

野呂有子 Yuko Kanakubo Noro, “A Comparative Study of ‘the Ultimate Love’ in *Paradise Lost* and *Shitsurakuen*”, 『東京成徳大学紀要』 第 9 号 (2002) 43–51.

A Comparative Study of ‘the Ultimate Love’ in *Paradise Lost* and *Shitsurakuen*

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1.

In 1997, a Japanese film based on a Japanese novel, *Shitsurakuen*, was very popular among Japanese. The title of the film, *Shitsurakuen*, was identical with one of the traditional Japanese titles of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, but the content of the former was completely different from that of English epic.

While in *Paradise Lost*, the ultimate love is that of God incarnated in the matrimonial love between Adam and Eve, the theme of *Shitsurakuen* is the illicit love between a man and a woman. Each has his/her own family, but in the end they commit ‘*shin-ju*’, a type of suicide, which is strictly forbidden in the Christian world. While at the end of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve bravely leave Eden, and go into this world, believing in God’s Providence, Kuki and Rinko, the hero and heroine of *Shitsurakuen*, leave this world and commit double suicide, believing in life after death. The ultimate love in *Paradise Lost* is active, life-oriented, and backed by the love of the Christian God, while the ultimate love in *Shitsurakuen* is pessimistic, death-oriented, and backed by secularized *Johdo* faith.¹

Confronting the sustained popularity of the book and the film alike, most Japanese Miltonists and readers of *Paradise Lost* became bewildered and wondered why the author of *Shitsurakuen* chose that title for his book, and in what sense the immorality of theme and obscenity of repetitive sexual depictions of *Shitsurakuen* are equated with the sublimity and the holy matrimonial love in *Paradise Lost*.

However, neither public nor private colloquy seems to have been held between the Japanese Miltonists and the author of *Shitsurakuen*, Jun-ichi Watanabe. Meanwhile, the word, ‘*shitsurakuen*’, came to mean ‘*furin*’, adultery, in Japanese. There even appears the coinage, ‘*shitsurakuen-genshou*’, the phenomenon of ‘*furin*’! And the bewilderment of Japanese Miltonists and readers of *Paradise Lost* has increased and remains still.

My aim in this paper is to explain how *Shitsurakuen* has been popularized as a story of the ‘ultimate love’ between man and woman, to discuss in what tradition this Japanese novel is situated, and to compare the difference and similarity, if any, between *Paradise Lost* and *Shitsurakuen*.

Kuki and Rinko in Watanabe’s *Shitsurakuen* are in an ‘inappropriate’ relationship, one of illicit love. They do not stop their sexual intercourse, and in the end commit ‘*shin-ju*’, double suicide, one of the Japanese traditional ways of suicide between the lovers whose love is morally forbidden by society or by their parents.

Is the title only a coincidence, or did the author select it solely because of the beautiful sounds and Chinese characters of the word? The answer to both is ‘No.’ Watanabe intentionally selected the title for his book, fully recognizing of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

In the first place, the theme of the novel is ‘the ultimate love between man and woman.’ Secondly, as *Paradise Lost* consists of *twelve* books, *Shitsurakuen* consists of *twelve* chapters with a coroner’s inquest report appended as the thirteenth chapter. Thirdly, in the conversations of the hero and heroine and in the narrative the words, ‘hell’, ‘paradise’, ‘devil’, and ‘the garden’ often appear. Lastly, the reader encounters the following sentences just before the double suicide of the couple:

Kuki [the hero] murmurs the word, ‘paradise’. Rinko [the heroine] already has thrown away any doubt about the belief that the life after death is in a paradise where their eternal love never withers. Once the heavenly man and woman were expelled from paradise as punishment for eating the forbidden fruit.

¹ The belief that people can reach the Pure Land through saying prayer when they die.

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Now Adam and Eve are coming back again to Paradise. Even though seduced by the serpent, will the lovers be able to reenter Paradise, once they sinned against God? Kuki is not confident about the answer, but even if they do not come back there, he has no discontent. They are now in the impure and profane world because they did eat the forbidden fruit of sexual intercourse. If they fell from heaven to this world for that reason, they will consume and enjoy the fruit to the full, and die.
(260-61. My translation)²

Though there is some confusion about the location of heaven and paradise in Watanabe’s depiction cited above, it is clear that he is conscious of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* while writing *Shitsurakuen*. He uses Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as the paradigm and completes his novel, whose outward aspect is westernized, while its mentality is genuine Japanese.

2.

While *Shitsurakuen* borrows its title and theme from Western culture, its concept and mentality exactly reflect the lineage of the Japanese cultural, literary tradition of the ‘*shin-ju mono*’, a love story culminating in a double suicide. In the novel, Kuki and Rinko talk about the double suicide of 1923 committed by Takeo Arishima, a famous novelist in the Taisho period (1911-1926), with Akiko Hatano, his lover. Takeo Arishima was one of the foremost modern Japanese novelists, and Akiko Hatano was the very beautiful editor of an advanced woman’s magazine. Their double suicide astonished contemporary Japanese people, because Arishima’s novels were very popular, they sold well and there seemed no cause for him to commit suicide. Though Akiko was wife to another man, Arishima’s wife was already dead, so if Akiko had divorced her husband, they would have wedded. But they did not get married. Instead they chose death.

In his note left behind him, Arishima said, ‘I welcome death at the height of delight and joy.’(187) Kuki and Rinko considered the reason Arishima and Akiko chose death. Then, as hinted by Arishima’s last words above, Kuki and Rinko concluded that Arishima and Akiko loved each other truly earnestly. Because both of them became disillusioned with their marital life, they were dubious of marriage itself, which was full of daily routines and soon transformed itself into inertia. If they wanted to keep their love at its apex, they should not get married, and decided they would die at the height of passion, to make their love eternal.

The episode of Arishima and Akiko casts a dark shadow on the mentality of the hero and heroine of *Shitsurakuen*, and prefigures their fatal end. They adore the death of Arishima and Akiko, and choose Karuizawa as the place for *shin-ju* just as Arishima and Akiko did. Clearly they imitate the way of Arishima’s as their example showing the ultimate love between man and woman.

However, Arishima’s suicide is not their only precedent. At another point, Kuki thinks as follows:

People have been thinking that mature double suicide was committed when the man and the woman lost the place for living after he spent some other person’s money for his lover or they were afflicted with their forbidden love.

But now the time is different from the Edo period when [Monzaemon] Chikamatsu or Saikaku [Ihara] lived. Those ages are far, far away, when there was a big gap between the rich and the poor. People suffered from

² Jun-ichi Watanabe. *Shitsurakuen* [*Paradise Lost*. Two volumes] (1997, Kohdan-sha, Tokyo) All the numbers in parentheses after the following citation designate the page number of this book.

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poverty or debt, and they were severely bound by social rank and ‘*giri-ninjo*’, duty, obligation and unbearable human ties, till they had no alternative but to die. (244)

Monzaemon Chikamatsu (1653-1724) and Saikaku Ihara (1642-93) are the most popular writers and dramatists in the Edo period. Especially Chikamatsu is such a great dramatist that in Japan he is often compared with Shakespeare. And he is the very first person to write a ‘*shin-ju*’ drama in 1704, and continued writing in the forefront on the same theme actively and energetically, until the Tokugawa Shogunate government forbade the performing, dramatizing and publishing of the records of ‘*shin-ju*’ dramas in 1723.

Chikamatsu said that the beginning of ‘*shin-ju*’ was *Ikutama-shin-ju* in 1683,³ and he himself dramatized ‘*shin-ju*’ in *Sonezaki-shin-ju* as his first ‘*shin-ju*’ drama in 1704, twenty-one years later.

According to the definition of *Kojien*, one of the most authoritative Japanese dictionaries, ‘*shin-ju*’ means:

- 1 to do one’s duty, ‘*giri*’, to others;
- 2 the exact witness of one’s true love towards his / her lover between man and woman in love, for example, pieces of nails, hair, tattoos, cut fingers and double suicide;
- 3 to commit double suicide when man and woman love each other; and
- 4 figuratively to commit suicide together with more than two persons.

The concept now in question is connected with definitions 2 and 3. In addition to these, it is noteworthy that the love between man and woman is often not matrimonial, but an illicit, forbidden love. For example, in *Shin-ju Ten-no Amijima* (1720), one of the most famous ‘*shin-ju mono*’ by Chikamatsu, the hero is a husband and the heroine is ‘Yujo’, a public prostitute. They could never be recognized as man and wife in this world.

Then, unlike *Paradise Lost*, why has the ultimate love in Japanese literature since Chikamatsu not often been observed in the matrimony of man and wife, but in ‘*furin*’, illicit relations? It is too big a problem to deal with in this paper, but one certainty is that the words of Chikamatsu in *Shinju Ten-no Amijima* have had a great impact upon several modern novelists like Jun-ichiro Tanizaki (1886), Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927), and Osamu Dazai (1909-48):⁴

nyoubou no futokoro niwa oni ga sumuka ja ga sumuka
ninen to iumono sumori ni site...

I [a husband] wonder whether in the bosom of one’s wife
an ogre, or a serpent, lives.

So, I have never shared bed with my wife for two years.⁵

Tanizaki in one of his novels introduced a scene where his character watches *Shin-ju Ten-no Amijima*.⁶ Akutagawa discussed this drama in a literary essay, and Dazai wrote a story adopted from the drama. Moreover, Akutagawa failed in committing double suicide with a female friend of his wife (although a few months later he did commit single suicide), and Dazai committed double suicide with a

³ An Appendix added to *Chikamatsu Monzaemon Shu* [Some Works of Monzaemon Chikamatsu] Number 46, 3-5. (1998. Shohgaku-kan, Tokyo)

⁴ *Op.cit.*

⁵ Monzaemon Chikamatsu, *Shin-ju-Ten-no-Amijima*.

⁶ An Appendix added to *Chikamatsu Monzaemon Shu*. Number 46, 3-5.

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woman other than his wife. They threw themselves into a river to perform ‘*jusui*’, another mode of Japanese traditional suicide. However, it is not certain whether he believed in resurrection through water in the next life according to the idea of *Rin-ne*, successive rebirth after death, in Buddhist teaching.⁷

3.

In the minds of both man and woman who commit double suicide, we can see an enthusiastic hope for rebirth as man and wife in the next life, (the concept of *Rin-ne*, successive death and rebirth, in Buddhism). Alternatively, they will go to ‘*Johdo*’, the Purified Land, as ‘*hotoke*’, or sacred heavenly beings, sitting on the same heavenly lotus flower in the life after death in the Western Paradise of *Johdo* where the Buddha *Amida* resides (as defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary*).

However passionately they love each other, they cannot become man and wife in this world, so they cannot help committing suicide, believing in some future after death.

Rinko, the heroine of *Shitsurakuen*, seems to believe in the *Johdo* version of life after death, while Kuki as a modern rational man is skeptical about this. But he is satisfied that theirs will represent the most ideal and deliberate form of *shin-ju* towards the world, which no Japanese novelist before him since the beginning of the Meiji period (1868) has accomplished. While Kuki the hero is an editor at a publishing company, Watanabe, the author, claims he was so deeply involved in creating the world of *Shitsurakuen*, that he identified himself with Kuki and Rinko. Therefore, Kuki represents his author’s mentality. Clearly, Watanabe is conscious of the lineage of great modern Japanese novelists who have committed suicide or double suicide since the Meiji period, like Ryu-nosuke Akutagawa, Osamu Dazai, Takeo Arishima, Yukio Mishima (1925-70), and Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972). In *Shitsurakuen*, Watanabe makes his hero and heroine, the alter egos of the author, commit a ‘far better’ and ‘more elegant’ way of suicide than those of any preceding novelists. In *Suicide: Japan and the West* (1979), Stuart D. B. Picken compares the different results of suicide between Japan and the West, saying:

Secular myths of Japan and the West also contrast with each other. While in Dante’s *Inferno* the seventh world is the place where suicides and unsuccessful suicides go, *Gokuraku*, equivalent to the Paradise in the West, is where those saying prayers of *Namu-Amida-butsu* at the moment of death go straight after death according to the traditional doctrine of Amida Buddhists [believers of the *Johdo* faith]. In Japanese dramas representing *shin-ju*, man and woman often commit double suicide, saying this Buddhist prayer, being sure of their rebirth after death in *Gokuraku*, the Paradise. In other words, while the Christian myths say that suicides will fall straight into hell, Japanese Buddhist narrative makes a definite promise that suicides will go straight into *Gokuraku-Johdo*, the Purified Land and Western Paradise (my translation from Japanese).⁸

This book elaborately clarifies the fact that Japanese society had an extremely strong sucking force towards suicide, comparing Japanese, who have an established system of suicide, with Westerners, who have been regarding ‘not committing suicide’ as their Christian duty.

As I stated above, while Watanabe’s *Shitsurakuen* borrows the title, theme and outward paradigm

⁷ In Japanese literary tradition since the Meiji period, the idea that the author’s life is the accomplishment of his works has prevailed. This is partly because Japanese novelists misunderstood the concept of the ‘I-novel’, autobiographical novel. While it originally designates a style of writing novels in the West, Japanese novelists and critics thought they should write about their own private lives and feelings in their own works.

⁸ *In Suicide: Japan and the West*, p.63. (The Simul Press Inc., Tokyo, Japan)

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from *Paradise Lost*, its concept and mentality is squarely in the lineage of the traditional Japanese ‘*shin-ju*’ literature, with roots in the *Joh-ruri*⁹ dramas of Monzaemon Chikamatsu that are closely connected with secularized *Johdo* Buddhist faith in Japan. Takeshi Muramatsu states in his *Shi-no-Nihon-Bungaku-Shi* [*Japanese Literary History Centering Around Death*] (1972) as follows:

Originally, Buddhism teaches that the future after death will become worse if people insist on this world when they die. To end one’s life with his / her beloved is nothing but an insistence on worldliness, so those who commit suicide in thrall to ‘*bon-noh*’ (worldly passions) shall, from the standpoint of original Buddhist teachings, go to hell or live in ‘*chikusho-doh*’ (the bestial life) far from sitting on the same heavenly lotus flower in *Johdo*. Original Buddhism has to be deprived of the concept of ‘*zai-shoh*’ (the sin and punishment of the), if *shin-ju* is to become related with the *Johdo* faith and lovers believe in the next life on the same heavenly lotus flower.

In other words, their belief is a secularized *Johdo* faith. This is not reasonable, but while the belief in ‘*Seiho-Johdo*’, the Purified Land in the West, remains, the secularization and de-theologization already began in various parts of Japan from the Muromachi period [1399-1573]. It is hardly a mere coincidence that priests themselves started to write many stories of unsuccessful *shin-ju* commitment as of the Muromachi period.

As far as Japanese literature is concerned, it is Chikamatsu, who presents the secularized *Johdo* faith to the full in his works....¹⁰

4.

Also in *Paradise Lost* we encounter Eve’s seductive insinuation of ‘*shin-ju*’ to Adam. After Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden tree, they are driven to despair. And just as in *Shitsurakuen*, Rinko, the woman, first talks of suicide, Eve suggests double suicide to Adam in Book X:

...which would be misery
And torment less than none of what we dread,
Then both ourselves and Seed at once to free
From what we fear for both, let us make short,
Let us seek Death, or not found, supply
With our own hands his Office on ourselves
Why stand we shivering under fears,
That show no end but Death, and have the power,
Of many ways to die the shortest choosing,
Destruction with destruction to destroy.

(996-1007; my italics)

Eve’s motive for suicide is completely different from that of Rinko. The former does not believe in happy resurrection after suicide, but she thinks up suicide as a means to avoid a miserable fate befalling all her descendants. She thinks of death for the sake of the ‘public good.’ This is Eve’s second

⁹ A type of Japanese dramatic recitation, accompanied by samisen, a kind of Japanese guitar or banjo, associated with the Japanese puppet theatre.

¹⁰ Takeshi Muramatsu. *Shi-no-Nihon-Bungaku-shi* [*Japanese Literary History Centering Around Death*] (1972, Shinchoh-sha, Tokyo), 228.

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temptation of Adam, although she is quite sincere, never conscious of the fatality of her proposal, and because of her total unconsciousness, it is a very dangerous proposal for them both. They are on the verge of sinning again. But unlike Kuki in *Shitsurakuen*, Adam argues against Eve, saying:

Or if you covet death, as utmost end
Of misery, so thinking to evade
The penalty pronounc'd, doubt not but God
Hath wiselier arm'd his vengeful ire than so
To be forestall'd: much more I fear lest Death
So snatcht will not exempt us from the pain
Of contumacy will provoke the Highest
To make death in us live: Then let us seek
Some safer resolution, which methinks
I have in view, calling to mind with heed
Part of our Sentence, that thy Seed shall bruise
The Serpent's head... (1020-30)

Adam is never again deluded by Eve into any false decision. He has learnt from his agonizing experience. At Eve's first temptation of Adam, he failed to behave rightly in spite of Raphael's advice beforehand, 'fondly overcome by female charm'. But now Adam dissuades her from embracing such a blasphemous idea as suicide. He will never make a fatal mistake again. He believes in the words of God's Son and has a hope in the future, not 'in the future life after death of the *Johdo* faith', but in the future of this world, and in human posterity, 'the Woman's Seed'.

This time Eve therefore obeys her husband. Now their salvation begins, because they regain the right way of thinking and behaving.

Adam and Eve are in social solidarity with posterity and all human beings through God's promise, and accordingly their sexual intercourse is not for its own sake, but produces their children whose posterity will overcome Satan, Sin and Death.

On the contrary, Kuki and Rinko, and indeed all the characters of *shin-ju* dramas, and modern Japanese novelists who committed double suicide would not have children with their lovers. Their relations are isolated from other social relations; moreover, they are not in social solidarity with posterity, as if to have children would flaw their ultimate love. Even as for the Purified Land, all the illicit lovers represented by Kuki and Rinko would be satisfied only if both of the two were reborn as man and wife on the heavenly lotus. Their love is completely isolated and selfish.

Unlike Christianity, there is no creator, nor beginning and end of the world, in Buddhist teaching. The human body is not created by God, so if someone destroys his/her body, such behavior is not regarded as blasphemy against God. If a person commits suicide in order to show his/her ultimate love or loyalty to his/her partner, such an act is not blamed by others, but sometimes highly praised as honourable behavior. Moreover, the person might be reborn in the next life in this world, according to *Rin-ne* thought, or might become *hotoke*, a saint, in the *Johdo* paradise. In the final scene of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve go out into this world from a timeless paradise. They begin to live in history.

On the other hand, in *Shitsurakuen* Kuki and Rinko refuse to live in this world, and try to go out of history. These attitudes towards this world, life and history are completely opposite from each other. Seemingly, Kuki and Rinko appear to *voluntarily select* death as a *free* man and woman *liberated from all worldly bonds* (my italics). The man and woman seem to leave 'the false marriage' and run for 'the true love' (222) just like Milton asserts in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643). But Kuki and Rinko will not get married because they suspect that any love may extinguish after they get married, and the routine life will set in.

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But why did the love, which the others blessed and also his wife and he thought secure and stable, corrupt so easily and disfiguredly? He naturally thinks up the words, ‘daily life’ and ‘inertia’.

Any love might run to inertia and extinguish, once it is buried under daily routine after getting married. And this love with Rinko might be no exception even though so passionate now.... Each of them already experienced marriage, and instead of peace and security in each one’s home, they respectively found inertia and sloth nesting there. (136)

They are afraid of changing and try to stop time and history, by freezing the most beautiful period of their life. But their very behavior is sloth and inertia: they give up their efforts to live their lives to the full. They behave against the course of nature and the Providence of God.

Milton regards man and wife as the smallest unit of community. For him, government exists for the welfare of the people; people separately are weak, so they make a community. Man and wife, as a unit of this community, participate in the governing of their state. To live actively in this world means, to Milton, to make this world better for people to live in, obeying the will of God. The Japanese *shin-ju* tradition lacks this point of view. The ultimate love only between the pair of lovers in a closed world orients itself to death.

Through the Second World War, Japanese realized how powerless the *Yamato Damashii* spirit, the *Kamikaze* spirit, and *seppuku*, or self-killing, are in the international world. Now, Japanese are wavering between the Western way of thinking and the traditional Japanese way of thinking. Sometimes Yukio Mishima’s *seppuku* suicide by sword, or the *shin-ju* story of *Shitsurakuen* may overwhelm the Japanese mind. However, I hope all of them will become mere monuments of the ancient Japan. Reading Milton in Japan at this time is very important for Japanese, who have awakened from the dream of the divine rights of emperors of the past, which was cherished for so many years.