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### Abstract

Examines examples of forbidden love, romantic passion, love suicides, and other versions of the *leibestod* motif in Japanese films, and compares them to medieval European stories such as that of Tristan and Iseult.

### Additional Keywords

Cinema, Japanese; Leibestod motif; Tristan and Iseult

# All for Love: The Myth of Romantic Passion in Japanese Cinema<sup>1</sup>

Rebecca A. Umland and Samuel J. Umland

*To fall in love is to create a religion that has a fallible god.*

Jorges Luis Borges

IN his seminal study *Love in the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont examines the obscure origins and insidious effects of the myth of romantic passion from the Middle Ages to the present. The fullest expression of this myth—its most complete incarnation—can be found in the story of Tristan and Iseult, whose forbidden love is linked inextricably with fate and death. The unhappy history of this pair occurs, Rougemont posits, because what the lovers really seek is a religious experience that no mere mortal can provide; they can only achieve fulfillment through the transcendence of death. According to Rougemont, this *liebestod* motif, prevalent in Western literature, has informed our expectations of love so completely that romantic passion and marriage sometimes seem to be mutually exclusive. Although Rougemont avers that this is a Western phenomenon which arose largely as a result of the Albigensian (Cathar) heresy in the Middle Ages, we have found, curiously, that the theme of romantic passion frequently informs Japanese cinema, suggesting that this myth operates on a Jungian, that is, a universal level. This connection between east and west is manifest in a number of films that employ this myth of passion, but we will discuss in detail two examples, Masahiro Shinoda's *Double Suicide* (1969) and Nagisa Oshima's *Empire of Passion* (1978), this latter the lesser-known follow-up to Oshima's notorious *Realm of the Senses* (aka *In the Realm of the Senses*, 1976).

*Double Suicide* is one of several film versions of a popular early eighteenth-century puppet play, "The Love Suicides at Amijima" (*Shinju Ten no Amijima*), first performed in 1720 by the celebrated Japanese playwright, Chikamatsu Monzaemon. It is important to note that Chikamatsu wrote dozens of plays that feature the *shinju* (love suicide) and that he based these works on cases that actually occurred in his own time. In his study of *Shinju Ten No Amijima*, Donald H. Shively observes: "It is probable that all of Chikamatsu's domestic plays are based either directly on an actual occurrence or on a story prevalent in the popular

literature of the day” (19). Shively also notes that the plots of most of the twenty-four “domestic plays” Chikamatsu wrote “revolve about a love affair, which most often ends in tragedy.” He continues: “Fifteen of them have been classified as ‘love suicide pieces’ (*shinjumono*), but in some of these the suicides are not consummated. The other nine deal with illicit love, which is almost always adulterous” (19).

Each play contains an elegant *michiyuki*, or lovers’ journey, to a sacred site where, once they reaffirm their unhappy mutual love, the woman (usually a prostitute) is slain by her beloved, who then swiftly dispenses with himself. The lovers do so putatively in the hope that they will be reborn together in paradise. As we shall see, *Double Suicide* follows Chikamatsu’s formula closely, shifting the emphasis only slightly to accommodate a modern audience. More important for our purposes, it shares striking similarities with the medieval romance of Tristan and Iseult, suggesting that a shared or similar myth informs each. In *Empire of Passion*, the emphasis on fated love is downplayed, although the expression of romantic passion and its tragic consequences remains the same. Before we discuss these films, however, we must first review briefly Rougemont’s main premise and conclusion, as we follow his work closely in our definitions of both “myth” and “romantic passion.” We will then take a cursory glance at examples of cinematic classics from the western world that demonstrate clearly how this myth still exerts a pronounced influence, after which we will turn to a discussion of examples from Japanese cinema that share this phenomenon which is often—and, we aver, erroneously—considered exclusively “Western.” Here, our views expand and modify Rougemont’s.

Rougemont’s aim in *Love in the Western World* is to provide “an etymology of the passions” (18). In so doing, he attempts to trace Western romantic attitudes and behavior back to their mythic source. The Tristan story embodies the myth of idealized passion, a passion that serves as a transfiguring source even as it inflicts great suffering.

In order to distinguish between myth and story, we cite Rougemont: “A myth arises whenever it becomes dangerous or impossible to speak plainly about certain social or religious matters [ . . . ] and yet there is a desire to preserve these or else it is impossible to destroy them.” A myth both half conceals and half reveals its origin; it expresses realities that speak to our instincts, “but it also veils them to the extent that broad daylight and reason might imperil them” (21). Myths, in other words, are disguised truths. By “story” we mean a sequence of events in cause-effect order, consciously shaped into a framework of art—beginning, middle,

and end—and governed by the conventions of the chosen genre. The Tristan *myth* is the intolerable truth that *passion is linked to death*; the *story* is cast in the form of medieval romance. Although this romantic passion causes calamity, even death, it is glorified instead of being recognized for the misfortune it really is. Rougemont points to our literature and film as expressions of our tendency to romanticize that which makes us unhappy:

Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself. What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of the senses nor the fruitful contentment of the married couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its *passion*. And passion means suffering. (15)

Indeed, who remembers happy lovers? For every contented couple, our film and literature portray many more of greater fame whose stories are tragic: Tristan and Iseult; Lancelot and Guinevere; Romeo and Juliet; Heathcliff and Catherine, Rhett and Scarlett; Rick and Ilsa of *Casablanca*; Tristan and Susannah in *Legends of the Fall*. Even the lovers in Eric Seagal's saccharine novel *Love Story* stand as testimony to the connection between passion and tragedy. But how do we account for this impulse towards suffering? To explain this, Rougemont traces the myth of romantic love to its point of origin: 12th-century France, in the southern region of Provence. Here two important events occurred.

First, the Cathar (Albigensian) heresy flourished. The Cathars were Gnostics who believed in a dualistic universe; hence their belief that the soul was parted from its spirit (which remained in heaven) and became entrapped in an evil material world, which also accounts for their belief that procreation was evil. This dualism explains why the Cathars rejected the incarnation of Christ, why they were ascetics who preached celibacy and mortification of the flesh, and why then believed in reincarnation.

The other event was the simultaneous rise of the Troubadour poets in the same region. Their verse has long been acknowledged as the first "romantic" literary compositions in Western culture. Scholars have puzzled over their mingling of the sacred and secular, their use of a displaced religious vocabulary in their "love poems," sometimes referred to as the "love religion" or "courtly love." Troubadour poems declare the poet's idolatrous passion for some unattainable lady, sometimes a lady the poet has never even seen. Despite the poet/lover's intense longing, the love remains unrequited, thus causing great suffering. Rougemont argues that this "passion" for an idealized "lady" is in fact a cloaked religious love—Cathar in its

sentiment—encoded because of the oppressive Catholic Church. In other words, the Troubadours were really Cathars, or Cathar sympathizers, masquerading as lovesick courtiers.<sup>2</sup>

While these initial “love poems” were actually expressive of a mystical yearning for a union with God, which can only be achieved through the transcendence of death, this verse spread south to Italy and north to Brittany and England. As it gained popularity, however, Rougemont argues, its origins became obscured and the passionate longing for religious transcendence was misread; the myth became fallen when this verse was taken literally as love poetry. The Cathar beliefs contained in it were compatible with the Celtic (Druidic) beliefs in the transmigration of souls, dualism, and in the tenet that woman was both prophetic and divine, which only added to the fervor of the concept of passionate love for her. In the Celtic north the Cathar heresy gave birth to the Tristan and Iseult myth, upon which all notions of passion in the West are based. From this legacy, we unknowingly seek spiritual transcendence through romantic love, an impossibility. We confuse two kinds of love, expecting human love to provide us with divine fulfillment. As Jorge Luis Borges states: “To fall in love is to create a religion that has a fallible god.”<sup>3</sup> The result, to which the Tristan myth attests, is tragedy and suffering. Yet, we continue to glorify passion.

The Tristan story is rife with what Rougemont calls “riddles.” We refer to the early medieval poetic tradition, using the reconstructed version provided by Joseph Bédier, which may be summarized briefly as follows. Tristan (the very name means “sorrowful birth”) wins for King Mark, his uncle and liege, the beautiful Iseult of Ireland, whom he himself loves. She reciprocates Tristan’s desire, which increases en route to Cornwall (where Iseult will marry Mark) after she and Tristan inadvertently drink a magic potion that inflames their passion, culminating in sexual consummation. Despite this, apparently prompted by his obligation to his uncle and king, Tristan relinquishes Iseult to Mark and the two wed. Nonetheless, Tristan and Iseult then immediately resume their now adulterous affair, during which the lovers exchange vows that constitute a covert suicide pact and plot their reunion in the afterlife. The lovers continue their liaison, are eventually discovered, and Tristan is banished. He rescues Iseult from certain death and they dwell in the Wood of Morois for three years. Inexplicably, and rather abruptly, they one day agree that Iseult should return to Mark, and Tristan departs the country. He takes a wife in Brittany, also named Iseult, but then, oddly, he refuses to consummate the marriage. Wounded in battle and languishing because he misses his first love,

the moribund Tristan summons the first Iseult, but she arrives to learn he is already dead. She in turn dies of a broken heart.

These events serve as a mythic paradigm for passionate love—one that is conceived as a result of forces beyond our control (the potion)—prevented by obstacles (geographic distance, incest, family feuds, war, or marriage to another, for instance), and is the cause of great suffering, often death. As Rougemont astutely observes, Tristan and Iseult are in love, but not with each other. Their love is essentially narcissistic in nature, as each projects a spiritual longing onto the other. He further remarks: “it is unbelievable that Tristan should ever be in a position to marry Iseult. She typifies the woman a man does not marry; for once she became his wife she would no longer be what she is, and he would no longer love her. Just think of a Mme Tristan!” (44–45).

Rougemont is right: Even though Scarlett (nee O’Hara) and Rhett Butler are married for a number of years, is it even possible to view her as a dutiful wife, contentedly stirring grits for breakfast? (Note that Scarlett’s estrangement from Rhett results from her indifference to both him and their young daughter, Bonnie, who dies tragically in a riding accident, as did Scarlett’s father). Can we envision the domestication of Xena, Warrior Princess? Rougemont’s point is that in our literature and film the pattern of illicit love prevails, albeit frequently in a transmuted form.

The myth of romantic passion in modern novels and films, Rougemont avers, exerts a potent but dangerous influence. “Fallen myths can distill venom even as the dead truths alluded to by Nietzsche,” he claims (23), and its pernicious presence is abundantly evident in these popular forms of entertainment. Although it may be that Rougemont exaggerates when he asserts that the decay of Western civilization can be traced to the persistent and pervasive presence of this displaced passion, its power over our thoughts and actions is evident. A simple inventory of our collective taste in popular music, novels, and films will corroborate this assertion. And mythographer Joseph Campbell concurs with the important role cinema plays in our lives when he claims that the movie theater is “a special temple” where we go to learn about ourselves (*The Power of Myth* 16).

From *Days of Our Lives* to *Dynasty* to *Twin Peaks*,<sup>4</sup> romantic passion, with all its trappings—the love triangle, taboo breaking, and secret, transgressive yearnings—comprises the very foundation of both day- and nighttime soap operas, but cinematic melodramas that have earned the title of “classics” also operate with this myth at their very center. Examples abound, but we will content ourselves

with only a few. One of the most popular films of all time, Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942), serves as a complex embodiment of this myth. First, it features the love triangle consisting of Ilsa, Victor Laslow, and Rick Blaine. Victor is the Mark figure, the mature powerful leader of the underground resistance, and Ilsa (even her name is evocative of "Iseult"), his much younger wife who, believing her husband to be dead, has fallen in love with Rick, closer to her own age and who, under the surface of his cynical apolitical posture, is really, like Laslow, very much a passionate idealist. Also present is what Rougemont calls the alibi, a circumstance or cause that excuses the illicit love (believing Victor is dead, Ilsa feels free to fall for Rick, himself ignorant of her marriage), so the adulterous lovers are exonerated. The story includes the all-important obstacle, in this case both Ilsa's marriage and the war. Passion clashes with duty to husband and to the service of a larger ideal, and the film concludes with the tragic parting of the lovers.

More recently, it is passion that makes tick the top grossing film of all time, James Cameron's 1998 Academy Award winning *Titanic*: remove the story of fated love and you have yet another disaster movie such as *The Poseidon Adventure* (1973). Audiences just can't get enough of it—*Titanic*, after all, followed on the heels of *The English Patient* from the previous year (another Academy Award winner), a disturbing film which also reveals that the passion of lovers is for death.

This myth is exclusively Western, so Rougemont argues, because of the unique circumstances that gave rise to it. Eastern attitudes and practices, which he defines as those of "India, China, Tibet, and Japan" (71), are quite removed from this dilemma. He points to the common practice of conjugal arrangements based largely on economic alliances or considerations other than sexual attraction. Compatibility in Eastern marriages, he argues, is, at best, a mutual respect: because married couples do not expect to find passion in marriage, their lives are more tranquil, the family unit thus much stronger. In the East, married couples appropriate passion to its proper place, seeing it correctly as a religious desire. Thus, claims Rougemont: "The attitude of a European, who wonders all his life: 'Is it love or not? [. . .] Am I in love with her or am I in love with love?'—to a Chinese psychiatrist that attitude might well appear as symptomatic of insanity" (71).

Although there may be some truth in Rougemont's assertion that East and West hold differing notions of the marriage ideal, Chikamatsu's plays offer evidence that unhappy marriages occurred, as in occidental unions, and that passion was often found outside of marriage—hence the rise and popularity of the "gay quarters" where men sought pleasure from liaisons with prostitutes, some of which ended in



love suicides, a phenomenon that became quite fashionable.<sup>5</sup> We must account for its pronounced presence in Japanese cinema, then, not primarily from a commingling and exchange of cinematic art, as considerable as that certainly is, but from some deeper, universal impulse for transcendence.<sup>6</sup>

*Double Suicide* belongs to a tradition of love suicide films in Japanese cinema. It explores the conflict between love (*ninjo*) and social obligation (*giri*). Jihei (Kichiemon Nakamura), a paper merchant in an arranged marriage to his first cousin, Osan (Shima Iwashita), has become obsessed with an indentured Geisha, Koharu,<sup>8</sup> also played—interestingly—by the same actress cast as Osan, Shima Iwashita. That the same actress plays both wife and prostitute is evocative of Tristan's unlikely love for the two Iseults: the one with whom he shares a great passion for death, and the wife to whom he refuses conjugal rights—just as Jihei, we learn, has not had sex with his wife for two years. Because Osan is not only Jihei's wife but also his first cousin, his duty to her (*giri*) is augmented. Koharu's duty is to her aged, helpless mother, who depends upon her for her livelihood. Jihei lacks the necessary funds to “redeem” Koharu and thus rescue her from her life of prostitution, so the two lovers write monthly pledges of love to each other, as well as manifesting other displays of masochistic affection. This is complicated by the fact that a rich boisterous merchant, Tahei (Hosei Komatsu), intends to redeem Koharu for himself.

Like the Tristan myth, *Double Suicide* thus features two triangles, yet another instance of doubling: that of Osan/Jihei/Koharu and that of Jihei/Koharu/Tahei. To make matters even more complex, Jihei's wife, Osan, worried about Jihei's health and his indifference to his family and business, writes a letter to Koharu begging her to relinquish her hold on Jihei. Ironies abound: out of a sense of honor, Koharu promises Osan to do so, but when Osan fears that Koharu will commit suicide rather than allow the loathsome Tahei to possess her, she, in turn, urges Jihei to redeem his mistress. Initially eager to comply, Jihei soon realizes that, should he do so, he would find himself in yet another dilemma: what to do with his new possession, Koharu. She could scarcely reside in his home with his family, nor would he have the means to keep her in a separate residence. This places Jihei in an impossible dilemma: when Osan's father reclaims his daughter, urging the unhappy Jihei to divorce her, Jihei's guilt and sense of obligation from conflicting claims on his affection results in the inevitable murder/suicide.

Western viewers will find strangely familiar the view of fated passion employed here, especially its affinity with the medieval Tristan myth: Jihei's obsession with a forbidden love that violates social taboos; incest and arranged marriage, and the

love triangle, underscored by the same actress cast in the role of wife and lover. The intense love and longing Jihei and Koharu experience contains the displaced religious connotations inherent in the Tristan story, foreshadowing the sacred setting the lovers choose for their end, and amplifying the religious fervor with which they meet their death, hoping to be reborn together in paradise. That this is similar to the Tristan story is apparent from an elliptical conversation of Tristan and Iseult. Tristan promises his beloved:

“one day, friend, we shall go together to a fortunate land from which none returns. There, rises a castle of white marble; at each of its thousand windows burns a lighted candle; at each a minstrel plays and sings a melody without end; the sun does not shine there but none regrets his light: it is the happy land of the living.” (*The Romance of Tristan and Iseult* 62)

Here, Tristan suggests that the life they now know is really a prison from which they will escape to enjoy true bliss in “the happy land of the living” that lies beyond death. Later, when the lovers are about to be parted for the last time, Iseult’s exhortation to Tristan is likewise revealing, as she alludes to these very words:

“Oh, friend,” she said, “fold your arms round me close and strain me so that our hearts may break and our souls go free at last. The fields whence none return, but where great singers sing their songs for ever. Take me now.”

“I will take you to the Happy Palace of the living, Queen! The time is near. We have drunk all joy and sorrow. The time is near. When it is finished, if I call you, will you come, my friend?”

“Friend,” said she, “call me and you know that I shall come.”

“Friend,” said he, “God send you His reward.”

As he went out the spies would have held him; but he laughed aloud, and flourished his club, and cried: “Peace, gentlemen, I go and will not stay. My lady sends me to prepare that shining house I vowed her, of crystal, and of rose shot through with morning.” (190)

Thus Tristan shows his eagerness to seek his own death, recounted in the next section, which Bédier aptly titles “Death.” Through death, Tristan and Iseult will at last find the transcendence they have sought: they die in the hope that they will be reunited in a heavenly abode.

This spiritual dimension is mirrored in the conclusion of *Double Suicide*, when the lovers make frenzied love one last time, in a cemetery, after which they renounce all earthly claims to their affection and loyalty by cutting their hair: Jihei does so first, becoming a self-proclaimed “priest.” Koharu, mirroring his act, becomes a

“nun.” Absolving themselves of their obligation (*giri*), the lovers are free to commit suicide and enter a new life after death.

When Jihei and Koharu write monthly pledges to each other and then, later, cut their hair, they are engaging in ritualistic acts that prove to themselves—and others—that their love is the genuine item. In his critical edition of Chikamatsu's play, Donald Shively notes that the word *shinju* meant “sincerity of heart,” which had to be demonstrated by acts of mortification and self-mutilation: “writing vows of undying love, shaving the head, tattooing, and pulling out the fingernails and toenails” are a few examples Shively cites (*Love Suicide* 24-25). Such methods, Shively notes, are described in a manual titled *Great Mirror of the Way of Sex* (*Shikado okagami*), written by Hatakeyama Kizan (1628-1704), a contemporary of Chikamatsu, apparently a kind of Japanese equivalent of Andreas Cappellanus's *Art of Courtly Love*. According to Shively, “By the end of the seventeenth century the love suicide had become so frequent among the townsmen that it became something of an institution, with its own conventions and formal procedures” (*Love Suicide* 25). Stories of love suicides stirred such public interest that the plays became very popular in themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Suffering is viewed as a transformative power. Not happy love, but only that which causes great pain can exert such a powerful effect. Tristan and Iseult suffer willingly, even eagerly for their love: they are persecuted relentlessly by members of Mark's court, experience intense longing in each others' absence, and yet cannot remain together contentedly when they have the opportunity, as they do in the Wood of Morois. Moreover, the lovers engage in acts of sadomasochism, alternately punishing each other and themselves. For instance, when the exiled Tristan arrives at Mark's court disguised as a leper, Iseult orders him to be driven off even though she recognizes him. She commands the men-at-arms to “Drive off this leper!” to which Tristan responds, “Queen, have mercy!” The valets strike him with clubs, “And Iseult laughed aloud. Her laughter rang even as she entered the church” (*Tristan and Iseult* 174). Iseult immediately feels remorse and guilt for her cruelty towards her disguised lover, and engages in a masochistic, displaced religious act: “From that day, to punish herself for her error and folly, Iseult the Fair put on a hairshirt and wore it against her skin” (175).

Julia Kristeva, in *Tales of Love*, has argued that the relationship of another pair of famous lovers, Romeo and Juliet, is essentially sadomasochistic, much like that of the archetypes upon which they are modeled, Tristan and Iseult. The lovers' passion, she claims, is based on hatred. Kristeva cites Juliet's reaction when she

discovers Romeo's identity, "My only love sprung from my only hate!" (1.5.135), and Juliet's soliloquy as she awaits the arrival of Romeo on their wedding night. Oddly, Juliet anticipates not the consummation of their love, but Romeo's death:

"Come, gentle night, come, loving black-brow'd night,  
Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,  
Take him and cut him out in little stars,  
And he will make the face of heaven so fine  
That all the world will be in love with night,  
And pay no worship to the garish sun." (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.2.20-25)

Kristeva also accurately observes that Romeo easily transfers his love from Rosaline to Juliet because both are members of the hated Capulet family, a virtual restatement of the cultural gnomon, "a thin line between love and hate."

Indeed, great passion demands lots of fuel, immense libidinal energy, especially since to fire ecstatic bouts of passion requires the fabrication of continuous obstacles to inhibit its expression. For instance, in our earlier review of the story, we noted that Tristan and Iseult continually act at odds with their emotions. Recall that for Rougemont these contradictions signal that we are indeed in the empire of passion, or the realm of myth: the myth must be preserved, even if it causes improbable contradictions in the story.

The expression of this contradiction is conveniently delineated in Oshima's *Empire of Passion* (*Ai no borei* 1978), which features a transgressive love that concludes with the horrible martyrdom of the lovers.<sup>10</sup> An older, married woman with two children, Seki (Yoshiyuki Kazuko) is seduced by a younger man, a soldier named Toyoji (Fuji Tatsuya), recently returned to the village from the war.<sup>11</sup> She is married to Gisaburo (Tamura Takahiro), an unambitious rickshaw man who is away from home for long periods of time. Toyoji seduces her by inviting himself for tea during one of Gisaburo's absences. He offers expensive sweets that the two share, which approximates the love potion of the Tristan story. Following another sexual encounter during which Toyoji performs oral sex, he demands that he be allowed to shave Seki's pubic hair, to mark her as his own. Once she concurs, however, the murder of Gisaburo becomes imperative, because her shaved pudenda would reveal her unfaithfulness. As Maureen Turim astutely notes: "The shaving would announce their affair, which in turn would endanger their lives. Together they strangle Gisaburo, an act that now takes the form of self-defense following the convoluted logic that stems from insatiable desire" (150-51).

Following the murder of Gisaburo, the two throw his body down an old well, thus burying the evidence of their crime. The obstacle to the expression of their desire would thus seem to be removed.

Not so. Toyoji tells her they must stay apart, they must not be seen together by the villagers; otherwise they may come under suspicion. Thus, while the husband was alive, though absent, the two lovers were free to carry on their affair, indulge in the uninhibited expression of their insatiable desire. Once they murder him, however, they cannot be together, lest they be suspected as partners in crime for the murder of the husband. Had they devised another scheme—in which the husband turned up dead, for instance—the obstacle would indeed have been removed, and they would have been free to marry. Instead, they concoct the scarcely credible story that an unambitious, unimaginative, but uxorious husband abandoned his family to work far from the village, in Tokyo. Their cover story, in effect, provides a formidable, and self-imposed, obstacle that cannot be overcome. Three years go by, and in order to maintain their innocence they must live in fear of being discovered, which keeps them apart. Seki continues to yearn for Toyoji, but his ardor cools considerably. The mythic import is evident when the couple attempt to revive their passion by literally re-enacting the first time Toyoji seduced Seki, repeating the exact dialogue and actions during the fated tea that led to the consummation of desire. Only when the noose begins to tighten, however, do they recover their sexual passion, in flagrant disregard of its social consequences. The prospect of death thus fuels their passion, and each remains true to the other as they suffer a cruel death, martyrs for love.

Such is the essential paradox at the core of the myth of romantic passion: the passion of lovers is for death. Tristan and Iseult, like their counterparts, Jihei and Koharu, express a longing to experience that which lies beyond death. Eros, boundless desire, dictates their fate, instilling in them the hope that they will enjoy a transcendence not possible within the confines of this world. The same mad desire drives Seki and Toyoji to their inexorable end. Thus, *ninjo* (love) opposes *giri* (duty); passion is at enmity with marriage. Whether we read a romance from medieval Europe, a play from eighteenth-century Japan, or view a contemporary film, the myth of romantic passion informs our sensibilities, transcending the apparent boundaries of culture and history.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>A version of this essay was read at Mythcon XXXI, held at Kilauea Military Camp, Volcano, Island of Hawaii, in August 2000. We are grateful to the lively discussion of the participants who attended our presentation.

<sup>2</sup>The prevailing view that the Cathars participated in body hatred has been challenged by Ezra Pound, who argued that the Cathars embodied the spirit of classical paganism that survived Church domination. The Troubadours, therefore, might well have viewed the body and the senses as vehicles for religious experience. See Robert Castillo, *The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism, and the Myths of Ezra Pound* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), especially chapters 2 and 16.

<sup>3</sup>Qtd. in Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), 79. Borges's comment appears in the context of his discussion of Dante and Beatrice, "The Meeting in a Dream," in *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952*.

<sup>4</sup>For a complete discussion of the role of romantic passion in *Twin Peaks*, see our article, "The King and I: The Arthurian Legend in *Twin Peaks*" in *Wrapped in Plastic* 31 (October 1997): 2-9.

<sup>5</sup>Donald H. Shively, *The Love Suicide at Amijima: A Study of a Japanese Domestic Tragedy by Chikamatsu Monzaemon* (1953. Center for Japanese Studies. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1991), 18-24.

<sup>6</sup>In March 1997, the Theatre of Yugen performed *Blood Wine, Blood Wedding*—"A Kabuki-Flamenco Fusion"—at Fort Mason's Cowell Theater in San Francisco. This highly original production combined the texts of Chikamatsu's play, *Love Suicides at Sonezaki*, and Federico Garcia Lorca's play, *Blood Wedding*. In the program notes for the production, the playwright, Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, remarked upon "the striking cultural affinities between Spain and Japan," singling out the "wrenching tragedies of lovers torn apart by the inextricable conflict between passionate desire and the obligations of honor, family, duty, pride, and blood. Death is the inevitable consummation." This production, which emphasized the affinities—at least on the structural level—between East and West, is precisely our point. We thank Eleanor Farrell for bringing this production to our attention and for providing us materials about the production.

<sup>7</sup>Keiko I. McDonald, "Giri, Ninjo, and Fatalism: Image Pattern and Thematic Conflict in Shinoda's *Double Suicide*, in *Cinema East: A Critical Study of Major Japanese Films* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1983).

<sup>8</sup>The late film director Luis Buñuel showed an interest in the Tristan myth. In addition to his film about a female Tristan, *Tristana* (1970), Buñuel also directed *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), in which he cast two different actresses to play the same part, in order to emphasize that the women in the Tristan story are doubles.

<sup>9</sup>This phenomenon is not unlike the effect of Goethe's memorable novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774. Werther's suicide caused such a sensation that it was blamed for a rash of lovers' suicides, European versions of the *shinju*. Victor Lange, in the "Introduction" to his edition of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, notes: "Poetry was

all too crudely transformed into reality, and countless suicides were ascribed to its abhorrent teachings: in Leipzig and Copenhagen its distribution had to be banned by law. Within a short time after the publication of the novel, a wave of 'Werther-fever' had swept Europe. In 1784 a young English lady committed suicide and a copy of a translation of *Werther* was found under her pillow" (*Sorrows* x). In a preface to the second edition, an irritated Goethe urged readers "not to succumb to the fatal mood of the book" (*Sorrows* xi).

<sup>10</sup>Among his many films, Oshima had previously directed *Muri-shinju: Nihon no natsu* (*Japanese Summer: Double Suicide*), released in 1967. We have not had the opportunity to screen this film.

<sup>11</sup>Since the story is set in the year 1895, this leads Maureen Turim, in *The Films of Nagisa Oshima: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast*, to aver that the war alluded to is the Sino-Japanese War. She argues that the Sino-Japanese War represented "a major victory for Meiji militarism and one that has been linked to both the beginning of Japanese imperialism in Asia and the war with Russia in 1904-1905" (148).

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