

Kabuki Play Guide: Love Letters from the Pleasure Quarters (Kuruwa Bunshô 廊文章)

Source: [https://enmokudb.kabuki.ne.jp/repertoire_en/love-letters-from-the-pleasure-quarters_\(kuruwa-bunsho\)/?tab=home](https://enmokudb.kabuki.ne.jp/repertoire_en/love-letters-from-the-pleasure-quarters_(kuruwa-bunsho)/?tab=home)

Love Letters from the Pleasure Quarters

廊文章

Kuruwa Bunsho



Overview



Characters



Kabuki Plus

Lover's quarrel between a young man and Osaka's star courtesan

Whereas Edo Kabuki was typified by bravado masculine characters like Sukeroku, Osaka Kabuki-goers enjoyed more modest and gentle types like Izaemon, who had no money or power but abundant charm. The story, amounting to little more than a lover's quarrel between the pouting Izaemon and the glamorous courtesan Yugiri, has remained an audience favorite for centuries.

Synopsis

by Izuka Misa

The paper kimono

Youngsters are busy preparing for New Year's in front of the Osaka geisha house Yoshidaya,. A man appears wearing an old, dusty straw hat and paper kimono, looking very cold. He requests a meeting with the owner. Everyone mocks him, saying this is not a place for such a humble person. The owner of Yoshidaya emerges and discovers that the man is Izaemon, the son of Osaka's biggest merchant, and immediately invites him inside.

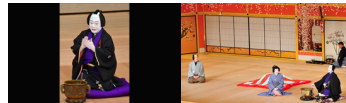


[Left] Izaemon (Kataoka Nizaemon) May 2013 Kabukiza Theatre

[Right] [from left] Kizaemon (Kataoka Gato) , Izaemon (Sakata Tojiuro) November 2008 Kabukiza Theatre

VIP room inside geisha house

Izaemon spent a large amount of his father's money on the famed courtesan Yugiri. He was thus disowned and now has no money or place to stay. He heard a rumor that Yugiri was ill worrying about him, and came to see her despite his reduced status.



[Left] Izaemon (Sakata Tojiuro) December 2012 Kabukiza Theatre

[Right] [from left] Kizaemon (Bando Yajuro) , Okisa (Kataoka Hidetaro) , Izaemon (Kataoka Nizaemon) May 2013 Kabukiza Theatre

Lover's quarrel

Izaemon is upset to learn that Yugiri is entertaining a customer and laments at her unfaithfulness. Yugiri comes into the room wearing a hair band signifying that she has been sick. The lovers immediately begin to quarrel. Yugiri tearfully admonishes Izaemon for his hurtful talk, but their doubts soon disappear, and they make up. A money box is delivered from Izaemon's family announcing that they have finally approved of the courtesan and will accept her into the family. Ahead of the new year the next day, the Yoshida shop is full of joy.



[Left] Yugiri (Bando Tamasaburo) May 2013 Kabukiza Theatre

[Center] [from left] Yugiri (Nakamura Kaishun) , Izaemon (Sakata Tojiuro) November 2008 Kabukiza Theatre

[Right] [from left] Izaemon (Kataoka Nizaemon) , Yugiri (Bando Tamasaburo) May 2013 Kabukiza Theatre

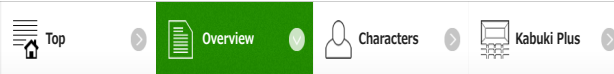
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Love Letters from the Pleasure Quarters

廓文章

Kuruwa Bunsho



Overview

by Hashimoto Hiroki

Title	Love Letters from the Pleasure Quarters
Writer	Unknown
Premiere	Bunraku: May 1793, Osaka Kabuki: October 1808, Edo
Overview	<p>This is the Kabuki version of the "Yoshida Scene" from a puppet play by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Japan's greatest playwright. It was based on a real-life love affair between the son of a large merchant and the courtesan Yugini, famous for her intelligence and beauty. Yugini's untimely death in January 1678 was mourned all over Osaka. She featured in many plays, starting with <i>New Year's Without Yugini</i> just one month after her death. This play is the most famous in the Yugini series and has been performed repeatedly since its opening.</p> <p>Sakata Tojiro I, a pioneer of <i>wagoto</i> (gentle, handsome male) characters, was particularly known for his portrayal of Izaemon, and played in 18 productions of <i>New Year's Without Yugini</i>. Izaemon is still regarded as one of the principal <i>wagoto</i> roles in Kabuki. The main feature of the role is his typical Osaka charm, making him particularly popular among women despite his lack of power or money. The character famously wears a paper kimono as a symbol of his poverty. This show is one of the Nakamura Ganjiro household's Twelve Select Plays. The acting family of Kataoka Nizaemon uses old-style stage directions, such as long poles with candles to provide mood lighting for characters when they appear on the <i>hanamichi</i>.</p> <p>★main graphic★</p> <p>[from left] Okisa (Kataoka Hidetaro) 、 Kizaemon (Kataoka Gato) 、 Izaemon (Nakamura Ganjiro) 、 Yugini (Nakamura Jakuemon) November 2004 Kabukiza Theatre</p>

External links

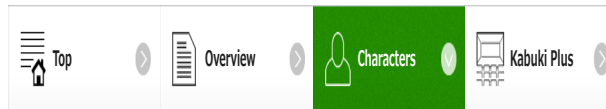
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Kuruwa Bunsho



Characters

Fujiya Izaemon

Yugin's lover. Formerly living a comfortable life as the son of a big merchant, but was disowned for his dissolute lifestyle. He goes into hiding bearing a large amount of debt.

Yugin

A high-ranking courtesan in Ogiya, a pleasure house in Osaka's pleasure quarters. She is known for both her beauty and intelligence and promises to marry Izaemon. However, she falls ill after he was disowned and gone missing. In the original story, she had a seven-year-old child with Izaemon.

Yoshidaya Kizaemon

Owner of pleasure house Yoshidaya. He has a kind nature and worries about the young couple.

Okisa

Wife of Yoshidaya owner.

Awa no Daijin (wealthy man from Awa)

Comes to Osaka from the provinces in hopes of meeting Yugin. He pretends to be a rich man from the countryside, but his unmannered behavior gives him away.



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Kabuki Play Guide

Japanese

Kabuki

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Kuruwa Bunshô

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Characters

Kabuki Plus

Kabuki Plus

by Iizuka Misa

Wagoto

The "wa" implies a gentle, softer acting style. Began in Osaka during the late 17th century, these roles often feature a high-ranking man who has lost his status because of a dissolute life in the pleasure quarters. The actor's own personality is an important element, and the mood and attractions can change significantly depending on the performer.

Yatsushi

Son of a high-ranking nobleman or rich merchant who falls into trouble by taking up with courtesans. His untidy hair and weak appearance provoke pity from women.

Tsukkorobashi (a pushover)

notable!

A man so weak that a single shove would look to topple him. Handsome and kind but does not understand the world. He falls in love whole-heartedly. Examples include Izaemon in this show and Yôgorô in *Hikimado* (*The Skylight*). There is another type of gentleman's role known as *pintokona*, a tougher and more straightforward character.

Keisei-kai (Courtesan buying)

A genre featuring a beautiful couple in the pleasure quarters. *Keisei* literally means a beauty who destroys a kingdom and a castle, referring to a high-ranking prostitute. Sakata Tôjirô I played the wagoto role in this genre to great acclaim in numerous plays, establishing an entire field of acting.

Ōtayu

The highest rank of courtesan. They are trained from a young age and, with their beauty and intelligence, were allowed to meet noblemen and lords on even terms. Some famous courtesans like Yoshino Ōtayu and Takao Ōtayu became legendary and served as models for Kabuki dramas. Yûgiri Ōtayu, a real-life courtesan in the Osaka pleasure quarters during the late 17th century, was a model for many plays after her young death. She was a major star among the commoners.

Paper kimono

notable!

Kimono made of recycled paper. It is a symbol indicating that the character is so poor that he cannot afford proper cloth. Looking closely at Izaemon's paper kimono, we see that there are letters – in fact, the kimono is made of love letters from Yûgiri. Courtesans are said to never fall in love, so getting heartfelt letters from Ōtayu, the highest courtesan of all, and making a kimono from them is greater than gold. It is the ultimate luxury kimono.

Thousand-mat room

Stage set giving impression of layer upon layer of rooms extending into the palace using paper screens. It can be a painted backdrop using perspective or layers of screens indicating depth.

Hair band signifying sickness

notable!

A hair band using wrinkled cloth dyed with the root of a purple plant. In Kabuki, this signifies a sick person if the knot is placed on the left forehead. It is also used by love-struck characters such as Yûgiri. A long strand hangs from the band, making the character look weak and erotic.

700 kanme

There were three types of money in circulation in the Edo Period: gold, silver and copper. Edo mainly used gold, while Osaka and Kyoto used silver. Copper was for everyday use. The 700 kanme quoted in the play, referring to silver, is equivalent in today's terms, by conservative estimate, to around ¥800 million. Izaemon boasts that a debt of 700 kanme would not bother him, suggesting just how rich his family must be.

Awa no Daijin

Awa no Daijin (wealthy man from Awa) burns with jealousy at Yûgiri's love for Izaemon. In the drama *Yûgiri Awa Naruto* (Yûgiri and the *Naruto Straits of Awa*), the basis for this play, the character is the samurai Hiraoka Sakon. Izaemon and Yûgiri have a baby that is taken by Hiraoka, who then attempts to lure Yûgiri as a wet nurse. Hiraoka's wife, wanting to check out this Yûgiri, disguises herself as a samurai, goes to the brothel and requests Yûgiri's service. Izaemon spots the "couple" and becomes jealous. This incident is not featured in *Love Letters*, but the play still carries a sense that Awa no Daijin has an ulterior motive.

Kamigata Kabuki and various Izaemons

notable!

Acting families considered particularly representative of Kamigata (Osaka) Kabuki include the Nari-koma/Yamashiro families (Nakamura Ganjirô, Sakata Tôjirô) and Matsushima family (Kataoka Nizaemon). From the Meiji to early Showa Periods (late 19th to early 20th centuries), Ganjirô I (Nari-koma), praised as the "face of Osaka", made *Love Letters* one of his Twelve Select Plays. In his version, only one young actor shows up at the Yoshidaya brothel and another couple make an early exit, leaving the rest of the play to a sweet, intimate rendezvous between Izaemon (Ganjirô) and Yûgiri. The script hints at a child between them, making for a rather mature atmosphere.
In contrast, the Kataoka version (Matsushima) does not mention a child, and the pair perform in the style of young lovers. The dialogue in the reception room is light-hearted, and a character appears in some productions during the couple's argument to calm Yûgiri down. When the treasure chest is delivered, everyone joyously gathers in the reception room as if a celebratory banquet is about to begin. For a more classic feel, some directors use a candle on a long pole (see below) to cast a light on Izaemon as he appears on the *hanamichi*, an innovation introduced by Nizaemon XI (1857-1934).
Kamigata Kabuki is known for letting the actors make use of their own personalities rather than relying on fixed acting styles. The families pay heed to traditions of prior generations but incorporate the idiosyncrasies of individual actors, making each production unique.

Sashidashi (candle lighting)

This is also known as "face lighting". A candle is placed at the end of a long pole and held close to the lead character's face. Theaters in the old days had dim lighting, so the poles were used by assistants to highlight the actor, much like spotlights today. They are still used occasionally in plays to give scenes an old-fashioned feeling.

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