Manga Shakespeare and the Hermeneutic Problems of “Double Access”

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The adaptation of Shakespeare in comic books and graphic novels is one of the myriad contemporary appropriations of Shakespeare that is ripe for receiving serious critical attention. Now widely available through mass production and distribution are various forms of “graphic Shakespeare,” aimed particularly at a children or teen readership, and heavily endorsed by educational institutions.1 Since the publication of Neil Gaiman’s influential graphic novel The Sandman (1988–1996), which appropriated and reinvented the characters of A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Tempest along with the character of Shakespeare himself, “the scholarly community has finally recognized the significance of comics and especially Shakespeare in the comics” (Wetmore 171). Yet the emergent medium of graphic Shakespeare raises intriguing questions that literary critics have just begun to explore. As Douglas Lanier has argued, any translation of Shakespeare into pop culture, any new incarnation of “Shakespop,” suggests “an interplay between two cultural systems—high and pop culture—that operate in parallel realms, two bodies of reference, sets of cultural institutions, canons of aesthetic standards, modes of constructing cultural authority” (16). Given that popular adaptations of Shakespeare involve a “contest for authority between the two cultural systems and the institutional interests they represent” (Lanier 16), a critic who sets about to interpret a graphic rendering of a Shakespeare text must necessarily negotiate between high-culture and pop-culture interests. The UK-based series known as Manga Shakespeare is one recent graphic incarnation of Shakespeare that allows us to interrogate the double focus of adaptation as a translation of high culture into pop-culture terms. What new interpretive challenges are created when Shakespeare, the sanctified, centuries-old poet of the Western literary canon, gets transposed into a popular modern Japanese graphic art form?

Manga has emerged as one of the newest and trendiest ways to remake Shakespeare for popular culture. Manga, or Japanese comics, is the fastest-growing comics market for Western readers. Heike Jüngst points out that “Manga have become the largest segment of translated comics in the Western world” (50). In 2006 Paul Gravett announced, “This is not some passing craze or flavour of the month”; Manga has achieved a “phenomenal success across Europe as well as in the States, where over the past four years they have become by far

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1 The most recent comics series of Shakespeare’s plays include Black Dog’s Graphic Shakespeare Library, published by Black Dog and Leventhal; the new Classical Comics series, available in three separate reading-skill levels; and the Manga edition published by Wiley.
the fastest growing category of book sold in America” (“Manga: An Introduction”). Anne Allison emphasizes just how enormously “the global market in Japanese youth products has skyrocketed. Called the country’s GNC (gross national cool) by the American reporter Douglas McGray (2002), these exports now exceed what had been the leading industries in Japan’s postwar economy: automobiles and steel” (13). Though the reading of manga in Japan is by no means confined to youth culture, manga exports from Japan, as well as manga produced in the European and American markets, have a special appeal to young people as a means of resisting the established values of high culture. Manga discourse—not just the reading of manga but the viewing of anime (Japanese animation) and participation in fan-based activities such as conventions, cosplay (fans dressing up as their favourite manga characters), online chat groups and fan-fiction—provides a community for young manga readers that is in many ways “incomprehensible” to their parents (Allison 13). The Manga Shakespeare series capitalizes on these new reading habits of teens, merging what Michael Bristol has called the “Bardbiz”—the Shakespeare industry—with what we might call the “Mangabiz”—the growing industry that supports all the forms of manga discourse.

The UK-based Manga Shakespeare series manages the controlling commercial interests of youth culture alongside the academic investment of high culture, setting these two “Shakespeares” side by side on the page. Though the British Manga Shakespeare is not the only graphic adaptation of Shakespeare’s plays, it is arguably one of the most artistically and critically interesting and has experienced remarkable financial success as a published graphic series. Since its inception in 2007, it already boasts no fewer than fourteen volumes of abridged manga versions of Shakespeare’s plays. Its publisher SelfMadeHero Press bills it “a breakout series, . . . introducing teens to a new kind of Bard” and appealing to both “reluctant readers and manga fans alike.” As I suggest later through an examination of the Manga Shakespeare volumes Romeo and Juliet and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, what sets the Manga Shakespeare series apart is the sensitive attention to the manga medium, conveying the kind of “double intention” that Bristol reminds us is inherent in the afterlife of any Shakespeare play (13). Every performance of a Shakespeare play is created by the “dialogue between the historical moment of its creation and the contemporaneity of its mise-en-scène” (Bristol 13). This dialogic principle applies as well to graphic revisions of Shakespeare, as indeed to all adaptation. The graphic reworkings of Shakespeare volumes provide a translation that keeps the “interplay between two cultural systems” dynamic and open for the reader. The Manga Shakespeare Romeo and Juliet and A Midsummer Night’s Dream exemplify the strength of popular appropriations of Shakespeare, as Lanier has articulated it: they generate new meanings, providing “an important means by which notions about Shakespeare’s cultural significance is created, extended, debated, revised, and renewed” (Lanier 19–20). Manga Shakespeare entails the same kind of cultural exchange as other popular appropriations of Shakespeare, which, as Hulbert, Wetmore, and York aptly explain, give the traditionally sanctioned Shakespeare “street cred” while giving the potentially radical youth-culture “cultural cred” (7–8).
Clearly the *Manga Shakespeare Collection* aims to capture a corner of the readership market that otherwise might not be engaging with Shakespeare. This graphic reinvention of Shakespeare is seen by many educators, parents, and students as the ideal way to help struggling young readers “get Shakespeare.” Like so many fetishized consumer products that make up the Bardbiz, *Manga Shakespeare* creates a parodic distance with the Bard as a representative of elite art. Jostein Gripsrud calls this kind of ironic distance a “double access” to both high and low culture at the same time. Gripsrud’s notion of “double access” provides a helpful means of prying open the hermeneutic problems posed by *Manga Shakespeare*. *Manga Shakespeare* functions as a point of “double access” to Shakespeare, understood on the one hand as a high-culture representative of Britishness and traditional literary studies, and on the other hand as a new, increasingly cool popular icon of youth culture. The *Manga Shakespeare* volumes have a wide appeal not just to pop-culture fans such as manga enthusiasts and graphic critics, but also to literary critics and Shakespeare scholars who represent the aesthetic interests of academic culture and at the same time are increasingly called to assume a new pop-culture role, particularly as educators who must become the “fans of fans.” As Fredric Jameson pointed out in 1993, at the historical moment when Cultural Studies was emerging as a new postdisciplinary area of study, the intellectual studying cultural phenomena can now be positioned as a fan, or indeed as a “fan of fans”; however, it is crucial to recognize the distinction between critics and the fans whose affective investments they study, “the distance that has to be overcome between the ‘real’ fans and their academic ethnographer” (42). Critics who trace the appropriations of Shakespeare in popular culture may well harbour what Richard Burt calls the “academic fantasy . . . that the cultural critic can occupy all positions, be the virtuoso, the one who can cross over, do it all” (Burt 15-17). But, despite the apparent closing of the gap between Shakespeare critics and fans of Shakespeare’s various reincarnations in popular culture, these two groups are separated by differing investments—which cannot help but lead to differing readings of the plays, that is, to different Shakespeares altogether. Those from the high-culture camp, analyzing the *Manga Shakespeare* texts as critics and educators, need to acknowledge not just the various hermeneutic possibilities that circulate in readings of *Manga Shakespeare* but also, as Gripsrud makes clear, their own stake as high-culture advocates in the interpretive process.

**Duellling Shakespeares and the Role of *Manga Shakespeare***

*Manga Shakespeare* capitalizes on the paradox that Shakespeare is at once a popular commodity and a beacon of high culture. The series’ “double access” to the Bard keeps in place the divide between popular culture and high culture; despite his ubiquitous presence in popular culture, “for most observers Shakespeare, as the icon of high or ‘proper’ culture, seems to stand apart from popular culture” (Lanier 3). As Graham Holderness puts it, even though Shakespeare is “a component of popular culture” whose name is learned through “advertisements, television comedies, the names of pubs and beers,” “Shakespeare” resonates as a “universal symbol of high art, of ‘culture,’ of education, of the English spirit”
Shakespeare remains, foremost in academia and the education system, a marker of high culture, even if pop-culture aficionados of the plays continue to give Shakespeare new meanings and new use-value. In Lanier’s words, “Because . . . Shakespeare symbolizes high art in general, the distinction between ‘Shakespeare’ and ‘popular culture’ epitomizes one of the great divides in the culture of the last century, the division between highbrow and lowbrow” (Lanier 3).

Admittedly, this connection between Shakespeare and high culture has not always held: Lawrence Levine has convincingly shown that, while Shakespeare in the twentieth century was a badge of the elite, in the nineteenth century, particularly in America, Shakespeare was a staple of popular culture. The resurgence of new mediations and reinventions of Shakespeare in the last decade has led some to posit a new prominence for Shakespeare in twenty-first-century popular culture (Gans 150). It is true that “What’s different about the way Shakespeare signifies in 1990s America . . . is that his status is contradictory in youth culture: he is both cool and uncool, both a signifier of elite and of popular culture, in part because of the way he is now positioned inside and outside of academia” (Burt 6). The explosion of Shakespearean adaptation since the 1990s may even reignite “the utopian desire that Shakespeare might be made genuinely popular if only his work could be made consonant with popular tastes and practices” (Lanier 46). However, even though Shakespeare “serves important iconic functions in both canonical and popular culture,” one must concede that “Shakespeare is not a dominant component of popular culture” (Lanier 18).

Shakespeare will always be linked to high as well as popular culture because of the paradox that, while he is immanent in Western culture, he is not immediately accessible. The need to translate Shakespeare so that mainstream (youth) culture can understand the plays is precisely what has led to so many recent teen adaptations of Shakespeare, which must be accessible, interesting, and relevant in order to engage a popular teen audience (Hulbert, Wetmore, and York 1–2). Yet overseeing and indeed sanctioning the pop-culture adaptations remain largely the province of critics and scholars, those “culture professionals” who occupy the upper-middle-class position of high culture (Gans 7). To borrow Claudius’s words in Hamlet, “You must translate. ’Tis fit we understand them” (4.1.2). Appropriately enough, Claudius’s words serve as the epigraph to the “plain English” No Fear Shakespeare editions of Shakespeare’s plays (Hulbert, Wetmore, and York 18), and could well articulate the driving motivation behind the proliferation of reduced versions of the plays, study guides, and a whole host of educational tools designed by those in the know—in the first instance, scholars and critics—to make Shakespeare intelligible for those who need to know.

The reader’s positioning through high or popular culture, or indeed through a “double access” to both, has obvious implications for the interpretation of Shakespeare. We may take as a preliminary example Claudius’s lines from Hamlet quoted above. In an ironic twist, Hulbert, Wetmore, and York misinterpret (or appropriate) Claudius’s lines by reading the opening of act 4 in a way that is wholly unorthodox and even, from the perspectives of
the original Folio and Quarto versions of the play, erroneous. Claudius is speaking of Hamlet’s sighs, and uses the royal “we”: “we must translate them.” Hulbert, Wetmore, and York inexplicably take “we” to refer to Claudius and Gertrude, who want to translate Hamlet’s “sighs,” and say that Claudius is speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in this scene. By contrast, the standard scholarly treatment of the scene interprets the “sighs” that Claudius wants to “translate” as belonging to Gertrude, who has just been upset about her wild encounter with Hamlet in the previous scene, and would therefore be the signified “you” whom Claudius addresses. Many editors stress the continuity between act 4, scene 1, and the last scene of act 3: this reading makes more sense of Claudius’s lines (see, e.g., Ewbank 346). The interpretation of Hulbert, Wetmore, and York is less convincing, particularly because it is not supported by any scholarly apparatus or critical conversation; one wonders whether their reading of the play is built on a popular version or a common understanding of the play. My need to offer a corrective to their unscholarly reading is telling, certainly, of my own allegiance to and interpellation in academic culture. The difference in interpretation intriguingly underscores the divide between high-culture and popular-culture Shakespeares, and shows how a “cross-over” conversation between the two generates multiple interpretations.

If Shakespeare still largely functions as a high-culture marker, the sanctioned (mis)recognition of Shakespeare endorsed by scholars, critics, and educators represents prime “cultural capital,” to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term (Forms of Capital). Educators, particularly those at the secondary and undergraduate level, may occupy a liminal position, attempting to negotiate between academic imperatives and popular taste, but until recently they have largely affirmed the sentiments of bardolators such as Harold Bloom, who expresses Shakespeare’s dominance in the starkest of terms: “If any author has become a mortal god, it must be Shakespeare,” for “Only the Bible has a circumference that is everywhere, like Shakespeare’s” (Bloom 3). Many educators of young people have in their practices and policies maintained Shakespeare’s position as “the fixed center of the Western canon” (Bloom 3). As Alan Sinfield has shown, Shakespeare forms such a large part of the education system because he “has been made to speak mainly for the right” (159), and it is the right, or the dominant classes, that have controlled the curriculum. Yet Sinfield insists that this need not be the case: “Shakespeare does not have to work in a conservative manner. His plays do not have to signify in the ways they have customarily been made to” (161); “he does not have to be a crucial stage in the justification of elitism in education and culture. He has been appropriated for certain practices and attitudes, and can be reappropriated for others” (161). Sinfield traces in the British education system the recent emergence of “radical teachers” who seek to engage their students with a politically and culturally relevant Shakespeare (Sinfield 175). This very movement away from a conservative, universalist, and transcendent Shakespeare has led to the creation of educational tools such as the Manga Shakespeare series. At its best in the Romeo and Juliet and Midsummer Night’s Dream volume, Manga
Shakespeare adopts an edgy innovative approach to the “Bard,” as the so-called great purveyor of universal Truths.

The reason that Manga Shakespeare has achieved such critical acclaim, especially by educators and school librarians, is that it provides a highly pragmatic means of getting teens to take their necessary dose of Shakespeare. The economic motivation for the creation of the series certainly stems from the requirement that high-school and undergraduate students need to understand Shakespeare and, particularly in the British educational system, must write examinations on Shakespeare. Indeed, SelfMadeHero has cashed in on Shakespeare and on manga, offering, in addition to its growing number of volumes of Manga Shakespeare, a growing array of resources for educators of Shakespeare, including a website that advertises workshop programs, and presents “learning resources,” along with a “social network” or blog group (mangashakespeare.ning.com), and other interactive technology to support the published volumes.

Since its launch just a few years ago, the Manga Shakespeare series has won numerous awards and critical recognition: it was featured among the “Best Graphic Novels of 2008” in The Independent; declared one of “25 Essential Manga” by NEO Magazine; awarded the UK Young Publisher of the Year 2008 Award; recommended by Learning and Teaching Scotland and by the Globe’s Children’s Book Recommendation Panel; chosen by the US Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) as “Best Books for the Teen Age” and “Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers.” The slick Manga Shakespeare website is crammed with testimonials from reputed magazines, educational agencies, school librarians, teachers, and parents. The reviews are representative of the general enthusiasm of educators for the series: The Bookseller in November 2008 praises Manga Shakespeare because “Manga is the most popular form of graphic novels among the young, with a generation of British youth weaned on watching animation from Japan and reading manga.” The School Librarian Magazine in Winter 2008 calls the Manga Shakespeare Macbeth “Perfect for upper primaries, as well as older readers too . . . . the story has all the elements to excite the imaginations of youngsters”; and goes on to declare, “This whole series is developing into a very useful resource as it has such resonancy with youngsters.”

Significantly, the Manga Shakespeare website assures the would-be consumer of the “educational quality” of the series, saying, “The Manga Shakespeare editorial team is led by a leading Shakespeare scholar and an educational editor. Advised by teachers and other educationalists, the team is expert in making serious works of literature more accessible.” Moreover, the website presents manga as “a proven teaching tool,” and points out that “in the UK, use of manga and other new media has been endorsed by The Scottish Office

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NATE, The Reading Agency, and the Quality and Curriculum Authority in meeting the needs of students studying English.”

*Manga Shakespeare* is one of the hottest topics in recent publishing conferences, as well, such as the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2008, where Gravett formed a panel on *Manga Shakespeare*, along with publisher Emma Hayley from SelfMade Hero and one of the series artists, Robert Deas. In the conference panel, Hayley described the origins of the SelfMadeHero publishing house, which was inspired by the doubling of manga sales in 2004 and supported by the talents of experienced adaptor Richard Appignanesi (well known for the graphic volumes in the Introducing Series), textual adviser Nicholas de Somogyi, and a host of trained manga artists. Hayley noted that “commissioning homegrown talents to create manga would have been impossible ten years ago as the influence of Japanese comics and animation was then at a very early stage, but today a whole generation has developed, greatly encouraged by such initiatives as the competitions run by IMAF, the International Manga and Anime Festival, TokyoPop’s Rising Stars, the Japanese Government’s International Manga Award and since last year the Embassy of Japan in London’s contest, Manga Jiman or ‘Manga Pride’” (Gravett, “Scottish Manga”). In addition, Hayley pointed out that “the annual volumes of Best New Manga and the Sweat Drop group” has led to the creation of a new generation of manga artists in the UK. So clearly there are strong market forces influencing the viability and popularity of *Manga Shakespeare* as a cultural phenomenon straddling high and popular culture. What becomes clear even from this brief review of the reception of *Manga Shakespeare* is just how strongly the motives of educators continue to drive the production and consumption of the series. Shakespeare’s stock may be way up in popular culture, thanks to what one reviewer calls the “new life” breathed into Shakespeare by manga adaptation (*Sunday Express*, September 2007). But we cannot overlook the fact that “Shakespeare,” as a “set of social practices,” in Holderness’s phrase (94), is still being controlled and disseminated by high-culture interests. As an academic coming to Shakespeare with a particular professional interest (motivated by economic as well as what appear to be more detached aesthetic factors), I have a stake, already acknowledged, in the interpretive process of *Manga Shakespeare*, even as I try to participate in the pop-culture comics form as a “fan of fans.” In his article “‘High Culture’ Revisited,” Gripsrud persuasively refutes the assumption that “the distinction between high and low culture is ‘in fact’ outmoded and only kept alive in reactionary ideological rhetoric” (195). On the contrary, Gripsrud claims, the distinction between high and low culture is “still alive as a social fact throughout the western world,” and therefore “a total dismissal of the distinction between high and low culture may serve as an ideological veiling of the social positions of researchers and other academic intellectuals, hindering a recognition of the political limitations, obligations, and possibilities inherent in these positions” (195). Gripsrud makes the simple but significant point that “Some people have access to both high and low culture, but the majority has only access to the low one”; and the “dividing lines between ‘double-access’ and ‘single access’ audiences” are linked to “significant social
characteristics, such as income and education,” in other words to the “social formations we call classes” (199). In fact, “The double access to the codes and practices of both high and low culture is a class privilege” (199). Gripsrud stresses the need for “double access” audiences to cultivate the “intellectual distanciation which is a prerequisite for all forms of critical reflection (and thus for conscious, ‘strategic’ political action as well)” (Gripsrud 204).

Reading Manga, Reading Shakespeare: The Critical Imperative

Despite their technical sophistication, in general “manga . . . are not considered products of high culture” (Ingelsrud and Allen 50). In contrast to Shakespeare’s texts, Manga Shakespeare is marked as a product of lowbrow or popular culture in the ways that Harrington and Bielby suggest all such products are (6): the manga texts are more immediately accessible, more emotional and less distant, as well as less moored to an identifiable single author (the dominance of the “genius” Bard being supplanted by the controlling hand of the lesser-known mangaka, or manga artist). Though the Manga Shakespeare volumes juxtapose an appeal to popular culture (emotional involvement with the graphic text) with an appeal to high culture (aesthetic contemplation of the verbal text), in important ways the volumes also unsettle this opposition. In the case of Manga Shakespeare, what resonates strongly is Gripsrud’s point that “there is a fluidity between the high and low realms of culture in the area of ‘artistic’ texts” (204). At first it might seem as though the Manga Shakespeare volumes A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Romeo and Juliet support Bourdieu’s distinction between high culture’s focus on aesthetic disinterest and popular culture’s focus on emotional engagement. However, Manga Shakespeare complicates this distinction, raising questions about what cultural competence—that is, reading—means for those in both high-culture and popular-culture camps. For the reading of Shakespeare in manga form can be as sophisticated and critically demanding a process as the reading of Shakespeare in a scholarly edition—even if the popular reading because of the images may more immediately provoke the reader’s emotional engagement with the characters and actions.

According to Bourdieu, high culture is characterized by the “pure gaze,” an attitude of detached aesthetic contemplation and disinterestedness which involves a deliberate distancing from the necessities of “ordinary life.” Bourdieu contrasts the “pure gaze” or “pure taste” with “barbarous taste,” the popular response (30–32). Works of art that feature formal experimentation and the defamiliarization of accepted conventions invoke the pure gaze, and are marked by “the sacred character, separate and separating, of high culture” (33). “Pure taste” refuses what it regards as “the ‘facile’ involvement and ‘vulgar’ enjoyment” of the popular response (4), a response which typically affirms the “continuity between art and life” (4) and privileges “norms of morality or agreeableness” (5). Popular works of art, especially the theatre and cinema, demand both “the spectator’s participation in the show and collective participation in the festivity which it occasions” (34).
But how might audience responses to Shakespeare’s plays fit Bourdieu’s distinction? From their earliest performances, the plays have drawn both the “pure gaze” and the “popular gaze.” For Shakespeare from the beginning is a popular playwright who offers audiences the kind of character identification and neat plot symmetry that can indeed support “norms of morality or agreeableness.” Audiences have found much that is agreeable—the conventional and conservative happy endings of the comedies, the mirroring of life and morality in the histories, the humanist consolations of the tragedies, the “most high miracle” (Tempest, 5.1.170) of restored losses in the romances. At the same time, Shakespeare’s plays are always already marked by defamiliarizing moments and scenes that break the fourth wall, alienate us from the characters, or turn our focus from the object of representation (life or “nature”) to the mode of representation (art). As is typical of high culture, the plays advertise their own formal experiments and invoke the aesthetic response, a refusal to “take things seriously” (Bourdieu 34).

On one hand, the Manga Shakespeare series appeals to the “popular gaze” by emphasizing “norms of morality or agreeableness”; on the other hand, it appeals to the “pure gaze” by advertising its own formal experiments. It is significant that the textual adapter, Richard Appignanesi, chooses to translate the text into the popular visual medium of manga but at the same time retains many of Shakespeare’s lines rather than resorting to modern paraphrase. So the language of the 1590s to a large extent survives in Appignanesi’s relatively “text heavy” adaptations. The inclusion of Shakespeare’s lines defamiliarizes the manga volumes’ gestures toward modernization of the script. Shakespeare’s lines, albeit sometimes truncated or cut off from their context, are juxtaposed with the manga pictures, with few textual notes and very limited apparatus to aid the reader in converting them to modern paraphrase, except for a few captions that stand in for stage directions, indicating scenes or characters. Contemplating Shakespeare’s language obviously requires the intellectual detachment and disinterestedness associated with the pure gaze of high culture. The manga art, however, has a more direct emotional impact on the reader that can effect an identification with the characters and provide more immediate access to Shakespeare than does the dense script.

If the medium of manga appeals to the popular gaze, the very act of seeing (the gaze, whether “pure” or “popular”) depends upon having acquired cultural competence, either through the “scholastic” or “pedantic” training supported by educational institutions, or through a “domestic” education acquired outside formal education: “the ‘eye’ is a product of history reproduced by education” (Bourdieu 3). Indeed, the “double access” to Manga Shakespeare requires cultural competence in “reading” both Shakespeare’s lines and the manga illustrations; a “double access” reader can decode neither Shakespeare nor manga “naturally,” without practice in making the conventions intelligible. The emotional response to Manga Shakespeare in the end, then, depends on the intellectual ability to “read” or interpret manga. For, as Bourdieu reminds us, “A work of art has meaning and interest only
for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (2). This is as true for readers of manga as it is for readers of Shakespeare.

Indeed, even as Manga Shakespeare encourages a more immediate participation and emotional involvement with Shakespeare’s characters and story, it encourages us to contemplate the manga art and hence shift our focus from content to form, particularly to the artistic technique of the manga artist, which defamiliarizes the conventions of “realistic” characterization. In shifting our attention from Shakespeare’s formal innovations to the innovations of the manga illustrator, Manga Shakespeare highlights the cultural competence of the teen manga reader. Far from implying a move away from critical thinking, the manga adaptations of Shakespeare therefore have the potential to engage their teen readership in deeper intellectual activity, both about manga and about Shakespeare.

The Western motivation behind the series is signaled by the volumes’ front-to-back format (rather than the usual back-to-front Japanese format). Using a conventional comics technique, Appignanesi drastically cuts lines from Shakespeare’s script and translates them into visual terms: this is necessary because, as Douglas Wolk points out, in any graphic work, “More than 150 words or so on a six-panel page, and things start to look pretty crowded” (26). Earlier comic-book adapters of Shakespeare were content to crowd a single-panel page with entire soliloquies, creating a static effect not unlike a proscenium theatre. For example, Wetmore criticizes the 1990 graphic Hamlet in the new Classics Illustrated series (originally launched in comic format in the 1950s, but launched anew in the late 1980s: this adaptation is aesthetically disappointing because it fails to use available comics techniques to full effect. The fact that the adaptors Steven Grant and Tom Mandrake take a “full page, single picture approach to the larger speeches actually makes the least use of the comic aesthetic” (193). There is a too-heavy reliance on the text rather than the image, and as a result there are too many “distinctly un-comic moments” (Wetmore 193). Wetmore decries the weak artwork of the growing number of mass-produced educational tools, “Shakespeare substitutes such as No Fear Shakespeare and Shakespeare Made Easy” (194). However, the question of how to achieve a balance between text and image in the graphic format is a vexed one. After surveying several graphic versions of Hamlet, Marion D. Perret finds Grant and Mandrake’s version the best attempt, because it “makes the text a lively presence in the scene” (“Suit,” 144). Perret emphasizes the reader’s role in comics adaptations of Shakespeare: “The ideal animating of abstract thought arises from interplay between the playwright’s words, the artist’s images, and the reader’s imagination and involvement” (144). As Perret succinctly puts it, “Graphic liveliness . . . is intrinsic to the dialectic between word and image” (“Suit,” 123).

Manga Shakespeare uses the reader-centered conventions of Japanese comics to create exactly this kind of “dialectic between word and image.” Appignanesi and artists Sonia Leong and Kate Brown do so by using pared-down lines from Shakespeare along with multiple panels and perspectives to achieve a dynamic effect that draws the reader into the text. Particularly with Leong’s Romeo and Juliet, manga layout is used to enhance the fast-paced,
intensely psychological action of the love-tragedy. As Brenner points out, in manga “the layout acts as storyteller”; “manga contain many of the shots and patterns of cinema, including close-ups, pans, jump-cuts, and irising (using a circular frame to zero in on a subject as lenses originally irised in ‘filmmaking’)” (65). The fact that manga artists “typically use many more panels per page than are used in Western comics . . . requires more attention and work on the reader’s part to order and make sense of the sequence of panels” (66). Brenner stresses the “need for visual literacy” and points out that “The learning curve for building coherent meaning is one of the common hurdles for new readers” (66). Hence the recent market for handbooks on how to read manga, and how to cultivate visual literacy, targeted specifically at teachers and students (see, e.g., Gibson).

Shakespeare Mangafied

A literary critic or “culture professional” whose eye has been trained to privilege the written text may at first come to the Manga Shakespeare volumes looking for a faithful representation of Shakespeare’s formal conventions and lines. Such a critic might be dismayed at the liberties taken to gear Shakespeare towards a youth readership. In both volumes, the “norms of morality or agreeableness” that Bourdieu associates with popular taste have apparently edged out the complexity and ambiguity of Shakespeare’s treatment of love. There is an almost complete erasure of the pathos and tragic potential both in the lovers’ stories and in the Pyramus and Thisbe episode, an episode which in Shakespeare’s text drives Hippolyta to the brink of tears as she says, “Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man” (5.1.286). Appignanesi has cut this line. Hippolyta shows no pity but rather maintains a single expression of annoyance throughout the mechanicals’ performance of the play-within-the-play. The silliness of the manga-within-the-manga is underscored by the feeble sound effects of the actor playing Lion (“RAH RAH RAH”). The audience of lovers evinces almost no responses to the performance; the only trace of good will towards the players remains in Theseus’s lines, such as when he says, “THE BEST IN THIS KIND ARE BUT SHADOWS ... AND THE WORST ARE NO WORSE, IF IMAGINATION AMEND THEM” (194; cf. 5.1.210–11). Appignanesi has taken these lines from the earlier passage in Shakespeare’s text, and patched them together with Theseus’s final words about the performance (5.1.345; 351–57). One of the only affective moments in this scene, where we catch a glimpse of the broader audience’s response to the play, is the panel in which the four lovers are shown in silence, with conventional manga expressive lines (hatchings) on their faces, after the panel in which both Pyramus and Thisbe appear “dead” on the floor (194). But Hippolyta’s own response to the mechanicals’ performance is summed up in the last line given to her in the manga volume: “THIS IS THE SILLIEST STUFF THAT EVER I HEARD” (194; cf. 1.1.209). The manga Midsummer Night’s Dream volume, then, when placed beside Shakespeare’s text reveals a marked narrowing of the responses of Shakespeare’s multiple audiences.
Similarly, the complex power-struggle between Hippolyta and Theseus is drastically simplified in the manga volume, as evidenced by the illustration of the two lovers in their opening scene. Theseus reminds Hippolyta, “I WOOED THEE WITH MY SWORD AND WON THY LOVE DOING THEE INJURIES” (14; cf. 1.1.16–17). What has been lost in this version, though, is the thematic link between love and violence that Theseus introduces here, which will be developed later in Shakespeare’s play (as in the violent confusion of identity among Demetrius and Lysander, Hermia and Lysander). In some striking productions of the play, directors have Hippolyta enter as Theseus’s captive, a spoil of war, even having her brought onstage in a cage.3 Appignanesi’s adaptation, by contrast, reduces Hippolyta’s role to one of devotion to Theseus. Queen of the Amazons, manga-style, she is not. Although at one point we see her as the Amazon hunter complete with bow in hand and leather shield over her right breast (161–65), this show of war-like expertise seems a brief aberration, and her fighting instinct for most of the play has all but fizzled into bouts of irritation.

So a high-culture reading of the manga Midsummer Night’s Dream might emphasize the deformation of the source-text that results from cuts to Shakespeare’s lines, the simplification of character and action, and the neglect of key thematic elements such as the metadramatic dimension. However, to do so would be to ignore what is accomplished through translation into another mode. The illustrator Kate Brown has not excised but rather transposed into the graphic or visual medium many moments where the play comments on itself as a play. In the famous epilogue, for instance, since the stage transaction between Puck and the audience has been transformed into a transaction between Puck and the reader, Puck’s line “GIVE ME YOUR HANDS, IF WE BE FRIENDS” (204; cf. 5.1.432) on one level no longer makes sense. The appeal for applause and the apology for what the actors could not achieve—which constitute such a conventional move in epilogues of Shakespeare’s day—are lost in translation. Puck ends the manga volume with a feather in his hand, his back turned to the reader, so that he can write his final line, “And Robin shall restore Amends” (205; cf. 5.1.433). And yet here the emphasis on the written text, and on the power of the visible, virtually concrete, line is entirely appropriate in a graphic adaptation, for as Federico Zanettin points out, in the language of comics words are “embodied with a visual, almost physical force” (13).

A “double access” reading of the manga volumes, rather than emphasizing the source-text and hence merely “harping on cuts” (as Semenza has shown that critics analyzing children’s film adaptations tend to do [39]), can acknowledge the formal innovations made possible by this pop-culture translation. When one compares to the source-text what is

3 See, e.g., Peter Holland’s Oxford edition of A Midsummer Night’s Dream for a discussion of the “sense of captivity” evinced by Hippolyta in several productions of the play. Holland makes special mention of John Hancock’s 1966 Actors Workshop Company production in San Francisco, where Hippolyta enters “as a captive animal wearing black body make-up and a leopard-skin bikini in a bamboo cage, her lines snarled with biting sarcasm” (131).
regarded as the truncated translation, the final assessment of the adaptation cannot help but be seen as wanting. But a shift to reading the adaptation in terms of the graphic new medium presents a more productive reading. In the Manga Shakespeare A Midsummer Night’s Dream, for example, analyzing the interaction between pictures and verbal elements shows that the metadramatic elements in the text have not been wiped out. Puck is presented as a puppeteer of the characters (110–14), as he recounts to Oberon the strange events caused by the “night-rule” of confusion in the woods. The reader sees Puck literally holding the strings to control the characters; this image further breaks down the naturalistic notion of characters as autonomous agents or persons.

The illustrations make strange the representation of nature as well as character. The sky on certain pages appears like a stage prop, such as when Puck is introduced to the reader (47). Against a backdrop of the nighttime forest, the manga artist has placed three cut-out circles of increasing size. In the largest circular panel, Puck leans out, apparently onto the sky, which takes on the appearance of a puppet-play curtain. The manga art defamiliarizes not only the realistic illusion of the night-sky here but also Shakespeare’s own metadramatic conventions.

When it comes to the *Manga Shakespeare Romeo and Juliet*, a literary critic could subject the popular adaptation to a high-culture reading that would keep “Shakespeare” moored to the conventions of the early-modern epoch. One could take issue with the way the *Romeo and Juliet* volume drastically cuts all the sonnets, for example, destroying the rhyme scheme in the opening prologue and reducing it to two lines; excising entirely the Chorus’s second sonnet at the opening of act 2; and turning even the lovers’ first sonnet exchange into a shell of the original, severely weakening the elaborate religious conceit and the intertwined dialogue of the lovers. In terms of high-culture Shakespeare, this scene would be a dismal disappointment.

The manga format, though, has not so much effaced as translated the intensity of the lovers’ verbal exchange. Leong shifts the reader’s attention to the visual display of the lovers, the placement of panels on the page which cut back and forth between Romeo and Juliet, including sections of her face and *manpu* lines (conventional manga markings to show heightened emotion). The page comes alive with starburst, cross, and cherub backgrounds, in conventional *shojo* (romantic or girl-centered) manga fashion, so that the reader is invited to participate in creating the meaning of this first famous encounter between the lovers. A critically responsible reading of the translation involves a formal shift in focus, from Shakespeare’s sacrosanct script (seen as stable, however malleable it has been historically in the hands of editors), towards the comics medium, to underscore the dialectical interaction between word and picture, and hence highlight the achievement of the manga transformation.

The youth readership has also necessitated many cuts pertaining to the sexual imagery in both plays, particularly the blend of sex and violence in *Romeo and Juliet*. The censor has been hard at work reforming Mercutio’s speeches, for example. The manga
readers will not have to wonder what Mercutio means when he advises Romeo, “If love be rough with you, be rough with love; / Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down” (1.4.27–28); only the first line appears in the manga volume, and the rest of the suggestive speech between Romeo, Mercutio, and Benvolio in act 1, scene 4 is collapsed into the caption “ROMEO, MERCUTIO, AND BENVOLIO JOIN THE CAPULET PARTY . . .” (26). Subsequently, Queen Mab is no longer “the hag, when maids lies on their backs, / That presses them and learns them first to bear, / Making them women of good carriage” (1.4.91–94), for Mercutio’s 43-line speech gets reduced to four lines (29), and the “love” that Mab plants in “lovers’ brains” (29; cf. 1.4.71) becomes considerably tidier and less disturbing in the manga version. Mercutio’s bawdy banter with Romeo in act 2, scene 4, similarly, is almost wiped clean of sexual innuendo, both heterosexual and queer. The manga reader does not have to envision what Mercutio might mean when he tells Benvolio that Romeo has had “the very pin of his heart cleft with the blind bow-boy’s butt shaft” (2.4.13–16). For the same reasons, “die” loses its double meaning in the Manga Shakespeare Romeo and Juliet, as the enmeshment of lust, love, and sacrificial death gets neatly bowdlerized away in most scenes. Romeo’s final words “THUS WITH A KISS, I DIE” (177) cannot resonate with Juliet’s aubade at the beginning of act 3, scene 2—“when I shall die / Take him and cut him out in little stars” (21–22)—where the Elizabethan meaning of the word “die” carries its full sexual force, “to experience a sexual orgasm” (OED). While such cuts may be understandable given the young readers, one wonders whether an impulse to preserve what Henry Giroux has called the “myth of childhood innocence” has not been at work here: as Semenza suggests,, this impulse underlies most children’s adaptations of Shakespeare (44).

Rather than solely harping on these cuts, however, we must recognize how other translation decisions work effectively to inject a revivifying contemporaneity into Shakespeare. For example, the manga volumes update Shakespeare’s plays through a focus on the new role of technology in the characters’ lives. In Manga Shakespeare A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Egeus first makes his case against Hermia and Lysander to Theseus via what looks like a security camera with a television monitor (14–17), signaling Theseus and Hippolyta’s distance as rulers from the common people. The mechanicals rehearse their performance with the help of a computer, which is supposed to give them their script but is apparently not in good working order, for the sign “REJECTED” appears on the screen (39–40). Technology provides a means of contemporizing the tragic inevitability of the ending in Romeo and Juliet: Romeo cannot receive word of Friar Laurence’s scheme to fake Juliet’s death, because his cell phone shows “NO SIGNAL” once he is banished to the “Mantua Development” on the outskirts of Tokyo. All these transposed elements show how teen adaptations of Shakespeare are made relevant by appealing to the daily affairs so familiar to teenagers. For, as Hulbert, Wetmore, and York argue, youth culture is both “mediated” and “consumptive”: that is, “Individual and collective identity are established by and associated with the products that one buys and uses” (6).
The manga format suggests an exotic otherness along with a rooted familiarity, especially visible in the Japanese elements of the *Romeo and Juliet* volume. Japan is a sign of otherness for Western manga readers, but also represents real possibilities, as Allison makes clear: it is “a marker of phantasm and difference yet one anchored in a reality of sorts” (16). Leong’s *Romeo and Juliet* boldly situates Shakespeare within this ambiguous Japanese context: the Verona setting becomes present-day Tokyo, where Romeo and Juliet’s families are at war because they are rivaling Yakuza (Japanese mafia) families. The Japanese disposition of the characters lends a richness and complexity, as well as a drive and urgency, reminiscent of Luhrmann’s “rock-video” film version of the play. The manga Romeo is presented as a “rock idol” holding a microphone and singing, in his first appearance in the list of characters that prefaces the volume. What makes this adaptation so satisfying is Leong’s ability to catch the cultural resonances of the text, not just through the depiction of the Japanese setting but through side glances at other renditions such as the Luhrmann film and *West Side Story*.

Reviewers of *Manga Shakespeare* have singled out the medium as particularly well suited to the adaptation of Shakespeare. A reviewer in *The Observer* writes, “This ‘manga Shakespeare’ hybrid is unlikely – but makes absolute sense ... [it] shares similarities with Shakespeare’s theatre, relying heavily on recurring image and highly expressive gestures.” One critic in the *Financial Times* even posits that “A cartoon version of Shakespeare is in some ways truer to the original than reading the text alone; the visual element was always supposed to be part of the experience.” The *Independent on Sunday* compares the achievement of *Manga Shakespeare* to the groundbreaking adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Baz Luhrmann: “This new series does in book form what film director Baz Luhrmann did on screen – make Shakespeare cool and accessible to a younger generation... [the] artists use the dynamic flow of manga to give Shakespeare’s plots an addictive page turning energy.” But most of all, critics have focused on the emotional appeal of *Manga Shakespeare* as one of the most exciting features of this pop-culture adaptation. A reviewer in *The Times* recognizes just “how vividly manga techniques and pacing can convey motion and emotion”; and yet another reviewer of *Manga Shakespeare* comments that “manga is a dynamic, emotional and cinematic medium easily absorbed by the eye. Its attractive art and simple storytelling methods enthuse readers to approach Shakespeare’s work in the way he intended – as entertainment.”

Manga as a particular sub-genre of comics has been credited with the ability to evoke strong emotions through the use of simplified lines. The use of simplified lines is, of course, a standard feature of the comics genre. Hans-Christian Christiansen and Anne Magnussen remind us that as early as 1845, comics pioneer Rudolph Töpffer was theorizing “the mental...

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4 For quotations in this paragraph, see the Press Archives on the SelfMadeHero website: <http://www.selfmadehero.com/manga_shakespeare/publicity.html>. 
process” whereby the “comics reader transforms the simple line drawings into faces and figurines” (14). We may now, following E.H. Gombrich, speak of “the law of Töpffer which states that any configuration that the reader would interpret as a face is induced with life and personality” (Christiansen and Magnusson 14). But if the comics genre encourages the imbuing of personality by way of the face, some forms of manga (such as the “large eyes” graphic style popularized by Tezuka Osamu in the 1960s) place even greater than usual emphasis on the face, and so are well suited to promoting the character identification so prominent in popular reception of Shakespeare. The focus in manga on facial features suggest that the Japanese comics privilege character development; as A History of Manga suggests, “In Japanese manga the theme is made apparent through the words and actions of the characters, such that the reader is able to experience the theme through a process of psychological identification with the protagonists.” According to the authors of A History of Manga, it is this focus on character identification that “accounts for the extraordinary popularity of the manga genre.” Manga would seem to be an ideal medium, then, for conveying characters as popular as those of Shakespeare, whom Bloom calls the great “inventor” of the human, that is, of personality. What is intriguing in the Manga Shakespeare volumes is the way we are drawn towards emotional participation in the story, by the characters’ faces and by the other signals of expressiveness, at the same time as we are drawn away from that participation through the appearance on the page of Shakespeare’s lines, the language and formal elements of the text, now “mangafied.”

In Reading Japan Cool: Patterns of Manga Literacy and Discourse, John E. Ingulsrud and Kate Allen introduce the concept of manga’s unique demands on the reader by emphasizing the “multimodal” dimension of the comics medium (4). Analysts of multimodal discourse have shown that “readers comprehend multimodal texts in stages, beginning with the graphics, then the large captions, and on down to the lexico-grammar, the words and sentences” (van Leeuwen, qtd. in Ingulsrud and Allen 5). Even decoding the visual details requires an extensive knowledge of manga conventions. In both manga volumes, the representation of sound effects through onomatopoeia certainly gives the words an almost material role in conveying the excitement of the action and the emotion of the characters. These verbal additions to the text are used to comic effect in A Midsummer Night’s Dream: for example, “SHUFF SHUFF” when Puck puts some new running shoes on and bounds away (64); “FWOMP” when Helena tackles Demetrius in an effort to conquer him (70). In Romeo and Juliet, the onomatopoeia conversely enhances the tragic violence of the duel scenes, for example when Mercutio battles Tybalt—“KTANG! KLANG!” in one panel; “STOMP, CHAK!” in another (79)—and again when Romeo battles Tybalt—“KANG! THNK! WUD!” (in three separate panels where the pictures themselves effectively embroil the reader in the conflict without making clear who is winning) (83).

As Zanettin outlines, the “dialect” of manga can be distinguished from the broader language of comics because manga has its “own set of conventions and stylemes” (18). For instance, manga typically pauses the action of the narrative, by spreading one scene across
several panels or by using the page to show close-ups and detailed moments” (Ingulsrud and Allen 31). Indeed, “the deliberate manipulation of panel size, shape, and arrangement of expressive effect has been developed most extensively by manga creators” (Ingulsrud and Allen 31). One of the primary differences between Western comics and manga involves the interplay between layout, characterization, and the role of the reader. Generally in comics, characters are relatively “stable” and “do not change”; however, “in many manga, the characters themselves can be drawn in degrees of iconicity or caricaturization, representing differing psychological states and positional identities” (Ingulsrud and Allen 27).

The *Romeo and Juliet* volume shows off the ability of manga to achieve character identification through the manipulation of layout and drawing techniques. In this volume, the traditional Tezuka-influenced drawing with the large eyes and faces filling the frames achieves a heightened effect of pathos for the characters, and a focus on the emotional pulses of the plot. A critic in *Kirkus Reviews* points out that in *Romeo and Juliet* “Traditional manga styling – large eyes, incredibly graceful figures, expressive backdrops, and Chibi (small and cute) panels to express highly emotional moments – combine seamlessly with Western elements—left to right pagination and straightforward panel layout.”

At the same time, the chibi are particularly noteworthy as a means of destabilizing naturalistic character. In manga vocabulary, *chibi*, or “super-deformed” (SD), refers to “The exaggerated and simplified form characters take on in a heightened emotional state” (Brenner 29). In several places, Leong makes provocative use of chibi to bring out the comic effect of Romeo’s and Juliet’s inflamed, impatient passion. First, when Mercutio is teasing Romeo about having given his friends “THE COUNTERFEIT” or “THE SLIP” the previous night (62), he says to Romeo, “I WILL BITE THEE BY THE EAR FOR THAT!” (63). At this point, Romeo and Mercutio turn into chibi figures, play-fighting with each other. Shortly after this scene, when the Nurse comes to speak to Romeo as a prospective suitor for Juliet, all of the bawdy innuendo associated with the Nurse in Shakespeare’s play gets translated to comic effect in the manga version, as Romeo and his friends are transformed into chibi through the Nurse’s aggressive antics. Finally, as Juliet waits for the Nurse to give her news about her beloved Romeo, the Nurse’s slow, dull old age makes Juliet regress into chibi form. The action word “SCREECH!” and the jagged edges of the speech bubbles, along with the bold font, accentuate Juliet’s comical chibi rage towards the Nurse, as she echoes in disbelief, “‘YOUR LOVE SAYS LIKE AN HONEST GENTLEMAN, “WHERE IS YOUR MOTHER?”’” Leong exploits the comic potential in these scenes, through the exaggerated passion of the characters. The tragic scenes of the play do not make use of chibi, presumably because they would detract from the more dignified action. This manga technique presents intriguing possibilities for the decentering of Shakespearean character. The *Manga Shakespeare Romeo and Juliet* is a powerful and estranging retelling: the chibi moments of passion defamiliarize Shakespeare and frame his lines with renewed emotional intensity.

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5 See the Amazon UK website http://www.amazon.ca.uk/Manga-Shakespeare-Juliet-Sonia-Leong.
revealing not just how volatile and young the characters are, but also how important the reader’s role is in filling in the gaps between panels to create character itself.

One feels that the *Manga Shakespeare A Midsummer Night’s Dream* might likewise have made effective use of chibi. Yet the volume only lightly touches upon the comic effects of the lovers’ confusion of identity and of Bottom the ass. Brown plays with character in other ways, however. The manga volume presents a hermeneutic difficulty by often making us feel distanced from a psychic connection with the characters. Most disturbingly, Puck is presented as a goblin with no recognizable human face (or hands or feet); this greatly contributes to a kind of emotional distance gained by the narrative. At one point Oberon rolls Puck up into a ball (123), emphasizing his non-human status, and forcing us away from an easy identification with the character. But Puck’s grotesque depiction can be seen as serving an important aesthetic function. As Douglas Wolk has shown, “ugly” pictures in comics invite a critical consideration of how we make meaning itself: “Unpretty drawing makes the fantasy of participation or identification less easy and powerful; it calls us back to what’s really going on in the image and in the narrative it belongs to. The viewer is forced to look beyond the image’s surface for what it might mean” (58).

Unsettling conventional assumptions about realistic character is well within the province of popular teen adaptations of Shakespeare, which need not involve a “dumbing down” of intellectual or formal complexity for their readers. Gregory Colón Semenza has made precisely this argument in his brilliant analysis of *The Animated Tales*, the popular animated children’s film adaptations of Shakespeare based on Leon Goldman’s abridged tales. Although it has been subject to the charge of having “dumbed down” Shakespeare, “*The Animated Tales* is capable of producing in its young viewers the equivalency of a knowledge effect” (52), because it has the power to “expose the artistic apparatus” (59) and hence to shift the focus “from adapted content to the processes of adaptation” (62). The success of Shakespeare adaptations for young people cannot be said to lie in their complexity of characterization or in their naturalistic effects—for on that basis, *The Animated Tales* and *Manga Shakespeare* would be judged an artistic failure—but rather in the ways they lead the viewer to contemplate how that illusion of realism is achieved. Semenza’s emphasis on the formal sophistication of non-realistic cinematic technique can be fruitfully applied to critical studies of comics adaptations, particularly *Manga Shakespeare*. On the basis of traditional characterization, the *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night’s Dream* volumes are puzzling at best, enervating and deeply disturbing at worst. Those looking for an “authentic” experience of young love, presented realistically so that readers can put themselves in the lovers’ place and experience intense empathy with their situation, will be profoundly disappointed. For, though the dynamic layout of manga does provoke strong emotions in the reader, its borrowing from the technique of film animation means that characters are presented as flat, one-dimensional, caricatured.
The Double Nature of Adaptation as Translation

*Manga Shakespeare* participates in what Linda Hutcheon has called the “double vision” of adaptation as a mode of writing. The adapted work is important both as a formal product, a transcoding or transposition of a particular work or works; and as a creative process, an act of re-interpretation as well as re-creation. Adaptation can be seen as a form of translation. What an adaptation translates is not just the original text or “language,” but also the cultural codes inherent in the original. Adaptation raises questions, then, about intertextuality and cultural exchange. The *Manga Shakespeare* volumes *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* offer inter-mediation, in Hutcheon’s terms, as they filter Shakespeare’s courtly-love discourse through a popular visual medium and translate the cultural code of love for their modern teen audiences. In doing so, these *Manga Shakespeare* volumes perform their own colonizing work, and at the same time open Shakespeare up to twenty-first-century revaluations of love and the imagination. How well, though, does *Manga Shakespeare* let Shakespeare speak?

Manga translations of Shakespeare do let the original text speak. As a unique kind of adaptation, a split text, *Manga Shakespeare* has the capacity to emphasize the complementarity, the intergraphic dialogism, between source-text and translation-text. The *Manga Shakespeare* adaptations of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* retain Shakespeare’s original lines to a surprising extent (though it is true that the Manga adapter Richard Appignanesi makes significant cuts, omissions, and additions, as we have seen). But Shakespeare in the *Manga Shakespeare* volumes still speaks extensively in his own cultural “write.” Gérard Genette’s central metaphor to describe the intertextual relation, what he calls “literature in the second degree,” is the figure of the palimpsest, which is a “written document, usually on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of erased writing still visible.” *Manga Shakespeare*, though, is not only a palimpsestuous redressing of Shakespeare: it does not cover up Shakespeare entirely (in the way that a looser adaptation like *O* veils Shakespeare’s *Othello*). Shakespeare may be mangafied but is by no means entirely mangled. In fact, *Manga Shakespeare*’s use of modern illustrations to translate the source-text is more akin to the method of medieval illumination than to palimpsest. The parallel, split, dialogic texts that result have the capacity to make new, to make strange, both the words of Shakespeare and the images of the manga artist. This mutual estrangement is the most exciting aspect of *Manga Shakespeare*, for high-culture scholars and pop-culture aficionados alike.

Successful adaptations bring out the foreignness both of source-text and translation-text. In the most ethical and skillful adaptations, the two texts interpenetrate, so that their difference can resonate in a way that re-makes meaning, that turns hermeneutic problems into opportunities for meaningful cultural dialogue and exchange. This is the import of Walter Benjamin’s groundbreaking essay on “The Task of the Translator,” whose notions have been fruitfully applied to adaptation theory. According to Benjamin, a good translation has the power to “express the central reciprocal relationship between languages.” The translator...
should not seek to make the translation-text the same as the source-text but rather to "harmonize" or bring together two different languages. Benjamin borrows from Rudolph Pannwitz's influential argument that translators who try simply to turn the foreign language (or text) into their own language are misguided; what the translator must seek to do instead is to allow "his [sic] language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue," to "expand and deepen his [sic] language by means of the foreign language" (Pannwitz, qtd. in Benjamin 81). Benjamin's translation model emphasizes the way the foreign source-text can inflect the translation-text with new meaning, and thus bring about a transformative interchange between the two texts and cultures.

John Fletcher uses this point to shed light on how theatrical adaptations are faced with a kind of "ethical imperative": "If I truly seek to translate a work from the past onto the present stage, I must strive for the transformative, for that which challenges and exceeds an audience’s expectations and preconceptions"; "Translation, then, functions less as a bridge between two discrete entities and more as a dynamic encounter between imaginative forces who emerge from the experience transformed" (Fletcher). The doubleness of the term "Manga Shakespeare" points to the transforming possibilities for both Shakespeare and Manga, in the juxtaposition and creative collision of these two “imaginative forces.”

The two appeals in Manga Shakespeare coexist, through a kind of contrary motion, so that what Manga Shakespeare gives us is the emotional involvement of popular culture, alongside the critical detachment of high culture. Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream may provide an even better touchstone for this distinction, through the debate of Theseus and Hippolyta over their interpretations of the lovers’ “story of the night.” In A Midsummer Night’s Dream, the four courtly lovers (Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius) spend a dreamy night of confusion in the forest of Athens, but awake to find their obstacles have magically vanished. Faced with the story of these lovers, Theseus and Hippolyta (in a typically self-conscious Shakespearean moment) face a kind of hermeneutic imperative—a compulsion to interpret. Theseus’s well-known championing of Reason in his dismissal of “The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,” who are “of imagination all compact,” starkly contrasts Hippolyta’s emotional response to the lovers’ story as “something of great constancy, / But howsoever, strange and admirable” (5.2.7–8, 26–7). Shakespeare ends by setting these competing claims side by side: the detached analytical response juxtaposed, dialogically, with the involved emotional response. Shakespeare appeals, in other words, to “barbarous” and “pure taste,” to the conditioned responses of both popular and high culture. Manga Shakespeare offers a way to combine these two competing responses to the text. Between the so-called pure gaze and the popular gaze, in reading Manga Shakespeare through the lens of “double access,” one can encounter a dynamic interchange between high and popular culture that above all captivates the reader, enlivening and regenerating the ambiguous cultural site of meaning that we call Shakespeare.
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