featured heroic samurai that embodied values like self-discipline, honesty, uprightness and compassion.¹³ Committing suicide out of loyalty to one's lord, which is motivated by *giri*, would be glorified, but the *ninjo*-centered love suicides wouldn't be acceptable acts for the samurai.¹⁴ However, the merchant protagonists of domestic plays differ greatly from those samurai and so do their actions. Instead of the *giri*-focused history plays, the domestic plays end in the love suicides of characters driven by their *ninjo*.

In his book about the play, Shively analyzes every character, starting with the protagonist, Jihei, whom he describes as an unsuccessful merchant who's indolent, irresolute and negligent of his business. His sense of honor and responsibility is less developed than that of his wife and his nature is changeable.¹⁵ He's weak-willed and his impulsiveness and fear of public shame are probably typical for many Osaka townsmen.¹⁶

His rival, Tahei, is described as a unsympathetic playboy who expresses the high spirits of the *nouveau riche* with his contempt for samurai and his cocky attitude.¹⁷

¹³ Shively, "Popular culture," 759

¹⁴ Shively, "Popular culture," 759

¹⁵ Donald H. Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima (Shinjū ten no Amijima) : a study of a Japanese domestic tragedy by Chikamatsu Monzaemon*, Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1953, 38

¹⁶ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 38

¹⁷ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 38

Jihei's wife, Osan, is the Confucian model wife who's willing to do anything to maintain Jihei's reputation and is a hard-working, efficient mother and merchant. Instead of passive obedience she proves herself capable of taking initiative and is "idealized to the point of incredibility".¹⁸

The female protagonist, Koharu, is in Shively's opinion "quite colorless". She embodies faithfulness and a sense of obligation, but apart from that there isn't much characterization.¹⁹

As for the other characters: the aunt is a familiar type role with conflicting obligations; Jihei's brother, Magoemon, is prudent and upright, and a model Osaka merchant.²⁰

However, Osan's father, Gozaemon, is a new role.²¹ While most of the old men in Chikamatsu's plays are good-natured, Gozaemon is ill-tempered and narrow-minded and prioritizes his financial interests over human values.²²

At the end of his analysis, Shively argues the following:

Although Chikamatsu does succeed in making the characters in *Ten no Amijima* human enough to win the sympathy of the audience, in the final analysis they are what they appear on the stage – puppets of his idealized ethic.²³

In other words, Chikamatsu didn't succeed in making the puppets transcend their being and appear like actual human beings. I find this statement problematic, to be honest. The way it's formulated seems to suggest that Chikamatsu somehow failed in something that wasn't even his goal to begin with. This attitude is also noticeable when Shively argues that the domestic plays were presented with an atmosphere as realistic as possible.²⁴ However, this stands in contrast to what Chikamatsu himself said about the "thin margin between illusion and reality".

Furthermore, Shively seems to criticize the use of clear-cut types in the history plays – and to a lesser degree in domestic plays – even though character types are an inherent quality of the puppet theatre. The head of a puppet reveals the character type that it's supposed to represent, so there's really no avoiding the use of types. Shively's opinion shows the influences of Western theatrical realism and bears the assumption that types are by definition a negative trait for a story to have. However, types – or the stylized representation of reality – fit in well with the popular culture of Chikamatsu's time. And even outside of Japanese popular culture, the effect of types

¹⁸ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 38

¹⁹ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 38-39

²⁰ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 39

²¹ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 39

²² Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 39

²³ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 42

²⁴ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 16

depends on the way they're used. In a Western, as well as Japanese, context, they can strengthen the moral of a story or its relatability. I will get back to this in the second chapter.

Shively does acknowledge that it's the viewpoint of Western drama from which the "failure" to create distinctive personalities is "disappointing", but he ties it to the "differing role of the individual" in Japan and the West.²⁵ I disagree with this for two reasons.

Firstly, Western theatrical realism didn't exist until at least a century after Chikamatsu's death. Of course, Western theatrical history knows some distinctive personalities, but it was by no means the trend to create such characters. Archetypes exist for a reason; they have their roots in centuries of storytelling. Western, like Japanese, theatre is full of types and tropes and even in the majority of stories today truly distinctive characters are rarely found. Even though they help to make a story feel more authentic, in terms of quality they have little necessity. Thus the comparison to Western drama is too simplistic.

Secondly, Shively appears to ignore the fact that puppet theatre is a theatre of types. The puppets are human enough to be empathized with, but they aren't meant to come across as real human beings; they are supposed to be in between the naturalistic and the symbolic. That was Chikamatsu's goal and in that he succeeded.

Donald Keene also brings up the viewpoint of the Western reader in his book "World within walls: Japanese literature of the pre-modern era 1600-1868". In his discussion of *giri* and *ninjō* he states that Western readers are likely to find many examples of this clash irritating, since they don't get why the characters would give so much weight to conventions.²⁶ He clarifies that *giri* isn't necessarily a rejection of the natural inclinations of the heart in favor of duty; this sense of duty can be as natural as *ninjō* and finds its origin in a feeling of gratitude toward another person.²⁷ An example of this would be Jihei's *giri* toward Osan. Keene states the following:

Giri not softened by *ninjō* may seem inhuman: it denies the individual's right to be happy at the expense of society. *Ninjō* unchecked by *giri*, however, is not only self-indulgent but can in the end destroy human society.²⁸

So, society needs to be mindful of the individual; if the individual can find neither happiness nor satisfaction, that will leave society with no redeeming qualities. However, the individual also needs to be mindful of the society; nobody is isolated from the rest and if everyone were to act on every selfish impulse, society couldn't function. That's why *giri* and *ninjō* don't stand in

²⁵ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 37

²⁶ Keene, *World within walls*, 260

²⁷ Keene, *World within walls*, 260

²⁸ Keene, *World within walls*, 260-261

opposition, but rather form a complementary contrast. The complexity of this contrast, as Keene portrays in his book, is found in the triangular relationship between Jihei, Osan and Koharu, who are all bound to each other by *giri* as well as *ninjō*. Keene argues that this is what makes 'The Love Suicide at Amijima a true tragedy; the tragedy doesn't stem from a typical villain, but from the good nature of the three characters.²⁹ Even if Jihei's financial issues and Tahei were to suddenly vanish, the complications that arise from the relations of *giri* and *ninjō* make it so that no possible outcome can bring happiness to all three of them. This also causes a bittersweet ending, since Jihei and Koharu achieve salvation, but Osan is left unhappy.

According to Keene, Chikamatsu's *sewamono* didn't have the variety expected of a great playwright, since the theme of love suicide and the complication caused by *giri* and *ninjō* didn't leave much room for invention.³⁰

Keene argues that the interest of the play lay first and foremost in the portrayal of the lives of townsmen, since the outcome of the play – the suicide – was already known to the audience and Chikamatsu faced the limitations of puppets as actors.³¹ The merchant characters weren't easily distinguishable from one another, which probably corresponds to the low amount of individuality of actual merchants in Chikamatsu's time.³² The undifferentiated nature of protagonists like Jihei, however, is compensated for by the way in which each *sewamono* confirms the portrayal of the Osaka townsmen's milieu, and the effect of which is undeniably tragic.³³ Keene further argues that "the natural tendency of the puppet theater to portray types accorded with the society"³⁴, but unfortunately he doesn't elaborate on this or explain why he thinks this was the case.

Unlike Shively and Keene, in "Circles of Fantasy: convention in the plays of Chikamatsu" Andrew Gerstle focuses on the musical score of the play for his interpretation of 'The Love Suicide at Amijima. This focus gives him a very fascinating insight: the climax of the play revolves around Osan.³⁵

He comes to this conclusion by looking at the musical structure, specifically unit 6 in which Osan encourages Jihei to redeem Koharu. The unit is divided in several sections, and in each of those Osan sacrifices something for Jihei and Koharu.³⁶

²⁹ Keene, *World within walls*, 261

³⁰ Keene, *World within walls*, 261

³¹ Keene, *World within walls*, 261-262

³² Keene, *World within walls*, 262

³³ Keene, *World within walls*, 263

³⁴ Keene, *World within walls*, 262

³⁵ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 144

³⁶ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 144

In the first, “6. a. Osan gives Jihei money to ransom Koharu (*fushi* p. 409 “this money he never put there.”)³⁷. So the sacrifice Osan makes here is a material one, namely: money.

In the second section, “b. (*kotoba*) Osan gives up all possessions for Jihei (*suete* p. 410 “and puts her love in besides.”)³⁸. Again she makes a material sacrifice, but this time it’s the possessions of herself and her children that she voluntarily gives up. Gerstle describes it as an arialike passage and the lines become longer as Osan’s feelings of grief grow keener.³⁹

In the third section, “c. (*kotoba*) Osan bares her soul to aid Jihei (*chū fushi* p. 410 “and he is silently weeping.”)⁴⁰. Here the sacrifice leaves the material realm; it’s not just possessions anymore that Osan is willing to give up. She sacrifices her soul, and each of the sacrifices is offered freely,⁴¹ until she seriously considers her new role in the household once Koharu’s ransom is dealt with, “d. (*kotoba*) What shall Osan do? Be his cook? (*suete* p. 410 “She falls to the floor with a cry of woe.”)⁴². Her grief weighs too heavy on her and she collapses, ideally evoking pity and sympathy from the audience.⁴³

The *kotoba*, straightforward speech style, and *suete*, harsh music, are written multiple times. Even though Osan shows resilience and determination when she discusses the finances and gathers the last possessions of the family, the harsh music reveals the emotional turmoil she hides beneath her strong façade.⁴⁴ She contributes to the destruction of her family, since the sacrifice of the garments means her children will freeze when winter comes, but she’s able to keep her agony hidden, until section 6d.⁴⁵ The rhetorical technique is once again one that begins with cool speech and switches to hot song; when she considers her new role her voice rises in song reaching its peak at *ue*, followed up by the harsh music, as a means to make the audience sympathize with her.⁴⁶

Thus, the climax of the play revolves around the suffering of Osan, the one who’s abandoned.⁴⁷ Instead of romanticizing love suicide, as was done in *The Love Suicide at Sonezaki*, *The Love Suicide at Amijima* focusses on the painful consequences of such an act: the suffering

³⁷ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 143

³⁸ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 143

³⁹ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 144

⁴⁰ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 143

⁴¹ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 144

⁴² Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 143

⁴³ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 144

⁴⁴ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 146

⁴⁵ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 146

⁴⁶ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 146

⁴⁷ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 152

of the ones left behind.⁴⁸ Jihei and Koharu may have been saved, but they were never allowed to forget how their passion harmed those around them.⁴⁹

Even though Shively called Osan “idealized to the point of incredibility”, I think a statement like this misses the point. I think Osan isn’t meant to be a realistic person, but rather a representation of all those loved ones who are left behind. The ones who honestly care for men like Jihei and do anything in their power to help them, but despite their efforts must endure the suffering of loss. Even though Osan is the embodiment of virtue, she’s still the one who ends up unhappy. The pain of a devoted and innocent woman, like the simplified Osan, shows the true essence of the play: the importance of life.⁵⁰

To summarize, the play should be viewed in relation to the context in which it was produced and thus the use of types, which has its roots and significance in Japanese popular culture, shouldn’t be seen as a negative trait of Chikamatsu’s play.

Furthermore, the play needs to be analyzed as a whole. Apart from the textual aspect, there were also visual and musical aspects that played their part in the telling of the story. These aspects should be taken into consideration, along with the text.

⁴⁸ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 152

⁴⁹ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 151

⁵⁰ Gerstle, *Circles of fantasy*, 152

2. Empathetic characters

It is essential that, not saying "it is sad," one should make it pathetic in itself.⁵¹

Here Chikamatsu talks about something that modern authors call the “show-don’t-tell” rule, which indicates that rather than telling your audience your character is sad, for example, you should *show* them through description, action or dialogue (or visual or musical techniques, in the case of theatre). Chikamatsu used several techniques – textually, visually and musically – to convey emotions and construct empathetic characters, which will be explored in this chapter.

Heads, shadows and gestures

The heads used for the puppets tell the audience what type of character they’re looking at. However, a quick disclaimer should be in order. The heads discussed in this thesis are those that are used in *bunraku*, modern puppet theatre. Thus, these heads aren’t the same as the ones used in Chikamatsu’s day, but they probably depict roughly the same types.

In “Bunraku: the Art of the Japanese Puppet Theatre”, Donald Keene categorizes the heads as follows:

	Good	Bad
Young man	<i>Kembishi, genta, oniwaka</i> and <i>waka otoko</i>	<i>Yokambei</i> and <i>darasuke</i>
Young woman	<i>Musume, Shinzō</i> and <i>Keisei</i>	-
Middle-aged man	<i>Komei</i> and <i>bunshichi</i>	<i>Danshichi</i> and <i>kintoki</i>
Middle-aged woman	<i>Fukeoyama</i>	<i>Yashio</i>
Old man	<i>Kiichi, masamune, sadanoshin, takeuji</i> and <i>shiratayū</i>	<i>Shūto</i> (father-in-law)
Old woman	<i>Baba</i>	<i>Bakuya</i> ⁵²

There are evidently more male types than female types. The male heads are also more detailed and expressive.

⁵¹ Makoto Ueda, “Chikamatsu and His Ideas on Drama,” 111

⁵² Donald Keene, *Bunraku: the art of Japanese puppet theatre*, Tokyo: Kodansha International LTD (1973): 53

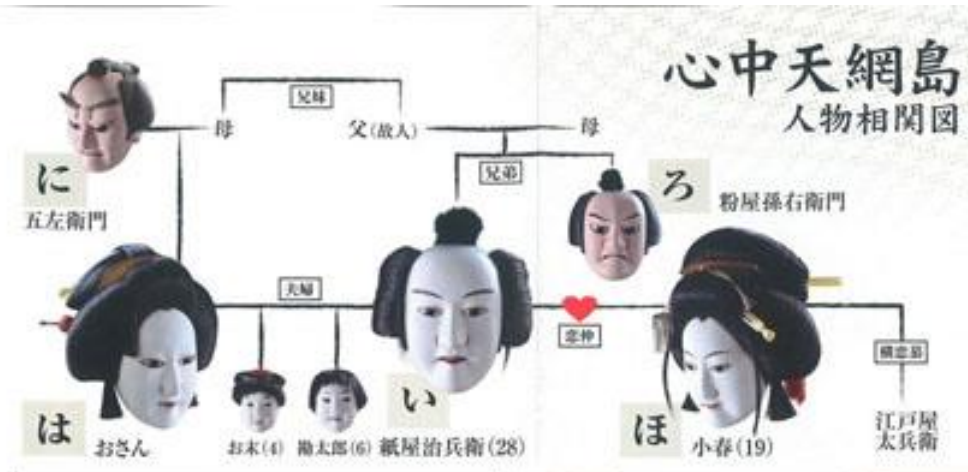


Figure 1. Relationships of the characters of *The Love Suicide at Amijima*.

Figure 1 shows the puppet heads, along with the names of the characters. The protagonist, Jihei (shown in the middle) has the *waka otoko* head – although Keene says he has a *genta* head in the first act⁵³ – and Magoemon (shown at the right side above Jihei), has what appears to be a *darasuke* head, which is quite strange, for Keene categorized that as a ‘bad’ head. Perhaps he’s considered to be an unwanted character in the eyes of Jihei, since he goes to great lengths to prevent the suicide. Gozaemon (at the upper-left) presumably has a *shūto* (father-in-law) head, since that’s the only ‘bad old man’ head in Keene’s categorization.

Koharu (at Jihei’s right) has the *musume* head, which – according to Shiho Takai – depicts five specific character types: *akahime* (‘red princess’), characterized as “a young daughter of an aristocratic or samurai family who is passionately in love”; *onna budō* (‘female samurai’), characterized as “a woman who is as skilled in martial arts and the way of the sword as a man”; *machi musume* (town girl), characterized as “a young woman who lives in town. Outgoing, cosmopolitan, has relationship experience”; *inaka musume* (‘country girl’), characterized as “a provincial daughter. Naive, passionately in love”; and, finally, *yūjo* (‘prostitute’), characterized as “a young prostitute. Often used in love suicide plays”.⁵⁴ Koharu is, of course, the *yūjo* type.

⁵³ Keene, *Bunraku*, 54

⁵⁴ Shiho Takai, “Prostitutes, Stepmothers, and Provincial Daughters: Women and Jōruri Puppet Plays in 18th Century Japan”, 78

Osan (at Jihei's left), however, has the *fukeoyama* head (Figure 2), the 'good middle-aged woman'. Keene describes this head as representing "women of intelligence, passionately devoted to their children, and loyal to their husbands"⁵⁵. Although, considering her age, the *musume* head would suit her better, she's depicted with a *fukeoyama* head because the shaven eyebrows show her married status and the traits 'intelligence', 'devotion' and 'loyalty' fit her seamlessly.



Figure 2. *Fukeoyama* head. Photograph made by Kaneko Hiroshi.

As the puppet theatre developed, the types represented by the heads became more rigid, leaving little room for individuality.⁵⁶ A character was either purely good or purely evil and their nature was visible from the start,⁵⁷ which meant that sudden character shifts were less effective. Since Jihei, Koharu and Osan all had 'good' heads, they are all viewed as 'good' characters, which is where the tragedy of the play stems from, according to Keene.

⁵⁵ Keene, *Bunraku*, 72

⁵⁶ Keene, *Bunraku*, 32

⁵⁷ Keene, *Bunraku*, 32

As I said earlier, there are more male puppet heads than female ones. Moreover, the male heads are more detailed and diverse than the female ones, which makes it easier to show and change expressions.

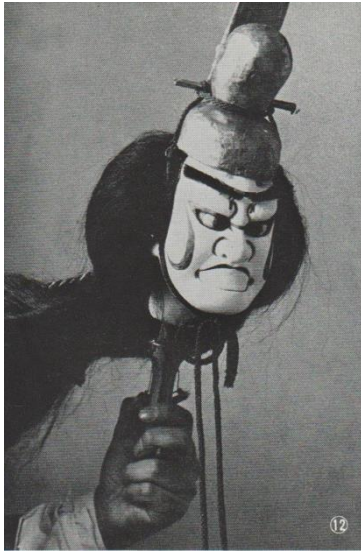


Figure 3.1. Male head with raised eyebrows. Photograph made by Kaneko Hiroshi.



Figure 3.2. Male head looking downward with a frown. Photograph made by Kaneko Hiroshi.

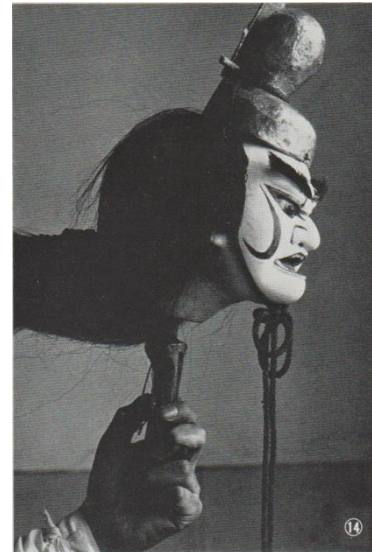


Figure 3.3. Male head with an open mouth. Photograph made by Kaneko Hiroshi.

Male heads like the ones in Figure 3.1., 3.2. and 3.3. are so that the eyes, eyebrows, or mouth can be moved, thus altering the expression. However, this option was rarely used, for it would make the technique less effective in the climactic scenes.⁵⁸ Another technique, that could be applied to the female heads as well, was the use of light and shadow, as was common in the *nō* theatre. The changing shadows are visible in the figures above.

Carpenter states that *nō* masks were made to capture the very essence of human experience, emotion, and beauty.⁵⁹ He compares them to the masks used in the classical theatres of Greece and Rome, and how these masks specified the gender, age and personality type of the role, and created a façade that hid away the actor's individual presence.⁶⁰ *Nō* masks may not have had moving parts, but they were able to convey nuanced emotions by using the effect of light and shadow.⁶¹ The less expressive masks for female roles could be tilted up, raised into the light, to convey happiness, and tilted down, enveloped in shadows, to convey sadness.⁶² Like this, the puppet heads could also take advantage of the effects of light and shadow.

⁵⁸ Keene, *Bunraku*, 56

⁵⁹ John Carpenter, "The Human Figure in the Playground of Edo Artistic Imagination" in Robert T. Singer ed.: *Edo: Art in Japan 1615-1868*, Washington: National Gallery of Art (1998): 372

⁶⁰ Carpenter, "The Human Figure in the Playground of Edo Artistic Imagination", 372

⁶¹ Carpenter, "The Human Figure in the Playground of Edo Artistic Imagination", 372

⁶² Carpenter, "The Human Figure in the Playground of Edo Artistic Imagination", 372

Yet another means for expression was the use of gestures. Gestures enabled dramatic illusion and were necessary to convey the changing expressions and carry the shifts of emotion.⁶³ There are two kinds of gestures to be distinguished, called *furi* and *kata*. *Furi* is the “stylized reproduction of familiar human movements”, which includes every motion that a human being can perform, and *kata* is an extension, rather than a reproduction, of human attitudes.⁶⁴ These gestures, combined with the heads and shadow effects – and, of course, clothing and décor – would have created a wholesome visual experience, that contributed to the construction of the characters.

Types, music and empathy

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the types that Shively criticized fit in well with Japanese popular culture. As Carpenter states:

Artists of the Edo period constantly explored new modes of portraying human beings at work and at play, relying not on purely naturalistic representations but rather on more subtle symbolic methods.⁶⁵

In other words, stylization and symbolism were valued more in Edo period popular culture than pure realism. This is the milieu in which Chikamatsu made his plays, and therefore it would have logically affected his views and writings.

Furthermore, they can actually have a positive impact on the story, namely its moral and relatability. The more detailed and distinctive a character is, the less likely the audience is to recognize themselves in it. However, this all relies on the context of the story, the goal of the author, the portrayal of the characters, and the like.

The positive effect on the story’s moral can be linked to ‘simplification’, and the relatability to ‘objectivity versus subjectivity’. Both of these principles can be most easily found in cartoons.

In “Understanding Comics” Scott McCloud explains that simplification is an effective tool for cartoons to amplify certain ideas and eliminate unnecessary details until only the essential meaning is left.⁶⁶ Storytelling is all about ideas – morals, ideologies, etc. – and, thus, characters – and images, in the case of comics – are simplified to serve the purpose of the narrative and to best convey or illustrate those specific ideas.⁶⁷

⁶³ Keene, *Bunraku*, 56

⁶⁴ Keene, *Bunraku*, 56-57

⁶⁵ Carpenter, “The Human Figure in the Playground of Edo Artistic Imagination”, 394-395

⁶⁶ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993): 30

⁶⁷ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 31

So, Chikamatsu's simplified types are likely better capable of focusing the attention of the audience on the essential meaning of his play, thereby positively affecting the transmittance of its moral.

Whereas this first principle is rather technical, the second is more psychological and wouldn't be something that was consciously considered. Nonetheless, it helps explain why types – in some contexts – work even better than distinctive characters, in terms of relatability.

'Objectivity versus subjectivity', as McCloud argues, revolves around the identification of the viewer. A person is more likely to see himself in a simplified drawing of a face than in a photo or realistic drawing of the face of another person, for the simplified drawing lacks the details needed to identify a specific person, and is, thus, universally identifiable.⁶⁸ Consequently, the face of a cartoon villain can be made more detailed to distance the audience from him, subconsciously, and draw them closer to the simple-faced hero of the story.

Likewise, the puppet heads used for the protagonist and his lover are simpler and less detailed than the others, especially the 'bad' heads, that have more detailed expressions. This can make the audience empathize more with the "heroes" of the story.

Along with the musical aspect, which makes Osan's character especially empathetic, Chikamatsu's play uses everything the audience sees and hears effectively to direct their empathy. The viewers can likely recognize quite a bit of themselves in the puppets on stage, precisely because of – rather than despite – their simplicity, and the audience's feelings of empathy and identification are guided through an emotional experience by the dynamic voice of the narrator accompanied by the strategic music of the shamisen.

Ethics, *mitate* and irony

The conflict between *giri* and *ninjō* that stood in the center of Chikamatsu's plays added to the relatability of them. To the merchants in the audience this conflict would have likely been familiar, since they lived in a strict society that didn't leave much room for passion and emotions. Because the struggles of characters like Jihei, Koharu and Osan were relatable, it would have been easier for the audience to empathize with the characters and identify themselves with them.

According to Keene, Chikamatsu put much effort into giving his plays literary distinction. The narration contains complex passages filled with puns, half-finished phrases and allusions.⁶⁹ Even though a large portion of his audience probably wasn't able to grasp every wordplay, they were

⁶⁸ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 36

⁶⁹ Keene, *World Within Walls*, 267

generally familiar with the literature he quoted and could in any case enjoy the beautiful language.⁷⁰ This didn't so much help with relatability of the characters, but it could in a way 'beautify' them. Since the audience consisted of townspeople, primarily, this would've been appealing. The characters represented their class, so this beautification could help the audience feel better about themselves and possibly make the characters more sympathetic. This is also what Chikamatsu consistently does with the prostitutes in his plays; they are presented in a favorable light, as loyal women whose use of language can often be quite poetic. This sophisticated and civilized portrayal makes these "low" people appear more respectable, admirable, and good-natured, which in turn makes the audience more willing to empathize with their struggles.

However, the use of language isn't the only textual element that Keene remarks on. As discussed in the previous chapter, Keene argues that the structure of Chikamatsu's domestic plays on lovers' suicide didn't allow for much variety. This sounds like a point of critique, even though this kind of fixed structure does have its merits. These merits have a lot to do with an important technique for directing empathy, which was well used in classical Greek tragedies and later in Western literature, and which is undeniably present in *The Love Suicide at Amijima*: dramatic irony.

"A Dictionary of Media and Communication" defines this term as:

A dramatic effect in which the audience for a drama (in any medium) or the reader of a novel has information that characters lack that enables the audience or reader to understand the implications of a situation or of what is being said while the characters do not. (...) dramatic irony is a device intended to elicit empathy for the doomed protagonist.⁷¹

So, the audience feels empathetic toward the protagonist because they know what will happen to them. It also "creates intense suspense and humor" and "emphasizes, embellishes, and conveys emotions and moods more effectively".⁷² Chikamatsu uses this technique in several ways, one of which is explained in an article about *mitate* techniques in Chikamatsu's plays written by a Korean scholar, Han Kyoung-ja. In her article she defines *mitate* as: the likening or comparing of one thing to another thing, and trying to homogenize different things on the basis of

⁷⁰ Keene, *World Within Walls*, 268

⁷¹ Oxford Reference, "dramatic irony", accessed on April 20, 2019, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-0778>

⁷² Literary Devices, "Dramatic Irony", accessed on April 20, 2019, https://literarydevices.net/dramatic-irony/?fbclid=IwAR17ludjWTQFvW5Jp3aZFE7miR6qr39wcB_XSX1nk8KxI3GSyYQv6N6XRqk

association.⁷³ The term is usually translated as ‘parody’ or ‘allusion’. Han explains the use of *mitate* in the prelude of the play, usually by quoting Chinese Classics, poems, or the like. Another way this *mitate* can manifest is in the name(s) of the protagonist(s). Regarding the purpose of this, Han argues that while the *mitate* don’t have any significant role within the world of the play, they are instruments for the audience to use and predict what lies in store for the protagonist.⁷⁴

In the case of referencing older works, these quotes can clarify important themes or certain character traits of the protagonist and are mostly used in history plays, rather than domestic plays. In the case of using names for association, when a protagonist bears the name of a well-known historical figure, for example, the audience can use their knowledge of that figure to predict what will happen to the protagonist.

As I said, this is more often used by Chikamatsu in history plays, rather than domestic plays, but the other way he uses dramatic irony is very much present in *The Love Suicide at Amijima*. Unlike the more subtle *mitate*, this technique is foreshadowing in its most basic form.

Is her name, Koharu, an omen that in this tenth month she will leave in this society a scandalous reputation?⁷⁵

Like this, the event of Jihei and Koharu’s suicide is foreshadowed from the beginning. By the time this play was created, the audience knew what to expect. They knew that despite Koharu’s lie in the first act and despite the efforts of Jihei’s family the couple would eventually meet their end. Chikamatsu took their expectation – which was built on the familiar structure Keene critiqued – and added sentences of foreshadowing to make it even stronger, all while creating scenes that contrasted this expectation. While the narrator hints at the event from the start, Koharu expresses her unwillingness to commit suicide, as does Jihei in the second act. When the main characters state that they won’t perform a lovers’ suicide, irony arises, because the audience *knows* that they will, in the end, do exactly that.

To sum up, Chikamatsu uses visual, musical and textual means to direct the audience’s empathy. Regarding the visual aspect, the simplified puppet heads serve to make the characters more identifiable – and therefore more empathetic – and to direct the attention of the audience away from unnecessary details. Furthermore, the shadow techniques and gestures help to convey emotions more effectively, likewise leading to more empathetic characters. Regarding the musical

⁷³ Kyoung-ja Han, “Chikamatsu no jōruri ni okeru mitate no hōhō,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 74 (2017), pp. 489

⁷⁴ Han, “Chikamatsu no jōruri ni okeru mitate no hōhō,” 497

⁷⁵ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 63-64

aspect, the climax is built around Osan's suffering, which makes the audience automatically empathize with her, since they are guided to do so. And, regarding the textual aspect, techniques like dramatic irony are used to strengthen empathy and create situations in which the ignorance of the characters will make the audience more emotionally invested.

Now, what would be the purpose of directing empathy? The empathetic state of the audience – which makes them emotionally invested in the characters and the play – causes them to be more susceptible to any potential critiques and messages the play harbors. When a viewer is emotionally invested in a play the things that play presents as 'true' are more easily accepted as such.

However, with the audience's empathy successfully directed, what critiques would Chikamatsu have tried to convey? And how is this related to his social class? The next chapter will explore these questions further.

3. A critical samurai

This chapter will argue that Chikamatsu had the educational and moral background to evaluate the failing system of Tokugawa society. He used his position as a samurai to criticize the clash of the ideal Confucian society with the real one, by exploring this clash in his plays. It will look at possible critiques embodied by the empathetic characters.

Osan – the failing ideal

The structure of Tokugawa society was a division – and hierarchy – of four classes, *shi-nō-keō-shō* (samurai, farmers, artisans, merchants). This structure was based on the contemporary value system that originated from China, more specifically several Chinese books like ‘the Book of Han’.⁷⁶ The Chinese (Confucian) value system was important in Tokugawa society. Readers and copybooks used for the education of samurai children contained quotations from Chinese classics and histories.⁷⁷ This ensured the children absorbed Chinese moral and humanistic ideas, which strengthened Confucian social principles, like loyalty to their lord and devotion to their parents.⁷⁸ This value system was propagated by the shogun and daimyo as a formal code of personal conduct, in order to maintain the discipline that had otherwise likely weakened in the absence of personal loyalties the samurai of previous ages formed on the battlefield and that cemented feudal relationships.⁷⁹ Education, which fostered the internalization of these values, was seen as a form of self-cultivation,⁸⁰ something that praised in Neo-Confucianism.

Neo-Confucianism also assumes “human nature” to be inherently good and values “seriousness”, or the “Method of the Heart-Mind”, as its core practice element.⁸¹ These influences are undeniably present in Chikamatsu’s work.

In the end, the division into four classes was an ideal that didn’t match with reality. While the farmers, for example, were theoretically higher in rank than the artisans and merchants – that together form the group of ‘townspeople’ – in reality, they were often treated as less.⁸² Furthermore, the merchant class gained economic power during the Edo period and eventually even samurai were indebted to them. They may not have had a shred of political power, but they

⁷⁶ "しのうこうしょう【士農工商】", 国史大辞典, JapanKnowledge, <https://japanknowledge-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl>, (参照 2019-04-23)

⁷⁷ Shively, “Popular culture”, 717

⁷⁸ Shively, “Popular culture”, 717

⁷⁹ Shively, “Popular culture”, 717

⁸⁰ Shively, “Popular culture”, 716

⁸¹ Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism : a cultural history*, 49

⁸² "しのうこうしょう【士農工商】", 国史大辞典, JapanKnowledge, <https://japanknowledge-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl>, (参照 2019-04-23)

could enjoy quite some influence with their money. Thus, the ideal wasn't an accurate depiction of reality, something that is made clear through several characters, one of which is Osan.

Osan is the embodiment of virtue and Confucianism and yet she's the one who suffers the most and is forced to sacrifice the most. She may be "idealized to the point of incredibility" but this isn't a negative thing. Rather, it empowers the critique that the play possibly carries. It strengthens the notion that the idealized world clashes with the real one, because the one character who's as exemplary as the samurai heroes of history plays, is the one who loses everything. Osan sacrifices her possessions and her soul, and the musical climax revolves around her most painful moment.

Through her character Chikamatsu's possibly criticized the failing ideal. While he might have favored the ideal – if Osan is indeed the instrument of critique it certainly seems so – the failure of the ideal to manifest in real society, or of society to mirror the ideal, can be a point of criticism. In fact, it may even contain a hint of cynicism. As a "fallen" samurai, Chikamatsu had quite an interesting position in society. It would be no surprise for him to become slightly cynical when the ideals he had been raised with were so obviously absent from his actual environment.

Jihei and Koharu – the empty ideal

According to Gerstle, Chikamatsu's genius lies in the way he depicts human passion and weakness.⁸³ Chikamatsu himself allegedly described the portrayal of the pathos of characters torn between *giri* and *ninjō* to be the essence of art.⁸⁴ Later in his career he used different angles to explore larger themes⁸⁵, one of which, Gerstle argues, is 'crime and responsibility'.⁸⁶ He questions the view that the theme of 'free will' has no place in Japan's Buddhist culture in which karma as a concept is fundamental, and thus likely favors the theme of 'fate or divine intervention'.⁸⁷ In this regard, a shift can be seen between Chikamatsu's older and later plays; while the blame was first on the villains or society, it came to be put on the protagonist.⁸⁸ The notion of responsibility is paradoxical, because of the conflict between the inescapable karma, on the one hand, and the concept of mercy for all, which is fundamental to popular Amidist Buddhism.⁸⁹

Chikamatsu's exploration of the excesses of passion and its consequences, led him to question the nature of good and evil,⁹⁰ seek the limits of Buddhist mercy and Ito Jinsai's

⁸³ Andrew Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", in *Monumenta Nipponica* 51, no. 3 (October, 1996): 318

⁸⁴ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 319

⁸⁵ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 319

⁸⁶ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 320

⁸⁷ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 320

⁸⁸ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 320

⁸⁹ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 321

⁹⁰ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 321

humanistic philosophy which assumes the essential goodness of humans, and examine human psychology and responsibility.⁹¹ This exploration leads to contradictory characters with a ‘good’ puppet head who nonetheless act immorally, and a complex view of who or what is to blame for human actions. While the blame is put on the ‘system’ and fate, the characters are held equally responsible for their actions, since it was their choice to act.⁹²

According to Shively, the moral theme of *The Love Suicide at Amijima* is expressed in its title: the “Heaven’s Net”, which bears a double meaning and refers to both Heaven’s retribution for sins and the saving net of Amida Buddha.⁹³ So, the paradox that Gerstle spoke of is visible here, as well. However, besides the paradox resulting from the complex view of responsibility, this title can be seen as a critique of its own. As Shively explains, Chikamatsu assures the audience that the lovers in his play are saved by Amida, despite their blind passion, which stands in stark contrast to the Buddhist way of life, and their mockery of monastic vows⁹⁴ by using it as a convenient escape from their obligations. As long as they “observe the proper forms” and “have faith that they will be saved”, that is all that matters.⁹⁵ In my opinion, this wordplay alone can already be viewed as a critique.

Furthermore, as stated in the previous chapter, the puppet heads classified a character as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ from the moment it first appears on stage. Here the form is also more dominant than the content. Jihei and Koharu have to be saved, despite their bad deeds, because they are depicted with ‘good’ heads. Perhaps if they had been depicted with ‘bad’ heads, while acting morally, they wouldn’t have achieved salvation. Chikamatsu could have criticized this superficial view.

In the middle – a question of representation

One might wonder whom the preceding points of critique were aimed at. The Tokugawa Shogunate? The townspeople? To be honest, there’s a case to make for both of them. To explore this question, it’s important to look at the characters in relation to what or whom they represent. As mentioned before, Chikamatsu’s characters adhere to clear-cut types and are therefore well-suited for the stylized representation of reality. How Chikamatsu portrays certain groups by means of this representation, can offer us some fascinating insights.

To start with the protagonist, Jihei represents the group of unsuccessful merchants. He’s weak, irresponsible and not fit to run a business. He’s one of the characters that demonstrate the

⁹¹ Gerstle, “Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu”, 326

⁹² Gerstle, “Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu”, 326

⁹³ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 41

⁹⁴ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 41

⁹⁵ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 41

failing ideal, because he was born into a profession that's ill-suited to him. His wife is better capable of performing his duties than he is. In response to his incompetence, he resorts to escapism.

In a sense, he represents society as it really is, confined in the rigid structures enforced by the government and with no room for human emotion or passion. Like society, Jihei is trapped in two extremes that are in conflict with each other; he cannot adhere to the ideal, because the ideal ignores his emotional side, and he cannot lavish in his passions, for society doesn't allow it. Because of this, there's a constant tension and frustration in his character.

He stands in stark contrast to his brother, Magoemon, who represents the successful and responsible merchants. Perhaps he isn't as idealized as Osan, but he does show the side of society that works. Of course, society doesn't fail in its entirety. There are bound to have been people who fit well in the class of their birth and who managed to build a satisfying life for themselves. Magoemon is a helpful, honorable character, which makes him wildly different from the other successful merchant in the story: Tahei.

As Shively argued in his analysis, Tahei expresses the high spirits of the newly risen group of wealthy merchants. As such he represents the *nouveau riche*. He enjoys success in his occupation, but he lacks proper moral conduct and respect. Especially for someone like Chikamatsu, who himself came from a samurai background, conceited merchants like Tahei that showed no respect for those higher in rank, must have been truly annoying. Such merchants could be seen as an object of the 'empty ideal' critique, since they fit with the form – they are good at their job and stick to the rules of society – and therefore succeed in society, despite their immorality and disrespectful attitude. In other words, they don't fit with the content of the ideal, only with its form. His character could show the bias Chikamatsu as a samurai must have had against the "lower" merchants.

As for Koharu, she represents the moral prostitutes that often make their appearance in Chikamatsu's plays. She resides in the grey area that his plays explore and her puppet head, *musume*, reveals her good nature. She's loyal and honorable, despite her profession, and serves as an argument against the strict Tokugawa system. She demonstrates both the 'failing ideal', in the mismatch between her loyal personality and her profession, and the 'empty ideal', in her achieving salvation, despite her immoral deeds of abandoning her mother and not keeping her promise to Osan.

Osan can represent two things: the loved ones suffering the pain of abandonment, and the Confucian ideal. If the former, she demonstrates the dark side of lovers' suicide and the dangers of indulging in passion. If the latter, she demonstrates the fault of reality. In the latter case it's

notable that Jihei (the real society) abandons Osan (the ideal) in favor of Koharu (the grey area). In fact, this can be taken even further, if Gozaemon is added to the equation.

Gozaemon, Osan's father, is a successful merchant, like Magoemon and Tahei, but he differs from them in several ways. He doesn't have the helpful attitude of Magoemon, who genuinely cares for Jihei and goes to great lengths to save him from his inevitable death – going as far as to dress up as a samurai and visiting Koharu, and even offering her money to prevent the suicide. In contrast to this, Gozaemon is a cold character much concerned with honor and reputation. He has no regards for emotions whatsoever and no tolerance for mistakes. Moreover, unlike Tahei, Gozaemon has a strictness that could have been characteristic for the older generation. He's old-fashioned and wouldn't waste his money on pleasure, like Tahei does. Furthermore, Gozaemon appears condescending and seems to think himself morally superior to others. So, what or whom does he represent? Of course, he could simply represent the older generation of merchants.

However, one could go as far as to argue that Gozaemon potentially represents the Tokugawa Shogunate. This might appear farfetched, and perhaps it is, but I believe there's definitely something to say for this. Naturally, due to censorship in the Edo period, Chikamatsu couldn't have been obvious about something like this.

Gozaemon shares some characteristics with the Tokugawa Shogunate, starting with his rigid personality and his contempt for the pursuit of passion. He either ignores – in Osan's case – or condemns – in Jihei's case – displays of irrational emotions. Likewise, the Tokugawa Shogunate left no room for *ninjō* and enforced a rigid structure on society. Moreover, Gozaemon is old-fashioned and much concerned with rules and reputation, like the Shogunate. He shows no mercy to either Jihei or Osan and drives Jihei toward suicide, without regard for the emotions of Jihei, Osan and their children. Likewise, the Shogunate in its rigidness drove certain groups of people to despair.

These traits especially come forth when Gozaemon forcefully takes Osan away. This is where he finishes the equation of Jihei, Osan and Koharu. Jihei (the real society) considers abandoning Osan (the ideal) in favor of Koharu (the grey area); and Gozaemon (the Shogunate) takes Osan away from Jihei, thereby removing all hope and doubt and driving him to his end.

Looking at it this way, it can be concluded that the critique isn't aimed at the merchants or the Shogunate, but at both. They both mistreat the ideal; Jihei neglects Osan and eventually abandons her, and Gozaemon treats her as property and an instrument – without even listening to her or having any respect for her wishes – as the Shogunate treats the Confucian ideal as an instrument to keep the samurai in line. Chikamatsu, as a samurai in the margins of his social class and standing in the middle of high and low, was in the position to see the “lower” classes neglect

or ignore the ideal, and the “higher” samurai and the Shogunate use it instrumentally, as an empty vessel, without listening or living up to its contents.

To summarize, the play can harbor a critique of the ‘failing ideal’ – meaning the clash between the ideal and reality – and the ‘empty ideal’ – meaning the dominance of form and the absence of content. Based on whom each character represents, one can conclude that the critique was aimed at both the government and the townspeople.

Conclusion

The question this thesis attempted to answer is how the characters were constructed in Chikamatsu's *The Love Suicide at Amijima*, while interpreting the play as a performance, rather than a text.

Textually, the play has been interpreted as a mature story about the struggles of *giri* and *ninjō*, but inadequate in its ability to portray distinct personalities. However, when considering the musical layer, the interpretation altered. Musically, an emotional experience is created that reaches its peak during Osan's moment of suffering, resulting in her character becoming the center of attention and empathy. Thus, the play is not just about the salvation of death, but primarily about the importance of life. Yet another layer adds more to the interpretation. Visually, the characters were constructed according to archetypes – shown by the heads – and emotions were conveyed through techniques that involved a particular “vocabulary” the theatregoers were familiar with. Since Osan's head emphasized her good personality, her suffering was even more excruciating. Together, the musical and visual layer color the text by adding emotional experiences for the audience.

All in all, the multiple layers of the play directed the empathy of the audience through simplification and beautification and, in doing so, made the audience susceptible for Chikamatsu's critique of society's superficiality and the failure of the societal system, aimed at the “morally inferior” lower classes and the “morally inadequate” higher classes. Another contributing factor in this regard was the possibility of representation through types.

To get back to Shively's critique, I would argue that Osan's idealized and unrealistic nature isn't a problem. As I said in the introduction, believability overshadows realism – though they largely overlap. Any general audience – Japanese or Western – prefers believable, yet slightly unrealistic, characters, over rationally realistic characters, that just don't *feel* believable. A play is primarily an emotional experience and as long as Osan's “emotionally” believable, she's a good character. The argument that “typical” characters are shallow or unbelievable, is overly simplistic and ignores the opportunities types can grant a story. Because the puppets are not clearly delineated, the audience is free to project their own feelings and interpretations on them. In doing so, they create depth to the characters that cannot be found in the text alone. The clear-cut types are like simple pictures that the audience can color as they see fit. Chikamatsu may have determined the general lines, but it's up to his audience to choose the colors.

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Figures

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Published on May 26, 2013. pulinblog.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2013/05/post-2dc7.html
- Figure 2 – Donald Keene, *Bunraku: the art of Japanese puppet theatre*, Tokyo: Kodansha International LTD (1973): 72
- Figure 3.1 – Donald Keene, *Bunraku: the art of Japanese puppet theatre*, 74
- Figure 3.2 – Donald Keene, *Bunraku: the art of Japanese puppet theatre*, 74
- Figure 3.3. – Donald Keene, *Bunraku: the art of Japanese puppet theatre*, 74