

SHUNKAN ON DEVIL ISLAND:
DOMESTICATING POLITICAL EXILE IN THE PUPPET
PLAY *HEIKE NYOGO NO SHIMA*

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ABSTRACT: This essay discusses the scene entitled *Shunkan on Devil Island* from Chikamatsu Monzaemon's early modern puppet play *The Heike on the Island of Women* as a commentary on social and political strictures of the early modern Tokugawa shogunate, which increasingly regulated social and commercial life as it sought to maintain control of the burgeoning cities of Edo and Osaka in the early 1700s. The play is loosely based on the medieval epic war tale *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*), a beloved and foundational text that has found numerous afterlives in Japan's theatrical, narrative and cinematic traditions. *Shunkan on Devil Island* refashions the Heike's story of the Buddhist prelate Shunkan (banished to Devil Island following a botched coup attempt) as a specifically early modern tale by introducing a female character, Chidori, who becomes the wife of one of Shunkan's two fellow male exiles and therefore a member of the "family" that they, as aristocrats banished to a distant island, create. Through exploring the idea of family relations on the remote Kigaigashima, Chikamatsu recasts the well-known tale of *Shunkan on Devil Island* to create a utopic staged space that comments on the oppressiveness of the early modern polity experienced acutely by the urban audiences of the early 18th century.

KEY-WORDS: Japanese puppet theatre, *bunraku*, *ningyō jōruri*, Early modern theatre, *Tale of the Heike*, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Shunkan

RIASSUNTO: Questo saggio si occupa della scena intitolata *Shunkan sull'Isola del Diavolo*, tratta dall'opera teatrale di marionette di Chikamatsu Monzaemon *L'Heike l'Isola delle Donne*. L'opera è un commento alle restrizioni sociali e politiche dello shogunato Tokugawa della prima età moderna, che regolava sempre più la vita sociale e commerciale nel tentativo di controllare le città di Edo e Osaka all'inizio del 1700. L'opera è liberamente ispirata al racconto epico di guerra medievale, *La storia dell'Heike*, un testo amato e fondamentale, che ha trovato numerose vite successive nelle tradizioni teatrali, narrative, e cinematografiche del Giappone. *Shunkan sull'Isola del Diavolo*



rimodella la storia di Heike del prelado buddista Shunkan (bandito sull'Isola del Diavolo in seguito a un fallito tentativo di colpo di stato) come un racconto specificamente moderno, introducendo un personaggio femminile, Chidori, che diventa la moglie di uno dei due compagni esiliati di Shunkan, e quindi un membro della "famiglia" che essi creano, da aristocratici esiliati su un'isola lontana. Esplorando l'idea delle relazioni familiari nella remota Kigaigashima, Chikamatsu riformula la famosa storia di *Shunkan sull'Isola del Diavolo* per creare uno spazio scenico utopico che commenta l'oppressione del sistema politico della prima età moderna percepita in modo acuto dal pubblico urbano dell'inizio del XVIII secolo.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Teatro delle marionette giapponese, *bunraku*, *ningyō jōruri*, teatro della prima età moderna, *La storia dell'Heike*, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Shunkan

Japan's *ningyō jōruri* 人形浄瑠璃 is among the most complex and theatrical puppet traditions in the world.¹ The product of a historical context of rapid urbanization combined with the growth of popular commercial entertainment aimed at urban audiences, *ningyō jōruri* emerged side-by-side with kabuki in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during Japan's early modern age (1600-1868), and the two arts vied for audiences in the burgeoning urban centers of Edo (modern-day Tokyo) and Osaka. The competition for audiences proved synergistic for both arts: while most early plays were written for the puppet stage, kabuki troupes often restaged successful puppet plays with live actors, adding new interpretations and interest to characters. That *ningyō jōruri* had to attract the same audiences as kabuki helped spur the development of large, complex puppets with articulated arms, hands, and legs that could closely imitate the movements of actual humans on stage.² The extreme popularity of individual kabuki actors in specific roles further led

¹ Today, and especially outside academic circles, the term *bunraku* is used to encompass the puppet theatre that emerged during Japan's early modern age, referred to as the Edo or Tokugawa Period (1600-1868), so called because the Tokugawa family ruled as shoguns and established their political seat at Edo (modern-day Tokyo). *Bunraku* was the name originally of one troupe; *ningyō jōruri* is the more generic term (BRAZELL 1998: 303).

² Puppets also sometimes have other features, like mouths and eyes that can be opened and closed, faces that flip from human to demonic, or heads that split in half when struck by a sword.

to the highlighting and reshaping of certain parts of plays not only for kabuki but also on the puppet stage. Such is the case with the play *Shunkan on Devil Island* (*Shunkan Kikaigashima no ba* 俊寛鬼界島場). A puppet play about one of classical Japan's most famous exiles, the Buddhist prelate Shunkan, who was banished to and died on Kikaigashima (Devil Island), *Shunkan on Devil Island* derives from most of Act Two of the five-act puppet play entitled *The Heike and the Isle of Women* (*Heike nyogo no shima*) written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725), the best-known early playwright of *ningyō jōruri*. The play debuted in 1719 at the Takemotoza theatre in Osaka, and was staged as kabuki less than a year later; it continues to be part of the repertoire of both arts today.

Like many historical plays, *Shunkan on Devil Island* is an adaptation of earlier works: the early fourteenth-century war tale *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari* 平家物語) and the early fifteenth-century noh play *Shunkan*, based on a portion of the *Tale of the Heike* narrative. All three versions tell the story of Shunkan's banishment to Devil Island following a botched coup attempt in 1177 planned at his home during the run-up to the Genpei War (1180-1185), the civil war that ended Japan's classical age and gave rise to the age of the warriors. This essay explores the process of adaptation of the medieval *Tale of the Heike* to the early modern puppet stage and the ways that the puppet play transforms a familiar story about unjust punishment and karmic retribution into a social commentary on the urban world in which the puppet theatre emerged. In particular, I focus on how Chikamatsu resituates this story of exile to frame a tale that comments on social relations and family structures in the context of early modern society for the growing urban audiences of urban theatregoers.

1. CHIKAMATSU'S SOURCES

The narrative underpinning *The Heike and the Isle of Women* comes from the first three books of the *Tale of the Heike*, a work that has been deemed Japan's epic for the many ways it resembles European epic traditions. Although not a poem, the Heike embraces oral formulaic tropes associated with epic, including dressing the warrior, the order of battle, enumeration of lists, and name-announcing, and it is part of an oral performance tradi-

tion. The tale recounts a six-year civil war that brought Japan's classical age to a close with the victory of Minamoto no Yoritomo, the man who would become Japan's first shogun in 1192. The *Tale of the Heike* comprises about eighty variant lines, many of which were originally sung by peripatetic blind male performers who accompanied their narration on the four-stringed *biwa* lute. These men were referred to as *biwa hōshi* 琵琶法師, or 'biwa priests'.³

The *Tale of the Heike*'s narrative and musical origins lie in elegiac ritual and memorial chant intended to soothe the spirits of those killed in the war and lead them to Buddhist enlightenment. The title of the work directs attention to the Heike clan, the losing side, those deemed most apt to return as angry spirits (*onryō* 怨靈) to wreak havoc in the here-and-now. The tale arrived at its current form in the late fourteenth century, after a two-hundred-year period marked by political instability. Starting at the end of the war in 1185, power arrangements were generally in tension between the imperial court and the shogun, a political position the victors created for themselves at the end of the war. The political situation was further complicated by two unsuccessful Mongol invasions (1274 and 1281) and a fissure in the imperial family that led to sporadic warfare for almost six decades in the middle of the fourteenth century. As a story, therefore, the *Tale of the Heike* creates narrative order in response to the political unease not only of the war itself but also of the two centuries that followed it. Although some variants were compiled as histories of the war, the tale was most prominently circulated in the orally transmitted versions performed by *biwa hōshi*, who were loosely affiliated with Buddhist temples and whose status points to the religious and placatory nature of the tale.

Battlefield heroics are an important concern, but the tale also dwells on non-military affairs, including the fate of women and children left behind when men went off to war or the unjust banishment of many innocent, or mostly innocent, men. The story of Shunkan falls into this latter category. He and his two fellow exiles are but three of the many banished men whose stories fill the opening chapters of the work, but their extend-

³ The most recent translation is Royall Tyler's of 2012 (TYLER 2012). This is the first translation to attempt to represent the performance of the tale, by formatting passages differently depending on the musical formulae through which they were performed. The introduction provides a general background of textual development.

ed narrative is significant: we witness them apprehended, sentenced, and then expelled to an island beyond the extremity of the realm by the despotic ruler Taira no Kiyomori, who has also placed his daughter as consort (and then empress) to the reigning emperor. When the other two are returned to the capital as part of a general amnesty during the empress's pregnancy, Shunkan is left behind, ostensibly due to Kiyomori's particular ire at him, but also because the others engaged in religious practices at the site of exile that Shunkan eschewed. He lingers long enough to meet with a former acolyte who has come searching for him. The acolyte finds Shunkan starving on the beach and stays with him for his final days. The acolyte then cremates the body and carries it back to the mainland for proper interment at the Buddhist temple complex at Mt. Koya. Shortly thereafter, Kiyomori dies, and the war begins in earnest. In the tale, this narrative strand is an important example of Kiyomori's capricious rule and excessive cruelty that also emphasizes the importance of Buddhist practice (Shunkan's interment at Mt. Koya) in quieting the wrath of angry spirits.

The first dramatization of the Shunkan story is the *nob Shunkan*. The playwright is unknown, but the play dates from the early fifteenth century and was probably written during the lifetime of Zeami (ca. 1363-ca. 1443), credited as *noh*'s founder.⁴ Shunkan remains in the active *nob* repertoire today. Although *noh* is most famous for its *mugen* 夢幻 or 'dream' plays, which are highly symbolic and center on ghosts, Shunkan is an example of a *genzai* 現在 or 'real time' *nob*, a more theatrical variety, populated with characters who are living beings enacting stories in real time. Like many other *genzai* plays, the plot is more complex and the roles less generic than in *mugen* plays, which always feature placation of a ghost. The play follows closely a set of episodes from Book Two of the *Tale of the Heike* describing the exiles' life on Devil Island and concluding with the pardon of Shunkan's companions and their abandonment of him as they return by boat to the capital. *Shunkan* is comprised of two acts. A very short first act takes place in the capital, and the second, much longer one on Devil Island. The highlight of the play is the sailing away

⁴ Although historically attributed to Zeami, scholars doubt this assertion; qualities suggesting that the playwright might be Motomasa or Zenchiku are not sufficient for definitive identification (YAMASHITA 2006: 177). However, the play is mentioned by Zenchiku in *Kabuzuinōki*, confirming its early composition (SANARI 1964: 1421).

of the boat – a simple frame made of bamboo and reminiscent of the outline of a skiff – which has come to retrieve the two other exiles, Naritsune and Yasuyori, as Shunkan begs not to be left behind.

The Heike on the Isle of Women's five acts provide a highly elaborated (and further fictionalized) version of Shunkan's story. It opens with the despot Kiyomori, having uncovered the plot to depose him, exiling Shunkan and his co-conspirators. Kiyomori then mistreats Shunkan's wife and has her killed for rebuffing his sexual advances; the exiles suffer on the distant Devil Island; the other two exiles are forgiven and return toward the capital; they encounter Kiyomori, who causes more suffering; and the play ends with signs that Kiyomori's days are numbered. As with many early modern adaptations, *The Heike and the Isle of Women* includes numerous fabricated situations and exciting plot twists while retaining sufficient threads of the original to make the story recognizable, and it shifts scenes from the capital city to Devil Island to locations along the sea route between the two. Like most successful puppet plays, less than a year after first appearing on the puppet stage, *The Heike and the Isle of Women* was staged as a kabuki play at the Naka no shibai theatre in Osaka.⁵ In 1759, a performance of the role of Shunkan by kabuki virtuoso Ichikawa Danzō III was so well-received that *Shunkan on Devil Island* began to be staged as an independent piece on both the puppet and kabuki stages.⁶ As many full plays would require an entire day to perform, such reductions were fairly routine and became the basis for current productions. Today, *Shunkan on Devil Island* – essentially the scene that is an elaboration of the noh play – is the only part of the original play performed in the puppet repertoire, although some parts of the longer play are still considered part of the active kabuki repertoire.

Chikamatsu wrote *Shunkan on Devil Island* during a time of political stability, a growth in urban culture, and tight social controls: the Tokugawa shogunate had set up its headquarters in Edo (present-day Tokyo) at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Its policies had led to increased population in Edo and Osaka and the concomitant rise in merchant and artisan populations with disposable income and an interest in theatre. At

⁵ WATANABE 1999: 190.

⁶ LEITNER 1998: 418-419.

the same time, the social structure was codified into a four-tiered system, with samurai at the top and merchants and other urbanites at or near the bottom. Rules restricted movement and social behavior, particularly for non-samurai, and censorship was a constant obstacle for artists creating in many spheres, including theatre.

By Chikamatsu's day, the twin arts of puppet theatre and kabuki were thriving both in Osaka, where Chikamatsu worked and the puppet theatre emerged, and Edo.⁷ Because the puppet theater grew from storytelling traditions, unlike kabuki, it maintained a form in which a chanter, the *gidayū* 義太夫, performs all the narration and dialogue, and is accompanied by a shamisen player. Also, in contrast to kabuki, in which actors deliver dialogue, the *gidayū* is responsible for differentiating characters through varied vocalizations, and plays a role more akin to that of the *biwa hōshi* of the recitational tradition of the *Tale of the Heike*. Traditionally, all performers – puppeteers, *gidayū*, and shamisen players – were men, as was true of the *biwa hōshi* and noh actors before them.

2. KIKAIHASHIMA IN *TALE OF THE HEIKE* AND *SHUNKAN*

Although the arc of Shunkan's story spans numerous episodes in the *Tale of the Heike*, its most famous part is the description of the exiles' lives on Devil Island and the agonizing abandonment of Shunkan after the other two are pardoned. The 'Devil Island exiles' narrative is but one example of many unjust banishments Kiyomori orders at the beginning of the tale. The dispersal of legitimate power to peripheral sites of exile at the tale's beginning additionally serves as the basis for the rise from exile of Minamoto Yoritomo, who will defeat Kiyomori's clan in the war and establish his shogunate – Japan's first – near his place of exile, a move that bifurcated the government and marks the rise of the warrior class. The trope of exile is thus central to the work, and the story of the 'Devil Island exiles' is the first indication that the site of exile could also be a source of power for Kiyomori's enemies.

⁷ UNESCO's presentation of *bunraku* in the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 2008, includes a short video clip of the art; the first minute and a half of which depict a performance of *Shunkan on Devil Island* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEUQNvn8EJQ>>. Accessed April 30, 2023.

One remarkable feature of this part of the narrative is the attention to the character of the landscape of Devil Island, the space of banishment.⁸ Described as a volcanic island lying to the south of Kyushu, the southernmost of the main Japanese islands, it lies far beyond the usual sites of exile and at a distance that renders it essentially imaginary: it is at the border of the commonly known world. And in the tale, it is utterly alien, populated with people whose language is unintelligible and whose appearance is not quite human:

[The residents] are dark, ox-like, and very hairy, and they do not understand human speech.
The men wear no *ebashi* hat; the women do not let their hair hang loose.
Going unclothed as they do, they little resemble people.
Having no food, they think only of slaughtering living beings.
The peasants till no hillside paddies,
And so it is that they have no rice;
Since they lack mulberry trees and leaves,
They have nothing resembling silk.
A peak at the center of the island
smolders with everlasting fire,
And stuff called 'sulfur' lies everywhere;
Some even call this 'Sulfur Island'.
Above, thunder constantly crashes and booms.
Below, it just rains and rains.
No not for one miserable moment
Does human life seem possible here.⁹

This description underlines the kinds of distances from the capital at which Devil Island lies: linguistically, culturally, and physically, the residents are alien and frightening to the exiles. Scholars also note that this fiery vision of the volcano resembles depictions of Buddhist hell-realms, many of which depict the dead suffering various tortures, for example, being engulfed in flames, starving, or drowning. The name given the island reflects this – it is Kikaigashima 鬼界島, the island of demons. Thus the place of exile is like that most

⁸ Book Two, episodes 10, 15, and 16 (TYLER 2012: 106-110; 118-125).

⁹ Ivi: 106.

alienating exilic destination, hell. Its residents, moreover, are described as beasts: they look like oxen, they are hairy, they hunt, and their language sounds more like bird calls than human speech: this characterization suggests another of the Buddhist lower realms, that of beasts. The men seem definitively to have been expelled from not just the capital, but also the human world.

The response of Yasuyori and Naritsune, however, is to reimagine the space as something holy: they «wanted at all costs to enshrine the three Kumano deities on the island so as to pray that they might return to the capital».¹⁰ Their practice within the tale reflects the actual historical significance of the Kumano shrines in the late twelfth century. The Kumano deities were enshrined at Kumano, a complex of three holy sites spread over the mountainous interior and eastern shore of the Kii peninsula. These three shrines formed one of the most important and prestigious pilgrimage circuits during Japan's classical age and beyond.¹¹ From the eleventh century in particular, members of the royal family and high-ranking aristocrats made frequent trips there, which helped to develop Kumano's status as a socio-political node of power. The deepening of Buddhism's roots in Japan during this period, particularly among the high aristocracy, also led to the conjoining of Buddhist and native deities, including those traditionally revered at Kumano. As a result, Buddhist cosmologies were mapped onto the actual landscape of the Kumano pilgrimage routes. As Max Moerman notes, as Buddhist deities became identified with those native to the sacred spaces within the Kumano region, the paradises associated with individual Buddhist deities were simultaneously inscribed on the spaces of Kumano, rendering it:

... a place where native and Buddhist cosmologies, one locative and the other utopian, converged. The mountains of Kumano contained a multiplicity of other worlds: the homelands of an ancestral past and the celestial paradises of Buddhist rebirth.¹²

Thus, the idea of a polyvalent landscape was associated with Kumano from very early on.

¹⁰ Ivi: 118.

¹¹ MOERMAN 2005: 1.

¹² *Ibidem.*

In their efforts to recreate a Kumano pilgrimage route, Naritsune and Yasuyori transport that polyvalence to Devil Island by naming certain features of the landscape after similar sites in the Kumano region, as they travel from one to the next as if they were on the pilgrimage route. The narrator remarks:

They could not change to new pilgrim robes,
Since they had none. They dressed in hemp
And for their ablutions drew from a swale,
Water that in their minds they drew
From the pristine Iwada River.
Whatever height they chance to climb
In their minds was the Hosshin Gate,
And on each of their pilgrimages
Yasuyori pronounced a prayer.¹³

Yasuyori and Naritsune thus circumambulate the island, converting the land from hellscape to sacred space. In the process, they effectively transform their dead-end journey of expulsion into one of pilgrimage, that circular, profitable kind of movement, one that embraces at least the hope of a return home.¹⁴

Within the *Tale of the Heike*, the making familiar of Devil Island as a mini-Kumano resonates with the treatment of other provincial locales. As provincial residents and formally or informally exiled political players become more prominent, the spaces they inhabit become meaningful in new ways that complicate the exile motif – here, two unjustly banished men imbue such a space with the numinous power of Kumano and leverage that to effect their return. This early extended narrative that transforms the peripheral into the powerfully sacred is the narrative's first hint at how ideas about exilic spaces will be altered in the war tale.¹⁵ The space of exile reconfigured as a place of numinous power is fundamental in the tale's depiction of Devil Island and to the narrative of the exiles as a whole:

¹³ TYLER 2012: 119.

¹⁴ BIALOCK 2007: 256.

¹⁵ The transformation of the exilic trope in the *Tale of the Heike* is considered in OYLER 2006, especially Chapter 5.

they reimagine a world in which they are able to call on the Kumano deities, and those deities eventually respond by moving Kiyomori to release them. Shunkan's abandonment reflects his unwillingness to participate in the other men's perigrinations, and only comes to a conclusion when his remains are carried back to Mt. Koya for burial. Thus one important feature of the Heike narrative of Shunkan's fate is the religious revisioning of Kikaigashima, which is ultimately concluded with the return of Shunkan's remains to one of the most important Buddhist sites in the realm.

This characterization of Devil Island is replicated in the *noh Shunkan*, a work that cleaves closely to the *Tale of the Heike* narrative, with an emphasis on Naritune and Yasuyori's reinscribing of Kumano on Devil Island. Their piety, and Shunkan's choice not to join them on their pilgrimage, is marked from the start. The first dramatic highlight of the play is Shunkan's examination of the letter of pardon, on which his name cannot be found. The two others leave, promising to plead his case once they arrive in the capital. As the boat departs, Shunkan clings to the ropes used to moor it, creating a second dramatic climax as he is abandoned as the boat disappears in the offing. Shunkan stages the *Tale of the Heike* story faithfully, adding to it the visual poignancy of witnessing Shunkan search the letter of pardon for his name, and then be left utterly alone as the others depart Devil Island. Although the portrayal of religious reinscription of the space persists, this dramatic rendering concludes with the abject Shunkan alone on the island, a haunting image that is replicated in both the puppet play and later versions of his story.¹⁶

3. THE *SHUNKAN ON DEVIL ISLAND* SCENE FROM *THE HEIKE AND THE ISLAND OF WOMEN*

In Chikamatsu's hands, the story of the Devil Island exiles becomes wildly more dramatic through the addition of characters and subplots wholly absent from the *Tale of the Heike*, a transformation well in keeping with the orientation of the early modern puppet theatre, patronized by urbanites in Osaka and Edo. One important alteration is the introduction

¹⁶ WATANABE 1999: 198.

of a female character on Devil Island: Chidori, a native of Devil Island, and an attractive young woman who becomes the love interest of Naritsune.¹⁷ Her prominence, and the introduction of a domestic arrangement (which substantially overshadows the religious one of the earlier works), shifts the social geography of the story and in so doing points to reimagining the meaning of exile for a world in which being part of society meant occupying a defined place within a stratified social hierarchy.

Chidori first appears in the play as a pliant and attractive young woman who has charmed Naritsune, the youngest and most politically prominent of the three exiles. They have ‘married’, and when the wicked envoy Senoo bearing news of the pardon arrives, Naritsune plans to take Chidori home with him. In this version, all three men are pardoned through an earlier plot twist – Kiyomori’s upright son, Shigemori, has arranged a partial pardon for Shunkan and transmitted it through Tazaemon, an equally upright member of Senoo’s party. Conflict derives from Senoo’s unwillingness to bring a fourth passenger back to the capital, and the plot thickens when Shunkan learns that his beloved wife Azumaya has been killed for rebuffing the sexual advances of Kiyomori. The play concludes with Shunkan, having slain the envoy and thus given cause for Shigemori’s pardon to be revoked, staying on the island as the rest head toward the capital.

The landscape in *Shunkan on Devil Island* is at once that familiar from *Tale of the Heike* and a different and less hostile one. The play opens with a brief description of Devil Island as «a place where demons live. It is indeed a hell on earth», a nod to the *Tale of the Heike* description.¹⁸ On stage, however, it is rather reminiscent of other lonely shorelines familiar from Japanese poetry and narrative: the set depicts a rocky shore, with the sea stretched out beside and behind it. There is no visual evidence of sulphureous vapors or other hellish vistas, but such empty strands conventionally evoke separation from the socio-political center and the civilization it represents – usually because a good man has been unjustly exiled.¹⁹

¹⁷ This character is likely built on the mention of a dalliance of Naritsune in *Genpei jōsuiki*, an expanded, late-medieval variant of *The Tale of the Heike*. Although only mentioned in passing in that work, it is most likely the seed for Chikamatsu’s reimagining of the story (ENOMOTO 1980: 27; and MASAKI 2005).

¹⁸ LEITNER 1998 1998: 420; SNKBZ 2000: 483.

¹⁹ This represents a more extreme poeticization of landscape in theatre that began in Zeami’s *noh* (BRAZELL 1997).

The act opens with Shunkan alone on the empty shore. Naritsune and Yasuyori arrive after having been gone for several days on their circumambulation of the (imagined) Kumano shrines. However, on this visit, they also bring Chidori, whom they introduce to Shunkan as Naritsune's wife, a figure who recasts the relationships among the group as, quite literally, familiar. She not only genuinely loves Naritsune but says, «I pray that my husband's good friend Yasuyori will be my elder brother and that Lord Shunkan will act as my father. I will be a most devoted daughter and sister in return».²⁰ This new configuration is the first notable result of their peregrinations.

Chidori does not appear immediately on stage; instead, Naritsune invites Shunkan and the audience to imagine her:

The girl I love is named Chidori. She is the daughter of a Kiri Island fisherman and works on the beach wearing a sea-stained robe, gathering in the salt water and drying it for its salt. When the tide is right, she reveals her lovely body as she takes a bucket and scythe and plunges into the bottomless depths to gather many kinds of seaweed, too busy even to keep her hair back with a boxwood comb.²¹

The introduction of Chidori transforms the hellscape to a more familiar, pastoral one – this Devil Island is peopled not by ox-like creatures, but by a young woman with a 'lovely body'. For a culturally clued-in audience, this type of scene is also familiar from poetry and narrative specifically linked to exile, and particularly the exile in Suma of several historical and fictional men, most prominently the hero of the *Tale of Genji*. The play integrates a series of poetically codified *engo* 縁語 (associative words) to activate this pastoralization. For example, Chidori's name means plover, and refers to a bird whose plaintive call echoes that of the exiled men on the shore. Moreover, she is a saltmaker and a diving girl (*ama* 海人), whose (always implied) sensuality is given special attention here:

²⁰ LEITNER 1998 424; SNKBZ 486.

²¹ LEITNER 1998: 423; SNKBZ 485-486.

Naritsune describes her revealing her body as she prepares to dive into the sea. Learning of Naritsune's beloved, Shunkan, in fact, notes, «It reminds me of the love affair of the fabled Prince Yukihira, who fell in love with a fishergirl at Suma Beach». ²² Yukihira's story is recounted in a poem he purportedly wrote in exile at the seaside location of Suma. His poem is also the basis for one of the best-loved noh plays, *Matsukaze*. The narrative is further rendered familiar by Chidori's not-so-alien behaviors: to Naritsune's ear, her language is «a charming island accent» (*Satsuma namari* 薩摩なまり). Naritsune thus situates her dialect as akin to that of Satsuma, the southernmost province of Kyushu, further drawing her (and therefore Devil Island) within much less alien linguistic terrain. Moreover, her demeanor is «just like that of a woman from the capital». ²³ Chidori's appearance reinforces this characterization:

Her beauty is such that,
Though she be clad in rags,
It were as if her garments
Were of silk and silver threads.
Why in the world was she born
A lowly diving girl?²⁴

The puppet head and costume used for Chidori reinforce her legibility as a lovely young woman – the head is the one used for other young, innocent, beautiful women of any class, and her clothing, while simple, is the common dress for a woman of humble means. Everything about her appearance codes her in familiar ways as a beautiful, if lowly, young woman worthy of the attention of an aristocrat in exile. Shunkan notes:

I know that you wish me to act as your father from this day forward. [...] Since we are to be parent and child, from now on you are my daughter. If pardon were to be granted to us, we

²² LEITNER 1998: 423; SNKBZ 2000: 485.

²³ LEITNER 1998: 423-424; SNKBZ 2000: 487

²⁴ LEITNER 1998: 424; SNKBZ 2000: 487. Leitner has here “maker of salt” for ama; the term embraces this occupation but more specifically refers to diving for seaweed and is translated as “diving girl” earlier, so I have slightly modified the translation here for consistency.

four would return to the capital together; you would be acknowledged as the wife of Naritsune ... and would wear long, trailing scarlet hakama skirts, like any other noblewoman.²⁵

Chidori responds demurely, but notes that «if a lowly saltmaker like me were to wear long Scarlet skirts, she would surely be punished», a reminder that it is the setting that permits the group to imagine a community in which they constitute a family.²⁶

Their status as a family is celebrated in an ensuing wedding ceremony, one in which each aspect requires a leap of imagination. Although there is no wine for the celebration, Chidori suggests that they imitate the sacred hermit of China who «lived for seven hundred years by drinking water in which chrysanthemums were floated».²⁷ This reference evokes the famous story about a figure known in Japan as Kikujidō, an exile from the court who became a hermit and lived for hundreds of years because he drank water from a mountain stream fed by the magical dew fallen from chrysanthemums in a hidden valley.²⁸ Chidori goes on to say, «We should [...] drink fresh water from an island stream as if it were wine. This abalone shell will serve as a winecup». Each character takes his or her proper place, and, through wishful imagination, together they transform the rocky strand into a banquet hall where the abalone shell becomes «a cup of lapis lazuli as they pretend to be drinking wine».²⁹

The wedding ceremony and the domestic arrangement it authorizes are yet another reimagining of the space of Devil Island. Yasuyori and Naritsune evoke Kumano through their tracing of a pilgrimage route, turning the land holy, and now Chidori invites the group to imagine themselves in Kikujidō's place, so that the water they drink seems to be wine. Like the exiles' Kumano pilgrimage, Chidori's revisioning turns hostile space into familiar, welcoming space. But whereas the exiles impose the familiar on

²⁵ LEITNER 1998: 424-425; SNKBZ 2000: 487.

²⁶ LEITNER 1998: 425; SNKBZ 2000: 488.

²⁷ LEITNER 1998: 425; SNKBZ 2000: 488.

²⁸ The "chrysanthemum dew" story of Kikujidō is also the basis for plays in both noh and kabuki. Through this story, the chrysanthemum is associated with longevity, and is the central image for the Chrysanthemum Festival (*Chōyō no sekku*), one of the five *seasonal festivals celebrated in pre-modern Japan* originally brought from China. For discussions of the festivals see SHIRANE 2012, esp. 159-160.

²⁹ LEITNER 1998: 426; SNKBZ 2000: 488.

the alien, Chidori willfully creates a domestic utopia where the exiles become her family. Hers is a greater act of wishful thinking, one that creates the imaginary situation in which she could be wife to Naritsune and daughter-in-law to Shunkan. This scenario also emphasizes Shunkan's own domestic and romantic dimensions: he understands the ardor of the young lovers because he, too, knows romantic love.³⁰

In Chikamatsu's play, Devil Island thus becomes a place of domestic harmony, and one that pointedly transgresses class boundaries. Despite her charms, Chidori is a peasant girl, and it is purely their exilic status that allows her to be acknowledged by the aristocratic men as a wife. As she points out, she would be prohibited from dressing as an aristocrat in the capital. It is only because they are on an island they can reimagine as a utopian space that the creation of this family is possible. The "outside" location of Devil Island enables a kind of social movement that was not available in everyday society for either people of Shunkan's day or for the early modern spectators of Chikamatsu's play.

The scene of the wedding celebration is interrupted by the approach of a boat bearing Kiyomori's henchman Senoo from the capital. The appearance of the envoy disrupts this newly imagined world by calling two of the exiles back to the capital, thus reinstating the boundary between homeland and exile, aristocrat and peasant, reality and imagination. He says he has come to take only Naritsune and Yasuyori back; Shunkan's name is not on the pardon he carries. After Shunkan examines the pardon futilely searching for his name, Tanzaemon finally reveals Shigemori's letter allowing Shunkan to return part way to the capital. All four then attempt to board the boat, believing their imagined family unit can be transported off the island. As they board, however, Chidori is stopped by the cruel envoy, Senoo, who says she is «not fit to board this boat» and calls her a «filthy creature».³¹ As the villain, he is quick to reinstate the kind of order that, as Chidori noted earlier, would prevent someone like her from being in the company of someone like Naritsune. Senoo, moreover, taunts the exiles as they beg for Chidori to be brought along, aiming his derision most pointedly at Shunkan, to whom he reveals that Shunkan's

³⁰ ENOMOTO 1980: 27.

³¹ LEITNER 1998: 431; SNKBZ 2000: 491.

wife has died rather than succumb to Kiyomori's advances. Senoo's escalating viciousness leads to the dramatic highlight of the act, Chidori's lament:

A samurai is said to know the meaning of compassion.
It is a lie! It is a falsehood!
There are no devils on Devil Island
The devils are all in the capital.
From the very day we first exchanged vows
Wishing a letter of pardon from Kyoto
I worshipped the sun and the moon
And fervently prayed to the dragon god
Not because I wanted
To return with my husband to the capital
To live a life of splendor
But because I wanted to sleep
With him there at least one night....
You evil devil! You fiend! Will one girl make your flimsy boat too heavy? Have you no eyes
to see the misery of others? ...³²

Chidori's despair is aimed at the imposition of conventional social mores, made here more oppressive by Senoo's cruelty. She pointedly singles out samurai as her tormenters. This accusation would have resonated with early modern viewers, for whom 'samurai' as an official class was defined against the other classes beneath it: saltmakers and divers, but also performers, merchants, and the majority of the cast and audience for *ningyō jōruri*. Chidori further asserts that it is love for Naritsune that drives her desire to return with him to the capital, not desire 'to live a life of splendor'.

When Senoo still forbids Chidori from boarding the boat, Shunkan, bereft in the knowledge that his wife has died, offers Chidori his place on the boat, but Senoo will not permit this exchange, and proceeds to insult, kick, and trample the two. In desperation, Shunkan appropriates Senoo's sword and strikes him with it. When Chidori attempts to assist Shunkan, he forbids her to help him, realizing that she must remain blameless if

³² LEITNER 1998: 433-434; SNKBZ 2000: 492-493.

she is to board the boat. Although Tazaemon urges Shunkan not to deal the final blow to Senoo, Shunkan strikes again, clearing the way for Chidori to replace him on the boat.

Tazaemon's entreaties to Shunkan are grounded in his concern with various kinds of order: he has been instructed to bring back three exiles; Shunkan's crime against Senoo does not respect the goodwill of Shigemori, who sought to release him; and the amnesty that freed the men was intended to serve as karmic insurance for the safe delivery of the pregnant empress, Kiyomori's daughter. Shunkan counters that by including Chidori in their number, the boat will hold the requisite number of three returnees and therefore be permitted to pass through the checkpoints along the way to the capital. His offense in killing Senoo negates Shigemori's clemency. And by leaving Shunkan behind, Tazaemon will have discharged his duty fully.

Although Chidori insists that she should be the one to stay behind, Shunkan mounts an argument that now transforms Devil Island even further:

I have already passed through the three evil hells – the hell of hunger, the hell of battle – as you've just seen – and the hell of brimstone, which is always being burned on this island. I will surely be given salvation in the next world. The boat on which Shunkan will ride will be Buddha's noble craft bringing me to the shores of enlightenment. I have no desire to take a boat back to the floating world.³³

Shunkan thus returns Devil Island to its original state, a hellscape, but one through which he can envision himself moving in a sort of productive pilgrimage toward enlightenment: his description of his journey through hell to reach Buddhist truth echoes the ending of the *Tale of the Heike*, in which the empress mentioned above, the sole survivor of her clan, describes her own fate in similar terms. Whereas Shunkan did not join his companions on their Kumano pilgrimages, he follows them in seeing his life on Devil Island as a pilgrimage that might bring release, if only in the afterlife. He chooses to forego the envoy's boat – representing return and reintegration into the social and political order – in anticipation of the Buddha's, destined for yet another imaginary realm where the social and political order that has caused him so much grief cannot intrude as the envoy has.

³³ LEITNER 1998: 439; SNKBZ 2000: 497.

The play ends with Shunkan, standing alone on a hillock, watching the boat disappear in the offing:

He climbs to the highest point on the shore
And, waving, stretches his frame
As tall as he can,
Then breaks down, weeping,
In the pure white sand.
Though he burns with longing
And shouts with despair,
Not a soul is there to comfort him.
Only the cries of the gulls
And the wild geese flying overhead
Answer his lonely calls.
His only friends are the Chidori,
Which he lures to his side.
The tide rushes in to cut him off from those
Who have left him behind.³⁴

He has become one with the island as the Chidori who was his daughter disappears in the boat and the plovers (Chidori) replace her as his companions.

What is Devil Island, then, for the early modern audience? On one level, it is a fantasy pastoral realm, where a domestic, happily ordered – if patently invented – ‘family’ can exist. It lies outside the realm, beyond the reach of the exacting class structure, and it represents freedom from such restrictions: the religious utopia that is created in the *Tale of the Heike* and *Shunkan* becomes a domestic utopia in Chikamatsu’s hands. It is a space that the exiles make familiar by replicating the categories of society, a place where such replication allows them to imagine reintegration – and for a brief moment their wishing seems to turn that desire into reality, as a boat does come to retrieve them. When it becomes clear that not all of them will be permitted to return, Shunkan clings to the

³⁴ LEITNER 1998: 440-441; SNKBZ 2000: 497. The UNESCO video clip referenced earlier presents a portion of this scene, including the dramatic spinning of the center part of the stage holding the hillock from which Shunkan watches the boat depart.

imagined role of father he has assumed. This is a role he can embrace at this moment only because his actual family in the capital no longer exists.

Whereas in the *Tale of the Heike* these exiles represent Kiyomori's unjust manipulation in the political sphere, in *Shunkan on Devil Island* they demonstrate instead his cruelty in the social sphere. By insisting that Chidori take his place, Shunkan embraces a familial role that Kiyomori has taken from him, which makes the final scene especially poignant. He remains out of self-sacrifice, wholly embracing the ideal of a family of equals, where his sacrifice as the patriarch will ensure the reintegration into society of those under his care.

In the end, Shunkan's sacrifice comes to naught – in a later act, Chidori is killed before she reaches the capital, thus breaking up the 'family'. In part this is a twist typical of historical plays both in Chikamatsu's oeuvre and in early modern theatre more generally: righteous characters die or are killed to heighten drama. But it also reflects concerns more common to domestic plays of the time: the harmonious 'family' can only exist in the exilic space of Devil Island. So as Shunkan embraces his fate, not only his companions but also their imagined world slips away, to be replaced by the alien, frightening, and lonely strand as he watches the boat depart, his only hope the belief that his suffering will lead to his release in the afterlife.

In the milieu of early modern theater, where self-sacrifice was celebrated in increasingly theatrical acts, the quiet solitude of Shunkan at the end of this play is especially heart-wrenching, as it accentuates his loss of community and specifically family. His plight certainly resonated with the urban audiences of Chikamatsu's plays, for whom Shunkan and his compatriots' everyday desires to create community and celebrate friendship were more compelling than the religiously inflected represented in medieval versions of the Shunkan story.³⁵ Chikamatsu's reworking of the familiar plot shifts the register of the play to focus on the hopes and fears of characters in a utopian community situated on Devil Island, a place that, like the stage on which it was performed, represented a momentary escape from the strictures and obligations of everyday life, even as it ultimately also stressed the imaginary nature of the world created there.

³⁵ ENOMOTO 1980: 29-30.

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