Shakespeare, Youth, and Comic Books

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Shakespearean play-texts are adapted into comic books in order to appeal to young readers. By analyzing four different adaptations including two comic book series and two manga series, it seeks to answer these research questions: what is the relationship between entertainment and education in comic book adaptations of Shakespeare? Are there problems that adaptations create at the same time as they try to solve issues of interest or understanding, as perceived by youth? This paper argues that the tension between entertainment and education in comic book adaptations of Shakespeare is usually imbalanced depending on an adaptation's goals. Substantial changes to the narrative, setting, or characters can create strong dissonances while reading although these feelings can be countered by balancing them with other changes. Adapting Shakespeare's work into comic books engages youth with an author that they often perceive as difficult and indicates his continued relevance in both education and entertainment.

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A Note on the Text

      Unless otherwise stated, quotations from comic books omit such textual features as bold font, italics, and all-capital writing. This is also true for quotations taken from Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics : The Invisible Art*, which is written as a comic book itself. Furthermore, foreign terms, such as "manga" and "shōjo", are italicized upon their first use and not again thereafter.

<u>Introduction: Shakespeare, Youth, and Comic Books</u>

Comic books have remained a popular genre of storytelling since their creation in the early 1930s and have always been a point of contention among literary enthusiasts in Western culture. They have perennially been viewed as "the lowest rung of the cultural ladder; the pay was poor, the production shoddy" (Weiner 2-3) in the early years of comics, when the genre was beginning to take root in North American culture. As Scott McCloud points out in his book *Understanding Comics : The Invisible Art*, "[some] of the most inspired and innovative comics of our century have never received recognition AS comics […]. For much of this century, the word 'comics' has had such negative connotations that many of comics' most devoted practitioners have preferred to be known as 'illustrators,' 'commercial artists' or, at best, 'cartoonists'" (18) in order to be disassociated with the comics industry. Comics took root in Western literary culture because they were a new form of printed entertainment, and yet although "comic strips were always recognized as something read by everyone, […] comic books were perceived as a format for children" (Weiner 3), a stigma that has always been attached to the genre. The idea that comic books were meant for children was not the only mark against them; they were considered to be poor literature and an overall bad influence. Yet comics were beloved of children as they grew up and they devoured the stories that comic books told with such enthusiasm that "*Parents' Magazine* sought to address the problem by producing a series of wholesome, fact-filled comics designed to wean preadolescents from the rapidly proliferating superhero fare" (Jones 10).

Since comic books became a mainstream form of entertainment, in spite of adult disapproval, comic book shops flourished and new kinds of comics began to appear on the shelves. Will Eisner's *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* is considered to be the

first modern "graphic novel", which is a term that was coined by Eisner as he tried to find a company that would publish his book-length comic book (Weiner 17). As this trend became more common, the general opinion of comic books began to change. If they were sponsored by a major publisher, comic books were trusted to be safe and educational, carrying with them the hope that if "young people read these, […] it could encourage them to move on to reading books composed primarily of text" (22). This goal has been longstanding in the minds of adults, but the comic book has not struggled for survival since they have remained a popular form of entertainment even for adults who find enjoyment in completely textual literature. Graphic novels nevertheless became a hit with publishers and the reading public, especially with the rising popularity of Japanese *manga* throughout the 1990's (61) and the publication of Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* in 2000 (57).

McCloud offers a definition of comics in which he calls them "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or to produce a response in the viewer", and he while acknowledges that this definition is imperfect, is it deliberately so since "Our attempts to define comics are an on-going process which won't end anytime soon" (9, 23). Additionally, there are a number of theories regarding the study of comic books, which cover a range of topics, including the technical aspects of panel and page layout, colour and illustration choices, communication and speech, narrative structures and readability, audiences and interpretation. It is important to consider all aspects of the comic book when it is being studied; focusing on only the illustrations or the narrative confines one's understanding of the story to a very narrow perspective, and a full comprehension of the story being told is lost. The study of the comics form can be separated into two distinct sections: aspects relating to form and aspects relating to narrative.

The study of the form that comics take focuses on the technical aspects of creating a comic book by examining the choices that allow a comic book to take shape. In terms of the layout, the gutter is a fantastic starting point for examining the theories of comic book studies. It refers to the space between panels on the comics page as well as being "the theoretical space in which the reader performs the suturing operation that ultimately enables the interpretive act, based on the assumption that the relationship between two consecutive images is not an arbitrary one" (Goggin & Hassler-Forest 1). The gutter is a defining quality that separates comics from other pictorial texts, such as children's picture books, and it affects the comprehension of the passage of time in comic books. The gutter is just one way that comics can be understood as a "mosaic art, in which lots of separate little pieces that come together through their relationships to each other form a whole, but nevertheless remain apparent as still-separate pieces" (Nodelman 438). Although the gutter helps to illustrate the passage of time between panels, the reader must also understand that the gutter represents "the possibility of alternative consequences between panels" since it "is the manifestation of the simultaneous discontinuities of space and time" (Mikkonen 77). Forced to make these logical connections between panels on one's own, a reader engages in closure since although "Nothing is seen between the two panels, […] experience tells you something must be there" and it is "closure [that] allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (McCloud 67).

Another important feature of the comics form is panels. Like the gutter that they create, panels are a defining quality of comic books and provide numerous ways of studying the medium. Panels—both their physical shape and their contents—show scenes strategically selected by the creator in order to weave the narrative and allow readers to interpret the fragments of the story as they experience it. Panels are especially adept at illustrating the flow of

time, not only through the use of the gutter, but through their own shape as well as through the illustrations within them. There is time both within and outside of panels, and this flow of time, although depicted by the creator, is controlled by the reader. The number of panels in a sequence, or particularly long panels flanked by smaller ones, affects a reader's perception of how quickly or slowly time is flowing in the narrative (100-101). In addition to "the linear sequence of images, single panels have the potential to interact across a narrative continuum. Graphic narrative can play on a network of spatially arranged visual connections between different panels on the same page; on subsequent double spreads; or even on more distant parts of the story" (Mikkonen 80). The use of speech balloons or banners within panels may help to further situate time in relation to the story, but regardless of these cues, readers control the pace at which they read, what they read first and how they connect each panel in the narrative. Comic books themselves encourage this kind of reading since "Both past and future are real and visible and all around us" (McCloud 104) when we read comics since the page is static, and the images only possess the illusion of movement and flow of time.

The narrative is always impacted by the form of the comic book: page layouts, types of panels, speech balloon designs, colour or lack thereof, and innumerable other qualities of the form guide one's perception of the narrative. The two are inextricably bound together and cannot be read separately. As adaptations of Shakespeare into a comic book form have become more prevalent, many teachers and scholars have come to regard comic books as an ideal form that not only appeals to young readers but is also very similar to a theatrical performance (as noted in Wetmore 172, Rokison 81, Grande 3) which is what the play-texts were meant to be used in: live productions. There are, of course, as many difficulties in adapting Shakespearean play-texts into comic book form as there are upsides. A continual point of contention when adapting

Shakespeare into comic book form is fidelity. Measuring *any* adaptation's worth on the basis of fidelity is sure to bring disappointment in some way since no adaptation can achieve perfect faithfulness to a source text. Although speaking with regards to film, Thomas Leitch notes that "faithful adaptations are […] so likely to be different from one another" (127) since different adaptations prioritize different qualities; cuts, character depictions, setting, and narrative changes are all based on who the adaptation is meant for and the goals that a particular adaptation has. Margaret Jane Kidnie discusses this same concept with specific regard to theatre, but it is equally applicable to comic book adaptations as well. She writes:

> It is sometimes assumed […] that the printed text of Shakespeare's plays provides the fixed point against which theatrical production can be monitored. In practice, however, appeals to the text are hampered by an inability to determine what constitutes the text of *Hamlet*, or any other play. […] [P]erceptions of a textual original necessarily extend well beyond any single text or document, providing the standard against which not only performance but a range of printed texts […] can themselves be assessed in terms of their supposed accuracy.

Evidently, fidelity to Shakespeare's play-texts in a range of adaptations is considered a necessary element, and deviation from obvious—if not extreme—fidelity is a risk that may not pay off. She goes on to propose that "a play, for all that it carries the rhetorical and ideological force of an enduring stability, is not an object at all, but rather a dynamic *process* that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users" (2). In this way, comic book adaptations can be understood as a natural evolution for the sensibilities of young readers since they are "able to process information presented in the form of multiple images juxtaposed with text very quickly. And, if they are faced with large blocks of text that are difficult to understand, they become unengaged" (Maynard 103), making a dually visual-textual adaptation more appealing.

Through the analysis of each text, this paper will seek to answer the following research questions: what is the relationship between entertainment and education in comic book

adaptations of Shakespeare? How does the transposition of the play-text into comic book format affect the narrative? Does adaptation to a visual and textual medium add to the understanding or enjoyment of Shakespeare? Are there problems that adaptations create at the same time as they try to solve issues of interest or understanding, as perceived by youth? These questions provide a basis for analyzing the way Shakespeare is presented in comic book format and how his plays are received by the target youth audience. This paper assumes that graphic adaptations of Shakespeare are meant both to be an educational tool and to foster genuine enjoyment in youth due to an updated and very visual medium. These adaptations may create problems in the faithfulness of the adapted text to the source through various decisions regarding language, character and scene inclusions, subplot omissions, and changes to the setting, resulting in the possibility that the text is not really "Shakespeare".

This paper will focus on four different comic book texts and analyze how they adapt Shakespeare's play-texts in a graphic form. Chapter One will examine the *Classics Illustrated* series which adapted many different classical texts into a comic book form, including five of Shakespeare's play-texts. This chapter will examine *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* in detail and discuss the success and failures of the adaptation choices with particular regard to fidelity as that was considered to be of primary importance. The text-art balance will also be analyzed as the series is very text-heavy in an effort to maintain fidelity to the play-texts and as such, the art is sometimes merely illustrative of the text rather than functioning independently to expand on what the text states. Ultimately, this series was meant to be an introduction for young readers to classic literature in a form that they both understood and enjoyed, so this chapter will also assess whether or not the adaptations possessed an implicit assumption that readers should already have a basic knowledge of the story.

The second chapter will focus on the Shakespearean adaptations in *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman. This series has its own over-arching story that does not depend on adaptations, but it does adapt two plays by Shakespeare—*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*—in order to muse on the process of writing and creativity. This chapter will explore the use of Shakespeare as a character with particular regard to how his existence as a character affects the transmission of the adapted play-texts, since both adaptations revolve around his life and his personal connection to the titular Sandman. Given that *The Sandman* has its own story and characters, the adaptations within the story will also be analyzed in terms of how they treat fidelity to the play-texts. Because they are adapted within an ongoing and original story, these adaptations will be analyzed with regard to how the stories are transmitted to the audience due to the intimate connection to the story of *The Sandman*.

Chapter Three will provide a detailed study of *Romeo x Juliet*, which is a Japanese *manga*, better known as a graphic novel in Western culture. This adaptation makes many unique adaptation choices, most notably by setting the story in an alternate fantastical universe that appears to be worlds away from Shakespeare's play-text. I examine how the manga treats fidelity and how the deviations affect the transmission of the story. The story makes significant alterations to aspects of the narrative, such as the Montague-Capulet feud and the roles of the characters, so this chapter will examine these changes and analyze how they affect the adaptation as a whole. Since manga are printed almost entirely in black and white, this chapter will also assess the artwork based on how it supports or expands on the text. Because Shakespeare's language is not included in the manga due to its nature as an English translation of a Japanese comic book, this chapter will also evaluate whether or not it can actually be considered a successful adaptation for lacking the language despite claiming to adapt the story.

The final chapter will analyze the *Manga Shakespeare* series, which is based in Europe but uses the manga form, creating a hybrid kind of manga adaption. This chapter will focus specifically on the series' adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* and will examine how this series treats fidelity alongside comparisons to the previous chapters. Because this series chooses to update the settings of the play-texts, the effects of these new settings will also be examined with regard to how they integrate with the language in order to convey the story effectively for young readers. Because this series retains the language of the play-texts, this chapter will also assess the text-art balance to determine how a more heavily cut text, as opposed to a very text-heavy series like *Classics Illustrated*, is able to convey the story together with the art.

Classics Illustrated was the first series to adapt Shakespeare's play-texts into comic book form. Five play-texts were included in the series: *Julius Caesar* (1950), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1951), *Hamlet* (1952), *Macbeth* (1955) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1956) (Wetmore 175). Albert Kanter was the creator of the series and wanted it to function as a way "of introducing young readers to the classic literature that had sustained him over the years" (Jones 11). As such, the first issue of the series—Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* in 1941—included a letter entitled "To Our Readers" that stated his objectives for the series:

> It is not our intent to replace the old established classics with these editions […] but rather we aim to create an active interest in those great masterpieces and to instill a desire to read the original text. It is also our aim to present these editions to include all of the action that is bound to stimulate greater enjoyment for its readers. […] Considerable research, writing, re-writing and editing have gone into this book. We have spared no expense in presenting the finest art work, engraving, paper and binding possible in order to produce the most and the best for 10 cents. This is our policy and we will continue it in all future editions of what will be the "CLASSIC COMICS LIBRARY" (12).

This letter makes clear Kanter's admiration of past literary masters and his commitment to maintain faithful reproductions as much as possible in a limited amount of space. Although opinions were far from universal, the series "was perceived as having an educational value that regular comics did not" and "[was] the only comics allowed in many school systems" (Wetmore 174) which implies that his commitment to extreme fidelity was supported by parents and teachers alike.

Since Shakespeare is often considered to be the epitome of good literature, Kanter believed that "the inclusion of Shakespeare in the line offered incontrovertible evidence of the seriousness of his publication's purpose" (Jones 111). When the inclusion of *Julius Caesar* was announced, the company promised "'an editorial staff of twenty literary researchers' hired to

'insur[e] that the comic book adaptation would adhere rigorously to the author's language and plot'" (qtd. in Wetmore 175). The commitment to faithful adaptations was of paramount importance to Kanter, so the inclusion of Shakespeare in the series meant that the fidelity that he proposed to adhere to was doubly significant with Shakespeare's play-texts. Ensuring that the language is as faithful as possible to the play-text becomes extremely difficult when critics fear that "the comic book tendency to represent even poetry as prose through the use of word bubbles will not only ruin the Shakespeare play, it will put the youth off reading poetry forever" (177). The fear that bad adaptations—or adaptations made in a form that lacks refinement—will have a lasting negative effect on the original text as well as young readers was—and still remains—a very real fear both of adaptors and their critics. In fact, the company "'maintained that its adaptations of literary classics were not comic books' per se, but literature in graphic form" (qtd. in Wetmore 175) in order to avoid the stigma associated with the form.

Although fidelity was a primary concern for Kanter, the execution of fidelity is a tricky question. Especially with Shakespeare, the question of what definitively makes an adaptation of Shakespeare's play-texts faithful to the texts themselves becomes difficult to answer: is it his language? His characters? His stories? Something else entirely? Thomas Leitch notes that when examining adaptations "it should be clear by now that fidelity itself, even as a goal, is the exception to the norm of variously unfaithful adaptations" and that "every case of attempted fidelity is exceptional not only because faithful adaptations are in the minority but because they are so likely to be different from one another." No adaptation can be entirely faithful to the source text since it is made into a new form altogether that has different possibilities and limitations. For example, both *Classics Illustrated* and the *Manga Shakespeare* series aim to be faithful to the play-texts yet the series go about achieving this goal in entirely different ways. It is

for this reason that Leitch explains that "instead of constantly seeking answers to the question, 'Why are so many adaptations unfaithful to perfectly good sources?' adaptation studies would be better advised to ask the question, 'Why does this particular adaptation aim to be faithful?'" (127). As illustrated through his letter to the readers, Kanter's adaptations aim to be faithful to the source text because the goal was to stimulate a desire to read good literature but not act as a replacement for the original text. Fidelity is paramount not because Kanter wanted young readers simply to enjoy the comic book version of a piece of literature but because he wanted to show young readers that the masterpieces were as good as—if not better than—the fantastical superhero genre that they were so enamoured with reading.

Yet fidelity to the text is only one facet of creating a faithful adaptation. More difficult is facilitating harmony between text and image so that the "visual interpretation may provide students the ability to understand and communicate ideas they cannot yet comprehend from text alone" (Wolfe and Kleijwegt 30). By the same token, *Classics Illustrated* comics cannot be purely illustrative since the interaction between text and image is meant to "offer more complicated combinations of back-and-forth between text and picture, picture and picture, and text and text, on each page and spread […] throughout the whole story" (Nodelman 438). The challenge for the series is to maintain a balance of text and image that is not only faithful to the source but also enjoyable for young readers. Although the art and the layouts are relatively straightforward in the *Classics Illustrated* series, for young readers the "process of reading multimodal texts involves an active perception of micro-semiotic elements such as color, image, perspective, etc., used in single panels combined together into larger conceptual tropes […] used across several panels" (Wolfe and Kleijwegt 31). The relation between art and text is crucial to

creating successful adaptations of classic literature for young readers as they rely on both parts of a text to understand the story: text and image are of equal importance.

This chapter will analyze two of the five Shakespeare adaptations in the series—*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*—since they represent two of the most well-known and well-loved plays that are still frequently studied in schools. These adaptations are straightforward and make unique adaptation choices. Does the extreme faithfulness to the play-text create successful adaptations? Does the adaptation make any changes to the play-text and if so, how do they affect the fidelity that the series aims to maintain? Does the artwork support the text or does it serve a more illustrative function? These adaptations achieve Kanter's goals to maintain fidelity to the play-texts but they are often too text-focussed to make the most effective use of the comic book form.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Classics Illustrated's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* prioritizes fidelity to Shakespeare's language yet unlike earlier adaptations of the series the artwork becomes a more important part of the text as a whole. The title page is designed simply, introducing only the four lovers and Puck and describing the action in vague terms: "A dark forest...an angry fairy king…his mischievous messenger…a magic flower…four thwarted lovers…and a troupe of wretched actors make a merry mix-up on a Midsummer night…." (CI *Midsummer* 1). This exemplifies how the series aims to make the story easily comprehensible by young readers through immediately laying out the main plot points while at the same time refraining from expressing the resolution of the story. Unlike previous installments of Shakespearean adaptation in the series, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* works to strike a stronger balance between text and

art by using colour to wordlessly express emotional connections between the characters and regularly including explanatory banners to ensure that the progression of the action is clear. These design choices are not always successful; in particular, the explanatory banners are often paraphrases of dialogue from the play-text which seemingly goes against Kanter's desire to maintain absolute fidelity by changing Shakespeare's language. The art, text and situational banners all work to adapt the play-text into the comic book form faithfully, yet the implementation of these design choices is not always effective at achieving Kanter's ultimate goals of fidelity and clarity in the adaptation.

Harmonizing Text and Art

Since the *Classics Illustrated* series seeks to be as faithful as possible to the source texts, the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is very text-heavy in spite of the numerous cuts to the dialogue. Egeus' first speech is reproduced with minimal changes; for instance, instead of saying "Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes" (Shakespeare *Midsummer* 1.1.28), Egeus only addresses his complaints to Theseus, saying instead that "Lysander hast given her rhymes" (CI *Midsummer* 3). The language becomes easier for young readers to comprehend and provides the space necessary for a strong adaptation, especially since the comic book "is a form associated with youth, inherently American, and is also an inherently reductive form, not least of which because of the limit on the number of pages allowed for each book" (Wetmore 173-174). The adaptation prioritizes clearly explaining the main storyline of the four lovers, and for that reason the focus is placed on including as much of Egeus' speech as possible to set the stage. Once that has been established, many lines from the opening scene are cut, leaving only the most direct quotes to indicate Hermia's punishment if she does not wed Demetrius.

The focus on retaining as much of Shakespeare's language as possible is a clear concern in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Although there is a move towards a more effective text-art balance, this issue still showcases a tendency towards retaining large amounts of dialogue, which forces some panels to be overcome with large speech bubbles. Oberon's dialogue on page 13 is a good example of how the focus on the language is given such prominence that using the art to support or expand on what is being spoken is overlooked. This problem of underused illustrative opportunities and heavily text-based comics exists in other adaptations of Shakespeare as well; both *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* include so much text that many of their speeches are reproduced in their entirety. For instance, Cassius' speech regarding Caesar in 1.2.92-133 is entirely reproduced and takes up half of the full-page panel. Even Mark Antony's speeches over Caesar's corpse of 3.2.73-107, 118-137 and 140-146, which are cut and conflated together, still take up a full two page spread with a speech bubble taking up almost a third of each page. Examples from the adaptation of *Hamlet* include his famous 'To be or not to be' speech, from which nothing is cut and which takes up a full quarter of the full-page panel (in a very small font), and the adaptation of 3.3.36-71 where Claudius' speech bubble takes up more than half of his panel despite the text being cut in some places. Not only do all of these adaptations focus almost entirely on including as much of Shakespeare's unabridged language as possible, they also fail to use the illustrations to their advantage by not showing actions that cannot be told through the dialogue. The images only rarely expand upon the language and typically serve a more illustrative function in these adaptations.

The opening scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does, however, make it clear that the words alone are not enough to make a successful adaptation. *Classics Illustrated* is an early example of how "a comic book version of Shakespeare's plays blends the elements of both

textual adaptation and visual representation that in many ways comes remarkably close to theatrical production, missing only the liveness" (Wetmore 173). This means that what cannot always be included in speech is otherwise illustrated through the images and page layouts. A standard square panel shows Theseus questioning Hermia about her feelings regarding Demetrius. A borderless panel provides a close-up view of her face and her head tilted downwards with one hand pressed against her chest. Together, these qualities produce a profoundly dramatic pose that emphasizes Hermia's disconnect from her father and Theseus. As McCloud notes, many readers "are so used to the standard rectangular format that a 'borderless' panel such as this can take on a timeless quality" (102) which helps to emphasize the depth of Hermia's love for Lysander at the same time as she is distancing herself from the others. Due to the necessity of cutting as many lines as possible while still maintaining a faithful link to the source text, the adaptation instead uses images like this that are meant to evoke a particular emotional understanding of Hermia within the reader. In this instance, the artwork is expanding on what the text states. Although her only line is "So is Lysander" (CI *Midsummer* 3), Hermia's pose indicates emotions that are not stated in the text and offers a clear illustration through which young readers may interpret her relationship with Lysander without relying on language.

Panel choice is not the only way that the adaptation draws attention to the divisions between characters. In an effort to remain true to the play-text and due to the investment that Kanter announced would be put into research for the creation of the adaptations, the human characters are all depicted in a Grecian style of attire to synchronize with the Athenian setting. On the other hand, the fairies are all dressed in a very English style with no stated reason for the difference. The choice to design the two groups in different outfits subtly indicates the otherness of the fairies from the humans beyond simply relying on textual cues regarding their supernatural

associations. This visual differentiation is continued through the use of colour, although it is primarily employed in relation to the four lovers, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Lysander and Demetrius declare their love for Helena. *Classics Illustrated: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, pp. 28.

This scene is a prime example of how colour is used to illustrate the correct pairs of lovers. Lysander and Hermia are dressed in blue to signify their otherness from the other characters, such as Egeus and Theseus, who do not support their relationship. Demetrius and Helena are coloured in red—just as Egeus and Theseus are—as a way of signifying their participation in the Athenian culture. Due to Lysander's proximity to Helena in this scene, the contrasting colours of their clothes visually reinforces the misapplication of Lysander's love while at the same time drawing attention to the correct suitor, Demetrius, whose red clothing visually pairs him with Helena. The same is true for Lysander and Hermia; despite Lysander's dialogue throughout the scene as he insists that he loves Helena, his blue clothing visually pairs him with Hermia.

Although colour is an effective way to simplify the identification of the characters, ultimately some of the richness of the play-text is lost through their interchangeable designs and the adaptation becomes boring to read. Colour becomes the main differentiating feature among the lovers as the designs of the characters are so similar that they would be difficult to tell apart otherwise. Lysander looks identical to Demetrius, as do Hermia and Helena, which presents the characters as lacking individuality that is clearly present in the play-text. This lack of differentiation in character design makes the adaptation less visually interesting, and as such, less desirable to read. It is true that comic books were "designed to be read quickly, which explains the preference for stereotypical elements that are easily recognized. Thus the main characters are usually dressed in a typical, familiar outfit, and are rendered with typified body and facial features" (Lefèvre 16); yet the problem with this adaptation is that it goes beyond using "familiar outfits" and "typified body and facial features" to the point where there is no differentiation between them at all except the colour of their clothing. This means that even knowing the names

of the characters becomes unnecessary since the colour coding makes it clear who the correct pairs are. The lack of variation in the designs of the human characters makes the depiction of their storyline very monotonous to read. This issue is not exclusive to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; the adaptation of *Julius Caesar* is dominated by a cast of male characters who all look so strongly alike that it is often necessary to refer to the opening title page, which acts as a dramatis personae, in order to keep each one straight.

Just as this adaptation uses the art to illustrate important concepts time and time again (such as how the lovers are inextricably connected), so too does the adaptation do this through situational banners that indicate specific plot points in addition to setting numerous times. One example of this overuse of banners concerns the lovers: the adaptation employs them to reiterate the effects of Puck's use of the love juice. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, each panel includes an explanatory banner on this page but they become redundant alongside the dialogue. The fact that Lysander and Demetrius are both vying for Helena's love was already established in the preceeding scene (as illustrated through Figure 1) so the close proximity of these banners feels jarring. The immersion into Shakespeare's world is interrupted by these banners, which continually reinforce points that have already been clearly stated. Although situation banners are not bad and can be helpful at times, the overuse of them in this adaptation makes the story read monotonously. Another example occurs during the adaptation of 3.2 where not only is Oberon's preceeding speech (354-377) converted into a banner explaining the action in the following panels, but those panels *also* include numerous banners that explain the action as it happens (on pages 32-35). The over-reliance on situational banners to explain what the dialogue expresses is boring to read and makes the adaptation feel very simplistic.

Figure 2: The lovers quarrel as Oberon and Puck watch in secret. *Classics Illustrated: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, pp. 30.

Overall, the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has several flaws in its design but ultimately it achieves the goals that Kanter had laid out with the inception of this series. As a

very text heavy adaptation, this comic book often fails to make full use of the artwork to show what cannot be included in the text. The artwork remains rather stationary and uninteresting due to the similarities between the designs of the characters. The transmission of the story is sometimes too repetitive with the inclusion of multiple banners that continually explain key plot points as the story progresses. Despite these flaws, the adaptation does convey the story of the play-text with clarity, if simplistically, and it is certainly working towards a better text-art balance than earlier adaptations in the series. The language of play-text is kept mostly intact, as Kanter wanted, and the setting is well represented through the Grecian clothing of the lovers.

Romeo and Juliet

The *Classics Illustrated* adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* uses many of the same design choices as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but ultimately this adaptation does much more effectively. Colour is more fully utilized in this adaptation not only to indicate factions or destined lovers, but also to express the emotional states of Romeo and Juliet as their relationship progresses throughout the story. Another improvement in this adaptation is the use of explanatory banners; rather than being employed to paraphrase speeches made by characters, they are relegated to simply stating actions that the characters are engaging in. These banners are still imperfect, of course, as this relegation can sometimes lead to redundancy alongside the artwork that often clearly illustrates the actions, thus rendering the explanations unnecessary. In terms of fidelity, despite the inevitable cuts to the text, this adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* strives to maintain the poetry present in the play-text through the formatting of the text in the speech balloons, as illustrated in Figure 3 below. As the final Shakespearean adaptation in the series, *Romeo and Juliet* is the most successful issue to harmonize text and art. This ensures that

not only is Kanter's goal to maintain fidelity achieved, but that the story is also very clearly

conveyed to his target audience.

An Emotional Journey in Colour

As the last adaptation of a Shakespearean play in the *Classics Illustrated* line, *Romeo and*

Juliet bears many similarities to the earlier ones in its commitment to fidelity, but it maintains a

much stronger text-art balance overall. Clarity remains a key concern in this adaptation as

evidenced through the simplicity of the title page. An abbreviated and simplified version of the

Chorus's Prologue is printed down the centre of the page and merely situates the action in

Verona, among "two noble families [that] feuded bitterly" who "each had only one child.

Montague had a son, Romeo. Capulet had a daughter, Juliet" (CI *Romeo* 1). The adaptation

leaves out all mention that a "pair of star-crossed lovers take their life" as well as all references

to the end of the play which mentions "the continuance of their parents' rage, / Which, but their

children's end, nought could remove" (Shakespeare *Romeo* Prologue 6, 10-11), a choice which

turns the focus of the prologue to clearly explaining the nature of the feud and the families

involved in it, rather than explaining the whole course of the story to come. Since the adaptation

of the Chorus does not state that Romeo and Juliet are "star-crossed lovers," the art of the title

page implies their connection by positioning them facing each other with a hand outstretched

towards the middle of the page.

As in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this adaptation uses colour to indicate visually

factions as well as symbolism throughout the story. Romeo begins by wearing a blue tunic that

indicates his melancholic state, as blue is a colour that "can be perceived as cold, unemotional

and unfriendly," which are all adjectives that describe Romeo's demeanour before he meets

Juliet. On the other hand, she is garbed in a long, red dress which not only typically represents love, but also can be seen as defiant, demanding and aggressive (Colour Affects) which are all traits that the Capulet family embodies. The colours of their outfits not only symbolize their passions and sorrows, but also emphasize the divide between them as a result of the blood feud between their families. The colour of their clothing is the one associated with their respective families, as evidenced by the household servants in the opening scene (CI *Romeo* 2) who also wear blue and red. The pair is further linked together visually through their pose, which expresses what the simplified prologue cannot: that they are divided by family but are also romantically connected.

Interestingly, from the time of their marriage onward, the colours that the lovers began wearing are reversed. Instead, Juliet is gowned entirely in blue which symbolizes her own melancholy at being parted from Romeo and her sorrow over Tybalt's death. For his part, Romeo wears orange to their wedding, which "combines the energy of red and the happiness of yellow. It is associated with joy" and is a clear echo of the passion of Juliet's red dress from their initial meeting. Because Romeo's joy is at its peak at the time of their wedding, orange is an apt colour choice that is equally useful in reinforcing how his joy is shattered upon Tybalt's death and his subsequent banishment. His final outfit is a combination of black and red symbolizing both his love for Juliet and his grief about her apparent death (Colour Wheel Pro). It is clear that the use of colour is more sophisticated in *Romeo and Juliet* than it was in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where colour was primarily used to differentiate between the correct couples and possessed fewer symbolic meanings. In this way, the adaptation uses colour to reinforce visually the themes of the play-text while also emphasizing the depth of Romeo and Juliet's relationship.

A Focus on Romeo and Juliet: The Importance of Text and Scene

Much like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this adaptation prioritizes clarity and accomplishes this through shifting the focus more fully onto the titular couple by making their scenes more important than others where the characters are either alone or not together at all. The other scenes are all condensed and suffer heavy textual cuts in order to form incredibly short sequences that clearly explain key plot points. For instance, the adaptation of the balcony scene spans six pages, making it the longest single scene to be adapted from the play-text. The final scene of the play nearly matches its length at five full pages while the masked ball trails behind at only four pages. These are all scenes in which the couple appear together, and it is these scenes that *Classics Illustrated* gives precedence to over scenes where either one of the characters is alone or they do not appear at all. The Capulet ball and the balcony scene are the two most important scenes in which to establish that Romeo and Juliet share an unquestionable love-at-first-sight connection and thus facilitate the feeling that their deaths are truly tragic at the end of the adaptation.

Given the condensed dialogue, the art spectacularly expands on the emotions that the language is unable to convey alone. Although the sonnet that Romeo and Juliet compose together in 1.5 is almost completely removed from the adaptation, the art beautifully illustrates their bond. Across three panels, the artist draws the pair closer together and their eyes never lose contact, which exemplifies the speed with which their love blossoms. Their poses further support this: as illustrated in Figure 3 below, during the adaptation of 2.2, Juliet stands looking wistfully towards the heavens as she wishes that Romeo would "refuse thy name" while he kneels in the bushes looking up towards her with an expression of joy, his palms held upwards and open, indicating his desire to "hear more" and willingness to pursue a relationship with Juliet (CI *Romeo* 16).

There are also several close-up shots of Juliet's face where her eyes are closed as she speaks her lines (18-19) in order to emphasize the depth of her feelings for Romeo. The balance between art and text is already evidently more effective than in previous adaptations in the series—enough of Shakespeare's language remains to ensure each scene progresses smoothly, yet as Figure 3 shows, the speech balloons leave lots of space for the art to visually indicate the emotions and actions that accompany the dialogue.

Figure 3 also clearly illustrates how *Classics Illustrated* treated Shakespeare's language. Although, as mentioned earlier, there were fears that youth would be put off reading poetry forever due to the comic book tendency to represent poetry as prose, it is clear that the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* sought to preserve the poetry by retaining the form of it where possible. Juliet's dialogue in this scene is a very clear example of how the adaptors strove to ensure that the language was not represented as prose. In the first panel, Juliet's line "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" is all one line in the play-text. Instead of immediately following that line with the rest of her speech and creating a block of prose dialogue, the adaptors indent "Romeo?" to indicate that it is a part of the previous line and then begin a new line entirely in the speech balloon to continue her dialogue. Figure 3 illustrates many instances of this choice to indent words that are part of a previous line of dialogue rather than simply compressing the dialogue into prose format. The shape of the word balloons further supports this initiative as they are primarily square or rectangular in shape. The form of the speech balloons facilitates the retention of poetic dialogue by providing enough space to clearly print these lines in a poetic form. Despite the cuts that must be made to the language, it is clear that the adaptors wanted to ensure that the poetic feel of the dialogue was not converted entirely into prose. This is a

significant change from the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which printed all of the

dialogue simply as prose, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 3: Romeo listens to Juliet in secret. *Classics Illustrated: Romeo and Juliet*, pp. 16.

On a similar note, the way characters are established in the adaptation does not play into the typical characterizations that are credited to them by young readers. Very often, young readers judge both Romeo and Juliet to be whiny, childish, and hopelessly infatuated with one another. *Classics Illustrated* instead presents the pair as being strong-willed and mature, although their lovesick dispositions are still present. Juliet in particular looks graceful and mature; during the ball, she smiles at the guests and curtsies properly to them (10), clearly interacting with others. Where other adaptations, such as the manga *Romeo x Juliet*, emphasize Juliet's independence, the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation highlights her femininity and poise. These qualities are strengths as well and *Classics Illustrated* stands out from other adaptations for staying true to the character that Shakespeare wrote. Certainly, Juliet's youth still comes through in her representation and is particularly evident when she confronts her Nurse for news of Romeo's plans for their marriage. Her expression is worried and anxious as she leans forward eagerly (24) to showcase her lovesickness. Although her frustration with her teasing Nurse is clear, the adaptation avoids portraying her—either through her dialogue or her design—as simply whiny. Upon being told that "Early next Thursday morn, the gallant Paris shall make thee a joyful bride" (34), Juliet does not rail against her mother or cry—her downcast eyes, folded hands and blue dress are enough to indicate her despair without forcing her to give in to a childish tantrum. *Classics Illustrated* does a spectacular job of illustrating that Juliet's youth and traditional femininity is her own strength.

Romeo's character is equally well adapted from the play-text. Despite his sudden change of heart from loving Rosaline in favour of Juliet, *Classics Illustrated* clearly shows that Romeo is passionately devoted to her. His expression is full of child-like wonder when he sees her at the

Capulet ball (10) in a clever reference to both his youth and intense feelings of love. He immediately falls to his knees upon seeing her appear on her balcony and again when he swears "by yonder blessed moon" that he loves her (15, 18), which indicates that his devotion is unwavering. Although most adaptations of the play-text portray Romeo in a similar way, his characterization is significant in the *Classics Illustrated* version because it illustrates most clearly that his devotion to Juliet is his strength. The thought of being without Rosaline simply causes Romeo to "live dead" (Shakespeare *Romeo and Juliet* 1.1.223) whereas the thought of living without Juliet ensures that "never from this palace of dim night [will] [he] depart again" (CI *Romeo* 41). Every illustration of Romeo shows a characterization that is strikingly close to the Romeo of Shakespeare's play-text. The adaptation is very effective at highlighting the qualities of the characters that are often modified and not presenting Romeo and Juliet as simply being whiny, immature children.

However, given Kanter's stance on considering the adaptations not as comic books but rather as illustrated classics, there remains a clear reliance on explanatory banners to indicate the progression and scene changes of the story. These banners function in a similar way to the ones in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in that they are meant to aid in the transmission of the story, but they do sometimes over-simplify it instead. They are less repetitive than those in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and they are usually more supportive of the text. For instance, as Romeo arrives at the Capulet ball, one banner explains that he "immediately forgot Rosaline, the girl he came to see" just as he says, "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (10); in this way, the banner helpfully reminds readers that Romeo was initially in love with another woman since Rosaline never appears in the adaptation. Similarly, as Romeo enters the Capulet orchard, another banner explains "Then, as he turned toward the house…" just

as he launches into exclaiming, "What light through yonder window breaks?" (15), which is paired beautifully with Romeo's line of sight being visually directed towards Juliet's distant silhouette, reinforcing the image of her shining beauty and the light of her bedroom both textually and artistically. Because the art in this adaptation functions much more strongly as a supportive and expansive element rather than being simply illustrative of the text, the adaptation's reliance on expository banners is much more effective than the redundancy that characterized those of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Overall, the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* is effective at transmitting the story to young readers. The artwork supports and expands on the text to convey meaning by illustrating actions and emotions that are not always made explicit through the dialogue. Colour is a particularly effective way that the adaptation visually reinforces the emotional states of Romeo and Juliet. Furthermore, no significant changes are made to the plot, characters or setting of the play-text due to Kanter's policy of maintaining fidelity to the play-text as much as possible. Unfortunately, over-reliance on explanatory banners creates some instances of redundancy in the transmission of the story.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, the adaptations of the *Classics Illustrated* series are successful and maintain a faithful connection to the play-texts on which they are based. The language is taken directly from the play-texts with some glosses throughout the adaptations to ease the comprehension of difficult words and sentence structures by young readers. Due to the extreme fidelity of these adaptations, they are very effective at transmitting the most important concepts and the most basic cores of the stories for young readers by trimming down the length of the plays and cutting

the less critical plots and characters. Since these adaptations were meant to function as introductions that would encourage youth to read the original texts, their brevity and conciseness achieves Kanter's standards for faithful, engaging comic book versions of the classics in spite of his hesitancy to acknowledge that link. From this perspective, his emphasis on maintaining fidelity to the play-texts offers a distinct advantage over other adaptations that allow for a more artistic interpretation because the faithfulness ensures an authenticity and educational value that other adaptations may lack. This is a prime reason why these comic books were allowed to be used in school systems while others were not: the strict fidelity ensured that the books were not only accurately presenting each play-text but also engaging students in ways that other methods could not.

However, the adaptations have some flaws that negatively impact the transmission of the stories, though these are usually minor issues. The series was very text-heavy in most adaptations and in this regard, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* were the most textually dense. With whole panels devoted to the reproduction of important soliloquys, these adaptations were unable to use the accompanying artwork in a more effective way. The adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* certainly made strides to being much less text-focussed but even so, it still lacked a strong textual-visual balance that was much more successfully achieved in *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In particular, many panels in that adaptation lacked sufficient space to portray multiple characters or elaborate scenes because it retained as much text as possible, which is a quality that became more balanced in later issues. The extreme fidelity that Kanter prioritized in the creation of each adaptation is only one piece of creating a successful adaptation—given his goals, later adaptations such as *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet* are more successful than earlier ones, such as *Julius Caesar*, because they allow the images to expand on the text rather than simply illustrating

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what has been spoken. In this way, later adaptations became more successful at transmitting the story than earlier ones due to the text-image balance that created a more unified whole that earlier, textually dense adaptations struggled to achieve.

Therefore, the *Classics Illustrated* adaptations of Shakespeare's play-texts are imperfect in many ways but they are quite successful at conveying each story. Their absolute faithfulness to the play-texts offers increasingly expansive illustrations that effectively support the dialogue and provide visual cues to ensure clarity. Some unnecessary repetition in the form of explanatory banners feels jarring to the reading experience, especially in cases where the dialogue and art work together to express the unfolding events. Even so, the adaptations all ultimately achieved Kanter's goals of maintaining a faithful connection to the play-texts.

Chapter Two: *The Sandman*

Kanter's *Classics Illustrated* comic book series ran until 1971, after he had sold the rights

and the series floundered to an end (Jones 270). Although briefly revived by different companies

throughout the 1990s, the era of *Classics Illustrated* adaptations was most certainly over. No

other adaptations of Shakespeare's plays appeared in a comic book format until 1989 as a part of

Neil Gaiman's phenomenal series *The Sandman*, which began under the DC Comics label. It was

moved to their newly-created Vertigo imprint in 1993 since it was meant to be "a venue for

material of an edgier, more sophisticated nature" while "graphic storytelling matured and began

to reach out to broader audiences" (DC Entertainment). Unlike *Classics Illustrated*, Gaiman's

series does not focus each issue on the adaptation of another literary work, nor was it focused on

creating a story that could be used in the classroom due to its educational value; the series has its

own story and its own characters. Although some issues do incorporate adaptations from many

different sources into the plot, the focus of the series is on Gaiman's own characters and stories.

It is clear that adaptations in *The Sandman* exist to exemplify the life of the titular Sandman

rather than stand as their own independent stories with their own goals.

One quality of *The Sandman* that particularly sets it apart from the strict fidelity and

educational values that *Classics Illustrated* strove to promote is the inclusion of Shakespeare as a

character. This creates a heavy focus on the presentation of Shakespeare's personal history in

this story arc since contemporary adaptations "typically locate the meaning of Shakespeare's

works firmly with the man himself, in his personal life or his individual genius rather than, say,

in the source texts which he imitated, the collaborative conditions of the playhouse, or his

posthumous reinvention by posterity" (Lanier 114). The series adapts only two plays by

Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in issue 19 and *The Tempest* in issue 75. These two

plays resonate thematically with the story of Morpheus, Lord of Dreams, around whom the series revolves, due to their exploration of creativity, dreams and storytelling. It is essential to remember that these two adaptations are part of—and hugely impact—an ongoing and original story. Unlike *Classics Illustrated*, they cannot be read as separate from the story of the Lord of Dreams and as such, due to the interconnectivity between the adaptations and the overarching story of *The Sandman,* fidelity is not a primary concern. Indeed, the plays are less important to Dream's story than Shakespeare himself, around whom each adaptation revolves.

This chapter will explore the use of Shakespeare as a character and his role in the narrative. How does Shakespeare's existence as a character affect the transmission of the adaptations? How does the artwork affect the understanding of the adaptations and illustrate their larger connection to *The Sandman* as a whole? How does their connection to *The Sandman* affect the adaptation choices for the play-texts? Gaiman's adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* in the context of *The Sandman*'s focus on creativity and dreaming, which in turn makes the exploration of Shakespeare's life and writing process the focal point of these two issues. This approach that Gaiman uses makes these Shakespeare-focused issues more complex than those offered by *Classics Illustrated* because they are adapted as part of both Shakespeare's life and the over-arching story of *The Sandman*.

Shakespeare as a Character

It is impossible for readers to understand Shakespeare's relevance to the story of *The Sandman* without first outlining the over-arching plot of the series. Gaiman's series revolves around the character of Dream, known also as Morpheus, who is "one of seven Endless. The Endless—Dream, Death, Destiny, Desire, Despair, Delirium, and Destruction—are the

embodiments of essential characteristics of life. They control and create these characteristics, interacting not only with humans" but with other beings and creatures as well (Castaldo 98-99) across centuries. The over-arching plot of the series "involved Dream engaging in a series of heroic tasks, following an archetypal hero's journey. Dream had to free himself from imprisonment and regain his kingdom. […] Having completed his labors, he was then replaced by a new Sandman" (Weiner 40). The series can be considered both "a *Bildungsroman* tale (referring to the formative years of Morpheus, whose humanization underlies the series)" and "a comic [that] is simply one about storytelling: like dreaming itself, it is a vehicle for fantasy tales" (Round 96). The series focuses heavily on stories and the importance of storytelling, making Shakespeare's inclusion throughout the tale very poignant, since he

> is popular culture's favourite symbol for the principle of literary authorship, and his appearance brings into play related issues, among them the origins and nature of genius, the relation between expressive freedom and artistic, commercial, or political constraints, the interplay between authorial experience and a work's meaning, and the relation between the author's 'original' conception and latter-day adaptations or reinventions (Lanier 114-115).

The Sandman certainly meditates on the nature of genius and the interplay between an author's experience and the meaning of his work, and the inclusion of Shakespeare as a character is one way that the series accomplishes that goal.

The Doll's House, the second collected volume of *The Sandman*, features no adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. However, it is a necessary starting point because it is the first time that Shakespeare appears as a character in the series. Issue 13, entitled "Men of Good Fortune", takes place over the course of several hundred years. The issue opens in a tavern during 1389 in which Dream and his sister Death encounter a man who does not want to die. The two "strike a bargain, and, with Death's promise not to take Hob until he desires it, Dream approached Hob and

suggests that they meet each century" (Castaldo 100) to discuss his continued life. During their second meeting, in 1589, Dream overhears Shakespeare in conversation with Kit Marlowe about playwriting. Shakespeare laments to Marlowe that he "would give anything to have your gifts. Or more than anything to give men dreams that would live on long after I am dead" (Gaiman, "Men" 113), a wish that Dream is all too eager to grant. He approaches Shakespeare and asks: "Would you write great plays? Create new dreams to spur the minds of men? Is that your will?" and Shakespeare replies in the affirmative (114).

This initial meeting illustrates that the segments involving Shakespeare will centre on his desire to create stories that will outlive him through his Faustian bargain with Dream. Castaldo notes that there is "ample documentary evidence of Shakespeare's life. We have evidence of a practical man who did not make enemies, was generally liked and retired early. What we don't have is a great deal of knowledge of his personal views" which is a quality that allows *The Sandman* to "[reinvent] Shakespeare to suit its needs" (95). Gaiman uses this ambiguity to create a frame for the creation and production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* later in the series. The frame shifts the focus of each adaptation from the plays to Shakespeare's life and work, which forces readers to understand the adaptations of the plays through the personal history of Shakespeare in the way that *The Sandman* illustrates. Unlike *Classics Illustrated*, the series never offers a clear-cut, scene-by-scene adaptation of the play-text, which implies that Gaiman's goals with the inclusion of Shakespeare are very different from those of Kanter. Castaldo argues that Gaiman's use of Shakespeare is meant to be as "a human parallel to Dream, an embodiment of something far greater than a single person, the bearer of something vital to humanity, and because of that, a person weighed down and ruled by responsibilities far greater than usual" (99). While this is true, the key to Shakespeare's characterization in *The Sandman* is

his humanness—as readers witness Shakespeare's conversation with Marlowe, it is an eager and young man who is presented in the comic. Using Shakespeare's life—and his Faustian bargain with Dream—to create a frame through which to read the two adaptations allows the questions of storytelling and creativity to be addressed rather than focusing on the adaptation of the play-text.

Gaiman's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in issue 19 opens with the date of "June 23rd, 1593" (Gaiman "Midsummer" 54), and although only five years have passed since their initial meeting, Shakespeare is uncomfortably aware of his debt to Dream for granting him the ability to write great plays. Gaiman clearly wants the story to be about Shakespeare as opposed to his plays; it is not that the plays are not important to the story—both plays that are adapted hold a strong significance to the over-arching story of *The Sandman*—but that the adaptations are less important to Gaiman than they were to Kanter. Wetmore notes that "beyond biography, the larger graphic novel interacts with Shakespeare, both his plays and his characters on several levels" by including quotes from the plays throughout *The Sandman*, making Shakespearean characters "real" characters in the narrative, and allowing for the creation of an intertext between the play-texts and the issues bearing their titles (188) as well as expanding upon Shakespeare's own history. These choices allow the plays to take on a life of their own that the textual versions lack: Shakespeare's perception of his plays is thus coupled with the reader's own perception of Shakespeare and of his plays. This framing of the Shakespeare story arc fosters a new way of understanding the plays through the double adaptation of Gaiman's narrative of Shakespeare's life and Shakespeare's own production of his play-text.

<u>A Midsummer Night's Dream</u>

Gaiman's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is unique due to the frame that he uses to structure the issue. Unlike the adaptations of the *Classics Illustrated* series, Gaiman does not employ a scene-by-scene adaptation of the play-text but instead chooses to draw attention to the themes common to both *The Sandman* story and the play-text. To that end, Gaiman's use of Shakespeare as a central character in the issue serves to illustrate how creativity and dreams affect his work and the people around him. This series treats the play-texts as sources that exemplify the rewards and punishments of literary creation, such as how Shakespeare's distance from his family is blamed on his single-minded devotion to creating great, lasting literature. Gaiman's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" illustrates Shakespeare while he is attaining the peak of his writing career and contrasts his achievement of writing a great play against the bitterness of his son, Hamnet, whose feelings of abandonment by his father are easily manipulated by Titania in a clear parallel to her actions in the play-text. This adaptation is a strong example of how *The Sandman* does not rely on a scene-by-scene adaptation to convey the story; instead, *The Sandman* situates "real" versions of the events in the play-text alongside the premier performance of the play to emphasize the effects of single-minded devotion to as artist's craft on the world around him.

Narrative Choices: Merging Reality with Fiction

Issue 19 tells the story of Shakespeare and his troupe of actors giving the first performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "to an audience that includes Morpheus, Auberon, Titania, and the rest of the fairy folk. This allows Gaiman to situate 'real' versions of the play's characters and events alongside their actor counterparts" (Round "Transforming" 96). However,

although the issue is titled after the play-text, Gaiman only offers a sporadic adaptation of the play itself and does so through the representation of an actual performance. Where *Classics Illustrated* adapted the plays without a theatrical frame in order to present the story as faithfully as possible as though it was a real occurrence, Gaiman employs one in order to draw the reader's attention away from the play. He wants to ensure that the focus of the story is on Dream and Shakespeare's bargain, and on the burden of creativity, rather than simply retelling the story that is written in the play-text. *The Sandman* is not about adaptation—it merely uses adaptations like "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in order to explore other topics and themes that pertain to the over-arching storyline of the series. Furthermore, Shakespeare's inclusion as a character makes a typical adaptation, such as those made by *Classics Illustrated*, of his play-texts impossible because he necessarily creates a frame through which to understand the story.

His existence as a character makes the transmission of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" take a back-seat to both a new way of understanding the play as well as the heavily-elaborated exploration of Shakespeare's life. In *The Sandman*, the play is no longer simply a play; Auberon implies the reality of the play by commenting that "this diversion, although pleasant, is not true. Things never happened thus" (Gaiman "Dream" 74). The transmission of the play thus becomes enmeshed with the reality of *The Sandman* universe because it is clear that both the story and the characters of the play exist or once existed. Shakespeare's act of writing the play—and performing it alongside his actors for the fairy audience—is itself an adaptation within Gaiman's own writing of this issue. The performance is Shakespeare's own adaptation of the play within Gaiman's adaptation of the play as both having occurred in the past and occurring again through the interaction between the fairy audience and human actors. This complexity of using Shakespeare as a character to create an adaptation within an adaptation forces readers to re-

evaluate typical adaptations such as those made by *Classics Illustrated*, since this one reveals

that there is more to the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* than merely illustrating it scene-

by-scene.

Through the double-adaptation, Gaiman makes the play into a literal experience for the

Lord Strange's Men. Gaiman's adaptation begins with Shakespeare's troupe arriving "on

Midsummer's eve, by the long man of Wilmington" by Dream's command. Dream explains that

"Wendel's Mound was a theatre before your race came to this island" (55) and Round supports

his claim by noting that this real-world site "forms a natural amphitheatre" and that the nature of

the figure remains undecided, but "has been interpreted as […] the crosspiece of a gate" (Round

"Subverting" 29). Gaiman plays on this speculation when Dream commands, "Wendel! Open

your door" (Gaiman "Midsummer" 57) to let the fairy court enter the mortal realm. Just as the

play-text is heavily set in the forest near Athens, so too does Gaiman set his adaptation of *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream in the natural countryside of England. With the arrival of the fairy

court, however, the images of the landscape drastically change: the area where the audience

gathers to sit becomes dark and washed with hues of blue and shaded with black whereas panels

focusing on the actors are coloured with bright greens and more distinct backgrounds. As

illustrated in Figure 4 below, Charles Vess, the artist behind this issue, uses colour to create a

clear distinction between the mysterious fairies and the normalcy of the human actors. This

fosters a clear sense of danger emanating from the fairy audience that is further embodied in the

very depictions of the fairies which differs strongly from Kanter's *Classics Illustrated*.
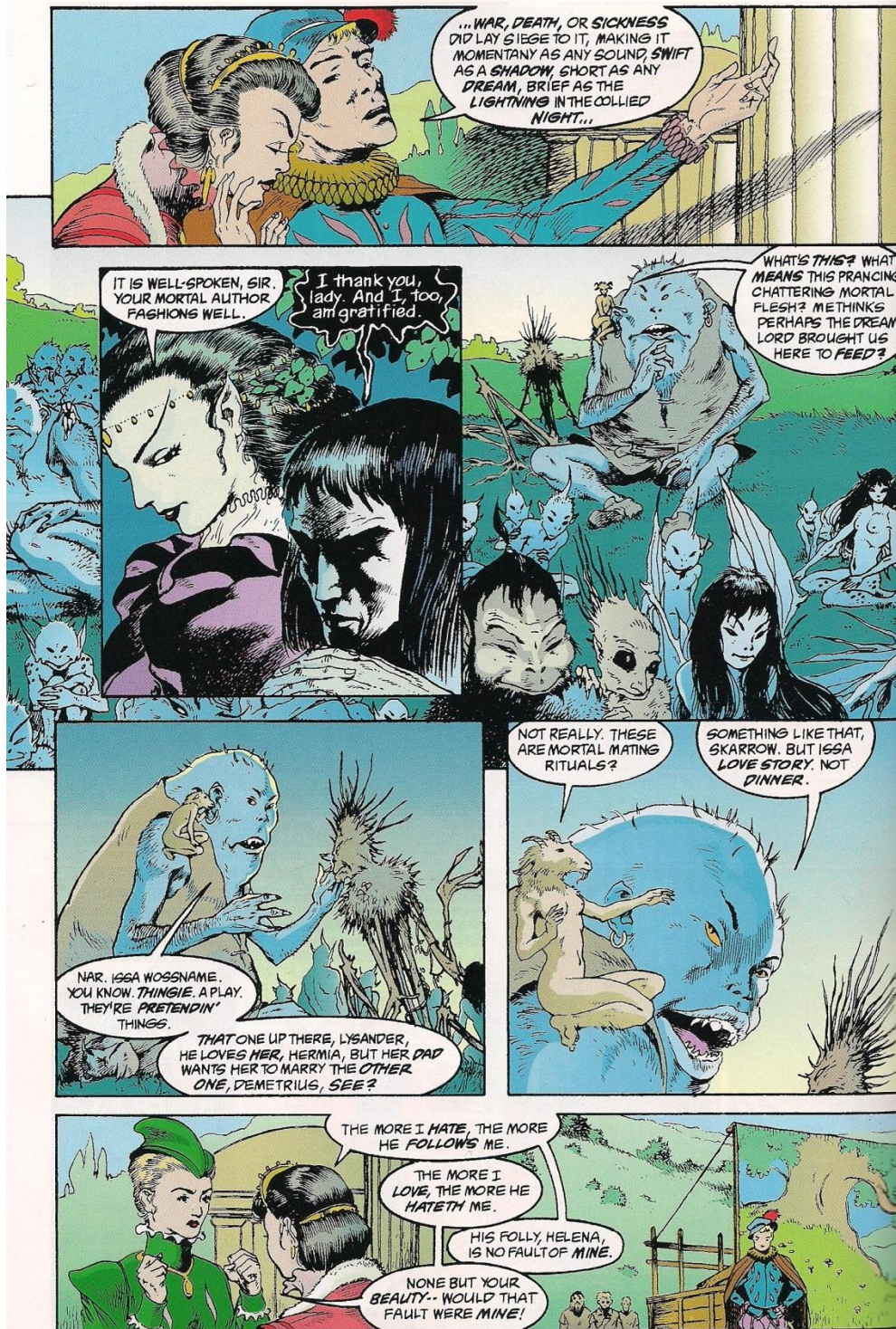
Figure 4. The fairies witness the first performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *The Sandman* "A Midsummer Night's Dream," issue 19, pp. 61.

As the audience gathers, Gaiman shifts the story into Shakespeare's own adaptation of the play. Given the nature of the series, many scenes are not included at all during this section of the issue. In the role of Theseus, Shakespeare delivers the opening four lines of the speech at which time the panel switches to a close-up shot of Dream's profile (60), with a speech bubble whose source is off-screen in the gutter. With a gutter on both side of Dream's panel, the reader must assume that Shakespeare finished the remaining lines of the speech as well as Hippolyta's in the first gutter and the words in Dream's panel are what is being spoken at that exact moment from an unseen source that must be Shakespeare as Theseus. Although using the gutters to his advantage saves Gaiman from allocating more space for the adaptation of the play-text itself, the discontinuity between the actor's lines and the outside (and sometimes unrelated) commentary from the fairy audience makes it difficult for readers less familiar with Shakespeare to determine exactly who is speaking when panels and lines are divided in this way. On the same note, this is a clear parallel to the play-text where the Mechanicals often comment on the nature of acting and theatricality.

A Dangerous Audience: The Depiction of the Fairies

Interspersed between Shakespeare's production are panels that provide commentary by the fairy audience. These fairies in the audience do not look or speak in ways that seem to be very fairy-like, as illustrated above in Figure 4. Wetmore explains that Gaiman's representation of the fairies returns them "to the pre-Christian context, when they were dangerous, but it also once again returns the reader to comic book Shakespeare. The villains must be dangerous. This Puck is the equivalent of *Batman's* Joker: lethally funny" (190-191). Although Titania, Auberon and even Puck are quite humanoid in their appearance "the rest of *The Sandman*'s fey are monstrous in both appearance and behaviour and as such are visually more reminiscent of British

folklore than the Victorian ethereal stereotype" (Round, "Transforming" 101). This supports how

the actors—as well as the readers—perceive them to be antagonists throughout the course of the

issue. In fact, Round illustrates how the visual representation of the fairies and their threatening

personalities in *The Sandman* "also seems supported by the original text, as for example in the

Puck's exchange with Oberon" during 3.2:

> **PUCK** My fairy lord, this must be done with haste.
>
> For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
>
> And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger:
>
> At whose approach, ghosts, wand'ring here and there,
>
> Troop home to churchyards. Damnèd spirits all,
>
> That in crossways and floods have burial,
>
> Already to their wormy beds are gone;
>
> For fear lest day should look their shames upon,
>
> They willfully exile from light,
>
> And must for aye consort with black-browed night.
>
> **OBERON** But we are spirits of a different sort" (378-388).

Round goes on to note that although Oberon denies that the fairies have similar associations with

evil in the play-text, "the shared terms 'spirits' and ghostly imagery allow for a more menacing

interpretation of *Dream*. Whereas twentieth-century public expectations of the play demand

child-sized fairies fluttering around elaborately constructed woodland scenery, […] today's

stereotypes of fairies are considered to be a result of Christian meddling in pre-Christian myths"

since "Other legend has also described the fey as bizarre and ugly" (Round, "Subverting" 24-25).

The fairy audience is certainly portrayed much more bizarrely than those in *Classics Illustrated*,

bearing resemblances to ogres, satyrs and winged creatures and also including characters that

look like a pile of walking twigs, as Peaseblossom does (Gaiman "Midsummer" 61). The visual

cues here reinforce the sense that the fairies are dangerous and invite readers to interpret the

adaptation of the play-text (specifically Gaiman's whole issue rather than simply Shakespeare's

production in the issue) in a menacing way. This strongly links the play-text to the story of *The*

Sandman series which is full of the dangers and monsters which haunt dreams.

Their lines are interspersed between scenes of the actors as the play progresses and they

provide a useful summary of the action of the play as well as very comedic moments. Since the

story is not simply one about the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into performance,

Gaiman must shift focus between Shakespeare's production and Dream's viewing of it alongside

Titania and Auberon. Since there is no way to show every scene, he employs the fairies to

summarize the plot in order to ensure that readers are clearly aware of the progression of the

play. In some ways, their commentary is incredibly basic: for instance, one explains that "Issa

wossname. You know. Thingie. A play. They're pretendin' things. That one up there, Lysander,

he loves her, Hermia, but her dad wants her to marry the other one, Demetrius, see?" (61). This

commentary, although seemingly overbearingly simplified, is an integral part of the adaptation

because the scene where those exact points are established is completely skipped in the previous

panels with the actors. Unlike the explanatory banners in *Classics Illustrated*, which were often

repetitive to dialogue appearing in the very same panels, *The Sandman* makes minimal use of

them, allowing the commentary of the fairies to fill in the blanks left by the way Gaiman shifts

the focus of the story between Dream's conversation with Titania and Auberon and the

performance of the play. Gaiman uses this same effect to summarize the significance of the love

potion that Titania mentions was "In the old tale […], that left the goddess rutting with an ass"

(64). The transmission of the story is continuously being clarified due to the audience's

commentary yet the lack of focus on the performance itself draws attention away from

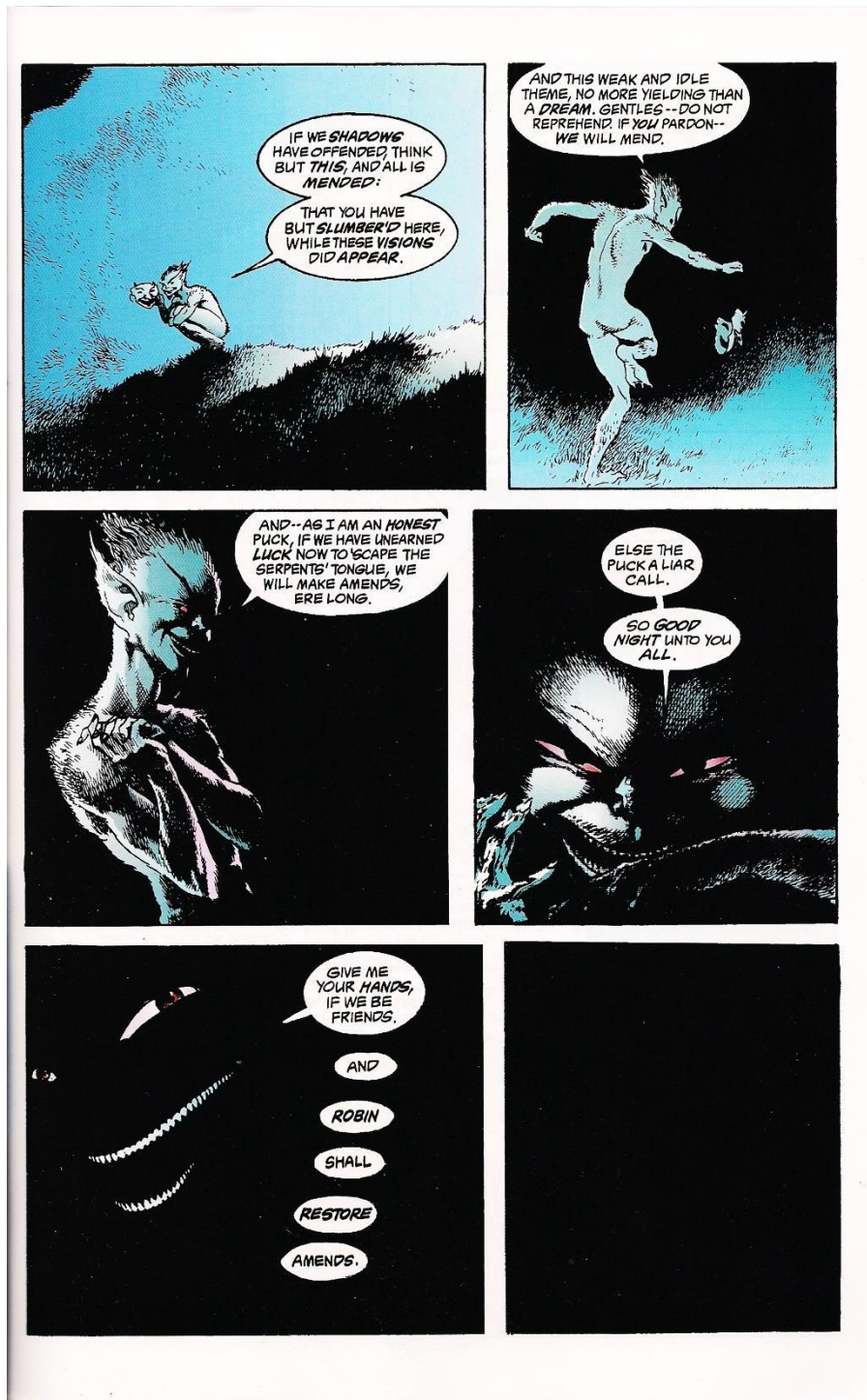Shakespeare in favour of Dream and the "real" Titania and Auberon.

Figure 5. Puck recites his final speech. *The Sandman* "A Midsummer Night's Dream," issue 19, pp. 76.

As the adaptation draws towards its end, Puck takes over his role in the play because "I have played me for time out of mind. And I do Robin Goodfellow better than anyone" (68), adding a further layer to the doubling effect that Gaiman has achieved through the framing of this issue. It is only in

> the concluding pages of Gaiman's 'Dream,' [that] the events both within and without the play merge. […] The blurring of story-level content in this way blends notions of reality and illusion completely, and the next page, which depicts the "real" Puck giving the epilogue, may as a result be read as sheer reality or sheer illusion (Round, "Transforming" 102).

Puck's speech is noteworthy due to the textual and visual cues that add a strongly sinister element to the words and fairies as a whole that was not present in *Classics Illustrated*. As shown above in Figure 5, each panel becomes consumed by a growing darkness, Puck's red eyes and sharp teeth emphasize the dangerous nature of the fairies that was overlooked in *Classics Illustrated* despite its acknowledgement in the play-text. As he fades away, the words Gaiman emphasizes in the dialogue take on an equally menacing quality. Puck has now shed the role of actor and speaks directly to the audience, which is now, ironically, Shakespeare and his actors as well as the reader. Particular emphasis is placed on the words "slumber'd", "visions" and "dream" in the first two panels, implying a sense of sleep overcoming the audience. In the fourth panel, emphasis is written as "So ***good night*** unto you ***all***" which further propels the sense of sleepiness as Puck's face continues to fade from view. Together with the textual emphasis on dreams, visions and nighttime, Puck's delivery of the final speech casts a spell of sleep over the audience that mirrors the multiple instances of sleep in the play-text.

Upon awaking, the actors question the reality of the experience: Shakespeare wonders if it "was […] a dream" and Hamnet insists that he "had such a strange dream" (Gaiman "Midsummer" 77) yet life continues as normal now that they fairies have left. This is true of the

ending to the play-text as well, which implies that normalcy is maintained when the lives of mortals do not knowingly cross theirs, as they "do run / By the triple Hecate's team / From the presence of the sun, / Following darkness like a dream, / Now are frolic" (Shakespeare *Midsummer* 5.1.375-379). Puck implies that fairies are most active at night, and as such, their power over the troupe is at its peak as the day becomes night. The ending emphasizes the unreality that the Midsummer Night not only brought upon the characters in the play-text but also on the "real" people in *The Sandman*.

Overall, this issue does not focus on the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The issue focuses more strongly on the aspects of reality and unreality, and on Dream's relationship with the fairies and with Shakespeare. This means that the transmission of the story is made much more complex because few panels draw attention to the performance of the play, and the audience commentary offers only the most basic plot summary during the adaptation. The artwork does emphasize the otherness of the fairy court and it draws a much sharper contrast with the humans than the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation did. Since *The Sandman* is not focused on providing adaptations of Shakespeare to the audience, Gaiman is able to explore the effects of Shakespeare's bargain with Dream, the burden of creativity and the way in which stories mirror reality.

The Tempest

It is during the final issue of *The Sandman* that Shakespeare appears again and fulfills the final part of his bargain with Dream. This issue is similar in the artistic style to "A Midsummer Night's Dream" but the adaptation of *The Tempest* is not immediately recognizable. As with the previous adaptation, this issue treats the play-text as a source from which to explore the effects

of an artist's single-minded devotion to his craft in his life. This is a theme that is already present in *The Tempest* which means that this play-text is ideal to use in *The Sandman*, where Dream explains that "I am…in my fashion…an island…" and that he is the "Prince of stories […]; but I have no story of my own. Nor shall I ever" (Gaiman "Tempest" 82). The parallels and themes that tie this adaptation into the universe of *The Sandman* have been building since Shakespeare's introduction in "Men of Good Fortune" and reach their apex here. Similarly to "A Midsummer Night's Dream," this issue avoids a scene-by-scene adaptation by instead choosing to illustrate portions of different scenes that are thematically pertinent to illustrating the writing process involved in the creation of the play-text. As the final issue in the series, "The Tempest" serves an important role in exploring the impact that artistic creation has not only on the artist, but also on the lives of everyone surrounding him.

Writing The Tempest*: Finding Inspiration in Ordinary Events*

Shakespeare's personal history plays an even more crucial role in this issue than in the two previous ones as much of this adaptation focuses on the process of actually writing the play. It is, however, still an adaptation as the events that occur in the play occur during Shakespeare's life: his life *is* the adaptation of the play. The adaptation of the play-text is used to "[demonstrate] the ways in which fiction is life transformed, as we are first shown each 'real' event, before an illustration of Shakespeare incorporating it into his play" (Round "Transforming" 102). For instance, Shakespeare's trip to the inn offers him the opportunity to witness "the sight of a dead Indian" and overhear other patrons comment that "It smells like a fish! Like a salted cod's head!" (Gaiman, "Tempest" 154), which itself recalls the diction of Trinculo's speech in 2.2.24-36 where he describes Caliban as "smell[ing] like a fish; a very ancient and fishlike smell" (25-26). Despite Round's assertion that the play-texts showcase how

the act of writing fiction is impacted by real experiences, this is also an example of how

Gaiman's adaptation of both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* follows how most

"popular portrayals of Shakespeare wilfully commit some form of 'the biographical fallacy',

treating the plays as a veiled record of what happened to the author in ordinary life" (Lanier

115). The unknown details of Shakespeare's life allow Gaiman the opportunity to mould his

character to the specific needs of *The Sandman* as a whole, offering insight into the creative

process that facilitates the creation of great literature.

Using Shakespeare's life as the adaptation of the play makes for a unique transmission of

The Tempest yet also keeps the fact that this is an adaptation hidden beneath the historical aspect

of the issue. This frame ensures that this issue not only explores the creative process behind

writing the play-text but also *is* the story of *The Tempest*. Unlike other adaptations—such as

Romeo x Juliet or the *Classics Illustrated* series—this one is not immediately recognizable,

which makes the transmission of the play-text more difficult to perceive. Castaldo argues that

this "issue […] is, to a large extent, simply an illustrated version of *The Tempest*" (108) rather

than an adaptation of it, and although this may appear to be true at first glance, the adaptation is

still present: it lies in the representation of Shakespeare's day to day life. As he is very clearly

aligned with Prospero, Shakespeare's story and creative powers take a central role in this issue,

just as Prospero's magic is a central element of *The Tempest.* In fact, given that few scenes from

the play-text are even included in the issue, Gaiman's "Tempest" is *not* a mere illustration of the

original text: it is an unusually poignant adaptation that addresses the process of creating art as

well as how that creation affects the artist's daily life, which is certainly an integral theme in the

play-text. Prospero's magic may not be the same kind of art as Shakespeare's writing, but it *is* art

that is inextricably tied with his life, which is explored through the effect that playwriting has on Shakespeare's life throughout the issue.

Throughout the issue, Gaiman includes banners of dialogue drawn directly from the play-text that hold some significance for the particular scene in which they appear. For instance, the opening page includes lines from the very opening of the play-text and Shakespeare's daughter Judith quickly informs him—and the audience—that "There is a storm brewing" (Gaiman "Tempest" 147). The physical storm is not the only one to which Judith's lines—or even the quoted text—refers, as there is also a storm within Shakespeare's family as he remains disconnected from his wife and daughter as he agonizes over the creation of the play-text that will finally end his Faustian bargain with Dream. Upon completion of the play-text, Shakespeare encounters Dream for the final time and articulates this bargain as being in "service" to Dream in a way similar not only to Faustus' bargain with the devil, but also with Prospero and Ariel's tumultuous master-and-servant relationship that is only paid in full at the end of the play-text, after many years of service. Just as Shakespeare expresses an eager desire to be finally finished with "The burden of words" that he is finally able to "lay […] down" (183), so too does Prospero give up his magic to return to a normal life. This is a parallel that has been embedded in the Shakespeare story-arc since "Men of Good Fortune" in issue 13. In a sense, the adaptation of *The Tempest* began long before the final issue of the series as Shakespeare has always been showcasing qualities of Prospero even though he only articulates this connection near the end of the issue.
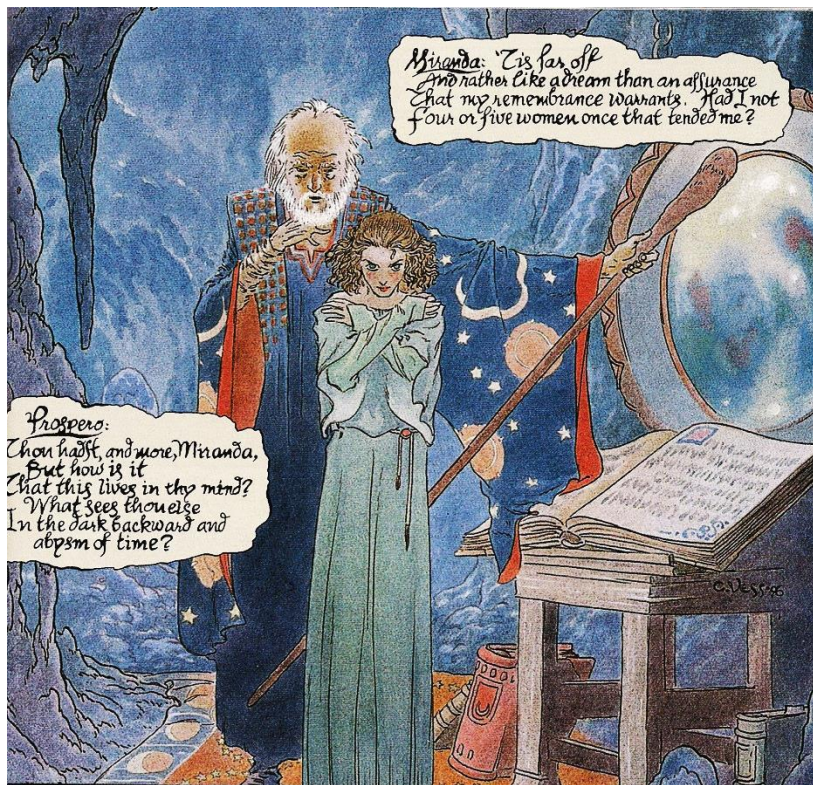
Figure 6: Miranda with Prospero; Judith with Shakespeare. *The Sandman* "The Tempest," issue 75, pp. 157, 164.

Much like "A Midsummer Night's Dream," this adaptation of *The Tempest* cuts nearly all of the original text and illustrates only a few scenes that hold some significance to the life of Shakespeare and his act of literary creation. Although few scenes are actually shown, the art of those scenes is often more telling than the dialogue because it is able to show what cannot be

said in a way reminiscent of the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Figure 6 shows how the art is used to evoke the sense that the events and characters of *The Tempest* are inspired by those in Shakespeare's own life. Figure 6 above shows two unrelated panels: one panel shows Prospero standing behind Miranda and waving his staff as if to divine how her memory can reach back to her childhood before their exile and the other depicts Shakespeare talking to his daughter Judith as he writes the play-text of *The Tempest*. The art in the first panel emphasizes Prospero's supernatural associations as well as his age which opposes Miranda's youth and determined expression. This is a clear parallel with Shakespeare and Judith: although Shakespeare has forgotten how he told Marlowe he would give anything in order to be as great an author (178), Judith has never forgotten her jealousy of Hamnet or her despair at never seeing her father. She even uses the same language as he did when speaking to Marlowe: "I would have given the world to have had you here—when I truly was a little girl" (164). Lanier notes that the "governing sorrow in Shakespeare's life […] is that his mythic power as a writer, his 'magic', comes at the price of distance from the pleasures of ordinary bourgeois life" (123) and a distance from his family. The art emphasizes how Miranda and Judith are visually similar, implying that Miranda's character is based on Shakespeare's daughter. The disconnect between the father-daughter pairs is also visually reinforced: Prospero's eyes are closed as he questions how Miranda can still recall her childhood, just as Shakespeare's focus is on his writing rather than Judith's despair. These two panels draw attention to how artistic creation can negatively impact the lives of people around them which reinforces the burden of the bargain that the youthful Shakespeare made without fully understanding.

The adaptation of *The Tempest* continually draws attention to the burden of words that Shakespeare is bound by through the illustrations of how his everyday life becomes *The*

Tempest. At the same time, however, this also draws attention away from the adaptation of *The Tempest* because the focus of the issue is on Shakespeare and how his life affects his writing. The adaptation of the play-text is the vehicle through which Gaiman invites the audience to perceive Shakespeare and the creative process. Upon completing the manuscript of the play-text, Shakespeare accompanies Dream into his castle to discuss this commission and the significance that it holds for the both of them. Shakespeare claims that he

> is Prosper, certainly […]. But I am also Ariel—a flaming firing spirit, crackling like lightning in the sky. And I am dull Caliban. I am dark Antonio, brooding and planning, and old Gonzalo, counseling silly wisdom. And I am Trinculo, the jester, and Stephano the butler, for they are clowns and fools, and I am also a clown and a fool (Gaiman "Tempest" 175-176).

Shakespeare states that his life is indeed transformed into the fiction of the play—each character is a piece of himself and the whole play-text is rooted in his experiences. Unlike *Classics Illustrated*, which adapted the play-texts as separate entities from the author, *The Sandman* celebrates the unique relationship the author has with his art; in this case, Shakespeare's "God-given gift of words" (170) becomes the focus of his story-arc in *The Sandman* universe rather than the inclusion of the play-texts. His creative process is the focus of "The Tempest" because the play-text itself is all about creation and manipulation of ordinary events into something extraordinary, primarily through Prospero's magic, just as Shakespeare does in his writing. The approach Gaiman uses makes these Shakespeare-focused issues no less an adaptation of the play-texts than traditional ones offered by *Classics Illustrated*—they simply shift the focus from the representation of the play-texts to the creative process behind the play-texts.

The final pages of the issue are a clear adaptation of Prospero's epilogue in the play-texts, and this is not simply because the adaptation ends by illustrating Shakespeare writing it. This scene is symbolic of Shakespeare giving up his own "magic" by writing the epilogue with "no

magic but mine own words" (183) or, in other words, with no further pact with Dream to provide

him with the power to write great plays, just as Prospero gives up his powers and concludes his

pact with Ariel. Indeed, he is not only being set free from his bargain with Dream but also from

the audience that expects great plays as, through Prospero, Shakespeare requests that the

audience "let [their] indulgence set [him] free". Although Gaiman's summarizing banners in the

final panel note that Shakespeare "wrote nothing more alone, after *The Tempest*" (184), any

subsequent work was free from the shackles of necessity from a bargain that weighed heavily on

Shakespeare throughout the course of *The Sandman*.

This issue offers an adaptation of *The Tempest* that is not immediately apparent due to the

extreme focus on exploring the intimate relationship between the artist and the artist's life. This

means that most of the play-text is completely cut from the adaptation because it is simply

adapted in a non-traditional way. The art uses many close-up panels to focus the reader's

attention on the emotional aspect of creativity in Shakespeare and on how his feelings and

experiences inform the text he writes. Although unusual in design, the adaptation is faithful to

the play-text in a much less extreme way than *Classics Illustrated*, which allows for more

complexity in the transmission of the story and perception of both the play-text and of

Shakespeare as an artist.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, the adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* are unique in

their design and in their relationship to the story of *The Sandman*. Because the adaptation of each

play-text is not the focus of their respective issues, Gaiman is able to use them to illustrate points

that are related to the story of *The Sandman* as a whole. Indeed, these particular issues are more

suited for an older audience because there is an underlying assumption in these adaptations that the reader is already (at least partially) familiar with the original play-texts, since Gaiman spends the bulk of each issue focusing on Dream, Shakespeare and the difficulties related to literary creation. In this way, Gaiman's inclusion of Shakespeare as a character invites readers to interpret the play-texts as possessing an intimate relationship to his life that is completely lost in traditional adaptations, such as *Classics Illustrated*, where the author is only acknowledged on the title page and in a closing authorial biography. Gaiman's choice to include Shakespeare as a character allows for a more complex adaptation of the play-texts through the way his character facilitates a meditation on the process of literary creation.

Fidelity is another quality that makes Gaiman's adaptations distinctive from other adaptations because it is not a primary concern in *The Sandman*. This is not to say that his adaptations are *not* faithful to the play-texts, since, insofar as the plots and characters are concerned, they remain unchanged. Even the language that is not cut from the adaptations is pulled directly from the play-texts. However, because these adaptations are not the focus of each issue, strict scene-by-scene fidelity is unnecessary. The approach that Gaiman uses to frame each narrative and connect each one to the over-arching story of *The Sandman* subtly follows the play-texts without allowing Shakespearean adaptation to overshadow completely the story of Dream that he is exploring throughout the series.

The transmission of each adaptation is determined by Shakespeare's existence as a character. It is his life and bargain with Dream that creates the frame through which each adaptation is conveyed and ultimately connected to the story of *The Sandman*. Because Shakespeare is a parallel of Dream, and both exhibit the difficulties of literary creation, the artwork is often heavily shadowed to reinforce visually the anxiety that artistic creation has on

the artist. Gaiman's adaptation of *The Tempest* is the best example of this as many panels show close-up views of Shakespeare's face and his expression is often shadowed as he agonizes over the creation of the play-text that will end his bargain with Dream. Though these are similar techniques to those found in the *Classics Illustrated* series, they typically reinforce the sense that Shakespeare is more important to *The Sandman* than the adaptations of his plays. Since the adaptations in *The Sandman* are not the focus of those issues, they are certainly not meant to be introductions to the play-texts and should not be treated as though they are.

Chapter Three: *Romeo x Juliet*

At the same time that more sophisticated comic books like *The Sandman* were on the rise

in North America, so too was a very different kind of comic book being introduced to Western

culture. Japanese *manga* entered the Western markets in the 1980s and maintained "a reputation

for vulgarity, violence, and bad drawing" according to the opinions of Western intelligentsia,

educators, and parents (Bouissou 17), much like their Western comic book counterparts had done

since their inception. In her introduction to *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural*

Perspectives, Toni Johnson-Woods notes that there are many ways in which manga differs from

Western comic books, such as that they

> are read from back to front and right to left. The next most glaring difference is that they
> are largely rendered in black and white, lacking the hypercoloring of Western comics.
> Inside, the frames are not always neat rectangles lined up equidistant (i.e., four to a line
> and four lines to a page); there can be one, two or seven frames on a page. The manga
> aesthetic embraces a myriad of graphic techniques […]. Often drawing techniques are
> mixed on the same page; thus, the same character can be rendered as a full-sized angular
> person or a small chubby one. The words are few—manga relies more heavily on visual
> cues and adopts cinematic techniques such as close-ups and freeze frames. Sound effects
> also add texture to the story. The use of sound effects is quintessentially Japanese and
> reflects the onomatopoeia of the Japanese language […]. For the first time Western
> reader, manga is a visual, textual, and intellectual challenge (5-6).

It also includes a wide variety of genres that appeal to a wide range of audiences. Johnson-

Woods notes that manga are first printed in a serialized anthology format "by publishers who

deliberately target certain readerships […]. The Japanese manga genres therefore reflect the

genre of anthologies in which the manga appear: shōnen (boys' manga […]), shōjo (girls' manga

[…]), seinen manga (men's manga […]) and *josei* manga (women's manga […])" (8). These are

the main genres and each one includes numerous sub-genres which promotes a kind of "genre

hybridity—how elements or characteristics particular to one genre are often recombined with

others as creative reworkings that drive readership appeal as well as plot and character development" (Bryce and Davis 34).

The main obstacle to bringing manga to Western audiences is language. Most Western readers are unfamiliar with Japanese and so it is necessary that they be translated into the language that the target audience understands. However, translating manga includes a whole host of additional challenges. Because images "both complement and accommodate the source language on every level" (Sell 93), it is difficult to make translations that interact with the images in the same way. Additionally, manga makes heavy use of onomatopoeia and

> mimetic expressions that are similar in execution and use, but express a present state or condition rather than an occurring sound. […] Mimesis can also represent something entirely soundless, in effect assigning it a sound, such as *niko niko* for a smile, or *shiin*, which is used to express a state of utter silence. […] In manga and comics these words are more often than not physically part of the artwork, […] making it easy to see the interrelatedness of images and text, as they are literally both image and text (98-99).

Sell notes that some companies will choose to replace these words completely and others will include subtitles or notes, especially if the company wants to minimize changes to the artwork, while still other companies will romanize the words (99) and include notes at the end that explain them. Upon its initial introduction to Western markets, manga was typically reversed to be read left to right in an effort to appeal to their audience. Because the fan interest in anime was also steadily rising at this time, "fans soon turned their attention to manga and began importing it even without being able to read Japanese." It is more common now for manga to be read in the original right to left order and for onomatopoeic, mimetic, and other Japanese terms to be included in the final product because fans enjoy the exotic feel of manga compared to Western comic books (Rampant 222-224).

Romeo x Juliet is a manga adaptation of Shakespeare's famous tragedy. It belongs to the *shōjo* genre and includes a number of sub-genres, such as fantasy and romance. As previously mentioned, shōjo manga targets primarily a female audience. This kind of manga has a strong focus on human relations and therefore it "tends to revolve around issues of love and friendship, and is filled with unrequited love, love triangles, friendships forged through the trials and tribulations of high school life, and the like" (Prough 94). Shakespeare's play-text is full of many of these themes and this adaptation expands them further. Given the genre and themes, it is unsurprising that the "protagonist in shōjo manga is almost always a young girl. Typically the stories revolve around the heroine and her group of friends" (95) as is the case with *Romeo x Juliet*. Due to the shōjo genre, Juliet becomes the focus of the adaptation as the events are almost always shown from her perspective. Although still a central element of the adaptation, Romeo's role is less prominent than Juliet's.

The play-text lends itself well to adaptation into the shōjo genre because the relationship between Romeo and Juliet already has themes of love, unrequited love and, to a lesser extent, friendship that are necessary elements in shōjo manga. In spite of these built-in shōjo characteristics, there are significant changes to the narrative of the play-text, the setting, and even the characters. As with *The Sandman*, this adaptation takes a unique approach to exploring the story of the play-text by foregoing the more traditionally faithful scene-by-scene adaptation that was typical of the *Classics Illustrated* series. Instead, this adaptation uses the play-text as a source of inspiration to create a new version of the story. By casting Juliet as the main protagonist and setting this adaptation in Neo Verona, *Romeo x Juliet* leaves the source text recognizable beneath the surface of their new interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Although it retains many classic scenes from the play-text, this adaptation is not concerned with maintaining

strict fidelity to the play-text and instead chooses to be creative with its interpretation of the original story. To that end, not only are many of the events of the play-text removed entirely, the adaptation also contains abundant references to other Shakespearean play-texts, most notably through the use of character names. In this way, only a handful of characters named in the play-text of *Romeo and Juliet* actually appear in the adaptation, which creates a unique reading experience for those people who have a deeper knowledge of the Shakespearean canon.

This chapter will explore the English translation of the *Romeo x Juliet* manga as it is presented for a Western youth audience. How do changes to the narrative structure, setting, and characters affect the transmission of the story? How does the visual focus of the manga format aid in the transmission of the story? Given the numerous changes to the play-text, how does this adaptation interact with the play-text as its source? Because Shakespeare never indicates if either family is better or worse, or more or less at fault, than the other for the feud and ensuing tragedy, *Romeo x Juliet* reinterprets the story of the play-text as one of clear good-versus-evil. This adaptation draws attention to the nature of the feud on the world at large, amplifying its effects by giving it a clear perpetrator in Lord Montague. Additionally, since this adaptation is made in the shōjo genre, the manga centres around Juliet as a way of both appealing to the manga's female audience and further exploring the effects of the feud on the Capulet family.

Reimagining Verona: Changes to Narrative and Setting

The adaptation begins with a brief prologue that functions similarly to the Chorus at the opening of the play-text. The opening narration lays out the scene by explaining that "In Neo Verona, City of Flowers, there once were two great rival households. The House of Montague and…the House of Capulet" (Beckwitt et al, 5). It is immediately clear that the adaptation has

chosen to set the story in an alternate world; not only does the updated name of the city, "Neo Verona," imply a sense of newness to the story, but the image of a dragon-horse on which Juliet escapes the burning castle (a creature that appear throughout the adaptation) implies that the play-text has been set in a fantasy world. A time-skip of fourteen years introduces the "girl hunts" that have plagued Neo Verona since Juliet's escape and are explained as the work of Montague, who "has been searching relentlessly for her" (79) to finish the Capulet deaths that he began. These changes appear to distance the manga adaptation from the play-text, yet it is necessary to realize that the story is still clearly rooted in the feud between the two houses. This is a key element of the play-text that remains a central issue in the adaptation and it is this feud that sparks the tragic romance.

The unique setting for this adaptation allows the Montague-Capulet feud to be more fully fleshed out. In the play-text, this feud is simply described as an "ancient grudge" (Shakespeare *Romeo* 1 Cho. 3) which all members of the two households participate in perpetuating. *Romeo x Juliet* expands on the nature of the feud by casting Lord Montague as the villain and dictator of Neo Verona who has annihilated nearly all members of the rival Capulet family. Montague's role as the villain in the story gives the feud a more black-and-white interpretation since resistance to his cruelties becomes a central focus in the adaptation and emphasizes how social unity is an essential quality of peace and prosperity, a theme that is equally important in the play-text. In terms of the narrative, the added substance to the nature of the feud better sustains the length of the adaptation and offers a solid reason to help unite Juliet with Romeo when she discovers that he too opposes the atrocities of his father (Beckwitt et al, 23). Although the manga states that the families were "rival households", the fault is heavily skewed towards the Montagues because it is Lord Montague who leads his troops to storm the Capulet's castle (5) because he "wanted to

be the most feared ruler…in the whole world" (326). Lady Montague supports this adaptation's interpretation that Montague is a deplorable person by noting that "Duke Capulet was a good lord, honest and fair" (189). Since the fantastical setting of this adaptation also necessitates a change in the progression of the narrative, the changes made to the nature of the rivalry are minor and it ultimately still leads to their deaths. By expanding on the nature of the feud, *Romeo x Juliet* is a clear example of how adaptation choices can complicate the understanding of how it can be considered a "genuine [instance] of Shakespeare's [work]" when it appears to be so different. Kidnie explains that the "process of gauging when something is 'like enough' likewise guides work recognition, continually fashioning and redefining its accepted limits" (112-113), such as with the feud: it is not so out of the realm of possibility that it severs any relationship between the adaptation and the play-text, but rather "like enough" that although different, it is not an unacceptable interpretation, and it accomplishes the same task as in the play-text.

Romeo x Juliet is also unique in that the narrative reverses the roles of Romeo and Juliet in several ways. As noted earlier, "*shōjo* manga is manga for girls" (Prough 93) and thus they typically follow a female protagonist in order to appeal more fully to a female audience; thus, casting Juliet as the protagonist over Romeo is the logical choice for this adaptation. In her guise as the Red Whirlwind, a freedom fighter of sorts, Juliet engages the Montague soldiers in combat much like the household servants do at the beginning of the play-text. Just as the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation states that "Every member of the two households, from the servants to the masters took part in the ceaseless fighting" (CI "Romeo" 1), *Romeo x Juliet* illustrates Juliet partaking in the combat, and it is only after she has married Romeo that her goal becomes one of restoring peace by uniting with him against the tyrannical rule of his father. This is a clear parallel to Romeo's insistence in the play-text that he "love[s] [Tybalt] better than [he] canst

devise / […] And so, good Capulet, which name I tender / As dearly as mine own, be satisfied"
(Shakespeare *Romeo* 3.1.68-71) in an effort to avoid a conflict with the Capulets now that he has
been united in marriage with Juliet. Similarly, it is Juliet who attends the Rose Ball uninvited
(Beckwitt et al, 39) and who goes to Mantua (252), while it is Romeo who becomes unwillingly
engaged (31, 37-38) and opposes his father's decisions, especially those pertaining to his
tyrannical rule and control of Romeo's life (82-83). The most interesting lesson of this role
reversal is that it does not negatively affect the transmission of the story. Although Juliet
performs some of the actions that the play-text ascribes to Romeo, the story still plays out
exactly as it does in the play-text: Romeo still pursues her and convinces her of his love in spite
of the feud between their families (194-199), they still secretly marry (220-221) and ultimately
die together (359-365). Strict fidelity to the play-text is clearly unnecessary to create an
adaptation that is still able to tell the story of *Romeo and Juliet* that Shakespeare wrote, yet
bringing Juliet to the forefront of the story is a key element of making the adaptation work as a
shōjo manga. Since this genre of manga focuses on human relations and follows a female
heroine, this adaptation relies on highlighting the social network of Neo Verona and emphasizes
not only how Juliet is expected to repair the relationship between the Capulet and Montague
families, but also the relationship between the nobles and the peasants. Although unity with the
Montagues is a necessary element of restoring peace, it is Juliet—and the Red Whirlwind—that
people initially look to, to accomplish this task.

Role reversal is not the only adaptation choice that facilitates a unique narrative style for
the transmission of the story. As previously noted, the manga is clearly set in an alternate
universe where magic, fictional creatures and other fantastical elements are considered normal.
The most significant of these changes to the setting, and the narrative as a whole, is the inclusion

of the great tree Escalus and the mysterious witch Ophelia. To employ Escalus' name for a tree which supports the world seems to be a bizarre choice rather than employing him as the ruler of Neo Verona, as Prince Escalus is in the play-text. Using the name "Ophelia" for the magical caretaker of the tree is certainly more unusual given that she is not a character in *Romeo and Juliet* at all. Ophelia claims that Escalus is one of two trees that support the world and that "One tree is withered and dead, the other is slowly dying from human greed. Just like humans, without love, these trees will wither and die…" (Beckwitt et al, 231) and bring about the destruction of the world. Certainly, the fate of the world was not at stake in the play-text, yet the use of Prince Escalus' name for the world tree is not coincidental. Just as the tree in the adaptation supports the world and facilitates harmony and prosperity, so too does Prince Escalus strive to maintain peace and harmony in Verona when he declares to the feuding families that "If ever you disturb our streets again / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace" (Shakespeare *Romeo* 1.1.95-96). The manga plays with this idea by employing Prince Escalus as the very source of life in this alternate world that has been irreparably damaged by the constant fighting. Everything that the world tree Escalus stands for is present in the play-text; the main difference is the way in which the manga chooses to adapt these concepts. Regardless of the means, the adaptation expresses the same sentiment as the play-text: the constant fighting is detrimental to Verona's wellbeing.

Where Escalus' significance is easy to determine in relation to its play-text counterpart, Ophelia is much more difficult to analyze. Although she is not the only character to appear in this adaptation with a name referencing a play-text other than *Romeo and Juliet*, she is one of the most important in spite of her few appearances in the book. Ophelia's role is not very clearly explained in the adaptation though she bears strong resemblances to her mad counterpart in *Hamlet*. Although Ophelia orders Juliet to "Become a tree of Escalus" (291) which would save

the world from destruction, her appearance and her actions are incredibly malicious. The manga uses numerous close-up views of Ophelia's face, which is strangely tattooed and always partially shadowed; her expression is always severe or aloof (290, 346) to emphasize her otherness from the inhabitants of Neo Verona. Much like with the fairies in Gaiman's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ophelia is deliberately illustrated to appear of ambiguous allegiance. Like Montague, Ophelia acts as a secondary, yet no less threatening, villain for the adaptation who further emphasizes the effects of social chaos on the world at large. The facts that her motives and allegiances are ambiguous further aids in amplifying the looming sense of danger following Juliet since all of Ophelia's scenes occur with her. This adaptation is intent on creating clear villains that the protagonists—Juliet and Romeo—can oppose. Unlike the play-text wherein neither the Montagues nor the Capulets were any more good or evil than the other, *Romeo x Juliet* is invested in creating a clear battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil.

Ophelia's inclusion in the story does make the transmission of *Romeo and Juliet* more complex, in great part because she is not native to the play-text in the first place. She draws attention to how the constant fighting initiated by Montague against the Capulets—and then perpetuated against the citizens of Neo Verona—is damaging to everyone, but she complicates the understanding of this issue because she too appears to be vicious in her attempts to convince Juliet to sacrifice her life in order to restore wellbeing to the world. Like Montague, Ophelia cares not at all about the people of the world: "Escalus is the one and only precious life there is!" (357) she claims. Her significance to the adaptation is wrought with complications and her appearance in the story makes the transmission of *Romeo and Juliet* more difficult to convey. The reason for this deviation from the play-text stems from the expansion on the nature and

effects of the Montague-Capulet feud: by including Montague and Ophelia as villainous characters, the adaptation seeks to offer a new interpretation of the feud and its destructive effects on others by providing two characters who represent those qualities. Where Shakespeare left the nature of the feud unclear, and its effects less detrimental to the wellbeing of the world as a whole, *Romeo x Juliet* clarifies it in order to create a story of good and evil. Due to her position as a villain, Ophelia's impact on the end of the story changes the expected tragic ending to one of willing sacrifice. Juliet is willing to do as Ophelia desires and give up her life because she "just want[s] to protect this world and everyone [she] love[s]" (350) which clearly illustrates that her death is not a tragic outcome of ceaseless fighting but rather a noble sacrifice. Romeo's death is equally sacrificial as he vows to Juliet that "[her] fate is [his] fate" (340) and willingly follows her into danger. This is a substantial deviation from the play-text wherein Prince Escalus explains that "heaven finds means to kill your joys with love" (Shakespeare *Romeo* 5.3.293) through miscommunication which exemplifies the tragically avoidable nature of their deaths. Ophelia represents the all-consuming destructive power of the feud by *demanding* the death of the last living Capulet as an ultimatum for the safety of Neo Verona, a choice that neither Juliet nor Romeo face in the play-text. This further illustrates the adaptation's concern reinterpreting the original story with a clear good-versus-evil plot.

In spite of these differences from the play-text, it is essential to recall that this adaptation is set in an alternate reality where the transmission of the story is shaped by the world in which it occurs. The world of Neo Verona is a fantastical one where a world tree, dragon-horses and even a witch-like Ophelia are not at all out of place and changes to the narrative must be expected. It is clear that *Romeo x Juliet* treats the play-text as a source that is ripe for change; indeed, the adaptation is no less the story of *Romeo and Juliet* for all the differences in the transmission of it.

Thomas Leitch describes how some adaptors regard literary works "in quasi-scriptural terms, as a particular kind of sacred writing whose adaptation demands unusual fidelity under unusually severe penalties" (133), an opinion that was certainly held by Kanter and informed the production of each *Classics Illustrated* adaptation. However, determining "what constitutes authentic Shakespeare is a question that can never finally be resolved since there is no *a priori* category that texts and stagings are productions *of*" (Kidnie 9), that is to say, there is no one text that can be held up as the ultimate standard of Shakespeare since editions of each play-text vary considerably. In this way, *Romeo x Juliet* avoids problems of fidelity by treating the play-text as a source from which a new, yet equally true, version of the story can be told. As Gaiman's Puck says, "It never happened; yet it is still true" (Gaiman "Midsummer" 66).

Reimagining the Capulets: Juliet and Tybalt

Since the adaptation reverses the roles of Romeo and Juliet in a number of ways, it is unsurprising that their personalities are adapted in ways that better serve the manga's narrative of good-versus-evil. On the same note, their personalities still retain clear connections to their play-text counterparts. Since this manga is of the shōjo genre, Juliet becomes the main character as is almost always the case in this genre that celebrates female characters and a female audience. Given that Juliet performs many of Romeo's roles, her strength, sense of justice, and daring are heavily emphasized. Unlike Shakespeare's Juliet, this adaptation reimagines her as "the only survivor" (Beckwitt et al, 75) of the Capulet family. Until her sixteenth birthday, Juliet lives her life unaware of her true heritage or of the feud that killed her family—she is only aware that Montague and the nobles of Neo Verona are corrupt and violent, and is forced to disguise herself as a boy whenever she ventures out into public. In a way similar to *Classics Illustrated*, Juliet is dressed entirely in red (as evidenced through the coloured opening pages), a choice which is

significant for a number of reasons. Red is a colour of passion and as such it is particularly descriptive of this Juliet who bravely fights off enemies with a sword. It is also a colour evocative of the flames that consume Juliet's home and reminiscent of the bloodshed that occurred when Montague murdered her family. Red establishes not only Juliet but the whole Capulet family as passionate and daring, a quality that is necessary in a heroine fighting against the tyranny of a villainous dictator.

Even in the play-text, Juliet possessed an inner strength that gave her the courage to go against her family's expectations and pursue a secret relationship with Romeo. Although in *Romeo x Juliet* she lacks blood relatives—except for Tybalt—Juliet is still expected to oppose the Montagues as a whole. Unlike the play-text, Juliet initially decides to cut off her blossoming friendship with Romeo saying that "Even if you mean me no harm…you're still…you're still my enemy" (146) in spite of the tears that run down her cheeks. This forces Juliet to engage in the feud that she clearly does not fully believe in. Although she does not articulate this feeling in her dialogue until much later in the adaptation, the art expresses her displeasure at being associated with a rebellion intent on restoring the Capulet family. As she rallies commoners to her cause, close up illustrations of her face become more common. Her head is often tilted downwards, her eyes downcast and her mouth downturned in order to emphasize her sorrow at participating in a cause she feels obligated to lead ("I can't let anyone else down…!" (153)) but is visually shown to feel little desire to participate in.

Figure 7: Juliet and her companions. *Romeo x Juliet* Act 4, pp. 158-159.

Despite her reluctance to lead the Capulet loyalists against Montague, Juliet steels her resolve and does not shy away from making difficult decisions. As with her play-text and *Classics Illustrated* counterparts, Juliet's determination is a recurring theme throughout the manga adaptation. The scene directly preceding her surprise attack on Montague, as shown in Figure 7, brilliantly illustrates both her determination to lead the rebellion and her fears and underlying unwillingness to perpetuate the feud that Montague began. As she agrees to attack Montague, the top panel illustrates her hand clenching in silent resolve and her eyes in the following panel clearly reflect her determination to participate in an attempt to overthrow an

undeniably tyrannical ruler. Yet when the attack is about to proceed, and her companion comments that her hand is shaking, Juliet's face reflects fear and uncertainty through her wide eyes and the hatching lines beside her face, which indicate her surprise at her façade of certainty being called out. In spite of this, Juliet steels herself again—this time by clenching her eyes shut—and insists that she has made up her mind not only to lead the attack on Montague, but also to lead the rebellion. The final panel illustrates Juliet clenching her sword closely to reflect her determination to fight Montague and her simultaneous unwillingness to be an integral part of the rebellion. In *Romeo x Juliet*, her determination is focused on creating a better world where nobody must "run away to be together" (236) and a "peaceful city, one that doesn't suffer under tyranny" (256). Because of the changes to the way in which the story plays out in this adaptation, Juliet's determination is equally divided between pursuing a relationship with Romeo and restoring Neo Verona to the people (323).

Where Juliet's determined and passionate personality is emphasized in this adaptation, Tybalt's fighting spirit remains his most obvious characteristic. Although he appears only a handful of times throughout the adaptation, Tybalt acts as a foil for Juliet by embodying the qualities of rage, hatred for the Montagues and revenge that she lacks. In this adaptation, however, Tybalt is not only a Capulet but a Montague as well, a significant deviation from the play-text. Unlike his play-text counterpart, the Tybalt of *Romeo x Juliet* claims that the "bloodline means nothing" (265) to him and that his one desire is to have his revenge on Montague because he "courted [Tybalt's] mother and used her to gain a noble rank" and was the cause of her eventual madness (266-268). His hate for Montague is what drives his every action, just as was the case in the play-text where he sought every opportunity to battle with his sworn enemies: "What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word / As I hate hell, all Montagues, and

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thee" (Shakespeare *Romeo* 1.1.68-69). What separates this adaptation of Tybalt from the play-text is the profound change in his role in the story: instead of existing solely to hate the Montagues and die to Romeo's blade, this Tybalt acts as a guide to Juliet and would-be assassin of Montague. In fact, Tybalt's hate is centred entirely on Montague and his concern over Romeo's very existence seems negligible. As Juliet's foil, Tybalt's viewpoint necessarily opposes hers, just as it does in the play-text, since his hate for the Montague is due entirely to his father's actions whereas Juliet clearly expresses her desire for "people to live together in peace! I want the House of Montague and the House of Capulet to build that kind of Neo Verona together!" (Beckwitt et al, 269).

Despite Tybalt's bloodline connection to the Montagues, *Romeo x Juliet*'s Tybalt is not all that far removed from the play-text. The expansions made to the nature of the feud and the fact that Juliet was the only known Capulet survivor of it required that Tybalt's role be slightly altered in order to fit the story and yet the character maintains the spirit of the play-text. Upon confronting Montague near the end of the adaptation, Tybalt's vow that he will "give [Montague] a taste of the hell [his] mother saw" (318) echoes his claim to Romeo in the play-text that "the love I bear thee can afford / No better term than this: thou art a villain" and that no protests of love on Romeo's part "shall […] excuse the injuries / That thou hast done me; therefore turn and draw" (3.1.59-60, 65-66). The adaptation turns Tybalt's hate fully on Lord Montague rather than on Romeo, yet the passion of his hate is equally strong in the adaptation as in the play-text. Tybalt's role is considerably different from the play-text, but his actions continue to convey the same message: that he is deeply committed to the fight against the Montagues and will seek them out—whether Romeo in the play-text or Lord Montague in the

manga adaptation—since Juliet, who embodies a similar passion, chooses not to let rage against the Montagues dictate her perceptions of them.

Although their roles are slightly changed in order to better serve this adaptation, both Juliet and Tybalt are adapted to closely resemble their play-text counterparts. Juliet's determination and passion were defining qualities in the play-text that drove her to pursue a relationship with Romeo in spite of her family's expectations. In this adaptation, they serve her equally well not only for that reason but also to give her the courage to sacrifice her life for the wellbeing of Neo Verona. Likewise, Tybalt's fighting spirit and hate for the Montagues are two defining qualities of his character that foil Juliet's grace, love of Romeo, and desire for peace in both the play-text and the manga adaptation. Although *Romeo x Juliet* makes numerous changes to the setting and the flow of the narrative, the adaptation ensures that the characters are strongly rooted in the play-text and in this way they are able to tell a new, yet still recognizable, story of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Reimagining the Montagues: Romeo and Lord Montague

Similarly to the Capulet characters, the adaptations of Romeo and Lord Montague are both firmly rooted in the play-text, although Montague is certainly more fully associated with evil than he originally was. Romeo, however, is very similar to his play-text counterpart in that he retains his gentlemanly demeanour and devoted love of Juliet. By the same token, the choice to make Romeo, too, unaware of the Montague-Capulet feud is bizarre since the very premise of the story is that the feud is what initially separates the lovers and ultimately leads to their deaths. In Juliet's case, this is understandable: her heritage is hidden until she is considered old enough to lead the Capulet loyalists against Montague. Because neither Juliet nor Romeo is initially

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aware of the Montague-Capulet feud, they are divided primarily by class. This, coupled with the expansions to the nature of the feud and Montague's tyrannical reign, allows Romeo's sense of justice to flourish and his concern for other people is made more apparent. Aside from his devotion to Juliet, the adaptation focuses on Romeo's humanitarian side as he often expresses how it "pains [him] to see the state of Neo Verona" (24). Where the play-text highlights Romeo's melancholic distance from his family and friends—his father comments that "Away from the light steals home my heavy son, / And private in his chamber pens himself" (Shakespeare *Romeo* 1.1.123-124)—the adaptation focuses on Romeo's involvement with the people of Neo Verona—Montague complains that he ought to "Leave the sightseeing to the troops. [Romeo] should be studying government, politics" (Beckwitt et al, 29).

Romeo's concern for other people ensures that he acts as a foil for Montague since he is undeniably cast as the ultimate villain of *Romeo x Juliet*. The adaptation's choice to expand on the characteristics that the play-text does not focus on as heavily as his love for Juliet—namely Romeo's compassion for his friends, illustrated most clearly when he engages Tybalt in combat to avenge Mercutio's death (Shakespeare *Romeo* 3.1.104-132)—is how the adaptation draws attention to Romeo's compassion and love for the people around him, which often feels lost in adaptations that focus more heavily on his devotion to Juliet. *Romeo x Juliet* ensures that the depth of Romeo's character is clear: his defining feature is not simply his love for Juliet but rather that is only one expression of how he is a warm-hearted person that is deeply concerned with the wellbeing of others. This reiterates his function as a foil to the villain Montague, who is much less complex, and as a complement to Juliet who shares many similar qualities.

The design of the two characters further establishes their opposition. Although the use of shadowing alone is enough to indicate that Montague is a much more threatening character than

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Romeo, it is the differences in the design of their eyes which express this most clearly. The use of abnormally large eyes is a well-known component of manga since the "usefulness of eyes for expression is usually attributed to the fact that they are […] the window to the soul" (Prough 97). As can be seen in Figure 8 below, Romeo's whole face is much brighter than Montague's and his eyes are both round and large; coupled with his slightly slanted eyebrows and downturned mouth, Romeo's expression is one of worry at being the target of his father's displeasure. Montague, on the other hand, is shadowed much more heavily than Romeo and his eyes are much narrower which gives him a decidedly sinister appearance to contrast his son. In the bottom panel, the extreme focus on Montague's eyes draws attention to his tiny pupils, sharply slanted eyebrows and frown lines around his eyes—these all imply a sense of underlying danger that becomes more apparent throughout the adaptation. The details in the design of the characters are strong enough to convey the story even without the inclusion of dialogue.

Casting Montague as the ultimate villain of the story is a major deviation from the play-text wherein the situation is not nearly so black-and-white. Romeo accuses Montague of not "know[ing] what love is" and claims that he "Only believe[s] in power" (Beckwitt et al, 314), while other characters remember the deceased Capulet as having been a good duke. In the play-text, Shakespeare gives no indication that one family is more or less good than the other. Prince Escalus emphasizes their equal blame in the tragedy that left both families bereft of a child: "Where be these enemies? Capulet! Montague! / See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate, / That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love" (Shakespeare *Romeo* 5.3.290-292). Old Capulet also recognizes their mutual fault by noting that the lovers' deaths were "Poor sacrifices of our enmity" (5.3.303). Although the opening scene of *Romeo x Juliet* notes that they were rival households, the adaptation requires a villain in order to sustain the changes made to the

narrative since it is ultimately adapted as a story of good and evil, of overthrowing tyranny with justice.

Figure 8: Montague confronts Romeo about his activities. *Romeo x Juliet* Act 1, pp. 29.

Montague is an intriguing—if predictable—villain and as Romeo's foil, his role as the ultimate villain emphasizes Romeo's compassion for other people by highlighting Montague's complete lack of concern for others. Furthermore, Montague's association with evil is one way

that the adaptation stresses the extent of the impact that the Montague-Capulet feud had not only on the two families or the people, but on the very world itself. Although the impact of the feud in the play-text is not as extensive as in this adaptation, it harms many people beyond the two families: not only do "Verona's ancient citizens / […] wield old partisans, in hands as old, / Canker'd with peace, to part [their] canker'd hate" (1.1.79-82), Paris and Mercutio, both kinsmen of Prince Escalus, die as a result of feud. As a villain, Montague's role is heavily expanded on in order to draw attention to the effects the feud has not only on those people directly involved in it, but also those, like Paris and Mercutio, who are caught in the crossfire. Furthermore, because the feud is implied to have only *begun* with Montague as of his annihilation of the Capulet family at the beginning of the manga, he becomes the villain of the story because there is now a clear-cut reason for the feud even existing in the first place: Montague's insatiable ambition. By giving the feud a source, *Romeo x Juliet* needs a villain against which the heroes can fight and, as the source of the feud, Montague automatically fills that role.

Although Romeo's character is similar to his play-text counterpart, Montague's is much more heavily expanded upon and bears few resemblances to the play-text. Romeo's compassion for others is just as important as his devotion to Juliet in this adaptation, qualities which highlight how complimentary his personality is to Juliet's, ensuring that they share the same goals and thus work well together as a team against the tyranny of Montague. His foil, Montague, embodies everything that the heroes oppose—ambition, power and wealth—and his reign over Neo Verona is a symbol of the disastrous effects that the feud can have on others. Despite the changes that *Romeo x Juliet* makes to the characters, especially Montague, the story of the play-text is still clearly conveyed.

<u>Concluding Remarks</u>

The adaptation of *Romeo x Juliet* offers a unique rendition of Shakespeare's famous tragedy by choosing to forego strict fidelity to the play-text. Instead of treating the play-text as the sole way to express the story, *Romeo x Juliet* uses it primarily as a source from which to shape a new, yet still recognizable, version of the same tale. Since fidelity is not a key element of this adaptation, *Romeo x Juliet* is able to expand on the nature and effects of the Montague-Capulet feud and reverse the roles of Romeo and Juliet in order to explore the story in the shōjo genre. This illustrates how fidelity is not a necessary component of a successful adaptation by deliberately picking which elements of the play-text it wanted to emphasize and expand upon (for example: the impact of the feud on others) and which ones it wanted to change (for example: Montague's clear association with evil) in order to tell a new version of the story of Romeo and Juliet.

The art plays a significant role in manga due to the visual focus of the form. Many panels in this adaptation are close up illustrations of a character's face in order to illustrate the emotions that are not expressed through the dialogue. The art eases the transmission of the story because it consistently reinforces the themes of good-versus-evil and visually expresses the effects of the feud on the world of Neo Verona. Examples of this include Juliet's determination, which is expressed through her eyes, Montague's association with evil, which is expressed through a heavily shadowed face, and the failing health of the world, which is expressed through the constant earthquakes and withering plant-life. The art creates a rich and vibrant world that, although fantastical, appears as real as the Verona that is illustrated in the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation.

The success of *Romeo x Juliet* as an adaptation of the play-text is dependent on the value a reader places on fidelity. This adaptation maintains faithful links to the play-text as well as deviating strongly from it in some significant ways. If one feels that fidelity is a necessary component of an adaptation that is aimed for young readers, then this adaptation is largely unsuccessful because of the multiple substantial changes it makes to the narrative, setting and characters in order to tell a new version of an old story. On the other hand, if one feels that fidelity is an important, but not essential, component of an adaptation that is aimed for young readers, then this adaptation is quite successful because it retains many qualities of the play-text despite the fantastical setting and changes to the plot. In either case, it is undeniable that the story of star-crossed love is conveyed clearly in the adaptation just as it is in the play-text.

Chapter Four: *Manga Shakespeare*

Because manga has grown in popularity with Western audiences since its initial

introduction in the 1980s, many "commercially translated manga tend to be consumed as overtly

foreignized texts, with their readers well aware that they are reading translations" which

encourages the fans to appropriate the texts as more than simply foreign import products. An

increasingly common example of this appropriation is through "the creation of original non-

Japanese 'manga', that is, manga produced in languages other than Japanese around the world"

(Sell 94). One such example is SelfMadeHero, the publisher behind the *Manga Shakespeare*

series, which was launched in 2007 in the United Kingdom and "whose principal aim is to

breathe new life into the classics" (Hayley 267). This goal is strikingly close to that of Kanter's

Classics Illustrated series and many of the adaptations are remarkably similar in their adaptation

choices. Unlike *The Sandman* or *Romeo x Juliet*, these adaptations adhere more obviously to the

play-text and clearly seek 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'" (Grande 3). Furthermore, the back cover of each book describes the series

initiative as being "much more fun than a study guide" and insists that "each of the books brings

life to one of the most important works of literature in the English language. Whether it's for

school or for relaxation, whether you're a fan of manga or of the Bard, *Manga Shakespeare*

won't disappoint" (SelfMadeHero), which directly supports the sense that the series is aimed

mainly towards an audience of students.

In many ways, "*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" (Grande 3). Emma Hayley, the Managing Director and Publisher at

SelfMadeHero, states that her

> primary aim with the *Manga Shakespeare* series was to introduce teenagers or first-time
> readers to the work of William Shakespeare via a medium they understood. Manga, with
> its pace and vigor, was particularly appropriate for Shakespeare, who intended his plays
> to be seen rather than read. *Manga Shakespeare* provided a bridge between the world of
> performance and linear text, a way of bringing Shakespeare to life in a visual way for a
> new audience. I wanted these mangas to be seen as entertainment rather than as primarily
> educational (Hayley 268-269).

Although *Manga Shakespeare* is focused on only one author, Hayley's goal shares a common

theme with Kanter's for *Classics Illustrated*: to introduce young readers to classic stories in a

form that those readers enjoy. Ensuring that Shakespeare is interesting to the readership has been

an ongoing struggle, and visual adaptations—ranging from film to comic books—have been

employed by many educational institutions to foster student attention and comprehension. This

series functions with this struggle in mind while seeking to avoid being labelled as merely

educational material to the target audience in a way that parallels Kanter's desire for his series to

be regarded as "illustrated classics" as opposed to comic books. The implicit meaning is that

youth should consider Shakespeare as enjoyable and that his work is relevant even outside of

classroom settings.

 Manga Shakespeare is a clear example of how "like the theatre, the artists creating a

graphic novel, when adapting a classical, well-known narrative, must make the same choices as

the design team of a theatre company. They can place plays in new visual contexts" in order to

appeal more strongly to youth audiences. In addition, the way the characters are drawn and the

way the settings are represented means that the "design element is significant because, like in the

theatre, the image determines much of the meaning" (Wetmore 172). Where *Classics Illustrated*

sought to remain as faithful as possible in every way to the play-texts, *Manga Shakespeare* is focused on breathing new life into the classics—their choices regarding the artwork are as important to their success in this matter as their choice to remain as faithful as possible to the play-texts. Hayley's goals may be nearly identical to those of Kanter, but the audience has changed dramatically since the launch of *Classics Illustrated* in the 1950s, which, in turn, creates new challenges regarding fidelity, art, and language.

This chapter will explore the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. How does the series treat fidelity to the play-text? In what ways does the series achieve Hayley's goals effectively? In what ways does the series fail to do so? How do the adaptation choices regarding setting and textual abridgement affect the transmission of the narrative? How does the art support or expand on what is stated in the text in order to convey the story? Do the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptations draw on previous comic book adaptations of Shakespeare, and if so, how? *Manga Shakespeare* treats the play-texts as important sources but the series avoids absolute fidelity in order to include updated settings and modernized representations of the characters that may appeal more readily to their target audience. The art of the updated settings, however, is sometimes at odds with Shakespeare's dialogue, which causes feelings of dissonance while reading.

Romeo and Juliet

Manga Shakespeare may operate on many of the same premises that *Classics Illustrated* was created with but the series instead approaches fidelity as an important, though less absolute, element, of the adaptation process. The *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* illustrates how the series makes many unique choices for their adaptations since they place a

strong emphasis on alternate settings for each play. Most students first encounter Shakespeare in secondary education and view anything remotely associated with him as boring or too complicated. Since educators must find ways to make Shakespeare both interesting and accessible to the students, there are many "books about teaching Shakespeare in the classroom [that] deal with the anxiety of relevance: How do 'we' make Shakespeare interesting to 'them?' How do we convince the students that Shakespeare is relevant to their lives and worth reading and knowing?" (Hulbert, Wetmore, and York 1-2). A drastic change to the setting of the plays is one way that *Manga Shakespeare* seeks to answer these questions: if the setting is made more accessible—for instance, set in the present—or more unique—such as a completely alternate reality—then it follows that the interest of students will be caught and maintained. With their adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, the series chose to follow the former route by setting it in present-day Tokyo. Although Hayley's claim that the "setting was appropriate" because "the story line was feasible in present-day Japan, where very traditional values sometimes clash with a younger generation's ideals" (Hayley 270) is certainly valid, there remains a strong dissonance between the setting and the play-text.

Against a cityscape background stand the Montagues and the Capulets—Lady Capulet and Lord Montague are both dressed in traditional Japanese outfits compared to the other characters who are all wearing modern clothes—which visually reinforces Hayley's point regarding the clash between new and old values in Japan. Typically, older characters are dressed in traditional garb whereas the younger characters—such as Benvolio and Mercutio—are dressed in jeans and T-shirts. The updated setting is clear, yet the adaptation relies on the readership's previous experience of manga in order to understand exactly how the feuding families have been transposed into modern-day Tokyo instead of Verona. Where the play-text merely describes the

feud as an "ancient grudge" (Shakespeare *Romeo* 1 Cho. 3) with no specific reason made clear, the adaptation states that "their rival Yakuza families are at war" (Appignanesi i). This is strikingly similar to how *Romeo x Juliet* cast Montague as the ultimate villain in order to provide a reason for the feud in that adaptation through the form of a rivalry and ambition. Furthermore, Juliet is described as being a "Shibuya girl" (ii), a term which, like "yakuza", has no textual gloss in the adaptation, although it is obvious that they are not drawn from the play-text. Lacking a gloss for these words indicates that the series functions on the assumption that their readers will already know that "Yakuza" is a term referring to "a Japanese gangster" and denotes "an organized crime syndicate in Japan" (Merriam-Webster Online "Yakuza") since there are many popular manga that use the Yakuza as the basis of their story. The same conclusion can be drawn from Juliet's classification as a "Shibuya girl", which refers to "one of the twenty-three wards of Tokyo, but often refers to just the popular shopping and entertainment area" and is a centre of youth fashion and culture (Japan-Guide "Shibuya"). A Shibuya girl is thus a "trendsetter dressed in the latest Japanese fashions" (Hayley 271). The series functions as an introduction to Shakespeare but not to manga and, in this case, Japanese culture, which is a valid assumption yet the inclusion of glosses would ensure clarity of understanding even in readers new the form. Since the alternate setting and the manga form are meant to "breathe new life into Shakespeare," ensuring that the new setting and terminology associated with it are clarified should be equally important.

Narrative Changes

Unlike *Romeo x Juliet* this adaptation makes no changes to the way the story plays out despite the setting being moved to present-day Tokyo. Only three lines of the Chorus prologue are included in the adaptation which is much less than the longer amount of text that was present

in both the *Classics Illustrated* and the *Romeo x Juliet* adaptations. The lines that remain form an awkward sentence due to the absence of any punctuation: "Two households from ancient grudge break to new mutiny from these two foes a pair of star-crossed lovers take their life…" (Appignanesi 1). Hayley chose to keep the original Shakespearean text in an abridged form because "To modernize the text would mean losing that element" of beauty unnecessarily (Hayley 269), yet the very first page already lacks the textual beauty that she strives to maintain. Although *Classics Illustrated* was often wordy, their desire to maintain strict faithfulness to the play-text ensured that, even if the poetic feel was lost, the language remained well structured and easily readable. Additionally, *Romeo x Juliet* retains a prologue in translation that is similar to the wording of the Chorus and includes all the proper punctuation; for a manga created directly in English, the awkward phrasing seems very unusual. The inclusion of some punctuation in order to indicate pauses, or even to clearly form two separate sentences, would have helped to maintain a sense of beauty and flow to the writing.

Although this adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* focuses heavily on the relationship of the lovers in a way similar to *Classics Illustrated*, it also tries to emphasize the importance of other people in their lives and the impacts they have on the outcome of their relationship. For instance, when the manga adapts 1.3, wherein Lady Capulet discusses the prospect of marriage with Juliet and bids her Nurse to stay and "hear [their] counsel" (Shakespeare *Romeo* 1.3.9), this adaptation opts to include a brief version of the Nurse's story that serves to illustrate their close relationship and hint at Juliet's lack of relationship with her mother. Both *Classics Illustrated* and *Romeo x Juliet* completely removed the Nurse's anecdote of Juliet's childhood as it is not necessary to elucidate the storyline, especially since both of those adaptations tended to focus more heavily on the scenes in which Romeo and Juliet appeared together as a way of highlighting the strength

of their relationship. In *Manga Shakespeare*, Juliet shows complete deference to her mother: she bows formally to Lady Capulet and only speaks to her mother directly on occasion, such as when she claims that marriage is "an honour that I dream not of" and when she agrees to "look to like" Paris' suit (Appignanesi 23-20, 24-25). On the other hand, even in the Nurse's flashback as she recounts the story of Juliet's childhood, Juliet is illustrated as being physically close to the Nurse and the present Juliet gazes at her fondly (23). The inclusion of this scene is instrumental in highlighting the nature of Juliet's relationship with her mother and her nurse, since they represent two clashing ideals: Lady Capulet is clearly aligned with tradition and parental control over her child's life whereas the Nurse is aligned with freedom and choice.

The inclusion of this scene illustrates how Juliet is caught between her duty and her desires, in a similar way to her counterpart in *Romeo x Juliet.* The Nurse's physical proximity to Juliet and their fond looks also foreshadows her role in bringing the lovers together because she is clearly invested in seeing Juliet happy. Although this scene is very useful to elucidate the theme of clashing ideals in the story, the adaptation includes multiple other scenes that are much less successful than this one. The clearest example of this is the adaptation of Mercutio's Queen Mab soliloquy which is here reduced to only five lines. The inclusion of this scene stresses Romeo's lovesickness by attributing it to the work of the fairies since they are known for trickery and casting spells on unsuspecting mortals, just as Puck did to Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Like the earlier scene with Juliet and her Nurse, this conversation between Mercutio and Romeo is meant to highlight their closeness. Unlike the scene previous scene, however, retaining an abridged version of Mercutio's soliloquy provides neither foreshadowing for the upcoming events nor provides any new information regarding Romeo's relationship with his friends.

Mercutio's speech ultimately comes across as a confusing and unnecessary digression prior to the Capulet ball that does not express any of the major themes in the adaptation.

Harmonizing Language and Art

Overall, the adaptation is surprisingly close to the play-text as well as the *Classics Illustrated* series. As with Kanter's series, Hayley's team of adaptors leaves the structure of the narrative exactly as it is in the play-text, unlike *Romeo x Juliet*, which chose to split up multiple scenes across the whole story (such as how the Rose Ball occurred well before Romeo's declaration of love several chapters later). In particular, Shakespeare's language is at odds with the Japanese setting of this adaptation. One of the most effective examples of this is the adaptation of Romeo and Juliet's marriage, as seen below in Figure 9, which evidentially takes place in a shrine despite Friar Laurence's insistence that they "shall not stay alone till holy church incorporate two in one" (Appignanesi 75). Friar Laurence is equally at odds with his dialogue given that he is dressed as a priest of the shrine and not a friar at all. The Christian tone of the dialogue and the Christian vocation of the friar are poorly meshed with the Asian shrine and costumes that are represented in the art. Although the fidelity to the play-text is maintained through the inclusion of Shakespeare's dialogue, it is equally contradicted through the art, which is ultimately due to the choice of changing the setting of the adaptation to present-day Japan.

This is not to say an alternate setting cannot effectively convey the story, as *Romeo x Juliet* is a strong example of an adaptation that made radical changes to the setting while at the same time maintaining obvious links to the play-text. The main problem that *Manga Shakespeare* encounters in this case—a problem that *Romeo x Juliet* could avoid due to the original Japanese language of the text—is that Hayley is keen on retaining Shakespeare's

language. In itself, this is certainly an admirable quality and it is one that *Classics Illustrated* had

much success with despite being very text-heavy. Coupled with the setting of present-day Japan,

however, Shakespeare's language causes a major dissonance while reading and the immersion in

the story is interrupted by the visual representation of Asian faith alongside the Christian

dialogue. Although Japan does offer a setting similar to the play-text where values often clash

between generations, the setting and Shakespearean language also clash enough to draw attention

away from the story. Perhaps in this case, updating the setting to modern Verona would have

been more effective since the dissonance between the language and the art would have been

much less noticeable.

Figure 9: Romeo and Juliet are married. *Manga Shakespeare Romeo and Juliet*, pp. 74-75.

This is not the only instance of dissonance between the setting and language but it is one of the most jarring. The updated setting of the story does achieve Hayley's goal of breathing new life into Shakespeare but due to the consistent clash with the language, the immersive reading experience is interrupted. From a textual standpoint, however, the story is not negatively impacted by the setting; although the textual abridgement is heavier than in *Classics Illustrated* and the dialogue sometimes seems choppy, the language that is retained is concise and helps to clearly convey the story of the play-text.

Character Artwork

Since *Manga Shakespeare* is far less text-heavy than *Classics Illustrated*, much of the cut text has been translated into images rather than words. Since young readers are "growing up in a digital age," they "are far more visually literate than those of previous generations" (Hayley 268) and are able to read images as efficiently as words, meaning that the faithfulness of the adaptation is not dependent on the amount of text that is retained. Though the series draws on the shōjo genre, which is "particularly obvious in the panel layouts, pacing, and emphasis on characters' emotions" (275), the art tends to highlight the stereotypical interpretations of the characters rather than truly bringing to life their depth. This is especially noticeable with Romeo and Juliet who both appear to be shallow and whiny through the way they are represented visually. This is because the artist, Sonia Leong, often draws the lovers in a chibi style, meaning that they "become 'superdeformed' – taking on a hypercartoony or deformed style – to show a spontaneous general lack of seriousness" (Cohn 192) and as such, it usually functions as comedy. However, the use of this style alongside the Leong's normal designs draws attention to the perceived immaturity of the characters rather than emphasizing their strengths.

For instance, in the adaptation of 2.4 Romeo becomes depressed when the Nurse describes how "there is a nobleman in town, one Paris…I anger [Juliet] sometimes and tell her that Paris is the properer man" (Appignanesi 67) to the point that he sprouts dog-like ears and a tail, and his tears run like rivers down his face. Regardless of how amusing this portrayal of him is, it only serves to illustrate Romeo's associations with a crying child and a lost puppy. This same scene in *Classics Illustrated*, though adapted in only two panels as opposed to several pages as it is in *Manga Shakespeare*, depicts Romeo standing tall with his hands clasped together as he instructs Juliet's Nurse regarding their marriage arrangements. In *Romeo x Juliet*, he is shown to be steadfastly loyal, brave and just; upon declaring his love for Juliet, Romeo stands tall, which emphasizes his maturity. Although both previous adaptations include some humorous scenes, anything relating to the relationship between Romeo and Juliet is depicted in a serious manner. This highlights the maturity of both characters, a maturity that is also present in the play-text, and which is lost through the use of chibi art to portray Romeo like a kicked puppy.

The same is true of Juliet's depictions: as she awaits the Nurse's return, her figure is drawn in the chibi style to indicate her feelings of distress (68) and this style contrasts strongly with the surrounding panels where she is drawn as feminine and mature, an echo of the very lady-like Juliet in the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation of the play-text. In response to the Nurse's inquiry "Where is your mother?" (71), Juliet appears again in a chibi form, this time with a fang in her mouth, which is one of many conventional depictions of rage (Cohn 192). The lightning in the background of the panel further points to her anger and any sense of maturity she had is lost in the comedy that is made of Juliet's distress. As with Romeo's depictions across adaptations, Juliet is illustrated as agitated, flustered and frustrated during this scene in *Classics Illustrated* but in no way does she appear childish or immature. The grace and maturity that Juliet shows in

the play-text is often lost in this adaptation where her chibi depictions illustrate her as an immature, overreacting child even when those panels are surrounded by others which illustrate her normally and express her feelings through her face in a way very similar to *Romeo x Juliet*. In both cases, Leong's use of chibi art plays into stereotypical views of the lovers as little more than immature, overreacting children despite the maturity and grace that they possess and frequently display in the play-text.

Aside from the prevalence of the chibi style, Leong's art usually functions as a combination of the styles of both *Classics Illustrated* and *Romeo x Juliet*. For instance, during the adaptation of 2.2, Romeo's lovesick expressions are reminiscent of his counterpart in the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation, especially as they both initially hide behind a bush with a raised hand and uplifted eyes to stare in wonder at Juliet on her balcony (*Classics Illustrated* 16 and *Manga Shakespeare* 42). Since this adaptation foregoes the use of colour in order to maintain closer fidelity to the manga form, the art must illustrate the contrast between parent and child in different ways. Although the setting is imperfect, it does allow for this divide to be articulated primarily through the clothing of the characters. Hayley notes that initially, Juliet's design was more traditional and developed into a trendsetter as a way of contrasting her traditional parents (271), and thereby visually illustrates how the lovers set aside their investment in the feud in favour of pursuing a love they are otherwise forbidden from having.

Overall, Leong's art works well with the heavily abridged text to convey a modernized version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Although the chibi style is overused to the point of negating the maturity and seriousness of the lovers planning a secret marriage, Leong's normal art effectively illustrates the clash between young and old as well as the passion in Romeo and Juliet's love. The focus the art places on emotion helpfully expresses the relationships between *all* the

characters, which was ignored in *Classics Illustrated*, and as such the expectations that are verbally articulated are also visually reinforced through the emphasis on emotion in the faces of each character in a way similar to *Romeo x Juliet*. The adaptation overall strikes a good balance between text and art, and in this way it successfully modernizes the story of *Romeo and Juliet* for a young audience.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

     Manga Shakespeare's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* boasts many of the same choices as *Romeo and Juliet*. The introduction of the characters situates the action in "Athens – where modern technology meets ancient tradition…" (Appignanesi viii) which follows the same notion of updating *Romeo and Juliet*'s setting in order to more readily appeal to young readers. As with the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Manga Shakespeare* treats the play-text as a source from which a new version of the story can be told except that rather than creating a completely new version of the story (as exemplified in *Romeo x Juliet*), the adaptation confines itself to updating the settings. Unlike other installments in the series that dramatically change the setting in some way (such as moving *Romeo and Juliet* to Japan, or *Hamlet*'s "cyberpunk future", or even setting *The Tempest* in a "future after a global energy crisis" (Hayley 271, 275)) the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* leaves the story in Athens, which helps to preserve a stronger sense of closeness to the play-text. It is for this reason that *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s updated setting feels less at odds with the play-text language, since modern technology is only briefly included in the adaptation. The opening scene, wherein Egeus approaches Theseus with his complaint against Hermia, is one of the few scenes to clearly illustrate the modern setting as the meeting takes place via flat-screen monitors. Since the bulk of

the story takes place in the forest, the modernized setting has very little impact on the story,

consequently creating less of a dissonance with the language and the setting in this adaptation.

Narrative Choices: Staging Athens

The *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does not change the

storyline or make any changes to the characters. As with other installments in the series, this

adaptation retains the language of the play-text in a heavily abridged form, which ensures that

the manga must rely on the art to support the text. Andrea Grande notes that despite the fact that

the cuts work to achieve "the simplification of character, and the neglect of key thematic

elements such as the metadramatic dimension," the artwork still allows for "many moments

where the play comments on itself as a play" (12). Though *Romeo and Juliet* bore some

similarities to both the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation and the *Romeo x Juliet* manga, *A

Midsummer Night's Dream* is clearly influenced by *The Sandman* more than *Classics Illustrated*.

Like Gaiman's adaptation, *Manga Shakespeare*'s adaptation muses on the nature of acting and

manipulation. To accomplish this, illustrator Kate Brown often avoids detailed and realistic

backgrounds in designing each panel and replaces them with designs that evoke the appearance

of a stage.

The clearest example of this is the adaptation of 3.2 wherein Puck reports his successful

trick on Titania and Bottom to Oberon. Puck literally stands on a stage complete with curtains

and props (Appignanesi 110) which is an implicit comment on the unreality of the story—how

can it be real if it is adapted with the form of a stage? *Classics Illustrated* avoided this issue by

allowing the story to proceed as a real occurrence. *The Sandman* treats Shakespeare's play as a

new version of an "old tale" (Gaiman *Midsummer* 64) by incorporating real fairies that

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manipulate the production—Titania's charming of Hamnet, Auberon's gift of fairy gold, and Puck's intrusion into the play itself are all examples of the way Gaiman highlights their manipulative tendencies. The *Manga Shakespeare* Puck proceeds to use finger puppets to re-enact the events leading to Titania's enchanted meeting with Bottom, a direct reference to the manipulation that the fairies use throughout the story, and also functions as an "image [that] further breaks down the naturalistic notion of characters as autonomous agents or persons" (Grande 13). The stage on which Puck stands positions him as the master manipulator in a way that parallels Gaiman's depiction of the fairies as a whole. The unreality that is represented by the stage is in fact very much the world in which the other characters live but are entirely unaware of.

As seen below in Figure 10, the world is a literal stage in which the fairies are the ultimate influence. The first panel is surrounded by stage curtains and filled with background props to represent the forest. Puck appears to be pushing the curtains aside and noticeably holds on to what looks like a window, implying that he and Oberon are backstage looking towards the area where the lovers are hidden. This situates the fairies as the whimsical controllers of the people who have no idea that the strings of their world are being influenced by anyone other than themselves. Coupled with the stage setting of the panel, Oberon's concern that "The noise they make will cause Demetrius to awake" is akin to a director observing the production of a play that his actors are unaware they are performing. This is further supported by the following page, where the stage curtains are noticeably absent yet the bushes and trees of the forest still appear one-dimensional and prop-like. Neither Helena nor Lysander appears to be aware of the stage-like properties of their world and, like the play-text, they are oblivious to the meddling fairies in their lives. By turning Athens into a stage, *Manga Shakespeare* is playing with the notion that

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Figure 10: Oberon and Puck observe Lysander and Helena. *Manga Shakespeare A Midsummer Night's Dream*, pp. 126-127.

"All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players" (Shakespeare *As You Like It* 2.7.138-139). The transmission of the story is very aware of itself as a story much in the same way that the play-text comments repeatedly on the nature of plays.

Despite the heavily abridged text, the clear design of Athens as a stage invites readers to understand this adaptation as a story shaped by perception. This adaptation functions as a microcosm of reality by bringing the theatrical concerns of the play-text to the forefront of the adaptation. The human characters have no understanding that their world is a stage or that they are actors in it. Helena sums up this concept through her exasperation with her friends: "Now I

perceive they have conjoined all three to fashion this false sport in spite of me" (Appignanesi 134). She fails to realize that the fault for her humiliation lies with Puck's mischief because she does not know who Puck *is*; in her perception, Athens is a normal world, and at times when there are no fairies present, the world appears more real to the reader as well. A good example of this is the opening scene where Theseus' room does not appear stage-like compared to the scenes which take place in the forest and near the fairies. Yet her perception is subjective to her knowledge of the world; with the existence of the fairies, it is clear that they have a great deal of influence of the happenings of the world that is unknown to the other characters. The fairies see what is happening in the world around them and meddle where they desire. Puck's finger-puppet re-enactment of his mischief is an expression of the theatrical nature of life since there are many occurrences—such as Demetrius and Lysander's sudden inexplicable love for Helena rather than Hermia—that people are unable to explain. This adaptation expresses this reality by presenting the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as though it were an unknowing play performed by unknowing actors for an unknown audience and controlled by unknown directors.

Since the adaptation emphasizes the fairies' role as directors of the unwitting play, the reader assumes the position as the audience as though this were a real theatrical production. This adaptation choice is a world away from *Classics Illustrated*, which chose simply to adapt the story as though it was a real event. It also bears some similarities to the end of *The Sandman*'s adaptation of the play-text wherein Puck's final speech is suddenly not only directed towards Shakespeare's troupe of actors, but also unquestionably towards the reader. Puck is the only character in both adaptations to appear aware that there is an audience other than the fairies. Upon commenting "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (125) Puck raises his hand as if to whisper to the reader—the audience of the play unknowingly enacted together by the humans

and the fairies. The adaptation focuses on the way in which an individual's perception affects

their life as they unfold and create a story with the unfolding lives of the people around them. In

this adaptation, *Manga Shakespeare* conveys the story of the play-text through a visual theatrical

framing that emphasizes the manipulative tendencies of the fairies in the lives of mortals.

This is a clever way to introduce the play-text's concern with the nature of theatre to

young readers while still conveying the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Although the

language is heavily cut, often ruining the beauty of the dialogue, the art is particularly adept at

supporting and expanding on what is written. *Manga Shakespeare*'s *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream also avoids the issue of dissonance while reading much more effectively in this

adaptation because the updated setting takes a much less central role in the story; aside from a

handful of television sets, technology is rarely present. In fact, the ancient Grecian style of

clothing that the characters wear and the mundane setting of the forest actually make the

language feel less out of place than in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Character Artwork

In terms of the character designs, it is clear that the designs were inspired by Charles

Vess' artwork for *The Sandman*'s adaptation of the play-text. This is most obvious with Brown's

depiction of the fairies. Much like Gaiman's Auberon, Brown's Oberon sports curling horns and

narrow eyes that emphasize the dangerous personalities that fairies were thought to possess. The

opening coloured pages further highlight his otherworldly air through his yellow, cat-like eyes.

Titania, for her part, looks less intimidating than her consort as her design is very similar to that

of Helena and Hermia; the main difference is her eyes, which are similar to Oberon's (6). Puck—

as well as the fairies in Titania's entourage—is equally inspired by the designs in *The Sandman*

as he is clearly illustrated as a goblin unlike his *Classics Illustrated* counterpart. The choice to represent the fairies in grotesque and intimidating ways serves an aesthetic function beyond a simple visual homage to *The Sandman*. Douglas Wolk explains how "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" (qtd. in Grande 18). The design of the fairies highlights their otherness from the human characters by implying a sense of danger that is always underlying the mischief they cause.

     Manga Shakespeare walks a middle-ground between the fairies of the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation and those of *The Sandman*. These fairies *look* dangerous, yet their actions are dictated by the play-text which causes them to act in non-threatening, yet mischievous ways. With the notable exception of Puck, the fairies appear completely oblivious to the fact that there is a reading audience to their antics. Brown's artwork effectively portrays their potential danger, as seen with Puck during the final scene: an extreme close-up of his face shows only a wide, sharp-toothed smile (204) that is reminiscent of the last image of Puck in *The Sandman*. Additionally, this adaptation also chooses to keep Puck's lines regarding "the time of night that the graves, all gaping wide, every one lets forth his sprite in the church-way paths to glide" (197) which, coupled with his goblin appearance, implies that his mischief, as well as that of Oberon's, may have been comedic but had the potential to be threatening. His finger puppets appear throughout the manga; beyond simply using them to visually re-enact his trick on Titania, Puck also employs them in the adaptation of 3.2, as he draws Lysander and Demetrius away from each other as a symbol of his control over their actions. Of the fairies, Puck is portrayed as a puppeteer, guiding the lives of others according to his whims in a way that is very close to his mischievous play-text counterpart.

Where Puck is the puppeteer, Oberon is the director of the show and is clearly spurred into action by witnessing Helena's repeated rejections by Demetrius. Similarly to their adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Manga Shakespeare* uses the art of this adaptation to expand on the nature of Oberon's reasons for interfering with the lovers at all. Upon witnessing Helena's fervent and desperate attempts to elicit a declaration of love from Demetrius (68-69), the scene cuts to silent images of Oberon whose expression is unquestionably sad. This implies that the jealousy Titania previously accused him of was not so far from the truth. The images imply that he feels a connection with the repeatedly rejected Helena that is not explicitly stated in the play-text. These two images of a reflective and sorrowful Oberon give a clear reason for his desire to use the love potion on "a disdainful youth" so that "the next thing he espies / May be the lady" and thus "he may prove / More fond on her than she upon her love" (Shakespeare *Midsummer* 2.1.261-266). The artwork supports the text while at the same time providing further depth to the character of Oberon by implying that in spite of his threatening appearance, his actions are not merely born from a desire to cause havoc among others. With Titania, his trick is revenge for her scorn; with Helena, his love-tricks are well intentioned to aid Helena's happiness. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is no longer simply a comedy: it is a love story born of the compassion of a fairy who is not immediately recognizable in his design or through the text alone.

It is important to recognize that this scene is also an example of another way that *Manga Shakespeare* acts as a middle-ground between the adaptation choices made by *Classics Illustrated* and by *The Sandman*. The former adhered strictly to the play-text and the art was deliberately designed to resemble exactly what occurred in the play-text with minimal interpretation. This scene in *Classics Illustrated* implies no emotional bonds between Oberon and Helena; rather, Oberon's choice to use the love potion on Demetrius is simply a natural

result of witnessing his disgraceful treatment of Helena. On the other hand, due to the framing narrative in *The Sandman*, the focus is not on the human characters of the play-text at all and instead draws attention to the nature of creativity and adaptation into performance. Instead of maintaining either a strict or incredibly loose sense of fidelity to the play-text, *Manga Shakespeare* adds a further depth to the character of Oberon that, although not explicitly stated, is a logical way to interpret the scene without dramatically changing the story that Shakespeare wrote.

In general, Brown's art effectively conveys interpretations of the fairies as manipulative and emotionally connected with the human characters. The staging effect of the setting emphasizes the play-text's concern with theatricality and draws the focus away from the modernity of Athens, ensuring that the dissonance between an updated setting and language is minimized. Although the text is heavily abridged, the flow of the sentences is well maintained and, together with the strong illustrations, the story is clearly conveyed despite the cuts. Overall, this adaptation is a good introduction to young readers not only to the story, but also to the play-text's focus on the nature of theatricality.

Concluding Remarks

In a similar way to *Romeo x Juliet*, the success of the *Manga Shakespeare* series is heavily dependent on the value a reader places on fidelity. Overall, the series maintains a clear and faithful link to the play-texts by retaining Shakespeare's original language, although they are much less text-heavy than their *Classics Illustrated* predecessors, which sometimes interrupts the flow and beauty of the dialogue. Although scholars or literary critics who have "been trained to privilege the written text […] might be dismayed at the liberties taken to gear Shakespeare

towards a youth readership" (Grande 11), it is necessary to keep in mind that these comic books are intended as an introduction to Shakespeare for teenagers and first-time readers (Hayley 268-269) and not simply as visual reproductions of the play-text. As with the *Classics Illustrated* series, this implies a desire to encourage young readers to read the original play-text without fear of difficult language or irrelevant stories. To that end, *Manga Shakespeare* chose to update the settings in order to better appeal to young readers and still maintain a link to Shakespeare through the dialogue.

The updated settings seek to help illustrate that the play-texts remain relevant to modern readers but, as with other forms of adaptation (such as film and television), these updates may seem to actually "exploit the shallow sensibility and economic viability of their primary audience through a process of 'dumbing down' Shakespearean playtexts" (Semenza 37). It is important to remember that nowhere does the series state or imply that its target audience is incapable of reading the original play-texts; rather, the series is primarily marketed as an introduction for young readers to Shakespeare in a form that they both understand and enjoy. The cuts to the play-text may be heavy in the adaptation, yet the layouts and artwork provide a complexity of storytelling that is equal to the amount of textual cuts and continues to provide a depth to the story that is not dependent on the amount of text. In this way, the series seeks to challenge preconceived ideas regarding Shakespeare and lead young readers back to the play-text.

The series does not treat fidelity to the play-text as an absolute rule as Kanter had, but neither is it an intentionally loose adaptation in order to tell the story in a uniquely new way, as both Gaiman's *The Sandman* and the *Romeo x Juliet* manga did. In spite of the updated settings, the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptations act a kind of middle-ground between the two extremes, adhering neither to extremely strict nor extremely loose fidelity. The series is not without its

flaws, however, as illustrated most clearly through the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* which made such a drastic change to the setting that the language and art often felt at odds, creating a strong sense of dissonance. The setting certainly had its uses—the ability to demonstrate the divide between young and old generations was more easily expressed simply through the clothing than a less drastic update could have achieved visually—yet it is difficult not to notice the dissonance between language and setting while reading it.

The *Manga Shakespeare* adaptations sometimes draw on previous adaptations but do not imitate them completely, instead using them as tools from which to create an adaptation that pays homage to others but uses those inspirations to achieve Hayley's goals. This is most clearly illustrated through the similarities in the designs of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the way they were drawn in *The Sandman*. Both series use the designs of the fairies to visually suggest the danger they are capable of, but *Manga Shakespeare* chooses to emphasize their mischievous nature more than their threatening one as Gaiman did. Though Hayley's goals with the series are similar to those of Kanter, the series chooses to cut more of the text and incorporate unique layouts and artwork since 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" (Hayley 269). In this way, *Manga Shakespeare* is more successful at harmonizing the text-image balance that was often skewed more heavily towards text than image in *Classics Illustrated.* On the whole, the *Manga Shakespeare* series successfully adapts Shakespeare's play-texts for a youth audience by appealing to them through updated settings and the manga form while maintaining a clear link to Shakespeare by leaving the stories largely unchanged and the language mostly intact.

Conclusion: Daring to be Different

In his eulogy to Shakespeare, Ben Jonson praises his memory by claiming that "He was not of an age, but for all time!" which is a point that is illustrated time and time again through the many adaptations that Shakespeare's works have undergone throughout the years. Comic book adaptations of Shakespeare are one of the most interesting ways to adapt the play-texts since there are innumerable artistic styles through which each story can be expressed alongside the text. This paper examined four different kinds of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare and each one had different goals and used different artistic styles and techniques to convey the story. With the popularity of comic books—especially manga, which is now being produced not only by Japanese publishers but by English ones as well—ever on the rise, these adaptations are sure to flourish in the coming years. The multitude of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare points to his continued relevance in the current era despite how young readers are often initially resistant to approaching his work.

For this paper, I researched four comic book adaptations of Shakespearean play-texts, including the *Classics Illustrated* series, *The Sandman* series, the *Romeo x Juliet* manga and the *Manga Shakespeare* series. I compared them to both their respective play-texts and to the other adaptations in this paper. As I studied each adaptation, I analyzed how they differed from the play-texts, whether or not the art supported or expanded on the text, how changes to the narrative, setting, characters, and language affected the transmission of the story, and why the adaptations chose to make the changes—if any—that they did. I also completed extensive research on comic books as a whole, including a range of topics such as panel and page layouts, the use of speech bubbles and explanatory banners, and the use of colour. Furthermore, I researched adaptation as a practice in order to understand why these adaptations made certain

choices, why they are significant to Shakespeare studies, and how they interact not only with their respective play-text(s) but also with each other.

In this paper, I have used the following three points to guide my research and analyses of the adaptations:

1. Adaptation of Shakespeare into comic book form is driven by the tension between providing entertainment and/or education.
2. There are three types of questions that every adaptation of Shakespeare must contend with: questions relating to fidelity; questions relating to changes to the narrative, setting, and characters; and questions about changes to or retention of Shakespeare's language.
3. These adaptations point to a continued relevance of Shakespeare because his work is constantly being adapted into forms that are more appealing to young readers, who are often resistant to his work.

All three of these points are illustrated through Kanter's *Classics Illustrated* adaptations. He considered his adaptations to be "illustrated classics" as opposed to "comic books" due to the stigma of bad literature that the latter term held, yet their form was chosen *because* young readers were more attracted to comic books than to prose texts. As illustrated through the discussions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, fidelity to the play-texts was the central concern in these issues as they followed a very strict scene-by-scene adaptation and retained as much of Shakespeare's dialogue as possible and made no changes to the narrative, setting, or characters. Since these adaptations were meant as introductions to Shakespeare and were used as educational tools, it was necessary for Kanter to create adaptations that were both entertaining (so that children would enjoy reading them over other comic books) and educational (so that children would be exposed to good literature).

In a similar way, Gaiman's adaptations of Shakespeare in *The Sandman* also illustrate these concepts, though the educational aspect of engaging readers with Shakespeare is not a focus; rather, these adaptations seek to entertain, as comic books are meant to do, as well as

explore themes of literary creation through the use of Shakespeare as a character. Fidelity is not a concern in these adaptations because their goal is not to expose readers to a certain kind of literature but rather to explore how devotion to one's work can affect one's life as a whole. The fact that the series does include Shakespeare as a character, however, and uses adaptations of his plays to explore these themes suggests that Shakespeare and his work remain relevant to modern readers in ways other than simply providing a scene-by-scene adaptation of any play-text.

The shōjo manga *Romeo x Juliet* does the same as *The Sandman* in that its focus is also not on educating readers about Shakespeare or *Romeo and Juliet* but rather on reimagining a new version of a classic story. This adaptation treats the play-text as a source that is ripe for change and as such, it makes numerous changes to the course of the narrative and sets the story in a new, fantastical setting filled with characters from other play-texts entirely and even Shakespeare himself. Despite the lack of focus on making a faithful adaptation, this manga still includes important themes, characters, and scenes that were present in the play-text and weaves them with new characters and events that make a reimagined story bearing clear resemblances to the original. Since this manga was initially written for a Japanese audience and was brought to Western audiences in translation, it suggests that Shakespeare's work is considered relevant across the globe.

The adaptations of the *Manga Shakespeare* series, however, provide a middle ground between the strict fidelity of *Classics Illustrated* and more interpretive adaptations of *The Sandman* and *Romeo x Juliet*. The *Manga Shakespeare* adaptations are invested in appealing to young readers by using the manga form and updated settings while still retaining Shakespeare's language and making no changes to how each story progresses. The series aims not only to introduce Shakespeare to reluctant readers, but also to entertain anyone who picks up the book,

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whether they be young or old, fans of Shakespeare or not. These adaptations bear many

similarities to those of *Classics Illustrated* and aim to achieve similar goals. In this way, it is

clear that Shakespeare continues to be considered an important and relevant part of our culture

and education given that these adaptations are aimed at appealing to young readers while still

conveying the original story.

By using these questions as guidelines to begin my research on each text, I have

discovered three major qualities that comic book adaptations of Shakespeare share:

1. Fidelity is not the be-all or end-all of an adaptation, nor is it possible to achieve perfect fidelity.
2. Although fidelity is not possible to achieve, substantial changes to the narrative, setting, or characters can create strong dissonances while reading. On the other hand, feelings of dissonance can be countered by balancing them with other changes, rather than relegating them only to one area of the adaptation.
3. The tension between entertainment and education in comic book adaptations of Shakespeare is usually imbalanced; depending on an adaptation's goals, the educational factor is sometimes given less focus than the entertainment value, and vice versa.

All of my texts approached the topic of fidelity from different angles which were determined by

the goals that the creators of each text had. It is impossible to avoid the idea of fidelity while

studying adaptations because adaptations are inevitably compared to their source text in order to

understand how they differ from each other and why those differences are significant. For

instance, *Classics Illustrated* and *Manga Shakespeare* were created many years apart with very

similar goals: to engage youth with Shakespeare via a medium that they enjoyed. The former

prioritized fidelity while the latter did not, yet both series provide adaptations that convey

Shakespeare's play-texts as clearly as possible for the youth audience that they target.

Furthermore, perfect fidelity is not possible to achieve because fidelity itself is an impossible

goal; despite the changes to the setting that *Manga Shakespeare* makes to *Romeo and Juliet*, the

story is conveyed as clearly as it is in *Classics Illustrated* and both adaptations are abridged. Knowing that perfect fidelity is not necessary raises the question of why it matters how faithful an adaptation is. *Romeo x Juliet* made major changes to every aspect of the play-text yet the story of star-crossed lovers remains at the core of the adaptation; *The Sandman* appeared to focus on Shakespeare while cleverly using his life and experiences to adapt the play-texts. Given this, it is clear that fidelity is not a crucial factor of an adaptation since all of these series provide strong adaptations that achieve their respective goals while approaching them from completely different stances on the importance of fidelity.

Moreover, although strict fidelity is not necessarily the most effective way of approaching the creation of an adaptation, substantial changes to narrative, setting, and characters can create strong feelings of dissonance while reading. *Manga Shakespeare*'s adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* is a strong example of how updating the setting to modern-day Japan feels incompatible alongside the unchanged dialogue of the play-text. Similarly, the changes made in *Romeo x Juliet* can also trigger feelings of dissonance while reading when events do not occur as the reader expects when they relate the title of the manga to Shakespeare's play-text. There is, of course, no real solution to this issue since the nature of adaptation is to be different from the source text. As some changes may cause more feelings of dissonance than others, one way to make those changes work effectively is to balance them with other changes; for instance, instead of setting *Romeo and Juliet* in Japan, perhaps modern-day Verona may have accomplished the same objective more effectively and felt less at odds with the language. The other key to avoiding feelings of dissonance is, as a reader, to avoid expecting certain things of an adaptation like *Romeo x Juliet* that has clearly reimagined the source text as a whole; as mentioned earlier, the nature of adaptation is do something differently than the original.

Additionally, comic book adaptations of Shakespeare may both educate and entertain audiences, although some do tend to emphasize one aspect more fully than the other. *Classics Illustrated*, *The Sandman*, and even *Manga Shakespeare* all aim to educate their audiences in some way; where *Classics Illustrated* and *Manga Shakespeare* seek to educate young readers about Shakespeare and expose them to his work in a form that they enjoy, *The Sandman*'s Shakespearean adaptations take a different angle. These issues pose questions regarding the burdens of literary creation and illustrate how great literature is a product of hard work. Using Shakespeare as a character and adapting his work into the very fabric of his life allows Gaiman to illustrate that all writers—including Shakespeare—are affected by the pressure of creating something great. Regardless of their educational tendencies, all of these adaptations are meant to entertain their readers—like novels and plays, comic books are meant to be entertaining, and it is clear that continued adaptations of Shakespeare point not only to his relevance to education but also to his continued relevance as an entertainer.

There are many areas of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare that could be studied in the future. Two of my texts—*The Sandman* and *Romeo x Juliet*—included Shakespeare as a character, although to different extents and different reasons. There are other adaptations that also include Shakespeare as a character—such as the *Kill Shakespeare* series—which is a truly intriguing choice: why include Shakespeare as a character? In what kinds of adaptations does he appear? Another area of further research can be drawn from *Romeo x Juliet*: the mixing of characters from separate play-texts into one adaptation. This is an intriguing choice that deserves further research as it affects the perception of the play-texts, the characters and even of Shakespeare himself. Here again *Kill Shakespeare* is an example of an adaptation that brings characters from across different play-texts together. Also related to *Romeo x Juliet* is the

question of how comic book adaptations of Shakespeare are presented for other cultures. This manga was initially meant for a female Japanese audience and many shōjo manga use high school plays of *Romeo and Juliet* as a way to draw the main characters together in a romantic relationship. What other ways do comic books adapt Shakespeare for foreign audiences? How do they differ from those made by Western adaptations?

Comic books continue to be a beloved form of entertainment among all ages. Adapting Shakespeare's work into comic books is a fantastic way of engaging reluctant and young readers with an author that they often approach with preconceived notions of difficulty and boredom. His presence in comic book adaptations illustrates his continued importance not only to education but also to entertaining multitudes of people across the globe. Although it is sometimes difficult to accept, fidelity to Shakespeare is not what makes an adaptation of his play-texts good or achieve the goals of the adaptors; comic book adaptations of Shakespeare should take advantage of the ability to be different from Shakespeare to create a new version of an old story that will continue to be passed down through the ages to both entertain and educate.

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