
Complex Love And Gender Roles In Love Suicides At Amijima And Desiree's Baby

Chikamatsu Monzaemon and Kate Chopin are well known writers of their respective genre. While they are famous writers, they are also very different from one another when it comes to the tales they write about. Though there are quite a lot of differences between their most popular stories, the Love Suicides at Amijima and Desiree's Baby have many things in common with one another, dealing with women treatment, gender role, a similar theme, and the complexity of love.

Encyclopedia Britannica editor Donald Keen wrote about the history of Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Known for writing the Love Suicides at Amijima, Monzaemon was born in 1653, Echizen, Japan, and died Jan. 6, 1725 in Osaka, Japan. He was a Japanese playwright who is widely regarded as among the greatest dramatists of that country. Originally named Sugimori Nobumori, he is credited with more than 100 plays, most of which were written as j?ruri dramas, performed by puppets (1-6). Keen notes how he was also the first author of j?ruri to write works that not only gave the puppet operator the opportunity to display his skill but also were of considerable literary merit.

Keen also talks about how Chikamatsu was born into a samurai family, but his father apparently abandoned his feudal duties sometime between 1664 and 1670, moving the family to Ky?to. He also includes Chikamatsu serving as a member of the court aristocracy while living there (7-10). In addition to this, the origin of his connection to the theatre are currently unknown. Yotsugi Soga (1683; "The Soga Heir"), a j?ruri, is the first play that can be definitely attributed to Chikamatsu. The following year he wrote a Kabuki play, and by 1693 he was writing exclusively for actors. In 1703 he would establish an earlier connection with the j?ruri chanter Takemoto Giday?, and he moved in 1705 from Ky?to to ?saka to be nearer to Giday?'s puppet theatre, the Takemoto-za (10-14). Chikamatsu would spend his remaining days as a staff playwright for the theatre until his death.

Known for writing Desiree's Baby, Kate Chopin was an American novelist and short-story writer known as an interpreter of New Orleans culture. According to other editors from Encyclopedia Britannica, being Yamini Chauhan, Aakanksha Gaur, John Higgins, and Gloria Lotha, it was thanks to her that there was a revival of interest in Chopin in the late 20th century (1-4). This is mainly because of her concerns about the freedom of women foreshadowed later feminist literary themes.

Born to a prominent St. Louis family, Katherine O'Flaherty read widely as a girl. In June 1870 she married Oscar Chopin, with whom she lived in his native New Orleans, Louisiana, and later on a plantation near Cloutierville, Louisiana, until his death in 1882. After he died she began to write about the Creole and Cajun people she had observed in the South. Her first novel, which is *At Fault* (1890), was considered to be undistinguished, but she would later be acclaimed for her finely crafted short stories, of which she wrote more than 100. The editors mention how one of these acclaimed stories, that being "Désirée's Baby", would continue to be widely anthologized throughout time (5-11). With the backstory of both writers well known, it is easier to get a grasp at what Chikamatsu Monzaemon and Kate Chopin

Both of these stories show off ways that women were treated terribly back in the day. The Love Suicides shows off Jihei, who cheated on his wife trashing Koharu for reasonably wanting to stay alive, breaking a pact they made with one another. In Act 2 of the story, Jihei states “I have not a shred of attachment left for that vampire in human skin” (2.1, 349). He would also call her a rotten whore, showing his hypocritical attitude toward her. Another instance of the Love Suicides showing off Jihei mistreating a woman is when he searches for Koharu before he finds out she would not be killing herself. Once he does learn this, Jihei quickly thinks about killing her with no hesitation (1.2, 341). Jihei wanting to cause physical harm towards Koharu over wanting to live is not something that would be acceptable today, but back then would be no problem at all.

In *Desiree's Baby*, Desiree ends up being treated as a monster of sorts by her husband Armand due to their baby being half black, and she gets blamed for it. What causes such an uproar is when he decides to say “It means that the child is not white; it means you are not white” (109-110). After that assumption, Armand decides to leave Desiree and the baby, leading to the unfortunate demise of both.

The stories also gives readers the characters lack of respect and loyalty towards others. In the Love Suicides at Amijima, Jihei acts as if he's superior to the people he knows. This includes Osan, the wife he decides to cheat on. An example of him acting superior towards someone, specifically to Osan, is when he says “You're too well bred, despite your intelligence, to understand her likes. What makes you suppose that faithless creature would kill herself?” (2.1, 350). Jihei talked down to his own wife as if she was wrong about his situation about Koharu, thinking he is in the right.

Desiree's Baby portrays Armand as a slave owner, who just so happens to also be a black man himself. He only finds out about his true race thanks to a letter from his mother, stating “I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery” (168-170). After leaving Desiree behind and forcing other black men to work for him, this revelation likely broke him. Not only that, but Armand would have to live the rest of his days living in his own shame. An additional example to further prove that there were no respect towards black people is when Desiree tries to say goodbye to Armand. Once she moans out “good-by, Armand”, he instead ignores it (141-142). While there was a chance for him to “forgive” and forget about the problematic situation with Desiree, he decides to stick with being a petty and angry man who will end up regretting everything by letting her go.

Another thing both stories have in common were Monzaemon and Chopin dealing with denial, gender roles, and love all at once in some sort of way. For example, the Love Suicides at Amijima shows Jihei being a bad father for most of the story. Chikamatsu Monzaemon has another story like this one, called “Love Suicides at Sonezaki”, Noted by Donald Keene of New York: Columbia University Press, this story is about a young man who works in a shop selling soy sauce, with his heroine a prostitute of the lower class. Chikamatsu made the villain of this story, Kuheiji, to make suicide more plausible for the unhappy lovers; only to kill themselves due to being tired of life in general (115-119). The story has different characters, yet has the exact same plot as Amijima, also ending in the main character dying like a “hero”. Cheating on his wife and killing himself instead of taking care of his own children, Jihei manages to get away with all of that due to being written as the story's hero. No matter what the situation is, Jihei is meant to be seen as a loyal and loving man in this adventure of his.

Desiree's Baby, on the other hand, has the titular character end with a death for a purpose. Kate Chopin decided to make sure the ending of her story would have an ironic feel to it, as noted by American writer Madonne M. Miner of ST. James Press. She states how Armand finding his mother's letter speaks of the terrible costs to men and women when the former would claim complete interpretive power, similar to the return of the repressed (60-62). Due to the letter being returned to him, he now has to accept the misdoings he ended up causing. Knowing this, not only does this show a lack of true love between the two characters, but it also shows Armand's treatment towards Desiree and the baby near the end of the story became misplaced. Losing a family over race issues with no actual evidence to prove his claim to be true ruined all of their lives.

An additional thing both stories have in common is the overall theme they have. Love Suicides is about how marriage doesn't equal happiness and love, while Desiree's Baby is about how racial purity is not something that measures a person. The connection between the two themes is that the main character for both stories, Jihei and Desiree, lose everything dear to them due to a judgement in their relationships. Due to cheating on his wife, Jihei lost Osan as well as their children, the latter of which could've been taken back if he wanted to. Desiree, thanks to Armand being a fool, she lost her lover and her child. They would both lose their own lives as well due to suicide, though only Jihei wanted to die this way in the first place.

The plot of both stories also help make the theme connection they have in common through the consequences caused. The Love Suicides at Amijima has the audience confronted with the constant consequence of two lovers trying to be together. Analyzed by Andrew C. Gerstle from the Council on East Asian Studies in Harvard University, talks about how complicated matters by creating a relationship of mutual obligation and respect between Koharu and Osan (5-7). This situation he put the characters in emphasized the consequences of the decision which made the timing of the hidden love between Jihei and Koharu difficult. With Osan being taken away from Jihei by her father Gozaemon, he lost a choice to choose from for a relationship, leading to both of them losing their children in the process due to the suicide of Jihei.

Desiree's Baby centers around the complex themes of race and gender, as it is a prevalent topic throughout the story, noted by Roslyn Foy of Explicator and Ellen Peel of American Literature (8-9). With Desiree struggling with establishing herself to her fullest potential and Armand treating black people as if they were absolutely meaningless, these themes help build up the story as intended. Unfortunately, both of these characters end up having their direction in the lives they lived destroyed. Peel wrote about how Desiree, due to being immersed in her husband's value system and never standing up to him, never gets to make a name for herself in the end (61-62). Desiree not standing up to the man she loved is an example of how inferior women were to men back in the day, to the point where they were not allowed to talk back.

Foy described how with the imagery to view black people differently for most of his life causes Armand having to hate himself due to hating black people. His hatred towards himself represents the color black bringing negativity throughout the story compared to the color of white people (50-54). Though his reaction to his child being half black and instantly blaming his wife instantly is quite foolish, it was also a reasonable reaction to have back then. However, that does not make him leaving his family a right call whatsoever.

The Love Suicides at Amijima and Desiree's Baby have many things in common with one another regardless of the glaring differences. With sympathetic characters like Desiree, Osan,

and Koharu alongside characters like Jihei and Armand not being people anyone would trust or respect, both stories manage to show off what they have in common with their own spin. Chikamatsu Monzaemon and Kate Chopin have earned their spot among writing legends, while *Love Suicides* and *Desiree's Baby* prove that love is not always at first sight, especially if gender is used to determine what true love is.

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