

Shakespeare's Hamlet in Manga Form

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the evolution of manga from its historical roots in Japan's Meiji Period to its global influence and differentiation from Western comics, particularly focusing on the role of manga adaptations of Shakespeare's works, like *Hamlet*. It delves into the cultural and technological factors that contributed to manga's rise, the unique characteristics that distinguish it from other comics, and the specific ways manga has embraced and adapted Shakespearean narratives to appeal to contemporary audiences globally. The analysis includes the impact of manga adaptations on understanding and engaging with Shakespeare's plays, highlighting the interplay between traditional literature and modern manga art forms in both educational and entertainment contexts. The text further examines the commercial success and cultural significance of manga adaptations of Shakespeare, underscoring the medium's flexibility and its role in globalizing Shakespeare's works.

Keywords: *Hamlet, Manga, Meiji Period, globalizing Shakespeare's works.*

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ÖZ

Bu makale, manga'nın tarihsel kökenlerinden Japonya'nın Meiji Dönemi'ne, Batı çizgi romanlarından farklılaşmasına ve küresel etkisine kadar olan evrimini incelemekte, özellikle Shakespeare'in *Hamlet* gibi eserlerinin manga adaptasyonlarının rolüne odaklanmaktadır. Manga'nın yükselişine katkıda bulunan kültürel ve teknolojik faktörleri, diğer çizgi romanlardan ayıran benzersiz özelliklerini ve Shakespeare'in anlatılarını çağdaş küresel izleyicilere hitap edecek şekilde benimseyip uyarladığı özel yolları içerir. Bu analiz, manga adaptasyonlarının Shakespeare'in oyunlarını anlama ve onlarla etkileşime girme üzerindeki etkisini inceyip ve geleneksel edebiyat ile modern manga sanat formları arasındaki etkileşimi hem eğitim hem de eğlence bağlamlarında vurgulamaktadır. Metin, ayrıca Shakespeare'in manga adaptasyonlarının ticari başarısını ve kültürel önemini incelemekte, ortamın esnekliğini ve Shakespeare'in eserlerini küreselleştirmedeki rolünü altını çizmektedir.

Keywords: *Hamlet, Manga, Meiji Dönemi, Shakespeare'in eserlerinin küreselleştirilmesi.*

THE ART OF MANGA

Manga is an umbrella term to refer to graphic novels and comics in Japan. The meaning of the term is explained as “*Manga* (漫画 or まんが) is Japanese for ‘comics.’ Coined in the 1800s by the Japanese artist Hokusai to refer to doodles in his sketchbook, the term can be translated as “whimsical sketches” or “lighthearted pictures.” (Thompson, 2007, p. xii) The origin of the art style of manga in Japan is discussed to date back to the illustrations of Buddhist monks in the twelfth century. (Brenner, 2007, p. 1) The mass consumption of the art style came with the use of wooden block prints in the Tokugawa Era, “Although panels were not specifically used, the tradition of style and observation from life turned into stylized beauty is still an evident part of manga’s visuals,” which then developed further to become comics. (Brenner, 2007, p. 2) However, what is known and consumed as manga in comic book format today evolved after the 1960s with major Western influences.

The earlier influence of Western comics in Japan began during the Meiji Period (1862–1912), when “the rich tradition of Japanese graphic narration was to meet the Western one, and this encounter gave birth to what has been named — for the first time — manga.” (Boissou, 2010, p. 21) Since the

Meiji Period in Japan “brought about the modernization and Westernization of the country,” (Meiji Restoration), manga were consistently affected as well. During the Meiji Period, “The West introduced the technology — offset and lithography printing — that permitted the transformation of the graphic narration into a new type of low-cost mass media, and some Westerners provided the model for such a new media.” (Boissou, 2010, p. 21) With the technology, artists from the West started interacting with Japanese society as well, the most influential names being Briton Charles Wirgman and Frenchman Georges Bigot, though the main trigger for the American-like comics was due to political reasons. (Schodt, 1983, p. 38) For instance, in 1897, the *Marumaru Chimbun* published a series suggesting that the political cartoons from the newspapers had been influential in the victory of William McKinley in the U.S. election. (Boissou, 2010, p. 22)

This series, along with various discussions on politics and modernism in Japan, enabled Japanese reformists to incorporate comics into the everyday print of newspapers. “Several years later, two of Japan’s most famous cartoonists of this century, Rakuten Kitazawa (1876–1955) and Ipppei Okamoto (1886–1948), helped popularise and adapt American cartoons and comic strips.” This adaptation process, in awe of the popularity of comic strips in American newspapers, led Kitazawa to create the first serialised Japanese comic strip with regular characters. (Schodt, 1983, p. 42) However, the rise and commercial success of the art form came after World War II, with heavier influences from the West.

As stated, and explained with examples, before the 1960s, “manga are mostly children’s adventure stories and family newspaper strips.” (Thompson, 2007, p. xvii) The exception to that generalisation and the trigger for the modern version of manga would be the attempts of Osamu Tezuka, who tried his hand at creating science fiction and *Shōjo*² manga to tell stories. Later on, his attempts earned him the titles of “Grandfather of Manga” and “God of Manga,” since his first popular work, *Astro Boy*, started a revolution and, alongside Tezuka’s many other works, changed manga culture forever. Schodt even summarises his presence in the manga industry as “Tezuka is an example of how one talented individual, born at the right time, can profoundly change the field he decides to work in.” (Schodt, 1983, p. 63)

² “This term distinguishes the audience for girls, or *shōjo* manga. *Shōjo* manga is usually defined by a concentration on emotion and relationships.” (Brenner, 2007, p. 304)

The first modern manga as the world knows it today appeared in 1947 with the publication of *Shintakarajima* (The New Treasure Island) by Tezuka Osamu himself and reportedly sold 400,000 copies in a few months.” (Boissou, 2010, pp. 24-25) The 200 pages comic, with its “creative page layout, clever use of sound effects, and lavish spread of frames to depict a single action made reading *Shintakarajima* almost like watching a movie. The young readers were dazzled.” (Schodt, 1983, p. 62) Moreover, after the success of his first work, Tezuka kept working relentlessly, and his numerous works helped the art of manga reach its full potential in both the international and local markets immensely. The most apparent example of these great achievements is his most popular work, *Astro Boy*.

Astro Boy, or *Tetsuwan Atom* in Japanese, featured an atomic-empowered boy robot built by a scientist as a replacement for his own son, who died in a car accident. It first appeared as a serialised manga in 1951, ran for 18 years, and became the first successful globalised product of the manga industry after it “began syndication as Japan’s first television cartoon (which was successfully exported abroad, including to the US) in 1961 under the name *Astro Boy*.” (Allison, 2000, p. 73) Besides Tezuka’s brilliance, there were two major reasons behind *Astro Boy*’s international success. The incorporation of Western influences into the globally distributed media enabled consumers outside of Japan to feel somewhat familiar with a foreign work of art.

As mentioned earlier, modern manga as a form is considerably influenced by the West through technology, politics, and comic strips. Moreover, the art and artists themselves are influenced by the West as well. “Tezuka’s artistic style was primarily inspired not by other comics, but by cinema, particularly the works of animators like Walt Disney and Max Fleischer”. As manga’s popularity surged, Tezuka’s groundbreaking approach went on to inspire a growing community of manga artists (Schodt, 1983, p. 63-64).

On the other side, apart from the influence of Western comics, postwar manga stood out from American and Franco-Belgian comics with what Tezuka started. Much like the comic artists who contributed massively to the popularity of superhero franchises in American comic books during World War II. (Sanderson et al., 2023) Tezuka and the other first generations manga artists were teenagers during the war. They were not old enough to take part in the fight but were mature enough to feel the pressure of war, and it was reflected in their art. (Johnson-Woods, 2010, p. 25)

According to Johnson-Woods, the trauma of the war brought four main elements that differentiated manga from other comic books. The first element is the underlying adult failure, destruction of the world, and teenagers saving the world through the power of friendship to promote optimism. The occurrence of this element seems pretty fitting for the devastation the war brought about, and it works both as a promise and as an inspiration to future generations. The second one is the *mecha* genre, in which robots piloted by teenagers save Japan from others, due to a desire to win the war their fathers could not. The third one is the scientific adventure genre, just like Tezuka's *Astro Boy*, and the last element was "the fruit of the enforcement of new ideals imported by U.S. occupation (freedom, democracy) upon a nation whose traditional values had failed but not disappeared." (Johnson-Woods, 2010, p. 25)

After the 1960s, the popularity of manga skyrocketed when anime TV shows were produced for the first time. As Schodt writes in detail, "By the mid-1960s the industry had assumed its present configuration. It was predominantly located in Tokyo. Television and comics were firmly intertwined in a symbiotic relationship." (Schodt, 1983, p. 67). The anime enabled manga to reach out to a wider audience in and outside Japan, and this newly found popularity and globalisation allowed manga to differentiate itself from the original inspiration of the art form, American comics, which eventually fluctuated the success of manga outside of Japan.

Many things about Manga changed or stood out from other forms of comics thanks to the globalisation of the products. For instance, "While the development of comics in the United States faltered, and sales shrivelled, Japan gave birth to a Godzilla. But the explosion of the industry did not occur without a sacrifice. The colour printing which was so common before the war all but disappeared. Political and editorial cartoons were virtually destroyed by politics, ideology, and later, apathy." (Schodt, 1983, p. 67). As another example, unlike its Western counterparts, manga has various sub-categories that appeal to different target audiences, like *Shōjo* and *Josei*³ manga, which were eventually owned by female creators, "displacing men with the convincing argument that they better understood female psychology." (Schodt, 1983, p. 67) since the genres were specifically

³ "This term distinguishes the audience for manga aimed at women aged eighteen and up. Josei manga include many of the traditions of *Shōjo* titles, but the content is more mature in terms of explicitness and complexity," (Brenner, 2007, p. 298).

aimed at women and young girls. However, in the U.S. comic industry, which is largely dominated by superhero comics, *Shōjo* and *Josei* manga were deemed too unconventional and failed to reach a certain popularity until recently.

In 1993, Japan achieved great commercial success with a live-action show called *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* in Hollywood, whereas other Japanese productions did not do so well. The main reason behind the success of the show was attributed to its radical transformation to suit American taste better, contrary to the anime show called *Sailor Moon*. According to the business experts, the reason why *Sailor Moon* failed to achieve the same success as *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* was because the anime did not go through a similar change as the live action show and was not Americanized, so the American audience felt that it was too foreign to be enjoyed (Allison, 2000, p. 67-68). Although *Sailor Moon* became successful in other countries where it was launched, such as France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Canada, due to smart marketing campaigns in the local markets, the manga and anime industry, to prevent similar instances to the failure of marketing *Sailor Moon* in the U.S., took on a new marketing strategy.

During the mid-1990s, the local market for manga started to decline in Japan, and publishers began searching for a new market. The licencing process started first with the other Asian countries in the late 1980s, then proceeded with Europe. After successful licencing processes with Asia and Europe, Japanese publishers started to focus on the U.S. market as a last resort, due to the population of children in the U.S. being twice as large as Japan's. (Wong, 2006, p. 29) After entering the U.S. market, to appeal to the American audience, without repeating a similar marketing failure akin to *Sailor Moon*, publishers and artists decided to promote Japanese works as nationless and as general as they could. While studying this globalisation process of Japanese products in detail, Bainbridge and Norris categorised this marketing strategy as “denationalisation” and wrote,

Aside from positioning manga within this commercial flow, the more significant part of the influence of these commercial forces is in the growing denationalization of works of manga that can become standardized global icons, like *Astro Boy* or *Pokémon*. These products can be promoted by marketing campaigns and easily appropriated by audiences to become an appealing product in any market. Through this process, manga is placed within a familiar environment and becomes an everyday practice; just as you play

with *Naruto* action figures, build *Evangelion* model kits and wear *Death Note* hoodies, so too will you read the manga that preceded the anime. (Bainbridge & Norris, 2010, p. 247-248).

The consumption of manga merchandise in other industries boosted both the economic expansion and the cultural recognition of the art of manga. Furthermore, in the United States, manga sales have tripled from 2000 to 2002, a market value of US\$40–50 million with manga now accounting for one-third of the U.S. graphic novel market. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 15) Perhaps even more tellingly, this figure does not include OEL (original English-language) manga. (Bainbridge & Norris, 2010, p. 235). The market values provide an estimation of how many people started consuming manga in 2006 since the current number in 2023 is \$5.05 billion according to The All Japan Magazine and Book Publishers' and Editors' Association (AJPEA), and the immense increase in demand for manga, partly due to easier access via the internet and e-books, shows that in contemporary popular culture, manga is still a popular choice of entertainment. (Vendrell, 2023). However, the key piece of information here is the fact that manga in the original English language do exist. Western culture, after many years of consuming Japanese manga, decided to produce their own manga—not comic books or graphic novels, but specifically manga with unique Japanese artistic style—even after denationalisation of the art style became the most critical marketing strategy outside Japan. Just like Shakespeare's tragedies in manga forms, originally in English yet retold in the Japanese art of manga. So, in the following sections, this paper will examine the process of how *Hamlet* got turned into manga and how it affects the consumers of *Hamlet* in its manga form.

***Hamlet* in Japan**

Hamlet is one of the most popular Shakespeare plays in general and in Japan due to various reasons, and with a closer look, those reasons reveal unique takes on Shakespeare and the society of Japan through how Japanese artists and intellectuals interpreted Shakespeare. Just as the initial major influences from the West started affecting manga in the Meiji Restoration, Shakespeare and *Hamlet* were first introduced to Japan in the same modernisation period during the late 19th century. During this period, the effects of arts and culture were at their peak, and the interaction between the local culture and the Western culture became inevitable. While being exposed to Western literature, Shakespeare became a prominent figure in

this new, modernised, and intellectual era. Sato summarises the concept by writing, "Shakespeare, or *Hamlet* in particular, had a dramatic impact on the intellectual history of the Meiji period," then strengthens his argument by mentioning, "Drama specialist Kawatake Toshio goes so far as to say that the process of modernization in Japanese poetry, fiction, and drama can be traced through the successive ways in which *Hamlet* was accepted and emulated by Meiji intellectuals." (Sato, 1985, p. 23)

Furthermore, Sato divides the impact of *Hamlet* in Japan into three categories, with three different characters representing each category. "Crest of a utilitarian wave to provide practical advice on how to succeed," through Polonius, next, "with the emerging trend of soul-searching in literature to suggest a way of establishing self-identity," through Hamlet and lastly, "the tide of Romanticism to introduce fragile feminine beauty as a literary," through Ophelia. (Sato, 1985, p. 23) What is interesting in this categorization and about the appearance of *Hamlet* in Japan is that, even though Polonius is not a celebrated character in the canon, he is the first character to have a major presence, and his words affected the modern era of Japan greatly. On this exact subject, Sato starts out by writing, "Hamlet made its entrance in Japan with a mere three lines from Polonius's didactic speech: 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be;/ For loan oft loses both itself and friend, / And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry'" then he goes on to mention how this epigram became a muse for the tenth chapter of a self-help book by Samuel Smiles, which has become one of the greatest three books of the Meiji period of Japan with its translation under the concept of tales from the West. (Sato, 1985, p. 23)

This fascination with Polonius and his take on money contributes to a very local, very Japanese take on *Hamlet*. The tenth chapter of the self-help book that Sato mentioned was about money and how to manage it, so before appreciating *Hamlet's* literary value and the tragedy the play entails, Japanese intellectuals during the Meiji Period, who were tired after a long history of war and calamity under the feudal regime, tried to prosper economically first in order to create a convenient space for the Japanese people to appreciate cultural modernisation and enrichment.

After the search for practical knowledge stopped between Meiji intellectuals, "in 1874, a Yokohama-based monthly magazine with an English title, *The Japan Punch*, printed his soliloquy starting with the famous question, "To be or not to be," in a Japanese translation transcribed in the Western

alphabet.” (Sato, 1985, p. 24) This monthly magazine called *The Japan Punch* was started by one of the names Schodt mentioned a lot in terms of influence while writing about the beginning of the modernisation period of manga, Charles Wingman. Furthermore, this print of Hamlet’s soliloquy was the earliest appearance of *Hamlet* in Japanese popular culture, which eventually became a major presence with the play’s manga adaptation and numerous references in the manga, anime, and television industries.

Shakespeare Adaptations in Japanese Popular Culture

P. K Nayar argues that “Shakespeare as a product is differentiated along various lines to suit multiple markets,” and Shakespeare suits Japanese popular culture in its own, Japanified way. (Nayar, 2015, p.42) Shakespeare became an enormous figure in Japan, and as one of his most famous works, *Hamlet*, became extremely popular as well, even if people did not read *Hamlet* or any other works of Shakespeare directly. They simply became common knowledge due to regular exposure to entertainment media.

At a Zoom conference titled *Shakespeare in Japan* from Birmingham University, Ryuta Minami addresses this by saying,

Shakespeare is known to almost anyone because the number of people who go to the theatre is limited but Shakespeare appears on TV commercials, and mobile games and comics and what we call light novels and novels for young people. So, they’ve never read Shakespeare’s plays, so sometimes they refer to Shakespeare’s plays as ‘Shakespeare’s novels’ but they are familiar with some, a couple of Shakespeare’s plays, like *Romeo & Juliet* and *Hamlet*, and possibly, *Macbeth* as well. They are quite well known with younger people and older generations as well, I think. (Minami, 2016, 03:00-04:02).

Thus, it is not a far-fetched idea to say that Shakespeare is consumed in Japanese society due to its excellent marketing. But what would be the reason behind commercialising Shakespeare to this extent?

During the same Zoom conference, while talking about the wide use of Shakespeare in Japan, Yukari Yoshihara jokingly says, “And it is copyright-free.” (Yoshihara, 2022, 07:55-07:58) For economic purposes, it is indeed incredibly convenient to use copyright-free material, and it is a plausible contribution to the popularity of Shakespeare, yet there is much more. After her whimsical remark, Yoshihara goes on and explains her reasoning by saying,

I can go back about 100 years, 150 years ago to say that the first Japanese Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, was *No*⁴, *Kabuki*⁵ adaptation. The story followed Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, but the characters were turned into Japanese in kimono. In the first Japanese adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello*, the story was set in Taiwan during Japanese colonisation. So these are the instances of how Shakespeare was adaptable in the context of Japanese history, politics, etc. And ever since, Shakespeare's works have been giving us really great occasions to adapt, to use, to utilise, to circulate, to reuse Shakespeare to produce something new, weird, and awesome. And, the most recent product of this history, the culture of adaptation is now appearing in popular culture, in manga, anime, cosplay... But they are sort of inheriting, the tradition or history of adapting Shakespeare through its copyright-free use. (Yoshihara, 2022, 08:10-09:53)

As Yoshihara explains in depth with historical context, Japanese popular culture items are, most naturally, reproduced in a way that attracts Japanese consumers. Popular images or symbols in Japan tend to have a dramatic or exaggerated flair to them. For instance, in English, what we perceive as simply cuteness translates to the term *kawaii* in Japanese. The closest translation of the term is cute, yet it has various meanings ranging from the cuteness of a baby to adult cuteness with a hint of sexiness to the cuteness of grotesque things that one seems to want to keep looking at. (Minami, 2016, p. 118) This depth of simple-looking, common themes is what makes Japanese cultural mediums open to interpretation.

The Japanese mainstream culture has many different ways of interpreting Shakespeare and his plays. There has been an abundance of quotes from Shakespearean works in different anime and video games that are widely consumed in Japan, which even led to inserting the author himself in these mediums. Shakespeare in Japan, much like Hello Kitty, has become adjusted to the previously mentioned *kawaii* term and has spread in popularity even back into Western culture without disturbing the root of what makes them Shakespearean. Ryuta Minami, one of the same scholars from the Birmingham University conference, has studied this commotion in-depth and commented on the same finding by writing, When Shakespeare is transferred onto popular media platforms such as anime,

4 "Derived from Buddhist traditions and Chinese influences, No started in the fourteenth century and is the oldest form of theater in Japan," (Brenner, 2007, p. 302)

5 "During the subsequent eras, kabuki actors were known to be the equivalent of geisha for female courtiers, their sexual favors bought once the performance was through. Kabuki today consists of three types of performance: elaborate historical plays, more realistic domestic plays, and dances," (Brenner, 2007, p. 298)

manga (graphic novels), and video games, references to Shakespeare's plays are fragmentary, heterogeneous, and obscure, yet still recognizably Shakespearean. This means that any alterations are acceptable or sometimes even preferable in the anime-manga imagination as long as the media object is recognizably Shakespearean. (Minami, 2016, p. 117)

There are various Shakespeare adaptations in Japan, varying in terms of quality, loyalty to the original work of Shakespeare, seriousness, popularity, and so on. Some of them are translated into English, and some of them remain only in Japanese. There are manga like *Requiem of the Rose King*, an experimental series that has "artistic experimentations with gender transgressions with powerful women and an intersexed Richard." (Yoshihara, 2016, p. 119) Then there are some other adaptations to purely ridicule and parody Shakespeare, such as "Othello, a farce of an old man trying to keep up with the latest fashion out of jealousy (New Othello [Shin Osero]: 1906)," (Yoshihara, 2013, p. 86). According to Yoshihara, these parodies are reactions to Japanese high culture and the authority of Shakespeare. (Yoshihara, 2013, p. 84).

Any topic, symbol, or figure that can receive prolonged attention and has ample available materials for reproduction, has the potential to elicit both positive and negative reactions. However, some media may be created to utilise various reactions, both favourable and unfavourable, in order to establish a common ground. For Shakespeare and Japanese popular culture, a similar medium with the intention of finding a middle ground is the use of Shakespeare in manga form. With a parallel mindset, Yoshihara writes, "To some people, making manga with Shakespearean motifs is seen as an insult to the writer, but I believe that the blending of Shakespeare and manga will open up new possibilities of encounter between classical culture and contemporary culture, high art and popular culture, and the global and the local." (Yoshihara, 2022, p.169)

Manga Adaptations of *Hamlet*

Hamlet has various adaptations and reinterpretations in Japanese popular culture. For instance, In April 2014, the Japan Broadcasting Company (NHK) broadcasted a 1-minute and 30-second animated film titled *Ophelia, not yet*. This animation playfully references John Everett Millais's 1852 painting of Ophelia. In this animated version, Ophelia resembles Millais's portrayal but doesn't meet the tragic fate of drowning since she's depicted as a national backstroke champion and can swim. (Yoshihara, 2016, p.

107-108). There are some manga, such as *The Blast of Tempest* and its anime adaptation with the same name. The manga and the show use a significant amount of *Hamlet* quotes and as the story unfolds, the three main characters resemble Hamlet, Laertes, and Ophelia. (Minami, 2016, p. 119-120)

Additionally, there are also diverse manga versions of *Hamlet* that illustrate the play in manga style, and two of them will be analysed in this paper. *Hamlet, The Manga Edition* by Adam Sexton and Tintin Pantoja, which maintains the original storyline and retells it in manga style, and *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet* published by SelfMadeHero, which presents Hamlet in a near-future dystopia with cybernetic elements. However, before delving into the chosen works, it's somewhat important to note that neither of the manga adaptations were created by Japanese artists or editors. This absence of Japanese manga artists in the development of these manga adaptations can be attributed to Japan's "nationless" marketing strategy, which had been mentioned earlier in this paper, and the widespread global popularity of manga.

Yoshihara celebrates the existence of non-Japanese manga artists and the combination of Shakespeare and manga by writing, "Likewise, *manga* originated in Japan but has become a global art form that is enjoyed by local and international audiences alike; *manga* artists today are no longer exclusively Japanese. It was a British publisher, SelfMadeHero (SMH), that made the combination of Shakespeare and *manga* globally current." (Yoshihara, 2022, p. 175) Much like how manga and Japanese popular culture were influenced by Western culture, the manga adaptations of Hamlet drew inspiration from Japan and the art style of manga. Therefore, the absence of Japanese artists does not separate them from Japan or its popular culture.

Firstly, *Hamlet, The Manga Edition* has an introduction written by the editor, Adam Sexton. In the introduction, he claims that manga is an ideal medium for Shakespeare's works since manga is inherently visual. (Sexton, 2008, p. 2). Then he compares manga to theatre adaptations and states, "Unbound by the physical realities of the theater, the graphic novel can depict any situation, no matter how fantastical or violent, that its creators are able to pencil, ink, and shade." (Sexton, 2008, p. 2) Though a comparison between art forms is not something that can be easily done,

having an easily accessible visual form of *Hamlet* in print may prove beneficial for experiencing the play.

To strengthen his argument and to explain why the medium is specifically based on *Hamlet*, Sexton writes,

Not one of Shakespeare's plays contains more internal material—thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears and ideas—than *Hamlet*. Hamlet himself delivers five soliloquies throughout the course of the tragedy named for him, and all are masterpieces of poetry and rhetoric, philosophy and wordplay. Though *Shakespeare's Hamlet: The Manga Edition* doesn't explain the soliloquies, it gives us the opportunity to read and reread them in the context of the visually-presented action described above. By means of dynamic new medium of manga, Shakespeare's timeless tragedy is thereby made new—again. (Sexton, 2008, p. 2)

All in all, *Hamlet* is a play that is filled with numerous tragic scenes and soliloquies, and experiencing such a play to its full extent requires certain delicacies. For instance, during a stage play, one can receive the power of emotion through the right tonation and the right gestures, and in a manga, it can be done with expressions.

Graphic novels and manga provide creators with the ability to guide readers' attention to specific aspects of a story. Through the use of space, fonts, and darker shading for emphasis, creators can easily highlight particular elements on a page. Visual narrative techniques compensate for the absence of audio and vocal enhancements in staged theatre plays. In pivotal scenes, static images with their own sequential dynamics, conveying highly expressive facial expressions, and the option to revisit the storyline by flipping through pages multiple times, offer valuable avenues for experiencing and analysing a tragedy.

Furthermore, this concept is excellent for teaching and learning as well. In an article, Schwarz studies how to expand literacies through visuals and graphic novels and writes, "To read and interpret graphic novels, students have to pay attention to the usual literary elements of character, plot, and dialogue, and they also have to consider visual elements such as color, shading, panel layout, perspective, and even the lettering style." (Schwarz, 2006, p. 59)

To clarify these arguments, a close-up reading of two selected scenes from *Hamlet, The Manga Edition*, can be provided. The first selected scene is on

page 169 of the manga, there is an illustration of a part of the duel between Hamlet and Laertes (see Fig. 1). Analysing this scene offers an opportunity to observe how manga's art style functions in scenes with minimal text and maximum action while still conveying subtle yet distinct details.

In a single illustrated page, readers can grasp more than just the highlighted fighting scene; they can analyse the entire duel from various perspectives. The upper panels of the page depict the varying moods of the two characters during the fight. The first two panels on the upper left indicate that Hamlet begins the duel with enthusiasm, seeing it as a contest between two individuals with a bond rather than an intent to kill. This is evident from his facial expressions and evasive moves. Instead of countering the incoming strikes, he adeptly dodges them until the third panel on the top right, where he retaliates and makes contact with his sword. In the fourth panel just below, there's a significant change in Hamlet's expression. The focus on his darkened eye with a dilated pupil suggests a shift towards a more serious and ominous demeanour.

Moving on to Laertes, within the same panels, he undergoes a transformation as well. In the first two panels at the top right, he acts purely on his fighting instincts, viewing Hamlet as a target and openly displaying his hostility. However, in the third panel, Hamlet strikes him down, and you can see the shock and slight panic on Laertes' face as he realises that his opponent is not to be underestimated. This realisation is depicted in even greater detail in the final bottom panel. Laertes' face is drenched in sweat, and somewhat reluctantly, he acknowledges that Hamlet has made contact.

The final panel reveals more, not just with Laertes alone but with the addition of combining the king and queen with Laertes' anxious expression. In this last panel, the queen and the king are shown as spectators observing the duel between Hamlet and Laertes. The king even comments, "Our son shall win." (Sexton, 2008, p.169) While this may simply seem to create a broader scene for the story, the fact that both spectators' faces are not illustrated is a form of foreshadowing. In manga, faceless background characters imply that those characters have dark or hidden deeds that will change the course of action in the near future.

In summary, manga can effectively portray action-packed scenes while allowing room for detailed character analysis. Also, manga can draw attention to specific details of wordless action scenes by focusing on the

mood of the characters and even including the background characters and their roles without disturbing the flow of a scene by using a sequence of multiple panels that vary in size and shape to compose a page. The readers can focus individually on each panel for specifics or look at the whole page for a compact understanding of the highlighted event of the story without getting sidetracked by the details.



Fig. 1. Sexton, Adam. *Shakespeare's Hamlet The Manga Edition*. Art by Tintin Pantoja. Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2008. Print.

The second selected scene is on page 34 (see Fig. 2). Unlike the first scene, here the delivery of lines has a heavier emphasis than the depicted actions. In scenes with similar settings, the flow of a scene and the dynamic range are still important, especially regarding facial expressions. However, rather than creating an atmosphere for the characters to interact with one another, the emphasis is placed on lines and how they are relayed to the viewer. On the last panels on the right side of the lower half of the page, one of the most well-known lines of the original play, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," is illustrated. (Shakespeare, 2012, p. 30), Combined with the prior panels on the left, everything that is drawn is to highlight this specific line.

The first panel on the lower left shows a confused but determined Hamlet after encountering the ghost. In the second panel, Hamlet declares that he will follow the ghost with his eyes closed, which indicates that his resolve is final despite the warnings of others, while the ghost is illustrated with bold and dark lines to show the seriousness of the situation and to darken the mood. On the third panel at the top right of the bottom half, a soldier in panic is trying to reach out to Hamlet, yet his attention is solely on the ghost that is holding his face in his hands. The much smaller panel right underneath it, shows Hamlet's single eye with an enlarged pupil, indicating his subtle terror and providing the contrast in Hamlet's mood from the previous panels. To complement the interaction and to create a mirror image, the fifth panel shows another single eye filled with a kind of despair and heaviness, yet this time, it belongs to the ghost. Lastly, the final panel of the page shows the closed eye of the ghost, indicating that he conveyed whatever he had to and is ready to go on.

So, scenes that demonstrate emotions and require words can also be illustrated vividly in manga. Perhaps with the lack of audio, there can be many artistic and emotional aspects missing since tonation, emphasis on certain words, or even the subtle breaking of a voice can have a great effect on the scene, yet every medium has its own advantages and disadvantages.



Fig. 2. Sexton, Adam. *Shakespeare's Hamlet The Manga Edition*. Art by Tintin Pantoja. Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2008. Print.

The second selected work, *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet*, offers a new perspective on the original *Hamlet* storyline with the text adaptation of Richard Appignanesi and the illustrations of Emma Vieceli. There are many creative takes on this manga adaptation. The first remarkable artistic choice, straight on the cover of the manga, is Hamlet's portrayal as a *Bishonen*⁶ with white hair and a black streak, and it is a strategic choice.

⁶ "Literally, "beautiful young men." Bishonen are male characters designed to appeal to girls, identified by fine features, tall and slender frames, and fine features. Bishonen are not always willowy and may sport a more muscled physique, but they are always beautiful," (Brenner, 2007, p. 294)

While writing about the creative struggles of creating *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet* and finding an audience, Emma Hayley, the publisher of the manga, states, “Many of Shakespeare’s plays do not easily fit into the conventional manga categories both because of the nature of the plays themselves and also because Shakespeare has a wide-reaching readership both in terms of age and gender. Take *Hamlet* for example: does it appeal more to male or to female readers?” (Hayley, 2010, p. 273)

This concern of hers stems from the fact that manga has many categories for many different target audience groups in terms of age and gender, and she writes, “our manga version of *Hamlet* possesses characteristics of shōjo manga, it is not typically shōjo because of the nature of the narrative. There is an unwritten code in shōjo manga that males cannot be protagonists, or at least, they are rare.” (Hayley, 2010, p. 274) So the production team finds the solution to this problem by turning *Hamlet* into a bishonen to appeal to both genders. A male lead character that the boys can relate to still exists while being pretty enough to capture the attention of girls.

Secondly, the story takes place in a dystopic cyberworld in the year 2107, after the world has been devastated by climate change, yet the language used is Shakespearean, not modern. Hayley explains this choice by writing, “We decided that keeping the original Shakespearean text was crucial, but in an abridged form. The reason Shakespeare is still the most widely read playwright today is because of many factors, but one is the beauty of the language he uses. To modernize the text would mean losing that element unnecessarily.” (Hayley, 2010, p. 269).

Though it is admittedly foreign to see *Hamlet* asking, “How chances it they travel?” before looking at a hologram coming out of his wristband to see the arrival of the players he hired to perform a play for his uncle/father, it is still pleasant to read the manga in the original Shakespearean language since it provides a crucial connection to the original play, and the abridgment of the text works very well with the illustrations and the nature of manga. (Appignanesi et al, 2022, p. 65) The intention behind the artistic choice, as Hayley explains, “The point of this beautiful medium is not to have pages of talking heads, but to “show” and not “tell,” combining visual poetry with textual poetry,” is conveyed successfully. (Hayley, 2010, p. 269) The positive reactions to the *Manga Shakespeare* support this claim as well.

Manga Shakespeare attracted worldwide attention when the first books were published in March 2007. Rather than only attaining reviews in the comic press, our manga received critical acclaim in influential mainstream newspapers such as the Financial Times, which wrote, ‘The manga versions are... visually appealing, intelligently adapted, and demonstrate that Shakespeare is a writer for every age. 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’ (Hayley, 2010, p. 276-277).

So, a new medium that is a combination of *Hamlet* and manga, *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet*, along with other manga adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, reached a large and global audience with the potential to captivate readers from diverse backgrounds and age groups who may not have been initially drawn to the original play through conventional means.

Attitudes Towards Manga and Potential of *Manga Hamlet*

Historically, manga did not always have the best reputation among the print media. In 1959, when the first manga consumers grew up and began high school, their parents believed that they had reached an age in which they should stop reading “children’s stories,” but by publishing the first weekly magazines for promoting manga, publishers disregarded such expectations. (Bouissou, 2010, p. 26) Instead of remaining as a children’s entertainment form, manga grew older and maturer with its audience and started illustrating various topics in life and adulthood. For instance, a long and brutal political student movement among collage students started in 1968, and manga reflected the same outrage its readers felt by breaking taboo after taboo and publishing series with themes such as violence, sex, death, and indecent behaviour even against the protests of parents and teacher’s associations. (Bouissou, 2010, p. 26-27)

The globalisation process of manga was risky and complicated before it eventually flourished. “The survival of manga in Asia outside Japan was not always a certainty; at times, it faced a Sisyphean task, dodging denouncements from high government officials, cartoonists, parents, and teachers and facing censorship and bannings.” (Lent, 2010, p. 297) For starters, Korea eventually developed a comic book format called manhwa, inspired by Japanese manga, yet the relationship between Korea and manga “was torn between being attracted to it and feeling obliged to boycott it.” (Lent, 2010, p. 301)

By the same token, “Among Western intelligentsia, educationalists, and parents, manga has long had a reputation for vulgarity, violence, and bad drawing.” (Bouissou, 2010, p. 17) When a new wave of anime and manga started becoming popular in France, it alarmed French parents and authorities, and “accordingly, the major French comics publishers boycotted manga until the demand became impossible to ignore.” (Malone, 2010, p. 323)

Moving on to more recent times, Kate Allen and John E. Ingulsrud published a study in 2003, called “Manga literacy: Popular culture and the reading habits of Japanese college students.” They started their study by writing, “Manga constitutes the most popular kind of reading material in Japan, However, these texts are not accepted in schools because many parents and teachers believe reading manga is too easy and may have adverse effects.” (Allen, K., & Ingulsrud, 2003, p.674) Later in the essay, they categorised the reasons why the students read manga according to their responses, and one of the categories was about learning something new. “Comments show that, contrary to those critics who claim that reading manga is detrimental, these readers are learning about language, format, and ideas. More important, they enjoy their learning.” (Allen, K., & Ingulsrud, 2003, p.677) Then, in the conclusion part of the story, they wrote, “There are various ways to use manga in the classroom. Rather than simply ban manga, teachers can explore the kinds of texts being read and also how readers engage with manga. Students may become more critical readers if teachers equip them with the necessary skills to understand the variety of messages that manga can represent.” (Allen, K., & Ingulsrud, 2003, p.681)

Even more recently, in 2019, a scholar named Allison P. Hobgood published her experience as a visiting scholar at Tokyo International University during the summer of 2016, and she did exactly what Allen and Ingulsrud suggested. She used a manga adaptation of *Macbeth* from SelfMadeHero, the same British publishing house that published *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet* as well. She explained her conclusion about using the material by writing, “These innovative adaptations, lambasted by some scholars as the ‘dumbing down’ of early modern literature, contrastingly provided me and my students with unique points of access to Shakespeare.” (Hobgood, 2019, p. 51)

What Hobgood did with her students by using the manga version of *Macbeth* is what the publisher, Emma Hayley, envisioned and worked for. She wrote, “We continue to see our series as having a global appeal, and in early 2008, I completed a tour of Malaysia, Singapore, and India (as a guest of the British Council), putting on Manga Shakespeare workshops and talks for teachers and students,” and quoted the very positive feedback from authorities responsible for education in the countries she toured. (Hayley, 2010, p. 278)

In light of these comments, this paper proposes that there is vast potential in manga adaptations of Shakespeare, specifically in *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet*. The version of *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet* used for this paper was printed in 2022, even though the work was first published in 2007. This goes on to show that there is still a demand for the manga and that it can be utilised further. Furthermore, the main advantage of reading a classic in its manga form is having a new perspective with visual narrative techniques, and *Hamlet* helps its manga version shine due to its dynamic and emotion filled story. The play is filled with heavy emotions and philosophical angst, which makes it best experienced with illustrated visuals, which can be looked at for a long time and many times. The Illustrator of the manga, Emma Viecelli, states, “In *Hamlet*, I focused less on what’s happening but more on who it’s happening to,” explains Viecelli, “for instance, I used lots of close-ups to express the emotions of the characters. It was important for getting a story as cerebral as *Hamlet* across effectively.” (Hayley, 2010, p. 271)

Every character in *Hamlet* demonstrates a wide range of emotions in their own way, and the visual representations of the *Shakespeare Manga Hamlet* make it easier to understand the characters and their mindsets through their visually portrayed reactions, even to the illustrator herself. Hayley writes, “Viecelli’s depiction of Ophelia started out as a spanner-wielding technician in an attempt to make her a dominant character, but this approach changed, and she developed into a more feminine figure, which showed that Ophelia’s strength as a character was her femininity.” The more Viecelli illustrated the characters, the more she understood their nature, as the readers of *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet* potentially did and will continue to do so. (Hayley, 2010, p. 279)

Conclusion

Japan has a unique way of utilising numerous elements in its popular culture. For instance, “Warren Buffet, Cup O’ Noodles, and William Shakespeare all share a publishing format gestures to the wide variety of manga available and the global spread of manga and its commercial, aesthetic, and educational value.” (Johnson-Woods, 2010, p. 12) However, what Shakespeare does not have in common with Warren Buffet and Cup O’ Noodles is having a grand historical impact on Japanese culture.

During the Meiji Period, Japan began a modernization process and opened itself up to Western influences for the first time. With this process of broadening the country’s horizon, Japan encountered Shakespeare for the first time through *Hamlet* and developed the culture of manga through American comic strips and technological advancements in the printing industry. After the Meiji Period, Japan kept interacting with the rest of the world and produced modern manga after World War II.

With time, as modern manga began to be globally distributed, it became a product with immense presence, and even started to influence other countries to the point that combining Shakespeare and manga became possible outside of Japanese popular culture. Furthermore, manga adaptations of famous Shakespeare plays were published by a British publishing house by the name of SelfMadeHero with an all-British team since the publisher wanted to support the UK’s own emerging talents as manga artists. This is partly due to Japan’s nationless marketing strategies for manga, and partly to the “ever-increasing popularity of manga outside of Japan.” (Hayley, 2010, p. 270)

Additionally, the emergence of Manga Shakespeare is based on creativity and intellectualism that can surface from any talented individual who adore both manga and Shakespeare, or as Yoshihara writes, “The adaptation of Shakespeare into manga is a creative act in itself, based on deep knowledge of the cultural codes of original works, and such adaptations are nothing less than an act of love for the originals.” (Yoshihara, 2022, p. 180) The very existence of this new and experimental format is a celebration of Shakespeare on a global scale, with the intention of capturing the attention of new, especially young, readers to the literary genius behind the works of Shakespeare.

As a final note, though the benefits of manga adaptations of Shakespeare are discussed in general, the reason why this paper specifically chose to analyse *Hamlet's* manga adaptations is that, as a play, *Hamlet* is the most suitable tragedy to highlight the best features of its manga adaptation due to its grand effect in Japanese history and with its characters who are filled with a variety of emotions that can be displayed the best in the form of manga with visual narrative techniques.

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