

Chushingura, the Treasury of Loyal Retainers: A Puppet Play Study Guide

Chushingura, the Treasury of Loyal Retainers: A Puppet Play by Takeda Izumo

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Plot Summary

The Japanese puppet play Chushingura is a story of revenge. Moronao, a governor, pursues Lord Hangan's wife, leading Lord Hangan to violence against him. Lord Hangan is ordered to kill himself as punishment. Hangan's samurai, Yuranosuke, spends years destroying his reputation so that he can be in a position to take vengeance on Moronao.

As the play begins, four lords gather to celebrate the opening of a new temple and to discuss an addition to the treasury. Afterward, Lord Wakasanosuke catches governor Moronao attempting to seduce Kaoyo, the wife of Lord Hangan. Infuriated by the interference, Moronao viciously berates the lesser lord, nearly provoking Lord Wakasanosuke to violence. Later, at the consecration, Wakasanosuke's plans to assassinate Moronao are foiled when Moronao unexpectedly apologizes. Unbeknownst to Wakasanosuke, Honzo, his own head retainer, has softened Moronao's heart with a bribe.

At the consecration, Moronao receives a poem from Kaoyo that signifies her rejection of his love. Frustrated, Moronao verbally retaliates against Kaoyo's husband, Lord Hangan. Hangan responds with steel, successfully wounding Moronao. Since Hangan's attending samurai, Kampei, has been distracted by the fairer sex, Honzo acts in his stead, restraining Lord Hangan. As punishment, the shogun demands that Lord Hangan commit seppuku. He gracefully complies, but with his last breath he also requests that Yuranosuke, his most loyal samurai, seek revenge against Moronao.

Much time passes. Kampei, now a penniless ronin, hopes to raise enough money to find justice for his fallen lord. To this end, he allows his wife to be sold into prostitution. Unfortunately, Kampei is tricked by circumstance into believing that he has killed his own father-in-law and therefore commits seppuku. Before he actually dies, however, Kampei is exonerated of his crime and honorably added to the "league" of samurai who will seek vengeance against Moronao.

Yuranosuke, to keep Moronao off guard, pretends to have sunken into dishonor and debauchery. Several men, both his own former colleagues and Moronao's spies, travel to Yuranosuke's "tea house" to test the former samurai's character. Yuranosuke fools them all, convincing them they he has no intention of seeking revenge for Lord Hangan. Yuranosuke has a close call when Kudayu overhears a portion of his plans.

Honzo's wife and daughter, Tonase and Konami, travel to Yuranosuke's residence to discover what is to become of Konami's engagement to Yuranosuke's son Rikiya. Oishi refuses to see the two wed, citing that she will not allow Rikiya to marry the daughter of Honzo, the man who restrained Lord Hangan. Oishi will give her consent only in exchange for Honzo's severed head. Honzo, who was lurking nearby, throws off his disguise. Fighting ensues. Rikiya seriously wounds Honzo. Yuranosuke arrives. Honzo confesses his sins and asks for forgiveness. He will gladly sacrifice himself for his daughter's sake.



The league, needing to amass weapons and armor without raising suspicion, vets a merchant named Gihei. The samurai stage a police raid on Gihei's establishment. The merchant proves himself honorable by refusing to betray confidence. The raid on Moronao's mansion goes off as planned. The league finds Moronao and beheads him with Lord Hangan's dagger. The samurai then prepare to fight to the death before Lord Hangan's shrine as Moronao's brother arrives with reinforcements.



Act One

Act One Summary

The Japanese puppet play *Chushingura* is a story of revenge. Moronao, a governor, pursues Lord Hangan's wife, leading Lord Hangan to violence against him. Lord Hangan is ordered to kill himself as punishment. Hangan's samurai, Yuranosuke, spends years destroying his reputation so that he can be in a position to take vengeance on Moronao.

As the play begins, the Ashikaga shogun, Lord Takauji, in recognition of his defeat over Nitta Yoshisada, builds a temple in Tsurugaoka. Deputy Ashikaga Tadayoshi, the shogun's younger brother, arrives to oversee the celebration of the temple's opening, where he is received by governor Ko no Moronao and the local lords Wakasanosuke Yasuchika and Enya Hangan Takasada.

The four lords discuss the shogun's recent order to add Nitta Yoshisada's helmet to the treasury. Moronao, with considerable arrogance, disagrees with the shogun's decision, insisting that the helmet is unworthy of inclusion and can't be authenticated as the actual helmet of Nitta Yoshisada. Tadayoshi calls Enya's wife, Kaoyo, as a sort of expert witness. Kaoyo identifies the correct helmet by scent, recognizing the smell of the rare incense that Yoshisada was known to burn inside his helmet.

After the meeting, Moronao makes shameless advances upon Kaoyo, offering her a love poem. Flustered and shamed, Kaoyo hurls the poem to the ground. She considers telling her husband, but fears that her husband's outrage would lead to injury and further indignation. Undaunted, Moronao promises to continue his pursuit of Kaoyo and threatens to kill her husband if she does not comply.

Yasuchika happens to pass, noting the tears in Kaoyo's eyes. He immediately deduces that Moronao is up to his old tricks. Yasuchika tries to excuse Kaoyo, but Moronao forbids her to leave. Moronao heaps abuse upon Yasuchika, reminding him that he is Yasuchika's superior and can ruin him with ease. He insults Yasuchika's wealth and status and even questions his honor as a samurai. Yasuchika is barely able to restrain himself.

Act One Analysis

The first act establishes Moronao as the antagonist, demonstrating that he lacks the decorum and restraint exhibited by other characters. The narrator points out that Moronao doesn't hesitate to contradict the opinion of his shogun, indicating that he has little respect for his lord. The implication is that since Moronao won't respect someone who is so obviously worthy of respect, he is very unlikely to respect peers or subordinates. His behavior toward Kaoyo and Yasuchika lends credence to this theory, demonstrating that Moronao is willing to use his power and influence to further his own ends.



Moronao's violation of decorum is perpetuated by the decorum itself. If Kaoyo were to tell her husband of Moronao's behavior, Moronao might be brought to account. In her embarrassment, however, resulting from Moronao's outrageous behavior, Kaoyo fears to consider what further injury might occur if she tells of the harassment. In other words, she fears that, in confronting this breach of decorum, more breaches, and thus more embarrassment, will result. By not holding Moronao accountable, Moronao is allowed to continue this objectionable behavior.



Act Two

Act Two Summary

Outside Yasuchika's mansion two servants swap rumors of their lord's humiliation at the hands of Moronao. Overhearing this, chief retainer Kakogawa Honzo Yukikuni, scolds them for their foolish worrying. Honzo's wife and daughter, Tonase and Konami, appear to bring word from her ladyship; she too is worried about the rumored spat between her husband and Moronao and wonders if Honzo can shed any light on the matter. Honzo is exasperated, arguing that it is the place of a samurai's wife to shield her husband from having to answer socially dangerous questions.

Honzo agrees to speak to her ladyship. Before he goes, he instructs Tonase to receive a messenger from Enya Hangan Takasada. Realizing that the messenger is Obashi Rikiya, her daughter's betrothed, Tonase feigns illness, affording her daughter the opportunity to receive Rikiya in her place. Konami is grateful for her mother's transparent ploy.

Konami and Rikiya meet. The lovers are elated. Konami tries to kiss Rikiya, but despite his mutual affection, he insists on strict decorum. Rikiya relays Enya's instructions for the coming festivities, asking that the instructions be repeated to Lord Wakasanosuke. Before Konami can respond, Wakasanosuke appears, indicating that he overheard the entire exchange. He promises to meet Lord Hangan tomorrow at 4 a.m. as instructed. Having delivered his message, Rikiya departs.

Honzo returns. Hearing that Wakasanosuke wishes to discuss a private matter, he dismisses Konami. Before Wakasanosuke will reveal anything, the lord extracts a promise from the samurai that he will, no matter what, do as he is instructed. Hanzo reluctantly consents. Wakasanosuke reveals that he plans to kill Moronao at the consecration, acknowledging that the act will likely result in the forfeiture of his household. Hearing of these plans, Hanzo reacts - much to Wakasanosuke's surprise - with praise and admiration. He advises the lord to rest up, since the consecration is only a few hours away.

Act Two Analysis

The argument between Moronao and Wakasanosuke is now common knowledge. Since Moronao is the higher and more respected lord, this means that Wakasanosuke has lost face. To the common man, hearing the rumor, it looks as though Wakasanosuke has been put in his place by his betters, reprimanded like a misbehaving child. Considering Moronao's behavior, this strikes Wakasanosuke as a gross injustice. His decision to kill Moronao indicates that Wakasanosuke values his ideals above life and household. This makes Honzo's bribing of Moronao all the more shameful.



Honzo's insistence that Tonase should lie for him suggests that the samurai has no compunction against lying beyond the fear of getting caught. This is apparent in the way that Honzo reacts to Wakasanosuke's plans to kill Moronao: He praises the lord's courage and implies that Wakasanosuke has his complete support. As soon as Wakasanosuke's back is turned, however, Honzo is off to interfere with his lord's plans. It is important to remember that Honzo faces a conflict of interest here. If Wakasanosuke loses his lordship, Honzo will become a ronin, a samurai without master or income.



Act Three

Act Three Summary

To celebrate the temple's consecration, lords both minor and great gather at the newly built palace of Tadayoshi. Moronao, seeming the very image of arrogance, arrives with retainer Sagisaka Bannai in tow. Master and retainer unabashedly discuss how Moronao might subvert the will of the chaste Kaoyo when they are summoned to speak to Hanzo. Suspecting a trick, the two men prepare to fight.

Honzo, speaking diplomatically, praises Moronao on his master's behalf, offering up a large assortment of gifts and treasures. Moronao, stunned by the gesture, adopts more conciliatory tones. He expresses his gratitude, much to Honzo's chagrin, by insisting upon Honzo's company during the proceedings.

Lord Enya Hangan Takasada arrives with retainer Kampei, embarrassed to be running late. Kampei, spotting his young wife Okaru just outside the gate, pauses to speak to her. Okaru delivers to Kampei a letterbox from Kaoyo. Kampei is to give the letterbox to Lord Hangan so that Lord Hangan may place it in the hand of Moronao.

Kampei departs to deliver the letterbox. Bannai exploits Kampei's absence to sexually harass Okaru. Aware of Bannai's intent, Kampei lures Moronao's servants to Bannai, thus exposing Bannai's shameful behavior. Grateful, Okaru flirts with Kampei, enticing him to fool around. Kampei acquiesces. The lovers depart, hand in hand.

Meanwhile, inside the palace, Wakasanosuke's vengeful blood is cooled when Moronao unexpectedly throws down his swords and apologizes for his earlier misbehavior toward Wakasanosuke. Confused and disappointed, Wakasanosuke pleads illness, retiring to an adjoining antechamber. Moronao scolds the late-arriving Enya Hangan Takasada. Hangan apologizes and delivers to Moronao the letterbox from Kaoyo.

The letterbox contains a poem. Moronao lies to Hangan, suggesting that Kaoyo offered the poem so that he might critique her work. Reading the poem, however, Moronao quickly interprets it as a rejection of his love. Now frustrated, Moronao becomes insulting toward Hangan. Hangan tries to dismiss this poor behavior, but his anger soon overwhelms him. He draws his weapon and wounds Moronao on the forehead. Honzo quickly moves to restrain Hangan. The entire palace is in an uproar.

The chaos prevents Kampei, who is still outside with Okaru, from rushing to his master's side. Hearing what has transpired in his absence, Kampei is deeply ashamed. Kampei considers seppuku, but Okaru convinces him that it is she who deserves the blame. Bannai emerges from the palace to hurl abuse at Kampei. There is a short scuffle between Moronao's retainers and Kampei. Okaru convinces Kampei to spare the treacherous Bannai.



Act Three Analysis

In the opening moments of the act, Moronao's reveals the depths of his depravity: He intends to coerce Kaoyo into becoming his lover. It's no accident that this revelation is immediately followed by the scene in which Honzo panders to Moronao. Honzo may save his lord and secure his future as a samurai, but he does so by honoring a man who deserves only scorn. The sheer fact that Honzo doesn't wish to remain in Moronao's presence shows that he knows the lord's true nature. This is a sin for which Honzo must eventually atone.

Compared to Hanzo, Kampei's crime is much less severe in principle, but much worse in consequence. As a young man in love, Kampei is a sympathetic character. He sneaks off with Okaru, leaving Lord Hangan unattended. On any other day, in any other circumstance, such insubordination would likely invite a minor reprimand. In context, however, Kampei neglected his lord in a time of dire need. This mistake serves to define Kampei for the remainder of the play.

Lord Hangan's restraint, despite his eventual loss of control, is a testament to the strength of decorum in feudal Japan. Hangan is initially unwilling to believe that Moronao intends to insult him. He tries to dismiss Moronao's behavior as drunkenness. After enduring a torrential rant from Moronao, Hangan asks if Moronao has lost his senses. Hangan finds it easier to believe that Moronao has lost his mind, than to believe that Moronao behaves this way of his own accord. It is only after Moronao confirms his intent that Lord Hangan responds with violence. Like Wakasanosuke, Hangan chooses to respond to the injustice rather than to continue losing face.



Act Four

Act Four Summary

Enya Hangan is confined to his residence, attended by Rikiya and his wife Kaoyo. He is visited by his chief of samurai, Hara Goemon, and samurai Ono Kodayu. Goemon is impressed to learn that Rikiya has remained with Hangan through the night and intends to stay by his side until Yuranosuke arrives. Goemon is hopeful for a positive outcome, but Kodayu chides him for being unrealistic. Kodayu, revealing his own greedy nature, offends Goemon by suggesting that the samurai chief might have averted disaster by bribing Moronao. Kaoyo quells the argument by explaining the root cause of the trouble - Moronao's lechery. The shogun's envoys arrive.

Hangan graciously welcomes Yakushiji Jirozaemon and Ishido Umanojo, offering each a cup of sake. Being a friend Moronao's, Yakushiji repays Hangan's hospitality with scorn. Ishido pronounces the shogun's sentence: Lord Hangan's lands are to be confiscated and Hangan must commit seppuku. Kaoyo is horrified, but Hangan accepts the sentence with grace. Hangan removes his cloak, revealing that he is already garbed in the requisite death robes; everyone is astonished. Hangan explains that he expected this outcome from the beginning and only regrets that Honzo prevented him from killing Moronao.

As Hangan prepares for seppuku, loyal retainers beg to see him one last time. Hangan declares that he will see no one before Yuranosuke. Unfortunately the ceremony has begun. Hangan cannot wait for Yuranosuke. At the last moment, just as Hangan impales himself with the dagger, Yuranosuke appears. The two friends say their final farewells. Hangan asks Yuranosuke to avenge him, offering the seppuku dagger as a memento. Hangan dies.

Yakushiji, continuing his outrageous behavior, continues to speak poorly of the departed Hangan. He demands that the estate be turned over immediately. Ishido rebukes Yakushiji, suggesting that his colleague show some respect. Yakushiji, undaunted, orders his men to begin looting the premises. Ishido leaves to report that the seppuku was carried out as ordered. Hangan's body is taken to the temple. Kaoyo is heartbroken.

Hangan's former samurai discuss their newfound roles as ronin. Kodayu suggests that they all split Hangan's public assets and immediately turn over the mansion. Sadakuro, Kodayu's son, agrees with his father. Yagoro suggests that they should instead defend the mansion to their deaths. Yuranosuke agrees. Wanting no part of such a plan, Kodayu and Sadakuro depart. With father and son gone, Yuranosuke reveals that he only agreed with the idea to test the loyalty of Kodayu and his son. Yuranosuke collects Rikiya and several of the loyal ronin. Together they depart, vowing to one day avenge their fallen master.



Act Four Analysis

In the opening scene, Kudayu expresses an opinion similar in nature to Honzo's actions in the act prior, suggesting that Lord Hangan should have bribed Moronao. Goemon condemns the idea, asserting that no true samurai would resort to flattery. Kudayu goes one further than Honzo, however, by blaming Lord Hangan for having made an enemy of Moronao in the first place. This "might makes right" attitude explains Kudayu's later decision to enter the employ of Moronao.

In his final moments, Lord Hangan is a paragon of virtue and decorum. Despite his doom, Hangan is calm and light of spirit. Like a good host, he offers sake to his guests, demonstrating that he harbors no ill will against them. That Hangan already wears his death robes shows that he is serenely resigned to his fate and prepared to carry out the will of his lord. As a true samurai, Lord Hangan lives and dies in the nature of service.

In the wake of Lord Hangan's death, the samurai react in one of three ways. Kudayu and Sadakuro are concerned with their own safety. Their thoughts therefore turn to matters of money and compliance. Yagoro goes the opposite extreme. His thoughts are consumed with righteous indignation on behalf of his fallen lord. Yagoro is prepared to die in symbolic protest. Only Yuranosuke sees the big picture, realizing that vengeance will require time, effort and, most of all, continued survival.



Act Five

Act Five Summary

Much time has passed. Kampei, now impoverished, hunts for food outside the town of Yamazaki. Through the pounding rain he spots a fellow samurai traveling the nearby road. He hails the man, requesting a light for his dampened rifle fuse. The man initially takes him for a highwayman, but Kampei quells the man's fear by allowing the man to hold his rifle while he relights the fuse. The man finally recognizes Kampei. Kampei, in return, recognizes the man as comrade-in-arms Senzaki Yagoro.

Seeing one another again, the two warriors are overcome by bitter memories. Kampei confesses shame over his insubordination on the day of Lord Hangan's crime. Crying now, Kampei begs to take part in the rumored plan of revenge against Moronao. Yagoro denies the rumor, instead suggesting that he and Goemon are raising money to create a monument for Lord Hangan. Kampei gets the implication - the planned vengeance is true, but it can't be spoken of out in the open. Kampei promises to raise money for the "monument" effort. The two men exchange farewells and part company.

Elsewhere along the road, Ono Sadakuro, now a common thief, accosts an aged traveler. The old man begs Sadakuro not to rob him, explaining that the money he carries is from the sale of his only daughter. The money would allow his daughter to make amends with her ronin husband, helping him to rectify a bit of trouble she has caused. Unmoved, Sadakuro brutally stabs the old man, takes his wallet, and kicks the corpse into the valley below.

Suddenly, a frightened boar races past Sadakuro. Gunshots sound. Sadakuro falls over, fatally wounded. Kampei appears, gun in hand. Fumbling in the darkness, Kampei is soon horrified to discover that he has killed a man. He searches the man for medicine and finds the wallet Sadakuro stole just moments before. By feel, Kampei estimates that the wallet holds forty or fifty ryo. Counting himself blessed, Kampei hurries down the road.

Act Five Analysis

Here Kampei demonstrates that, despite the one lapse in judgment that came to define his life, he is still a samurai in spirit. Kampei has not turned to robbery as Sadakuro has, but rather, honorably survives by hunting his own food. Confronted with a wary traveler, Kampei responds with both compassion and trust, allowing the man to hold his rifle while he himself relights the fuse. Kampei is still stirred by love and shame, indicating that his sense of duty burns bright as ever. Kampei's first and only priority is to make amends for his past misdeed.

In shooting Sadakuro, Kampei unknowingly serves the cause of poetic justice, killing the murderer of his father-in-law. He errs, however, by stealing the wallet found on

Sadakuro's body. Kampei wants so badly to be a part of Lord Hangan's vengeance that he rationalizes the theft as divine providence. Taking this wallet will directly result in the misunderstanding that culminates in his death.



Act Six

Act Six Summary

Within Kampei's cottage, Okaru worries about her overdo husband. Her mother notes that her own husband is overdue as well. Okaru and her mother discuss Okaru's decision to prostitute herself on Kampei's behalf. Just then, Ichinomiya arrives to take custody of Okaru. He claims to have already paid the first half of the price to Okaru's father when he visited the night before. Now he wishes to pay the second half. Okaru insists that she can't leave until her father returns with the rest of the money.

Kampeï returns home to find Ichinomiya trying to leave with his wife. Okaru's mother explains the situation. Kampei is amenable to the idea of selling his wife, but is also anxious to tell everyone of his recent windfall. To Kampei's horror, however, his newfound wallet matches the pattern of Ichinomiya's kimono. Kampei is suddenly haunted by the notion that he may have accidentally slain his own father-in-law.

Kampeï allows Okaru to be taken away, lying that he encountered her father earlier that morning. Mother bids daughter a tearful farewell. Later, three hunters arrive bearing the corpse of Okaru's father. Heartbroken, Okaru's mother thrusts her hand into Kampei's kimono and extracts the bloodstained wallet. Okaru's mother decries Kampei as a murderer, screaming for vengeance.

Goemon and Yagoro arrive, noting that something is awry. Kampei dismisses it as a domestic matter. He greets the two samurai and thanks them for the visit. Kampei humbly requests that the two samurai permit him to assist in the construction of Hangan's "monument." Goemon rejects Kampei's offering, explaining that Yuranosuke could not accept money from one proven so faithless to Lord Hangan. Seeing her opportunity, Okaru's mother again accuses Kampei of her husband's murder.

Believing the accusation is true, the two samurai condemn Kampei. Overcome with guilt, Kampei stabs himself. With the knife in his belly, Kampei gives his account of what happened. Goemon quickly examines the body and determines that the man was killed by sword, not gunshots. Goemon also deduces that Sadakuro is the actual murderer and likely also the true victim of Kampei's hunting accident.

Mortified, Okaru's mother forgives her son-in-law. Kampei nevertheless continues his seppuku, pulling the dagger across his midsection. Goemon commends Kampei for unwittingly avenging his father-in-law's murder and invites Kampei to join the league of vengeance against Moronao - admitting for the first time that such a thing exists. In agony, Kampei can only mark the contract with his blood. Kampei dies as redeemed man. The two samurai leave with the money. Okaru's mother is stricken with grief, having lost her entire family in a single day.



Act Six Analysis

The poetic justice continues. Kampei seeks to redeem his samurai honor by selling the very woman whom he once chose over his duty as a samurai. Unfortunately for Kampei, he stole a wallet—containing money which, ironically, he was intended to have—that implicates him as the murderer of his own father-in-law. Had he never touched the wallet, or if he had come clean immediately upon returning home, disaster might have been averted. Kampei's greatest mistake lay in his silence. He lets the matter simmer until the wallet is discovered, and by then things have spiraled out of control.

Kampei's flaw lay in his all-consuming desire for redemption. He is so focused on raising money for the "monument" that he loses sight of the very standards by which he hopes to redeem himself. If he were honest and forthright, as a samurai should be, he would not steal from the dead. Rather, he would do as the hunters did and see the dead paid its due respect—especially if he believed himself to be the killer. Instead, Kampei sought to hide the truth in order to escape the consequences of his actions. This is not fitting behavior for a samurai.

In the end, only seppuku redeems Kampei. Even though he is not a murderer, he is nevertheless guilty of dishonorable behavior. His willingness to die shows, at last, that he is prepared to accept the consequences of his actions. Goemon and Yagoro, however, are also guilty for believing, without evidence, that Kampei was capable of killing his own father-in-law in cold blood. This guilt is likely a factor in their decision to invite Kampei into the league. They, like Kampei, want to make amends.



Act Seven

Act Seven Summary

Kudayu and Bannai arrive at a teahouse to investigate Yuranosuke's rumored descent into debauchery. As they ascend the stairs to their room, they hear Yuranosuke's drunken cries. Moments later, Jutaro, Kitahachi and Yagoro, intent on performing an investigation of their own, find Yuranosuke a drunken mess.

The three samurai threaten to sober Yuranosuke by force. Heiemon, Okaru's brother, suddenly appears to beg leniency from the three warriors. Heiemon explains that even though he was a lowly courier in Lord Hangan's service, he hopes to join the growing league against Moronao. Yuranosuke denies knowledge of any such league. Heiemon doesn't accept the answer. He still insists on joining the league.

Convinced that Yuranosuke is lost, the three samurai resolve to slay him. Once more, Heiemon intercedes, begging that they wait until Yuranosuke has sobered up. The samurai finally relent, allowing themselves to be guided back to their room. Later, Rikiya arrives. Breathless from running, he wakes Yuranosuke to deliver an urgent letter from Lady Kaoyo. Rikiya reports that Moronao is soon to return to his home province. Yuranosuke sends his son home, ordering him to return with transport later that evening.

Before Yuranosuke can unseal the letter, Kudayu appears. He tries to trick Yuranosuke into admitting that his drunkenness is just an act and that he yet plans to avenge Lord Hangan. Yuranosuke, laughing at the idea, invites Kudayu to drink with him in friendship. He accepts. Yuranosuke stuns Kudayu by failing to observe the customary taboo against eating meat on the eve of a death's anniversary.

Moments later, having observed Yuranosuke's behavior, Bannai tells Kudayu that he intends to report to Moronao that the honorless Yuranosuke is no threat. The two men also discover, much to Bannai's amusement, that Yuranosuke's rust-flecked samurai sword. Bannai boards a palanquin and departs. Kudayu, however, concerned about the letter that Yuranosuke earlier received, secretly stays behind to investigate.

Yuranosuke reads the enemy intelligence from Lady Kaoyo. Yuranosuke, seeing that Okaru spies on him from the balcony above, asks to speak to the girl. On the ground, Okaru admits looking at the letter but denies knowing any of its content. Yuranosuke promises to redeem Okaru's contract if she will agree to serve as his wife for three days, after which she is free to do whatever she wishes. Okaru, though suspicious at first, agrees. Yuranosuke departs. Moments later, Heiemon appears.

Heiemon tells his sister, Okaru, that he, despite her shame at now being a prostitute, is honored by the sacrifice she has made. Okaru tells her brother that her contract is to be redeemed by Yuranosuke. When Heiemon seems dubious of Yuranosuke's honor,



Okaru admits that she read Lady Kaoyo's letter and knows that Yuranosuke plans to avenge his master.

Thinking his sister's life is now forfeit, Heiemon makes a half-hearted attempt to slay her. Now in tears, Heiemon tells Okaru that her father and husband are both dead. She is devastated. Heiemon explains that Okaru must die for her knowledge. Okaru asks that she be allowed to kill herself. Yuranosuke suddenly appears, staying Okaru's hand. Yuranosuke then reveals that Kudayu has been listening beneath the mats. He slashes Kudayu thoroughly with his rusted samurai sword and demands that the body be thrown in the river.

Act Seven Analysis

It is not initially apparent whether or not Yuranosuke is faking his dissipated state. The audience is no more certain of Yuranosuke's character than are the two groups come to investigate him. Once again, Yagoro, along with the other two samurai, is willing to believe the worst of a former colleague. It is only Heiemon, a lowly but loyal footman, who persists in believing that Yuranosuke is working an angle. Considering Yuranosuke's compelling performance, Heiemon seems almost foolishly optimistic to suspect that a samurai's heart still beats within.

With the arrival of Lady Kaoyo's letter, it is now obvious that Yuranosuke is putting on a performance to lull Moronao into a false sense of security. This means that Heiemon, by convincing the samurai not to attack Yuranosuke, has saved the entire operation. If the samurai had attacked, Yuranosuke's cover would have likely been blown. With Kudayu and Bannai nearby, Moronao would likely have been warned of a coming attack. Considering the few samurai comprising the league, a surprise attack is likely essential.

Now that the audience is aware of Yuranosuke's true colors, he instantly becomes a sympathetic character. To Kudayu and Bannai, Yuranosuke's rusty sword is incontrovertible proof that the once loyal samurai is now debauched. To the audience, however, the sword symbolizes something quite different. It means that Yuranosuke has sacrificed his own honor for the sake of loyalty. It means that he has, through sheer force of will, neglected the very symbol of a samurai's pride.

Yuranosuke's slaying of Kudayu is a threshold moment, whereby the true destroys the false. The sword in this case is a metaphor for Yuranosuke himself. He is tarnished and neglected, but Yuranosuke, like his sword, still holds an edge. Beneath this accumulated rust, Yuranosuke is still Lord Hangan's friend and loyal servant. Kudayu, however, proves false. Not only has Kudayu forgotten his lord, he has joined forces with the man who should be his sworn enemy.



Acts Eight and Nine

Acts Eight and Nine Summary

After learning that Rikiya has refused his engagement presents, Konami and mother Tonase decide to travel to Yamashina to discover what the matter could be. Konami worries that Rikiya has had a change of heart. As they walk overland, through rain and hail, mother tries to allay the fears of daughter. This ends a very short Act Eight.

It is early morning. Yuranosuke is home, but still playing the drunken libertine. His wife, Oishi, is caring and attentive. Yuranosuke feigns sleep until Oishi sends the servants away, then Yuranosuke and son Rikiya discuss the symbolism of the father's earlier romp in the snow. Yuranosuke explains that their league, like snow, is best preserved in shadow.

Tonase and Konami arrive at Yuranosuke's estate. They are politely, but aloofly received by Oishi. Tonase, presenting her husband's swords to indicate that she speaks with his blessing, expresses her desire to see Konami and Rikiya wed as promised. Oishi pleads that the match is no longer appropriate due to Yuranosuke's diminished income at the fall of Lord Hangan. Tonase points out that, if anything, the two fathers now have comparable income. Oishi shifts her argument, cruelly suggesting that Honzo, by bribing Moronao, is a "sycophant samurai."

Tonase, angered by Oishi's words, argues that the Rikiya and Konami have been married since their engagement. Oishi willingly acknowledges this, also decrees that they are henceforth divorced. Tonase spitefully suggests that Rikiya, now a poor ronin, has found himself a more profitable bride. Hearing that Konami will marry no other, Tonase resolves to commit seppuku. Konami, shamed by rejection, wishes to die as well. Tonase, proud of her daughter, agrees to kill Konami before killing herself.

Oishi, touched by Tonase's resolve as well as Konami's chastity, agrees to let Konami wed Rikiya, but asks to be given Honzo's head in exchange. She cannot forgive Honzo for preventing Lord Hangan from slaying Moronao. Honzo, who has thus far been disguised as a begging priest, indicates his consent. He then approaches Oishi, loudly dismissing Yuranosuke as debauchee and Rikiya as one in the same. He refuses Rikiya as a son-in-law and calls Oishi a hussy.

Enraged, Oishi attacks Honzo with a lance. Honzo quickly overpowers and disarms Oishi. Rikiya appears and, picking up the fallen lance, stabs Honzo. Honzo falls face first in agony. Yuranosuke appears, demanding restraint from his son. He notes that events have transpired exactly as Honzo had planned. Honzo, severely injured, confesses his crimes and begs for pity on behalf his daughter. He hopes that his death will appease any resentment.



Yuranosuke reveals that he and Rikiya expect to die in their quest for vengeance. Oishi explains that she spoke cruelly to Tonase and Konami to spare Konami the fate of a newlywed widow. Hearing this, Honzo is pleased at the kindness. He offers a gift to Rikiya. It is a map of Moronao's mansion. Yuranosuke impresses Honzo with his method for breaking the shutters of the mansion. Then, donning Honzo's disguise, Yuranosuke departs, leaving Rikiya behind "take care of any unfinished business."

Acts Eight and Nine Analysis

This act is complicated by several factors. Firstly, Yuranosuke resents Hanzo for pandering to, and subsequently saving, Ko no Moronao. Were it not for Honzo's interference, Moronao would've been slain by either Lord Wakasanosuke or Lord Hangan, and there would be no need for league to now seek vengeance. In fact, if it weren't for Honzo, Lord Hangan might not have died at all. This understandably complicates the engagement between Honzo's daughter and Yuranosuke's son, as it is likely that Yuranosuke doesn't wish to have Honzo as an in-law.

Another factor is that Rikiya is not long for the world. The league plans to exact revenge against Moronao and then to die defending Lord Hangan's shrine. Even supposing that Konami and Rikiya are wed, their marriage would indeed be a short. Oishi hopes that Tonase and Konami will be discouraged by her words, thus sparing Konami from the heartbreak of widowhood. This tactic backfires, however, when mother and daughter would rather die than face the humiliation of rejection.

Whatever else Honzo may or may not be, he's no fool. He sees all the factors complicating his daughter's engagement. Honzo understands that atonement will require his death. To this end, Honzo picks a fight with Oishi to lure her son into combat. Rikiya, being shorter tempered than his father, takes the bait. With Hanzo as the aggressor, Yuranosuke's family is now justified in killing him. Yuranosuke sees Honzo's plan and admires his sacrifice. When Yuranosuke tells Rikiya to "take care of any unfinished business," it is clear that he is instructing his son to behead Honzo as per the agreement.



Act Ten

Act Ten Summary

The merchant Amakawaya Gihei watches as laborers load his merchandise onto a ship. Goemon and Rikiya arrive to check on their shipment of armor and equipment. Gihei assures them that everything is in order, adding that he has taken extraordinary measures to avoid arousing suspicion, even to the point of sending his wife away and firing most of his employees. The samurai express their appreciation and depart.

Ryochiku, Gihei's father-in-law, arrives. He complains about having to support his daughter and threatens to send her straight home unless Gihei signs a writ of divorce. Fearful that his wife's untimely return will blow the operation, Gihei signs the divorce papers. With this done, Ryochiku smugly announces that he plans to remarry his daughter to a wealthy husband. Disgusted, Gihei kicks Ryochiku out.

Later that evening, Gihei, tricked into answering his door, finds himself surrounded by police. Gihei denies everything and is unfazed by threat of torture. Even when his son is threatened, Gihei insists that he can't confess what he doesn't know. To prove that threatening his son is useless, Gihei moves to strangle the child - only to be stopped by a sudden cry. Yuranosuke emerges from a nearby box. The "police" throw down their weapons and back up to a respectful distance. Gihei is stunned.

Yuranosuke lavishes Gihei with praise, comparing his strength of character to that of a samurai. Gihei forgives them for their ruse and humbly responds to praise with praise of his own. Gihei expresses his admiration for samurai, and wishes that he too could demonstrate his loyalty in battle. His eloquence moves the assembled samurai to the verge of tears. Gihei invites the samurai inside for sake and hand cut noodles. They accept and everyone enters the building.

Gihei's wife, Osono, desperate to see her son Yoshimatsu, questions the servant Igo. Gihei appears from inside. Osono returns the letter of divorce, proving her continued loyalty. Gihei scolds her for not following his instructions and complains that he's had considerable difficulty caring for his young son without her. Nevertheless, he can't renege on the divorce contract, nor can he allow Osono to see her son for fear of upsetting the child further. He demands that she return to her father. Gihei goes inside.

As she departs, Osono is assaulted. Her purse is taken and her hair is chopped off. Inside, Gihei attends to his guests' departure. Yuranosuke offends Gihei by offering a parting gift. Gihei kicks the gift over, spilling the contents: Osono's hair, a comb, and the divorce papers. Yuranosuke explains that Osono's hair was shorn at his order. No one will wed a bald woman, and in the meantime she can secretly pose as a nursemaid to her son. Gihei and Osono thank Yuranosuke for repairing their household.



Act Ten Analysis

Amakawaya Gihei is the common man's Yuranosuke, demonstrating that a noble spirit can arise from any walk of life. Whereas Yuranosuke sacrificed his honor for the sake of a higher calling, Gihei has sacrificed the common man's equivalent: His family and his livelihood. The encounter with the "police" is a parallel to the dinner scene in which Yuranosuke is forced to maintain his cover by eating meat, thus dishonoring the anniversary of his lord's death. In Gihei's case, the necessary betrayal is the willingness to murder his own son. This also directly parallels the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, casting Gihei in the role of Abraham and Yuranosuke as God.

Despite his excellence of character and proven honor, Gihei cannot stand on equal footing with the samurai. He hates being a merchant and wishes to be more, but there is a very real sense that this is an impossibility. The samurai are nearly moved to tears by Gihei's story because they are aware, on some level, that Gihei suffers under a great injustice. This makes Gihei something of a tragic hero, doomed by circumstance to never achieve his highest potential.

While Yuranosuke can't make Gihei into a samurai, he can return to the merchant some of what he has sacrificed. Using the same cleverness that allowed him to adopt the role of a libertine, Yuranosuke repairs Gihei's household. He prescribes to Gihei a carefully orchestrated deception designed to evade societal restriction, demonstrating that honor and honesty are not always one in the same.



Act Eleven

Act Eleven Summary

It is the night of the assault. Several boats come ashore near Moronao's mansion. Scores of armed and armored samurai, many of whom are named in detail, disembark into prearranged squads. Yuranosuke reminds everyone to use the passwords derived from the name of Gihei's shop: ama and kawa. The small army splits in two, with one group headed to the front of the mansion, and the other to the rear.

Within the mansion, put at ease by the rumors of Yuranosuke's dispensation, Moronao indulges his hedonism. A handful of Yuranosuke's men scout the mansion and disable guards on the perimeter, throwing open the main gate to the courtyard. The samurai breach the mansion's shutters by placing bent bamboo bows beneath them and then cutting the strings in unison. When the poles straighten, the shutters are destroyed.

Yuranosuke's league of samurai rushes into the mansion. Cries of alarm sound within. Outside, samurai from neighboring provinces respond to the sounds of distress. Yuranosuke explains to other samurai that league seeks to avenge the death of Lord Hangan and bears no ill will to the shogun, or to the neighboring provinces. The samurai, overcome by the heroic tale, praise the loyalty of Lord Hangan's retainers and promise not to interfere.

The invaders greatly over-match their opponents. Moronao evades detection for a time, but is eventually found hiding in a woodshed. Yuranosuke, respecting Moronao's station, explains his intent to behead him and asks for Moronao's forgiveness and compliance. Moronao pretends to concede, but then attacks suddenly by surprise. Moronao is quickly overpowered, his head severed by Lord Hangan's dagger.

The league ritually offers the severed head to the shrine of Lord Hangan. They take turns burning incense before the shrine. Yuranosuke burns incense on Kampei's behalf, expressing regret for the ronin's death. A samurai rushes into the chamber to warn that Moronao's younger brother attacks at the front gate. They all resolve to fight to the death at Lord Hangan's shrine. Yakushiji and Bannai suddenly leap out from hiding, but Rikiya leaps into action, easily dispatching both men. The assembled samurai cheer their victory, even knowing that their deaths are imminent.

Act Eleven Analysis

This is the fruition of Yuranosuke's stratagem. Moronao's is taken completely unaware, lulled into complacency by Yuranosuke's apparent dissipation. The shutters are breached using the bow-technique that Yuranosuke devised by watching bamboo bend beneath the weight of snow. Moronao's head is severed by the very knife that Lord Hangan used to commit seppuku. With vengeance finally achieved, Yuranosuke can



now allow himself the luxury of Yagoro's symbolic death. He can finally die in the service of his lord.

Though the league's assault on Moronao's mansion is undoubtedly illegal, never having been sanctioned by the shogun, Yuranosuke still makes every attempt to maintain honor and decorum. He makes his case to the neighboring samurai, speaking plainly and with assurances of no ill-intent against them. Yuranosuke even promises that his men are instructed to avoid damaging the mansion with fire. When Moronao is finally caught, Yuranosuke makes every attempt to treat him with dignity, even acknowledging his position and status. In celebrating their victory, the men light incense in honor of their lord, even remembering to light incense for their absent colleague Kampei.



Characters

Yuranosuke

Obashi Yuranosuke is a paragon of samurai loyalty, placing duty ahead of self. To uphold his vow of vengeance, Yuranosuke lulls Moronao into a false sense of security by presenting himself as dissipated and immoral. The implication is that, since Moronao is himself immoral, he is willing to believe that immorality grows in others. Unlike, Moronao, however, who glories in his debauchery, Yuranosuke suffers. As a true samurai, it is an anathema for Yuranosuke to allow his sword to go to rust. He endures this injustice, however, to see that higher justice is done.

Until Rikiya shows up with Kaoyo's letter, it isn't obvious that Yuranosuke is acting. Yuranosuke behaves foolishly and, at times, humorously. Even his friends and former colleagues are convinced that Yuranosuke is beyond redemption. The charade reaches a crescendo as Kudayu offers Yuranosuke a bite of octopus, reminding Yuranosuke that tomorrow is the anniversary of Lord Hangan's death. Kudayu takes the transgression as an act of disloyalty, when in truth it is quite the opposite. This suggests that even decorum and tradition are subordinate to higher principles.

Despite his zealous idealism, or perhaps because of it, Yuranosuke is merciful to those who demonstrate similar qualities. It is Okaru's willingness to die that convinces Yuranosuke to forgive her for reading Kaoyo's letter. He is similarly moved by Hanzo's willingness to die so that Konami, his daughter, might be wed. Clearly, Yuranosuke sees selflessness as one of the highest virtues.

Moronao

Ko no Moronao, as the governor of Kamakura and lord of Musashi, is a rich and politically powerful man. His outrageous behavior indirectly forces Enya Hangan Takasada to commit seppuku, thus compelling Enya's loyal retainers to plot vengeance against him. Moronao, as the antagonist of a moralizing play, represents the antithesis of samurai virtue, often behaving in a manner diametrically opposite to code of Bushido.

Moronao harbors an inflated sense of entitlement born of status and privilege, paying only lip service to etiquette and decorum. He shows little regard for others, pursuing Kaoyo despite her objection and despite her marriage to Lord Hangan. When Lord Wakasanosuke calls him to task, Moronao threatens to use his wealth and status to destroy Wakasanosuke's career and reputation, demonstrating that he places the power of his station above the responsibilities it entails.

Confronted with danger, Moronao repeatedly proves himself both wretched and cowardly. Moronao, for example, won't face Lord Hangan sword to sword. Instead, he uses Honzo's distraction as an opportunity to beat a frantic retreat. Later, during the raid on his mansion, Moronao is found bravely hiding in a woodshed. Finally, faced with the



inevitability of his own defeat, Moronao offers a false surrender to gain advantage on his foes.

Takauji

Lord Takauji is the ruling Ashikaga shogun. He presides over all of the lords in the play.

Tadayoshi

Lord Ashikaga Tadayoshi serves his older brother, Lord Takauji, as deputy.

Wakasanosnake

Wakasanosnake Yasuchika is the younger brother to the lord of Harima. If not for the subtle intervention of his loyal retainer Honzo, Wakasanosnake would have forfeited life and family honor to kill the dishonorable Moronao.

Hangan

Enya Hangan Takasada is the lord of the castle of Hoki. Moronao's insolence forces Enya to commit seppuku, compelling Enya's loyal retainers to seek vengeance.

Kaoyo

Kaoyo is the wife of Enya Hangan Takasada. It is Moronao's dishonorable lust for Kaoyo which indirectly causes Enya's death.

Honzo

Kakogawa Honzo Yukikuni is the samurai responsible for guarding the mansion of Momonoi Wakasanosnake Yasuchika. Honzo prevents Enya Hangan Takasada from killing the dishonorable Moronao, thus earning him the enmity of Enya's loyal retainers.

Konami

Konami is the daughter of Kakogawa Honzo Yukikuni. She is betrothed to Obashi Rikiya, son of Obashi Yuranosuke.

Tonase

Tonase is the wife of Kakogawa Honzo Yukikuni.



Rikiya

Obashi Rikiya is son of Obashi Yuranosuke and the betrothed of Konami Yukikuni.

Sagisaka Bannai

Bannai is a retainer in the service of Moronao. He is an arrogant sycophant and is in every way complicit in Moronao's dishonorable behavior.

Kampe

Hayano Kampei is a samurai in the service of Enya Hangan Takasada. While serving as Enya's sole attendant, Kampei allows himself to be distracted by his wife Okaru. As a result, he is unable to intervene when Hangan incriminates himself by attacking Moronao.

Okaru

Okaru is the wife of Hayano Kampei. She brings shame to Kampei by distracting her husband from his duty at a critical moment. Later she is sold into prostitution to help Kampei achieve vengeance against Moronao for Lord Hangan's death.

Goemon

Hara Goemon is the chief of the samurai serving under Enya Hangan Takasada.

Kudayu

Ono Kudayu is a sly and treacherous samurai in the service of Enya Hangan Takasada. He eventually dishonors his master's memory by serving as a spy for Moronao.

Yakushiji

Yakushiji Jirozaemon is a friend to Moronao and one of two envoys who pronounce the shogun's judgment over Enya Hangan Takasada. He is angry and disrespectful toward Enya, even after Hangan honorably commits seppuku.

Ishido

Ishido Umanojo is one of two envoys who pronounce the shogun's judgment over Enya Hangan Takasada. He treats Hangan with dignity and respect.



Ono Sadakuro

Sadakuro is a samurai in the service Enya Hangan Takasada and the son of Ono Kudayu. Like his father, Sadakuro e proves unwilling to avenge his master's death. He eventually becomes a highwayman.

Yagoro

Senzaki Yagoro is one of the samurai who served Enya Hangan Takasada and now plots revenge against Moronao. Of all the samurai, he is only one who advocated not surrendering Lord Hangan's mansion upon the occasion of his death.

Ichimonjiya

Ichimonjiya is a man who purchases women to serve as prostitutes.

Jutaro

Yuzama Jutaro is one of the samurai who served Enya Hangan Takasada and now plots revenge against Moronao.

Kitahachi

Takemori Kitahachi is yet another samurai who served Enya Hangan Takasada and now plots revenge against Moronao.

Heiemon

Teraoka Heiemon is a former foot soldier still loyal to Enya Hangan Takasada. He is also brother to Okaru, wife of Hayano Kampei.

Oisha

Obashi Oisha is the wife to Obashi Yuranosuke. She is the only female in the play who actually takes up arms.

Gihei

Amakawayu Gihei is the merchant responsible for providing the weapons and armor which the ronin then use to raid Moronao. He proves himself to be impeccably honorable and reliable.



Igo

Igo is the young simpleton who looks after Gihei's son.

Yoshimatsu

Amakawaya Yoshimatsu is four-year-old son of Amakawaya Gihei.

Osono

Amakawaya Osono is the wife of Amakawaya Gihei.

Ryochiku

Ota Ryochiku is the treacherous father of Osono. He tricks Gihei into divorcing his wife.



Objects/Places

Yoshisada's Helmet

Yoshisada's helmet is the headgear once worn by the shogun Yoshisada. It is identified by the smell of Ranjatai incense.

Ranjatai Incense

Ranjatai incense is made from a rare, expensive Chinese herb.

Inchiriki Teahouse

The Inchiriki teahouse is where Yuranosuke plays at being a debauchee to trick Moronao into believing him no longer a threat.

Moronao's Mansion

Moronao's mansion is the home of the Kamakura governor. It is also the final location of the play, where the league finally exacts its revenge against the lord of Musashi.

Bamboo Bow

The bamboo bow, an invention of Yuranosuke, is a device capable of destroying reinforced shutters. When the bow string is cut, the bamboo exerts considerable force as it returns to its normal shape.

Lord Hangan's Dagger

Lord Hangan's dagger is the weapon that Lord Hangan used to commit seppuku. Later Yuranosuke would use it decapitate Moronao.

The League Contract

The league contract is a list of people participating in the conspiracy to avenge the death of Lord Hangan.



Letter from Kaoyo

The letter from Kaoyo is a written intelligence briefing intended for the eyes of Yuranosuke.

Kampey's Cottage

Kampey's cottage is where Kampei lives with his wife and in-laws.

Striped Wallet

The striped wallet is the pouch that Kampei finds on the body of Sadakuro.

Lord Hangan's Monument

Lord Hangan's monument is a metaphor for the league's plot to kill Moronao. Whenever the league talks of raising money for the monument's construction, they are truly speaking of the planned assault on Moronao's mansion.



Themes

Loyalty

Yuranosuke's story is one of loyalty. He is the idealized samurai archetype, his sense of duty outlasting even the life of his lord. In essence, this means that Yuranosuke's loyalty is in no way compelled by external forces. There are no laws governing his behavior, no promised rewards or threatened punishments. Yuranosuke acts purely of his own accord, driven by his own sense of justice and love for his lord. In this respect, Yuranosuke is never truly a ronin, as he forever serves a master.

Not all of Lord Hangan's samurai prove so loyal as Yuranosuke. Kudayu finds fault in his lord's behavior, even suggesting that Hangan was foolish to make an enemy of Moronao. Kudayu's calculated pragmatism is soulless, leaving no room for the moral reasoning necessary to justify Lord Hangan's behavior. This explains why Kudayu later enters the employ of Moronao, the sworn enemy of his lord. To Kudayu, it's not a question of loyalty, but a question of making the right friends to achieve the most desirable results.

Chushingura offers several examples of imperfect loyalty producing undesirable results. Honzo interferes with his lord's vendetta against Moronao, violating the spirit, if not the letter, of his promised non-interference. As a result, Moronao is not killed by Wakasanosuke and thus lives to offend Lord Hangan. Similarly, Kampei allows himself to be distracted by the lovely Okaru, ensuring that no one is beside Lord Hangan to dissuade him from attacking Moronao. The story's implication is obvious: Loyalty is necessary for a just society.

Craftiness

Chushingura presents a complex view of characters who utilize deception, deceit and manipulation. Cleverness itself is presented as a virtue, even among the antagonists. The moral quality of cleverness, however, is dependent largely on intent. Tonase feigns illness to ensure that her daughter can spend time with her betrothed. This act is selfless and therefore only serves to endear Tonase to the audience. She is admired for the skill of her manipulation as much as the nobility of her intent.

Other examples of social artifice are morally gray. Honzo employs a bribe to soften Moronao's heart toward Lord Wakasanosuke, thus averting a confrontation between the two lords. To do this, however, Hanzo violates the spirit of his promised non-interference. He also pretends to speak in his lord's stead, as if the bribe were offered by Lord Wakasanosuke himself, showering Moronao with the sort of empty flattery that Goemon would later characterize as unbecoming to a samurai. This compels questions about Honzo's loyalty. Does he truly act in his lord's best interest? Or does he merely seek to avoid becoming a ronin?



Surprisingly, the craftiest character in the play is also its moral paragon: Yuranosuke. He tricks friend and foe alike, ruining his own reputation to lull Moronao into a false sense of security. Like Tonase, Yuranosuke is a selfless deceiver. He has nothing to gain beyond the satisfaction of knowing that he is forwarding the will of his fallen lord. In adopting this deplorable role, Yuranosuke places loyalty above his personal honor and duty above self-interest. He is the noble liar.

Love

In Chushingura, love is often complicated by matters of duty and loyalty. Kampei's love for Okaru distracts him from his duty to Lord Hangan. Kampei's insubordination, which would be minor under most circumstances, proves very serious in context. Had Kampei not been distracted, he might have prevented the unpleasant encounter between Hangan and Moronao. This presents love as something potentially dangerous when left uncontrolled.

In Chushingura, love often requires sacrifice. Oishi must accept that her husband and son plan to die in a quest for vengeance. To do otherwise would be to deny their honor. Honzo must sacrifice his very life to insure his daughter's happiness, trading his head in exchange for Konami's marriage. Okaru must sell herself into prostitution to secure Rikiya's place in the league. Implicit in this dynamic is the notion that love is bond that shares both joy and misery.

Marriage in Chushingura is a firm and serious union. This is readily apparent in the trust between Honzo and Tonase. Honzo trusts his wife not only speak on his behalf, but even to lie for him. He expects Tonase to act as a sort of lightning rod against questions too uncomfortable for a samurai to address. Tonase would later speak as her husband, even wearing her husband swords, and Oishi would respond with the voice of Yuranosuke. Oishi even fights in Yuranosuke's stead. Marriage enhances the bond of love to such a degree that husband and wife seem occasionally to have interchangeable roles.

Style

Point of View

Unlike most plays, Chushingura has its own narrator. This narrator speaks with a prompt, much as a character might, but instead of engaging the other actors, it instead provides description, exposition and insight. Since the play was originally performed with puppets, it's easy to see the benefit of such explicit narration. Puppets cannot express the full range of human emotion. Narration, however, can emphasize subtle cues that even a human actor might find difficult to convey.

While the narration aspires to empiricism, generally describing only what one might see or hear, the narrator also explicates character motivation, therefore serving as a values judge, therefore dispelling moral ambiguity and, in so doing, affirming societal notions of right and wrong. This necessarily serves to deny audience interpretation, as the story is pre-processed by a narrative authority. One could hardly argue on Moronao's behalf, for example, when the narrator explicitly refers to the character as a "master of deceit."

The omniscient narrator paints the story in absolute terms. The audience learns that Moronao has "designs on Kaoyo" because the narrator explicitly establishes this as so. In some cases the narrator even establishes what can or cannot be, or what would have happened had different choices been made. This lends an air of artifice to the experience, reminding the audience that these are characters in a play, and not people deciding the course of their own lives.

Setting

Chushingura is set in feudal Japan near the beginning of the Ryakuo era, in the province of the Ashikaga shogun Lord Takauji. As the story unfolds, the setting shifts between the dominions of lords subordinate to shogun Takauji. The play begins in Hoki, which is initially presided over by Enya Hangan Takasada, and concludes in Musashi, where Moronao's mansion is stormed by a league of samurai allied against him.

Sets move fluidly between indoor and outdoor locations. The action in Kampei's cottage includes the exterior to accommodate the arrival of the two samurai and the departure of Okaru. During the assault on Moronao's mansion, action moves from the outer gate, into the courtyard, and finally into the mansion itself. As a production, such dynamic storytelling suggests either complex, movable sets, or else sets with considerable depth, to simulate movement between two or more adjacent areas.

Considering the presence of samurai, Chushingura features some surprisingly advanced technology. A number of scenes depict men armed with match-fired rifles, and since the impoverished ronin Kampei can afford such a weapon, it is safe to assume that rifles are cheap and readily available. At one point Honzo even mentions the "alarm



clock" beside his lord's pillow. Technology or no, however, Chushingura's preferred weapon of war, is still the sword. Rifles are presented as solely for the use of hunting.

Language and Meaning

The pervading tone of the narrative is similar to that of a morality play, with the primary focus being on proper versus improper behavior, and whether or not characters make wise decisions at critical moments in the story. Rather than a true morality play, however, populated with personified vices and virtues, Chushingura's characters are more plausibly human. Moral failing can occur in varying degrees, ranging from Kampei's insubordination to Moronao's depravity. In general, however, the characters are punished or rewarded in a manner appropriate and proportionate to their behavior.

The narrator's presence adds another dimension to Chushingura, painting with words what cannot be expressed with mere puppets and set design. This serves to blur the line between performance and the literary, as raw language is used to frame the context of what the audience sees. This also means that the entirety of the play is, at least in part, painted by the narrator's brush.

Honor and shame are significant elements of the story, with character's seeking to uphold the former and avoid the latter. This comes across in the way the characters talk and behave toward one another. Words are carefully chosen. Strong emotions are suppressed when possible. Characters that frequently break decorum, like Moronao and Yakushiji are typically lacking in virtue. Among the virtuous, only the most profound and terrible suffering permits the breaking of decorum, such as Lord Hangan's offense over Moronao's abuse, or Okaru's despair at learning of her husband's death. In such circumstances, the depth of their suffering is underscored by their loss of resolve.

Structure

The play is broken up into eleven acts of roughly equal length, save for act eight which is notably shorter than the others. The first three acts are concerned with setting up Moronao as the antagonist and establishing the great trauma which will define the remainder of the story. Acts four through seven tell of the ronin's activities in the aftermath of their master's death, as they try to survive and regroup. A slight digression, acts eight and nine are focused on the engagement of Konami and Rikiya, and the redemption of Honzo. Acts ten and eleven tell of the preparation for and, finally, the achieving of, vengeance against Moronao.

Structurally, most of the content represents dialogue between characters. The narrator sets up scene context, adds commentary and occasionally provides descriptions. Often, the narrative portion of play can become quite lengthy, with the narrator providing historical or socio-political context for the audience. The characters themselves can become similarly long-winded, particularly when they are compelled to express or justify a strong emotion or conviction. Characters move fluidly in and out of scenes, sometimes resulting in multiple back-to-back scenes in the same location.



Quotes

"Man lasts but one lifetime, his name for all eternity." —Kaoyo, Act One, pg. 33

"Women and children always make a big fuss over quarrels, but a samurai may have to pay for it with his life if he's made a slip of the tongue—even it's only a word or merely half a word." —Honzo, Act Two, pg. 39

"Honzo, hearing these polite phrases, a complete turnabout in Moronao's manner, realizes his stratagem has met with success, but still he keeps his hands politely touching the ground." —Narrator, Act Three, pg. 51

"A man who fawns on another person or flatters him doesn't deserve to be called a samurai." —Goemon, Act Four, pg. 67

"It's natural you should mistake me for a bandit. I hunt in this neighborhood, but the heavy rain has soaked my match-rope, and now I don't know what to do. Here, I'll let you hold my gun, and borrow the light myself." —Kampe, Act Five, pg. 78

"It doesn't bother me to live in poverty, let alone in a village, when I'm with the man I love." —Okaru, Act Six, pg. 88

"At first I thought that it was some trick of his to throw the enemy off track. But he has abandoned himself to his pleasures more than convincingly." —Yagoro, Act Seven, pg. 106

"They say a man's heart is like a flowing stream. I wonder if his feelings have not changed? Has not some other flower blossomed even in the shade?" —Konami, Act Eight, pg. 126

"What an insensitive woman to have for a wife! Imagine trying to sober me, just when I'm feeling good!" —Yuranosuke, Act Nine, pg. 130

"When I learned I was to be entrusted with this service, I sent my wife back to her parents, and I dismissed my employees off after the other, finding fault with all of them." —Gihei, Act Ten, pg. 153

"What superb courage! Every man who serves a master should behave as you are doing." —Samurai, Act Eleven, pg. 175

"Yes, it would be best to end our lives before our master's tomb." —Yuranosuke, Act Eleven, pg. 180



Topics for Discussion

Moronao is killed in revenge for Lord Hangan's death, but was Moronao truly responsible? Why or why not?

Gihei says that "It is a miserable thing to be a merchant." Considering the important role he played in helping the samurai, why does he feel this way?

Both Yuranosuke and Hanzo are known for their craftiness. Compare and contrast. How are they different? How are they similar?

Over the course of the play, Moronao's outrageous behavior inspires two samurai to kill him. If this behavior is typical of Moronao, how is it that he's survived this long?

Suppose that Kampei had not allowed himself to be distracted by Okaru. How might the play have been different?

Yuranosuke proposes marriage to Okaru, asking that she be his wife for three days. Why does he do this?

Once Moronao is defeated, why is the league compelled to remain in the mansion, where they will surely die once reinforcements arrive?