

FOUR MAJOR PLAYS OF CHIKAMATSU

The Love Suicides at Sonezaki

The Love Suicides at Sonezaki (會根崎心中 Sonezaki Shinjū?) is a love-suicide Bunraku play by Chikamatsu Monzaemon. While not his first one (which was probably the puppet play *The Soga Successors* in 1683) nor his most popular (which would be *The Battles of Coxinga*), it is probably the most popular of his "domestic tragedies" or "domestic plays" (sewamono) as Donald Keene characterizes the non-historical plays.

It was first performed 20 June 1703. It was revived in 1717, with additional scenes added by Chikamatsu, such as the punishment of the villain, but the version typically translated and performed is the 1703 version.

Plot

Scene one

The Love Suicides at Sonezaki is a short play in three scenes, staged over a day and a night. The two central characters are a young orphan merchant clerk named Tokubei (whose firm deals in oil or possibly soy) and the courtesan with whom he is in love, Ohatsu.

In the first scene, Tokubei and an apprentice to their "firm of Hirano in Uchihon Street" are making the rounds of the firm's customers, delivering their wares and collecting on the bills, when, on the grounds of the Ikutama Shrine (in Osaka), Tokubei encounters his beloved Ohatsu, who berates him for his coldness in not visiting or writing her for some time now, and also for not confiding in her his troubles.

Moved by her plea, Tokubei tells her everything. The owner of the firm is Tokubei's uncle. Tokubei's scrupulously honest and steady performance has impressed him; he wants Tokubei to marry his wife's niece. Because Tokubei loves Ohatsu, he had tried to politely refuse. The uncle did not relent but continued to try to convince Tokubei to agree to the match. He proposed the match to Tokubei's stepmother, who must assent; she immediately agreed and returned to her home village - taking with her

the lavish dowry the uncle provided, some two kamme (a unit of measure for silver. Two kamme would be a significant amount; writing in the 1960s, Donald Keene stated that two kamme would then be equivalent to \$1000).

This agreement remains wholly unknown to Tokubei until his uncle tries to force him into the marriage. Tokubei makes his refusal categorical and absolute this time. The uncle is infuriated. He fires Tokubei from the firm, demands the return of the two kamme which Tokubei does not have, and says he will exile Tokubei from Osaka.

Tokubei goes to his village and eventually with the villagers' aid, forces the silver out of his stepmother and returns to Osaka.

On his return, Tokubei is collared by his close friend of many years, "Kuheiji the oil merchant", who tells Tokubei that he desperately needs a loan of two kamme or else he will not be able to meet his monthly bills and will go bankrupt.

Since Tokubei is so kind-hearted and does not actually need to return the two kamme until several days after Kuheiji promises to return the money, he loans it to Kuheiji.

Here Tokubei finishes recounting the events that have taken place before the start of the play. Just as he finishes, none other than the very Kuheiji he was speaking of enters the temple grounds at the head of a band of revelers and rowdies. Tokubei seizes the chance to ask Kuheiji to repay the now-overdue loan.

Kuheiji flatly denies the existence of any such debt. When Tokubei produces the promissory note Kuheiji had stamped with his seal, Kuheiji dismisses it as an extortion attempt, revealing that before he had stamped the promissory note, he had reported the seal as lost.

Tokubei realizes that he has been perfectly swindled and attacks Kuheiji. He is trounced and beaten by Kuheiji and his followers.

Scene two

While Tokubei is recovering from his beating and returning dejectedly to Ohatsu's place of employment, the Temma House, Kuheiji is headed there to boast of his new wealth and

successful scam, after having been busy spreading the story that Tokubei had tried to extort money from Kuheiji.

Ohatsu has no sooner hidden Tokubei under her robes than Kuheiji and some friends arrogantly stride in. While Kuheiji boasts of how Tokubei is sure to be executed or exiled and how he will then possess Ohatsu for himself, Ohatsu and Tokubei communicate through their hands and feet. They resolve to die within the day together.

Scene two ends with them sneaking past the sleeping servant guarding the exit.

Scene three

A memorial

Scene three begins with a long and poetic dialogue between the two lovers (into which the narrator injects the occasional lamenting comment). The two travel to the "Wood of Tenjin" (Tenjin being Sugawara no Michizane), and by an unusual tree in the Shonezaki shrine which has both a pine and palm tree growing out of the same trunk (this tree has since died), decide that this is the place they will do the grim deed.

Tokubei binds Ohatsu to the tree. So dreadful is the deed that his first stabs with the razor all go awry, but one blow strikes home in Ohatsu's throat, and she slowly begins dying. But before she does, Tokubei thrusts the razor into his own throat and the two die together.

See also

Sonezaki Shinjū, a 1978 film based on the same story.

The Battles of Coxinga

The Battles of Coxinga (国姓爺合戦 Kokusen'ya Kassen?) is a puppet play by Chikamatsu. It was his most popular play: first staged on November 26, 1715, in Osaka, it ran for the next seventeen months, far longer than the usual few weeks or months. Its enduring popularity can largely be attributed to its effectiveness as entertainment: its many scenes over a period of more than seven years follow the adventures of Coxinga

(based on the adventures of the real historical figure Koxinga; as the play is loosely based on real history, it is a jidaimono play, not a domestic play) in restoring the rightful dynasty of China and features effects uniquely suited for the puppet theater, such as the villain Ri Tōten gouging out an eye (ostensibly to prove his loyalty); in addition, Donald Keene suggests that the adventures in exotic China played well in isolationist Tokugawa Japan. While generally not considered as great in terms of literary quality as some of Chikamatsu's domestic tragedies like *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*, it is generally agreed to be his best historical play.

Plot

Act 1

Scene 1

The plot begins in the exceedingly luxurious and profligate court of the Chinese Emperor Shisōretsu (seventeenth ruler of the Ming dynasty), in May 1644. His wife is nearly ready to give birth to their first son and future heir, and Ryūkakun, wife of the loyal and sagacious counselor Go Sankei, has just given birth so she can be the imperial heir's wet nurse.

The Great King of Tartary (the Manchus) sends Prince Bairoku as his emissary to the court. The emissary's demand is that the emperor's wife be sent to him, to become his consort. The minister and General of the Right, Ri Tōten reveals that the reason that the Great King believes he can make this demand is because in 1641, Ri Tōten had sought ten million bushels of grain to relieve the famine gripping the land. In exchange, Ri Tōten had given them his promise that later they could ask for anything they wished.

Go Sankei opposes making good on Ri Tōten's promise, pointing out the immorality and outright foolishness of sending away the Empress with the heir. The envoy is deeply offended and rises to leave, uttering promises of war, when Ri Tōten takes his dagger and gouges out his left eye and presents it to the prince, who is thereby mollified when he leaves.

Scene 2

The emperor, favorably impressed by Ri Tōten's sacrifice decides to marry his younger sister,

the lovely Princess Sendan to him. She is opposed to any marriage so the emperor forces her to wager her assent on the outcome of a mock battle between 200 court ladies wielding plum or cherry branches. At the Emperor's previous instruction, the plums lose, dooming Sendan to the marriage.

Alarmed by the commotion of battle, Go Sankei apparels for war and rushes in. When he discovers the "senselessness" of the mock battle, he reproaches the emperor at length for alarming the palace, for setting a bad example, and more generally for his extravagances, his dislike of governance, and for being such a careless ruler that he didn't even know that it was Ri Tōten who was responsible for that famine by stealing rice from the Imperial storehouses and using his ill-got proceeds to bribe and corrupt people throughout the country, and last (but not least) for not recognizing that Ri Tōten gouging out his eye was in fact a message to the Tartars that they had his complete backing and should invade anon (Go Sankei "proves" this through use of yin and yang and analysis of ideographs).

The Emperor scorns Go Sankei's lecture, but immediately an ancient plaque with the dynasty name on it shatters. With a great tumult, the former envoy breaks into the palace at the head of an irresistible enemy host. Go Sankei's forces are hopelessly outnumbered and cannot resist. He instructs Ryūkakun to take the Princess to a certain harbor, named Kaidō; Go Sankei and his men would cut a path through the opposing hordes and secure the escape of the Empress and Emperor. Before Go Sankei's forces succeed and he returns, Ri Tōten and his brother, Ri Kaihō seize the Emperor and cut off his head. Tōten then takes the head to the Great King. Ri Kaihō is left to bring the Empress along into custody. On Go Sankei's return, he wrothfully strikes down Ri Kaihō and sorrowfully removes the imperial appurtenances and imperial regalia from the imperial corpse. With his own son and the Empress, the three escape to the coast at Kaidō.

Scene 3

Unfortunately for the three fugitives, no ships can be found at Kaidō to take them across to safety. They are pursued by musketeers who kill the Empress. Pausing in his haste, Go Sankei

realizes that the rightful heir to the throne may yet be salvaged. With his sword, he performs a Caesarean section and removes the still living prince. However, would not the enemy forces realize that the prince lived when they saw the empty womb and redouble their pursuit? Stoically, Go Sankei kills his own infant son and places the corpse in the womb to gain time and fool the enemy.

Go Sankei does not meet up with Ryūkakun and the princess. Ryūkakun ambushes one of Ri Tōten's henchmen, seizing his boat and sword. She puts the princess in the boat, pushes it off, trusting in the elements to deliver the princess to an old loyal courtier exiled to Japan, "Ikkan" or "Tei Shiryū Rōikkan".

Ryūkakun remains on the shore and perishes fighting the Mongols; they leave satisfied that everyone (including the prince) is dead, except for Go Sankei—although he does not worry them.

Act 2

Scene 1

Act 2 dawns in a sleepy Japanese fishing village, to which the "Grand Tutor" Tei Shiryū fled after being banished from China so many years ago. There he raised he remarried, and had a son, Watōnai, whom he raised as a fisherman and who has married a sturdy fisherwoman. He ceaselessly studied all the texts his father brought with him from China, studying with especial ardour the works on military strategy and tactics, and histories of war; despite his earnest efforts, he never truly grasps military matters until one day walking on the beach he spies a clam and a shrike locked in combat. The shrike's beak has been trapped and it cannot escape, but at the same time the clam is vulnerable as it is only safe so long as it holds on. The lesson Watōnai draws from this is "to provoke a quarrel between two adversaries, and then catch both when they least expect it." Watōnai immediately decides to try to apply his newfound insight to the war between China and Tartary.

No sooner has Watōnai's wife Komutsu pried apart the shrike and clam than the two see a small boat drifting towards them. Inside is the Princess Sendan. Neither Watōnai nor Komutsu speak Chinese, and perplexed what to do, they

summon Tei Shiryū, who relates to Sendan his exile. Sendan then pours forth her own recent history.

Encouraged by a prophecy of victory mentioned by Tei Shiryū's unnamed Japanese wife, and by analysis of ideograms and the I Ching, Watōnai resolves to reconquer China for the emperor. Watōnai tries to leave without his Komutsu, but shamed by this, she tries to persuade Watōnai to beat her to death first with his oar. Watōnai of course refuses. He relents when she is about to hurl herself off the cliff; apparently he had only been testing her to see whether he could entrust the princess to her. She passes, and Watōnai, Tei Shiryū, and his wife all set off for China.

Scene 2

Arrived in China, Tei Shiryū has a plan of sorts. In his exile, he left behind one daughter named Kinshōjo, who has married a puissant lord and general named Gojōgun Kanki. With her aid, hopefully Kanki could be persuaded to rebel and join forces with them and Go Sankei against their foreign overlords.

They decide to split up and take separate routes to avoid suspicion. While passing through the "Bamboo Forest of a Thousand Leagues", Watōnai and his mother encounter a large & fierce tiger driven thither by a tiger hunt. Of course Watōnai defeats the tiger and receives its submission. An Taijin, underling of Ri Toten, rushes up with his officers and soldiers - it was they who had driven that tiger thence, intending to take its head as a present for the Great King.

Watōnai refuses to give over the tiger and speaks rudely to them. They attack, but the tiger intervenes, splintering and shattering all their weaponry. Watōnai seizes An Taijin and hurls him against a rock. His entire body is shattered and he dies. Threatened, the officers and soldiers avow that they were not particularly enthused by Tartary and its regime, and so would join Watōnai. He gives them all Japanese-style shaved heads, and new names like "Luzonbei" or "Siamtarō" or "Jakartabei" or even "Englandbei".

Act 3

Scene 1

At the impregnable Castle of Lions, Watōnai is in

favor of attacking at once with his newfound soldiers, arguing that his half-sister's failure to ever send a letter to Tei Shiryū amply proves her disloyalty. His mother dissuades him, pointing out that a wife must obey her husband. Tei Shiryū asks at the gate to be allowed entrance and a private audience with General Kanki. Kanki is not there at that moment, so Tei Shiryū asks to speak to Kanki's wife and mentions that he is recently arrived from Japan. Agitated by his request and foreignness, the guards begin threatening them and preparing for battle; the narrator suggests that Kinshōjo rushes to the gate because she hears the rising tumult the guards make. She instructs the guards to "Do nothing rash!" She then inquires into the identities of the visitors. Tei Shiryū reveals himself.

Kinshōjo allows as to how Tei Shiryū's story of himself is accurate, but what proof does he really have that he is himself? He replies that his face should be compared to a portrait he had made of himself and left with her those many years ago. This proof conclusively settles the matter, as the image matches and none by Kinshōjo and Tei Shiryū would remember the portrait now as well.

Kinshōjo would fain let them all in, but the Great King of Tartary has issued orders that no foreigners be allowed into any fortresses. Kinshōjo asks the soldiers to make an exception for her stepmother, and they agree only on the condition that she be fettered like a criminal (so if anyone should take them to task for breaking their orders, they would have an excuse).

Before she vanishes into the gate, an agreement is made with Tei Shiryū and Watōnai waiting outside: if the negotiations go well, white dye will be dumped into the cistern, which will shortly flow into the river outside and be very visible. But if the negotiations fail, the dye will be red.

Scene 2

While Kinshōjo's maids are occupied trying to find some acceptable fare for the mother to eat, Kanki returns with good news: he has been promoted by the Great King to general of cavalry, commanding 100,000 horsemen. The mother comes in, and Kanki is moved by her hindrances and the love of her stepdaughter

that prompted her to travel even over the dangerous oceans. She asks him to throw in his lot with Watōnai. His response is favorable but he demurs from giving an immediate answer; he wants some time to consider. The mother presses him for that answer. Forced, he says yes, and then attempts to kill Kinshōjo. The mother intervenes and berates Kanki for trying to kill her daughter. Kanki explains that if he didn't kill Kinshōjo before announcing the alliance, he would be shamed before the whole world by gossip claiming that he did not join Watōnai's rebellion out of principle but because he was wholly dominated by his wife and her relations. Kinshōjo accepts Kanki's reasoning and steps forth to his sword. Once again, though cruelly bound, the mother intervenes. She reasons that if she allows her stepdaughter to be killed in front of her the very first time the two met, then "people will say that your Japanese stepmother hated her Chinese stepdaughter so much - though they were separated by three thousand leagues - that she had her put to death before her eyes. Such a report would disgrace not only me but Japan, for people would say, judging the country by my acts, that the Japanese were cruel-hearted."

Kinshōjo is convinced by the mother's speech this time and is reduced to tears. Seeing this, Kanki realizes that he cannot join Watōnai and is now his reluctant enemy. Kinshōjo goes to her bedchamber to deliver the scarlet dye signal. Watōnai bursts in among them regardless of the guards, and comes to loggerheads with Kanki when Kinshōjo comes back in: the scarlet came from no dye but the blood of her fatally cut open belly. Both Kanki and Watōnai are stunned, but now that Kinshōjo is dying and soon to be dead, Kanki can again join forces with Watōnai. Kanki bestows on Watōnai the new name that he will make famous: Coxinga.

Coxinga's mother perceives all this with joy, and true to her earlier words about shame, stabs herself in the throat and cuts through her liver. With her dying words, she exhorts Coxinga to defeat the hordes of Tartary mercilessly and to filially obey Tei Shiryū. She and Kinshōjo expire together.

Coxinga sets out with a will and an army.

Act 4

Scene 1

Back in Japan, Komutsu learns of Coxinga's success in obtaining Kanki as an ally. Joyously, she goes to the Shrine of Sumiyoshi, god of the sea, in Matura. She prays, and begins practicing her swordmanship with a bokken; some of her prayers are granted: her skills have progressed to the point where she can cut off a tree branch at a stroke. Encouraged, she proposes to Princess Sendan that they take passage in a merchantman bound for China. The Princess agrees.

Scene 2

Sendan and Komutsu, at the harbor, ask a young fisher boy wearing an uncannily antique hair-style to take them part of the way in his fishing boat. He promptly complies, and while speaking to them of geography and islands, poles them all the way to China using his supernatural powers; in a twinkling they are there and the boy is explaining to them that he is really the "Boy of the Sea from Sumiyoshi".

Scene 3

In this scene, focus shifts to Go Sankei, unseen for so long. For the past two years he had wandered the wilderness and remote regions of China as a fugitive, avoiding the agents of Ri Toten and raising the infant prince; he has grown inured to hardship and is weary. We see him climbing the "Mountain of the Nine Immortals", to its summit, prince in arms.

Pausing, he sees "two old men with shaggy eyebrows and white hair, seemingly in perfect harmony with the pine breeze, as friends who have lived together for years." The two are deeply engrossed in a game of Go. Go Sankei asks the two how they could be so deeply engrossed without the comforts of music, poetry, and wine? They reply that to Go Sankei the game is but a game, however they could see it for what it was: the world itself, yin and yang opposed, with the 361 sections roughly corresponding (to the 360 days of the lunar calendar) to a single day, and the tactics and strategies of the game the same as for war. Through the game, Go Sankei stands spellbound, watching as Coxinga wages his war. Thrilled at Coxinga's successes, Go Sankei makes as if to go to him. The two old men reveal that what he saw so vividly and as so close as the board itself were really hundreds of

leagues away and that more than five years have passed since he began watching their game. The two reveal themselves as the founder of the Ming dynasty and his chief counselor.

The two vanish and Go Sankei discovers that he has grown a long beard and that the prince is now a 7 year old of grave voice and mien. He asks leave of the prince to inform Coxinga of the prince's location. But the prince has no chance to reply because Tei Shiryū happens on them with the Princess Sendan in tow. They exchange news and discover that the villainous former envoy, Prince Bairoku and his thousands of men are swarming up the mountainside after them.

They beseech the first Emperor of the Ming and Lui Po-wen of Ch'ing-ti'en to aid them. In response, a bridge of clouds to the other side of the valley forms; they escape on it. When Prince Bairoku and his men try to follow, the bridge is blown away by a wind, and he and his men fall to their deaths. The survivors are pelted with rocks and other missiles until they succumb and Prince Bairoku, having managed to climb out of the chasm, has his head bashed in by Go Sankei with the two immortals' go board.

The group then goes to the Castle of Foochow, controlled by Coxinga.

Act 5

Scene 1

Coxinga's forces are drawn up and arrayed before Nanjing - the final battle is near. Coxinga discusses with his war council of Kanki, Go Sankei and Tei Shiryū how to defeat the Great King, Ri Toten, and their forces.

Go Sankei advocates an ingenious stratagem: tubes stuffed with honey and hornets should be prepared, and when Coxinga's forces prepared to retreat, dropped for the Tartar hordes to greedily open; whereupon they would be stung unmercifully and disarrayed. This opening would then become the focus of their true assault. Should they catch on, and attempt to burn the tubes en masse, the gunpowder placed in the bottom of the tubes against just such an occasion would explode them to bits.

Kanki proposes that several thousands of baskets of choice provisions be thoroughly

poisoned and left behind in another feigned retreat, whereupon they would counterattack.

Coxinga likes both suggestions, but decides to simply engage in a straightforward frontal assault, with Komutsu and her Japanese-looking troops in the vanguard.

The Princess Sendan rushes in with a message from Tei Shiryū: he has decided on an honorable suicide by attacking Nanking alone. Coxinga orders the assault launched immediately.

Scene 2

Tei Shiryū arrives at Nanking's main gate and issues his challenge to Ri Toten. The first soldier to respond is easily killed by him. Seeing that Tei Shiryū, Coxinga's father, is come, the Great King orders his capture. Tei Shiryū is surrounded by more than 50 club wielding men and is beaten, captured, bound.

Shortly thereafter, Coxinga's assault begins. Unarmed, he defeats all comers until Ri Toten and the Great King of Tartary ride up; bound to the face of Ri Toten's shield is Tei Shiryū. Coxinga cannot bring himself to attack now that Tei Shiryū is hostage.

Into this dilemma rush Go Sankei and Kanki. They prostrate themselves, and get close to the Great King, pretending to try to exchange Coxinga's head for their lives. The King is pleased by their offer but not so pleased when they spring up and seize him. Even as they do so, Coxinga pulls Tei Shiryū off the shield and binds Ri Toten to it.

The King is let off with only 500 lashes, but Ri Toten has his head and both arms cut off by Coxinga, Go Sankei, and Kanki, respectively.

The Emperor Eiryaku is placed on the throne, and all ends well.

The Uprooted Pine

The Uprooted Pine (Nebiki no Kadomatsu) is a play by Chikamatsu. It is a sewamono play (based on a real incident) like The Love Suicides at Sonezaki, written for the puppet theater. It

was first performed on 1 February 1718.

The title contains several meanings related to the plot: "uprooting" could be an expression referring to buying out a courtesan's contract from her owner and possessing her exclusively (uprooting her from her former life and residence), and "pine" could denote the highest class of courtesan (as opposed to "plum tree" for several ranks down); the title could also reference New Years festivities, as 1 February was one day after the Japanese New Year in 1718.

Plot Act 1

The plot begins on the Japanese New Year's Day in 1718, before the coming Day of the Rat on which the custom used to be to go out into the fields and uproot a pine tree as a part of the festivities. A great and renowned courtesan named Azuma is accosted by a poor old woman, who pours out her trouble: her son has been reduced by circumstances to working as a day laborer. Once his employer ordered him to deliver a letter to Azuma; this he did, but he fell madly in love with her. The old woman attempted to dissuade him, pointing out how impossible it would be for him to afford any of Azuma's services, but he refused to give up his hope. Finally she made him a deal: if she could persuade Azuma to drink a friendly cup of sake with young Hard Luck Yohei (as the son is nicknamed), then Yohei would abandon his hopeless love.

Azuma is deeply moved by the woman's words, and agrees; but calling out to Yohei, she lays out her troubles: Azuma is deeply in love with the wealthy and handsome merchant Yojibei of Yamazaki, son of Jōkan, but Yojibei cannot buy out Azuma's contract because his wife Okiku is jealous.

Azuma then attempts to give Yohei ten gold pieces so he could go out into the pleasure quarter and find some girl who was available to be intimate with.

Yohei hurls the gold to the ground, shamed that Azuma should have offered it. Azuma admits her mistake, and instead gives Yohei an under-

robe Yojibei had previously given Azuma. Realizing the depths of her love, Yohei instead takes the money, vowing to go to Edo and prosper in the oil trade there; after he makes his fortune, he will return and ransom Azuma so she could be reunited with Yojibei. The two agree to go to a teahouse to drink together before Yohei leaves.

In scene two, Azuma is accosted by the boorish and ill-mannered Hikosuke, a wealthy tobacco merchant who has repeatedly sought Azuma's services and has as often been turned down. Refused a fifth time, he attempts to drag Azuma to a back-room, there to have his way by main force. He is soundly beaten by Yohei and tossed out of the teahouse. Hikosuke's bluster comes to an end and he departs hastily.

No sooner is he gone then it is bruited about that Yojibei has arrived. He learns of the recent events from Azuma and thanks Yohei, proposing that before he leaves for Edo, he spend the night with Azuma and Yojibei drinking and dancing and singing as their thanks to him. Yohei begs off, as his legs hurt from the unfamiliar seating arrangements and his mother is no doubt worrying about what has become of him.

On his way out, he encounters Hikosuke who is spoiling for a rematch. Yohei stabs Hikosuke in the head, and flees when Hikosuke yells for help - if he were to be captured, he would never make to Edo and so could never help Azuma. Confused as to the identity of his assailant, Hikosuke blames Yojibei, who is speedily apprehended. Yojibei realizes that it was Yohei who is to blame, but he remains silent: he owes Yohei a debt of honor for protecting Azuma, and he will remain silent even though he is in mortal danger of execution if Hikosuke perishes of his wound.

Act 2

Act two opens with Okiku preparing food for Yojibei, who is now under house arrest in the house of his father, Jōkan. Jōkan is apparently refusing to pay off Hikosuke to drop the charges, even though he is extremely wealthy and could easily afford it. Jōkan and Yojibei's samurai father-in-law, Jibuemon discuss the matter through the medium of a game of shogi, but Jōkan is resolutely against saving Yojibei.

Weeping, Okiku and Jibuemon go out into the garden. Just then, Azuma arrives and throws a letter over for Yojibei; it instructs Yojibei to kill himself before a commoner executioner could, assuring him that Azuma would kill herself the moment she heard.

Outraged, Okiku goes out to Azuma and reproaches her:

"Thanks to you my husband has neglected the family business and has shown himself completely indifferent to what happens at home. Day and night he spends in visits to the Quarter...Cursed strumpet! Shameless creature!"

Azuma accepts her accusations and to show the sincerity of her grief, is on the verge of cutting her throat with a razor when Okiku is convinced and urges her to forbear.

Jōkan comes out. He speaks to Okiku of mice and mice traps; Okiku understands that what he is really talking about is his desire to see Yojibei escape his household and the headsman. Yojibei initially refuses the proffered escape with Azuma: if Hikosuke were to die, then Jōkan would be executed in Yojibei's stead, and even if he weren't, Yojibei's escape would cause all of Jōkan's assets to be impounded. Jōkan threatens to kill himself then and there. Yojibei reluctantly complies. Left behind, Okiku watches tearfully as Yojibei and Azuma leave for Edo.

Act 3

In act 3, Azuma and Yojibei travel from Yamazaki to Nara. Yojibei is not well - has gone mad. The lyrical scene ends with a beautiful description of the scenery and circumstances.

Time passes before scene two takes place in late summer. Yohei rides up to the same teahouse he had so fatefully drank in with Azuma and Yojibei. He recounts his enormous success in Edo to the master of the house, and announces that he will ransom the fugitive Azuma.

However, Yohei is not the only would-be buyer. Hikosuke has recovered his former spirits and wishes to buy out Azuma's contract as well, as does an old samurai with an extremely valuable antique two-foot broadsword; Yohei is convinced

that this old man is Jibuemon.

The owner determines that he can't left Azuma be ransomed before she returns. It would set a bad precedent otherwise. Yohei has his two chests brought in, and out spring both Azuma and Yojibei, now restored to his sense. Hikosuke is allowed to leave alive by Jibuemon, as long as he reports to the police that it was Yohei who did it and drops the charges. Yohei ransoms Azuma's contract for only 300 gold pieces, as it has not long to run, and gives the other 700 to various people. Azuma and Yojibei marry, to live happily ever after, although nothing is said of Okiku. Everyone begins to party.

The Love Suicides at Amijima

The Love Suicides at Amijima (Shinjū Ten no Amijima or Shinjūten no Amijima 心中天網島) is a domestic play (sewamono) by Japanese playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Originally written for the jōruri puppet theatre, it was adapted into kabuki shortly after its premiere. The play is one of Chikamatsu's more famous plays.

It was first performed 3 January 1721. Like The Love Suicides at Sonezaki it is supposedly based on a real love-suicide, but no original event has ever been identified, even after examinations of newspapers around 13 November 1720 (the date tradition holds the real love-suicide happened). Takano Masami has suggested that Chikamatsu based his play on the 1706 play The Love Suicides at Umeda by a rival playwright, Ki no Kaion.

Overview

The work concerns two lovers who cannot be together because of social and political situations, and are so blinded by love that they commit the gravest act, suicide. The play deals with turbulent and intense emotions. "Neither kind advice nor reason can gain the ear of one possessed by the god of Death. . ." yet, it also has the humor that is always greatly appreciated in plays. The Love Suicides at

Amijima can go from darkly brooding to light fanfare in an instant. Chikamatsu uses very coarse humor and song to entertain the audience. "Jihei is worthless as wastepaper, Which is not good enough, Even to blow the nose with. Namida! Namida! Namida!"

It is a typical three act play. Chikamatsu emphasizes the insanity of the amorous pair, Jihei and Koharu. He does so by making many of the supporting characters overtly rational and commonly berating the mental capacity of the lovers, which is another way of comic relief.

The play, both beautiful and tragic, ends with Jihei ending Koharu's life by his sword. Soon after Jihei takes his own life by hanging himself from a nearby tree and then found strung by the rope he had hanged himself with in the nearby river. One of the well-remembered lines in the play is one of the last few words shared by the lovers: "Let us leave no trace of tears upon our dead faces."

The Love Suicides at Amijima is perhaps more tragic because the main characters' lives are already quite bad to begin with. They are both poor and indebted to others. People in Japan could probably easily relate to the issues that plagued the protagonist. Jihei needed to focus his energy on something other than his meager life and weak family bonds, so he places himself within the outskirts of town.

The play was first staged during the Seventeenth-Century Boom, when many famines killed thousands, infanticide was being practiced with overwhelming numbers, and living costs were rising. Many people during this time could relate to Jihei's need for more in his life, his business failures, and his fascination with the beautiful Koharu.

Plot

Koharu is a 19 year old prostitute at the Kinokuni House in Sonezaki, who is being competed for by Kamiya Jihei (a struggling 28 year old married paper merchant) and Tahei (the wealthy and arrogant merchant nicknamed the Lone Wolf for his lack of family and possibly friends). She loves Jihei and does her best to avoid Tahei, but one night she has a samurai customer over at Kawachi House. She makes her way through the streets of the pleasure

quarter but doesn't quite avoid Tahei. Tahei follows her in and boastingly propositions her. The samurai shows up, head encased in a deep wicker hat to preserve his anonymity. Tahei peers in and is frightened away by the samurai's fierce eyes. The samurai is then examined by Koharu's maid. Satisfied that he is not Jihei, she leaves the two alone to do what they will.

The samurai reproaches the proprietress and Koharu: he had come all the way there, at considerable trouble to clear the overnight visit with his superiors, and they have treated him shamefully and not made his visit pleasant at all, with a poor welcome and a gloomy Koharu. Koharu begins talking to him, but asks him such morbid questions about suicide that the samurai is positively nonplussed by such morbidity. They move to a room by the garden so the samurai "can at least distract ourselves by looking at the lanterns" since Koharu's conversation is certainly not distracting. Jihei creeps around outside that room, resolving that he will signal her somehow and the two will run off and commit suicide together, like Koharu had promised him.

The samurai guesses as much as some suicidal pact had been agreed upon between Koharu and Jihei and that this pact is the reason for her unhappiness; he begs her to confide in him. She gratefully does, and confesses that while she had indeed promised to kill herself with Jihei since he was financially incapable of ransoming her and her contract had more than five years left to run - if another were to ransom her, the shame would be intolerable - but that she had promised hastily and did not really feel like dying. Would the samurai agree to be her customer for a year and so thwart Jihei? The samurai agrees.

Jihei overhears everything and is infuriated by her treachery. Her request is the final straw, and he begins positioning himself to stab Koharu to death. His short sword penetrates the shōji, but does not reach Koharu. The samurai reacts almost instantly, seizing Jihei's arms and tying him to the wood lattice.

Along comes Tahei, who sees Jihei standing there in the shadows and begins beating him, calling Jihei a thief and convicted criminal. The

samurai rushes out, and when Tahei cannot specify what exactly Jihei stole, hurls Tahei under Jihei's feet to trample to his heart's content. Tahei then ignominiously flees.

The samurai looses Jihei and the hood of his cloak. Jihei instantly recognizes the samurai as his brother Magoemon, a flour merchant, nicknamed the Miller. Magoemon reproaches Jihei, laying out the stress on his marriage, his finances, his business, and his extended family that his infatuation with this fickle prostitute has caused, all because Jihei was naive enough to take her at face value. Jihei contritely admits his fault and announces that any relationship between him and Koharu is over. He returns to Koharu the 29 letters and oaths of love she sent him, and asks Magoemon to take back his corresponding 29 tokens. Magoemon retrieves them all, and a woman's letter besides. Seeing that it is from Jihei's wife, Kamiya Osan, he stashes it away and promises Koharu that none but him shall read it before he burns them all, on his honor as a miller. Jihei kicks Koharu as they leave, and on that note, Act 1 ends.

Act 2 opens with a charming domestic scene of Jihei sleeping in the kotatsu, while Osan tends to the paper shop and their children. The maid Tama returns with the daughter Osue on her back and news that Magoemon and his aunt (Osan's mother) were imminently on their way for a visit. Osan wakes Jihei, who begins industriously working through his accounts on an abacus, so as to look busy when the two arrive.

They make a great fuss on their arrival, accusing Osan and Jihei of various faults; Magoemon seizes Jihei's abacus and hurls it to the ground as emphasis. Shocked, Jihei inquires as to what could be the problem, saying he hadn't even been to the pleasure quarter since that fateful night and had not so much as even thought about Koharu.

The aunt denies his word; her husband, and Jihei's uncle, Gozaemon, had heard much gossip in the pleasure quarter that some great patron was about to ransom Koharu and he was certain that the great patron spoken of was none other than Jihei.

When Jihei hears this, he quickly explains that

the patron must be Tahei; he had been unable to redeem Koharu in the past like he wanted because Jihei had always blocked his attempts, but now that Jihei had washed his hands of Koharu, there was nothing to stop him. Surely he was merely taking advantage of the situation.

Magoemon and the aunt are relieved to hear this. But Gozaemon might not be as convinced, so they ask Jihei to sign an oath on sacred paper that he will sever all relations with Koharu. Minds at peace, they leave to tell the uncle the good news.

Jihei's mind is not at peace however. He cannot forget Koharu and is weeping hot tears. Osan gives him a speech on her grievances, neglected by her formerly loving husband for no fault of her own, their business and by extension their children endangered by his fecklessness and distraction. Jihei corrects her: his grief is truly about his shame that since Koharu will allow herself to be ransomed, Tahei will crow to everyone about his victory of Jihei.

Osan tries to comfort him, pointing out that if that is the case, Koharu will probably kill herself first. Jihei will have none of this, however. To prove it, Osan reveals that she had sent Koharu a letter (the same letter read and burnt by Magoemon) begging her to somehow contrive to end the relationship with Jihei; Koharu had quite obviously fulfilled her promise to do so, and so Osan worries that Koharu will keep her other promise to kill herself should anyone but Jihei ransom her. Osan asks Jihei to save Koharu, since she does not want Koharu dead as a result of her request.

Jihei points out that the only way would be to put down as a deposit at least half Koharu's ransom in cold hard cash, but that he simply does not have that money. Osan produces more than half the requisite money, money she had been saving to pay a major wholesaler's bill and had raised by selling off her wardrobe - the money is necessary to keep the business afloat but "Koharu comes first." The rest of the money can be raised if they pawn all their finery as well.

In that finery, they set out about their mission of mercy. They are intercepted at the gate by

Gozaemon, come to demand that Jihei divorce Osan. Speaking venomously all the while, he checks to see whether Osan's dowry of fine clothes was still there. They are not in the dressers. He discovers them in the bundle, and insists at once that they are going to be sold to redeem Koharu. Jihei threatens to commit suicide then and there if Gozaemon continues to press him to sign the bill of divorcement. Gozaemon relents and leaves. He takes with him Osan as Act 2 ends.

That night, Jihei leaves the House, saying he is leaving for Kyoto. Out of sight, he turns back, but narrowly misses Magoemon as he searches for Jihei. Magoemon is deeply worried about a lovers' suicide. He learns from the proprietress that Jihei had already left, mentioning a trip to Kyoto. Concerned, he asks whether Koharu is still there. Somewhat comforted by the fact that they say Koharu is upstairs sound asleep and convinced no lovers' suicide could happen that night, he leaves to search elsewhere.

Jihei is deeply touched to see that his brother is still seeking to help him and save his life, ingrate and good for nothing though Jihei is. But he is determined to go forth with the suicide, and retrieves Koharu from an unguarded side-door.

The two leave the pleasure quarter, travelling over many bridges. They stop at Amijima, at the Daichō Temple. A spot near a sluice gate of a little stream with a bamboo thicket is the spot- "No matter how far we walk, there'll never be a spot marked 'For Suicides'. Let us kill ourselves here."

Koharu implores Jihei to kill her and then himself separately; she had promised Osan not to lead Jihei into a lovers' suicide and if their bodies were discovered together, then everyone would be certain Koharu had been lying or broke her promise. To forestall this objection, Jihei and Koharu cut their hair off- now that they are a Buddhist monk or nun, no one would hold the vows of a previous life against them.

Jihei's short sword fails to pierce her windpipe with the first stab, but the second one kills her. After her death, he hangs himself from a tree by jumping off the sluice gate. Fishermen discover his body the next morning when it is washed

down the stream into their nets.
Adaptations

The Japanese new wave filmmaker Masahiro Shinoda directed a stylized adaptation of the story as *Double Suicide* in 1969.

Milwaukee, WI-based Dale Gutzman (book, lyrics) and Todd Wellman (score) debuted the musical adaptation *Amijima* in 2007. Listen to the WUWM interview with the creative team.

The Australian National University's *Za Kabuki* performed a version of the play in 2005, directed by Mr. Shun Ikeda.