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Author(s)	Gene Moskowitz
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Shinji Ten No Amijima
 (Double Suicide At Amijima)
 (JAPANESE)

Venice, Sept. 9.

Toho International release of Hyogen-sha-Nippon Art Theatre Guild production. Features Kichiemon Nakamura, Shima Iwashita, Hosei Komatsu, Yusuke Takita. Directed by Masahiro Shinoda. Screenplay, Taeko Tomioka, Shinoda, Toru Takenitsu from puppet play by Monzaemon Chikamatsu; camera, Toichiro Narushima; music, Toru Takenitsu; art director, Kiyoshi Awazu. Reviewed at Venice Film Fest, Aug. 30, '69. Running Time, 165 MINS.

Jihei Kichiemon Nakamura
 Koharu, Osan Shima Iwashita
 Tahei Hosei Komatsu
 Magoemon Yusuke Takita
 Madame Kamatari Fujiwara
 Gozaemon Yoshi Kato
 Mother Shizue Kawarazaki
 Osugi Tokie Hidari

Stylized tale of a hopeless love in a society that has too rigid an ethical, social and economic frame makes for an anguished but riveting statement about love versus duty and the tragic aspects of codes that will brook no change or contestation and leave only one romanticized alternative via suicide.

Film is true to its derivation from the works of the great 18th century writer Monzaemon Chikamatsu, the Nipponese Shakespeare, who wrote mostly for the famed Bunraku Puppets, large puppets manipulated by black hooded men. Film also has modern resonances in its dissent by two lovers whose erotic attachment bucks the system but is destroyed by it.

It thus runs a thin line between fantasy and heightened reality and sets up a tragic, beautiful paean to love and freedom that transcends place, time and the ages. The black-hooded figures of the puppet theatre are also in the film and gain in dimension from their more subservient role to the puppets in the theatre.

They serve as a sort of Greek Chorus to the tragedy and even exude compassion although there is nothing they can do about it. A fairly prosperous paper shopowner with two children is in love with a courtesan in bondage via a sale by her family to a local house. Running into debt and unable to buy her out of her place he decides their only way out is a double suicide.

His brother comes to see the woman in disguise, but finds she does not want to really die and enrages the lover who is eavesdropping. But she has done it all due to a letter from his wife. The man supposedly gives up, but when he hears that a hated rival is buying her he realizes she may kill herself.

The wife confesses her letter and they decide to sell all their goods to save the girl, but are stopped by the wife's father who drags her off. The man finds his mistress

and goes off to a temple where he kills her in a heartbreakingly beautiful finale after they have made love in a cemetery that sums up the dignity, erotic beauty and purity of their love over the demands of an unbending system that has tried to deny instinct and desire for its own protection leaving no room for needed change.

This is a difficult film since its stylized dash leaves no place for dramatic ease but pares its theme to essentials using stylized settings, playing and progression. There is no sentimentality, but a transcen-

ding, timeless dealing with the tragic human problem of balancing the opposites of duty and emotion.

Director Masahiro Shinoda has a name in Japan, but this is his first film to find its way to a Western Fest and should be an eye opener for buffs and more demanding and evolving filmgoers. It appears an art item that may have to be nursed, but could find both youthful and mature audiences on its probing into the essence of life.

Pic is stunningly lensed, played and directed. Mosk.