

In the Name of Love? Character motivation for love suicide in *Sonezaki*
***Shinjū* and *Shinjū Ten no Amijima*.**

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Introduction

Love suicide certainly speaks to the imagination. One may find it tragic, romantic, or silly. In any case, it is complex. How could humans, who by nature desire survival and self-preservation, actively seek their own end? The reality of motivations is fascinating yet nigh incomprehensible. What is perhaps even more fascinating, however, is someone's perception of that reality. As storytellers construct their own fictional realities, those who tell tales of love suicide also construct motivations, some more complex than others.

This thesis shall explore the following research question: what motivates characters to commit love suicide in the puppet plays *The Love Suicide at Sonezaki* and *The Love Suicide at Amijima*? It will use two case studies, both written by Japanese playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725): *Sonezaki Shinjū* ('The Love Suicides at Sonezaki'), which premiered in 1703, and *Shinjū Ten no Amijima* ('The Love Suicides at Amijima'), which premiered in 1721. These plays are *sewamono* ('domestic plays') and are the first and one of the last Chikamatsu wrote in this genre. These specific plays have been chosen for two reasons: (1) there is almost twenty years in between, which means they might show an interesting development in Chikamatsu's treatment of the subject; and (2) they are the most famous of Chikamatsu's plays and, therefore, a large portion of scholarly interpretations revolve around these plays.

Among scholars of Japanese theatre, the reigning interpretation of motivation in plays has revolved around the dichotomy of *giri* and *ninjō* as a central theme. The Encyclopedia of Japan describes *giri* as a social obligation whereby one must reciprocate favors to sustain social relations; a classic example is a warrior's duty to serve their lord.¹ *Ninjō*, on the other hand, revolves around universal human feelings that one naturally feels towards others; an example would be the love of a parent for their child.² In this line of thinking the epic tales of *jūdaïmono* ('history plays') celebrate the triumph of *giri*, whereas the contemporary, topical tales of *sewamono* showcase the victory of *ninjō*. Steven Heine has pointed at the distinction of social-Confucian and religious-Buddhist interpretations³ and distinguished three perspectives of conventional interpretations: ethical, psychological and literary.⁴ The psychological perspective revolves around the *giri/ninjō* conflict and the

¹ "giri and ninjō," Encyclopedia of Japan, JapanKnowledge, accessed on July 8, 2020, <https://japanknowledge-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/lib/display/?lid=10800AN001008>

² JapanKnowledge. "giri and ninjō."

³ Steven Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World: Chikamatsu's Double Suicide Drama as Millenarian Discourse," in *the Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (1994): 377

⁴ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 373-375

consensus here is that, while the emotional motivation for suicide involves both *giri* and *ninjō*, “it is the intense passion of *ninjō* that compels the lovers to make the supreme sacrifice”.⁵

Influential Japanologist Donald Keene has likewise argued that the strength of the characters’ love pushes them to commit suicide together,⁶ as if *ninjō* is simply ‘romantic love’ or ‘passion’. However, the plays give reason to believe the characters are more emotionally complex than that.

This thesis will therefore use a non-normative approach to step away from the binaries of *giri* and *ninjō*. It by no means seeks to invalidate the *giri/ninjō* perspective. After all, Chikamatsu himself has allegedly claimed that portraying pathos of characters with conflicting *giri* and *ninjō* was essential to his art.⁷ Rather than dismissing this idea altogether, this thesis investigates alternative perspectives outside of that framework that can add to – not replace – the *giri/ninjō* interpretation. In essence, it seeks to broaden the psychological perspective.

To analyze the motivations of characters in these plays, I will look at context, text and subtext. With context I mean the events within the narrative that either happen “live” or are mentioned through narration or dialogue. With text I refer to the script of the plays written by Chikamatsu. For this part I am, however, limited by the translations of Donald Keene. With subtext, I refer to the layer of meaning beneath the surface that is the text. This is the most risky part to analyze, since it is the most expansive realm of interpretation. My own associations will inevitably influence my understanding of the subtext. Because of this I aim to create a plausible interpretation, rather than a “correct” one.

This thesis will use sociological and (socio)psychological theories as a frame of reference for its interpretation. As such, there will be less attention to historical contextualization. The world of the plays is fictional and, thus, I endeavor to support my interpretation with evidence found in the play or strongly suggested by the play.

I am not arguing that Chikamatsu knew modern psychological theories and consciously used these for the portrayal of his characters. However, I am arguing that Chikamatsu’s characters require a more extensive interpretation. They have often been treated as types serving to convey Chikamatsu’s ethics concerning *giri* and *ninjō*. Donald Shively, for example, has called them “puppets of [Chikamatsu’s] idealized ethic”⁸, discussing them as though their psychology and emotions are shallow and indistinctive. Such a view can be limiting. Furthermore, Chikamatsu’s plays have often been praised for their literary quality and his use of Buddhist and Confucian concepts and

⁵ Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 374

⁶ Donald Keene, *World Within Walls Japanese literature of the pre-modern era 1600-1868*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 261

⁷ Andrew Gerstle, “Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu”, in *Monumenta Nipponica* 51, no. 3 (October, 1996): 319

⁸ 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, 42

themes, but his characters are usually dismissed as mere ‘types’. It would be worthwhile to take some license in interpreting the motives of his characters with an ahistorical approach, and assuming for the sake of this interpretation that the used theories are universally applicable, as they aim to be. By showing that Chikamatsu’s characters and their words and actions fit within modern psychological insights, this thesis will argue that these characters are more psychologically and emotionally complex than they have been given credit for and, thus, deserve more appreciation.

One perhaps wonders what use this research has to the larger field of Japanese or theatre studies. Not only Japanese puppet theatre, but theatre and literature in general deserve a more complicated and nuanced understanding of the human psyche as they represent it. There are unsurprisingly many differences amongst stories in terms of complexity and nuance, but sometimes the simplification is a result of the interpreters desire to achieve an understanding of the “essence” of the story, by eliminating what is deemed unnecessary detail.

Especially the motivations of characters for suicide, are a topic often reduced for the sake of the argument – if not already reduced by the story itself. Suicide is an act involving complex psychological and sociological processes and it should never be treated as anything less, for we would risk misunderstanding it. In the case studies for this thesis the topic is love suicide, but upon close reading, one can conclude that the strength of love is hardly the only reason for it.

This thesis will argue that the lovers are motivated by love to die together, but the suicide in itself is rather motivated by a lack of control, the failure of social performance, and negative social emotions. The first chapter will discuss the existing interpretations and the case studies. The second chapter will focus on love as a motivator for suicide. The third chapter will discuss the issue of control and the fourth will focus on social performance.

1. Existing interpretations

In the pursuit of a new interpretation, it is necessary to first discuss the already existing ones. Therefore, this chapter shall explain the general plots of the case studies and then look at existing interpretations, to clarify the framework.

Sonezaki and Amijima

The case studies used for this thesis are *Sonezaki Shinjū* and *Shinjū Ten no Amijima*. *Sonezaki Shinjū* revolves around the love suicide of the young merchant Tokubei and the prostitute Ohatsu. The first act poses the central conflict of the story as Tokubei meets Ohatsu and tells her of what has passed since the last time they spoke. His uncle had wished for him to marry his aunt's niece and despite Tokubei's rejection, his stepmother accepted the dowry behind his back. When they forced him, he refused again and his angered uncle ordered him to give the dowry back, which Tokubei managed to get his hands on after much trouble.

Then his good friend Kuheiji claimed to desperately need the money and Tokubei lent it, believing it would be paid back in time. However, when he sees Kuheiji, the day before he is meant to return the dowry to his uncle, Kuheiji lies and accuses him of extortion with a receipt bearing a stolen seal. Tokubei is beaten by Kuheiji and his fellows and the act comes to a close.

In the second act, Tokubei goes to the pleasure quarters to find Ohatsu and hears Kuheiji boast of his money and speak ill of Tokubei. Kuheiji expresses interest in Ohatsu, but she tells Tokubei – in hiding – that she wishes to commit suicide, and he silently signals his agreement.

In the third act, they escape together and travel to the woods where Tokubei binds Ohatsu and himself to a tree and ends both their lives.

The other case study, *Shinjū Ten no Amijima*, revolves around the paper dealer Jihei and the prostitute Koharu. This play is considered more mature than *Sonezaki* due to the complications arising from Jihei having a wife and two children.

The play starts with Koharu on her way to meet a samurai customer and giving the needed context for the story through her conversation with another prostitute. Her lover, Jihei, has been banned from meeting her and she attempts to avoid his rival, Tahei, who is interested in her but whom she clearly dislikes. She meets the samurai and can speak of nothing but death. The samurai offers her help to prevent her suicide and her expression of unwillingness to die angers Jihei who was eavesdropping the two in hiding. He attacks and is bound and left by the samurai, and afterwards found and mocked by Tahei. The samurai comes to his aid and is revealed to be Jihei's

brother Magoemon in disguise. He exposes Koharu's "deceptive" nature and takes a letter she had gotten from a person unknown to the audience. He promises her to read it and reveal the contents to no one, and leaves with a heartbroken Jihei.

In the second act, Jihei is miserable and his wife Osan runs the business and cares for the children. When Magoemon and their aunt visit after hearing a rumor that someone planned to redeem Koharu, they openly suspect Jihei and he vows not to do such a thing. They leave content, but Jihei and Osan are less so. Jihei fears for his reputation since the buyer is no doubt Tahei, and Osan fears for Koharu's life. She tells Jihei about the letter she wrote Koharu, pleading her to sever her ties with him in order to save his life, and ensures him of Koharu's intent to die before going with Tahei. She gathers money and clothes to buy Koharu, but is caught by her father who visits the two unexpectedly. Enraged he demands Jihei divorce Osan and takes his daughter with him.

In the third act, Jihei goes to the quarters to make an advance payment for Koharu, and hides from his brother who brought Jihei's son in a desperate attempt to prevent suicide. When they leave, Jihei signals Koharu and she escapes. They travel to their deaths and cut off their hair to become a monk and a nun and thus free themselves from their earthly obligations towards Osan. To preserve their honor, they die in two different places and with two different methods.

Levels of interpretation

One of the pioneers of Japanology in twentieth century America is Donald Shively, whose research focused primarily on premodern Japanese popular culture and urban life. He argued that the history plays were *giri*-centered and the domestic plays were *ninjō*-centered.⁹ A samurai taking his own life for his lord would be glorified, contrary to a love suicide which was not considered acceptable.¹⁰ However, the lower classes who featured as protagonists in domestic plays were not subject to the same rules of conduct and their actions differed from those of the samurai.¹¹ Shively's position on *giri* and *ninjō* appears to be the most representative of scholars.

While the terms *giri* and *ninjō* have mostly been treated as a given, Donald Keene, who is known best as a Classical Japanese translator and a valuable scholar of Japanese literature, has discussed their meanings more elaborately. In his book *World Within Walls*, he explains their dynamic as a

⁹ Donald H. Shively, "Popular culture," *The Cambridge History of Japan* (1991): 759

¹⁰ Shively, "Popular culture," 759

¹¹ Kirsten Groot, *The Love Suicide at Amijima as a Performance: the construction of Chikamatsu's characters*, unpublished bachelor thesis, 2019, 6

complementary contrast rather than a contest, whereby pure *giri* poses a risk for the individual and pure *ninjō* endangers human society.¹² Either one needs the other for balance.

As mentioned in the introduction, Heine distinguishes the ethical, psychological and literary perspectives of conventional interpretations. The first two revolve around the conflict between *giri* and *ninjō*, as that is considered both the ethical dilemma arising from the hopes and frustrating realities of the Tokugawa merchant class,¹³ and also the emotional factor that leads to death.¹⁴ Heine emphasized that *giri* can contain feelings and is, therefore, a part of the emotional factor, though subordinate to *ninjō*.¹⁵ The third perspective, literary merit, poses Chikamatsu's skill in using literary techniques to beautify the mundane and the social misfits as the key to his success.¹⁶

As for the social-Confucian and religious-Buddhist levels of interpretation, Heine remarks on the tendency of scholars to discredit the latter. For example, Shively has said that the lovers in Chikamatsu's plays seem to have no agency or free will and act as mere plot devices, while the salvation appears to be automatic.¹⁷ Keene, like Shively, leans more towards the social-Confucian level. However, his ideas give the motif of soteriology – i.e. the doctrine of salvation – more credit than traditional Japanese commentaries, that tend to regard the Buddhist soteriological expectations in the plays as an afterthought.¹⁸

Apart from discussing levels of interpretation, Heine has also provided his own interpretation of soteriological expectations as motive for suicide. Here, the Amidist¹⁹ hope at its conclusion permeates psychological, social and literary interpretations.²⁰ He categorizes love suicide plays as a form of “tragic millenarism” wherein the only status is attained by having no status and hopefulness by abandoning all hope.²¹ He defines millenarism as follows:

... millenarism is about being conscious of powerlessness, in particular, an awareness of the implications in the *loss of secular power* based on money and social identity and the attempt of those who are alienated to *claim an ultimate, eternal source of power* that undermines or turns topsy-turvy the values of the mainstream social structure reinforced by orthodox theology.²²

¹² Keene, *World Within Walls*, 260-261

¹³ Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 373

¹⁴ Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 374

¹⁵ Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 374

¹⁶ Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 375

¹⁷ Shively, *The love suicide at Amijima*, 41

¹⁸ Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 378

¹⁹ Amidism is a sect of Mahāyāna Buddhism, specifically Pure Land Buddhism, and proclaims that believers can attain rebirth in the Pure Land by believing in Amida Buddha and hearing or saying his name. “Amidism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed on May 22, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Amidism>

²⁰ Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 369

²¹ Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 390

²² Heine, “Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World,” 370

As power is related to control, this interpretation already touches on the subject of the third chapter.

Heine further argues that the primary aim of these plays is to convey a social message about loss of identity and money, rather than to express love and emotional longing.²³ Instead of focusing on *giri* and *ninjō*, it shows this conflict to be finite and absent of any transcendent answer.²⁴ Rather than the priority of either *giri* or *ninjō*, the issue is that of *giri/ninjō* versus the salvation of Amidism that transcends that finite polarity.²⁵

According to Heine, millenarian implications beyond Buddhist morality or tragic romance must be included in the interpretation to understand why Chikamatsu's plays end in suicide.²⁶ While double suicide is to some extent influenced by the acceptance of dying from *bushidō* ("the way of the warrior"), it also reflects the paradoxical view of time from Buddhism.²⁷ This poses life and death as connected to one another and death as the moment where the two are unified, while embracing the perpetuity of impermanence simultaneously contradicts that fleeting nature of existence.²⁸ While death is not to be feared, since it forms a unified reality with life, both life and death are denied as an illusory alteration opposing enlightenment and Buddhism supports the idea of escaping the illusion through death.²⁹

The inevitable suicide at the end of the plays holds the promise of heavenly salvation.³⁰ Sowa Matsuto also speaks of salvation as a motive for suicide, along with honor and love. In his analysis of *Sonezaki*, he describes suicide for honor as a means to demonstrate one's self-respect and remove one's shame with death, emulating the samurai.³¹ Double suicide motivated by love, he argues, is a self-assertion of love whereby the lovers pledge themselves to one another in perpetuity.³² Finally, double suicide is specifically for Ohatsu the only way to attain salvation and, therefore, described as a religious act.³³

²³ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 390

²⁴ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 390

²⁵ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 372

²⁶ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 389

²⁷ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 389; this interpretation stems from the samurai's willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of *giri* and the idea that the protagonist of the love suicide plays emulates this behavior, not for the sake of but in protest against *giri*. The love suicide as mirroring samurai suicides is also noted by Sowa Matsuto in his discussion of honor as a motive.

²⁸ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 389

²⁹ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 389

³⁰ Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World," 370

³¹ Matsuto Sowa, "A Study of The Love Suicides at Sonezaki: A Unique Liebestod of the Japanese Taste," *Kinjō gakuin daigaku ronshū jinbun kagakuben* 9, no. 2, (March, 2013), pp. 49

³² Sowa, "A Study of The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," 49-50

³³ Sowa, "A Study of The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," 50

In contrast to this idea of salvation, Kawata Kō has treated suicide in plays as a form of extreme self-discipline in his study of the theories of Norbert Elias about the influences of the formation of the modern state on the appearance of self-constrained subjects. He applied this theory to early modern Japan by examining puppet plays and stated that the ‘father’ as signifying the power of the state changed to the ‘father’ as signifying morality,³⁴ and through this concept of the ‘father’ the power of the state became ubiquitous, reaching the hearts of the subjects.³⁵ According to Kawata, aggression came to be turned inwardly instead of outwardly as the self-constrained heroes entered the stage and performed acts of extreme self-discipline, like suicide.³⁶

As is apparent from the interpretations discussed above, there are many perspectives from which to view these plays. Extensive research has been done on Confucian and Buddhist influences and literary quality. However, the psychological profile of the characters appears to remain largely subject to either the *giri/ninjō* conflict or the religious beliefs. While these are certainly relevant perspectives, the plays themselves give reason to believe that there is more complexity and nuance than can be properly encapsulated in broad categories such as *giri* and *ninjō*.

³⁴ Kō Kawata, “Kokka • dōtoku • shutai - 17-seiki kōhan no minshū monogatari ni miru jikoyokuseiteki shutai no tōjō -,” *Japanese Sociological Review* 52, no. 2 (2001), pp. 233

³⁵ Kawata, “Kokka • dōtoku • shutai,” 247

³⁶ Kawata, “Kokka • dōtoku • shutai,” 233

2. Love and suicide

This chapter will explore a socioemotional theory of suicide in relation to the case studies. In doing so, it attempts to discover how love motivates double suicide, and more specifically, how the plays portray the relation between love and suicide.

Love and suicide suggestion

Émile Durkheim has been the first scholar to point out the sociological nature of suicide and many after him have researched and revised his initial ideas. Seth Abrutyn and Anna Mueller, for example, built their ideas around his two essential principles, which state that there is a direct link between the structure of suicide, as a social pathology, and that of social relationships, and that integration and (moral) regulation as central dimensions govern the structure of social relationships.³⁷

Abrutyn and Mueller place these principles in the context of a socioemotional theory of suicide, taking inspiration from other works of Durkheim that acknowledge that emotions significantly affect how to define the experience of social relations.³⁸ For this theory, they embarked on an exploration of the diverse array of social emotions that can motivate suicide, including love, and how these types of emotions relate to the structural and cultural conditions of their formation and expression.³⁹

In order to discuss their view on love as a motive for suicide, a discussion of the framework of Abrutyn's and Mueller's theory is required. They define the terms 'integration' and 'regulation', at the heart of Durkheim's theory, as the "quantity and quality of social ties" and the "clarity of norms and sanctions governing those ties".⁴⁰ The lack or plethora of integration (egoism/altruism) or regulation (anomie/fatalism) as related to the group an individual belongs to, would result in less protection against the impulse to commit suicide.⁴¹

Furthermore, they note that social relationships/groups/environments are comprised of recurring emotionally laden interactions that give each individual a unique emotional biography and profile as formed by the interweaving of intergroup relations and the peculiarities and experiences of members within-group.⁴² Thus, more negative emotional biographies and profiles of some groups that are low in status compared to other groups, the unique biographies and profiles of their members, or the intersection of both, can result in a negative emotional spiral of self-harm

³⁷ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 328

³⁸ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 328

³⁹ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 328

⁴⁰ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 329

⁴¹ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 329

⁴² Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 332

and amplified negative emotions.⁴³ Emotions and their corresponding behaviors and attitudes can spread between individuals and between groups, whereby this contagion positively correlates with the degree of (1) affection one feels towards a person or group, (2) perceived similarity with others that thus function as role models, (3) perceived high status of members or other groups that enhances the desirability and prestige of their behavior, and (4) the group's physical, social, or cultural isolation from other groups.⁴⁴

Abrutyn and Mueller composed sixteen propositions based on their research and those include the following two:

The greater the degree to which individuals are emotionally, psychologically, and sociologically bonded to each other, a group, or a cultural system, the greater the degree to which they will be oriented toward each other's emotions, attitudes, and behaviors.⁴⁵

The greater the degree to which individuals are emotionally, psychologically, and sociologically attuned to each other, the greater the risk of the spread of suicidal thoughts and behaviors from one member to the next through empathic responses, vulnerability to catching negative emotions, or the salience of real or perceived threats to the bond.⁴⁶

In other words, emotional, psychological, and sociological closeness facilitates an empathy that potentially results in the spread of suicidality from one to the other. This idea is essential to understand the role of love in suicide.

As opposed to Durkheim's view on the structure of social relationships as affecting the structure of suicide, Abrutyn and Mueller argue that it is the socioemotional structure generated by the structure and content of a social relationship, that affects the structure of suicide.⁴⁷ Especially social emotions like pride, shame and guilt have an integrative and regulative effect on social behavior.⁴⁸ In other words, Durkheim would have likely pointed at *giri* as the factor affecting suicide, whereas Abrutyn and Mueller would have pointed at both *giri* and *ninjō*.⁴⁹

⁴³ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 332

⁴⁴ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 332

⁴⁵ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 344

⁴⁶ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 344-345

⁴⁷ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 332

⁴⁸ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 332

⁴⁹ For this comparison, the distinction of *giri* and *ninjō* is made based on Doi Takeo's idea that *giri* relations (which he calls pseudo-*ninjō* relations) are tied to moral obligation and in a way merely the form of a relationship, whereas *ninjō* relations are authentic emotional connections that are ideally yet rarely experienced. Takeo Doi, "Giri-Ninjō: An Interpretation," in *Aspects of Social Change in Modern Japan*, ed. Ronald Philip Dore (Princeton University Press, 1967), 330

Abrutyn and Mueller emphasize the dynamic interplay between the psychology of an individual and their surrounding sociocultural and historical context.⁵⁰ They start off their theory with two propositions: (1) suicidal thoughts and behaviors determined by integration are based on “*sadness* emotions”, and (2) suicides determined by regulation are based on shame, usually manifest in anger directed at the self and others.⁵¹

The previously mentioned contagion of emotions and behaviors can result in suicide suggestion, a point of discussion not present in Durkheim’s theory. Heavily integrated groups are especially vulnerable to the contagious effect of suicide, for their members are very much in tune with the emotions and behaviors of their fellows.⁵² Abrutyn and Mueller discuss the emotional aspect of suicide suggestion and argue that it begins with closeness to another individual.⁵³ In reference to another scholar, they state that:

Love, or emotional closeness, between two people inherently involves some form of altruism to motivate behavior, and it can easily lead to the blurring of lines between self and other, that is, the other’s experiences can become confused with those of the self.⁵⁴

In other words, an individual can – to a certain extent – feel the emotions of a loved one as their own. There is no clear boundary between their own experiences and those of the other.

An individual’s suicidality may be increased by feelings of sorrow and anxiety resulting from the loss of an emotionally close bond (completed suicide) or the threat of such a loss (suicide attempt).⁵⁵ Suicide caused by the loss of a precious social bond can be considered altruistic-egoistic, as per the categorization of Abrutyn and Mueller.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Abrutyn and Mueller, “The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide,” 333

⁵¹ Abrutyn and Mueller, “The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide,” 333

⁵² Abrutyn and Mueller, “The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide,” 344

⁵³ Abrutyn and Mueller, “The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide,” 344

⁵⁴ Abrutyn and Mueller, “The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide,” 344

⁵⁵ Abrutyn and Mueller, “The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide,” 344

⁵⁶ Abrutyn and Mueller, “The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide,” 344

Type of Suicide	Emotion(s)	Ideal Type
1. Egoistic	Various forms of sadness, ranging in intensity (e.g., despair, hopelessness, melancholy) over real or imagined social isolation	The loner
2. Anomic	Repressed or bypassed shame + anger for real or imagined violations of social expectations	The joiner who tries to make friends but who is continually rejected
3. Egoistic-anomic	Grief + anxiety over real or imagined social isolation; shame + anger over real or imagined violations of social expectations; alienation from self and others	Divorcé, who has been married for several years
4. Fatalistic	Engulfed shame + fear for not meeting social expectations	Physically abused wife
4a. Fatalistic-egoistic	Shame + fear for not being able to meet social expectations + sadness + anxiety over real or imagined social isolation	Refugee who leaves a repressive state, but is isolated in his/her new milieu
4b. Fatalistic-anomic	Engulfed shame + fear over stigmatized identity; shame + anger caused by sudden change in status and inability to meet changed social expectations	Inmate serving life in prison, paroled after years
5. Altruistic	Various positive social emotions (e.g., pride, love, empathy)	Soldier who falls on a grenade
5a. Altruistic-anomic	Various positive social emotions; shame + anger for real or imagined violation of social expectations	Officer who kills him/herself before being dishonorably discharged
5b. Altruistic-fatalistic	Various positive social emotions; shame + fear for not meeting social expectations	Mass cult suicide
6a. Suicide suggestion: altruistic-egoistic	Various positive social emotions; various forms of sadness over real or imagined social isolation	Teen whose close friends kills himself or herself and who takes own life because of sorrow and empathy
6b. Suicide suggestion: altruistic-egoistic-anomic	Various positive social emotions; sadness at real or imagined social isolation; guilt + anger at self for not being there for a significant other; alienation from self and others	Parent who fails to recognize or prevent child's suicide completion and who completes out of guilt, sorrow, and alienation

Figure 1 The socioemotional structure of suicide, by Abrutyn and Mueller

This means that love indeed plays a major role as a contributor to suicide, for lovers who are emotionally close to one another can more easily persuade the other to commit suicide, or might choose to do so in fear of losing their bond, as is the case in many love suicide plays.

However, even though love is an important factor, it is not the only motivator. As seen in the chart above, various emotions can motivate suicide and oftentimes cases of suicide are too complex to be tied to one.

One might think that this applies solely to real suicides, and not fictional ones, for fiction must essentialize experiences in service of the narrative. The socioemotional theory is indeed based on reality, so there is no guarantee that it is applicable to Chikamatsu's fictional world. Therefore, it should be discussed in relation to the case studies.

Love in *Sonezaki* and *Amijima*

In both case studies, the lovers fear losing each other, as Tokubei of the former play will be forced to leave town and Koharu of the latter play is bought by another man than her lover. Thus, there

is clear ground for suicide suggestion. The fear of losing the other is present, and so is the persuasion or reassurance. In the dialogue of the play the lovers encouragingly carry each other towards death, as seen in the following examples:

OHATSU: ... And if a time should come when we can no longer meet, did our promises of love hold only for this world? Others before us have chosen reunion through death. To die is simple enough⁵⁷

KOHARU: What have we to grieve about? Though in this world we could not stay together, in the next and through each successive world to come until the end of time we shall be husband and wife.⁵⁸

JIHEI: Can suicide ever be pleasant, whether by hanging or cutting the throat? You mustn't let worries over trifles disturb the prayers of your last moments. Keep your eyes on the westward-moving moon, and worship it as Amida himself. Concentrate your thoughts on the Western Paradise. If you have any regrets about leaving the world, tell me now, then die.⁵⁹

However, love as a motivator – meaning it gives the characters a reason or stimulus to die – does not appear to be especially prominent. For example, in the following passage wherein Tokubei has made the decision to commit suicide, he does not utter a word about love:

TOKUBEI: I've been made the victim of a clever plot, as no doubt you've heard, and the more I struggle, the worse off I am. Everything has turned against me now. I can't survive this night. I've made up my mind to it.⁶⁰

When Ohatsu speaks of his suicide, she also makes no mention of love. The influence of love does not become apparent until she discusses her own wish to die with him.

OHATSU: ... His generosity has been his undoing. He's been tricked, but he hasn't evidence to prove it. After what has happened Tokubei has no choice but to kill himself. I wish I knew whether or not he was resolved to die.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Chikamatsu, Monzaemon, "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, translated by Donald Keene (Columbia University Press, 1990): 43

⁵⁸ Chikamatsu Monzaemon, "The Love Suicide at Amijima," *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, translated by Donald Keene (Columbia University Press, 1990): 420

⁵⁹ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicide at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 423

⁶⁰ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicide at Sonezaki," translated by Donald Keene, 48

⁶¹ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," translated by Donald Keene, 49

... Could I go on living even a moment if separated from Toku? ... I'm sure that Toku intends to die with me, as I with him.⁶²

Her hopelessness at the thought of living without Tokubei shows that love drives her, while not explicitly stating it as a reason. However, eventually they do speak of love when they are near their deaths.

OHATSU: I had this razor prepared in case we were overtaken on the way and separated. I was determined not to forfeit our name as lovers. How happy I am that we are to die together as we hoped!

TOKUBEI: How wonderful of you to have thought of that! I am so confident in our love that I have no fears even about death.⁶³

Here, love is directly related to their suicide, as important to the way their act will be interpreted and the effect it has on their reputation as lovers. In Tokubei's words it also serves to ease the fear of dying, as it strengthens his belief in good things awaiting after death.

The most notable mention of love in *Sonezaki* lies in its conclusion:

NARRATOR: ... No one is there to tell the tale, but the wind that blows through Sonezaki Wood transmits it, and high and low alike gather to pray for these lovers who beyond a doubt will in the future attain Buddhahood. They have become models of true love.⁶⁴

Since this presents quite an unambiguous assessment of the love suicide, we can assume that Chikamatsu intended to portray love as an important factor. He presented the suicide of Tokubei and Ohatsu as proof of the purity of their love, though he does not portray it as providing a reason, depending on the perspective. From Tokubei's perspective, love eased his choice yet never motivated it. From Ohatsu's perspective, love drove her to join Tokubei in death. Therefore, it might be concluded that, rather than motivating the lovers to commit suicide, it seems to have given them a reason to die together.

Amijima does not portray a romanticized version of love suicide as *Sonezaki* does. However, ironically, love is more clearly present as a motivator.

NARRATOR: ... so deeply, hopelessly, is [Jihei] tied to Koharu by the ropes of an ill-starred love ... They swore in the last letters they exchanged that if only they could meet, that day would be their last.

⁶² Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," translated by Donald Keene, 50

⁶³ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," translated by Donald Keene, 55

⁶⁴ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," translated by Donald Keene, 56

Night after night Jihei, ready for death, trudges to the Quarter, distractedly, as though his soul had left a body consumed by the fires of love.⁶⁵

Unlike in *Sonezaki*, here the lovers have already promised to commit suicide. Their “ill-starred love” can be regarded as a motive, and it clearly played its part considering it is described as a force trapping the lovers in their fate.

While the play assures us that Koharu’s love is pure, her conversation with the samurai casts doubt on her intentions.

KOHARU: ... He suggested that it would be better if we killed ourselves, and I agreed. I was caught by obligations from which I could not withdraw, and I promised him before I knew what I was doing.⁶⁶ ... I have a mother living in a back alley south of here. She has no one but me to depend on, ... I keep thinking that after I’m dead she’ll become a beggar or an outcast, and maybe she’ll die of starvation. That’s the only sad part about dying. I have just this one life. I’m ashamed that you may think me a coldhearted woman, but I must endure the shame. The most important thing is that I don’t want to die. I beg you, please help me to stay alive.⁶⁷

Despite the play’s conclusion and Koharu’s genuine love for Jihei, she still seems honest in her confession that she prefers to live. It is unlikely she said these things in order to fool Jihei, for she was not aware of his presence, according to the narrator who said earlier: “Inside they do not realize that anyone eavesdrops”⁶⁸. She only learns of his eavesdropping when he attempts to attack her and she recognizes the handle of his dirk.

During her conversation she comes up with a plan that shows her intent to let their relationship break off naturally with time, by taking the samurai as a regular customer. There is a chance she lied to the samurai about her unwillingness, to convince him to help her, but seeing that love suicide would mean Jihei’s death as well as her own, her words could have been true. After all, by the time she does decide to die and go with Jihei, other motivating factors have entered the stage. By then her options have been reduced to dying with Jihei or living as Tahei’s wife.

In the remainder of the play not much is said directly about causes or motivations. Eventually Jihei speaks the following words:

⁶⁵ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicide at Amijima,” translated by Donald Keene, 395

⁶⁶ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicide at Amijima,” translated by Donald Keene, 397

⁶⁷ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicide at Amijima,” translated by Donald Keene, 397

⁶⁸ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicide at Amijima,” translated by Donald Keene, 396

JIHEI: ... I shall kill you and then myself. If you ask the cause, it was that I lacked even the wisdom that might fill a tiny Shell Bridge. ... The time had come to cast away our lives. We promised we'd remain together faithfully, till you were an old woman and I an old man, but before we knew each other three full years, we have met this disaster.⁶⁹

He appears to blame himself for the suicide. If it were not for the disaster Jihei speaks of, he had hoped to grow old with Koharu. In his words he positions himself as both guilty of their misfortune and a victim of their fate.

Not much later Koharu says something more indirectly suggesting a particular motive:

KOHARU: What have we to grieve about? Though in this world we could not stay together, in the next and through each successive world to come until the end of time we shall be husband and wife.⁷⁰

This quote heavily suggests that love motivates Koharu. She seems to commit suicide, because she loves Jihei and cannot bare being separated from him and marrying Tahei instead. She dies with Jihei to be reborn with him and hope for a better next life. Again, it is from the perspective of the woman that love as a motivator appears the strongest.

To summarize, traditionally the love suicide plays have been interpreted to revolve around the conflict between *giri* and *ninjō* whereby *ninjō*, referring to passion or love, triumphed in the end, when the lovers lead each other to death.

While the close emotional bond of the lovers facilitates the contagion of suicide, the role of love as a motivator is weaker than expected. Although, there is a difference between the two case studies: *Amijima* appears to place love as a motivator more at the forefront than *Sonezaki*, which is ironically the play that most strongly romanticizes love suicide. Another difference lies in the perspectives of the lovers, whereby the women are more clearly motivated by love than the men.

⁶⁹ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicide at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 419

⁷⁰ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicide at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 420

3. Control and suicide

One of the motives for suicide could be a perceived lack of control. The lovers of Chikamatsu's plays often lack control in some way or form – for example, the prostitutes have no autonomy – and love suicide can, therefore, function as a way to regain some form of control: the control over one's death.

Fate and responsibility

The issue of control is closely linked to that of responsibility. To what extent do people control their own circumstances and actions, and are they responsible for them? Andrew Gerstle has written at length about 'crime and responsibility', which he sees as a major theme of Chikamatsu's later plays.⁷¹ Westerners might expect the theme of 'fate or divine intervention' to be prominent and that of 'free will' absent in Japan's Buddhist culture with its fundamental concept of karma.⁷² Gerstle argues against this using Chikamatsu's late plays.

While the earlier plays, like *Sonezaki*, sustain the innocence of the flawed main characters and puts the blame on a villain or the society, the later plays, like *Amijima*, shift the blame away from external forces and move it towards the protagonists.⁷³ In a way, protagonists have more agency and consequently more responsibility.

Chikamatsu explored this issue of responsibility against the paradox of the inescapable karma, on the one hand, and the concept of mercy for all, on the other hand.⁷⁴ He believed that humans are in their essence good, but his exploration of the excesses of passion seems to have confronted him with this inherent goodness and the nature of evil, as well as cause and effect.⁷⁵ Juggling these concepts and beliefs, his late plays portray grey, complex characters and stories that simultaneously blame fate and the protagonists that decided to act.⁷⁶ It acknowledged both karma and inevitability and the responsibility of choice that the characters have.

As one of these late plays, *Amijima* shows this balance in several ways. For example, the recurrent foreshadowing of the love suicide creates a strong sense of inevitability and fate. In the words of the narrator: "Is her name "Second Spring" a sign that she is fated to leave behind a fleeting name in November?"⁷⁷ On the other hand, the choices of characters are not made just because

⁷¹ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 320

⁷² Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 320

⁷³ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 320

⁷⁴ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 321

⁷⁵ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 321

⁷⁶ Gerstle, "Hero as Murderer in Chikamatsu", 326

⁷⁷ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 389

they are fated, but with clear consideration. Osan does not encourage Jihei to ransom Koharu because fate wills it so, but because she does not want Koharu's blood on her hands. Jihei's financial struggles are not caused by karma, but by his negligence.

The intertwining of fate and choice is also apparent in the dialogue. For example, when Tahei speaks with Koharu, he says: "You may try to avoid me all you please, but some special connection from a former life must have brought us together"⁷⁸. Other examples would be Koharu expressing her regret of her promise to the samurai, "What evil connection from a former existence made us promise to die? How I regret it now!"⁷⁹, and Jihei saying shortly before their suicide, "We are not fated to live any longer – let us make an end quickly"⁸⁰.

In contrast, the characters also speak of responsibility and guilt. Before their suicide Jihei and Koharu both exclaim that they are at fault and guilty of the other's approaching death. Furthermore, Koharu believes herself to be responsible for the divorce of Jihei and Osan. However, the character that most explicitly calls out Jihei on his responsibility is his elder brother Magoemon.

MAGOEMON: That's the kind of foolishness responsible for all your trouble. ... Instead of stamping on Koharu, why don't you use your feet on your own misguided disposition? – It's deplorable. ... you don't seem to realize that your whole fortune's collapsing. You shouldn't have to be lectured to by your brother.⁸¹ ... Our aunt, with all the heartache to bear herself, ... She's worried herself sick. What an ingrate, not to appreciate how she's defended you in your shame! This one offense is enough to make you the target for Heaven's future punishment! ... I see now how natural it was that you should desert your wife and children. What a faithful prostitute you discovered! I congratulate you!⁸²

He openly blames Jihei for causing his aunt's worries and neglecting his business. He also accuses Jihei of deserting his family for Koharu with the last comment, that is clearly meant to be sarcastic, since she earlier claimed to want to keep living and sever her relationship with Jihei.

Gerstle's argument seems to ring true for *Amijima* and, in line with his theory, this intertwining of the power of fate and the choice of the individual can hardly be found in the earlier play *Sonezaki*. It does not present the protagonists as responsible in the way that *Amijima* does and it emphasizes the victimhood of Tokubei and the lack of choice he has in the matter of suicide. The only hint of choice is when Tokubei tells Ohatsu that he has made up his mind to kill himself.⁸³ Moreover, Tokubei chose to lend Kuheiji the money from the dowry; a naïve decision, but a decision

⁷⁸ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 392

⁷⁹ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 398

⁸⁰ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 421

⁸¹ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 400

⁸² Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 401

⁸³ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," translated by Donald Keene, 48

nonetheless. Despite this, Ohatsu claims that “Tokubei has no choice but to kill himself”⁸⁴ and the play clarifies that he is the victim of an unfortunate situation, absolving him of any responsibility.

Gerstle’s discussion of ‘crime and responsibility’ as a theme can be linked to the issue of control, since one can only be responsible for those decisions and actions they can control. A simple way of translating the paradox of responsibility to the issue of control, would be to say that control is equally present and absent in the sense that characters cannot control the situation they are trapped in, but they can control the way they choose to act within those circumstances. However, that would be too simplistic. To gain a clearer view of this, we should dive deeper into the particulars of what the characters can and cannot control.

Lacking autonomy

There are primarily two ways in which the lovers of both case studies lack autonomy, namely financial and physical.

The male protagonists Tokubei and Jihei both face monetary troubles. Tokubei is indebted to his uncle because of the dowry he had yet to return and loses to Kuheiji. Jihei is struggling to keep his business afloat and lacks the necessary funds to redeem Koharu before someone else does. These financial troubles also pose risks to their reputation and honor. In Tokubei’s case, his honor is damaged by Kuheiji’s lies that brand him a criminal and by his inability to pay the debt to his uncle. In Jihei’s case, his honor is under threat by his failure as a businessman and by Tahei ransoming Koharu.

However, these men are not the only ones who lack autonomy. The female protagonists suffer on both fronts. They have no financial independence and on top of that no physical autonomy. As they are prostitutes, they are bound to their profession by a contract for which they still have to serve multiple years at the time of the plays.

Actual prostitutes in Japan during the Edo period (1600-1868) were mostly malnourished and overworked, victims to diseases and possibly death before they were twenty-five years old.⁸⁵ They were physically restricted, as leaving the quarter after 5:00 p.m. was prohibited, and their movement was severely controlled.⁸⁶ Being ransomed by a patron or committing suicide, usually with a lover, were the only ways to escape prostitution.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Sonezaki,” translated by Donald Keene, 49

⁸⁵ Janice Katz, “Beauty and Identity in Katsukawa Shunchō’s Standing Courtesan,” in *Painting the Floating World: Ukiyo-e Masterpieces from the Weston Collection*, ed. Janice Katz and Mami Hatayama (Chicago, IL : Art Institute of Chicago, 2018), 55

⁸⁶ Katz, “Beauty and Identity in Katsukawa Shunchō’s Standing Courtesan,” 55

⁸⁷ Katz, “Beauty and Identity in Katsukawa Shunchō’s Standing Courtesan,” 55

Technically one could serve her time and be released afterward, but often years would be added as punishment or due to the high interest rate of advances and goods she had received.⁸⁸ Even if she managed to finish her service and leave the quarters, there would be little hope for a good life, according to the early nineteenth century account of an Edo samurai named Buyō Inshi. Even though there is a time gap of approximately a century between this account and the reality on which the fictional worlds of Ohatsu and Koharu is based, one could assume there was not much difference in the hardships of prostitutes.

Buyō expressed his opinion on many things, including love suicide. He argued that prostitutes commit suicide with lovers from whom they have received sympathy, for such kindness is their only true desire.⁸⁹ Love suicide occurs, not because of the deep love, but rather because the lovers sympathize with each other as they both suffer from overwhelming hardships that leave them with no resources nor reasons to live.⁹⁰

While this reasoning disregards the complexity of motivations for suicide and Buyō claims that “someone who has even the slightest resources will never become a partner in suicide”⁹¹, there is some truth in his words. Namely, the nature of the prostitutes’ misfortunes was overwhelming, with hardly any reasons to keep living.

As is clear from the information above, prostitutes had little control over their environment. Proprietors controlled their bodies and movements. This lack of physical autonomy is visible in the fictional Ohatsu and Koharu, who both had to sneak out of the quarters in the third act, at the risk of getting caught. The narrator remarks on the fact that Ohatsu is being watched and “with so many sharp eyes watching, she cannot do as she pleases”⁹². Koharu also cannot do as she wishes and is not allowed to meet Jihei, with her master going as far as to have all her customers examined.

Taking back control

Control is an interesting theme in any play, but especially for the love suicide plays that use puppets as actors. Due to the puppets’ inanimate nature there is an inherent absence of control. Puppeteers control the puppets’ movements, but the illusion is created that the puppets do this themselves. This is reminiscent of the issue of fate and responsibility. Do the characters control themselves and are they thus responsible for their own actions, or are they subject to the hands of fate and is the little control they feel a mere illusion?

⁸⁸ Kate Wildman Nakai et al., *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard, by an Edo Samurai*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 324-325

⁸⁹ Nakai et al., *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption*, 317

⁹⁰ Nakai et al., *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption*, 318

⁹¹ Nakai et al., *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption*, 317

⁹² Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Sonezaki,” translated by Donald Keene, 48

The idea of using suicide as a form of self-punishment, as proposed by Kawata, is also tied to control. It controls the perception of one's morality, both the own perception and that of others. Heine's theory of suicide for salvation stands in contrast to this. However, whether the suicide serves as a means of punishment or salvation, both are represented as *means* that someone *chooses* to make use of.

Whether the protagonists seek punishment or salvation, and whether they do so consciously or subconsciously, in the end they are exerting what little control they have over their fate. I would argue that the need for control in and of itself is a motivator. Suicide could be a way for the lovers to take back control, or at least create an illusion of control, by choosing the moment and method of their death.

As is commonly known, humans have a need for control and there is reason to believe that this need is biological. Research has been done on animals and humans to find how the absence of control affects them. A perceived lack of control on stressors results in maladaptive behaviors, the release of stress hormones, suppression of the immune system and autonomic arousal, which are all hindered by the perception of control on those stressors.⁹³ Perceived control has even been shown to increase one's tolerance to pain and unpleasant noise, and it allows a person to regulate their emotional responses to a given stressful situation.⁹⁴ Even if true control is absent, the mere perception of it provides the same benefits, whether the person actively exercises control or not.⁹⁵

Moreover, strong beliefs of self-efficacy potentially require opportunities to exert control, because people who have rarely effectively used their agency, likely do not trust themselves to be able to achieve a desired outcome, which can leave them feeling helpless and depressed.⁹⁶ The need for control and the perceived lack thereof could result in maladaptive behaviors and the issue of control lies at the heart of eating disorders, mood and anxiety disorders and substance abuse.⁹⁷ Thus, the perceived lack of control can lead to different forms of psychopathology and feeling in control appears to be crucial for healthy functioning.⁹⁸

The described feelings of hopelessness and depression as well as the maladaptive behaviors can be found in both case studies, and most noticeably in *Amijima*. In *Sonezaki* the feelings of hopelessness and depression are less pronounced as the troubles causing the suicide are abrupt and the decision to commit suicide is quickly made. Moreover, the suicide of Tokubei and Ohatsu is

⁹³ Lauren A. Leotti; Sheena S. Iyengar; and Kevin N. Ochsner, "Born to choose: the origins and value of the need for control," in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 14, no. 10 (2010), 459

⁹⁴ Leotti; Iyengar; and Ochsner, "Born to choose," 459

⁹⁵ Leotti; Iyengar; and Ochsner, "Born to choose," 459

⁹⁶ Leotti; Iyengar; and Ochsner, "Born to choose," 457-458

⁹⁷ Leotti; Iyengar; and Ochsner, "Born to choose," 458

⁹⁸ Leotti; Iyengar; and Ochsner, "Born to choose," 458

portrayed with more relief than that of Jihei and Koharu which is tainted by the thoughts of those abandoned, like Osan and Jihei's children.

After Tokubei has been beaten he says the following:

TOKUBEI: ... Before three days have passed I, Tokubei, will make amends by showing all Osaka the purity at the bottom of my heart.⁹⁹

His words show his intent to clear his name and regain his honor and reputation. Therefore, the suicide is a means for him to control others' perception of him. I would not call it self-discipline, but rather a way to demonstrate his morality to mend his damaged reputation, for Tokubei believes in his own innocence and morality, despite speaking of his sins and the trouble he will cause his uncle after his death.

In *Amijima* the feelings of hopelessness and depression resulting from the perceived lack of control are clearly present. Already in the first act the samurai – Magoemon in disguise – remarks on Koharu's depressed appearance and the absence of a smile, and he calls her “bewitched by the god of death”¹⁰⁰. Jihei also notices that her face has become thin and pities her for her sorrow. In the second act Jihei's feelings become especially apparent as he lies by the *kotatsu* sleeping during the day, while his wife works, and he cries upon hearing that Koharu is to be redeemed by Tahei. His daytime sleeping could be interpreted as a sign of depression and the news of Koharu and Tahei could ignite or feed a sense of hopelessness. Osan gives him hope when she assembles money and goods to ransom Koharu, but this last shiver of hope is taken from him when Gozaemon – Osan's father – forces him to divorce her and carries her off.

In the third act both Jihei and Koharu have an air of sadness and depression to them. While they do express a certain degree of relief that they will die together and hope that they may be reborn together, the tone of the act is still persistently sad and lamenting. They choose to die and thereby exert what little control they have, but their options have been limited. Koharu's only choices at this point are to die with Jihei or to marry Tahei. Jihei's only choices are to die with Koharu or to let go of her and attempt to rebuild his business as a divorced and dishonored man and a caretaker to his children whom he had neglected. However, that last option must have seemed impossible to him, for in the entirety of the play he has low self-esteem and self-efficacy. He considers himself a burden to Magoemon and for his business and children he has been dependent on Osan.

⁹⁹ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Sonezaki,” translated by Donald Keene, 47

¹⁰⁰ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Amijima,” translated by Donald Keene, 396

This lack of self-confidence, partially a result of a perceived lack of control, is especially noticeable in the second act, when Osan convinces Jihei to ransom Koharu and prevent her suicide. At first Jihei speaks of financial difficulty since he would be required to pay half the ransom to keep Koharu out of Tahei's hands. However, Osan had pawned some of her clothes and raised a large sum for a bill they have yet to pay. If they pawn the other clothes of herself and their children, he would have enough money and Osan tells him they can ask Magoemon's help for the bill. In essence her plan is to save Koharu – meanwhile asserting Jihei's honor before Tahei – and rebuild the business afterwards. Jihei feels guilty when thinking about what will become of Osan, but she persuades him to follow her plan.

Then Gozaemon arrives and urges him to divorce Osan. At this point Jihei says the following:

JIHEI: ... I feel so deeply indebted to Osan that I cannot divorce her. You will understand that this is true as time passes and I show you how I apply myself to my work and restore my fortune. Until then please shut your eyes and allow us to remain together.¹⁰¹

What is interesting about these words, is that Jihei appears confident that the plan can work. He seems to believe that there is a chance – however slim – that he can rebuild the business after ransoming Koharu. It could be that he lies to ease Gozaemon's wrath, but given the scene beforehand wherein Osan actively persuades him and feeds him with courage, these words might very well be true to his feelings. However, this confidence is conditional. He only feels this way because Osan supports him. He believes in the plan and capabilities of his wife, not in his own.

This is why, when Osan is taken away from him, he averts from the original plan and decides to commit suicide. This forced divorce in itself also serves as a reason for suicide, since it shames him and damages his reputation. At one moment it even seemed as though he would take his life then and there, when he says good-bye to Osan and lays his hand on his dirk. However, it is doubtful that he would take his life in the presence of his wife and children and the moment is not elaborated on, for Osan clings to him and stops him from doing whatever it is he meant to do.

In any case, his low self-confidence is firmly established in the story and it explains why he does not follow through on Osan's plan in her absence. The path he chooses to take, is the only one that gives him a sense of control. He does not believe he can regain his fortune alone, or save his reputation. He does not believe he can control his environment, but he *can* control his death now that he still has the chance. As such, his lack of control could be considered a motivator.

¹⁰¹ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 412

To put it concisely, Chikamatsu's later plays explore the balance between fate and responsibility and place more blame on the shoulders of the protagonists. This issue of fate or individual responsibility is reflected in the issue of control. The protagonists lack autonomy – either physical, financial or both – and therefore suffer from a perceived lack of control over their environment that leads to feelings of depression and hopelessness. Committing suicide can be seen as an act of taking back that control – whether in the service of punishment or salvation – or in the very least creating the illusion of control.

4. Social performance and suicide

The most prominent motivations are related to social performance. Chikamatsu's characters are all bound to social roles and the corresponding expectations, limitations and prejudices. It is characteristic of Chikamatsu's domestic plays to explore the grey area wherein the social status system is nuanced and even contradicted by the reality of the play. Insofar as the case studies provide explicit reasoning for the choice to commit love suicide, the troubles at the forefront are social in nature.

Trapped by social expectations

Both *Sonezaki* and *Amijima* suggest various expectations tied to the social status of the characters. There are essentially three ways they do this.

Firstly, they create contrast with other characters. For example, the expectations of Jihei's social group are exemplified by his elder brother Magoemon, who is a responsible, financially successful merchant that goes to great lengths to help and protect his family. The differences between Jihei and Magoemon, therefore, show how Jihei fails to perform his social role.

Secondly, the plays use narration and dialogue to convey how characters view themselves. For example, Tokubei tells Ohatsu of his honesty. This is likely a trait that is expected of him – since a proper merchant should be trusted with money – and the damage done to his reputation by Kuheiji is also centered around this trait. Jihei has a more negative self-image. His words echo Magoemon's criticism aimed at him and the behaviors and attitudes at the core of that critique are those that are socially unacceptable or even reprehensible.

Thirdly, dialogue reveals prejudices of other characters. An example of this would be Tahei's belief that his fortune will sway Koharu, for she is expected as a prostitute to care only about money. Ironically Koharu's and Ohatsu's decision to commit love suicide both contradicts and affirms existing expectations. In both plays there is already a climate of love suicides surrounding the women. In the first act of *Amijima*, someone remarks on the recent absence of love suicides and in the last act of *Sonezaki*, Tokubei and Ohatsu overhear others singing about love suicide. Furthermore, Magoemon and Osan fear that Jihei and Koharu will kill themselves, and act to prevent this. It is thus in a way expected of prostitutes to join their lovers in death.

However, the lovers from both plays fail to perform their respective social roles. Tokubei who is expected to be an honest merchant, is accused of fraud and extortion; Jihei who is expected to run a successful business and act as a responsible husband and father, has squandered his fortune in the pleasure quarters and abandons his children; and Koharu and Ohatsu, who are expected to see men as customers and deceive them in pursuit of profit, cherish deep affections for their lovers

to the point of choosing to die with them. While Koharu and Ohatsu can be called admirable for their devotion and their behavior is perhaps deviant rather than socially unacceptable, the same cannot be said of Tokubei and Jihei. The male protagonists suffer from their failure, enough to desire death.

Returning to the socioemotional theory of suicide, Abrutyn and Mueller explain anomic suicides as resulting from a lack of regulation and usually involving a sudden drop in social status.¹⁰² The emotions involved here are those associated with disappointment and primarily anger, which makes the individual use violence directed at the perceived cause of ruin.¹⁰³ The one to blame can be either the self or someone else, but in any case of excess anger the individual attacks himself.¹⁰⁴ The trigger – loss of social status or a threat to a social bond – generates a feeling of embarrassment as the individual has failed to meet expectations, and thus potentially instigates a shame-anger spiral.¹⁰⁵

Shame forms the basis of anomic suicide and is born in social discomfort or even humiliation and centers on the concern about how the individual is perceived by others.¹⁰⁶ The emotion is typically directed at the threat of a bond and the person responsible for that threat.¹⁰⁷ As it is an exceptionally painful emotion, shame is often repressed and replaced by anger, which is likewise self-regulated and negatively sanctioned on by others.¹⁰⁸ This causes a feedback loop, wherein an individual feels anger as a reaction to shame, and shame as a reaction to their anger.¹⁰⁹

Shame and anger are visible in Jihei's reaction to Koharu telling the samurai she did not wish to die. Jihei felt humiliated and his shame took the form of anger as he attacked (and missed) Koharu with his dirk, and later kicked her on her forehead. In Tokubei these emotions manifest when Kuheiji accuses him of forgery. Tokubei's anger drives him to attack Kuheiji and after being beaten himself he feels humiliated and, hurt by his shame, he wished he had died while fighting.

While anomic suicide is based on a social emotion, namely shame, egoistic suicide is the result of sadness based emotions. Abrutyn and Mueller explain the mix-type of these two as follows:

... egoistic-anomic suicides are temporal cycles of grief and anxiety over real or imagined social isolation and shame and anger over real or imagined violations of social expectations. In addition, when

¹⁰² Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 335

¹⁰³ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 335

¹⁰⁴ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 335

¹⁰⁵ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 335

¹⁰⁶ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 335

¹⁰⁷ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 335

¹⁰⁸ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 335

¹⁰⁹ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 335

one's emotional disposition is less a cycling between the two types and more a true mixture of ego-anomie, alienation is the more precise emotional motivation.¹¹⁰

Grief, anxiety, shame and anger are all emotions clearly present in the case studies; in *Amijima* more so than in *Sonezaki*. Tokubei and Ohatsu experience anxiety and grief in the final act, although their love and good hopes relieve them of these. Regarding shame and anger, these are mostly present in the first and second act, as Tokubei is angry at Kuheiji and experiences shame due to his damaged reputation. For them it is perhaps a cycling between egoistic and anomic, whereas for Jihei and Koharu egoistic and anomic are more mixed. In their story grief, anxiety, anger and shame are shown in all acts of the play, sometimes alternating and sometimes blending.

According to Durkheim, fatalistic suicide is caused by excessive regulation that causes an individual's future to be blocked and their passions choked by an oppressive discipline.¹¹¹ This type of escapist suicide could fit within the society of Chikamatsu's time, if we were to assume the Japan of the Tokugawa Shogunate was indeed an oppressive state. A more tangible oppressive discipline, however, would be Tokubei's uncle, in the case of *Sonezaki*, and Gozaemon, in the case of *Amijima*, for they directly antagonize the male protagonists.

Abrutyn and Mueller build on this theory by discussing the difference between *bypassed* shame and *engulfed* or *overt* shame, whereby the first leads to anger-shame feedback loops and the latter is more centered on and directed at the self while at the same time involving an intense pain and desire to hide that self.¹¹² They link this engulfed shame to the theory of *stigma*, considering the case of an individual who strongly identifies with and feels connected to a group and their respective norms, yet is unable to live up to group expectations due to their stigmatized identity.¹¹³ This pushes them into withdrawal.¹¹⁴

Jihei definitely suffers from both types of shame, but perhaps the most dominant is engulfed shame as he lashes out at himself and blames himself for his troubles. One could say his suicide is an extreme method to hide the self and escape the painful shame that awaits him otherwise.

As for the stigmatized identity, that idea would be applicable to Koharu and Ohatsu. Even if Jihei and Tokubei had the funds to ransom them, they would be unable to live up to the expectations of the merchant's wife, despite their devotion and qualities. Their status as wives would remain tainted by their stigmatized profession, even though they would not be prostitutes anymore.

¹¹⁰ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 337

¹¹¹ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 338

¹¹² Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 339

¹¹³ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 339

¹¹⁴ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 339

This could add to hopelessness for the futures of their current lives, making them resort to love suicide and prayer for the next life.

Abrutyn and Mueller recognize problems with mixed-type suicides involving either fatalism or altruism, for they involve the complexities of the different levels of social reality, the micro and macro. For fatalism, they suggest a pallet in which this group-level force is mixed with the perception of being unable to meet expectations (anomie), and with self-directed powerful shame and feelings of isolation and sadness (egoism).¹¹⁵

As for altruistic suicides, they offer two considerations as solution, namely: (1) all self-sacrificial suicides and sympathetic suicides bred by collectivism should be considered altruistic; (2) integration to the extent that social support from elsewhere is delimited should be viewed as the root cause of mixed-type altruistic suicides.¹¹⁶

Altruism is not bound to a single emotion and stands in stark contrast to egoism, for the suicide should involve a feeling of relief and happiness, as a sign of solidarity and commitment.¹¹⁷ However, the emotional pallet can be quite complicated when altruism is mixed with fatalism, meaning that enthusiasm, pride in fulfilling a moral duty and love for the group are mixed with feelings of fear of the external world, shame and maybe even hopelessness.¹¹⁸

In the case of the mixed-type altruistic-anomic suicide, the motivation would be considered exasperated effervescence, whereby an individual violates certain norms of their group and, consumed by shame as they perceive themselves as a threat to their bond, view the restoration of the relationship as hopeless.¹¹⁹ Here, the force of disruption is central, in contrast to altruistic-fatalism where the individual is strongly integrated in the group and adheres to its norms and values.¹²⁰ Tokubei seems to fit with both categories. He could be said to violate certain norms by being a frequent visitor of the pleasure quarters, yet the norm he is thought to have violated is one he adheres to. The crime causing him shame is one he has not committed.

Broken pride

Apart from shame, pride is also an important social emotion mentioned by Abrutyn and Mueller and they are closely related to one another; pride is the source of shame. When pride is under threat, an individual is faced with humiliation. Therefore, broken pride can definitely be called the dominant driving force for suicide.

¹¹⁵ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 340

¹¹⁶ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 341

¹¹⁷ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 341

¹¹⁸ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 341

¹¹⁹ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 342

¹²⁰ Abrutyn and Mueller, "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide," 342

Jiheï is not successful in his career since he has squandered his fortune in the pleasure quarters – and one could wonder why he felt the need to go there in the first place. His brother constantly confronts him with his lack of success by being better at playing his social role, as well as Tahei, who is nowhere near as responsible as Magoemon, but financially successful nonetheless. He poses a direct threat to Jihei’s reputation.

Notably Magoemon seems to have a *darasuke* puppet head. This indicates a ‘bad young man’, according to the categorization of types of heads made by Donald Keene in “Bunraku: the Art of the Japanese Puppet Theatre”.¹²¹ Even though that categorization is based on modern *bunraku* theatre, the types depicted by the heads likely do not differ significantly from those of Chikamatsu’s day.



Figure 2.1 Magoemon’s *bunraku* puppet head



Figure 2.2 *Darasuke* puppet head

The use of a ‘bad’ head could indicate that Jihei has a negative perception of him, as his ‘superior’ elder brother, and that Jihei suffers from an inferiority complex. This feeling of inferiority is fed by Magoemon’s words and internalized by Jihei in thoughts such as this:

JIHEI: He cannot leave me to my death, though I am the worst of sinners! I remain to the last a burden to him! I’m unworthy of such kindness!¹²²

He considers himself a “burden” and “unworthy”, which shows his broken pride, shame, and guilt. It shows both ‘sadness’ emotions and social emotions. Notably he speaks of Magoemon’s “kindness”. On the one hand, this would suggest he views his brother in a positive light. On the other hand, the kindness of Magoemon potentially makes Jihei feel even more inferior and fuels a feeling of envy or jealousy. This would in turn darken Jihei’s perception of his brother.

Contrary to Jihei whose feelings of inferiority and broken pride are already noticeable from the beginning, Tokubei starts out as a prideful person. He highly values his honesty and purity of intention, as revealed by words like “I’ve served him with absolute honesty”¹²³ and “My master has

¹²¹ Donald Keene, *Bunraku: the art of Japanese puppet theatre*, Tokyo: Kodansha International LTD (1973): 53

¹²² Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Amijima,” translated by Donald Keene, 417

¹²³ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Sonezaki,” translated by Donald Keene, 42

been so impressed by my honesty”¹²⁴. His pride also echoes in his refusal to marry his aunt’s niece as he explains his reluctance by saying: “How could I ever assert myself?”.

Pride, as one of the social emotions, is not only linked to self-image but also others’ perception of the individual. Tokubei appears preoccupied with others’ perception of him and he makes explicit his intent to prove his purity through suicide, as quoted earlier. The importance of others’ opinions is also stressed in the final act, when Tokubei says the following:

TOKUBEI: ... it would be unfortunate if because of the pain we are to suffer people said that we looked ugly in death. Let us secure our bodies to this twin-trunked tree and die immaculately! We will become an unparalleled example of lovers’ suicide.¹²⁵

He is constantly concerned with the way others see him and even his death serves his reputation. When Kuheiji’s deception distorts others’ perception of Tokubei, the attribute of honesty that Tokubei prides himself on is questioned because of the false accusation of forgery and extortion. It is the very nature of this accusation that makes Tokubei’s pride suffer the optimal blow.

Dying to win

Love suicides can be seen as a victory of sorts. One way the lovers “win” by committing suicide is the salvation Heine spoke of. However, love suicide offers more than this otherworldly victory. There is an earthly victory present as well: male dominance.

The primary goal of any species is to reproduce and it is therefore no surprise that many stories feature the trope of the love triangle, whereby one character – almost always female – is meant to choose between two romantic prospects. This trope concerns itself with the concepts of ‘male-male competition’ and ‘female choice’. In an evolutionary sense, a woman would choose the fitter male to produce better offspring. Depending on the culture, physical strength may not necessarily be the desired trait; it is social success that plays an important role, whatever form it takes. Usually the dominant man is the one with access to resources and a high social status, for dominance implies power over others. One of the ways in which his desirability is enhanced, is his ability to acquire a mate.

This is reflected in stories where a male character must overcome certain obstacles and in the end “gets the girl”. At that point he has proven his worth in some way and deserved her affections, whether this female character is the princess he has rescued from the tower or the young woman

¹²⁴ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Sonezaki,” translated by Donald Keene, 42

¹²⁵ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Sonezaki,” translated by Donald Keene, 55

he has seduced. In many stories one of the obstacles is a male rival, as is the case in *Sonezaki* and *Amijima*.

It must be noted that the woman is not necessarily the goal of the competition. Although she can be treated as a price to be won – depending on the story – the real price in many cases is social status. It is the assertion of dominance over the rival. Even in *Sonezaki* and *Amijima*, that leave no doubt about Tokubei’s and Jihei’s sincere love for Ohatsu and Koharu, their male rivalries still seem to play a part, in the first less so than in the latter. Again, pride is a key emotion here.

A small hint of this is seen in *Sonezaki*, when Kuheiji expresses interest in Ohatsu and expects her to like him as well.

KUHEIJI: ... Well, if [Tokubei] kills himself, I’ll take good care of you after he’s gone! I think you’ve fallen for me too!

OHATSU: That’s most generous of you, I’m sure. But would you object if, by way of thanks for your kindness, I killed you? Could I go on living even a moment if separated from Toku?¹²⁶

Contrary to his expectations, she reacts quite aggressively and makes her preference for Tokubei explicit. This is merely a small piece of dialogue, but in *Amijima* the rivalry between Jihei and Tahei is one of the most important plotlines, and the play can thus be said to involve a love triangle of sorts.

Whereas Tokubei’s pride is crushed by Kuheiji’s scheme and their rivalry exists more in the realm of morality, Jihei’s pride – though already damaged – is under threat by Tahei in a different manner. Jihei’s and Tahei’s rivalry exists in two realms: financial and romantic. The price of victory in these realms is Koharu and “winning” her is directly linked to honor and social reputation, as suggested by the words Koharu speaks to the fake samurai:

KOHARU: ... My contracts with my former master and my present one still have five years to run. If somebody else claimed me during that time, it would be a blow to me, of course, but a worse disgrace to Jihei’s honor.

In terms of male-male competition, Tahei appears to be the dominant one. After all, he has the financial resources to buy Koharu and take care of her. Once Jihei has broken with Koharu, this is exactly what Tahei does. Fascinatingly, Jihei cries upon hearing the news, not because he lost Koharu, but because he lost the rivalry.

¹²⁶ Chikamatsu, “The Love Suicides at Sonezaki,” translated by Donald Keene, 50

JIHEI: ... I have not a shred of attachment left for that vampire in human skin, but *I bear a grudge against Tahei*. He has all the money he wants, no wife or children. *He's schemed again and again to redeem her, but Koharu refused to give in*, at least until I broke with her. She told me time and again, "You have nothing to worry about. I'll never let myself be redeemed by Tahei, not even if my ties with you are ended and I can no longer stay by your side. *If my master is induced by Tahei's money to deliver me to him, I'll kill myself in a way that'll do you credit!*" But think – not ten days have passed since I broke with her, and she's to be redeemed by Tahei! That rotten whore! That animal! No, I haven't a trace of affection left for her, but *I can just hear how Tahei will be boasting*. He'll spread the word around Osaka that my business has come to a standstill and I'm hard pressed for money. *I'll meet with contemptuous stares from the wholesalers. I'll be dishonored*. My heart is broken and my body burns with *shame*. What a disgrace! How maddening!¹²⁷ [italics added]

His concerns revolve first and foremost around Tahei and his own reputation. If Koharu marries Tahei, Jihei will have lost. However, Koharu rejects Tahei, even stating that she feels as though she had "some mortal enemy"¹²⁸. This shows that the winner of male competition is not necessarily the one chosen by the desired woman. What Koharu is looking for, is not the financial security provided by Tahei, but the sympathy and love provided by Jihei. The love suicide, in a way, shows that Koharu has chosen Jihei as her husband. While Tahei is victorious in the financial realm, Jihei is the one who wins the romantic rivalry. Despite his powerlessness, Jihei is the one who "gets the girl".

In short, a significant motivator for the love suicides is related to social performance and reputation. The protagonists are social misfits who fail to live up to social expectations. The social emotions that drive suicide are pride, shame and guilt, and especially pride and the resultant shame are heavily present in both case studies. Tokubei has his pride as an honest merchant, that is crushed and turned into shame when Kuheiji damages his reputation. Jihei already has damaged pride due to his 'superior' brother Magoemon, but his remaining pride is challenged in his rivalry with Tahei, whereby the attainment of Koharu is linked to honor. By committing suicide Tokubei seeks to win his moral rivalry with Kuheiji and assert himself as a pure person. Jihei, in turn, wins his romantic rivalry with Tahei by having Koharu choose suicide with him over a marriage with Tahei.

¹²⁷ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 408

¹²⁸ Chikamatsu, "The Love Suicides at Amijima," translated by Donald Keene, 389

Conclusion

By analyzing the two case studies, *Sonezaki Shinjū* and *Shinjū Ten no Amijima*, this thesis has brought attention to the emotional and psychological complexity of Chikamatsu's characters and their motives for love suicide. As such, it has aimed to broaden the psychological level of interpretation and explain what motivated the characters to end their lives.

In order to do so, this thesis has used the socioemotional theory of suicide created by Abrutyn and Mueller based on the theories of Durkheim. According to their classification, the *Sonezaki* suicide most closely fits the category of 'altruistic-anomic', from Tokubei's perspective, and 'suicide suggestion: altruistic-egoistic', from Ohatsu's perspective. The *Amijima* suicide is probably best described as 'egoistic-anomic', although there is definitely a fatalistic aspect to it as well and there is also suicide suggestion. However, these categories only cover the main emotions involved. To answer the research question in more detail, I shall discuss the particular motivations for each character.

From *Sonezaki*, Tokubei committed suicide to prove his purity after Kuheiji's scheme and, in doing so, save his social reputation and win their rivalry. Furthermore, his situation of indebtedness to his uncle as well as the false accusations that specifically attacked the one attribute he prided himself on, namely his honesty, made him feel powerless and this perceived lack of control added to a sense of hopelessness. Certain of the fact that he would lose his social reputation and his close bond with Ohatsu, he elected death.

As for Ohatsu, her primary motivation seems to be love. Due to her close emotional bond with Tokubei she felt his pain and shame as her own, to the point of wishing to die herself. She joined him in death to be reborn with him and possibly to control her own ending and achieve salvation.

From *Amijima*, Jihei chose death because his negligence of his business and family had led to the tarnishing of his social reputation and Tahei's ransoming of Koharu topped by Jihei's divorce from Osan would have dishonored him even further. He faced loss of social status and he felt guilt towards his family, shame towards others due to his perceived failure and anger directed at Tahei, his financial and romantic rival, and himself. The love suicide saved him from the social struggles awaiting him and demonstrated Koharu's preference for him, making him win the romantic rivalry. Moreover, Jihei had low self-confidence due to his perceived lack of control and his feelings of inferiority towards his elder brother, and thus suffered from hopelessness and depression.

Koharu's suicide was motivated by love for Jihei and suicide suggestion – the contagion of suicidality due to emotional closeness. She chose death in the hopes of achieving salvation and

being reborn with Jihei, and as such suicide was a way for her to take control of her strictly regulated life and escape a marriage with Tahei.

By committing love suicide, Koharu and Ohatsu might have partially hoped to be viewed as loyal, virtuous women despite their profession, but there is not enough evidence in the plays themselves to support this.

The above shows the skill of Chikamatsu as a playwright as he managed to make believable, emotionally complex characters. While this might seem contradictory to his use of types, it actually is not. Characters that are types can be complex and nuanced while adhering to the typical characteristics and tropes. In this regard *Sonezaki* and *Amijima* showcase Chikamatsu's development of his craft, as the character of Jihei is arguably more nuanced and complex than Tokubei, who served as the model for the love suicide merchant type.

As can be seen, moving away from *giri* and *ninjō* can open up other possibilities. However, there are, of course, many other roads to take with a non-normative approach. In future research, the psychological level of interpretation could be broadened even further, and there are many other love suicide plays that could serve as case studies and provide fascinating insights. By stepping over the borders of *giri* and *ninjō*, we can move along other roads of interpretation in the pursuit of enriching our understanding of Chikamatsu's work.

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Figures

- Figure 1 – Abrutyn, Seth; and Anna S. Mueller. “The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide: A Microsociological View of Durkheim’s Suicide.” In *Sociological Theory* 32, No. 4 (December, 2014): 346.
- Figure 2.1 – Pulin Blog. “bunraku ‘shinjū ten no amijima’ wo miru” 文楽「心中天網島」を観る Published on May 26, 2013. pulinblog.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2013/05/post-2dc7.html
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