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## Tacky “Shakespeares” in Japan

**Abstract:** There is no doubt that Shakespeare is “the flagship commodity” in the globalized cultural market. The fact that his works are being studied, performed, and admired, or, adapted and parodied almost all over the world, would surely testify that his works are great sources to be capitalized on (both culturally and materially) in the consumerist society in which we live. However, it could be also argued that the brand logo, “Shakespeare,” no longer holds such a privileged status, that it is merely one of numerous cultural artifacts that can be used and recycled, and that one of the few convenient things about “Shakespeare” is that it can be reproduced, copied, and parodied without the need for any royalty payments being made? Some popular, global, tacky “shakespeares” seek to destabilize the presupposed notion that “Shakespeare” is the dominant, central, hegemonic icon by juxtaposing “Shakespeare” with other artifacts, which are presumed to be of minimal capitalist and cultural value. This article attempts to illustrate how (in)significant or (un)influential Shakespeare, as a residual socio-cultural icon, can be. Tackyfying “Shakespeares” can, however, also be a means to proliferate the Bard. Japanese pop “Shakespeares,” proudly and assertively tacky, offer tributes to the great Bard.

**Keywords:** pop culture, Japan, consumerism, commodification, mass media

There is no doubt that Shakespeare is “the flagship commodity” (Dromgoole and Taylor) in the globalized cultural market. The fact that his works are being studied, performed, and admired, or, adapted and parodied almost all over the world, would surely testify that his works are great sources to be capitalized on (both culturally and materially) in the consumerist society in which we live, where everything, including “Shakespeare,” is a commodity.

Alternatively, could it be argued that the brand logo, “Shakespeare,” no longer holds such a privileged status, that it is merely one of numerous cultural artifacts that can be used and recycled, and that one of the few convenient things

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about “Shakespeare” is that it can be reproduced, copied, and parodied without the need for any royalty payments being made? Some popular, global, tacky “shakespeares” seek to destabilize the presupposed notion that “Shakespeare” is the dominant, central, hegemonic icon by juxtaposing “Shakespeare” with other cultural artifacts, which are presumed to be of minimal capitalist and cultural value.

In strange combinations of reverence and irreverence to the global brand of Shakespeare, pop culture in Japan has been keen to make Shakespeare tacky, trashy, sleazy, and gaudy, as well as cute and queer. In one of the earlier examples of tacky “shakespeares,” Yasuko Aoike’s manga, *Sons of Eve* (1977–79), a sissy Romeo makes love to a drag queen. More recently, in a manga story of a delinquent boy’s becoming the owner of a huge host club chain, he starts his career at a host club named “Romeo,” where hosts welcome customers shouting, “Welcome, Princess Juliet, to our club Romeo!” (Kurashina: 2003). This “tradition” of making Shakespeare tacky goes a long way back, at least into the early 20th century, when Masuda Taro Kaja transformed *Othello* into a farce, in which an old man tries to keep up with the latest fashion out of jealousy (New *Othello* [Shin Osero]: 1906); or when Takataro Kimura (1870–1931)—a graduate of the prestigious Tokyo Imperial University, philosopher, philologist, historian, translator of Plato, Shelley, and Byron—published his Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a Mere Compilation of the Oriental Materials, Chiefly Japanese (1914); or when Baron Shidehara, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was caricatured as a Hamlet, after his hesitation relating to military expansion (the *Ashahi*, Dec. 7th, 1932).

These tacky “shakespeares” were made in defiance of Shakespeare’s “Western” authority, or of serious, classy, and Westernized representations of Shakespeare in Japan that replicate “as close a copy as possible of ‘authentic’ English Shakespeare” (Minami 78). Tacky “shakespeares” are also reactions to Japanese high culture that has successfully appropriated Shakespeare to establish itself in a local or global cultural market, as is illustrated by Kurosawa’s or Ninagawa’s Shakespearean productions. “Authentic” or “authorized” Shakespeare in Japanese forms can be “too Shakespeare”: drab and dull. Shakespeare desperately needs an injection of B class bad taste, hilarious laughter, stupidity, cool fashion, the latest music, and risqué clothing, or, in short, tackiness, in order to survive and prosper in today’s Japan.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Though I confine my argument to tacky Shakespeares in Japan, I am conscious that it does not make much sense to try to put tacky Shakespeares within geo-political boundaries in this global age. One instance that makes the full use of Shakespeare as a global brand name or marketing gimmick is a video game *Lollipop Chainsaw* (2012), with its leading character named Juliet (her sisters are named Cordelia and Rosalind), produced by collaboration of a Japanese game designer, Suda 51, and Hollywood writer/director James Gunn (<<http://lollipopchainsaw.com/>> 31 July, 2012); James Gunn is a director/writer of *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), a porn adaptation of *Romeo*

The orthodox textbook version of the history of Shakespeare in Japan might tell you how, in Japan, until fairly recently, even such genres as manga, anime, and graphic novels (such as *Robio to Robietto*, a manga by the “manga god” Osamu Tezuka, adapted as a tragic love story between two robots: 1965) tried to adapt these Japanese forms into storytelling that was appropriate to Shakespeare. However, in fact, tacky “shakespeares” in Japan have a much longer history than authoritative or orthodox Shakespeare, as Shakespeare has been one of the readily available, copy-right-free, source materials for plagiarizing and rewriting.

### **Buccaneering the Flagship**

Looking back into the earliest periods of Japan’s encounter with the Bard allows us to see how “ripping off” rather than faithful replication founded itself as Japanese “tradition.” From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, setting Shakespearean stories in Japanese contexts<sup>2</sup>, rather than straight performances in Western settings and with Western clothes was the norm. I would argue that adaptations could simultaneously pay reverence to the authority of the original and aim at a blasphemous challenge to it.

Let us first examine a sacrilegious performance. In 1900 Boston, Otojiro Kawakami, the founder of modern Japanese theatre, performed a travesty adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, set in Japan, in gibberish Japanese, to audiences who did not understand a word of Japanese. His wife, Sadayakko, the first modern Japanese actress, in dismay, asked him what she should say in her role as Portia. In answer, he said, “Any nonsense in gibberish Japanese. Anyway, no one understands what you say. If you say it in a serious tone, they would think you are speaking some grave wisdom. That should be good enough for them” (Kaneo 30). He had, among his audience, Sir Henry Irving.

The above does not mean that Kawakami held no reverence to the Bard. Back in Japan, he produced Japanized adaptations of *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *The Merchant of Venice* in 1903. Kawakami intended to civilize, modernize, and Westernize Japanese theatre with the introduction of Shakespeare’s works. Even so, all of them were adaptations, taking great freedom in buccaneering the original works: *Othello* is the Colonial Governor of Taiwan under Japanese colonization, *Hamlet* a college student of Kyoto Imperial University riding on a bicycle, and *Shylock* a fisherman in “barbarous” Hokkaido (Japan’s northernmost large island). The *Othello* adaptation was a “serious” adaptation, and it served the great purpose of aestheticizing and romanticizing the Japanese

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and *Juliet* (See Burt 78).

<sup>2</sup> Notable examples include Udagawa Bunkai, *The World of Money in the Cherry Blossom Season* (adaptation of the *Merchant of Venice*: 1885); and Kojima Kosu, *The Sound of the Bell* (adaptation of *Timon of Athens*: 1909).

colonization of Taiwan as a “civilizing” mission. As if to balance its seriousness with a lighter aspect, or to relativize the authority of Shakespeare by highlighting the fundamental ridiculousness of a jealous man, Kawakami produced the above-mentioned parody of Othello, a farce of an old man trying to keep up with the latest fashion out of jealousy (New Othello [Shin Osero]: 1906).

Joseph L. Anderson, in his work on Kawakami’s tour to the U.S.A. and Europe, analyzes the practice and techniques of hon’an (adaptation) in Japan that had had long history before Japan’s encounter with the Bard. A hon’an adapted foreign material “in ways that obscured and often left few traces of the original” (279). It was considered as neither inferior to the original nor as a direct translation. Kawakami was following this “tradition” of hon’an in his Shakespearean productions. It is entirely feasible that in this “tradition” of adapting foreign material, there is “no reason to care whether” the creator of the original work is “the world’s greatest poet or an uncredited hack scriptwriter,” to borrow from Andrew Dickson’s preview article on the World Shakespeare Festival (April 2012).

As James Brandon writes, kabuki had had various experiences of incorporating Shakespeare’s stories to fit Japanese culture and kabuki theatrical form by adapting and “localizing” them. However, the early “localized” Shakespeare productions done in kabuki style were ridiculed for being vulgar distortions both of Shakespeare and kabuki. As Brandon points out, “for a period of thirty-five years, from 1925–1960, no kabuki actor appeared in any play of Shakespeare” (33). When Shakespeare and kabuki were brought together again in post-war productions, it was a “doublet and hose” production that happened to have a kabuki star in a leading role.

Adaptation-based performances were replaced by translation-based performances in the 1920s and up until the early 1980s: performances of Shakespeare usually tried to replicate modern European stage performances. A notable example is the 1955 Bungaku-za (Literary Theater Company) production of Hamlet, which boasted of its impeccable replication of the “original” Old Vic production two years earlier. The production claimed to be a faithful replica of “authoritative” British performances (Minami 79).

In the productions of Yukio Ninagawa, Tadashi Suzuki, and Hideki Noda in the 1980s and the 1990s, Shakespeare came to be localized and indigenized once again. Now, in the New Millennium, new generations of younger directors/producers through various mediums/genres, including theatre, TV, movies, manga/animation, and gambling machines, are attempting to localize and indigenize Shakespeare with a vengeance, to “un-shakespeare” Shakespeare, to undo the curse of canonicity, and of faithfulness to the text that has made Shakespeare, for many audiences, appear dull.

**Inoue Hidenori: Metal *Macbeth*, Kabuki-esque *Richard III*, and the Gay Best Friend in *Othello***

In his fifth adaptation of Shakespearean works, *Pure-Hearted Othello in a Port Town*,<sup>3</sup> Hidenori Inoue made another bold attempt at appropriating Shakespeare’s play. The scenes are set in the 1930s Japan. *Othello*, a second-generation Japanese-Brazilian born to an African-Brazilian father and a Japanese-Brazilian mother,<sup>4</sup> is a boss of a minor yakuza mafia family. The adaptation adds one significant character—Jun, a former male prostitute and brother to Emilia. Apart from the additions and changes in setting, the storyline of the adaptation follows the original fairly closely.

The adaptation highlights some of the most sensitive issues in Japan: fear of miscegenation, social unrest during economic depression, and institutionalized heterosexism. Ever since the first Japanese adaptation of *Othello* (1903), adapting the play into Japanese settings has been a problem in a country where the myth of racial homogeneity has been strongly imposed on the society. *Othello* in Inoue’s adaptation suffers racial discrimination both in the Japanese immigrant community in Brazil and the yakuza mafia community in Japan—he was forced to leave Brazil because the Japanese-Brazilian community demonized him as a monstrous mixed-breed who threatened the ideal of “pure” Japaneseness; back “home,” the Duke and Iago deride *Othello* behind his back, as a *han-bura* (half-Brazilian).

The added character, Jun, is marginalized because of his sexuality. *Desdemona*, *Emilia*, and Jun rail against the homosocial bonding between yakuza gangsters that excludes women and non-heterosexual men. Even though they are sympathetic to Jun, however, *Desdemona* and *Emilia* have their own heterosexist assumptions—for them, “true” love can exist only between a man and a woman.

Inoue’s virtuosity lies in his power to intermix the tragic and the tacky, which is most evident in his creation of Jun. He is a sissy, effeminate gay who adores his hyper-masculine brother-in-law (*Iago*); he becomes the GBF (gay best

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<sup>3</sup> The original Japanese title is *Minato machi junjo osero*, performed by the Shinkansen troupe, at Akasaka ACT Theater (April 30–May 15, 2011). Inoue’s Shakespearean works hitherto are: *Shakespeare in the Year Tempo 12* (2002), *Metal Macbeth* (2006), *Lord of the Lies* (2007), and *Richard III* (2009). The official trailer of his latest *Othello* adaptation is available at <<http://www.junjo-othello.jp/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Historically, immigration from Japan to Brazil began in 1908. The figuration of the *Othello* figure as a second-generation Japanese-Brazilian returning to his “home” country in the 1930s is historically persuasive. The adaptation also hints at the hardships suffered by Brazilian people working in today’s Japan. The Japanese government started to issue a special work visa to Brazilian Japanese and their families in 1989, to work as unskilled manual laborers. Because of the economic depression since the early 1990s and intolerant attitudes in Japan toward cultural/ethnic differences, they continue to experience poor working conditions and harsh discrimination.

friend) of the Desdemona figure, in whom she can confide her heartfelt desires. This characterization is funny, but stereotypical and possibly homophobic, yet Inoue manages to endow Jun with grandeur when he is killed by his brother-in-law (the Emilia figure survives), protesting against the patriarchal violence that killed the Desdemona figure. In spite of, or all the more because of these serious connotations, Inoue's Othello is hilariously funny for his conscious employment of "ripping off" techniques—he mixes various elements from *Othello*, *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), yakuza mafia movies such as *Akumyo* (*Notoriety*) (1961), and an erotic torture porn movie—thereby underlining the fact that for him, Shakespeare is merely one of the sources he can reuse and recycle.

### **Nakayashiki: Erotic and Gaudy but Full of Proletarian Angst**

The latest additions to the "tradition" of adapting Shakespeare are the All-Female Naughty Shakespeare Series, directed by Hirohito Nakayashiki: Series 001 – *Erotic, Gorgeous, and Lascivious: Hamlet (Nosatsu Hamuretto)*<sup>5</sup> and Series 002 – *Erotic Knock-Down Macbeth (Zeccho Makubesu)*<sup>6</sup>.

Both adaptations are set in today's pleasure quarters; all roles are played by actresses dressed in gaudy, glittering, skimpy clothes<sup>7</sup>; they speak in today's youth jargon, which is not at all easy to comprehend, even for a native Japanese audience over a certain age; and they sing and dance in burlesque-style—in other words, they are apparently flimsily camp. Yet behind their apparent camp tackiness, the director, Nakayashiki, is adamant in his decision to "recycle" Shakespeare's original works so that his adaptations can anatomize maladies in Japanese society: the exploitation of the young workforce, especially in the sex industry.

Gertrude and Ophelia are kyabakura (cabaret and club hostess bars) hostesses, Claudius the usurper-owner of the Kyabakura Kingdom, Denmark Co., and Hamlet is the heir to it. Though Gertrude and Ophelia are confident in the erotic power of their bodies, they cannot help but be exploited by the male-owned sex industry (though the male parts are performed by actresses). They are figures both of victimized femininity and the newly emergent self-assertion of female sexual agency. The audience broke into hilarious laughter when Gertrude, accused by her son of being sexually corrupt, says, "I am too ero(tic)," where, in the original, she says her soul is "tinct" (3.4). The audience's laughter could be

<sup>5</sup> Directed by Hirohito Nakayashiki, performed by the Kakiku kyaku troupe, at Theater Tram (Tokyo), September 16–25, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> April 14–23 at Kicchoji Theater (Tokyo): April 27–30 at AI Hall (Osaka), 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Though the theater troupe, Kakikuu-kyaku, a mixed-gender troupe, in the Shakespeare series the casts are all female. The choice could have been made out of an implicit criticism of Ninagawa Yukio's all-male Shakespeare series, such as *Taming of the Shrew* (2010).

at Gertrude’s stupidity (she does not realize that her son equates her eroticism with her sinfulness), but it could equally be rebellious laughter deriding Hamlet’s chauvinism (as for him, all-female sexual agency is “tinct”).

Nakayashiki’s latest adaptation of Shakespeare, the All-Female Naughty Shakespeare Series 002 – *Erotic Knock-Down Macbeth*, with all its apparent frivolous campiness, shows us that Nakayashiki is committed to making Shakespeare’s works meaningful in the context of the here-and-now in Japan in the 2010s, where laborers in service sectors are being harshly exploited. Macbeth (performed by an actress, Yurika Fukaya) is a waiter at what is called the *shitsuji kissa* (butler’s café)<sup>8</sup> and Lady Macbeth (Akiko Uchida) is a waitress at a so-called *meido café* (maid café)<sup>9</sup>. With the three witches in sexy bustiers, garter belts, and high heels, singing and dancing in burlesque style, and Hecate (performed by an actress, Ogata Agatha) strangely looking like a drag queen, Macbeth’s Scotland is set in a pleasure-quarter business world in today’s Japan. Duncan is the president of a company owning these businesses.

In his interview in the pamphlet, Nakayashiki declares his Shakespearean adaptations to be drama-themed on labor issues. He styles the company in his *Macbeth* adaptation on what is termed “black companies”: companies, mostly in the service sectors, exploiting employees with low pay and poor working conditions. Macbeth is described as a *shachiku* to the firm—literally, a domestic animal (*chiku*) serving his firm (*sha*) faithfully—a Japanese workaholic. In the original version, when he greets Duncan on returning from the war, Macbeth says, “The service, and the loyalty I owe, / In doing it, pays itself” (1.3). In the adaptation, Macbeth says, “The work you kindly assigned me gives me the utmost happiness and self-fulfillment. To work for you and your company is the very reason I am living for.” Thus, in Nakayashiki’s adaptations, Shakespeare’s works are reused to combine tacky campiness with a critique of the world where everything is commodified.

### “Shakespeare even the dumbest person can understand”—Future Century Shakespeare (2008–2009)

Having written all the above, it must be admitted that stage directors such as Inoue and Nakayashiki hold a certain degree of reverence toward the authority of Shakespeare. Other media is even more audacious to

<sup>8</sup> In *shitsuji kissa*, waiters dress themselves in Victorian-style butler’s suits. They welcome patrons saying, “Welcome back, Lady/Lord.” In the regular type of *shitsuji kissa*, Caucasian men are employed to be butlers; there is a particular type of *shitsuji kissa*, where (Japanese) women, cross-dressed as butlers, serve customers. The *Macbeth* adaptation, where Macbeth in a butler’s suit is performed by an actress, would be evocative of the latter.

<sup>9</sup> Themed cafes, where waitresses “cosplay” (play in costume) in chambermaid uniforms from the Victorian Age (but with short skirts and low necklines) serve patrons.

“unshakespeare” Shakespeare.

The TV adaptation series, titled *Future Century Shakespeare* (*Mirai seiki sheikusupia*) would be one of the good examples of “Shakespeare unshakespeared.” The scenes are set in today’s Yokohama, Japan. The characters, played by members of a pop group (AAA), are dressed in fashionable bad boy/bad girl style, and they sometimes say their “Shakespearean” lines in rap rhymes: either in Japanese or in English, with an emphatically Japanese accent<sup>10</sup>. The TV adaptation uses or abuses Shakespeare’s works in order to express social, political, and cultural anxieties in today’s Japan, including its aging society, youth who have no hope for their futures, and a society that is perceived to be rapidly becoming multi-ethnic.

The opening sequence describes almost everything about the TV adaptation’s “Shakespeare is no fun” attitude.

- A: Dumb as you are, you must have heard the title, *Romeo and Juliet*, at least? ... For you, Shakespeare might be too profound.  
 B: My image of Shakespeare—old guys wearing red wigs and false beards doing too many theatrical gestures and over-actions ...  
 C: Scholars and critics have made Shakespeare too difficult for mere commoners to understand, with their philosophical interpretations and acting method theories ...  
 B: To be, or not to be! [In rap rhyme]  
 D: Is it not in rhyme?  
 B: It’s Shakespeare.  
 D: Whose rhyme is it?  
 B: I’m saying, it is Shakespeare.  
 A: “Shakespeare is so hip and hop, check it out.” That’s the theme of this TV drama. In other words, this TV show offers, “Shakespeare even the dumbest person can understand.”

The TV series adaptation is “Shakespeare even the dumbest person can understand”: a Shakespeare made to fit into today’s tastes for the quick, easy, and fashionable. The TV adaptation is proud to be “a dumbed-down Shakespeare rewritten in the idiom of mass culture” (Boose and Burt 2). The TV adaptation shows off its self-consciousness about its own fakeness, inauthenticity, and tackiness by various means, including a Shakespeare robot with a hip-hop cap,

<sup>10</sup> Another rap adaptation of Shakespeare in Japan is Nagasumi’s live performance of his “*Romeo and Juliet* in rhyme,” set in today’s Tokyo, seen from the eyes of Paris (Jan. 11, 2009, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo). Nagasumi ridicules some Shakespearean virtuoso directors in Japan such as Hideki Noda and Yukio Ninagawa, calling them “theater geeks” who do not understand Shakespeare’s rhyme. These hip-hop or rap performers are reclaiming Shakespeare as belonging to their own subculture tribe, not to “theater geeks” or “nerdy” academics.

characters wearing T-shirts with Shakespeare as a monkey, as a sheep, and as a mouse resembling Mickey Mouse. The *Othello* episode emphasizes the fact that Shakespeare’s name and his works in themselves have almost no cultural significance in today’s Japan. Osero (indistinguishable from “Othello” in Japanese pronunciation) is, first and foremost, the name of a board game produced by a Japanese company. The game is played by two players on a board with a set of distinct pieces (typically disks with a white and a black face). The modern rules originated from Mito, Japan, in the 1970s. The name was selected as a reference to the Shakespearean play *Othello*, referencing the conflict between the Moor Othello and Iago, who describes himself as “two faced,” or, to the marriage between Othello and Desdemona.

In the TV adaptation, in the *Othello* episode, the Shakespeare figure (who appears throughout the series as a director of an amateur theatre troupe) plays the board game Osero with his assistant. The assistant suddenly realizes that the board game’s name, Osero, derives from his master’s work, *Othello*. The camera catches the amateur theatre group’s poster for their *Othello* production, which has a line explaining that their Othello is Shakespeare’s Othello, not the board game Osero. The Shakespeare figure plaintively says, “Couldn’t I receive a copyright fee?” He refers here to the company of the board game Osero, because it derives its name from the title of his work. In this way, the TV adaptation, half jokingly, half seriously, highlights the fact that Osero (Othello) is a board game, and how “Shakespeare” in Japan has lost almost any reference to the Bard’s work.

The TV adaptation surely “abuses” Shakespeare. However, it is successful in making Shakespearean stories more meaningful and relatable in today’s Japan. The *Othello* episode reflects the widening class–income disparity in Japan and the increasingly impoverished status of manual laborers. The *Othello* figure is a mechanical engineer: though hardworking and proud of his professional skills, he cannot earn much, and he always wears gloves to hide his hands, blackened with machine oil. The *Desdemona* figure is a children’s nurse, whose job is more “clean” and white collar in nature, thus, more respected. The gap between blue-collared jobs and white-collared jobs is widening, making Japan, formerly said to be a country where almost everyone is (lower) middle class with a steady income, into a ruthless, dog-eats-dog country. The TV adaptation tries to explain the cause of the tragedy in terms of the widening gap in Japanese society, attempting to make the increasing disparity easier to comprehend by the masses.

In some senses, the TV adaptation series is another tribute to the Bard, in that it revives and renews his works, making them relevant to today’s society. It shows a love for Shakespeare in particularly twisted ways, mixing reverence with irreverence, adoration with sarcasm. It does not keep his works at a reverential distance, but it dares to “recycle” them, even though the writers are

also eager to deconstruct the tragic grandeur in his work by, in the case of the *Othello* episode, turning the tragic love story into a sordid story of double adultery: the Desdemona figure is actually having an affair with the Cassio figure and gets married to him, instead of to the Othello figure.

### **Romijuri**

Almost every Japanese person would understand the term *romijuri*, short for *romio to jurietto*, even though she or he may never have read Shakespeare. *Romijuri* has become an overall term to describe a tear-jerking love tragedy without specific reference to the Bard's work. Parodying *romijuri* as nothing but boring and banal convention has also become part of Japanese youth culture.

A girl plays Juliet, and a boy plays Romeo in a high-school festival—inevitably, they must fall in love. In the “Kissing is Such Sweet Sorrow” episode of the super-popular manga and anime (animation) *Ran'ma 1/2*, (manga 1987–1996; anime 1989–1992), Akane performs Juliet and Ranma plays Romeo in the school festival. The girl and the boy believe that they belong to rivaling dojos (Japanese martial arts schools), but there is no such family antagonism. Their families want them to fall in love, and attempt to use the occasion of the school performance for that purpose. One hilarious Shakespeare take-off is *Even a Monkey can Draw Manga*, a manga guidebook on how to draw manga (Aihara and Takemura). It has an episode explaining how to draw a successful *shojo* manga (a Japanese comic for girls). The key to success is strictly to follow the *shojo* manga convention, even though it is foolish and banal. The girl, hurrying to school, bumps into a boy on a street. At first—in *Twilight* fashion—they have a terrible impression of each other. When the girl knows the boy has a tender heart, she is ready to fall in love. They play Romeo and Juliet in the school festival, and, of course, they fall in love. Here, *romijuri* is no more than a banal, worn-out *shojo* manga convention to be parodied. In a sad vein, in *Socrates in Love* (the novel by Kyoichi Katayama, 2001; manga version 2004; Film 2004), a mega hit, the girl plays Juliet and later dies of blood cancer. Sounds familiar? Yes, *Love Story*, a film (1970) based on Erick Segal's novel, deriving from Shakespeare's work, is one of the sources of *Socrates in Love*. It is a well-made, terminal-illness tearjerker, and the Romeo boy says, “I am a Romeo who must live on after Juliet's death.”

One needs high literacy levels in Japanese pop culture, rather than literacy in Shakespeare, to understand the *romijuri* and *osero* phenomenon. In these genres, “Shakespeare” is no more than a shallow, hollow sign to be recycled. One good point about Shakespeare's works is that the story lines are fairly simple and easy to copy.

### **What Happens when Romeo and Juliet Becomes a Gambling-Machine Story?**

The animation, *Romeo X Juliet* (2007; GONZO), is a supreme romijuri, adept at making the most of the global brand name of Romeo and Juliet. Also remarkable is the fact that not only is it an adaptation of Shakespeare’s work, but that it has become a source to be adapted in itself in various mediums and formats, including the pachinko gambling machines.

The scenes are set in the aerial city of Neo Verona. Tyranny rules this island in the sky after the Montague family took control 14 years previously. The disparity among the wealthy and poor is apparent in the present state. Romeo is the son of the current Montague dictator. Juliet, masquerading as a man, is the last descendent of Capulet, the previous rulers (Anime News Network).

Dani Cavallo, in *Anime and the Art of Adaptation*, documents and analyzes various cases of anime adaptations of classic tales, including the anime version of the *Tales of Genji*. He states that *Romeo X Juliet* “participates in the process of Shakespearean relocation” and it approaches the Bard’s work not as “a stable and immutable point of reference” but as “the raw material for potentially endless textual metamorphoses.” According to Cavallo, the anime, while it takes some “daring liberties in its reconception” of Shakespeare’s work, nevertheless is “loyal to the source text in positing the conflict between love and duty as pivotal to the drama” (100). Producers and consumers of the same work, however, seem to be more rebellious and take more liberties against the authority of the Bard.

Which is more global—and hence more lucrative—Shakespeare or manga/anime? There have been some heated debates over the significance of this anime-version among English-speaking anime fans. Some of the global anime fans were enraged at the anime as it “abused” the brand name of Romeo and Juliet. Other anime fans were unsatisfied as it did not fulfill the high quality expected of an anime produced in Japan. The production team of *Romeo X Juliet* (GONZO K.K.) has not even hidden the fact that they are using Shakespeare as a marketing gimmick. The president of the production team was reported to have said at a press conference: “What would be the best means to make GONZO’s works to be accepted by Hollywood fans. The answer is to adapt *Romeo and Juliet*. ... To be popular only in Japan is not good enough. I would seek the global launch of GONZO’s works—I want to make them go mainstream on a global scale” (Press Conference Review).

*Romeo X Juliet* is a story about a girl dressed as a boy. We, as Shakespearians, are fairly familiar with the vertiginous effects of cross-dressing, as when Olivia (performed by a boy actor in Shakespeare’s days) falls in love with Cesario without knowing “he” is actually a girl, Viola (performed by a boy actor). If I run the risk of self-exoticizing myself, I could boast that Japan has its

own “tradition” of literature/theatre about a boy-dressed-as-a-girl/a girl-dressed-as-a-boy, dating back at least to the 12th century (Torikaebaya monogatari). The convention has also become part of a less classic culture to which *Romeo X Juliet* belongs: anime and manga. The adaptation’s Juliet is a girl-revolutionary dressed as a boy, following the convention of a girl-dressed-as-a-boy in Shakespearean plays, of course, but also following the “tradition” of transvestite girls in Japanese manga, including Revolutionary Girl Utena (Utena, a girl-dressed-as-a-boy, fights against male paternalism by determining to become a “prince”; 1997, dir. Kunihiko Ikuhara; see Kotani) and Princess Knight by Tezuka Osamu (Sapphire, a princess forced to be dressed as a prince because of patriarchal law forbidding a girl to inherit the throne; 1954–1968). In these instances, both manga/anime tradition and Shakespeare are “ripped-off” and “bastardized” by the adaptation, *Romeo X Juliet*.

Furthermore, *Romeo X Juliet*, apart from being an adaptation of Shakespeare’s original (which itself could be understood as a spin-off of other older stories), has become an “original” to be reused, recycled, parodied, and put to different uses. An extreme case is a pachinko gaming device (vertical pinball/video slot machine) named CR *Romeo X Juliet* (2009, Toyomaru Industry). One can win the game if one completes the story of the pachinko game, which is based on *Romeo X Juliet*. Thus, the pachinko game is an adaptation of an adaptation of Shakespeare. The pachinko device, CR *Romeo X Juliet*, takes further liberties by daring to adapt the Bard’s classical tale of tragic romance into the gambling machine.

Here, romijuri re-organizes the groupings of subculture tribes as well. Previously, otaku “geeks” of manga/anime and pachinko fans used to inhabit two, quite separate cultural spheres with no interaction between the groups. The last decade saw an intermingling of these two tribes, when the pachinko industry incorporated manga/anime visual materials and stories into the pachinko machines. Then, otaku manga/anime fans were lured into gambling on the pachinko machines featuring manga/anime. However, recently, the direction has reversed; now pachinko fans learn about manga/anime stories and visuals by playing pachinko games featuring them, and sometimes go on to watch/read manga/anime. In the case of CR *Romeo X Juliet* pachinko, the gamblers might go back to the “original” anime, *Romeo X Juliet*, only vaguely conscious that the anime derives from Shakespeare’s work. Which is the authoritative “original” of CR *Romeo X Juliet*: anime *Romeo X Juliet* or Shakespeare’s work? Is there the possibility that pachinko gamblers, after watching the anime, will go back to the original story by Shakespeare? Alternatively, for them, will *Romeo and Juliet* remain merely as the name of the pachinko machine?

**Let’s Hack!**

In his preview article on the World Shakespeare Festival (April 2012), Andrew Dickson writes that “while we in Britain like to imagine Shakespeare is ours alone, the reality is that he has long since slipped over the border.” While “most British directors” hesitate to meddle with “the sacred text,” non-British Shakespearean directors have “a glorious freedom in ... Shakespearean reinvention” without being too much “troubled by notions of authenticity.” The adaptations and spin-offs studied in this article ransack Shakespeare’s works, hacking them with almost no respect to “the sacred text.” Obviously, it could be argued that these tacky “shakespeares” are no more than populist consumer goods to be bought, enjoyed, consumed, then thrown away and forgotten immediately afterward, while “authentic” Shakespeare is durable, beyond time, and beyond consumerist aesthetics. Yet, we are living in the material world, where it is doubtful whether durable goods are better than ephemeral commodities, where even Shakespeare is “the flagship commodity” in the globalized cultural market, where (cultural and material) commodities can produce their value only out of their exchange value, and not out of their essential value. Adaptations, spin-offs, and pirated aspects of Shakespeare’s works are a great means to put them into global circulation.

Shakespeare has only limited authority. I have here attempted to illustrate how (in)significant or (un)influential Shakespeare, as a residual socio-cultural icon, can be. Paradoxically, however, it is tacky conventions such as romijuri and osero that can keep Shakespeare as some sort of authority, though it is an authority to be ridiculed and parodied. Additionally, these genres keep Shakespeare’s works in constant circulation in the pop-culture market. Japanese pop Shakespeares, proudly and assertively tacky, offer tributes to the great Bard: as long as Japanese culture has romijuri and osero, Shakespeare will survive.

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