

Japanese *Romeo x Juliet* as Site of Cultural Cross-Pollination

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When Shakespeare's plays were introduced to Japan at the end of the nineteenth century, the translators knew that, if the performances were to have any significant impact on the audience, the texts had to be rewritten according to the dramatic conventions of traditional Japanese theatre, especially Kabuki and Bunraku. Since then, Shakespeare's plays have been appropriated across various literary and media forms, more recently as manga and anime, cross-pollinations of Western and Japanese art forms and ideologies. Drawing on Julie Sanders's concept of appropriation (2006) and Douglas Lanier's contention that most contemporary foreign-language Shakespeare is "post-textual" and rhizomatic (2010, 2014), this paper discusses the 24-episode TV anime *Romeo x Juliet* (Studio Gonzo, 2007) as a site of interesting interactions between the Japanese and the Western cultural traditions, storytelling conventions, and old and new ideologies. Imbued with Japanese spirituality, transnational politics, and ecophilosophical ideas, this anime series is Japanese and global at the same time, speaking more of the anime fan culture in and outside Japan than about Shakespeare's play.

Keywords: adaptation; rhizomatics; foreign Shakespeare; anime; cultural cross-pollination.

Introduction

In a "post-textual" and "post-fidelity" context, to quote Douglas Lanier (2010, 2014), especially in the case of foreign Shakespeare and pop-culture intermedial representations of his work, it is more interesting to look at how the plays are appropriated and repackaged for specific audiences, mapping this way the rhizomatic quality of the relationship between Shakespeare's texts and the wide array of adaptations across national, linguistic and media borders. This approach, more democratic in its theoretical and methodological attention to the process of adaptation as a normal cultural phenomenon through which stories are transmitted, may focus on the adaptation in its own context of production and reception, with a particular interest in the ways in which it relates to the adapted text and to the network of previous adaptations that reinterpret or echo that same text.

Instead of writing about a Shakespearean text as seen through the lens of a modern rewriting, this approach reveals the textual and cultural alchemy at work in the new "text". It focuses on what the adaptation tells us about trends in reading, viewing and interpretative practices, the aesthetic and ideological tendencies of the adapting culture, the intermedial and the global quality of art in the digital age, and, last but not least, the postmodern interest in dissolving the boundaries between high and low art, elite and pop-culture through playful medial and cultural cross-pollination, which film and the new media do so well.

This study is shaped by two relatively different yet compatible theoretical perspectives. The former, and the most important in the case of an adaptation like the Japanese anime *Romeo x Juliet*, is David Lanier's Shakespeare rhizomatics, a theory that removes the Shakespearean text from its central position in the discussion of adaptation, placing it among all forms of adaptation

and cultural memes connected with the play. According to the rhizome theory proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, from which Lanier's Shakespearean rhizomatics theory has emerged, all artistic manifestations can be visually represented as rhizomes, with bulbs, tubers spreading out horizontally into growing networks, constantly evolving, creating new relations and breaking older ones, with no hierarchies and no clear relationships of influence among all cultural manifestations that create the rhizome.

One of the most important aspects of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of the rhizome applied to adaptation studies is that it democratises the space of cultural phenomena by subverting the very idea of hierarchy and domination, since the rhizomes must be seen in a predominantly horizontal and not vertical relation to one another. "[T]he rhizome," Douglas Lanier writes, "can offer a compelling theoretical model. A rhizomatic conception of Shakespeare situates 'his' cultural authority not in the Shakespearean text at all, but in the accrued power of Shakespearean adaptation, the multiple, changing lines of force we and previous cultures have labeled as 'Shakespeare,' lines of force that have been created by and which respond to historical contingencies" (2014: 29). What is more, as Jim Casey (2017: s.p.) points out, we are not even in a position to talk about a source text proper, a real text to which the adaptation can be compared and then discussed in terms of fidelity; in this new approach to adaptation as a loosely defined term (very inclusive and refusing the criterion of fidelity altogether), Shakespeare himself and any of his texts become hyperreal, "ideas" of Shakespeare and *Romeo and Juliet* constructed over time through continuous interpretation and rewriting or adaptation across media (*cf.* Casey, 2017). In David Lanier's words, "[b]y emphasizing difference as essential to the cultural afterlife of 'Shakespeare,'" and by refusing to treat the Shakespearean text as a regulative standard or mystified icon of value, a rhizomatic approach seeks to demonstrate how "Shakespeare" becomes ever-other-than-itself precisely through the varied particularities of its manifestations, which proliferate according to no preordained teleology" (2014: 31). Comparing a Shakespearean play to an adaptation in the form of a cartoon, a graphic novel, a hip-hop song, or an anime series, or looking at cultural memes that only echo the early modern text takes the discussion in a new direction, where value judgements are secondary and subjective, and each work claims its own space and right to exist in connection with, rather than dependence on, a previous work.

In the particular case of foreign-language Shakespeare transposed in a different medium, a Shakespearean rhizomatics approach frees the discussion of an anime adaptation of any strict constraints binding it to the Shakespearean text, its author and the language and culture that shaped it. As this study will demonstrate, more interesting things can be said about the culture of production and reception of the adaptation, looking at the various aesthetic factors and ideological structures of the culture that created the adaptation, as well as at the context of its reception – the global youth culture that the anime addresses.

The second approach that informs this study relies both on the New Historicist concern for the historical context of a work's production, and on Julie Sanders' concepts of adaptation (as a process of reinterpretation, update, recontextualisation, transposition across media), and appropriation (as a possibly less easily traceable form of adaptation, echoing rather than rewriting the text to which it is somehow connected).¹ Seen thus from both perspectives, adaptations of texts written in a distant historical context and in a different language become sites of negotiations, of cross-pollinations between cultures, traditions, conventions, spiritualities and ideologies, which echo even older and less obvious cross-pollinations that represent the very fabric of human culture, for which the metaphor of the rhizome is most fitting.

Shakespeare in Japan

Romeo × Juliet (2007) is not the first animated film adaptation of Shakespeare's play. It is, how-

¹ For a more precise distinction between the two forms of engagement with a text and its cultural history, see Sanders (2006: 17-41).

ever, remarkably different from *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* (1992-94), a transnational project retelling twelve of Shakespeare's plays for young audiences, massively cutting the text and condensing the stories to fit the 26-minute format, without reinterpreting or recontextualising the plays in the good old tradition of textual fidelity. Neither is it similar to the more optimistic (and happy-ending) American animated films, *Romeo and Juliet: Sealed with a Kiss* (2005), featuring a love story in a community of seals, and *Gnomeo and Juliet* (2011), telling the love story of two gnomes. What makes this anime adaptation special is its *Japaneseness* and its reliance on genre conventions that open the Gonzo Studio TV anime series to global young audiences that know and appreciate this Japanese pop-culture genre.

In Japan, like in other Asian cultures, Shakespeare's work has always been appropriated, naturalised and recontextualised. Ironically, his plays have also contributed to the modernisation of Japanese theatre and, at least in the first decades of the twentieth century, they also contributed to the Westernisation of Japanese art and culture (Kishi & Bradshaw, 2006: vii-xii). From the very first translations into Japanese in the 1870s (Robun Kanagaki's *Seiyo Kabuki Hamuretto—Hamlet in Western Kabuki Style*, or the translations and adaptations of Charles and Mary Lamb's versions of the Shakespearean plays), or Keizo Kawashima's *Julius Caesar* in 1883, and *Romeo and Juliet* in 1886) (Sano, 1999: 339), Shakespeare's foreignness was a serious issue which had to be tackled with more concern for the local public than for the integrity of the translated work. Kawashima's translations have a purely documentary value today, yet Shoyo Tsubouchi's translations of all Shakespeare's plays (1884-1935) set the standard for both literary translations and performance texts. In *Shakespeare in Japan*, Tetsuo Kishi and Graham Bradshaw describe these translations as reflections of an "apparently curious and not always comfortable coexistence of the old and the new, the indigenous and the foreign" (2006: 2), reflecting Shoyo's Japanese sensibility and his Western education, and the ambivalent feelings of Japanese audiences at the turn of the century, not long after Japan opened its borders to Western culture and put an end to the country's two-century-old isolationism.

Politically and socially, the Japanese could relate to the world of Shakespeare's plays; culturally and aesthetically, however, Shakespeare was too foreign to be left unappropriated, which forced translators like Tsubouchi to use theatrical conventions from traditional Japanese theatre, especially Kabuki and Bunraku, as naturalising strategies. To make the performance text appropriate for the stage, he had to make radical textual interventions such as extensive rephrasing, conversion of dialogue into narrative text, and significant cuts (Kishi & Bradshaw, 2006: 3-5), helping the audience understand and enjoy the story of the play performed with music and an on-stage narrator. Shakespeare's language was sacrificed for the sake of introducing the English playwright and the Western world values that his plays reflect to a Japanese audience finally open to Western culture, and especially to European art.

In the twentieth century, Shakespeare continued to produce adaptations in Japanese culture in the form of film, manga and anime productions. In fact, filmed Shakespeare in Japan constitutes a very important chapter in the history of Shakespeare on screen. Akira Kurosawa's 1957 *Throne of Blood*, *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), and his 1985 *Ran* (adapting *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, respectively) are remarkable art house films and transfixing examples of creative rewriting whose aim is not so much to interpret as to recreate the source text. Like the theatrical performances based on Tsubouchi's translations, these films reveal that same Japanese tendency to appropriate Euro-American art, fusing native and foreign cultural and aesthetic traditions, spiritualities and styles. Even without Shakespeare's words, without the power of his language to create worlds and people them with memorable characters, Kurosawa's films used a type of visual poetry and film language that helped tell compelling stories of human error and suffering and replicate the aesthetic impact of the plays. Shakespeare becomes a Japanese author, his plays being returned to the Western public as exotic yet exciting aesthetic demonstrations of cinema of the finest quality, Japanese yet also relevant and meaningful to audiences across the world for precisely the same reason why Shakespeare's plays continue to be read, interpreted and rewritten: their uni-

versal appeal.

Both Japanese in origin and global in popularity, manga (Japanese graphic novels), and anime (Japanese cartoons, a cross-pollination of manga and Western animated film), have had a particular appeal to visual-oriented audiences in the past fifty years for reasons that are not always self-evident. On the one hand, in Japan both are regarded as pop-culture developments of Japanese pre-modern art, especially woodblock prints from the Edo period best known as the “Floating World” (Ukiyo) art, which revealed the realities of the time transfigured in accordance with the contemporary aesthetic conventions and a tendency for fantastic representations of ordinary life. Primarily a form of escape from the structures of oppression in the Japanese feudalistic society, providing people with fantasies of ideal beauty, pleasure (especially in erotica) and entertainment, the art of the “Floating World” established a national artistic tradition reflecting contemporary lifestyles and ideology, and also shaped the visual style of early manga. The 1814 *Hokusai Manga* collection established manga as a new mode in Japanese art, adding, according to manga historian Shimizu Isao (Berndt, 2006a: 35), playfulness, satire and a popular culture sensibility to the fantastic, dreamlike and high art quality of woodblock prints in early nineteenth century. The twentieth century saw the rise of story manga, an “impure, hybrid form of expression” (Berndt, 2006b: 352), and its animated version, the anime. Jacqueline Berndt (2006a:1-2) calls contemporary manga an “aesthetically and culturally, but also historically highly ambiguous medium vacillating as much between the Gutenberg galaxy and the computer era, temporality and spatiality, reading and writing, playfulness and seriousness, infant and adult”, which is also true of anime.

Popular culture phenomena associated with the emergence of post-WWII youth culture, manga and anime depart from their pre-modern Japanese sources in their openness to the inclusion of foreign aesthetic and cultural elements (American superhero comics and Hollywood cinema, for instance), which makes both media Japanese and global at the same time. Both are capable of telling stories with the help of a visual language that is as sophisticated as that of live-action film (constantly shifting POVs, surprising angle shots, extreme close-ups, slow motion, jump cuts, special effects), but they also rely on genre as a generator of fan culture. More thematically complex and addressing a wider audience than cartoons, anime fascinates the young and the old because it offers them a medium that also matches live action film in its ability to present contemporary concerns and legitimise or subvert – like any motion picture – current ideologies and social dynamics (Napier, 2000: 6, 9, 10).

***Romio to Jurietto (Romeo x Juliet)*, Studio Gonzo, 2007**

It is hardly surprising that manga and anime artists became interested in providing their fans with adaptations of classical texts, including Shakespeare’s plays, refashioned to make them appealing and “cool” to a heterogeneous audience. An emblematic teen story of love, *Romeo and Juliet* could have provided the creators of the 24-episode TV anime series *Romio to Jurietto* (translated into English as *Romeo x Juliet*)² with a readymade plot, easily adaptable as an animated film. The creative team, Reiko Yoshida (writer), Fumitoshi Oizaki (director and storyboard artist), and Harada Hiroki (character designer) opted for a radical adaptation of the play, rewriting the text, reinventing the protagonists and most of the characters even in their essential features, yet weaving in the text a host of references, allusions and even lines from other Shakespearean plays, which

²The title in English raises a number of interesting issues. On the one hand, it can be read by Western viewers as a nod to Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 title, *Romeo + Juliet* – a playful allusion to the idea of Shakespeare’s cultural commodification in a postmodern spirit, but also a reference to the idea of “cross”, as in “star-crossed lovers”. Somewhat on the same line, but with Japanese additional connotations, the x in the title, Jim Casey explains (2017, s.p.) is a Japanese Kanji typographical symbol called *batsu* (a cross or X) which “indicates that something is wrong, incorrect, or deserving punishment”. It may also allude to *batsu-itchi*, a term used to refer to someone who is divorced, whose identity as a spouse has been crossed out, as the married name is crossed out in the family register, which inevitably sends us back to the idea of a “cross” between the two young protagonists’ names.

the translators into English³ tried to identify and reproduce in the dialogue. While hardly anything more than a Japanese TV production that echoes the early modern play, *Romeo x Juliet* conveys the story's "transhistorical relevance" (Cavallaro, 2010: 123) by putting a new spin on the themes of romantic love, inevitability of fate, violence and the clash between the individual and the society. There is very little of the familiar Romeo and Juliet story left, yet there is clearly an intention to capitalise on the international fame of the play and the popularity of the young protagonists, contributing to the "*Romeo and Juliet*" rhizome, with its own history of reinterpretation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Shakespeare's immediate source, Arthur Brooke's poem, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, itself a rewriting of Italian novellas translated into English via French. With a long and interesting history of adaptations across centuries, languages, genres, media and cultures, the "*Romeo and Juliet*" rhizome becomes enriched with yet one more Japanese contribution, a node in the greater rhizomatic structure that has since continued to grow with further adaptations and memes.

Romeo x Juliet is not very different from the earliest adaptations of the Shakespearean plays for Kabuki and Bunraku performances in its focus on the needs and expectations of the target audience, with little concern for fidelity in adaptation. The thematic conventions of anime, addressing issues such as gender identity and gender roles, social conformity, and contemporary anxieties (ecophilosophical concerns, for instance) overwrite those of the Shakespearean text, yet most reviewers on English-language anime website forums do not seem to mind.⁴ On the contrary, even those who know the play that inspired the Studio Gonzo team are undisturbed by the series' appropriation of its source, excited to find an anime that quenches their thirst for action, drama, romance, and fantasy – key ingredients of anime products targeted at young viewers. Writing about the most appropriate strategies to offer Shakespeare's work to younger generations, Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. notes that the key to success is making it relevant for adolescents by "focusing on the teenage elements present within Shakespeare's work, or translating Shakespeare's work into something recognisably 'teen', something recognizably 'cool'" (2011: 389). Audiences are offered a message that speaks to them directly, part of an artistic experience that incorporates the technology and the art language to which they most readily respond.

Anime culture can provide its fans with both relevant stories and a familiar visual language and style that ensure the viewers' aesthetic pleasure. In the particular case of the Japanese animated *Romeo x Juliet*, the success of the series – occasionally disappointing in its storytelling and character portrayal – can be credited to the creators' ability to make Juliet and Romeo interesting characters, credible in their youthful idealism and readiness for self-sacrifice, and charming in their innocent eroticism. This is especially true of Juliet, modelled after the Shōjo manga⁵ female characters: beautiful, charming, powerful, and powerless at the same time. The fact that Juliet is also a champion of justice and a saviour of her community only adds weight to her character as a tragic figure (more than Shakespeare's Juliet, one might argue) and turns her into an inspirational heroine.

Juliet Fiammatta Erss DiCapulet is the only survivor of the House of Capulet, raised as a boy (Odin) until her sixteenth birthday, when her true identity is revealed to her by her protector,

³ The English translation of the script poses some interesting problems, as Jim Casey (2017) notes, after consulting with a Japanese translator. Depending on which version the English speaking viewer watches, the dubbed or the subtitled version, the dialogue is at times remarkably different in style, the subtitled version being more literal and less concerned with the poetry of the language, while the dubbed version at least makes an attempt to echo Shakespeare's language and match the lyricism of the scene with that of the lines in English.

⁴ See, for instance, websites like My Anime List (www.myanimelist.net), or Anime News Network (www.animenewsnetwork.com).

⁵ Shōjo manga and anime characters are usually 12-13 year-old-girls, with a liminal identity, defined by the innocent eroticism and the cuteness of a female character not yet a young woman (Prindle *apud* Napier, 2000: 119).

priest Conrad. We first meet her as the Red Whirlwind, a masked defender of the people of Neo Verona against the abuses of the tyrannical Lord Montague, Romeo's father and the man who ordered the assassination of the entire Capulet family when Juliet was only a little girl, supposedly as revenge for the rape of his mother by a member of the House of Capulet. Even before Juliet learns of her duty as heiress of the House of Capulet to save her people from the oppressive, whimsical rule of Montague, Juliet's heroic nature and extraordinary courage recommend her as a leader and an inspiration to the others. The gender ambiguity of her character from the very beginning is a reference to both Shakespeare's use of identity confusion as a comedic device, and a nod to the changing gender roles in our times as reflected in high-impact storytelling media, particularly in Western cinema and action-hero comics, manga and anime. Juliet is only sixteen, and her impetuous nature and innocence make her a victim of her own impulses and misinterpretations of various situations. Her imperfections make her lovable and easier for young female viewers to identify with her, especially as we see her mature through love and suffering.

Romeo's initial delicate nature and apparent detachment from the plight of the Neo Verona people create a sharp contrast between the two protagonists. Juliet, like Shakespeare's character, teaches Romeo to love, to believe in himself and in his transformative powers, and to dedicate himself to a higher cause. His love for Juliet is more selfish, a selfishness that erodes Juliet's determination to follow her destiny. Having led her people into a revolution that culminates with Lord Montague's assassination, Juliet must now turn towards her sacred duty, fulfilling her destiny as the saviour of Neo Verona and the floating island on which the city lies from an even more terrible fate: imminent destruction. Here Juliet's political and spiritual destiny converge, making her death a necessary yet meaningful sacrifice according to an old legend that marks her as the only hope for the revival of the dying Neo Verona. The Great Tree Escalus – the surviving life force of the floating island – like its twin tree years before, is slowly dying in the toxic atmosphere of Lord Montague's rule – and if the community is to survive, the tree must be revived through human sacrifice, for which Juliet is marked from birth.

It is in the final two episodes of the series that *Romeo x Juliet* foregrounds, more than ever before, its ties with the culture that has generated it. Of course, the very medium of production here is Japanese, with its set of visual conventions that viewers outside Japan accept as key features of Japanese animated film. There are, however, elements of storytelling that reflect a culture that loves competing narrative modes, subversive attitudes and generic hybridity in the same fashion as Shakespeare himself, yet in a style that reveals its non-European origins. The Japanese love manga and anime, and present them as reflections of national identity and contemporary popular culture, even though in some ways they also claim for them the status of global genres. Manga and anime display a preference for completely invented locations, mixing architectural designs from various historical periods and cultures, or elements of the fantastic borrowed from pre-Christian and traditional Japanese mythology.⁶ Yet there is a certain "stateless"-ness of manga and anime that this preference for partly recognisable locations reflects. According to Susan Napier (2000: 24-25), this frees the minds of Japanese viewers from the pressure they experience in the real world, this form of art allowing them to escape their own identity and reality through access to entirely fictional worlds where the unfamiliar (the European features of the characters; non-Japanese names; elongated silhouettes; strangely-coloured hair and bizarre costumes) is easily accepted as a generic convention with no necessary connection to known reality. Even when the stories are based on foreign narrative material, the impulse to adapt, to appropriate, to customise is irresistible and reflects a centuries-old tradition of naturalisation of everything coming from

⁶ The retrofuturistic architecture of Neo Verona with its Renaissance Italian look and the out-of-this-world location of the city, up in the air, floating above the sea, the costumes bridging a few centuries of European fashion, or the Pegasus-inspired dragon steeds that only male characters can ride contain no reference whatsoever to Japanese culture as such; they are, however, part of a visual code of manga and anime that fans accept without question in stories with a mythical quality like the present one.

outside the borders of Japan even long after the end of the country's self-imposed isolationism. Regardless how fascinating European and American art may be, cultural imports are refracted through a Japanese sensibility and worldview, adapted, as it were, for the Japanese consumer.

The episodes of *Romeo x Juliet* are uneven in aesthetic and narrative value, some scenes taking too long to convey a simple message or to show how the characters evolve while being apart, becoming the brave, selfless heroes that the final episode reveals them to be. Shakespeare's ability to create memorable scenes is nevertheless reflected in a number of unforgettable anime moments, all centred on the protagonists and their private encounters, where verbal lyricism is replaced by visual poetry. They prepare the viewers for the very dramatic ending which has the two lovers die together in the name of love (Romeo) and duty (Juliet), in a scene in which the sublime and the macabre coexist. The deaths of Romeo and Juliet are not just personal losses for the two families, witnessed by the entire community that will hopefully benefit from the restored peace. We are faced with an apocalyptic scenario of environmental destruction, where human society and nature are interconnected and the latter is made to suffer by the negative energies and evil actions of Lord Montague and his court. Here we find a Japanese animistic worldview, represented by several key story elements and characters. The Great Tree Escalus is an amoral, implacable spirit (*kami*) whose behaviour and relationship to man depend on man's attitude and performance of appropriate rituals (*cf.* Blacker, 1999: 41 ff.). The spirit's voice, Ophelia, is the guardian of the Great Tree Escalus, considered a goddess because she appears to be the anthropomorphic image of the tree that communicates with Juliet. She has a benevolent double in the Old Man, who visits and guides Romeo while he is banished from court. Last but not least, the white iris gives a new significance to the "love-as-sacrifice" motif of the Romeo and Juliet story. The white iris that is constantly associated with Juliet can be read as a symbol of Juliet's inner beauty and of her pure love for Romeo, but also as the mark of her tragic destiny, signifying her deep connection with the natural world, for which she must sacrifice. According to a Shintoist worldview, manifestations of sacred power in communities can be either protective or destructive, as the Great Tree of Escalus is in *Romeo x Juliet*, depending on people's ability to perform their duties to the god. The evil done in New Verona by Lord Montague can only be undone by the sacrifice of a pure young soul such as Juliet's, or else the protective powers of the magical tree will be replaced by its destructive force, with no hope of survival for the floating island and its inhabitants.

Apart from reflecting Japanese spirituality, the animated tale also shows a contemporary concern with the environment as transformed by human presence, destroying the natural balance of our world. The ideas of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and the Deep Ecology Movement scholars of the 1970s are here reflected in the form of an ecophilosophical idea that resonates with the Shintoist approach to the relationship between man and the manifestations of the divine in nature. This global dimension of the Ophelia-Escalus-Juliet story helps fans outside Japan understand the situation and respond to Juliet's tragedy as the tenets of this philosophical movement have been around for about 40 years, and the double nature of the story (spiritual and indigenous, allegorical and global) is a strategy for making the story relevant to young people everywhere. It is no longer just love that makes the two innocent young people die, but also a sense of honour and duty that ennobles their choice of death and turns them into martyrs. Unsurprisingly, this selfless death resonated well with young viewers animated by high ideals and still inspired by the idea of noble sacrifice for the greater good, the romantic element of the story – apart from connecting the anime to the Romeo and Juliet story we know – contributing to the emotional experience of the viewers.

Much can be said about the creative team's use of the "Shakespeare" rhizome in the fabric of the script of *Romeo x Juliet*. They are nothing but tongue-in-cheek references to Shakespeare's work endowed with new meanings and making more knowledgeable viewers smile at best. Such references include character names from different plays;⁷ slightly modified characters from the

⁷ In most cases, these characters have few if any features in common with the characters in Shakespeare's plays; they are used here to connect the anime to the Shakespeare rhizome, to recall, even in passing, the

Shakespearean play (for instance Mercutio becomes the son Lord Montague would have wanted, ambitious, determined, thirsty for power and evil, while Tybalt, here Romeo's half brother, is a Byronic hero type that assists Juliet in her political actions against Lord Montague); lines and phrases echoing the Shakespearean texts from various plays, and, last but not least, William the playwright, in whose house Juliet was brought up in secret. Willie is a caricature of Shakespeare himself, a man who spends his time trying to write plays, constantly complaining and sharing words of wisdom with occasional listeners, providing most of the few comic interludes in the series. He is a constant reminder of pop-culture artists' interest in subverting traditional forms of high art and the sheer pleasure young consumers of pop art derive from irreverence towards cultural icons manifested in radical adaptation and reformulation, collage and pastiche, which this Japanese anime illustrates only so well. If it were not for the powerful moral message conveyed by the young protagonists' sacrifice and death, touching and thought-provoking, there would be nothing of note about the Gonzo Studio *Romeo x Juliet*. With its deeply moving ending, however, the anime series saves itself from complete forgetfulness, earning a place in the top five best anime adaptations of classical texts featured on *My Anime List* next to adaptations of *Les Misérables*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Conclusion

Anime is a great equalizer across national, social, and cultural boundaries, which explains its popularity among viewers from different parts of the world and the emergence of a manga and anime market outside Japan since the 1960s. Springing from an encounter of cultures, narrative and visual traditions of Japanese and Western origin, developing into a popular culture phenomenon of global appeal, anime – like manga – created its own conventions, visual techniques, stylistic properties, and generic features, and it generated its own fan culture inside and outside Japan. Shakespeare remains, it would seem, a transnational, transcultural icon, that provides a source of inspiration for appropriations feeding on the cultural status of his work, even in adaptations which reflect different realities or ideologies. In a post-textual context, in which the future of great texts is no longer on the page or even on the stage, but in the new media and the world wide web, *Romeo x Juliet* is perhaps pointing towards a future in which the appeal of Shakespeare will be solely dependent on the relevance of his stories and the medium in which they are told. In the great rhizomatic structure called “Shakespeare”, the texts themselves, the good and the bad quarto editions, unfixed as they may be, will be even further reduced to fading palimpsests coloured and brought to life by the new media, like the old films salvaged from archives and digitally airbrushed, sites of interesting cultural and aesthetic cross-pollinations in constantly morphing rhizomes.

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cultural status of the Elizabethan playwright and his plays. For instance, the goddess of the Great Tree Escalus is called Ophelia, the only feature that the two share being their madness; Cordelia, King Lear's daughter is here Juliet's best friend and mother substitute; Portia, the witty young woman in *The Merchant of Venice* becomes here Portia Clemenza d'Aimee, Romeo's self-exiled mother, hiding from the harsh reality of her husband's destructive rule of Neo Verona; Hermione, Romeo's betrothed, is modelled in part after the eponymous character in *Winter's Tale*, without the force and dignity of the Shakespearean character. Other names include Francisco, Emilia, Petruccio, Antonio, Titus, Balthasar, and Regan.

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