Dan 1 & 2: Was there ever a battle at Dannoura?

Is it possible that Emperor Antoku¹, Tomomori² and Kiyotsune³ never drowned beneath the waves of the western seas? Or could those who died have been imposters? Courtiers’ diaries from 1184 and 1185 had already recorded false reports of the death in battle of some generals and tales of substitute heads being presented for inspection.⁴ So, even amongst the huge quantity of Heike tales generated in Japan in the Kamakura, Muromachi and Tokugawa periods, this is a story that would have possessed a considerable degree of believability. However, we must also note that there was a formal recording in the official court records of the deaths of Emperor Antoku, Tomomori and Kiyotsune, based on a report from Minamoto no Yoshitsune. It was these records that would go on to become the unalterable official history. The prologue of the 1747 puppet play Yoshitsune senbon zakura (Yoshitsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees) begins by summoning up that official history.

Ichikawa Ennosuke III’s recent kabuki production of parts of the play, Yoshitsune senbon zakura: Ikari Tomomori / Yoshinoyama (Yoshitsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees: Tomomori & The Anchor / Mt. Yoshino, Shinbashi Enbujō, 1987), was greeted by largely positive reviews. If it had been acknowledged that playwrights Akimoto Matsuyo and Shinoda Masahiro had in fact created a new play by combining the original with other texts by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, then Ennosuke’s experiment would be beyond the scope of this essay. However, reviewers described Ennosuke’s production as a “new direction” for Yoshitsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees. In particular, one influential kabuki critic wrote that “Ennosuke’s textual research returns the play, as far as possible, to its roots; the research underpinning it is scrupulous and impressive” (Shino 1987: 48-49). Given the widespread understanding that this was a new production of a historically accurate text, based closely on the original play, it is clear to me that we need to reconsider just how this play should be read today.⁵

In Tomomori & the Anchor / Mt. Yoshino, Tomomori appears dressed as a ghost, dances a hitosashimai, and then leaves the shipping office (tōkaiya) to head off to battle. The scene then shifts to the sea off Daimotsu Bay, where we are shown a naval battle between the Heike guerrillas and Yoshitsune’s

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¹ Emperor Antoku (1178-85). His mother was the daughter of Taira no Kiyomori. He supposedly died with the rest of the Heike clan at the naval Battle of Dannoura in 1185. This was the final battle in the Genpei war between the Taira and the Genji.
² Taira no Tomomori (1152-85). Fourth son of Taira no Kiyomori. Jumped into the sea and drowned at the Battle of Dannoura. The Tale of Heike depicts him as a general with a rich intelligence.
⁴ Gyokuyō, 1184, second month, 19th day. See also Tomikura Tokujirō, Heike monogatari zenchūshaku, vol. 9. This issue is also touched on in the late 13th century history Azuma kagami and the early Tokugawa historical texts Honchō tsūkan and Nihon ō dai ichiran.
⁵ There is also an argument that even though Ennosuke’s kabuki Tomomori differs from the puppet theatre version, it is still an outstanding role. This argument should be treated separately from arguments about the script and production of his play.
forces. This scene, where the Heike are annihilated after a ferocious and bloody struggle, is staged like a piece of Kamakura-period war reportage. In the original puppet play, Tomomori talks about organizing a Heike guerrilla force, but the question of Yoshitsune, a fugitive, was able to assemble such an overwhelming force is left unanswered. Ennosuke’s play is not the only kabuki version to present a large company of soldiers accompanying Yoshitsune. We see the same thing in the final scene of the second act of the traditional kabuki adaptation and earlier in the same act, where a host of both Heike soldiers and female attendants appear. However, in the original puppet theatre text, we are told that Yoshitsune is accompanied by only three men: Kamei, Suruga, and Musashibō Benkei. On the Heike side, there is Tomomori, the emperor, Sagami Gorō and his retainers, Tsubone, Irie Tanzō, and the boatmen. In contemporary bunraku performances, in addition to the ten characters above, one more simple puppet of a soldier appears and attacks Tomomori, but the number of characters on stage is almost identical to the original text of the play.

However, the traditional kabuki version narrowly avoids a conflict with the original due to the way that it stages the naval battle between Tomomori and Yoshitsune’s forces. As in contemporary bunraku productions, the battle is glimpsed at a distance through the sliding doors of the shipping office, in other words, exactly the same way as it is presented in the original text. This is in contrast to Ennosuke’s Tomomori & The Anchor / Mt. Yoshino, which shows the actual sea battle.

In the first dan, we are told that Yoshitsune “dispatched his closest retainers Kumai, Washinoō, Ise and Kataoka to different provinces, claiming they were on leave”. Kabuki is therefore simply wrong to bring all four of Yoshitsune’s retainers on stage in the second act. Amagasaki is halfway between the Heike stronghold of Shikoku and the capital, so it is plausible that Yoshitsune could have summoned fifty or a hundred soldiers if he gave the order. These forces would have been provided through personal ties of loyalty to him that were separate to the formal relations between the Kamakura bakufu and its retainers, so even when Yoshitsune’s fortunes had worsened and he was being pursued by Yoritomo, it would not have been that difficult for him to gather together a few dozen men. It may be argued that there is no conflict with the original puppet play, because Yoshitsune is shown with a sizeable force in the traditional kabuki version, and Ennosuke’s Tomomori & The Anchor / Mt. Yoshino is merely providing a realistic focus on the battle between Yoshitsune’s and Tomomori’s forces. However, did the original play actually leave room for the possibility of one final battle, even on a relatively small scale, between the Genji and Heike forces? Even if we set aside the fact that Yoshitsune has just three retainers with him, how may we account for the fact that, in spite of the two years he has had to prepare his guerrilla campaign, there are no named Heike warriors on Tomomori’s side? His entire force seems to consist of hastily assembled irregulars. Why should even Tomomori’s lifelong friend, Sagami Gorō, be described in the original text as one of the “boatmen under my own command”?

Did the battle between the Genji and Heike depicted in the final scene of the second dan of Yoshitsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees ever happen? A playful response to that question would be to say that we can read it as having happened in theory. By which I mean, at the time of the opening scene of the play, it is clear that the Battle of Yashima has already occurred but not the Battle of Dannoura. However, the description of the Battle of Yashima in that scene encompasses all of the battles in the final stages of the destruction of the Heike, including those elements of the Battle of Dannoura that were recorded in the historical record. Accordingly, we can argue that the Battle of Dannoura exists only as an...
idea in the play. If that idea of the Battle of Dannoura was a reflection of the sea battle off the coast of Daimotsu Bay, then the contemporary bunraku performance practice of it being performed as a type of mirage glimpsed through a sliding screen would be entirely appropriate. The playwrights convey the carnage and terror of the defeat while at the same time describing the battle with the language of suggestion and rumour:

What can be going on out there on the sea?
Tomomori must be in the midst of all that.
Their embattled voices, borne in upon the wind, they seem to be within the very room…
The action out at sea turns still. Can it be the signal of Tomomori’s death?
(Jones 1993: 119-120).

This passage features an extremely deliberate use of classical language, which as I have argued elsewhere, is a means to distance the reader from the events being described.7

Of course, *Yoshtsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees* is not *mugen* (phantasmal) noh. It is a puppet play, a theatrical text that values early modern rationalism, therefore it cannot ignore the imperatives of realism in its handling of time and space. In the following section I will explore what I mean by “mirage” and the “idea of the Battle of Dannoura”.

The plot of *Yoshtsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees* involves attacks by the ghosts of defeated Heike warriors on Yoshitsune, who is himself on a path that will lead him towards defeat and death. The play acknowledges the historical fact that the reason for Yoshitsune’s fall lay in the enmity between Minamoto no Yoritomo and the Emperor Goshirakawa. In each of its *dan*, the play uses a type of analytical structure in order to reveal the mysterious workings of karma that connect the present and the past.

In the second *dan*, Tomomori borrows the tone of epic to announce his own appearance, “What you will now behold / is the ghost of Taira no Tomomori, / scion in the ninth generation / of the Emperor Kanmu.” (Jones 1993: 113) At the end of the *dan* he says, “let it be said that he who sought revenge against Yoshitsune in the offing at Daimotsu Bay was but the unforgiving ghost of Tomomori.” (Jones 1993: 130) But, the Tomomori who appears in the Tōkaiya scene is, for a short while, freed from this epic, historical image of Tomomori. The play gives him a dramatic purpose in his desire for revenge against the Genji and his desire to rebuild his house. Why then must his actions nevertheless ultimately become those of a ghost? Normally, the idea of a living person pretending to be a ghost would be fodder for comedy, but the ghost of Tomomori in the play possesses a dismal and uncanny reality. But in spite of this, the badly wounded Tomomori still quotes the lines spoken by the ghost in the noh play *Funa Benkei*: “Aha! A marvel indeed! What say you, Yoshitsune? I had not imagined the thundering waves.” (Tyler 1992: 93-94). Yoshitsune first responds by telling him to stop play-acting at being a ghost, and then he commends him, saying,

“It was brave and praiseworthy of you to pretend to drown yourself in the western sea, then conceal yourself in this place while protecting the Emperor and seeking to take vengeance on the enemy of your clan.” (Jones 1993: 126).

This praise from his enemy makes Tomomori furious and he throws aside any pretence of being a ghost,

“It has been the lot of the Genji and the Heike to clash with one another. Whether I live or die, do you think I set aside my rancor?”

Wrathful his countenance –

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7 See Takemoto Gidayū’s comment that “the *kumiuchi* scene is not an actual battle” in *Uchiyama 1985*. 
Eyes shot with blood,
Hair flying in wild disarray –
Tomomori’s face is that
Of a hateful wraith not of this world.”

(Jones 1993: 126)

His focus on revenge, a this-worldly attachment, allows him to manifest negative karma while still alive. However, also present in the same place where the dying Tomomori confronts Yoshitsune is an emperor, still an eight-year old child, yet one who is clearly capable of distinguishing between his role as emperor and his membership of the Heike clan. It is as an emperor that he turns towards Tomomori and hints at the severing of his connection with the Heike. The symbiotic relationship between the position of emperor and the Heike clan vanishes without a trace, like a mirage, and Tomomori is newly pressed towards a change of heart.

Tomomori, who had clung so firmly to his desire for revenge on the Genji, suddenly renounces it. If he was the hero of a classical Western tragedy, the reasons for this vital change of heart would have to be explained to the audience in his own words. However, in Tomomori’s case the playwrights have provided him with no words to shed light on his emotions. Instead, Tomomori speaks of an important historical secret, revealing a stain on the imperial lineage that cannot be written about in the histories.

“Great is your good fortune, sire, that you were born an Emperor, a Lord of Heaven… Now my Emperor, you have fallen to humble circumstances, experienced the hardships of mortal men, with the six roads to hell revealed before your very eyes. And all of this has been due to my father Kiyomori’s ambition to become connected with the imperial house. He spread abroad the story that a princess was a prince; and through his power he tried to outwit providence, making you, his grandson, the Emperor. His treacherous lies to the Sun goddess have gathered one upon the other. It was inevitable that all his sins should finally be visited on the entire Heike clan!” (Jones 1993: 129-130)

The theory that the Emperor Antoku was actually a girl has its origin in book three of The Tale of the Heike, in the sections about his birth. It had previously been used as a plot element in the köjörori play Atsuta no miya buguzoroi (Armour Gathering at the Atsuta Shrine) and was also written about by several Tokugawa essayists.

That he could generate such popular rumours was a serious flaw in the Emperor Antoku as a ruler. In addition, the Sword, one of the three imperial regalia that acted as proofs of the legitimacy of the imperial line, sank to the bottom of the sea with him, leaving a blemish on the national polity that was hard to conceal. The loss of the imperial regalia and the search for them would become a central plot element in Tokugawa-period drama. Namiki Sōsuke used this plot in other plays he wrote around the same time, in Gunpō Fujimi Saigyō (Military Tactics and Saigyō at Mount Fuji, 1745) and in Ichinotani futaba gunki (Chronicle of the Battle of Ichinotani, 1751). But it was only in Yoshitsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees that Sōsuke’s focus moved from the loss of the regalia and the consequent blemish on the national polity to the illegitimacy of Antoku as emperor.

In the play Tomomori is aware that Emperor Antoku is a girl, but he accepts his emperorship as an established fact and averts his eyes from the part played by his father Kiyomori’s ambition. He surely would have felt few qualms about defending the legitimacy of Antoku as both an overt and covert symbol of Heike legitimacy. However, when Antoku cuts his ties with the Heike and emphasizes the inviolability of the imperial office, as the sole remaining witness to a historical secret, Tomomori cannot
avoid the realization that it is his duty to reveal this secret and then die – even if the person he is revealing the secret to is an enemy general.

I learned from Kurahashi Takeshi that J. B. Priestley wrote a play in which a dead man is given a second chance to live his life differently. This is exactly the same conception that underpins the Tōkaiya scene. The scene begins by liberating Tomomori from the epic, heroic framework established for him in The Tale of the Heike and similar texts. It does so by transforming him into Ginpei, a contemporary shipping office owner. This was a job with a scope for free action and potential impact on the national economy that would have been hugely attractive to Tokugawa-period Osaka merchants. From this position, Tomomori attempts to use his own power and assertions to rewrite the mistakes in an already written history. His maintains that the destruction of the Heike who are indelibly linked to Emperor Antoku, i.e. the erasure of an emperor, cannot possibly be a good thing for Japanese history. If such a mistaken history has come into existence, then Tomomori should be the one to rewrite it, to turn it in a different direction. His double identity as the shipping agent Ginpei of Amagasaki in daylight and the Heike general Taira no Tomomori at night is essential to further his plans to overthrow the Genji and return the Heike to power. Which is not to say that his plans were proceeding entirely smoothly. Until the Battle of Yashima in the second month of 1185, leading members of the Heike may have participated in the guerilla war, but after that battle many were killed, or contact was lost with them, or they fled. When the curtain opens on the Tōkaiya scene in the autumn of 1185, Tomomori has just 40 or 50 men: a handful of retainers, a few fishermen and boatmen from Daimotsu Bay, and some rank and file soldiers who could have fought for either side.

In spite of this Tomomori is not discouraged. Yoshitsune, the enemy he confronts, has just three men with him. This is an enemy it should not be difficult to overcome. In addition, should rumours spread that Yoshitsune has been killed by the vengeful ghosts of the Heike as karmic revenge for what he had done to them, public opinion may be swayed against the Genji regime. In the present moment, if Tomomori is given a second chance then the various failures that led to the defeat on the western seas will not be repeated. This time he calculates that victory is certain.

However, when he sets events in motion and as a direct result of his choices, he and those around him unavoidably end up following exactly the same path. Just as at the Battle of Yashima, where a decisive blow was delivered by Yoshitsune and just 70 or 80 of his men against the Yashima Palace which was guarded by almost a thousand Heike men, three of Yoshitsune’s retainers (Yoshitsune himself was not involved in the sea battle) destroy Tomomori’s forces in quick order. It is not just Tomomori and his fortunes on the battlefield that are duplicated: Emperor Antoku and Tsubone also repeat exactly the same fates that have already been reported by Yoshitsune to the court and recorded as history. The playwrights chillingly emphasize this by quoting many key phrases from the vulgate (rufubon) versions of The Tale of the Heike that circulated widely in the Tokugawa period.

Tomomori does not seem to recognize that he is repeating the downfall of the Heike right until the very end. The awareness that this is what is happening has rather to be imparted to the audience by the chanter. As the hero of the drama, Tomomori has no part to play in the narrative portions of the text. However, I would argue that he does come to an awareness that the proof of the rightness of history must lie in the destruction of the Heike and Antoku’s oneness with them. This awareness is prompted by the

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8 J. B. Priestley, Johnson over Jordan, 1939.
9 Detailed footnotes on the sources for these quotations from the rufubon can be found in Yūda 1965, and in Tsunoda & Uchiyama 1991.
Emperor’s statement of the severing of his ties with the Heike, and Tomomori’s recognition that the meaning of the Heike sin can never be written into the official history. At that moment, the individuality, the very existence of a Tomomori who had a chance to live a different life vanishes like the waves, Whither goes his name, his fame, Drawn by restless tides And flowing on, flowing ever on, Amid the foaming billows? (Jones 1993: 133-134)

All that is left is the official, historical image of Tomomori that was transmitted by The Tale of the Heike and noh: “Let it be said that he who sought revenge against Yoshitsune in the offing at Daimotsu Bay was but the unforgiving ghost of Tomomori.” (Jones 1993: 130)

The Tōkaiya scene therefore begins as drama, but in the end it transforms into epic.10 In terms of the function of the second dan in the five-act jōruri structure, they cannot be overly dramatic or complicated or the flow of the play as a whole will be disrupted. In order to prevent this, the playwrights emphasized the epic quality of the Tōkaiya scene, frequently quoting from the image of Tomomori already established in The Tale of the Heike and noh plays. The epic and the dramatic will be combined in the most elaborate way in the third dan, and this becomes the most important dan of the play.

The text of the second dan borrows stylistically so frequently from the text of The Tale of the Heike (partly to mixed Sino-Japanese (wakankonköbun) variants of the text, partly to Tokugawa variants) that it could be argued that the dan as a whole does not suit facially distinctive kabuki actors such as Onoe Shōroku II (1913-89) or Ichikawa Ennosuke III. Stereotyped puppets are more appropriate. I feel that it is impossible for an individualistic Tomomori created by human actors on the stage to trigger that indescribable emotion that audiences feel when the living Tomomori must disappear back into the historical Tomomori.

**Dan 2, 3 and 4**

The second dan is framed by how karmic retribution is visited upon the entire Heike clan because of Kiyomori’s ambition and the resulting damage to the sanctity of the imperial office. In the same way in the third dan, particularly in the Sushi shop scene, the tragic consequences of Shigemori and Yazaemon’s actions are visited on their sons, Koremori and Gonta. Koremori in particular is shown to exist constantly in the shadow of his father, Shigemori:

Wakaba no Naishi: This portrait here, why it looks just like your father Koremori. Ah, truly if Shigemori were still alive, the Heike would surely not have been swept away. Oh, it is good that you are not here to see the misery your grandson must endure. (Jones 1993: 56)

Yoshitsune: …the Middle General Koremori was the son of Taira Shigemori and thus heir to the leadership of the Heike clan. And Shigemori, in particular, had won the hearts of his clansmen through his benevolence and humanity. The number of people indebted to him is countless. If Koremori survived, there is no question that remnants of the Heike would rally around him. (Jones 1993: 75)

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10 Suehiro Tamotsu argues in Chikamatsu josetsu that the fundamental thought that underlies drama represents a revolt against history.
Kokingo: Our former lord Shigemori is a saint of Japan. My young master here is his grandson, so it cannot be that he is without the blessings of all the gods and Buddhas.

Narrator: True to his noble lineage
As a son of Shigemori,
Something of his father’s noble air
Yet remains within him
Even in the way he bares his heart. (Jones 1993: 172)

So closely does Koremori’s character in the play cleave to the image of his father that he never once comes to possess an independent existence. Gonta only needs a single glimpse of the portrait of Shigemori in Naishi’s baggage to intuit Koremori’s true identity. His father Yazaemon shelters Koremori because of the debt he owes to Shigemori and to atone for his loss of the gold. Even when Koremori listens to Yazaemon’s confession, we are told that he,

Recalls the days of glories past,
Thinks about his father.
How pitiful indeed the tears
That fall upon his knee. (Jones 1993: 170)

The greatness of Shigemori is recollected again and again as the highpoint of Taira glory.

Shuzui Kenji has already pointed out that there are two different first printings of *Yoshitsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees*, containing different texts of the third *dan*. (Shuzui 1939) In the earlier printing, Yazaemon’s confession to Koremori reads as follows,

…in the days of the glory of the Heike clan, when Lord Shigemori sent a donation for prayer services to Iwōzan in China, I was a captain in the narrow straits of Ondo. We stole the three thousand gold *ryō* coins and divided them up. If there had been an official investigation, my life would have been forfeit. It was Lord Shigemori who came to my aid. He said to me, “I, who would send Japan’s gold to China, I indeed am the one who robs Japan.” And he lamented what he had done. So there was no investigation and I came to this mountain village and started this business. Up until today I have been able to live in comfort and ease, but my son Gonta is a thief and a cheat. It must be retribution for my evil deeds. I dare not tell people this story, but in my heart I confess. (Tsunoda & Uchiyama 1991:478).

In the later, re-carved (kabuse hori) edition of the same text reads,

…dispatched a gift of three thousand gold *ryō* coins to Iwōzan in China, it was my misfortune as the official handling the matter, to be robbed of the money in the narrow straits of Ondo. I was on the point of killing myself as an apology, and it was Lord Shigemori who came to my aid. He said to me, “I, who would send Japan’s gold off to China, I indeed am the one who robs Japan.” And he lamented what he had done. Moreover, he did not blame me at all. Instead, he granted me leave to go. I returned to the place of my parents and took over a sushi business that had a long history. Thus, up until today I have been able to live in comfort and ease, but my son Gonta is a thief and a cheat. I realize that it must be retribution because I killed living things. (Jones 1993: 170)

As you can see, a portion of the text has been re-carved. It was this second version that circulated most
widely. It became the text used in subsequent editions, and later block-printed texts and kabuki scripts were based upon it. It is said that the only bunraku chanter who used the earlier version of the text before the 1920s was Takemoto Koshijidayū III (1865-1917) (Takemoto 1966: 208). In modern full-length performances at the National Theatre, the older text was performed in 1970 by Takemoto Sumitayū VII (1924-; at the time of the performance he was still using the name Takemoto Mojitayū IX), and by Takemoto Koshijidayū IV (1914-2002) in 1981.

According to the original text, Yazaemon was one of a group of sailors who stole the 3000 gold coins that Shigemori sent to China to pay for memorial services. But thanks to Shigemori’s benevolence he avoided punishment and went on to open the sushi shop. Yazaemon then becomes an entirely reformed character, and to repay the debt he owes to Shigemori, he has been sheltering his son Koremori from the Genji. However, as karmic retribution for his previous crime, Yazaemon’s son Gonta has become a villain. Fate will then bring Yazaemon to mistakenly kill his own son.

Sonoda Tamio has already pointed out the similarity between this plot line and the plot of *Kaba no kanja fujito gassen* (*The Cattail Crown and the Battle of Fujito*, 1730) by Namiki Sōsuke and Yasuda Abun. (Sonoda 1944: 296) In that play the major plot line is about the Heike warriors Iga Heinai Zaemon and Oguma no Gunji, who 20 years previously had stolen 1000 gold coins from 3000 that were meant to pay for a memorial service. Shigemori spares their lives and in return, after the fall of the Heike, they shelter his grandson Rokudai Gozen from the Genji forces. Iga Heinai Zaemon is down on his luck and has become Fujidayū, a humble salt-maker in Fujito Bay. But he is asked to put his life at risk by lying to the Genji leader Sasaki Moritsuna about the location of the shallows, thus causing serious damage to the Genji ships and allowing Rokudai to escape. He sells his life for 500 gold pieces (i.e. to pay for the money that he stole 20 years before), lets Rokudai escape, and then is killed by Moritsuna’s younger brother, Hirotsuna. But after Fujidayū’s wife and child kill Hirotsuna in revenge, it is revealed that Hirotsuna was in fact the abandoned child of Fujidayū and his wife. So, the play is an elaborate weaving of karma, in which Fujidayū is killed by his own son Hirotsuna, and Hirotsuna is then killed by his own mother and younger sister (see *dan* 2 and 4).

At the same time, Oguma no Gunji uses his share of the stolen money to enjoy a life of ease as a masterless samurai. But, perhaps due to his guilty conscience, he develops a mysterious ear condition, which makes even the quietest sound resound like a broken bell and means he cannot sleep. To repay his debt to Shigemori, he shelters Rokudai after Fujidayū frees him. However, out of an excess of caution, Rokudai and his retainer Saitō Go decide to substitute Rokudai and Saitō’s wife Karaaya without telling Gunji or his wife. Thanks to a mysterious side-effect of his illness, Gunji learns the truth and kills Karaaya and gives her head to the Genji, saying it is that of Rokudai. But Gunji’s wife believes that her husband has really killed Rokudai, and since she has become deaf, tragically she commits suicide before learning the truth (*dan* 3). In the same *dan*, a love affair between Rokudai and Gunji’s daughter Wakaba recalls the love triangle between Osato, Yasuke and Wakaba no Naiishi in *Yoshitsune & The Thousand Cherry Trees*. There are other parallels too, with some of Yazaemon and Gonta’s lines being almost identical to a speech by Gunji.

What we can clearly state about *dan* two to four of *Gaba no kanja fujito gassen* is that they feature

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12 Regarding the date of the amendments, Chiba Taneo has stated from evidence in the colophon of the performance text (shōhon) that it was probably around the time of the chanter Takemoto Yamatonojō (who retired from the Takemoto-za in 1763). It is also thought that the amendments have a link to the 1748 presentation of *yasuke sushi* to the Imperial Palace. (Shinohara 1959. Tsunoda & Uchijima 1991: 478).
two characters who were once evil, but who have since reformed and who try make recompense by risking their lives to help the family of their old master, Shigemori. However, the karma which follows them for their actions is more intense than they (or the audience) can ever have imagined, and their wives and children die pitiful deaths in recompense for their sins. In other words, human sin is like a bottomless well, and once a crime has been committed that hole can never be filled in by human agency alone. In the play we can see Sōsuke’s understanding of karma and cause and effect, as the roots of the misfortune spread endlessly outwards. Sōsuke brought this structure with him when he moved to the Takemoto-za, as we can see in the Sushi shop scene.

As others have argued, it is possible to read the Sushi shop scene as a story of loyalty (chūgi) involving both Yazaemon and Gonta, in which giri is denied and ninjō is emphasized. Takechi Tetsuya put it slightly differently,

The scene paints clearly the absence of compassion in feudal morality and a hatred for the giri that sweeps away Gonta’s entire family. It is precisely by focusing on that aspect that the Sushi shop scene continues to possess power. (Takechi 1990: 27)

In terms of producing the play on stage, either approach could be possible. However, a closer reading of the scene reveals two important counter arguments. If the Sushi shop scene is read as a justification of the actions of Gonta and his family, then in order to emphasize the tragic nature of his sacrifice, one must try to ignore Yazaemon’s initial sin and subsequent repentance. It will also become impossible to explain the illogic of Gonta’s action. An objective examination of Gonta’s actions reveals two fatal errors. The first is that after overhearing the conversation between his father and Koremori, he suddenly reforms and decides to help his father save Koremori from the Genji pursuers, but he avoids telling any of this to those who are now on his side and instead decides to act alone. The second is his rash decision to tie up Wakaba no Naishi and Rokudai and hand them over, even though he has not been instructed to do so by Kajiwara.

I will deal with the second point first. The first dan of the play reveals that Yoritomo and Yoshitsune were not particularly interested in detaining the wives and children of the Heike leaders, and indeed they were trying to ignore the issue. Rather, it is the evil aristocrat Tomokata who has been pursuing Wakaba no Naishi and Rokudai because he wants her for himself. It is also clear that Kajiwara did not raise the question of Naishi and Rokudai when he interrogated Yazaemon at the village office, otherwise Yazaemon would have mentioned it when he talked to Koremori after his return to the sushi shop. If Kajiwara had been searching for Naishi and Rokudai, why then would he suspect Yazaemon only of harbouring Koremori? When Gonta hands them over to him, Kajiwara says, “the unexpected capture of the Dreamfield Deer. Capturing this doe and fawn was splendid work.” His words suggest only that this was an unwelcome capture. Gonta could have accomplished his goals without ever involving Naishi and Rokudai. They only happened to be at the sushi shop by chance and there was no evidence that the Genji were searching for them, so Gonta committed a huge mistake by imagining that he had to create a substitution to save them too.

The first point could be explained by arguing that, given his history, no one would believe Gonta if he told them that he had reformed. Therefore, in order to deceive their enemies, Gonta had no choice but to first deceive his allies. However, because the playwrights did not show Gonta’s reasoning in real time to the audience, this argument could be (and has been) criticized as being unnatural (Nakamura 1942). In other words, in order to make Gonta’s revelation of his true intentions all the more shocking to the audience, the playwrights chose to ignore natural psychology, and instead they opportunistically chose to
paint him as a villain right up until the moment Yazaemon stabs him. This would lead us to a negative evaluation of the worth of the play. However, this criticism rests upon a partial understanding of the play – the idea that we must seek some tragic rationality in Gonta’s actions, and that one of the preconditions of the drama is that it must persuade audiences of the rightness of his actions. It leaves no room for the possibility that the playwrights consciously displayed Gonta’s actions as irrational and that the scene may have been deliberately constructed to avoid making the audience feel fully sympathetic towards him.

However, it turns out that Koremori, Wakaba and Rokudai were not saved through the terrible sacrifice paid by Gonta, his wife and child. Rather, it was Yoritomo who spared them, in repayment of the debt that he owed to Shigemori. The revelation of the mystery of the cloak also makes clear just why Koremori’s life was spared. When Koremori acknowledges his gratitude by raising the cloak to his forehead and saying, “in truth, I owe much to my father Shigemori” (Jones 1993: 193), he renders utterly meaningless the price that Yazaemon and Gonta’s families have paid to help him. The meaninglessness of Gonta’s sacrifice is made devastatingly clear. When Gonta makes his fateful decision to reform, his intention is not shown to the audience. Neither is the bitter grief of the substitution of his wife and child revealed “in real time” (Hirosue 1998) to the audience. Rather, he is still shown acting the part of a villain, and this then is how the playwrights ultimately relativize his death as meaningless. The fact that the audience is never fully permitted to feel sympathy for Gonta, that a certain distance is maintained right to the end was a deliberate calculation on the part of the playwrights.

At the same time that Gonta’s actions are relativized, this act makes clear that the decisive driver of the events was in fact Taira no Shigemori. We are reminded that Gonta was drawn into this chain of events by the strange, magnetic power of the memorial portrait of Shigemori he glimpsed in Naishi’s luggage. From the play’s opening dan, different characters speak repeatedly of the greatness of the late Shigemori, impressing this upon the minds of the audience and foreshadowing the events of sushi shop scene. However, for the audience Shigemori remains no more than a figure from history, a symbolic presence that lacks any living human character. On the other hand, if Gonta may lack the qualifications to be a dramatic hero, the audience’s feelings of intimacy are concentrated on him. If he had killed Koremori and handed over Naishi and her son to the Kamakura authorities, the audience would still be aware of his lovable nature that they had already seen and would be unable to fully despise him. I believe that the audience attitude to him is sculpted to allow enough room to believe that there must be something lying behind his villainous actions (by choosing to show Gonta switching the pail with the head and the pail with the money, the playwrights reveal that Gonta is not a villain). Accordingly, when they hear about his hidden goodness from Gonta’s own lips and see that is going to die from others’ mis-reading of him, the audience weeps for Gonta and prays that the sacrifice of his wife and child will at least have some meaning.

But just at that moment, the unforeseen power of the past in the form of Shigemori appears, relativizing Gonta’s actions and rendering them meaningless with a decisive severity. However, the play does not present this as an illogical and abrupt happening. The audience have already been thoroughly prepared for it by the references to the greatness of Shigemori, and to Yazaemon’s sins from the past, i.e. his misappropriation of the money that Shigemori had intended to donate to the Chinese temple. In addition, as I argued above, the playwrights have consciously maintained a distance between the audience and Gonta’s actions. Given these factors, the audience can be convinced by the reading of Gonta’s death as a type of karma or as the inevitability of fate. In the haori section, fate is explicitly mentioned:
Why on earth…? Both men are amazed, then Lord Koremori speaks.
Koremori: Ah, that must be it. Long ago, at the time of the Hōgen and Heiji disturbances, my father Shigemori and the nun Ike no Zenni arranged between themselves that Yoritomo, then sentenced to death, be exiled instead to Itō. As payment of that debt of gratitude, Yoritomo now spares Koremori’s life and tells him to enter the priesthoo d. Thus that parroting poem bespeaks a debt repaid. Ah, now I see: though he is my enemy, Yoritomo is a splendid general. More than “that which lies within the jewelled hangings,” something gracious and elegant lies within Yoritomo’s heart.

He takes up the cloak.

Koremori: In truth, I owe much to my father Shigemori. (Jones 1993: 192-193)

At this moment, the contemporary-life sushi shop scene begins to fade away from the audience, leaving them with a chill as it slips back into the past to become part of a picture scroll (emaki) about the Heiji and Hōgen rebellions. Characters like Gonta, Osato and Yazaemon, with whom they had felt so connected, are transformed into nameless bit part players in an old tale from an entirely different age. When the curtain is finally pulled closed on the scene, it is as if the sushi shop characters have been stripped of their individuality. (Gunji 1954)

When the structure of the sushi shop scene is understood as I have outlined, we can see the logic of contemporary bunraku performance practice. For example, the phrase, “the days of glories past and of my father”, which is dramatically nothing out of the ordinary, has always been emphasized by performers as a supremely difficult one. This can only be because they have recognized the importance of Shigemori to the scene. Similarly, the phrase, “as in the balance still hangs his fate”, which occurs earlier when Koremori, Naishi and Rokudai escape to Kamiichi village, contains none of the musical phrases which are normally used to suggest danger or weakness. Instead the shamisen player plays a powerful tataki pattern, symbolizing the power of fate. One is lead to the conclusion that these and other performance practices are based on very close readings of the play.

Koremori flees to Kamiichi as though being pursued by fate. But did Yazaemon and Osato really consider just how safe he would be simply by moving from the sushi shop in Shimoichi to the Yazaemon’s retirement villa in Kamiichi? Kajiwara rushed to Shimoichi, complying with the central government’s important political decision to arrest Koremori. He was already aware of the entirety of Yazaemon’s plans and he had seen him obtaining Kokingo’s severed head. In other words, he had made very careful preparations so that Koremori would not escape him. However, thanks to the muddled response of the residents of Yoshino district, his plans did not come to fruition.13

Mother: I know what you’re like all the time, and you may still be up to one of your tricks, but there’s some money we were to leave all of you to divide up when we died. Don’t tell your father. Take it and mend your ways. (Jones 1993: 166)

This exchange had probably happened dozens of times between Gonta and his mother in the past. However, today will bring an entirely different result, as the playwright emphasizes, “doting on her darling son, she brings out three silver kamme that in the end will send the young man straight to hell.” (Jones 1993: 167).

We see a similar moment in the shipping office scene, as the wife Oryū attempts to wake her hus-

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13 In the Tokugawa period, Shimoichi was a thriving commercial centre. The playwright makes the careful choice to describe Yoshino District as being situated “amid grasses of unusual hue”.

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band and child:

Oh, I feel so restless. She clicks a flint against a stone, lights the lamp, places it on the god shelf, lighting the room. Oyasu, Oyasu, she hastens her daughter. And to her husband too she calls out. My husband you are dressed for a journey of a thousand or ten thousand leagues. It’s getting dark. If you’re ready, you should be on your way... I wonder if he might be weary from his work and taking a nap. Ginpei, Ginpei! She calls out. What you will now behold is the ghost of Taira no Tomomori, scion in the ninth generation of the Emperor Kammu. (Jones 1993: 112-113)

The skill and freshness with which the lightly stained screen doors of a shipping office are transformed into the time and space of a second-category shurano play are breath-taking. In the third dan this blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary takes on an even more complex aspect than in the second dan. In the exchange I just mentioned where Gonta cheats his mother out of three kanme of silver, the movements of the two puppets are like a mother cat and a kitten playing together. But the chanter must avoid being drawn into this mood and chant the scene with a crisp, slightly detached tone.14

Here is the head of Koremori. Please take it. He is about to remove the lid when his wife comes rushing over and stays his hand. Oh wait! I put something rather important in that tub. What am I going to do if you open it? They pull the tub back and forth. I don't know what you're talking about. His wife, thinking of the money struggles with her husband, till finally Kajiwara intervenes. They've arranged all of this in advance to evade me. Bind them! Tie them up! (Jones 1993: 181)

The puppet of the little old woman clings to the big sushi tub, refusing to let go. At a moment that will determine the historical and political struggle between the Genji and the Heike, between Yoritomo and Koremori, all she can think about is the three kanme of silver that she scraped and saved. Kajiwara’s response is entirely understandable. Furthermore, we can perhaps accept his statement that he has heard of Gonta’s bad reputation but that now he is exhibiting loyalty to his superiors. However, when presented with a clearly rustic wife with white powder discoloration on her face and he is told that this is Wakabo no Naishi, the wife of Koremori and a woman who once served at the Emperor’s side, it is so patently ridiculous that all he can do is cover by exclaiming, “well done! Well done!” It is no surprise that it has been pointed out before that irony is an important element of the performance of this particular scene. (Sugiyama 2004: 140)

Space does not allow me to enumerate the ways in which Yazaemon’s household departs from the everyday. A more important problem is of Koremori and the everyday.

All of those around him are now consumed by tears of joy. The wounded Gonta crawls forth and edges close.

Gonta: I just wasn’t smart enough. I thought I had tricked Kajiwara, but he knew everything. As I think about it, up till now I’m the one that’s done all the cheating. How wretched that this has finally led to being cheated myself... cheated out of my own life.

Koremori: By deceiving the Buddha up till now, merely paying lip service to his teachings, I have not escaped the painful cycles of birth, death and rebirth. Now is the time to break away from that.

With a single stroke, he cuts off his topknot of hair. (Jones 1993: 193)

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14 This is not contradicted by Takagi Hiroyuki: “Generally the pace of the latter half of a play is quicker. However, in the sushi shop scene, the oral tradition instructs chanters to perform the earlier scenes more quickly.” (Takagi 1993)
The hope that Gonta would become the hero of this tragedy is never brought to fruition. If anything, the hero of the third *dan* of this epic is Koremori. Chikaishi Yasuaki classifies the structure of the sushi shop scene as follows:

An alternative version of the sustained tragic structure. The love scene in the third *dan*, the sushi shop scene between Osato and Yasuke/Koremori is similar (i.e. to the third *dan* of *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*) in that it can be described a lively addition to the plot. But the focus of the final scene of the third *dan* is on the section that contains Gonta’s presentation of the substitutes up until his death. (Chikaishi 1961: 101)

However, the plot lines about Osato’s love for Koremori and the bonds between Koremori, Naishi and Rokudai take up about half of the entire scene. In current performance practice too it is normal (though there are variant performances, of course) for the sushi shop scene to be divided between two chanters, with the more highly ranked chanter performing the first half. Chikaishi’s description of the love scene as merely “lively” (*nigiyakashi*) is perhaps due to the necessity of his system of classification.

If we treat Koremori as the hero, then his statement that, “by deceiving the Buddha up till now, merely paying lip service to his teachings, I have not escaped the painful cycles of birth, death and rebirth” becomes an important element in the drama, since it refers to the full range of his actions. In spite of his repentance, Gonta’s death is meaningless and his actions utterly futile. However, thanks to Gonta’s meaningless death, Koremori is finally able to enter the priesthood and move towards overcoming the cycle of birth and rebirth. This had become an important theme in Japanese literature since *The Tale of the Heike*. If taking the tonsure allows him to pray for the salvation of the Heike clan, then while the sushi shop scene may be described as pessimistic, it is not a hopeless drama in the contemporary sense. At the very least, Gonta whose life is nothing more than dust in the great vortex of fate, managed to live and accomplish his karma. That the salvation of the Heike clan would depend not upon 3000 gold pieces donated to a Chinese temple, but upon the severe reality of Koremori, his son and heir, taking religious orders was surely beyond the imagination even of that Japanese saint, Shigemori.

The dramatic conceptions created by Namiki Sōsuke during his years at the Toyotake-za were carried over into the sushi shop scene. But there is a different type of serenity in the scene compared to that found in *Kaba no kanja fujito gassen* (1730), *Nanto jusangane* (*The Thirteen Bells of the Southern Capital*, 1728), or *Wada gassen onna maizuru* (*The Wada Battle and Dancing Crane*, 1736). The performance of the bright, fluent opening to the first *dan* does not conflict with the rest of the play. In terms of the playwright’s approach, the macroscopic viewpoint of epic and history, and the microscopic approach taken to the everyday both exhibit a depth that cannot be compared to anything written during his Toyotake-za period.

*Yoshitsune*, the hero of *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees* as a whole, most concretely exhibits his embodiment of impermanence (*mujō*) in the first *dan*:

> Everything is as insubstantial as a world of dreams. I have been abandoned by a fickle world. I seem to hear the tinkle of the little horse bells that betoken travel. Kamei, Suruga, come. (Jones 1993: 83)

This final scene of the first *dan* revolves around the night attack on the Horikawa mansion and Yoshitsune’s relationship with his father-in-law, Kawagoe Tarō, so inevitably much of the text is drawn from the fifteenth-century chronicle *Gikeiki* (*The Chronicle of Yoshitsune*). However, the quotation above departs from the style of *The Chronicle of Yoshitsune* and owes more to the poetic sentiment of *The Tale of the Heike*.
The second and third dan of the play focus on two important themes from *The Tale of the Heike*: history and salvation. These themes are developed through the stories of Tomomori and Koremori. However, it is more difficult to point to a clear Heike theme in the fourth dan with its story of Noritsune. The first half of the final scene of the dan contains the beautiful story of Tadanobu’s 400 year longing for his parents. However, the use of time in the scene lacks the viewpoint of history and impermanence, and in that sense it is of a different quality to the use of time in first three dan. Yoshitsune compares himself to the fox Tadanobu and reminisces,

Oh, how I am struck by the constancy of affection in all living creatures. I was never filial for a day towards my dead father Yoshitomo, cut down by Osada Tadamune, and I grew up hiding on Mount Kurama hoping I might serve my brother Yoritomo. How bitter it is that my fortunes in the battles in the western sea and all my loyal services have become my very own enemy. Here I have been abandoned by the brother whom I have looked on as a parent. Genkurō, to whom I gave my name, is affected by some evil from a former life. It is the same with me; what unbroken attachments, and in what sort of previous existence, can have visited upon me such a karma as this? (Jones 1993: 248)

These are admirable sentiments and it is a powerful speech, but the image of Yoshitsune presented here is closer to the Yoshitsune of *The Chronicle of Yoshitsune* than that found in *The Tale of the Heike*. In any case, the fourth dan lacks the second and third dan’s skilful, dizzying switches and blending between concept and reality, the everyday and the extraordinary, medieval epic poetry and early modern drama. In the first dan, the climactic scene of the second dan, and the third dan we can say that epic provides the conceptual basis and drama its performative context, and that these two elements are used to maintain balance. At the moments when the performative form moves towards epic, it is because the playwright has made a conscious choice of lexis in order to emphasize the conceptual approach of the play. However, in the fourth dan, the fox Tadanobu’s long speech of reminiscence (Jones 1993: 242-246) retains the feel of a medieval oral narrative in terms of its expressive form. On the other hand, the text praises the fullness of Tadanobu’s actions and their basis in the human emotions of affection and filial piety. Here we can see a similarity to Chikamatsu’s late plays, especially in terms of the foundational dramatic concepts employed. Due to these elements, the structure of the fourth dan is rich with romance, humanity, and a sense of freedom, creating the play’s highpoint in terms of stage performance. Had the deep, complex structures of the second and third dan been carried through to the fourth dan, the patience of the audience probably would have begun to be tested. Namiki Sōsuke was the playwright for the first dan, the climactic scene of the second dan and the whole of the third dan, but here we can see how difficult it would be for him, with his centripetal disposition, to create by himself the rich expansiveness required by the five-dan jūruri structure.

*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees* is a masterpiece of the methods of communal composition. The analytical dramaturgy of Namiki Sōsuke’s dark, epic theatre is used to great effect in the first, the climactic scene of the second, and the third dan. In the fourth dan, a more compassionate story of parental and filial love, typical of playwrights from the Takemoto-za is deployed. The play remains faithful to the five-dan jūruri structure: love, warfare, pathos, michiyuki, while it demonstrates how karma from the past is transformed into moments of life and death in the present. As a whole, the play is unified by the presence of Yoshitsune, who is simultaneously a glorious national hero and a character who embodies the severity of impermanence.
Author's Note: I am grateful to the many suggestions offered by members of the Chikamatsu no Kai, where I presented on the play several times. In particular, the insights offered by Hara Michio, both in person and in his article “’Jitsu wa’ no sakugekibō: Yoshitsune senbonzakura no baai” (Bungaku, August/September 1978) were of great value.

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