Fragmented Bodies:  
The Construction and Deconstruction of Chikamatsu’s Plays on the Film Stage

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ABSTRACT

Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s classic bunraku (puppet) plays found their new theater in the younger Japanese film industry of the 1950s and 60s. This fascination with the traditional aspects of Japanese society and life ran parallel to the changes that Japan was experiencing due to Westernization. In order to deepen my understanding of the ways in which film serves as an active space for cultural and even political discourse, I examine three films, all of which are based on Chikamatsu’s works: Chikamatsu Monogatari/ Crucified Lovers (directed by Mizoguchi Kenji, 1954), Naniwa no Koi no Monogatari/ Chikamatsu’s Love in Osaka (Uchida Tomu, 1959) and Shinjū Ten no Amijima/ Double Suicide (Shinoda Masahiro, 1969).

I argue that the concern and search for realism is the core of the relationship between traditional theater and film. I use the concept of “fragmentation” as a way to show that the full “picture,” or reality that the directors present, is in fact composed of fragments and that the fragments highlight the problems of society. I unpack the concept further by analyzing three conceptual “bodies.” The aesthetic body focuses on an individual’s place in the social hierarchy. The body as a warzone explores the social problems that surround the individual and the ways in which those problems destroy his relationships. Lastly, the visible invisible body looks into the personifications of fate and challenges the idea that one’s life is predetermined.

This analysis ultimately reveals that in addition to being forms of entertainment, period films were used to affirm Japanese identity and question an individual’s relationship to society.
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Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s depiction of everyday life of everyday people reveals a Japan that was secret from the rest of the world. Chikamatsu (b. 1653 – d. 1725) lived during the Edo period (1603 – 1868), a time when Japan’s economy and arts flourished even though the country was “isolated.” As a playwright, he is noted for his eloquent language and repertoire that chronicles the joys, tragedies, mysteries, fantasies and hopes of his country’s citizens. His focus on conflicts between characters, their position in society and the interference of divine forces made his plays appealing to a wide range of audience. More importantly, the plays punctuated the idea that society is out-of-tune; there is discord in the symphony of peace. Each play contains a conflict that requires a solution. While one could argue that conflict is simply a fundamental part of drama, it nevertheless conjures the idea that the reality that Chikamatsu lived through is, through the playwright’s eyes, problematic.

The power of theater to meditate the state of society and human affairs lies not completely in the actors’ portrayal of their roles, but in the heart of the stories. Chikamatsu shifted away from working with kabuki actors and turned to actors who would not take liberties with his script: puppets. Bunraku or ningyō jōruri is a form of theater that uses puppets, a narrator and a shamisen player. The puppets are like shells that are filled with human emotions through the combination of the narrator’s voice and the puppeteers’ handling. Bunraku was a popular form of entertainment during the Edo period, but over time kabuki eclipsed its popularity. Interestingly, many of Chikamatsu’s works that were written for bunraku were also used in kabuki, which suggests that it is the stories that appealed to the audience, not necessarily the medium in which the stories were presented. By using puppets, Chikamatsu is able to manipulate the degree of
expressiveness that a character can have, which ironically, is similar to the rigidity of society, a problem that is deeply embedded in his stories. The sewamono, domestic plays, often showcase tragic lovers who commit double or “love” suicide because society does not allow them to be together. The main characters usually belong to the lower class—merchants, servants and prostitutes. The Edo period has a reputation for being a peaceful time, yet Chikamatsu’s sewamono exhibit melancholy and violence as if they were persistent diseases that had no cure. His works seemed progressive in that his empathy for tragic citizens translated into a call for action, the notion that society ought to see the people past their class labels. The struggle between the individual and society manifested itself more vividly when Japan opened up and began to welcome Western thinking. That conflict became more pronounced through the growing film industry. Classical Japanese films came to reflect the contrast between the traditional and modern. Chikamatsu’s realistic characters and stories transcended time and caught the attention of film directors in the 1950s and 60s.

The era of film tests the timeless quality of Chikamatsu’s plays. The world that Chikamatsu clearly described is incongruous with 1950s and 60s Japan. Yet the production of period films during the 50s and 60s intimated that there was an enduring desire to revisit the past. Film directors therefore faced the challenge of working with material that is made for traditional theater and making it presentable for cinema. Even though the directors used different stories, all of them encountered the same question: how could they bridge theater and film while infusing the material with their unique style? Even though decades have passed since the directors have completed their films,
the question still applies to current discussions regarding Japanese traditional theater and film.

Since many early films turned to theater for inspiration, it can be argued that film and theater as art forms came to share an identity. Theater and film are not opposing or competing forms of art. In fact, it is possible that Japanese theater and film share a deeper relationship than Western theater and film. When film was first introduced in Japan, it was seen as “an extension of the stage, a new kind of drama and not as in the West a new kind of photography” (Richie 1990, 2). Keiko McDonald poses a problem that scholars face when analyzing Japanese film adaptations of classical plays: “Many originals were written first for the Bunraku theater and then adapted for the Kabuki stage. The critic must determine to which genre the original belongs” (1994, 14). This suggests that in order to assess film adaptations, there has to be a clear “original” from which the film analysis can draw from. It does not come as a surprise that at times theater becomes synonymous with the plot information of the play, which is then used to highlight the differences with the film. Even though it is inevitable and logical to make comparisons between the stage and film versions, it is not enough to think of theater as a backdrop for the film. In fact, theater, particularly bunraku, and film are connected by the artists’ pursuit of realism and perception of reality. Bunraku is realistic not just because the stories resonate with ordinary people’s everyday concerns, but also because the plays are made up of “fragments.”

This paper will delve deeper into the idea that film utilizes the concept of fragmentation to construct the world that Chikamatsu created through his plays and analyze, or “deconstruct,” the meaning behind the characters’ experiences. Using
Mizoguchi Kenji’s *Chikamatsu Monogatari/ Crucified Lovers* (1954), Uchida Tomu’s *Naniwa no Koi no Monogatari/ Chikamatsu’s Love in Osaka* (1959), and Shinoda Masahiro’s *Shinjū Ten no Amijima/ Double Suicide* (1969), I have identified three “bodies” that work together to form the overall picture of a society that never quite lives up to the peace that the Edo period is known for. Donald Keene said, “the plays belong to a Japan which either no longer exists or is buried so deeply as to be almost undiscoverable” (1965, 41). While it is true that the Japan in bunraku plays seem distant or even foreign, the fact that the directors revived the stories through film suggests that they recognized links between the nature of the plays, the Edo period and post-war Japan: violence, suffering, sacrifice and the inevitability of an individual’s fate. In other words, the fragmentation of reality also points to the rift in society that Chikamatsu identified centuries ago.

The complexity and interconnectedness of the social and cultural issues make the process of analyzing these films challenging. I will use three bodies as an interpretive device to represent and structure the fragments that make up the surface and deep layers of reality that the directors wanted to capture through the lens of their camera: the aesthetic body, the body as a warzone and the visible invisible body. The discussion of the three bodies moves from the visible aspects of reality, one that can be seen immediately, to the deeper and more abstract concepts that affect the human psyche. The section on the aesthetic body examines the surface layer of reality, particularly in the way that the mise-en-scène reveals an individual’s place in the seemingly inescapable social hierarchy. Next, the body as a warzone grapples with social problems, such as the tension between *giri* and *ninjō* and their coexistence, and explores the destructive relationship
between the individual and society. Lastly, the visible invisible body identifies the multiple manifestations of fate and questions the role of fate in society and in individuals’ lives. All three highlight the brokenness of society. At the same time, it is the interaction between the fragments that produces the whole picture, the full reality. Despite the difference in the source materials and the artistic approaches of the directors, the films portray reality as a complete but fragmented experience that can only be mended through societal changes that come to value an individual’s rights and life. By discussing the function of the different bodies, the relationship between *bunraku* and film comes to the foreground and the power of art to mediate history and influence one’s perception of reality is exponentially increased.

**Fragmentation and Realism**

*Bunraku* by nature is a fragmented form of art. The puppets serve as an extended metaphor for the three components that bring the plays to life: the *tayu*, the *shamisen* player and the puppeteers. The *tayu* and the *shamisen* player are seated on a revolving platform on stage left. The *tayu* narrates the story and provides the voices of the characters while the *shamisen* player matches the *tayu*’s emotional crescendos and decrescendos. The sounds produced by the *shamisen* player “serve to create atmosphere, underline emotion, and direct the tempo for the entire performance; it does not compete with the voice but adds punctuation and italics” (Adachi 1985, 76). The audience can visualize a contradiction between the position of the *tayu* and *shamisen* player and their function in the play. The *tayu* is a diegetic element, a component of the world of the story. He is the “voice” of the play, but he is positioned outside of the main stage where
the story takes place. The shamisen player produces non-diegetic sounds and seems to be the only one who is in his proper place: outside the world of the characters. This is one manifestation of fragmentation that is introduced right at the start of a performance. Another aspect is the manipulation of the puppets. The head puppeteer, omo-zukai, handles the head and the right arm, the second puppeteer, hidari-zukai, moves the left arm and the junior operates the legs, ashi-zukai (Adachi 1985, 34). The image of three puppeteers operating one puppet, i.e. one character, also emphasizes the idea that the body is a vessel that can be controlled to blend art and everyday life. Furi are people’s everyday movements such as sitting, dancing and walking, and kata are specific poses created to “display the grace of the doll and the beauty of the kimono line or to portray a dramatic climax of action or mood, such as victory, revenge or determination” (Adachi 1985, 51). The puppeteers’ fluid movements and masterful control of the puppets’ bodies transform the puppets from empty shells to human-like subjects.

The versatile nature of puppets allows them to gain both human and non-human experiences. Older puppets, those found during the pre or early Edo period were simpler in structure and did not require three puppeteers. The puppets transformed “gradually, reaching the present final stage towards 1740” (Ortolani 1990, 202). The most recent puppets used in bunraku and the Awaji puppet theater stand at least one meter tall and use puppet heads and costumes that vary from character to character; hence each puppet transforms into the character much like how an actor would embody a role. In addition to entertainment, puppets were used for religious practices and rituals. Jane Marie Law explains that when worshiping the deity Ebisu, a puppet “serves as a control for spiritual contagion” and as “a protective ritual space for the resolution of Ebisu’s problematic and
amorphous nature” (Law 1997, 112). The puppets’ lives are contained within a fixed domain; there is no life offstage. This fact gives puppets the ability to represent what a man cannot. E. Gordon Craig, a British theater director, preferred puppets to live actors because puppets have the “unique power of generalization capable of transcending the finitude of any one person’s experience” (Law 1997, 30). Soviet puppeteer Sergei Obraztsov echoes Craig’s sentiment: “‘The puppet is not a man and for that very reason it can give a living portrayal of man in general’” (Law 1997, 30). The purity that both Craig and Obraztsov, and even Chikamatsu, attribute to the puppets makes them ideal actors.

The discussion on puppets as actors serves to highlight the fragmented nature of bunraku. Steve Tillis defines the “actor as the producer of the signs that communicate a dramatic character, rather than as, necessarily, the producer and the site of those signs” (1996, 109). He explains that in terms of puppet theater, “the operator’s corporeal being produces the signs of character…There is no actor, in other words, because the two aspects of acting – production and siting – are split between the operator and puppet” (1996, 110). Regardless of whether or not puppets are really actors, the puppeteer-puppet dynamic can represent the relationship between the subject and his surroundings. If the puppets are like the environment, the place of siting, and the puppeteers are the subjects, the producer of the signs, then the interaction between the two serve to construct the reality of the world of the play. More accurately, the interaction between the puppet and the puppeteer and their interaction with the tayu and shamisen player create the illusion of life on stage. The different parts form the whole, but while it seems that all the roles are equally important, the tayu emerges as the more fundamental piece of the play.
The development of drama as a form of literature raised the level of importance of the text. It also suggests that the text and performance cannot be divorced from each other. *Bunraku* has already laid the foundation for that reform. The text is literally sacred in *bunraku* not just because it is the script of the play, but also because it is the symbol of the playwright’s presence in the performance. This reverence is clearly displayed at the beginning of every performance when the *tayu* bows before the text (Tsuruo 1970, 91). According to Tsudayu, the *tayu* in the Asahi Theatre, “‘The *tayu*’s art lies in bringing out what is behind the words, between the lines and in the hearts of the characters’” (Adachi 1985, 64). Words supplied the emotions and the story; they were meant to be performed. For that reason, “the texts are known by the names not of the playwrights but of the chanter” (Keene 1965, 48). Consequently, Chikamatsu’s “joruri plays that were performed [during the late Edo period] were inevitably adapted, revised, or even totally rewritten to meet the demands of the new theater and it can probably be concluded that many [people] would not even have known of him at all” (Lee 2000, 182). Chikamatsu may have been the creator, but he was overshadowed by the *tayu* who represented both the text and the performance.

Chikamatsu and his plays came to symbolize one aspect of Japanese identity when he received a place in the Japanese canon. It is thanks to Musashiya, a publishing house, that Chikamatsu’s works became more accessible: “the project itself can be said to reflect the early Meiji interest in language and education” (Lee 2000, 183). This development provided the necessary resources for the formation of a national literature. At the forefront of the creation of a national literature is Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935), who “transformed Chikamatsu into a central literary figure, ‘Japan’s foremost
dramatist,”” (Shirane 2000, 8). Shōyō “likens Chikamatsu’s sewamono to Shakespeare’s works, and suggests that ‘Shakespeare is a larger version of Japan’s own Chikamatsu Monzaemon’” (Lee 2000, 188). Chikamatsu’s elevated status is one possible reason why many film directors and studios adapted his plays; however, a more likely reason would be because his plays exuded a kind of “Japaneseness” that is sentimental, sophisticated and genuine, the stories were given life on screen. As Lee explains, “for Shōyō the literary quality of sewamono lay in their realism, or to paraphrase his statement on the ‘main purpose’ of theater, in their truthful depiction of human emotions and society” (190). These themes made Chikamatsu’s works appealing to film studios that wanted to serve the public with a novel performance but familiar stories.

The “boundedness” of performance to the text is a testament to the close and unique relationship between bunraku and film, especially the three films that will be discussed in this paper. Since film was seen as a new kind of drama, it also required a presenter: “While dramatic situation might be represented on the stage, they were also to be presented simultaneously by an authoritative voice” (Richie 1990, 2). The benshi, like the tayu, acted as the narrator and expounded the story of the film, which also meant that he took the liberty to share his own interpretations. Narration is equivalent to the text, the story; “it is the word which gives a work or an event its authenticity” (Richie 1990, 7). Don Kirihara suggests that the benshi was not a “‘neutral explainer’” and that his purpose is “‘to reinforce, interrupt, counterpoint, and in any case to intercede’” (McDonald 1994, 26). Again the story and the performance, the moving images, are separate spectacles, but they work together to create the full theatrical experience. Audiences were left with a “correct” way of seeing a film. When sound film gained more popularity, the benshi no
longer became part of the film viewing experience. Perhaps this is a point when film began to shape its own identity as an art form.

Due to the changing political landscapes, film became more than an art and source of entertainment; it took on the role of social commentary as well. As Japan was recovering from World War II, the films that were produced during the 1950s and 1960s reflected the ideological and social concerns of the time. Japan was rebuilding its spirit and identity. The films became an active space for displaying and making sense of the contrast between the past and present. As Japanese film critic Sato Tadao says, “early film contained a paradox: it was a new means of expression but what it expressed was old” (1982, 7). Sato may have referred to the 1920s-30s movies, but his statement is just as applicable to the post-war films. The cultural discords that enveloped the Japanese people provided film studios and directors the opportunity to cater to “an audience hungry for a source of cultural entertainment cut off by the Occupation ban on feudal tales” (McDonald 1994, 71). Jidaigeki, period films, based on Chikamatsu’s plays marked the golden age of Japanese cinema. Sato explains that Chikamatsu’s works appealed to many directors because Chikamatsu “explored the idea of freedom,” particularly when it came to “the pursuit of love” (McDonald 1994, 72). The production and popularity of jidaigeki suggests that film studios and the public questioned the circumstances of their past and present. Film was a means for celebrating the beauty, the struggles and the legacy of Japanese life.

Adapting plays for the cinema meant that there had to be a sense of continuity between the old and new. Film adaptations in general seem to always be regarded as “parasitical on literature; they burrow into the body of the source text and steal its
vitality” (Stam 2005, 7). In the case of the film adaptations of Chikamatsu’s works, the films do not seem to be judged by their fidelity to the text, rather they are evaluated based on their ability to recreate the world of the Edo period and depict the characters’ situations and emotions realistically. The concern for realism came with the issue of modernism. Modernism in Japanese film referred to the variety of styles, “though one which somehow reaffirmed traditional notions, reinforced earlier methods of construction” (Richie 2005, 56). Modernism was experimentation within the boundaries of the already established Japanese aesthetic.

Film technology gave directors the freedom to sculpt the structure of Chikamatsu’s stories and present them in a way that simultaneously evokes nostalgia and distances the audience emotionally. The prime example of a film technique that produces this effect is the one-shot one-scene method. Both Mizoguchi Kenji’s Chikamatsu Monogatari and Shinoda Masahiro’s Shinjū Ten no Amijima use the one-shot one-scene method, which translates to long scenes that are usually filmed from a distance to capture the full image of the actor and his surroundings. Between the two directors, Mizoguchi is most associated with this technique. The Russian theorist Sergei Eisenstein conceptualized and preferred the use of montage and fast-cutting techniques to long takes (Richie 2008). Japanese critics applied Eisenstein’s theory to criticize Mizoguchi’s old-fashioned, non-cinematic style (Richie 2008; Sato 2008, 99). Non-cinematic became equivalent to theatrical: “it was the general feeling that while Mizoguchi’s technique was a refinement of the highest order, his films were not progressive, harking back to the old, formalized aesthetics found in Kabuki and Bunraku” (Sato 1982, 180). However, it is precisely because of his one-shot one-scene technique that Mizoguchi is able to show
“‘the climate of beauty,’” which is “the result of a striving for realism” (Richie 1990, 27). There can be no realism without aesthetics.

The presentation of a film is influenced by a director’s philosophy of realism. Richie describes Uchida as a “protean Mizoguchi” (1990, 32). Currently there are only a few English sources on Uchida, but his style seems to fit right in between Mizoguchi and Shinoda. Both Mizoguchi and Shinoda came from artistic backgrounds: Mizoguchi had a background in painting while Shinoda came from a background in theater. These factors can be clearly seen through the composition of their shots. Yoda Yoshitaka, a scriptwriter who is most famous for working with Mizoguchi in many of his films, explains, “‘The deepest beauty must be recorded with continuous shots’” (Richie 1990, 28). Continuous shots do not just mimic the unfolding of an artistic hand scroll that tells a story, but they are also the closest to the feeling of everyday life. The beauty lies in the full view of a scene: “The chosen reality is rendered with an aesthetic objectivity which compels belief. This continued and restricted view defines not only the beauty but also the truth of the scene, its chosen verisimilitude” (Richie 1990, 28). The “truth” emerges from the way that the directors make sense of art and life. Mizoguchi “observed without prejudice. The scales fell from his eyes and he developed a unique way of looking, a way that was grounded in society” (Sato 2008, 49). Similarly, Shinoda claims, “‘If my films had to be perfect reconstructions of reality, I would not make them. I begin with reality and see what higher idea comes out of it’” (Bock 1985, 341). Both directors remove personal judgment until they construct their work on the film stage. Reality is filtered, or “chosen,” only after both directors absorb and see their time period’s connection to the past.
It is not just because the films use Chikamatsu's works that they establish a connection to theater, but it is because both theater, in this case bunraku, and film are primarily concerned with the search for realism. Consequently, the search for realism leads to the creation of art, which Chikamatsu defines as “something which lies in the slender margin between the real and unreal…it is unreal, and yet it is not unreal; it is real, and yet it is not real” (Sontag 2006). This dichotomy is related to bunraku’s essence as a fragmented form of art. In order to complete the illusion of life, different “bodies” must synchronize to form a whole. Likewise, each of the three films that will be discussed can be divided into three sections or three bodies: the aesthetic body, the body as a warzone and the visible invisible body. By using the concept of the bodies, it becomes easier to see how the films blend the theatrical qualities of bunraku with the power of film to produce a stylized but authentic world of the Edo period. The discussion for each of the bodies will address the artistic, thematic and social concerns of the directors, which make up their overall view of reality in Japan.

**The Aesthetic Body**

The aesthetic body corresponds to the surface layer, the visible part of reality. In film language, it would be the mise-en-scène: “all the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed” (Bordwell 1993). This includes the actors, their body language, the setting, costumes, props, make-up and lighting. Since all three films are jidaigeki, immediately the audience of the 1950s and later are introduced to what S.A. Thornton calls, “social iconography,” which means that Japanese society is the subject and the theme and the “concern of this society is hierarchy, and of the individual, status”
The aesthetic body merges with the social iconography so that the images or the scenes that the audience sees already have the concept of the social hierarchy built into them. For example, a wife during the Edo period is identifiable because of her blackened teeth. Much like how *bunraku* puppet heads indicate whether or not a character is good or bad, the characters’ clothes reveal their social status. Social mobility was not an option in a “closed system” and “anyone capable of [violating the system] was a man more to be feared than admired” (Thornton 2008, 20). Even though that may have been true during the Edo period, it certainly rings with irony considering how Chikamatsu elevated the status of the violators by turning them into memorable romantic heroes and heroines. Through film, the directors were able to match an image with Chikamatsu’s text. This section will begin with Osan and Mohei from Mizoguchi’s *Chikamatsu Monogatari/ Crucified Lovers*.

Based on Chikamatsu’s *Daikyoji Mukashi-goyomi* (*The Almanac-Maker’s Tale*, 1715) and a similar tale by novelist Ihara Saikaku, *Chikamatsu Monogatari* is about a love affair between a mistress of a household and a servant and their struggle for survival in an unforgiving society. In Chikamatsu and Ihara’s version, Osan and Mohei accidentally become physical lovers. Osan switches with a female servant named Otama after she found out that her husband Ishun plans to spend a night in Otama’s room. Mohei enters Otama’s room to repay Otama for her help in an earlier incident that caused him to be accused of embezzlement. The circumstances are “close to farce” (LeFanu 2005, 107) and bear a resemblance to Shakespeare’s bed trick in *Measure for Measure* and *All’s Well That Ends Well*. The scheming servant Sukeemon catches Osan and Mohei together and assumes their crime. Rather than abiding by Chikamatsu’s setup, for the film, Mizoguchi
and Yoda decided to omit their physical union. As Mark LeFanu points out, “crucial to the psychological interest – and to the nobility – of Mizoguchi’s film is that Mohei should not ‘know’ that he is in love with Osan, nor she with him – exactly because, across the rigid class barriers of the time, such love would be literally unthinkable” (2005, 108). This setup of hidden emotions gives Mizoguchi a chance to develop both Mohei and Osan as characters and lovers and gives more emotional weight to the succeeding scenes. Keiko McDonald suggests that Mizoguchi “invites the audience to consider the oppressive unfairness of feudal morality in general” (1994, 187). In other words, Osan and Mohei are not just victims of circumstance, but also victims of society.

The boat scene in *Chikamatsu Monogatari* opens up the possibility that love can exist across the hierarchal boundaries. At this point in the film, Osan and Mohei are preparing to die. Mohei binds Osan’s legs for two reasons: it was customary to do so when a woman was thrown into the water “so that when the body was discovered the legs would not be apart” and it gives Mohei the chance to kneel (Sato 2008, 175). When Mohei confesses his love to Osan, Mohei’s kneeling position becomes a visual representation of the social hierarchy. Sato suggests that since “it is the love of a male servant for his mistress, it is a most appropriate posture” (2008, 175). Notice that the scene does not employ any close-ups. The long shot preserves the theatrical quality of the scene and allows the audience to see the characters fully for their vulnerabilities and awakening passion. Osan and Mohei stand but when Osan decides to live, Mohei sits back down and blames himself. Even without a close up, Osan’s determination is visible by the way she stands and looks out to the distance. She radiates with the aura of a proud mistress only to tear that status apart when she sits down, proclaims her newfound desire
to live and love Mohei. LeFanu emphasizes that the film “comes alive here through its beautiful sense of *pudeur*, of holding off” (2005, 108). The emotion is stronger exactly because Mizoguchi traced their development from mistress and servant to lovers “who do not see their adultery as immoral and are not ashamed to declare their love openly in front of the gods” (Sato 2008, 127). At last there is truth to the lies that made them fugitives. Even though the audience anticipates the dire consequences that come with their relationship, John Belton suggests that their relationship has a “spiritually redemptive nature” because it “gives meaning to their lives” (1971, 19). To add on to that, Sato writes, “Mizoguchi believed that men and women were wholly under the spell of their social positions until they fell in love” (Sato 2008, 177). The confession, the honesty of Osan and Mohei broke the spell, the social hierarchy, and the meaning of their lives now exists.

The movement and stillness of the boat and the surroundings symbolize the feeling of liberation. When Osan embraces Mohei, “her action changes the position of the boat in the frame – the direct, physical result of her emotion, of her love for Mohei” (Belton 1971, 19). This movement is, as Belton suggests, “a metaphysical statement, defining wordlessly the transcendent quality of the lovers’ relationship” (1971, 19). Movement, part of the aesthetic body, is directly related to the idea that the hierarchy can be shaken and shifted. Even though there are no actors in the last shot of the boat scene, the picture resonates with the presence of the characters. Vacuity is as telling as an active space in Japanese films and Mizoguchi uses the empty boat as a symbol for momentary happiness. Once Mohei and Osan leave the boat, they return to a life of hiding. Despite the fact that Osan wants to live, to live as equals and lovers is the same as to die as
adulterers. Again, the scene uses a long shot to put the boat in context: the calm waters contrast with the dark skies. Mizoguchi closes the scene with a fade as if to give the characters time for respite.

The mountain scene serves as a visual representation of Osan and Mohei’s labyrinthine relationship and implies that despite their attempt to escape the hierarchy, a gap continues to exist between the high and low class. Mizoguchi uses a high-angle, bird’s eye view shot to show Mohei running down the mountains and away from Osan. The audience can see both of them move in a zigzag pattern. Belton suggests, “the characters seem to have moved linearly from one point to another, to have escaped the confining interiors of the first half of the film” (1971, 19). While the mountain scene does appear to continue what the boat scene established – that the lovers are liberated – because of the wide scope and natural setting of the scene, the mountain scene in its entirety presents a paradox. The grandeur of the mountains cradles the existing social hierarchy. The linear and angled movement of the actors maintains a rigidity that mimics the tangible lines of demarcation between social classes. As Mohei moves further down the mountain, he almost becomes unrecognizable, like any other person who belonged to the lower class. Mohei’s existence becomes irrelevant until Osan catches up to him. It is she who reminds him of his new position: her husband, her master. It appears that Osan still holds power over Mohei. The mountain scene further highlights that the social hierarchy is etched into the characters’ identities.

The characters may understand their place in society, but it does not mean that they have abandoned their identities as “man” and “woman.” After the mountain scene, the police find and separate Mohei and Osan. Their separation will be discussed in more
detail in the body as a warzone. What is important to note here is their reunion before their execution. Mohei and Osan undergo one last transformation: Mohei rises above his social status and develops into a more chivalrous hero while Osan assumes the role reminiscent of an innocent maiden. Mohei covertly enters Osan’s house and they talk with her mother. Mohei is sitting with a straight posture. He appears taller than Osan, who is leaning on him and looking worried. Again, Mizoguchi uses a long shot to capture the whole picture. Sato notes that “their physical stances bespeak a mental state: the lower-class servant has now been transformed into a heroic lover, while the haughty upper-class mistress assumes a subdued pose and gazes upon her hero” (2005, 176). When Osan’s mother begs Mohei to turn himself in, Mohei does not falter and maintains his determined demeanor. He and Osan even manage to display their love for one another in front of her mother through a warm embrace and facial expressions that, although are slightly obscure because of the absence of a close up, radiate with sincerity and joy. Compared to the boat scene, which shows the symbolic deconstruction of social boundaries, this reunion shows that their relationship is organic. Before they are servant and mistress, they are man and woman. Sato believes that “Mizoguchi tried to depict the man-woman relationship on screen through the psychological relationships of dominance and subordination, by positioning his characters lower or higher” (2008, 177). While his idea applies especially to both the boat scene and this reunion scene, the reunion scene seems to disrupt that logic and instead presents a picture of a reality that is devoid of the human construction called the hierarchy. “Man” and “woman” are natural states and Mizoguchi has created a series of picturesque scenes that advances the understanding of a reality that is overlooked. His masterful ability to bridge the unnatural (the hierarchy)
with the natural (man-woman) serves to highlight one aspect of the fragmentation of reality.

Unlike Mizoguchi who depicts an almost seamless image of fragmentation, Uchida establishes the concept of fragmentation from the start in *Naniwa no Koi no Monogatari/ Chikamatsu’s Love in Osaka*. Uchida “approaches the material by way of an inventive narrative device that seems decades ahead of its time” (Sharp 2004). Rather than adapting the play *Meido no Hikyaku/ Courier of Hell* in the way that Chikamatsu wrote it, Uchida includes the process of creating the play by placing Chikamatsu himself in the film. McDonald explains that Uchida “adopts a complex rhetorical strategy that gives the audience an omniscient, front-row seat in witness of events that the playwright knows only secondhand” (1994, 81). The reality the audience sees then is twofold: the events of the film and the story that Chikamatsu is writing, which is the play that the film is based on. Despite Uchida’s creativity, his film has not received the same recognition as Mizoguchi’s and Shinoda’s films. Alexander Jacoby, one of the few scholars who has written about Uchida, admits that the film “is not ultimately as successful as its premise might suggest, if only because the realization of certain scenes is slightly pedestrian” (2005). Nevertheless, Uchida still manages to create scenes that bear an emotional weight exactly because the film “favours graceful stylization over dramatic pacing” (Sharp 2004). There are two scenes that exemplify the aesthetic body in *Naniwa no Koi no Monogatari*.

Similar to Mohei and Osan, Chubei and Umegawa position themselves in a manner that represents their ranks. Chubei is an adopted son of a household that has a courier business. Umegawa is a prostitute whom Chubei comes to love. McDonald points
out, “In the original, Chubei is pretty much a ‘type’ of young debauchee; his modern counterpart displays more sensitivity” (1994, 81). During their first meeting, because Chubei is filial and chaste, he lowers his head in embarrassment and avoids looking at Umegawa and the camera. He is either facing sideways or facing away from the camera completely. On the other hand, Umegawa appears more active within the camera frame. She kneels and begs Chubei to stay for the sake of her reputation within the brothel. It becomes apparent that Umegawa belongs to a lower social position. Like Mizoguchi, Uchida seems to suggest that until two people fall in love, they are bound by their social positions.

The michiyuki sequence, lovers’ journey, represents the characters’ physical and emotional escape from the social hierarchy. Most of Chikamatsu’s sewamono uses the michiyuki to signal the climax of the play and the prelude to the lovers’ suicide. It is also considered as one of the most memorable moments in a play. In the case of Meido no Hikyaku, the michiyuki is a feint; it tricks the audience into thinking that Chubei and Umegawa’s story will end like the other love suicides. Uchida makes use of the michiyuki to beautify their sorrow. The scene is reminiscent of a kabuki performance as Chubei and Umegawa move gracefully to a voice-over narration that tells the audience of their plight. By using live actors as opposed to puppets, Uchida is able “to study Chikamatsu’s dramaturgy in a direct transposition of real life to stage life, with all the feelings of empathy that brings” (McDonald 1994, 82). The scenery is bare before it switches to a snowy backdrop. Snow is commonly used in Japanese art to signify “purity, purification of the heart and mind, and the will to survive” (Sato 1994, 167). The snow echoes the lovers’ desire to stay together. This time Chubei and Umegawa stand side by side, both
now have equal stage presence and are no longer mindful of their statuses. The combination of the snowy backdrop and the actors’ movements gives the characters a sense of autonomy even though the sequence is orchestrated by the film’s Chikamatsu’s imagination. In fact, it is because the scene takes place in his imagination that the characters appear to have autonomy. The theatrical stage appears liberating when compared to real life.

The evident use of theatrical conventions within a film further complicates the events and life during the Edo period in the Japanese imagination. Shinoda’s *Shinjū Ten no Amijima/ Double Suicide* combines ukiyo-e (images of the floating world), bunraku, most notably the *kurogo* (the stagehands dressed in black), natural sceneries and live actors to situate reality within the imagined world. One cannot help but remember Chikamatsu’s philosophy of art when viewing this New Wave film. The Japanese New Wave refers to the films made during the 1960s–70s by a handful of directors who moved away from traditional aesthetics, tackled taboo themes and employed “unorthodox” film techniques (Criterion Collection). One of the traits of a New Wave film is that it is more explicit in its use of the human body. Interestingly though, Shinoda keeps some traditional aspects of filmmaking, like Mizoguchi’s one-shot one-scene method, to maintain the feeling of watching theater. If Mizoguchi’s film presents a natural-looking and slightly romanticized notion of reality, then Shinoda’s *Shinjū* belongs to the other end of the spectrum. As Audie Bock says, “the film becomes an aesthetic exercise in a novel presentation of a traditional form” (1985, 351). Cavanaugh slightly disagrees by saying, “Shinoda made a dramatized analysis of the photographic form of cinema” (2007, 212). Either way, the film, with its mixed usage of traditional arts and photography, is like a
crucible that carries the complex reality that has become Shinoda’s legacy in Japanese film history.

The man-woman relationship may be a positive natural state in Mizoguchi’s film, but it becomes destructive in Shinoda’s film. It is important to note that both Shinoda’s and Uchida’s films do not deal with a wide social gap between the lovers so the focus is more on the hierarchy between a man and a woman. Based on Chikamatsu’s famous play of the same name, Shinjū Ten no Amijima tells the story of the love suicide of Kamiya Jihei, a paper merchant, and Koharu, a prostitute. One of the earliest scenes in the film is Jihei’s recollection that shows Koharu and Jihei having sex on a set that uses ukiyo-e as the background. It is one of the two scenes that Shinoda added to the film and it provides a stark contrast to Mizoguchi and Uchida’s treatment of love affairs. When Koharu asks why Jihei loves her, Jihei responds, “Because you’re a woman and I’m a man.” Love exists because Jihei is a man and Koharu is a woman. Jihei treats love as if it were a duty towards Koharu. Although scholars such as Keene and McDonald agree that Jihei is driven by his ninjō, his passion for Koharu, the film seems to suggest that his love is flat and is in fact, only masked by a sense of passion.

Shinoda uses the first sex scene to show the superficiality of a man-woman relationship. Carole Cavanaugh calls the film two-dimensional and likens it to a manga in the sense that manga also rejects “the illusion of depth” (2007, 207). Cavanaugh also points out that by having the ukiyo-e in the background, Shinoda “plays with the concept of ‘surface’ by styling itself on the erotic optics of an art form associated with superficial pleasure” (2007, 207). Through a high angle shot, it is easier to see Jihei and Koharu blend in with the pictures and become trapped within that artistic space. In other words,
Shinoda does not just suggest that society constricts the man-woman relationship, but art is also an active force in dictating people’s ideas of “love,” thus trapping them into thinking that sexual possession is the core of their passion. The man-woman relationship is also about domination and subordination, but in this case the domination is more destructive than heroic, the kind that Mohei comes to display. These tensions lead to the next point of discussion: the body as a warzone.

**The Body as a Warzone**

While the aesthetic body deals with the concept of hierarchy as seen through the characters’ positions and setting, the body as a warzone digs deeper into the social problems and traces the sources of the characters’ sorrow and misfortune: the relationship of gender with money, reputation, and the tension between *giri* (obligation) and *ninjō* (human emotions). These factors drive the characters to plot, attack, retreat and act on their desires as if they were on a battlefield that guarantees death as the coveted prize. The most common interpretation of the idea of a warzone applies to the women of the stories. Mizoguchi is famous for “foregrounding woman as the suffering subject of history” (Le Fanu 2005, 27), but this idea is just as applicable to Uchida’s and Shinoda’s films.

Women and money become synonymous, and if money is considered as a form of evil, then women also take on that quality. Shinoda provides a long shot of Koharu complaining, “I’m bound by money from head to toe.” In addition, the *ukiyo-e* background functions as a fortress that confines Koharu. By using a long shot, Shinoda invites the audience to gaze at the product and inspect its quality. Women come with a
price tag and because of that, they are treated as products that can be traded and discarded, especially when they disrupt the proper order of human relationships. Jihei, Jihei’s brother Magoemon and Koharu are sitting as Magoemon reminds Jihei of his responsibility (i.e. a merchant of the family, a husband to a wife and a father to his children). Shinoda uses a medium long shot to capture all three characters in one frame. Magoemon almost divides the frame in half and is sitting tall, which expresses his righteous persona and conveys his purpose for breaking Jihei and Koharu’s relationship. This visual, vertical division serves to solidify the influence of *giri* in the lives of the characters.

*Giri* even binds people who are not family. Women are not just synonymous with money; they also become synonymous with each other. Prior to the start of the play and the film, Jihei’s wife, Osan, wrote a letter to Koharu asking her to stop seeing Jihei for she fears that they will commit suicide. When Jihei tells Osan that Tahei, a brute who plans to buy and marry Koharu, is also disgracing his name, Osan feels compelled to confess what she has done and pleads Jihei to save Koharu. Since she would feel responsible for Koharu’s death, Osan assists Jihei in redeeming Koharu. Shinoda showcases the *giri* between Osan and Koharu by using another vertical division. The left side of the frame shows a medium close-up of Osan who looks worried. At the center is a ghostly image of Koharu who is holding Osan’s letter. This ominous image suggests that *giri*, if it is not fulfilled, is like a spirit that haunts a person. Cavanaugh also notes, “At this moment, *giri*, the social force at the heart of the conflict, is most strongly operative in the film” (2007, 213). Shinoda further complicates *giri* in the film when he uses the same actress for both Osan and Koharu. Despite the fact that Magoemon reminded Jihei that he
has a wife, Shinoda seems to suggest that there is no distinction between women. In a way, Jihei loves the same woman. Bock suggests, “By using Iwashita Shima for both the courtesan and the wife, Shinoda stresses the total irrationality of love” (1985, 353). This idea relates to Jihei’s reason for loving Koharu: “Because you’re a woman.” Just as how Koharu and Osan are portrayed as the same person, giri and ninjō are indistinguishable. Women become the reflection of that battle.

Koharu, along with the scene location, become just another stage for Jihei to fight against giri. Before Jihei and Koharu commit suicide, they spend the night at a graveyard. “Locating their final lovemaking in a graveyard, Shinoda says, will capture, instead of romantic beauty a ‘fetishism of space,’ meaning both the three dimensions of real space and the infinite abyss of the lovers’ abjection” (Cavanaugh 2007, 209). The graveyard stands out as a “real space,” a place far removed from the artificiality of the past scenes, which used constructed sets. On the other hand, Nina Cornyetz suggests, “locations are merely another type of stage set” (2001, 120). With or without stage set, Shinoda suggests that there will always be boundaries that follow the lovers. In fact, even Koharu is treated as another form of place, a hindrance to Jihei’s escape from giri. Their sexual act is not “strictly speaking, reciprocal; the pleasure is his in giving, and hers in receiving” (Cornyetz 2001, 115). Even though “sex is seen as liberating, in the troubled modern sense, freeing the individual from the social bonds of giri” (McDonald 1994, 214), it is actually portrayed in the scene as more of a battle where the man tries to subdue giri (the woman) rather than free himself from it. After all, “Jihei is someone who is oscillating between a regretful heart and a merchant’s chivalrous spirit” (Sasaki 1999, 209). Jihei is still bound by his social roles, which cause his heart to feel “regretful.”
The climax of the battle involves the mutilation of the human body. Jihei begins their love suicide by stabbing Koharu first in the stomach and then slicing her throat. In an interview, Iwashita explained, “Koharu’s suicide might have been Osan’s suicide as well” (1999). Her portrayal not only reinforces the idea that women are indistinguishable, but it also becomes a symbol of the destruction of *giri* and *ninjō*. Sasaki Hisaharu, on the other hand, suggests, “Jihei reaches the catastrophe not because of Osan or Koharu, but because he chooses the death that can serve *giri*” (1999, 210). Even though the lovers wanted to use their death as a path to their reunion in the afterlife, the suicide itself is devoid of affection, which could explain Sasaki’s interpretation. The balance of Jihei’s human relationships is restored temporarily when Koharu dies, but it is immediately destabilized when Jihei kills himself. Then in a sense, the suicide is both a symbol of destruction and a last display of Jihei’s *giri* towards his family. This scene also epitomizes Shinoda’s belief that “‘whatever is in the process of being destroyed is beautiful’” (Bock 1985, 353). Even though Jihei commits suicide immediately after he kills her, Koharu’s death is given more weight because of the medium close-up, low-key lighting and blood that paints her body. Koharu’s face is reminiscent of a *bunraku* puppet head, with her hollow eyes and white skin. It becomes yet another reminder that a woman’s life can be bought according to the will of others.

Although the movie is less violent and forceful, *Naniwa* also explicitly emphasizes the idea that women are merchandise. When Chubei’s friend Hachiemon takes Chubei to the brothel for the first time, there is a long shot of the prostitutes sitting down, lined up in a row and behind the gates. They look like dolls on display in front of a store. Hachiemon further drives the point across when he says, “Look, Chubei. You have
Like Shinoda, Uchida makes use of vertical lines to first show a boundary between *giri* and *ninjō*. Once the boundaries are crossed, the distinction between *giri* and *ninjō* cease to exist. In addition, the lines demarcate the gender divisions. The brothel is a woman’s world. Even though they are the merchandise that is bought, they also have control over the economy and their bodies: “In an ironic way, prostitutes have certain autonomy over their own bodies primarily because they are thoroughly commodified. In order to sacrifice something, she has to own it” (Kinoshita 2007, 383). A woman’s body is not entirely her own though. When Umegawa expresses her sorrow to Chubei about being “merchandise that talks,” they are positioned in a way that cuts the frame in half. They face away from each other and from the camera. Not only does her monologue lament her restricted freedom, the mise-en-scène becomes a visual representation of a woman’s body as a shared space between her and her customer. Chubei’s sympathy, shown through the slight turn of his head, is not enough to mend Umegawa’s broken spirit.

Money can solve the characters’ problems, but it becomes the emblem of power struggle. In order to save Umegawa from being bought by the magnate, Chubei borrows money from Hachiemon plus the money that is meant for a *samurai*. The money that Umegawa despises is the same money that can release her from bondage. “Redeeming” Umegawa means buying her and successfully buying her makes Chubei a man. The economic battle for Umegawa becomes nothing more than a display of masculinity and a chance to protect one’s reputation. Chubei wants to prove that he can rise above his status and save a loved one. The film quickens its tempo when Chubei commits this heroic act and crime at the same time. Chubei is ecstatic to have won the bid for Umegawa, but the
mid-close up on his expression shows more of madness rather than happiness. For the first half of the film, Chubei is often looking down and his head is turned away from the camera. This scene stands out because it marks Chubei’s transformation from a filial, adopted son to a man driven by passion and a misplaced sense of duty, signs of tragedy according to society’s laws. Becoming “man and wife” is a rented relationship; the money used to buy Umegawa is embezzled money that Chubei is expected to repay. The cycle of buying and selling extends to human relationships and in the process, destroys them.

Chikamatsu identifies and criticizes the same problems that the previous two films presented. Mizoguchi is known for his “feminisuto” films, which Russell describes as a “special brand of Japanese feminism, an aesthetic appreciation of women, rather than a champion of women’s rights” (2011, 53). Kinoshita does not classify them as feminist films; however she, along with LeFanu, acknowledges that Mizoguchi “foreground[ed] women’s subjectivity and subjection embedded in social relations” (2007, 330). Mizoguchi, like Uchida and Shinoda, lets the women voice out their pain. After the procession of the unnamed lovers, the female servants, including Otama, surround Mohei and complain about the injustice in society. Voicing out amongst themselves and to the people around them is their only form of agency. When Otama reveals Ishun’s desire to have an affair, Osan plans to reprimand him for his ill intentions and his hypocritical attitude. The long shot shows Otama and Osan facing away from the camera. Their body language reveals their sorrow and quiet anger. Most importantly, had it not been for their clothing, the women would have been indistinguishable from one another. Similar to Shinoda’s interpretation, Mizoguchi in this scene makes the women lose their identities.
to suggest a sense of collectiveness, a shared experience of being treated as items to be exchanged. Kinoshita explains that a woman “seizes certain power and control as her own exchanger in the traffic in women” (2007, 62). The bedtrick idea suggests that to some extent the women are aware of how they are perceived so they use their position to reset the proper human relationships.

Unfortunately, delivering justice is not the task of a woman. After the mountain scene, Mohei and Osan visit Mohei’s father and ask for shelter and assistance. Mohei’s father reluctantly gives them a place to stay: a small prison-like room amidst the bamboo groves. The natural setting not only showcases the splendor of the landscape, but it also provides clear, vertical boundaries. Ironically, Mohei and Osan are trying to be free, but instead they find themselves locked up. Freedom is still temporary and confined. When Mohei’s father reveals their whereabouts to the authorities, Mohei and Osan are separated or more accurately, torn away from each other. Mohei is pinned down in the foreground while Osan is carried away. Even though Ishun is absent, it is in this scene that his presence can be felt the most. Mohei and Osan’s separation signals Ishun’s triumph. His reason for reclaiming Osan is to save his reputation. Like in Naniwa, reputation equates with power and masculinity. Justice is too strong for Osan to wield. Visually, the separation scene forms an invisible cross. The bamboos and trees continue to form vertical lines and the growing distance between Mohei and Osan create the horizontal line. Separation is their crucifixion and society nailed them to the cross.
The Visible Invisible Body

Society may not be entirely to blame for the characters’ behaviors and misfortunes. Social problems have become intertwined with fate in the minds of the characters; however, the directors seem to suggest that while fate as a concept appears fixed, it can be rewritten for better or worse. The personification of fate, the visible invisible bodies, in the three films is the directors’ response to the problem of limited social and artistic freedom. While the characters cannot rewrite their own endings, the visible invisible bodies first guide them to their supposed endings, then the directors interrupt their perceived outcomes to create unpredictability in a society that is fairly certain of each individual’s end.

The unnamed crucified lovers embody the fate of adulterers. A haunting shot of the lovers appears after the female servants complain to Mohei about the injustice in society. Out of the three films, Mizoguchi’s film is the quietest in its presentation of fate. Rather than evoke sympathy, Mizoguchi distances the audience from the crucified lovers. They are objectified, which reflects society’s view of fate as an outside observer as well as an unfeeling determiner of a person’s life. Even though the crucified lovers are the focus of the shot, the cross in the foreground deserves attention as well. The empty cross waits for its next victim. Mizoguchi lingers on the image and invites the audience to contemplate its significance in the lives of the characters. One can easily predict that Mohei and Osan will join the dead lovers on the cross. Bock comments that Mizoguchi, and Shinoda, have “been able to bring Chikamatsu’s work almost unchanged to the screen because both film directors and playwright share the ‘fatalistic concept of waiting destiny, and the inability of any man to escape it’” (1985, 351). While it is most likely
true that destiny is inescapable, the directors and Chikamatsu suggest that an individual’s destiny is not always inextricably linked to those who found themselves in similar situations. Another reason why the cross is empty is because Mohei and Osan’s fates are yet to be determined. The unnamed lovers symbolize the fate that society and the audience perceive to be certain.

The presence of the kurogo, the stagehands, in Shinjū suggests that fate is familiar and formulaic. At the start of the film, Shinoda is cloaked like one of the kurogo and is discussing the location of the love suicide with the scriptwriter on the phone. This scene reveals the ending even before the audience meets the characters and secondly, Shinoda suggests that he is present in the film as well. As the audience enters the story, the kurogo do not disappear. When Jihei looks down from the bridge, about six kurogo silently surround the dead bodies of a pair of unnamed lovers. The kurogo live up to two conceptions of fate: observers who know the ending and “the other side of Chikamatsu, who created the anti-social world tinged with the melodramatic concept of double suicide, and who was a great sentimentalist and hedonist” (McDonald 1994, 214). In other words, by placing the kurogo in the film, Shinoda questions the function of fate as both a fixed outcome and an observer of that outcome in the theatrical world and in real life. Cornyetz points out, “the kurogo are no more free of the script: their control of the actors amounts to advancing the requirements of the scripted in its filmic time-space” (2001, 114). Fate is formulaic because of the text, the written word, and the kurogo ensure that the characters follow it accordingly.

The kurogo act as mediators of the original script, Chikamatsu’s play, and the film script. One of the most eye-catching moments is the temporary freeze frame during
Koharu and Magoemon’s conversation concerning Osan’s letter. The characters are as still as statues while one kurogo takes the letter and shows it to the audience. A voice-over of the tayu explains what the letter is before the kurogo puts it back in Magoemon’s hands and the story resumes. This quick interference shows that the kurogo are omniscient; that they are given access to the full “story.” Even when there is a deviation from the original story, at least one kurogo is there to monitor the characters. It is interesting that the chief kurogo says Koharu’s name before he follows them to the graveyard where they spend the night. This is the only time he speaks, which shifts the image of fate from a distant observer to an empathic being, a quality that is closer to Chikamatsu. The kurogo’s presence during Jihei and Koharu’s rendezvous is non-intrusive yet cautionary. He signifies a break from the original script, like time stopping (Cornyetz 2001, 113); however, once the scene is over, the kurogo restores the action of the original script. He beckons the lovers to cross the bridge and enter the space for their suicide. The bridge symbolizes the journey between life and death and the connection between the secular and spiritual realm. The kurogo assist in Jihei’s suicide and then leave him as if to say their task is complete and the story has reached its expected outcome. Up to this point Chikamatsu and Shinoda’s artistic vision converge: “Aiding in the fated destruction, the compassion on [the kurogo’s] faces speaks for the playwright and the film director” (Bock 1985, 352). Compassion is certainly present in the scene, but indifference accompanies it. Within the kurogo lies Chikamatsu’s spirit as an artist and as the harbinger of fate.

The ability of a playwright to reshape reality comes from the power of his imagination. While Chikamatsu’s presence in the films has been cemented by the fact
that the films are based on his works, it is Uchida’s *Naniwa* that directly acknowledges
and retraces Chikamatsu’s strength and skill as a storyteller. Chikamatsu as a character in
the film moves in the same pattern that the *kurogo* do in *Shinjū*: from an observer to an
interloper. Unlike the *kurogo*, Chikamatsu breathes life into the events that he witnesses
and hears about. The film begins at the *bunraku* theater where the audience, including
Chikamatsu, watch his play. The film situates Chikamatsu in a seemingly inactive
position, that of an audience; however, it is exactly because he is observing that he is able
to take segments of the characters’ lives and construct a reality that he sees. As he listens
to Chubei and Hachiemon speak about Chubei’s role as a dutiful adopted son who will
potentially take over the courier business, the camera switches from showing Chubei and
Hachiemon in the foreground to showing Chikamatsu in the foreground. This
shot/reverse-shot further highlights Chikamatsu’s dual role as an insider, a member of
society, and an outsider, a part of reality that is invisible to many, but influences the
workings of society.

The written word allows the characters to transcend the human experience. The
human experience consists of mundane events and the resulting emotions from those
experiences. Umegawa’s simple act of kindness towards an injured girl allows
Chikamatsu to see the woman behind the layers of clothing and makeup that label her as
just another prostitute in the brothel. Again, the considerable distance between
Chikamatsu and Umegawa reflects the distinct layers of society and fate. Society is
visible, while fate is present but invisible. When Umegawa complains to Chubei, “money
is the enemy,” Chikamatsu hears her from another room and writes down her words. It is
only near the end of the film when Umegawa is about to throw herself in the well that
Chikamatsu intervenes. Chikamatsu hears about Umegawa and Chubei’s forced separation and provides another intervention: rewriting their ending. Even though Chubei and Umegawa belong to the lowest strata of the hierarchy, Chikamatsu’s writing raises their statuses and turns them into heroes. Thornton suggests, “The tragic hero is worshipped as a god not because he does good, but because he is capable of doing such evil. The tragic hero is a reverse image of society’s values” (2008, 85). By writing their story, two realities begin to coexist: the actual events and the reality on stage.

**Consolation/Connection**

The ending scenes of the films question the possible consolation for the characters and remedy for the fragmented bodies. To put it in another way, has the individual reconciled with society and have theater and film suggested a possible solution to the problems of the past and present, post-war era?

An ending can be written and rewritten, but an individual will remain a puppet of society. *Naniwa* ends with Chikamatsu, who is back to his initial position as a spectator, watching his latest creation *Meido no Hikyaku*. The film ending is quite vague. The scene that Chikamatsu is watching shows Umegawa sympathizing with Chubei’s father. The original play ends with the lovers’ separation, like the actual events in the film. The separation dramatizes the tight grip that society has on the individual, while the “gentler ending for the tragedy” (Jacoby 2005), Umegawa’s meeting with Chubei’s father, conveys solace and warmth in an unforgiving society. The conflicting endings bring out the tensions between reality and the imagined world and the messages that Chikamatsu and Uchida want to leave with the audience. The Chikamatsu in the film acts as an
extension of Uchida’s hope that the characters will attain some peace. As Chikamatsu says, “My pen is not so heartless.” On the other hand, Chikamatsu the original creator is more concerned with evoking sympathy from the audience by providing an ending that abides by the sense of justice in society. “The heavenly compassion they count on – rebirth together in the world to come – is too much to ask for a ‘courier from hell’” (McDonald 1994, 78). Chikamatsu binds them to their social positions and suggests that those chains do not disappear easily. Uchida’s ending has a more positive outlook regarding the relationship between the individual and society; however, that hope is also confined within the theatrical space and imagined world.

According to the play, death is the gateway to rebirth in the same lotus, but Shinjū the film subverts Chikamatsu’s compassion for the lovers by suggesting that death kills their love as well. The play ends with the message, “People say that they who were caught in the net of Buddha’s vow immediately gained salvation and deliverance” (Keene 1990, 208). Although the line is phrased as a hearsay or speculation, it rings with hope and assurance that the lovers will be reunited in the spiritual realm. In order for the spirit to be reborn, the head should be pointing to the north, face to the west and the body should be lying on the right side. This is the same position that Shakyamuni Buddha used when he died (Keene 1990, 207). For the final scene, Shinoda shoots first to the side to show a similarity between the unnamed lovers’ bodies in the beginning of the film and Jihei and Koharu. When he switches to a bird’s-eye view, the difference becomes more pronounced: Jihei and Koharu’s bodies are in opposite directions. Like parallel lines, the lovers’ lives will not touch even in death. “Shinoda is suggesting that double suicide is too easy a solution to the lovers’ moral dilemma” (McDonald 1994, 223). Shinoda
rewrites the lovers’ ending and by doing so, he “reveals his view of society as a victimizer responsible for man’s fate” (McDonald 1994, 223). Both Chikamatsu and Shinoda’s endings blame society for the individuals’ misery. Shinoda’s restructuring of the ending also illustrates the idea of fate as a result of an artistic choice.

The predicted ending is not the same as encountering the expected fate. Osan and Mohei have been apprehended and are paraded through the streets like the unnamed crucified lovers. Rather than lamenting their impending death, Osan and Mohei reveal calm expressions. The servants even remark that they “have never seen the Madame look so joyful” and that Mohei’s “expression is so serene.” The procession that labels them as eternal criminals is, from the lovers’ perspective, as good as a wedding ceremony that will bind them together. Mizoguchi ends the film with the procession, not the literal crucifixion. Facing death together is happiness. Separation in all three films is worse than death. LeFanu brings up Chikamatsu’s belief that this story is “a joyous tale” and that “what he means by joy seems to be not at all what Mizoguchi means. For Mizoguchi, a ‘happy ending’ is irrelevant. Better the scaffold than pardon” (2005, 109). Mizoguchi implies that in order to reconcile with society, an individual is forced to trade his happiness. It is either the individual or society and Mizoguchi places more value on the life of an individual. One’s fate is determined only after he has made his limited choice.

Conclusion

With the advent of film technologies and political ideologies, such as democracy, Japanese films during the post-war era became a platform for exploring their own country’s demons of the past and present. Chikamatsu showed that an individual is
powerless and trapped in a society that is generally perceived as peaceful. The directors may have had the vocabulary (i.e. lack of democracy) to describe the situations in Chikamatsu’s plays, but the idea of individual freedom and the struggle to achieve it were already part of their country’s history. Chikamatsu, Mizoguchi, Uchida and Shinoda all question the fragmentation of reality, the idea that reality is composed of different layers and that these layers are in fact societal problems that require solutions. Despite the antiquated sources of the films, the films successfully reoriented Japan to its heritage that may have been overlooked due to the changes in the 1950s and 60s. The films simultaneously brought out a sense of nostalgia and warning that even if the present situation is different from the past, the problem between the individual and society is the same.

The three bodies symbolize the sense of brokenness of society. The aesthetic body refers to the surface layer of reality, that which is explicitly seen. In the films, the mise-en-scène reveals the unequal social relationships between the characters. Mizoguchi’s Chikamatsu Monogatari best displays this idea: Mohei and Osan’s shift in body positions in three key scenes highlight the transformation of their relationship from servant and mistress to lovers. The body as the warzone focuses on society and explores the connections between persisting issues of gender, money and giri and ninjō. The various social relationships are tested and contested in all the films, but Shinoda’s Shinjū Ten no Amijima uses the relationship of Jihei and Koharu to comment on the false sense of love between a man and woman and the effect that giri and ninjō have on that love. Lastly, the visible invisible body forms the most complex layer as it questions established notions of fate and challenges the ability of an artist and art forms to recreate a fate that is suitable
and/or acceptable given his understanding of life and death. Uchida’s *Naniwa no Koi no Monogatari* creatively situates Chikamatsu in the film to show the process of creating “reality” on stage and reality as the characters in the film experience it. None of the films actively propose a solution, but they end with quiet and contemplative scenes that suggest society has to prioritize the weight of human life.

Aside from being a social commentary, the three films are in the unique position to showcase Japanese traditional art to a society that was modernizing and undergoing Westernization. Mizoguchi “was one artist who, through his assertion of the individual’s will, was able to modernize this tradition from the inside” (Sato 1982, 185). Sato’s compliment can be directed towards Uchida and Shinoda as well. The directors’ abilities to synthesize theatrical elements with film techniques puts forth the question of film’s potential to keep traditional art alive. Ultimately, Mizoguchi, Uchida and Shinoda are part of a handful of directors who worked diligently to improve their craft with the hope of exerting some influence on societal changes. At the same time, they were conscious of the fact that while they were able to exercise their creativity to present reality as they saw it and incite changes in society, their abilities were still confined to a two-dimensional space. An artist has the agency to transform his art, but his art cannot always change society. His vision and voice can transcend time, occupy various forms of space and demand societal change, but in the end, he is also a subject of the art that he creates. His power exists in “the slender margin between the real and unreal.”
Extended Bibliography


Mizoguchi, Kenji, dir. Chikamatsu Monogatari. 1954.


