

Shakespeare Refracted in Manga: *an Homage to André Lefevere*

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Abstract & Keywords

English:

Most of the canonical texts we engage with are not in their original form. Rather, as André Lefevere suggested in the early 1980s, they have been somehow rewritten, be it through translation, adaptation, remediation, or summary. This has become much more relevant and apparent in the digital age than at any other time in the past. The interesting case in point examined here is the first attempt to translate works by Shakespeare into a manga format outside Japan, namely, Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet* (2007), SelfMadeHero's first volume in its Manga Shakespeare series. To supplement Lefevere's thought, a Bourdieusian sociological approach is applied, particularly in relation with the transfer of prestige between Shakespeare as a canonical author and manga as a genre. The target text is posited in the framework of the social context of its production and reception and the various textual, ideological, and generic shifts that have taken place at the target end are discussed in relation to the socio-economic milieu, medium affordances, restrictions, and choices by the rewriters who mediated Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Keywords: Lefevere, refraction, Bourdieu, manga, Hamlet

1. Lefevere's refractions

Let us take a classic, any classic, in our native literature or in another. Chances are that we did not first come into contact with it in its unique, untouchable, 'sacralized' form. Rather, for most (if not all) of us the classic in question quite simply was, for all intents and purposes, its refraction, or rather a series of refractions: the comic strip, the extract in school anthologies and anthologies used in universities, the film, the TV serial, the plot summary we gallantly tried to commit to memory in those long dark nights of the soul immediately preceding graduation, critical articles telling us how to read the classic in question, what to think about it, and, above all, how to apply it to our lives. (Lefevere 1981: 73)

What André Lefevere describes above is the reality that most people face when they engage with canonical texts through what he called 'refractions' (Lefevere 1981, 1982) or 'rewritings' (Lefevere 1985, 1992a, 1992b).^[1] As an example, he mentions the Bible, 'which plays a very important role in the lives of many more people than those able to read it "in the original"' (Lefevere 1981: 73). Although Lefevere's theoretical views can be tracked back to the early 1980s, they arguably sound much more relevant today – the age of the Internet and digital culture – than they did then, since the forms and media into which canonical texts are being rewritten now have exceeded all possible expectations.

For Lefevere, translations were the most obvious refractions. He recognized that more and more of what was being read as literature was in fact literature in translation. When reading (or generally receiving) a literary text originally written in a language the reader does not speak, one tends to subconsciously disregard that what is being read is a translation, succumbing to the illusion of having direct access to the source text.^[2] Nevertheless, if the cultural turn in translation studies has amply discussed anything, it is the omnipresence of mediation in translation; every translation necessarily involves some degree of manipulation of the source text, either to reaffirm the dominant ideology and poetics or to challenge them.

Lefevere was retrospectively designated a member of the Manipulation School, the group of authors with works in Theo Hermans' (1985) edited volume *The Manipulation of Literature*. The scholars included in the volume varied considerably, but according to Hermans, the volume editor, they all shared an approach to the study of translation that was 'descriptive, target-oriented, functional, and systemic' (Hermans 1985: 10). In 'Translated Literature: Towards an Integrated Theory', Lefevere challenged the cornerstone concepts of Romanticism, that is the artist's genius and the sanctity of the original creation as a product of that genius. He did not disavow the importance of original texts, but drew the line at 'the idea that those texts [...] exist only in their "unique" form' (Lefevere 1981: 71). He then offered the following definition of refraction:

Refracted texts are [...] texts that have been processed for a certain audience (children, e.g.), or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology. [...] these refracted texts are mainly responsible for the canonized status of the corpus. After all, the poetics of a literature is its central refracted texts. (Lefevere 1981: 72)

Apart from translation, Lefevere also included under the blanket term *refraction* criticism, commentary, historiography, teaching, anthologies, and the production of plays. These refractions have played a crucial role influencing the reputation of writers and their works (Lefevere 1982: 4–5).

Lefevere blames Romantic premises for the secondary position historically assigned to translation:

[I]f the original is a work of genius it is, by definition, unique. If it is unique, it cannot be translated. And here we discover the deeper reason for the animosity the corpus concept displays towards translation: translation represents a threat to the uniqueness of the literary work in a way criticism, e.g., does not. Translation is reproduction, refraction' (Lefevere 1981: 71).[3]

Lefevere perceived translation and refractions in general as social practices, since, clearly, texts are not produced on their own, but by people, each of whom has their own agendas, ideologies, tastes, and ethics – in other words what Pierre Bourdieu called their 'habitus'. He describes refractors as 'the men and women who do not write literature, but rewrite it' and who are 'responsible for the general reception and survival of works of literature among non-professional readers, who constitute the great majority of readers in our global culture, to at least the same, if not a greater extent than the writers themselves' (Lefevere 1992b: 1). These include, of course, translators, but also editors, reviewers, anthologists, teachers, and so on.

In light of the above, it becomes clear that refractions play an important role in how we receive a particular author, if at all, as well as which texts are sanctioned by the dominant ideology of a culture at a particular time. In other words, refractions influence the development of the target literature:

All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live. (Lefevere 1992a: xi)

Thus, from among the multitude of texts written throughout time, assorted agents undertake to 'recuperate originals' (Lefevere 1981: 75–6), manipulate them to one degree or other, and repurpose them in the direction of a particular ideology or poetics, which Lefevere also sees as inextricably linked to ideology (ibid.: 71).

Lefevere bemoaned that despite the extremely important role that refractions had historically played in the shaping of literatures, all such texts were disregarded as irrelevant for academic research up until the late twentieth century: 'At best their existence has been lamented (after all, they are unfaithful to the original), at worst it has been ignored within the Romanticism-based approaches, on the very obvious grounds that what should not be cannot be, even though it is' (Lefevere 1982: 5). Were Lefevere still with us, he would likely be pleased that popular art and literature are now considered legitimate areas of study, that several academic fields dealing with precisely such texts have sprouted since the 1990s, and that translation studies itself has expanded its understanding of textuality beyond the verbal text and matured enough to cover a much broader range of practices.

Lefevere's examination of the agents behind the production of translation and his perception of translation as a social practice make him a precursor to the sociology of translation. Bourdieu's sociological theory informed a lot of Lefevere's work, particularly his analysis of patronage, status, and cultural capital. Indeed, Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari (2007: 10) included Lefevere among the scholars who approached translation as a socially driven practice before the advent of the sociology of translation.

Analysis of a translation, for Lefevere, should include not only the target text, but all the contextual factors on the target end as well: the choice of author and source text, the agents involved in the refraction, the choices made in the translation itself with regard to the dominant ideology and poetics, and the needs and positioning of the target culture. All these factors are clearly questions of sociological interest. The validity of Lefevere's analysis today is discussed here, adopting his methodological criteria to look into 'who rewrites, why, under what circumstances, for which audience' (Lefevere 1992b: 7) to examine the case of a modern refraction, Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet*, issued by the British publishing house SelfMadeHero (2007).[4]

2. The Rewriting contextualized: What? When? By whom? Why? For whom?

2.1. A rewriting of a rewriting of a rewriting

The research questions posed by Lefevere often prove to be much more complex than they initially appear, even the one regarding what was rewritten. The source text of this case study is William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* – or is it? Actually, none of Shakespeare's works survive in their original form. In the Bard's time, scripts for plays had no literary merit; they were only useful as assets of a theatrical group, so it is possible that at least some of his works were destroyed in the 1613 fire that burned down the Globe Theatre after a theatrical cannon misfired. The only extant materials associated with the historical figure named William Shakespeare (1564–1616) are two letters (Holland 2016: 833), six of his signatures on legal documents, and a portrait that may or may not depict the playwright. Thus, no living person has read Shakespeare's 'original' *Hamlet*, which has survived in the form of three rewritings: two quartos (believed to have been rewritten from memory by one of the Globe actors, possibly the one who played the minor role of Marcellus) and a version

in the first *Folio* (1623), the first collection of Shakespeare's works published posthumously by his friends and colleagues John Heminges and Henry Condell to memorialize him.

Shakespeare's plays themselves were often rewritings of stories that had been circulating for centuries, complicating Romantic claims about the originality of the Bard's genius. Harold Jenkins (1982: 82–112) traces the roots of *Hamlet's* storyline as early as the ninth century in various Roman and Norse myths. In the twelfth century, Saxo Grammaticus included the story of Hamlet (*sic*) in his *Historiae Danicae*; it was published as late as 1514, but Shakespeare was probably unaware of the earlier versions. Jenkins believes that Shakespeare may have been acquainted with the French version written by Belleforest in *Histoires tragiques* (1572), but also thinks that his most likely source of inspiration was the *Ur-Hamlet*, a play on the same subject staged around 1596 and presumably written by Thomas Kyd, who also wrote the *Spanish Tragedy* (*ibid.*: 82). Unfortunately, that rewriting has not survived, as it was never printed. So, although the concept of fidelity to the 'original' is one of the biggest bones of contention regarding rewrites, Lefevere (1981: 71) seems to have a point in asserting that original texts are indeed important, but that they do not necessarily exist in singular form.

2.2. The role of rewritings in the canonization of Shakespeare

Throughout the West, especially in the former British colonies, even if one never actually reads any of Shakespeare's works, one is inculcated from a very tender age to view Shakespeare as the greatest poet of all time. The Bard can also arguably be considered the most rewritten author in history. This in itself shows how rewritings guide our selection of texts to read, but also determine *how* we actually read, classify, and value texts, through their framing. Today 'Shakespeare' is a household name in cultures and languages far beyond his own, and some of his most emblematic characters are similarly recognizable worldwide, among them prince Hamlet and the star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet. Nevertheless, although most people might readily recognize the stereotype of a morose Danish prince dressed in black, holding a skull in his hand, and speaking in some kind of antiquated language, only a limited subgroup among them have actually seen the play staged; even fewer have read it (most probably in translation rather than in Elizabethan English); fewer still have read it in annotated scholarly editions; and only a very limited few have read the quartos, with their original spelling and punctuation, which are themselves, as we saw, rewritings. The vast majority of people only *know* of Hamlet, through refractions in schoolbooks, encyclopaedias, anthologies, Wikipedia entries, films, theatrical reviews, or the occasional intertextual reference in a novel, the news, or a TV commercial.

Shakespeare's works have proven to be infinitely refractable. The innumerable rewritings owe their existence to the symbolic capital of Shakespeare, the revered poet and playwright, but his symbolic capital has in turn been built through these rewritings. Shakespeare was undoubtedly an exceptionally gifted writer, but it was rewritings, not his literary merits alone, that boosted his prestige from that of a successful playwright in Elizabethan England to arguably one of the most universally celebrated writers in history. Thanks to those rewritings, Shakespeare's works are posited in the epicenter of the Western literary canon, and Shakespeare himself has become a symbol whose capital is constantly tapped into to legitimate the most diverse of causes.

2.3. The spread of manga outside Japan and young people's distaste for canonical texts

The refraction in this case study emerged as manga was spreading exponentially in popularity around the world, growing beyond a niche, but very active, fan base in the 1970s to become the most dynamically expanding comics genre today. Their popularity was largely due to the painstaking and devoted work of 'scanlators' in the 1970s and 1980s;[5] to the anime series that became popular in the 1980s and 1990s; to the even greater popularity of anime on streaming platforms in the 2000s; and more generally to the evolution of technology, the advent of the Internet, and the development of visual literacy. The success of manga internationally has been particularly noticeable over the past two decades. During the Covid-19 pandemic, demand for them largely exceeded supply (Aoki 2022). Adaptations of classical literary works as graphic novels have also experienced a resurgence in recent years (Serchay 2010: 3–4). In 2005, the year SelfMadeHero began work on its Manga Shakespeare series, the UK was somewhat belatedly catching the manga wave (Hayley 2010: 267).

The other contextual factor that contributed to the emergence of the case study text was the growing distaste of young readers for canonical literature. As Lefevere noted, "[H]igh" literature is increasingly read only in an educational setting (both secondary and higher education), but does no longer constitute the preferred reading matter of the non-professional reader' (Lefevere 1992b: 3). He further wrote, 'The non-professional reader increasingly does not read literature as written by its writers, but as rewritten by its rewriters' (*ibid.*: 4). Iulia Drăghici (2014: 115) saw the success of manga in the West as 'especially appealing to young people as a means of going against the established values of high culture'. In a similar vein, Jean-Marie Bouissou, in a 2010 newspaper interview, also associated the manga craze, at the time exceptionally strong in his native France, with the scepticism of French young readers towards canonical texts: 'These days, young people don't believe French culture is special. They don't care about the origins of whatever culture they enjoy. They don't have a particular enthusiasm for being and celebrating things French' (*ctd.* in Hays 2013).

Shakespeare's works in particular, apart from being linked to the English canon and the British educational system (Olive 2016), present a challenging level of difficulty for modern young Anglophones because of the complexities of Shakespeare's style of writing as well as their having been written in Middle English, a version of English spoken more than four centuries ago. That Shakespeare's language was becoming an 'unfamiliar tongue' was recognized as early as 1921 in the Newbolt report for educational reform (Olive 2016: 1228–9). Such unfamiliarity can be particularly intimidating for young readers, a situation that partly accounts for the various abridged versions to provide access to those texts (Delabastita 2016).

2.4. The agents of Manga Shakespeare Hamlet

As regards the materialization of refractions, Lefevere asked, 'By whom?' Once again, the response is more complex than one would expect. The particular manga is the result of multiple agencies.

In 2004 Emma Hayley, a British journalist and editor, noticed the increasing number of graphic novels in the United Kingdom and also spotted a ‘gap in the market for high quality graphic novels’ (SelfMadeHero 2022). Realizing that sales of manga in the UK roughly doubled from 2004 to 2005 (Hayley 2010: 267), in 2007 she founded SelfMadeHero, a publishing house specializing in quality graphic narratives, and began work on rewriting Shakespeare in manga format. In building a creative team (ibid.: 269), she chose Richard Appignanesi to adapt the works; he had ample experience in editing a series entitled *Introducing* published by Icon Books and featuring image-based books that popularized complex scientific and philosophical ideas. For the graphic design, she reached out to Sweatdrop Studios, a British *doujinshi* circle, [6] and, after considering a number of suggestions, she signed with mangakas [7] Sonia Leong for *Romeo and Juliet* and Emma Vieceli for *Hamlet* (Brienza 2015: 11). She also employed Nick de Somogyi as a textual consultant to ‘make sure that the abridged text maintained a consistency in style and fluidity’ (Hayley 2010: 269). According to Hayley, the book was the result of teamwork (ibid.: 270), so the final refraction is the mean vector of a network of multiple diverging agencies. That said, from a sociological perspective, in a network, every agent comes with their own habitus stemming from their positioning in the social space, which gives them literally a different point of view and greater or more restricted power to make decisions. So, in response to the question of who the refractor was in this case, the initiator may have been the publisher, but, as will be discussed below, the graphic artist also made some key artistic decisions that decisively affected the shaping of the final product.

2.5. A manga Hamlet?

A fundamental motive for the publication of a book is, as a rule, marketability in the form of potential profit. Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet* is no exception. The publisher apparently found an opportunity for profit by coupling the rising popularity of manga in Britain with Shakespeare’s colossal cultural capital as their national poet. Moreover, Shakespeare’s works come with the additional benefit of not requiring royalty payments, as no copyright exists. Even further, English being today’s lingua franca confers an English-language publication greater profit potential worldwide.

That said, as Bourdieu (1993) convincingly argued, symbolic goods, particularly books, have their own value system and therefore cannot be discussed solely in economic terms, merely as commodities. Kaindl (1999) similarly argued that ‘even though comics as a part of mass literature are primarily oriented toward the goal of achieving economic power, following the reasoning of Bourdieu, they also have to gain social acceptance both within and outside the literary field at the same time’. He reminded us that ‘[T]his social acceptance, or to use Bourdieu’s term, symbolic capital, was not initially granted to comics. Comics were said to have an especially bad influence on young people; it was claimed that they served as an instrument of ideological manipulation, promoted aggression and led to the impoverishment of language’ (Kaindl 1999: 271–2). Furthermore, discussing the position of comics in the social field, Kaindl underlined the disparate positions held by comics in U.S. and European social spaces, the result of their unique historical backgrounds: ‘While comic strips in the United States are [...] strongly characterized by their position in the journalistic field, European comics have developed along different lines and are primarily rooted in the literary field, with strips published in newspapers playing a much less significant role than in the U.S.’ (ibid.: 270). In short, in Europe, comics had a history of competing for legitimacy in the literary world.

In light of the above, the choice of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as the launch title of the Manga Shakespeare series and the inaugural volume of SelfMadeHero can be seen as an effort to use Shakespeare’s literary capital in his native England to confer cultural capital on graphic novels as worthy of inclusion in British literature. Of course, as Lefevere noted, ‘[C]ultural capital is transmitted, distributed, and regulated by means of translation, among other factors, not only between cultures, but also within one given culture’ (Lefevere 1998: 41). As Hayley, the publisher, put it, ‘It seems so strange to me that some people are unable to see the medium of manga as a form of literature with intrinsic value and instead blindly perceive it as a conduit for “dumbing down” great works; the divide between the visually literate and illiterate is obvious in this respect’ (Hayley 2010: 279).

At the same time, the popularity of manga and so-called Japanese soft power (Nye 1990) could be used to bolster some of Shakespeare’s fading currency among young readers, particularly manga fans.[8] As Lefevere (1981: 77) observed: ‘Refractions are also responsible for the diffusion of works of literature to audiences that are not interested or motivated enough to gain access to originals.’ The publisher explicitly described the purpose of *Hamlet* as manga: ‘Our goal is to make manga more accessible to the mainstream while making Shakespeare more accessible through manga, and we appeal to two different markets – the trade and the educational. While the main focus of the *Manga Shakespeare* series has been for entertainment (just as Shakespeare intended his plays to be), we have not ignored the value of the books on an educational level’ (Hayley 2010: 276). Hayley also mentioned another motive for the publication – to legitimate the work of non-Japanese mangakas and to act as ‘a UK publisher supporting its own new emerging talent’ (ibid.: 270).

Bourdieu (2008) asserted that the selection of titles on a publishing house’s list of publications is directly linked to the overall image the publisher seeks to build or project and to prestige.[9] In this regard, the fact that Hayley chose Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in manga as the launch title for her newfound publishing house may be viewed as an attempt to leverage Shakespeare’s cultural capital in England to heighten the visibility and prestige of SelfMadeHero.

In sum, in Bourdieusian terms, the symbolic functions of a manga *Hamlet* were to raise the cultural capital of graphic novels to the level of mainstream literature in Britain, to increase visibility and prestige for SelfMadeHero, and to legitimate non-Japanese mangakas in *otaku* culture[10] – all by exploiting Shakespeare’s symbolic power in his native England. The other function was to reverse Shakespeare’s receding symbolic capital among younger audiences by tapping into manga’s rising cultural capital among them.[11]

2.6. The audience

The publisher of the first non-Japanese manga *Hamlet* stated that the intention of the work was to draw ‘teenagers or first-time readers to the work of William Shakespeare’ (Hayley 2010: 268); it was also hoped that it would be ‘seen as entertainment rather than as primarily educational’ (ibid.: 269). Whether the intended audience ultimately emerges as the

actual consumer is always an uncertainty, but the former is nonetheless critical in shaping the target text, as important decisions are made during the development and production stages to meet the needs of the targeted audience.

Manga is a highly complex and diversified medium that deals with a wide range of themes. Unlike other comics, mangas are categorized not according to content, but based on the age and gender of the target audience. There are more than a thousand types of manga, but the five main ones are *shonen* (for boys), *shōjo* (for girls), *seinen* (for adult men), *josei* (for adult women), and *kodomomuke* (for small children in general). Each type has its own conventions, and the type affects every element of the final product, from the artistic conventions and the characters to the storyline and themes. Given this, which type of manga to produce is the first decision a creative team has to make, or in other words, identifying the target readership. In the case of *Hamlet*, the team opted for *shōjo*, which is meant for girls in the hope to make it more family friendly. Apart from aiming for general appeal, the choice of type may also depend on the nature of the story. In other tragedies by Shakespeare, as in the case of *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, which are packed with action, the team opted for *shonen*. By contrast, *Hamlet* is a play full of philosophical pondering in which physical action is delayed until the very end. Also, partly because of that deferring of action, the character of Hamlet has often been portrayed as effeminate and has been at times played by female actors. The choice of *shōjo*, therefore, seemed more appropriate for this tragedy, a choice which influenced the publication's overall creative approach and design.

3. The refraction itself

In Roman Jakobson's (1959) tripartite categorization of the translation of the linguistic sign, the refraction of *Hamlet* as manga would fall under the category of intersemiotic translation or transmutation. On another level, however, since the crossing of temporal boundaries presupposes a significant cultural shift, it can also be discussed as an intercultural translation despite England being the geographical locus of production for both the source and target texts. As L. P. Hartley famously put it, 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there' (Hartley 1953: 5). The refraction can also be considered intercultural in the sense that an English text is mediated by a Japanese medium, which has its own affordances and restrictions.

3.1. Layout, format, and paratexts

SelfMadeHero's refraction of *Hamlet* is a 208-page book roughly measuring 14 by 21 cm, primarily printed in black and white, the exception being the first eight pages, which serve as the dramatis personae.[12] The refractors decided not to adopt the typical manga format of reading right-to-left, but keep it left-to-right, which is itself a Westernized, or perhaps globalized, decision.

Paratexts are instrumental in guiding the reader's reception of the main text and are thus an extremely important source of information about the publisher's marketing strategy, including the target audience and the intended function of the target text.

The cover of *Hamlet* displays the series and book titles – Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet*, and the name of the graphic artist, Emma Vieceli, which is indicative of the prestige of the mangaka in the creation of a manga. Appignanesi, as the text adaptor, is acknowledged only on the title and copyright pages. The blurb on the back cover clearly identifies the book's target audience as: 'students, Shakespeare enthusiasts and manga fans.' Immediately following the eight coloured pages of the dramatis personae, Shakespeare makes a cameo appearance, drawn in manga style against a black background, amid text that reads,

The Tragedy of
HAMLET
Prince of Denmark

This layout fulfils the dual role of, first, establishing that the play at hand was written by Shakespeare, thus endearing his writings to the *otakus*, and, second, of reminding Shakespeare fans that they may be holding a manga, but it is still a story by Shakespeare; this confers twofold, targeted prestige. The book ends with a single-page plot summary and a brief outline of Shakespeare's life that serve as supportive material in an educational setting. Thus, the paratexts frame the manga as appealing to Shakespeare and manga fans for both recreational and educational purposes.

3.2. The verbal text

The verbal text comprises lines by Shakespeare, albeit drastically truncated in deference to the conventions of manga as a medium and the expectations of the target audience; hence acknowledgment of the adaptor is warranted and required. Since the role of graphic art in manga is much more prominent than in other media, including other kinds of comics, some of the information presented verbally in Shakespeare's version due to the constraints of theatre at the time has been translated pictorially. For example, Shakespeare's model text has Gertrude describe the drowning of Ophelia, because it was impossible to enact it on stage at the Globe. In the manga, the scene is visualized, making Gertrude's lines superfluous. Despite these affordances of manga, though, it is impossible to accommodate every element of a four-hour play within a 200-page graphic publication with minimal text. According to the publisher, the creative team members 'decided that keeping the original Shakespearean text was crucial, but in an abridged form', and they also felt it necessary to 'keep the poetry' (Hayley 2010: 269). In reality, however, one cannot profess to "keep the poetry" when the text is so drastically curtailed; it is impossible to preserve the iambic pentameter or Shakespeare's overall style when lines are necessarily altered to fit into speech bubbles. As an indication of this reductive process, Hamlet's famous 'to be or not to be' soliloquy (3.2.56–88) consists of 262 words in the Arden Shakespeare edition, but only 55 words in SelfMadeHero's manga.

In addition to metre, other aspects fundamental to Shakespeare's language include the mixing of genres with the use of humorous scenes in a tragedy, the use of wordplay and puns, bawdy and sexually allusive language, patterns of metaphors,

and sustaining certain themes across plays. The text in the manga *Hamlet* is a conglomeration of the most famous lines and key scenes from the play. Thus, despite lines being drawn from Shakespeare's versions, they are literally taken out of context. Sexual allusions are omitted, not simply due to the need to whittle down the text, but also because the creative team sought to make the manga family friendly and educationally acceptable. Also gone are Hamlet's philosophical musings, mainly delivered via soliloquies, as well as the gravedigger's socio-political commentary, either because they were considered irrelevant or because of the space constraints.

With the drastic shortening of the text, key features of Shakespeare's language are only hinted at and keywords or images function as allusions to the respective scenes from Shakespeare's model text for those familiar with it, albeit entirely lost to those who are not.

3.3. Graphic design

Comics create a synergy between the visual and the verbal to construct meaning. In the case of manga, the visual, the graphic art, dominates in the construction of meaning, with the verbal text playing an auxiliary role. Thus, mangakas are paramount to producing a manga, reinforcing, supplementing, and subsuming the verbal text with their illustrations. The conventions of mangas are key to fully understanding them and the reason why so many people enjoy reading them. A semiotic analysis brings to light some of the hidden meanings transmitted via the manga's graphic art.

As noted above, Shakespeare's wordplay, bawdiness, and humour were not transferred to the manga refraction, either to make it more family friendly or because of space restrictions. In some key scenes from the model text containing humour or wordplay, the mangaka has gone the extra mile to communicate that something funny or out of the ordinary is taking place by portraying Hamlet as a *chibi*, [13] such as when Hamlet puns on whether Polonius is a fishmonger. Nevertheless, unless one is familiar with the joke about the fishmonger's wife, it is largely impossible to grasp why Hamlet is portrayed this way. These conventions only work as intertextual allusions to the model text for readers who are already familiar with it.

3.4. Themes

Shōjo manga tend to feature dramatic stories about everyday life, interpersonal relations – romance, love, friendship – and emotions, elements typically not found in the more action-packed *shōnen* manga. As noted above in terms of *shōjo*, philosophical and socio-political themes have perhaps been viewed as unappealing to the target audience. Moreover, in accordance with the expectations for *shōjo*, violence has also been downplayed.

On the other hand, while many elements from the model text are absent in the manga refraction, others have been added, such as romanticized love and sentimentality. Lachrymose heroes are always ready to shed a tear, some of them on multiple occasions: Ophelia cries in no less than five panels; Hamlet, being effeminate and troubled, does his share of weeping; Gertrude, being a woman and thus 'frail', tears up in her chamber scene; Laertes cries when he realizes his sister has gone mad; Horatio weeps when Hamlet dies; and, yes, even Claudius sheds a remorseful tear in the chapel scene!

Typically, *shōjo* mangas not only address a female audience, but are also made by females and feature female characters as the central heroes. That said, besides females, another character that has flourished in *shōjo* manga is the *bishōnen*, the 'beautiful boy'. These are androgynous characters that can hardly be identified as men; rather, they are intersexual figures combining the best of the sexes. They are androgynous not simply in the way they look, but also in their sensibilities and in the situations in which they are found (McLelland 2010: 85). It is therefore unsurprising that SelfMadeHero's creative team decided to portray Hamlet as a *bishōnen*. The publisher explained that the decision to render *Hamlet* in *shōjo* was taken 'with the aim of appealing to girls as well as boys' (Hayley 2010: 273). She also noted, '[The story] is not typically *shōjo* because of the nature of the narrative. There is an unwritten code in *shōjo* manga that males cannot be protagonists, or at least, they are rare' (ibid.: 274). Motives aside, the portrayal of Hamlet as a *bishōnen* had a series of effects on the whole rewriting of the story. So, although on a superficial level there is a layer of romanticized love with ample sentimentality, the mangaka has added a layer of queerness, as thoroughly analysed by Brandon Christopher (2019). In the words of Yukari Yoshihara (2019: 167), '[M]anga adaptations of Shakespeare's works offer a fertile ground to test non-cisgender, non-heterosexual possibilities'.

Another thematic shift from the model text is the relocation of the story to a futuristic dystopia in the manga version. In Shakespeare's telling, the main theme is illness and decay in the context of a fictitious Denmark, which he sustains via a series of literary devices. In the target text, this theme has been modernized and expanded to a global scale in the form of a planetary ecological disaster. From the first page, one is introduced to a musing Hamlet staring at the misty outline of what appears to be a depressed Ophelia. Below him, the caption reads, 'The year is 2017. Global climate change has devastated the Earth. This is now a cyberworld in constant dread of war. Prince Hamlet of Denmark has come home to an uncertain future ...'. Thus, the story is set in a postapocalyptic near future – 2017, that is ten years from the book's publication – and features a young hero who, like today's youth, is concerned about ecological destruction and the threat of war, rather than the ills that consumed his Elizabethan forefather. 'Other modern translators', Lefevere wrote, 'take the course of analogy, linking aspects of the original to aspects of the times they live in. The aim is to convince readers that they are not wasting their time, that reading what they might consider "old hat", but for the fact that it is still recognized as cultural capital, may well turn out to be a meaningful exercise after all' (Lefevere 1998: 42).

For the very reasons Lefevere cited, alienation in the current technological era is another key theme added in the manga *Hamlet*. The story unfolds in an über-cyber tech culture depicted in steampunk style through a concatenation of incongruous, anachronistic elements, such as Polonius' attire including an ancient Egyptian-like hat, a monocle, and an electronic headset, which may be alluding to his unquestioning submission to the royal couple. Hamlet himself is portrayed as an emo teenager with wires popping out of his head and immersed in all kinds of futuristic audio-visual gadgets, but, nevertheless, inconsolably sad and lonely. This relocation of the tragedy serves multiple purposes. On the one hand, it potentially appeals to a sci-fi readership, but at the same time is absolutely compatible with the fantastic environments

that manga favours. It is also topical for the more ecologically sensitized reader and seems a fitting updating for the underlying theme of the model play – that is, illness, decay, and corruption in an ill-defined ‘Denmark’.

3.5. Fidelity?

All in all, numerous shifts in the manga *Hamlet* refraction result from the change of medium, function, socio-historical milieu, target audience, and dominant poetics as well as the ethics, values, and ideals it encompasses. Is it a ‘faithful’ refraction? The question is irrelevant, and the answer is contingent. Adaptations are comments on earlier texts from the viewpoint of the target culture and its needs, concerns, and ethics. Looking at this refraction on a microlevel, one gains little insight into Shakespeare and his time, but it is replete with information on the target culture and what is acceptable, feared, or desired by that culture at the target end. At the same time, the target text not only reflects but also reinforces or even constructs ideologies, gender identities, and values in the target culture, which in the case of the manga *Hamlet* includes reinforcing Shakespeare as the paragon of high (and popular) culture.

3.6. Reception

As noted, the goals of the manga *Hamlet* publisher, apart from financial profit, were, first, to legitimate graphic novels as literature in England; second, to legitimate the non-Japanese production of manga among the *otaku* subculture; and, third, to re-establish some of Shakespeare’s lost prestige among younger readers by presenting his work in an entertaining format appealing to them. How, in fact, was the manga received, and to what extent were the publisher’s initial goals met?

Measured in terms of sales, Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet* met with great success. Marketed around the world, the Manga Shakespeare series has grown to include fourteen works by the Bard at the times of writing. The year after SelfMadeHero’s *Hamlet* appeared, two more manga *Hamlets* were published in the United States; one by CliffsNotes, publishers of the student study guide series, and one by SparkNotes, likely in an effort to glean some of the success of their ground-breaking predecessor.[14] The international success of the first *Hamlet* can also be gauged by its being reproduced outside Britain. In some instances, this was done after acquiring copyright permission to translate the original English version into another language, as in the case of the Brazilian version in Portuguese, published in 2011 and translated by Alexei Bueno. In other instances, it inspired local artists to follow suit and produce a version in their native language. The trend has accelerated to such a degree that Shakespeare publications are no longer a novelty, but a subgenre in their own right, including a homegrown Japanese manga *Hamlet* by Hikaru Takahashi in 2018. There is also a 468-page unabridged edition and an intralingual version, in modern English, both of which came out in 2022:[15] both have already been translated into Spanish and French.

It seems that the Manga Shakespeare series succeeded in its goal to help legitimate graphic novels as literature in England. In 2008, Emma Hayley won the UK Young Publishing Entrepreneur of the Year award at the British Book Awards, and in 2011, SelfMadeHero received the Kitschies Black Tentacle award, a literary prize presented each year for ‘the most progressive, intelligent and entertaining books’. The SelfMadeHero website also notes the company receiving High Commendation at the FutureBook Digital Innovation Awards in 2011; Andreea Șerban (2021: 24) also cites that they have received awards by the British Council, the Young Creative Entrepreneur, and the London Book Fair. Awards are consecrating mechanisms in the field of literature and thus important indicators for gauging in what direction norms are headed (Bourdieu 1983). Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet* has attracted the attention and approval of mainstream news organizations, including *The Guardian* and the *BBC*. In addition to awards, comments by authenticated buyers on various bookselling websites and reviewers in literary journals have acknowledged the thawing of their initial scepticism towards the adaptation of Shakespeare into manga.

Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet* seems to have somewhat contributed in conferring legitimacy on works by non-Japanese mangakas and on non-Japanese manga in general as being genuine manga. It also represents a pioneering venture towards a new type of global manga (Brienza 2015). Yukari Yoshihara believes that the Manga Shakespeare series ‘helped to turn manga into an important vehicle for the intercultural translation of Shakespeare’ (Yoshihara 2022: 167); the manga *Hamlet* is a refraction of a story previously refracted by an English playwright and reworked today in a Westernized Japanese format, printed and bound in China, and distributed to an international audience with the facilitation of English as the lingua franca and a globalized market network. It appears that a globalized Shakespeare was the ideal vehicle for such a globalized refraction.

The year of Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet*’s publication, 2007, marked a watershed, during and after which there was an explosion of other such endeavours, validating its issuance as the timely expression of a convergence of factors. That same year, a similar trend took off in Japan, where East Press launched its series Manga de Dokuha (Reading through manga), which published demanding philosophical, political, and literary texts seminal in building the Western canon and aimed to popularize them for Japanese businessmen needing a shortcut to reinforce their cultural, and by extension social, capital. Unsurprisingly, the series included works by Shakespeare, namely, *King Lear* (2008) and *Hamlet* (2011). These refractions of Shakespeare’s works are globalized products that reinforce the canonization of Shakespeare and his value as a marketable product.

SelfMadeHero’s third goal – using manga as a vehicle to endear Shakespeare to young readers – has proved to be trickier than the others. Despite high sales and the trend its *Hamlet* triggered, it remains unclear whether its consumers were the teenage audience the refractors had in mind. The promotion page for the manga on Amazon’s website targets those aged 7–13. Unfortunately, no demographic data on the actual buyers is available. If reviews by actual purchasers are an accurate measure, those reveal them to be parents and teachers who acquired the book to introduce their children or students to Shakespeare in a reader-friendly medium. Granted, reviews on bookselling sites are a flimsy yardstick, since teenagers would not express themselves in that format anyway, but there were no traces of relevant threads in *otaku* fora either. The testimonials on SelfMadeHero’s website are restricted once again to an audience of parents and academics. Combined with the publisher’s description of the educational campaign they developed and executed and the accompanying educational

material they prepared (Hayley 2010: 278–9), one may gather that despite the initial goal for the manga to be read primarily for entertainment rather than education, it was the latter that actually prevailed.

According to a sociological analysis of manga fandom in France (Bouissou et al. 2010: 258), manga readers are not lower-class, undereducated teenagers trying to escape depressing daily lives, but middle-class young adults from stable family backgrounds, with generally high levels of education, including knowledge of foreign languages, and rather well-paid, white-collar jobs. If that description generally holds in Britain as well, it would definitely include Shakespeare aficionados – well-educated Shakespearians with a solid grasp of Shakespeare’s works who wish to enjoy them in yet another refraction; their goal would apparently not be to find out how the plot unfolds, but to see how the adaptor, in this case the mangaka, has dealt with Shakespeare’s text and to hopefully partake in the exhilaration shared by those well-versed in the play and thus able to appreciate the nuances added or changed in the refraction (Cutchins 2014).

Interestingly, Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet* brings two geek cultures together – that of Shakespearians and that of manga fans – to potentially create a niche readership. If indeed, as all indicators seem to suggest, mainly parents, teachers, and Shakespeare geeks bought the book, it would mean that the more general scepticism among younger readers towards canonical texts has so far proved stronger than their love of manga. Teenagers may have read it gladly as a substitute for the full, annotated versions when introduced to it by a parent or teacher, but it remains to be seen whether offering them canonical texts in manga format can curb their aversion to them.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the Manga Shakespeare *Hamlet* exploited the symbolic capital of both the source author and the medium, high in the literary field and the field of popular culture, respectively, to confer symbolic capital to each other. Shakespeare helped legitimate manga as literature, and manga helped re-establish some of Shakespeare’s slipping currency among young readers.

All in all, this case study was an attempt to showcase how Lefevere’s concept of refractions, or rewritings, offer themselves for sociological work on textual production, circulation, and reception. Admittedly, his insights need to be supplemented with more rigorous sociological theory, but they can be smoothly combined with the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, since Lefevere had already borrowed heavily from it.

The study also highlights how Lefevere’s approach readily offers itself for discussing complex contemporary case studies that straddle not only linguistic but also medial boundaries. In the digital age, it is imperative that one be fully conscious of the role rewritings play in the reception of texts, whether for entertainment or knowledge transfer; even more importantly, critical literacy needs to be cultivated among readers in the younger generations, as they are the most vulnerable receptors of these texts. The chances are that they will be immersed in rewritings throughout their lives to a far greater extent than previous generations. Lefevere seems to have seen that coming.

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Notes

[1] I personally favour the term *refraction*, because as a metaphor it incorporates the idea of distortion, manipulation, change of pace, as when light travels from one medium to another, and therefore can be particularly useful when discussing translative practices that cross medial boundaries, such as adaptations, remediations, and transmutations (Jakobson 1959). Lefevere himself, however, replaced it with the term *rewriting* in the mid-1980s. In any case, the intention here is not to reintroduce a term, but to underline the usefulness of Lefevere's concept in today's digital age, during which understanding has broadened considerably in regard to the concepts of 'text' and 'textuality' as well as 'translation' to include messages transferred in systems of signification way beyond the verbal.

[2] On the illusion of transparency and non-existence that translation creates, see Venuti 1995 and Hermans 1996.

[3] With 'corpus concept', Lefevere is referring to the 'corpus approach', which gives primary position to a corpus of original canonical text and discusses it in contradistinction to a 'systemic approach', which 'is prepared to give translation and, by extension, translated literature a bigger part to play in literary theory' (Lefevere 1981: 68).

[4] To my knowledge, the first attempt at a sociological approach to the study of comics in translation in English was that of Klaus Kaindl, who similarly asserted, 'If translation is understood not as a linguistic or textual operation, but as a social practice, the social context of action in which the translation process is embedded has to be taken as the starting point for analysis' (Kaindl 1999: 265).

[5] Scanlators were non-professional translators, who translated and distributed their favourite mangas without having secured rights to do so, but also without getting paid for their work. They typically did so to provide access to alternative titles that mainstream Western publishers did not consider marketable enough to publish or to provide the *otakus* (manga fans) with more source-oriented translations than the ones published by those same publishers to their audiences, which were still largely unversed in manga at the time.

[6] A *doujinshi* is a group of fans who self-produce magazines, novels, manga, and games.

[7] *Mangakas* are graphic artists who create manga.

[8] The term *soft power* (Nye 1990) encompasses the benefits gained through attraction rather than coercion. For instance, it is believed by some that the appeal of Japan has increased as a result of manga's growth in popularity worldwide. For more on this, see Bouissou 2013 and Keener 2015.

[9] 'A publisher is a person invested with the extraordinary power to ensure *publication*, to confer upon a text and its author a *public* existence (*Öffentlichkeit*) along with the fame and recognition that this entails. "Creation" of this sort usually involves a *consecration*, a *transfer of symbolic capital* (analogous to the one accomplished by a preface), bestowed by the publisher not only upon the author but upon the publishing house as well, specifically upon its "list", the repertoire of authors, themselves more or less consecrated, that it has published in the past' (Bourdieu 2008: 123).

[10] *Otaku* describes someone who is deeply immersed in fan culture of manga, anime, video games, and technology, oftentimes to an excessive or obsessive degree.

[11] Hayley wrote, 'So while Shakespeare had an influence on manga in Japan, now manga was to have an influence on the interpretation of Shakespeare in the UK' (Hayley 2010: 275).

[12] This article does not include images from the manga to showcase the claims made, as I did not manage to secure the right to do so; despite multiple written appeals for permission to include a few images from this manga in the article, I received no response. Nevertheless, since it was the first of its kind and has therefore been widely discussed, ample images from it are available on the Internet. I take this opportunity to endorse Federico Zanettin's (2008: 28) position that 'quoting' a few panels for academic purposes should be considered 'fair use', and I would add, in the case of academic publications, visual references to comics should be possible without the need to secure rights, as is the case with verbal references.

[13] *Chibis* are characters drawn in an exaggeratedly childlike manner to signify a state of embarrassment or playfulness.

[14] *Shakespeare's Hamlet: The Manga Edition* (2008), adapted by Adam Sexton and illustrated by Tintin Pantoja, Wiley Publishing, Hoboken, NJ; *No Fear: Hamlet. Graphic Novel* (2008), illustrated by Neil Babra, No Fear Shakespeare, New York, SparkNotes.

[15] *Manga Classics Hamlet: Full Original Text Edition* (2022), adapted by Crystal Chan and illustrated by Julien Choy, Manga Classics; *Manga Classics Hamlet: Modern English Edition* (2022), adapted by Michael Barltrop and Crystal S. Chan and illustrated by Julien Choy, Manga Classics.

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