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Graphic Drama: Reading Shakespeare in the Comics Medium

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English
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GRAPHIC DRAMA: READING SHAKESPEARE IN THE COMICS MEDIUM

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

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The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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Abstract

This project adopts a formalist method of literary analysis to approach the modern genre of Shakespearean comic book adaptations. These texts have as yet received little attention from the academy, despite their sophisticated engagement with problems of visualizing the transition from stage to comics page, as well as their capacity for making original contributions to the interpretation of Shakespearean drama. The formalist method that this thesis employs is derived from the foundational work of comics theorists Will Eisner and Scott McCloud, combined with an understanding of Shakespearean language and stage conventions. Once this method is developed and explained, the dissertation uses it in a series of readings demonstrating the ability of Shakespearean comic books to emulate and elaborate on early modern staging practices, engage sensitively and imaginatively with Shakespeare' literary language, and actually contribute to interpretive scholarly discussion of Shakespearean drama. Although many texts are examined, there is a particular emphasis on versions of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Macbeth*, which represent two extremes of the comics medium's versatile formal engagement with Shakespearean themes.

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Epigraph

"Cricket is an art. Like all arts it has a technical foundation. To enjoy it does not require technical knowledge, but analysis that is not technically based is mere impressionism."

- C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (178)

"To prescribe what [the poet] shall try to do is less reasonable than to hope that he will do something we should not have thought of suggesting."

- I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (148)

"What we've got is the most portable, limitless, intense, personal, focused, intimate, compelling, wonderful visual medium in creation."

- Jim Shooter, Foreward to *The Comic Book* (6)

Introduction

Why Shakespearean Comics?

From 1989 to 1996, celebrated writer Neil Gaiman authored the *Sandman* comic book

series, one of the most acclaimed productions in the history of the medium. The

nineteenth entry in the series is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1990) and it presents a

fantastical version of an early performance of the famous play. Much of Shakespeare's

dialogue finds its way into Gaiman's script, prompting this comment from the series'

Assistant Editor Tom Peyer:

> William is new to comics, but we think he did a fantastic job helping Neil with
>
> our play-within-a-play's dialogue. We would ordinarily predict great things ahead
>
> for this hot British talent, but, unfortunately, he died over three centuries ago. Too
>
> bad; he might have written the definitive Batman story. (Round 95)

The idea of treating William Shakespeare as a hot new talent in the field of comics is of

course, on the one hand, distinctly humorous. The humour is intensified by Peyer's

affected attitude of superiority, acknowledging Shakespeare as a "hot British talent," as if

the author of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* required the approval of a twentieth-century

editor for his legitimization. Yet I read the humour of this passage not only as subtly self-

deprecating on Peyer's part, but also as a joking comment on the transferability of literary

authority to a different cultural sphere. It is as if Peyer is jokingly saying, "Sure,

Shakespeare's plays may be at the centre of the Western canon...but will Batman fans be

impressed?" More seriously, however, Peyer's remark speaks to the inherently graphic

nature of Shakespearean drama. If Shakespeare were writing today, he might well

produce the definitive Batman story, just as he has produced definitive accounts of figures

like Julius Caesar and Richard III, establishing them more firmly in popular imagination

than any other representations. Furthermore, Shakespeare's plays were written in order to

be made visual on the early modern stage.[1] Over the centuries, the visualization of

Shakespeare has taken many forms: theatre, painting, sculpture, opera, film, and others.

Comic books are one more form of such visualization, and like the others they warrant an

approach that attends to their specific nature.

Additionally, Peyer's remark has also proved somewhat prescient, because comic

book versions of Shakespearean plays, particularly since 2007, have enjoyed an explosion

of popularity, with a large number of publications in only a short time.[2] Recent years

have also seen a great increase in the popularity of the comics medium in general. As

Robert G. Weiner observes, "in a world that is going more and more with digital content,

graphic novels are one of the last varieties of the printed form that are gaining popularity

as each year goes by" (Weiner 5). He also adds that "Graphic novels are now an

established part of the library and academic worlds, despite those who may still thumb

their nose at them" (5). While it is true that the medium of comics has endured a great

deal of nose-thumbing over the last eight decades, increased publication and increased

acknowledgement by critics has confirmed the cultural significance of comics, and the

ranks of the detractors are growing thinner all the time.

Gaiman is by no means the first to try his hand at adapting Shakespeare to the comics

medium. Shakespearean comic books begin in 1949 with the series Famous Authors

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[1] Certainly it is possible to make a case for Shakespeare as a literary dramatist who did indeed write with a reading audience in mind, but the position remains controversial. For a particularly strong case for this point, see:
Erne, Lukas. *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
[2] The years since 2007 have seen the publication of the Manga Shakespeare series, the Classical Comics series, the No Fear Shakespeare series, and the Manga Edition series, as well as individual titles such as Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet* and Marvel Comics' *Romeo and Juliet: The War*, for a total of nearly 30 books.

Illustrated. The issues were cheap, the texts were heavily abridged, and the series was ultimately short-lived; nevertheless, Famous Authors Illustrated did manage to produce versions of *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* all in the same year. Much more successful was the famous Classics Illustrated series, whose first Shakespearean title was *Julius Caesar*, published in 1950. After this came *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1951), *Hamlet* (1952), *Macbeth* (1955), and *Romeo and Juliet* (1956). Albert Kanter, the creator of the series, specifically intended it as a means of introducing young readers to the great, classic literature that he loved, and was anxious to produce a high-quality product worthy of his source texts (Jones 11). The series was highly successful, lasting from 1941 (under the name "Classic Comics") to 1971 (Jones 1). Classics Illustrated also enjoyed a brief revival in 1990; although this revival series only lasted for a year, it included a version of *Hamlet*.

Since the original Classics Illustrated, there have been a number of comic book series that included at least some Shakespearean plays, including Barron's Graphic Classics, Campfire Graphic Novels, Pendulum Illustrated Classics, Shakespeare Comic Books, and Workman Publishing. These have been thinly scattered, compared to the intense burst of publications that was to come in the twenty-first century. Many of these series shared Kanter's aim of introducing Shakespeare to young children, on the assumption that the comics medium is essentially simple and easy, and therefore suitable for young people who are reluctant readers, or who are not yet ready for real literature. There exists a major strand of comics studies which foregrounds this view, and I discuss it later in this chapter. The notable exception to this trend is Ian Pollock's *King Lear* (1984) which shows no particular indication of being intended for a young audience, or as an introduction to Shakespeare for beginners. Rather, it is a robust comics staging of the

play in its own right, in contrast to the majority of titles produced from the 1970s to the 1990s which aimed at simplification and easy comprehension for young people.

In 1998 and 2000, children's author and illustrator Marcia Williams produced two volumes of Shakespearean adaptations, covering fourteen plays in total. While these resemble many earlier publications in their stated intention to introduce young people to Shakespeare, Williams' approach of incorporating the space of the early modern theatre into her visualization is distinctive and worthy of special mention because it constitutes a radical new approach to the question of how to depict Shakespearean drama in the comics medium. The reader of Williams' version does not just regard the dramatic action of the play but also the social, material, and interpretive context in which that action is performed. Even more fascinating is the fact that this depiction is not simply a literal recreation of the early modern stage but something more complicated, as I will discuss at much greater length in Chapter 2.

Over the last seven years there has been a flurry of publications in the area of Shakespearean comics, produced by a wide range of publishers; these have been so many and so varied that it is difficult to generalize about their different functions and approaches. Certainly a series like No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels, published by Sparknotes, is explicitly intended to provide study aids for students, although the practice taken by this series in translating Shakespeare's writing into more modern English often obscures, erases, or distorts the literary features of the language in ways that strictly limit the capacity of these comics for engaging with Shakespeare.[3] The Saddleback Illustrated Classics series, intended for young children, includes twelve Shakespearean plays, as well as versions of thirty-three novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This series

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[3] I discuss a brief example from this series in Chapter 4.

streamlines Shakespeare's text even further, offering text that is not even the line-by-line translation of No Fear Shakespeare, but rather simple statements in modern English that serve to convey some of the basic thoughts and emotions of the characters and move the story through the necessary plot points. While this mode of presenting Shakespearean stories might serve to capture the interests of young children, and might also help them to follow a complicated plot, it enables no complex engagement with Shakespearean language or theatrical practice.

Yet for many of these current series, their status as educational aids or as children's introductions is not so easily established. The Manga Edition series is published by CliffNotes, and one would therefore expect it to fall entirely and decisively within the same category as No Fear Shakespeare: Shakespeare comics intended entirely as a study aid for students. Yet this would not be an accurate description at all. The promotional blurbs on the backs of the different volumes in the series[4] make no reference to school or study, but emphasize the interest and excitement of the story itself. Perhaps even more importantly, Adam Sexton's introductions to the various plays (consisting of a general introduction common to all, followed by a shorter play-specific introduction) completely avoid such study-aid materials as author biography, character description, and plot summary. Instead Sexton devotes his introduction to arguing for the virtues of the comics medium and its appropriateness and effectiveness as a mode of presenting Shakespearean drama. Furthermore, the artistry of this series far exceeds the requirements for a version intended only as a study aid, and it would be entirely unfair to conclude, simply on the

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[4] These include the Shakespearean plays *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as the non-Shakespearean novels *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Scarlet Letter*.

basis of the publisher, that it does not produce worthwhile productions of Shakespeare's plays.

Another highly notable series is Classical Comics which, in addition to such nineteenth-century titles as *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations*, *Dracula*, and *Frankenstein*, has also produced versions of *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, and *Henry V*, with versions of *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* forthcoming. This series is in many ways explicitly intended and marketed as a study-aid, with the Shakespearean plays coming in three different versions: Original Text, Plain Text, and Quick Text. The Plain Text version translates the language of the plays into modern English, while the Quick Text version reduces the dialogue to short, simple phrases, designed to allow even very weak readers to make some sense of the story. Yet despite this emphasis on youth education, the Original Text editions of Classics Comics Shakespeare resembles the Manga Edition in achieving a level of complexity that identify these comics as first-rate versions of Shakespeare in their own right. The Manga Shakespeare series comprises an impressive fourteen titles, including some infrequently produced plays, such as *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Henry VIII*. The series is, to an extent, marketed as a study guide, although the promotional blurb on the back of each book seeks to subvert that function to an extent by advertising the series as "much more fun than a study guide" (Mustashrik , back cover). Yet the series casts its net much wider than this, insisting upon its broad appeal to various types of reader: "Whether it's for school or for relaxation, whether you're a fan of manga or of the Bard, *Manga Shakespeare* won't disappoint!" (Mustashrik, back cover). While there may be a danger in attempting to be all things to all readers (or at least many things to many readers) I maintain that Manga Shakespeare does indeed have something to offer both to devotees

of the comics medium and to devotees of Shakespeare, as it is responsible for many of the

most daring, innovative, and complex of all Shakespearean comics adaptations. And still

it is only one of the dozens of Shakespearean comics, published across several different

series, each providing a different perspective on the playwright's work.[5]

The analytical approach to the comics medium that I adapt from formalist comics

theory could be applied to any works produced in the comics medium, and there are many

great comic books that deserve (and, in recent years, are beginning to receive) critical

attention, with more excellent works being produced all the time. Yet Shakespearean

comics seem to me especially worthy of attention, and not just because of the canonical,

high-culture status of the plays. One reason is that these comics adaptations represent a

new mode of visualization for dramatic literature in modern visual culture. Unlike

comics that are based on original stories, and are therefore intended from their inception

to take the specific visualized form of a comic book, adaptors of Shakespearean comics

must take a text written for the stage and find ways to accommodate it to this modern

medium. In Chapter 2 I will engage in a detailed discussion of how this stage-to-page

conversion works; for now I will simply say that the medium of comics is in many ways

ideally suited to the task of visualizing texts originally intended for the blank early

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[5] I must here devote a little space to the Canadian comic book series *Kill Shakespeare*, written by Anthony
Del Col and Conor McCreery and illustrated by Andy Belanger, Ian Herring, and Kagan McLeod. The
series is a sort of fanfiction, which incorporates characters from various Shakespearean plays and gives
each a role in an original adventure story. The idea of Shakespeare fanfiction has its precedents. Although
its tone and content is very different, *Kill Shakespeare* calls to mind such nineteenth-century efforts as
Mary Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare`s Heroines*, in which Clarke elaborates on the early
lives of various female characters from the plays, freely creating new characters and incidents that seem to
her appropriate. *Kill Shakespeare* is not, of course, supposed to have real continuity with Shakespeare's
stories. The formalist reading method that I develop in this dissertation does indeed work with a text like
Kill Shakespeare, but I have decided to leave it out of this study, as it has little relationship to
Shakespeare's work, beyond the names of the characters, and some of their basic personality traits. Neither
its plot nor its language is derived from the text of the plays.

modern stage, and this visualization provides skilled comics artists with the opportunity for subtle and inventive manipulations of the comics format.

Another reason why Shakespearean comics should be of special interest to aficionados both of Shakespeare and of comics is that every comic book involves interplay of words and images[6] and it is a truism that Shakespeare's use of words is as complex and poetic as that of anyone in English. To understand this language, and to arrange it effectively within the comics-appropriate devices of the text box and speech balloon, and to provide images to accompany it that engage sensitively with its complexities, is a challenge for the comics artist.[7] To be sure, there exists a danger that an artist might not be up to the task, and may either misunderstand Shakespeare's language, or fail to devise artwork that interacts meaningfully and effectively with it, but these sorts of hazards attend any adaptation of Shakespeare – in stage, film, comics, radio, and other media. In this dissertation I focus on those comics that I think exhibit a particularly sensitive engagement with Shakespeare's language, as well as a particularly ingenious creativity in accompanying it with sequences of images, truly stretching the limits of the medium in terms of the effects it can create.

Finally, it has become commonplace to observe that every generation interprets Shakespeare for itself, in a new way. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the comics medium has come to serve as one means of doing this. This project is in some

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[6] The exception to this rule is the "wordless novel" pioneered by Flemish artist Frans Masereel in the early twentieth century, beginning with *25 Images de la Passion d'un homme* (1918). Yet by the 1940s this particular genre had passed the peak of its popularity. Although some comics do contain short wordless sequences, the true wordless novel is currently a rarity in the comics world.

[7] The comics series No Fear Shakespeare, published by SparkNotes, replaces Shakespeare's language with a modernized and simplified translation, intended to help students to understand the play. While the translation of Shakespeare (and of literary texts in general) is a substantial topic in itself, I will say here that this translation does appear to provide the comics artist with fewer and less exciting possibilities. I briefly discuss an example from the No Fear Shakespeare version of *Macbeth* in Chapter 4.

respects modeled after the work of Stuart Sillars, author of the fascinating studies *Painting Shakespeare* (2006) and *The Illustrated Shakespeare, 1709-1875* (2008).[8] One of Sillars' main contentions is that the artists who painted and illustrated Shakespearean scenes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were capable of an extraordinary level of interpretive sophistication that often anticipated the insights of literary scholars— sometimes by as much as a century or more—and that these painters should therefore be acknowledged as critics in their own right. Although I cannot, of course, speak to the insights of future scholarship that current work in Shakespearean comics may anticipate, I do maintain that the comics medium is every bit as capable of critical engagement with Shakespeare as Neoclassical and Romantic painting and illustration, and that some comics versions of Shakespeare do come up with interpretive insights that can match, or even exceed, those of academic critics.

The Name of the Medium

Before commencing the main argument of this dissertation, it will be worth devoting some attention to the problem of how to name to it. The terms "comics" and "comic book" tend to imply humorous subject matter. Even if one overlooks the imputation of triviality that comes along with these terms, they also have the disadvantage of being generically biased, seeming to preclude the possibility that a particular work in the medium might be (for instance) tragic. The failure to consistently distinguish between the medium and the genres that inhabit it has been a consistent problem in discussions of comics; for the general public, "comic book" is so synonymous with "superhero" that the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Scholars and fans of the medium have

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[8] I discuss an example of Sillars' work in detail in Chapter 4.

proposed a variety of other terms to replace "comics" although none of these has met with

universal acceptance. George Dardess argues that "The uncertainty about how to name

this new art form is symptomatic not only of the form's rawness but also of our anxiety

that the form make the best impression possible," and wonders, "Will 'graphic novel'

make others think the form is somehow lewd or violent? And if that's what they think of

'graphic novel,' will 'adult comic' reassure them, with its porn-shop ambience?"

(Dardess 213). My problem with this angle of approaching the question is that Dardess is

attempting not to unite the medium under one label but to create more divisions within it

(a term like "graphic," for instance, being suitable to some comics but not all), according

to the concerns of audience-appropriateness and artistic seriousness, concerns which are

potentially open to endless debate. When it comes to a general name that one can apply

to the whole medium, he wonders, "doesn't 'sequential art narrative' go to the opposite

extreme of overdressing the form, as if one were forcing ill-fitting formal clothing on a

kid who has worn till now only jeans and T-shirts?" (213). Perhaps more to the point,

"sequential art" emphasizes the fact that the comics medium relies upon the placing of

panels in sequence, yet neglects the other major feature of the medium, which is the

combination of words and images. I will discuss this point at greater length in Chapter 1.

Celebrated comics artist and writer Art Spiegelman has adopted the term "comix,"

explaining "I spell it *c-o-m-i-x*, so you are not confused by the fact that comics have to be

funny, as in comic. You think it is a co-mix of words and pictures" (Spiegelman,

Interview 68). This term is potentially useful in its emphasis on one of the major formal

features of the comics medium, yet it remains unpopular. The alternative term

"sequential art," referred to by Dardess, was coined by Will Eisner in 1985, and is based

upon his definition of comics as "an art form that deals with the arrangement of pictures

or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (Eisner, *Comics* 5). As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 1, the primary significance of sequentiality to the medium is a somewhat controversial topic, so this term is not ideal and is certainly not universally accepted. Another popular name is "graphic novel," although there is some disagreement about its provenance. In *Faster than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, in a discussion of Will Eisner's influential work *A Contract With God* (1978), Stephen Weiner maintains that "The first modern 'graphic novel' was written and illustrated by veteran cartoonist Will Eisner, who coined the term while trying to persuade the editors at Bantam Books to publish the book-length comic book" (Weiner 17). Michele Gorman makes the same claim in *Getting Graphic!* (Gorman xii). In fact, it is possible to trace the term much further back, to fan writer Richard Kyle's use of the term in the fanzine *CAPA-ALPHA* #2 (November 1964), published by the Amateur Press Alliance (Harvey, Letter). More important than questions of terminological provenance, however, is the problem with the term "graphic novel," which is inaccurate: comics may be "graphic" but they are very often not "novels" at all. Many of the most celebrated comic books clearly belong to other genres: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is a Holocaust narrative based closely on true events; Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* is a personal memoir; Joe Sacco's *Palestine* is a work of journalism. Indeed, even Eisner's *A Contract With God*, which Weiner cites as the first graphic novel, is actually a collection of short stories. Certainly "graphic novel" would be entirely unsuitable to describe Shakespearean plays in comic book form, which is why I have adopted the term "graphic drama" for this dissertation. Cartoonist Ben Schwartz remarks, "I wish I knew a term that covered cartoon fiction, graphic non-fiction, picto-novellas, tone poetry funnies, autobiographical comics, or doodles with words. Funny or not, I just call them comics" (10). McCloud

usefully points out that, entirely aside from concerns about implied content, the word "comics" is valuable because "it refers to the medium itself, not a specific object as 'comic book' or 'comic strip' do" (McCloud, *Understanding* 4). Whatever benefits terms like "graphic novel" might have, they necessarily refer to only one type of publication that is possible within the medium and cannot be a useful name for the medium in its entirety. For better or for worse, "comics" is the term that has stuck, and to insist upon an alternate like "comix" or to invent one of my own would be, I think, an unsuccessful effort to swim against the inevitable current of the field. For better or for worse, "comics" does indeed appear to be the term that has stuck.

The Structure of this Dissertation

The first chapter of this dissertation outlines the major trends in comics studies, and gives a detailed account of the specific formalist methods that I use in my analyses of Shakespearean comic books. I begin with a sample analysis of a page from Emma Vieceli's Manga Shakespeare version of *Hamlet*, to give an immediate sense of what my approach is and the kinds of interpretive fruits that it can bear. Then I briefly discuss the broad theoretical and methodological movement of new formalism, which advocates for the primacy of close reading within literary studies, although not in the specifically restrictive way that characterized the New Criticism. It is within this movement that I wish to situate this project, as it embraces formalist close reading, but does so with a new critical vocabulary and new objects of study, and does so without the specific constraints of expectation and approach that New Criticism requires. I also spend some time outlining the major trends within comics studies, in order to contextualize within that field both the small body of criticism that currently exists on Shakespearean comic books

and my own particular approach. Then I discuss the major comics theorists from whose

descriptive formalist theory I derive my analytical method. By far the most important of

these is Scott McCloud, and I illustrate my discussion of his work (in more than one sense

of the word "illustrate") with examples taken from two different comic book versions of

Julius Caesar. The chapter closes with a reading of a two-page example from Will

Volley's Classical Comics version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

　　The second chapter of this dissertation treats the problems and possibilities that arise

when Shakespeare's plays are adapted to the medium of comics. First there is a section

on verse and how it must be reformatted to fit the comics convention of the speech

balloon, and the effects that can be gained and lost with this kind of textual

reconfiguration. Although the transferral of verse to the medium of comics very often

results in the elimination of line-breaks, and therefore removes some of the poetic effects

of the text, comic books have their own means of arranging text that has its own set of

significant effects. Chief among these comics-specific techniques is the precise

arrangement of text boxes and speech balloons on the page, whose placement can create

specific and potent effects. I devote the rest of the chapter to the "staging" of

Shakespearean drama on the page of a comic book and explore how this medium can

imitate, accommodate, and even transform the peculiar requirements of the early modern

stage. This chapter demonstrates not only the complex engagement with Shakespearean

text and staging of which the comics medium is capable, but also the value of a formalist

approach to draw out, analyze, and interpret these complexities. The concerns that I

discuss in this chapter, in addition to being of interest in themselves, emerge again in the

more extended and detailed readings contained in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, as the various

comic books discussed therein adopt different strategies for arranging Shakespeare's text

in text boxes and speech balloons, and for deciding how best to use the radically flexible "stage space" of a comics panel in the course of performing their own interpretations of Shakespeare's text. Yet while these two chapters both emerge directly from the general formalist theory in Chapter 1 and the more specific discussions of textual placement and staging in Chapter 2, they draw upon this establishing material to showcase two different stylistic extremes within Shakespearean comics: ambiguous formal constructions that reflect interpretive dilemmas, and straightforward formal constructions that present moral situations and decisions.

Chapter 3 focuses on *The Merchant of Venice* and looks primarily at the Manga Shakespeare version of the play, published in 2011, illustrated by Faye Yong, and textually adapted by Richard Appignanesi. I also devote some discussion to Marcia Williams' version of the play in *Bravo, Mr. William Shakespeare* (2000). This play provides a particularly suitable case study as one of its major themes is the manipulative interpretation of a law that, despite initial appearances, proves to be remarkably malleable; it is also about uneasy racial representations whose status as anti-Semitic has been a matter of debate in subsequent criticism. Yong and Williams adopt different strategies for handling these interpretive concerns. The Manga Shakespeare version adopts a formal malleability that fits the themes of the play and the themes of subsequent criticism, favouring panel transitions and word-image relationships whose status is often difficult to determine, and making creative use of the highly flexible "unlocalized space" of the early modern stage, which I will have discussed in detail in Chapter 2. By this means Yong's version enacts the interpretive uncertainties that constitute much of the thematic interest in the play, and the law of Shakespeare's Venice, as well as the law of comics, experience similar stretching and twisting in the course of Yong's treatment.

Williams, on the other hand, responds to the problems of the play by transforming her pages into the space of an early modern courtroom, casting readers as a jury deciding the issues presented in the play; her formal techniques do not mimic the interpretive uncertainties of the drama but instead stages those uncertainties as the subject of a judgement that the reader is invited to make. The variety of formal devices at work in these two texts enables me to demonstrate the complexity of Shakespearean comics, as well as the utility of a formalist approach to make new contributions not only in comics studies, but also in mainstream critical debates about *The Merchant of Venice*. They also provide a sharp contrast to the formal devices exhibited in the comic book versions of *Macbeth* that I discuss in Chapter 4.

The fourth and final chapter of the dissertation addresses several different comics versions of *Macbeth*, with a particular emphasis on Alex Blum's Classics Illustrated version, Jon Haward's Classical Comics version, and Robert Deas' Manga Shakespeare version. For the purposes of this project, *Macbeth* provides a useful thematic contrast to *The Merchant of Venice*, and not just because the two represent comedy and tragedy. While *The Merchant of Venice* involves the law, as a set of written rules that are in service of particular worldly goals and which may be manipulatively interpreted by any character with the wit to do so, *Macbeth* concerns the rule of good and evil. Although the characters in the play talk themselves in and out of different moral decisions, there is no letter of the law for them to manipulate, and therefore little opportunity for creative interpretive performances. Consequently, Blum, Haward, and Deas take a set of approaches to the play's visualization strikingly different from those of Yong and Williams. The focus of my analysis is how these various versions understand and represent the nature of that play's moral universe: whether it is an orderly world ruled by

divine fate, or a world of free agents making their own moral choices, or a world of chaos

and meaninglessness, in which no meaningful moral action is possible. Various readings

of the play are possible, and the three versions that I examine in detail in Chapter 4 take

different positions. In every case, however, faced with managing this binary, they do so

forcefully – not creating ambiguous formal structures or explicitly offering matters up for

judgment by the reader, but foregrounding the moral decisions and actions of the play in a

way that makes explicit the relationship between the characters and the versions of good

and evil that prevail in each particular comics version of the play. In doing so, they

demonstrate the ability of this visual medium to engage with Shakespeare in such a way

as to create innovative and insightful interpretations of the plays that in many ways are

aligned with major trends in Shakespeare scholarship.

A Brief Note on Citation

There has not yet evolved a standardized practice for citing comic books in MLA style, or

in any other format; those publishing in the field of comics studies must do the best they

can with the conventions that exist. Part of the complication emerges from the intensely

collaborative nature of most comic book production: works produced by major publishers

will typically have, at the very least, a writer, an illustrator, and a letterer, and some

involve many more people than that. When the text is adapted from another source, the

matter becomes more complicated still. In her discussions of Shakespearean comic

books, Marion Perret chooses to cite William Shakespeare as the primary author, with the

textual adaptor listed after the title, followed by the illustrator, thus:

> Shakespeare, William. 1950. *Hamlet*. Adapted by Dana E. Dutch. Illustrated by
>
> Henry Kiefer. Famous Authors Illustrated. 8. Bridgeport, Ct: Seaboard Press.
>
> (Perret 92).

While this approach is legitimate, it emphasizes the original author at the expense of the comic book creators whose artistic and interpretive work is the occasion for there being anything to write about in the field of comics criticism. In this dissertation I want to emphasize the illustrator's role in being the ultimate determiner of the panel transitions and word-image relationships in the produced comic book and I have therefore chosen to cite the illustrator as the primary author of the comic book in this manner:

> Kiefer, Henry, illus. *Hamlet*. Famous Authors Illustrated 8. Adapted from
>
> William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Text adaptor Dana E. Dutch. Bridgeport:
>
> Seaboard Press, 1950.

While Shakespeare's text is of course completely vital, for my readings of his plays I will use the Norton edition, and cite it accordingly.

Chapter 1

Formalist Comics Theory and Shakespearean Comics

Shakespearean Comics In Action: The Gates of Elsinore

This project adopts an analytical approach based upon formalist comics theory, which

enables a detailed understanding of the complex operations of the sometimes-maligned

medium that the pioneering theorist Scott McCloud terms "the invisible art" (McCloud,

Understanding 74). This approach, combined with attention to the inexhaustibly rich

poetry of Shakespeare's writing itself, enables informed, detailed, and critical

engagement with comic book adaptations of Shakespeare in a way that contributes to the

active debates and discussions within Shakespeare criticism. As a brief example of how

the comics medium can adapt Shakespeare, and of how a formalist method can engage

with such adaptations, I will perform a reading of the first page of the Manga Shakespeare

version of *Hamlet*, illustrated by Emma Vieceli and textually adapted by Richard

Appignanesi.

The page consists of a series of three panels (see Figure 1.1). The first shows a

forbidding image the front gate of Elsinore, topped with dark battlements, upon which

two back silhouetted figures can be seen, although they may be easy to miss at a glance.

This entire panel is skewed diagonally, immediately creating an effect of uneasy

strangeness. Yet Vieceli evidently does not want the image to be too obscure, as she

places at the top of the panel a reassuringly neat, square text box which informs the reader

that this scene is set "On the ramparts of Elsinore Castle, Denmark" (Vieceli 1). This

piece of text also serves to direct the reader's attention to the figures on the ramparts and

away from the huge, looming gateway that otherwise dominates the image. This is an

instance of an "Additive" word-image relationship, which comics theorist Scott McCloud

defines as a relationship in which "words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa"

(McCloud, *Understanding* 154). The words provide a precise location for the scene and

alerts the reader to a visual detail that will become important, while the image fleshes out

the appearance of the place.

The second panel in the sequence maintains the diagonal slant of the first panel, not in

its angle of perspective on the contents of the image, but rather in its shape: Vieceli

distorts the traditional rectangular shape, forming an unequal quadrilateral. This panel

follows the cue provided by the text box above, zooming in on the two shadowy figures

on the ramparts that, in the previous panel, were scarcely noticeable. Although this image

is still shadowy and obscure, it is possible to discern that the two characters have

approached nearer to one another. This transition belongs to the category of "Subject-to-

Subject," being the type that, again in McCloud's terms, "takes us from Subject-to-

Subject while staying within a scene or idea" (McCloud, *Understanding* 71). In this case,

the Subject-to-Subject transition takes the form of zeroing in on one detail in the previous

panel and making it the primary focus. Additionally, an unattributed speech balloon here

stands between the two panels, potentially belonging to either or both of them, demanding

"Who's there?" (Vieceli 1). We do not need to choose, as it would seem to apply equally

well to each: one of the figures on the ramparts is demanding to know the identity of the

other. Again we have the question of what the relationship is between word and image,

and this time one could make a good argument for the relationship being Additive again:

the image shows us the two figures and the text informs us that at least one of them

cannot identify the other. Yet one could almost make an argument for the relationship

being "Duo-Specific," that is one in which "in which both words and pictures send

essentially the same message" (McCloud, *Understanding* 153). In this case the dominant message conveyed by both words and images simultaneously is one of obscurity, of an inability to identify someone.

Thus we begin this sequence with an obscure panel in which the key figures are shadowy and easy to miss (without a bit of help from the text box, that is) to a panel in which the figures are still shadowy and in which the speech balloon only echoes what the images already invite the reader to ask: "Who's there?" This progress from first to second panel, far from reducing the mystery of the scene and providing the reader with more information about the situation, instead simply extends the mystery. We still do not know who these figures are, or even which of them is speaking – although this second point may not matter, given that they are identical in their hooded obscurity in any case.

The transition to the third panel is also Subject-to-Subject, and again involves an increased focus and emphasis upon a single aspect of the previous image. In this case, the object of increased focus is one of the two hooded figures; it is impossible to say which one, since Vieceli provided us with no way of distinguishing them in the first place. Now the figure is no longer silhouetted, but is still unidentified, and again the accompanying speech balloon explains nothing but rather demand more information, exactly the information that the images have been inviting the reader to want: "Stand! And unfold yourself!" (Vieceli 1). Unlike the second panel, this one has no border; or, rather, the edges of the hooded figure themselves constitute the border. Rather than being set apart from the rest of the page in his own compartment, the figure thrusts into the space of the first panel. He directly faces the reader, and the imperative in the speech balloon now appears to be addressed to the reader at least as much as to the other hooded figure on the ramparts. This approach to Shakespeare's dialogue is consistent with Marjorie Garber's

reading of the scene; as she puts it, "From the point of view of a modern or postmodern production, the flung-out line 'Who's there?' seems directed almost primarily at the audience, rather than at any character on the stage" (Garber 479).

Thus this short, single-page opening sequence sets up the attitude of questioning uncertainty that characterizes the whole of *Hamlet*. Even as the panel sequencing provides a closer and closer perspective on these figures, the reader still continues to learn almost nothing about them; when Vieceli finally provides a clear look at one of them, he is still hooded, and there is no way even to know which of the two identical figures is speaking when he demands answers – demands them from the other character, and apparently from the reader as well (perhaps any answers at all would be welcome at this point). Furthermore, the content of the speech balloons consists only of demands for more information – the same information that the reader is persistently denied, at least until the next page. This comic book production of the play uses a somewhat abridged version of Shakespeare's text, a common practice in theatrical productions as well, particularly with a play as long as *Hamlet*. Yet the textual adaptor Richard Appignanesi thoughtfully retains the famous question of the first line, as well as the demand, "Stand! Unfold yourself!" which, Garber observes, "usher[s] in the cloak-and-costume imagery, and also the imagery of folded paper and writing, which will become so predominant later in the play" (Garber 479). Thus Vieceli takes the uncertainty and questioning of the first few lines of Shakespeare's play and enhances these feelings by means of a careful deployment of the lines alongside sequential images, also anticipating the more general themes of the play by constantly shifting perspectives and still failing to uncover information that would be adequate basis for a judgement. In this way Vieceli sets up the

reader perfectly for the rest of the play and does it by means of those formal devices peculiar to the comics medium.

This brief example from a comic book version of *Hamlet* should give some sense of both the capabilities of the comics medium in interpreting and presenting Shakespearean drama and of the usefulness of a formalist approach in elucidating how these interpretations and presentations work. Yet before I launch into further analysis of Shakespearean comics, I must first outline the theoretical and critical background for my approach, which emerges from the fascinating and often conflicted world of comics studies. In my view, a formalist understanding of the medium is the most valuable product of this growing field.

Obstacles to Comics Studies Research

The development of a robust field of comics scholarship in the twentieth-century has been somewhat obstructed by the disdain and distrust that the medium has endured. This negative attitude reached its height in the 1950s with the American anti-comics campaign spearheaded by Dr. Fredric Wertham who, in his 1954 book, *The Seduction of the Innocent*, condemns comic books as a major cause of perversion and delinquency in American children.[9] The anti-comics movement has been well-documented by historians of the medium[10] but the development of comics scholarship has also faced some opposition from some admirers of comics, who are reluctant to intellectualize their favourite art form, for fear of spoiling it. One particularly famous anecdote concerns an

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[9] Wertham, Fredric. *Seduction of the Innocent*. New York: Main Road Books, Inc., 2004.
[10] Wertham's anti-comics campaign is discussed in virtually all histories of comics, but for the most focused and detailed treatment see: Hajdu, David. *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

encounter between the young Will Eisner (a writer and artist who was to become a giant in the comics medium) and Rube Goldberg, who was by then already a legendary cartoonist. Eisner enthusiastically told Goldberg about his great ambitions for the medium of comics, and the towering aesthetic and cultural heights he imagined them to be capable of attaining. Goldberg reportedly replied, "That's bullshit, kid! We're not artists! We're vaudevillians! And don't you ever forget that!" (McCloud *Reinventing* 26). Likewise, cartoonist Jules Feiffer, although he authored a loving history of comic books entitled *The Great Comic Book Heroes* in 1967, nevertheless describes the medium in decidedly uncomplimentary terms:

> Comic books, first of all, are junk. To accuse them of being what they are is to make no accusation at all: there is no such thing as *uncorrupt* junk or *moral* junk or *educational* junk – though attempts at the latter have, from time to time, been foisted on us. But education is not the purpose of junk (which is one reason why *True Comics* and *Classic Comics* and other half-hearted attempts to bring reality or literature into the field invariably looked embarrassing). Junk is there to entertain on the basest, most compromised of levels. It finds the lowest fantasmal common denominator and proceeds from there. (Feiffer 186).

One might plausibly argue for a similarly base appeal in early modern drama; goodness knows what Fredric Wertham thought of John Webster's plays, if he ever happened to read or see any. Although some of his objections to the typical contents of popular comic books may have some validity, these objections seem to be possible only because comics lack the air of respectability that a few centuries of age can grant.

New Formalism

The approach that I take in this project is aligned with the more general current

movement in literary theory and criticism known as new formalism, which advocates a

return to many of the close reading practices of New Criticism without the undesirable

theoretical baggage that comes along with that school that attempts to dictate in advance

what literary texts are necessarily like and what literary authors must necessarily be

doing, or attempting to do. This definition may seem somewhat vague, but it is

necessarily so, as new formalism, as Marjorie Levinson characterizes it, "is better

described as a movement than a theory or method" (Levinson 558). While there is

naturally a great deal of space for productive debate within any such movement, the

essential common thread among the participants is that they "seek to reinstate close

reading both at the curricular center of our discipline and as the opening move,

preliminary to any kind of critical consideration" (560). I am wholeheartedly in favour of

this view and would go so far as to say that without the detailed textual engagement

enabled by close reading it is hard to know what "critical consideration" could possibly

be, or on what it could work. As Levinson puts it, "Reading [...] quite simply produces

the basic materials that form the subject matter of even the most historical of

investigations" (560). Without a close, detailed engagement with the text, the reader

(literary critic, historian, or otherwise) can have no precise, substantial evidentiary

material with which to work. If reading produces the basic materials for an investigation,

then we would do best to start out with the most careful and exact reading that we can.

Without texts, the critic has nothing upon which to work, and without a close formal

engagement with the details of those texts, the criticism produced about them is unlikely

to be very accurate, to say nothing of being detailed and nuanced.

Terry Eagleton, a critic not typically associated with new formalism, but certainly friendly both to theory and to close reading,[11] remarks in a similar vein that even if high theory no longer has the powerful hold upon the discipline of English literary criticism that it used to, we cannot afford simply to dismiss it: "It is not as though the whole project was a ghastly mistake on which some merciful soul has now blown the whistle, so that we can all return to whatever it was we were doing before Ferdinand de Saussure heaved over the horizon" (Eagleton *After* 1-2). New formalism does not entail a rejection of the insights provided by theorists in the last several decades: the aims and interests of its practitioners can be highly diverse. It is my appreciation for this inclusivity that means I do not entirely embrace the subset of new formalism that overwhelmingly emphasizes pleasure and aesthetics as the central feature of literary engagement. When Charles Altieri insists that "Students have to experience the reading of poetry as sensuous indulgence that overflows into the luscious delights of being able to stage ourselves as different identities" (Altieri 262) I cannot entirely agree. The poem he chooses as his example in this part of his essay is John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," but not every other poem (indeed, perhaps no other poem) can claim anything like such a sensual appeal. Additionally, while experiencing the identities of others is one potential purpose of literature and literary criticism, and a very important one, it is surely not the only one. The great strength of new formalism—its ability to combine close reading with a broad range of theoretical, political, and historical concerns—does not seem to me well served by an insistence upon identity, or upon any other particular sort of textual content or reader aim.

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[11] See, for instance, *How to Read a Poem* (2007).

Thus John Lennard, although he has not tended to be identified with new formalism *per se*, nevertheless seems to me to encapsulate the point perfectly:

> I do not believe a craft-based practical criticism to be incompatible with or opposed to theoretical approaches; rather, it is a helpful precursor of them all, a foundation-course in reading. To interpret a given use of form, or a rhyme, or some metrical device may involve, for any particular reader, reference to Freud, Marx, de Saussure, or de Beauvoir; it must first be noticed by the reader, and it is much easier to notice things of which you have some knowledge. (Lennard xxii).

The particular brand of formalism that I adopt in this dissertation is not meant to limit the range of interests and topics that a critic might choose to examine in the field of comics studies. Rather, I regard it as the best way to equip the critic with a knowledge of form that is suitable to the medium, and therefore enables a truly sensitive engagement with the chosen text's operations. I therefore wish to distance my project from the position that Levinson terms "normative formalism," a view of art and culture whose adherents "campaign to bring back a sharp demarcation between history and art, discourse and literature, with form [...] the prerogative of art (559). This division goes back to the work of New Criticism, which was based upon the premise that, as John Crowe Ransom famously put it, "Criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic" (Ransom 587). Ransom's perspective privileges poetry as a special kind of discourse, divided from prose: poetry is "a means of escaping from prose," "a desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre," and every poem contains "a total poetic or individual object which tends to be universalized, but is not permitted to suffer that fate" (601). For my purposes, what is particularly significant about this characterization is the tendency of New Criticism (or "old formalism," as one might be tempted to call it) to draw a line of

demarcation between literary writing (typically poetry) and every other kind of writing, awarding to literature a special status, as if it can stand independently of history, culture, and ideology.

The point receives more elaborate attention from Cleanth Brooks in his 1951 essay "The Formalist Critics" which opens with "some articles of faith" on the topic of literature and criticism. These include the claims that "the primary concern of criticism is with the problem of unity—the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form," that "literature is ultimately metaphorical and symbolic," and that "as Allen Tate says, 'specific moral problems' are the subject matter of literature but that the purpose of literature is not to point a moral" (Brooks, "Formalist" 72). Brooks deserves credit for maintaining that he does not mean to cut literature off entirely from its surrounding culture: "The poem has its roots in history, past or present. Its place in the historical context simply cannot be ignored" (74). Yet the insistence upon the unity of a text (whether successful or unsuccessful, a literary work is assumed to be aiming at unity) and upon metaphor and symbolism seems to me a betrayal of a more fundamentally useful critical attitude, advocated by I. A. Richards in *Practical Criticism* before the advent of New Criticism: "To prescribe what [the poet] shall try to do is less reasonable than to hope that he will do something we should not have thought of suggesting" (Richards 148). Literary texts may aim for unity or not (and might therefore neither succeed nor fail at it), may or may not be metaphorical and symbolic, may or may not have as their subject matter "specific moral problems," and may or may not intend "to point a moral."

Thus the main reason that I so welcome the new formalist intervention, articulated by Levinson, is that it is a formalism free of the unnecessary and unsustainable distinction between those texts that are in their ontological essence literary and those that are not, and

one that does not seek to prescribe what sorts of features its object of analysis ought to display. Indeed if this "normative formalism" were the brand of formalism that I adopted, I would be obliged to open this dissertation with an extended argument for why comic books are literary (as opposed to being merely cultural or merely historical) and therefore worthy of, and susceptible to, study. I am anxious not to be misunderstood on this point: I certainly do intend to argue that these texts are worthy of, and susceptible to, study. But I will do so through a demonstration of their complexity and of the value of their interpretations of Shakespeare, not through demonstrating that they constitute "a desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre" in their escape from the prosaic. Shakespearean comics, like any other kind of text, have formal structures and conventions, and my formalist approach involves using my knowledge of those structures and conventions to analyze and interpret these texts, and show that the results of this analysis and interpretation are interesting, and relevant both to Shakespeare studies and to comics studies. This project employs a method derived from formalist comics theory and aligned with an updated version of formalism that dispenses with what Christopher Norris terms the "quasi-theological sanctions" of New Criticism (Norris 113). This approach is designed to demonstrate the capacity of Shakespearean comics to create new visualizations of early modern drama, engage with Shakespeare's language, and offer insightful readings of the plays.

The Current State of Comics Studies

Comics studies is a varied field consisting of three main strands. The first of these is the work produced mainly by non-scholars: comic book fans, artists and writers from within the industry, popular book reviewers. Their material tends to succeed at its chosen aim of

producing works suitable for a largely non-academic readership that consist not of

detailed, scholarly interpretations of comic books, but of general histories of the form,

and of encyclopaedias that provide information on various popular authors, titles, and

publishing companies. This body of work does not emphasize analysis and interpretation

but rather straightforward information. It can be intensely detailed, but tends to be of

relatively little interest for the reader whose interests center on the artistic and literary

appreciation and interpretation of comic books, at most providing some background

information. The second body of writing on comic books that this chapter surveys is that

produced by academics, and tends to be less intent upon providing an encyclopedic range

and volume of information and more focused either on the interpretation of comic books

or on observations on the culture of their distribution and consumption. Both this body of

work and that produced by non-scholars tend to ignore those formal features that are

crucial and inherent to the medium. Eisner's and McCloud's work have the interesting

distinction of not belonging precisely to any of these three categories, both being

positioned somewhere between the first and second, as essentially formalist, analytical

works, but written by comics producers, not by scholars, and aimed at a fairly general

audience. The formalist method that their work enables is necessary to a meaningful and

productive interpretive engagement with any comic book, including those based on the

work of Shakespeare. Yet despite the acknowledged centrality of these texts within

comics studies, no one has yet converted their accounts of the operations of comics into

an analytical, interpretive method that can be fruitfully applied to the analysis not only of

Shakespearean comic books, but of comic books in general.

 The third main strand of comics theory is produced primarily by teachers and

librarians, and concerns the role of comic books in classrooms and libraries. I survey this

work here partly to draw attention to an unfortunate prejudice that occupies this aspect of comics theory, even among writers who would appear to be staunch supporters of the medium. More importantly, however, this scholarship serves as the dominant tradition from which the very small body of extant scholarship on Shakespearean comics primarily emerges, and it is this tradition to which Shakespearean comics are most immediately and obviously relevant. Although this body of work tends to be in favour of incorporating comics into the standard curriculum, and therefore seems to be advocating for the medium, it tends to regard comics as nonessential supplementary texts, particularly as learning aids for young children, giving little attention to any artistic or literary value the medium can exhibit. The idea that comics might be worth reading, even if only as educational supplements, arose in response to the very harsh criticisms of the medium in the 1940s and 1950s. George R. Reynolds declares in 1942, "As literature, I think they [comic books] are terrible" (Reynolds 17). In 1944 James D. Landsdowne maintains that comic book reading undermines the American work ethic and that they would ultimately "diminish the power of a great democracy" (Landsdowne 15). Similarly, in 1950, Roderick Ronson warns that a child who reads "these ungrammatical scraps of narrative" will inevitably lose "the sustained endeavor necessary for reading a full-length novel" (Ronson 24). Most importantly, in his 1953 book, *The Seduction of the Innocent*, Fredric Wertham, the notorious anti-comics campaigner, argued that "severe reading difficulties and maximum comic book reading go hand in had [sic]" and that "comic books are a causal and reinforcing factor in children's reading disorders" (Wertham 130).[12] This same claim that comic books will damage literacy appears again in "Masterpieces as Cartoons" by the acclaimed American poet Delmore Schwartz, published in 1954.

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[12] I discuss Wertham's work and its consequences of American comic books at greater length in Chapter 4.

Schwartz maintains that literary works adapted to the comics medium will render children unable and unwilling to engage with true literature, retaining particular vitriol for such versions of Shakespearean drama (Schwartz 53).

Yet there has been support for the medium over the decades, starting with Ruth Strang in 1943, who comes up with the most charitable conclusion that one could reasonably expect in that decade, maintaining that comic books "serve a useful transitory purpose, often stimulating an initial interest in reading and leading to the reading of books" (Strang 342). This view has been echoed repeatedly over the subsequent decades by Josette Frank in 1944 and later by Karl Koenke in 1981. Also very prominent is Stephen Krashen, in his influential book, *The Power of Reading* (2004), who characterizes comics as "light reading" and a possible means to acquiring proper literacy (Krashen 91). His admirer, Gloria Schwarz, likewise argues that comics might be "helpful in promoting the goals of traditional literacy" (Schwarz 58). Jason Ranker offers a case study of an ESL teacher who used comic books in her first-grade classroom, concluding that "Including the visual mode is an important way to support reading comprehension for all types of learners" (Ranker 304). Similarly, James W. Brown (1977), Rufus K. Marsh (1978), and Stephen Cary (2004) also argue for the benefits of comics books in the language classroom, on the grounds that they are appealing and unintimidating for semiliterate or second-language readers.[13] This idea finds support not only from teachers and literacy experts but also librarians such as Michelle Gorman (2003), Don Gallo and Stephen Weiner (2004), David Serchay (2004 and 2008), and Dale Jacobs (2007). All of these

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[13] Brown, James W. "Comics in the Foreign Language Classroom: Pedagogical Perspectives." *FLA*. (1977): 18-25.
Marsh, Rufus K. "Teaching French with the Comics." *The French Review*. 51.6 (1978): 777-785.
Cary, Stephen. *Going Graphic: Comics at Work in the Multilingual Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Neinemann, 2004.

urge the inclusion of comics in school libraries and classrooms for the benefit of reluctant readers – an intermediate step on the road to understanding other, better kinds of texts. Comic books, in this line of thought, might best be thought of as the spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down.

The librarian's perspective is not necessarily connected with child literacy: Amy Kiste Nyberg observes that "The primary reason cited in the literature for adding graphic novels to the library collection is to motivate youngsters to visit the library and thereby boost traffic" (Nyberg 34). Maureen Mooney agrees: "If you acquire graphic novels, young adults will come" (Mooney 18). Refreshingly, Francisca Goldsmith forthrightly opposes this trend, pointing out that publisher and bookstores recognize the popularity of comic books among fully literate adults and, unlike most libraries, do not "ghettoize" their comics collections to youth departments (Goldsmith 19). It is encouraging to have voices like that of Francisca Goldsmith noting this trend and speaking out in a way that might encourage a further change of attitude towards the medium of comics. Although I certainly have no objections to Shakespearean comic books (or indeed comic books in general) from having a place in school libraries and classrooms, one of the purposes of this dissertation is to demonstrate the value of Shakespearean comic books for adult readers as well – indeed, for scholarly readers.

This body of pedagogical theory on comics provides the background for work of Marion Perret, one of the very few contributors to the body of critical work that exists on Shakespearean comics. This positive attitude is suggested in the title of one of her articles, "Not Just Condensation: How Comic Books Interpret Shakespeare." Perret begins this essay with the claim that "comic books bridge what once seemed to the educational world a chasm between low and high culture"; thus she appears to dismiss the

idea that comic books are inferior products, regarding them instead as standing not beneath but alongside works of "real literature" in the classroom (Perret, "Not Just" 71). She then turns her attention to matters of critical analysis and observes that "Although many students today are sensitive to differences in culture and values, few come to a Shakespeare class knowing how to do close reading of a text, whether verbal or visual" (90). She proposes a close reading exercise for teachers to conduct in class, which involves presenting a page or small number of panels and asking "specific leading questions" about them, such as "Why would the artist choose to show a skull in the pupil of Hamlet's eye just after he has killed Polonius? What does this suggest about what Hamlet is thinking?" (90). The idea of performing close readings of Shakespearean comics, is precisely in line with the aims of my own project, although Perret has almost nothing to say about comics theory. She makes one brief reference to Scott McCloud's work, but has nothing to say about panel transitions, specific word-image relationships, or how such basic formal features might be significant in an analysis.

In any case, despite her apparent advocacy for Shakespearean comics and for the comics medium generally, some of Perret's remarks undermine that expressed view, as when she asserts that "Though their aim is to introduce readers to the stories and characters entertainingly, comic book versions of Shakespeare's plays are not just illustrated digests of plots and sketches of character: inescapably, they interpret as well as inform" (73). Although this is evidently meant to be a positive statement about Shakespearean comics, in fact it asserts that all creators of all Shakespearean comics adaptations have as their primary (and perhaps only) aim the production of an entertaining, youth-friendly format to introduce people to Shakespearean plays. Perret's views are also expressed in "More than Child's Play: Approaching Hamlet through

Comic Books," a chapter in *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's Hamlet* (2001). Despite her apparent support of the comics medium, Perret is clearly an inheritor of the pedagogical tradition that has gone virtually unchanged since Strang argued that comic books "serve a useful transitory purpose" (Strang 342). My own project seeks to preserve from Perret's work the enthusiasm and the impetus to close-read comics, but to move away from a focus on comics as educational aids and towards an appreciation for their engagement with staging practices, language, and interpretive concerns.

My approach is in some ways closer to that of F. Vance Neill, who describes Shakespearean comics as "an attempt to stage a production of a Shakespeare play without depending on the theatrical apparatus" (Neill 1) although his critical vocabulary and analytical method differs significantly from mine. He discusses Shakespearean comic books in terms of "interface," which he defines as "a lens through which a cultural artifact is seen and perceived" which "makes an argument about the artifact for which it is a lens" (Neill 2). The interface of a comic book, according to Neill, "specifically entails the ratio of text and image, the number and shape of the panels, the lettering, the amount and types of balloons, the spatial arrangements—within each panel, each page, and across the pages—the visual style of the images, and the color scheme" (Neill 3). This broad description seems to cover all bases pretty well, although in his readings, Neill overwhelmingly emphasizes artistic drawing style, with a little attention to the use of colour and the design of speech balloons. While these are certainly legitimate aspects of comics for analytical discussion, Neill never discusses panel transitions and only once refers to a word-image relationship, thus avoiding the two most fundamental structural aspects of the comics medium. Nevertheless, although Neill does not identify his project in formalist terms, his conception of the interface is essentially compatible with the

approach that I adopt insofar as he insists that "The interface of a cultural artifact [...] has meaning; and that meaning constructs an argument" (Neill 9). Every comic book version of Shakespeare constitutes an interpretation of its source material, and this interpretation could be understood as an argument for a particular understanding of Shakespeare.

Standard Approaches in Comics Studies

Comics studies has embraced a fairly heterogeneous range of approaches, although formalism has remained relatively unpopular, and the question of method has been a matter of some debate within the field. In *Reinventing Comics* (2000) McCloud specifically criticizes the purely ideological approach to comics, identifying it entirely with academic approaches to the medium. He identifies the academic study of comics as an "encouraging trend" yet notes that such study has tended to regard comics not as works of art or literature, but rather has conducted itself by "relegating comics primarily to the status of cultural artifact" (93). He explains the problem as he sees it:

> Of course, comic strips and books are culture artifacts, as any work of art is, and they are worthy of study as such -- but as the theses on sexuality in Archie Comics and the superhero as fascist metaphor continued to proliferate, a lopsided portrayal of comics emerged; a portrayal of a form driven exclusively by the culture, devoid of any independent vision. A form with no intrinsic worth, and no authors. (93-4)

Although I have some sympathy for McCloud's position, I think that a new formalist perspective on the question of comics criticism could go a long way to alleviating his concerns about ideological criticism because new formalism, as opposed to the old "normative formalism" that places so many restrictions upon interpretation, does not require there to be such a clear and sharp distinction between comics as cultural artifacts

and comics as works of art and/or literature. Once this unhelpful distinction is erased, then formalist methods of analysis may be fruitfully applied to comics either for the purposes of aesthetic appreciation or cultural critique or, indeed, virtually any other purpose a critic might have in mind.

Many other approaches to comics have considerable value as well, particularly in the various histories of the medium, whose aims are not primarily critical or interpretive but documentarian.[14] Modern literary comics series like *Classics Illustrated* are often mentioned in these histories but their specific value and their interpretive approaches to their source texts are not touched on in these works, which must maintain their focus on large-scale trends, rather than on the analysis of any particular works. Consequently, these have limited value for a primarily analytical project such as this one, although they can certainly be of help in contextualizing specific works. Many of the more recent histories of American comics are somewhat narrower in their scope, devoted as they are to particular creators and publishers.[15] One of the encouraging consequences of this narrower focus is that some of these histories of comics have begun to exhibit a greater

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[14] Among the earliest of these is Feiffer's *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (1967) which, as we have seen, determinedly avoids any engagement with his materials that might hint at snobby intellectualism. Jim Steranko, a writer and artist in the comics field, shortly afterwards authored his more scholarly and detailed catalogue of authors and titles, *The Steranko History of Comics* (1970). Other comparable works include Dick Lupoff and Don Thompson's *All in Color For a Dime* (1970), Ron Goulart's *Comic Book Culture: An Illustrated History* (1980), *The Great Comic Book Artists* (1986), and *Ron Goulart's Great History of Comicbooks* (1986), as well as Gerard Jones and Will Jacobs' *The Comic Book Heroes: The First History of Modern Comic Books* (1985). The tradition continues into the twenty-first century with titles like Shirrel Rhoades' *A Compete History of American Comic Books* (2008) and Jean-Paul Gabilliet's *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (2010). In my opinion, the best of these is Paul Lopes' *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comics Book* (2009) which benefits greatly by rooting its history of American comics in a detailed and knowledgeable engagement with the history of the publishing industry more generally. Broader in scope are David Kunzle's *The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c.1450 to 1825* (1973) and *The History of the Comic Strip: The Nineteenth Century* (1990).

[15] See Tom Spurgeon and Jordan Raphael's *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book* (2004), Dan Raviv's *Comic Wars: Marvel's Battle for Survival* (2004), Gerard Jones' *Men of Tomorrow* (2005), Robert S. Petersen's *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narrative* (2011), and Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story* (2012).

interest in engaging with the formal details, even though this does not remain their primary focus. Grant Morrison's *Supergods* (2011) is notable for devoting some attention to the formal features of the medium, including, to an extent, panel transitions and angle of perspective, although not in the detailed and systematic way enabled by Eisner and McCloud, and is focused specifically on the superhero genre. If this new trend of increasing interest in formal analysis continues, then the benefits of a systematic approach derived from Eisner and McCloud will only become more pertinent to comics studies, beyond the specific field of Shakespearean comics which, although I regard it as a supreme achievement in the comics medium, is certainly not the only aspect of the field that rewards such a detailed approach.

Discussions of form do sometimes arise in works primarily devoted to other aspects of comics. In *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers* Matthew J. Pustz discusses comic book fans as an insular community with its own subculture, yet he still takes the trouble to emphasize the fact that "comics uses a unique language that demands training and experience for full understanding," even when that is not the main focus of his book at all. Many works of comics theory, however, are less concerned with form. Martin Barker's 1989 book, *Comics: Ideology, Power, and the Critics*, approaches various comic book series using a range of methodologies, dominated by reader surveys, and statistical summaries of content. In *Comics & Ideology* (2001), Matthew P. McAllister, Edward H. Sewell, and Ian Gordon take on the interesting question of the relationship that comics have with "power differences in society," but their list of methodological approaches does not include formalism (2). Similarly, Arthur Asa Berger's *The Comic-Stripped American* (1974), an early work in the annals of comics studies, regards comics as sociological data, without any particular concern for the

technical operations of the medium. Many other works in the field of comics studies are

primarily catalogues.[16] Shirrel Rhoades' *Comic Books: How the Industry Works* (2008)

differs from these, as it devotes some space to the literary merits of comics, amidst

various other matters, primarily the operations of the comics industry, yet even in this

short section, the emphasis is not on form but on general themes and genres. In contrast,

Rocco Versaci's book, *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature*

(2007) makes a case for comics as legitimate objects for literary study on the grounds that

there exist several successful examples of acknowledged literary genres in that comics

medium. Yet although he occasionally addresses a point of formal style, this is not a

primary focus in the book, and my own work seeks in some ways to extend his point

about literary merit beyond the recognition of the comics medium's capacity for generic

diversity. Similarly, Douglas Wolk's *Reading Comics* (2007) does not take the formal

features of comics as its primary focus, but it does make a few brief forays into formalist

analysis that point towards the great benefits that such an approach could achieve. One

can find a similar emphasis in the work of Mila Bongco in *Reading Comics: Language,*

Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comics (2000); she occasionally devotes

attention to formal devices in comics, but these discussions tend to be brief. There exist

also a few titles such as Stephen Becker's *Comic Art in America* (1959), Jerry Robinson's

The Comics (1974), Tomas M. Inge's *Comics as Culture* (1990), and, which in addition to

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[16] Maurice Horn's *Women in the Comics* (1977). Alphons Silbermann and H. D. Dryoff's collection *Comics and Visual Culture: Research Studies from Ten Countries* (1986), Martha Cornog and Timothy Perper's *Graphic Novels Beyond the Basics: Insights and Issues for Librarians* (2009), Steve Duin and Mike Richardson's *Comics Between the Panels* (1998), and Bart H. Beaty and Stephen Weiner's *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels: Independents and Underground Classics* (2012) are all primarily devoted to compiling statistics about comics readership and to summarizing of the plots and typical contents of various comics series.

being essentially concerned with cultural content, are also focused exclusively on newspaper strips.

As it is, formalist comics criticism is fairly scarce, and there exists no comics criticism that is based upon a systematic application of formalist comics theory, in particular the brilliant work of Eisner and McCloud. Formalism in comics studies has received some recent support, however, from Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith in their textbook *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture* (2009). Duncan and Smith devote two substantial chapters to an excellent survey of the medium's formal properties. But when they observe that this "more formal approach to comics criticism [...] promises to enrich our understanding and appreciation for the comics art form on its own terms" we should take note of the word "promises," which unmistakably implies that this enrichment has not yet occurred, despite the fact that the relevant theoretical works have been in circulation for over two decades. Furthermore, Duncan and Smith do not name a single work of criticism that draws upon these formalist projects, even as they express the hope that such a project will come. To their credit, these scholars do not simply wait for a more fully-developed comics formalism to appear, but seek to make it happen themselves in their subsequent edited collection, *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods* (2012), a work which is undoubtedly the most complete realization to date of a real formalist comics criticism. Even so, formalism is only one focus of the book, as it is also devoted to a broad range of concerns within comics studies, including elucidating industry procedures and studying comics readers as a social group.

My push for a formalist approach to the medium, which I identify with the broader movement of new formalism, is not intended to replace these approaches, or to position them as inferior, but to urge the adoption of a set of interpretive tools that can only help in

these investigations, whether they be of Shakespearean comics (a trend of study that I hope to encourage) or of other texts. Here I recall Levinson's crucial point: "Reading [...] quite simply produces the basic materials that form the subject matter of even the most historical of investigations" (Levinson 560).[17] An understanding of panel transitions, word-image relationships, and the other formal analytical categories with which comics theory can equip the critic, will not stifle or replace the concerns and methods of ideological criticism, but provide them with new vistas of substantive textual evidence upon which to base their claims and arguments. Other benefits of a new formalist approach may be slightly more difficult to spot, both because the movement is fairly broadly defined, and because, unlike many other approaches, it does not require that the critic pay special attention to particular kinds of subject matter. Rather, what new formalism does is to free the critic from the kinds of restrictions codified by Brooks in his "articles of faith." Consequently, the critic may approach these texts without assuming or insisting from the start that they must be (or must strive to be) formally and thematically unified, without assuming that they must be metaphorical and symbolic, without assuming that they must never point to a moral, and (perhaps most importantly) without assuming that a literary text is, on a deep ontological level, inherently different from other kinds of text, and that it must exhibit this kind of difference before it is susceptible to formalist analysis. This is what I mean when I refer earlier to New Criticism's "baggage" – baggage that formalism can happily jettison as it moves forward into this newer, less restrictive phase.

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[17] To "historical" one might readily add "ideological," "cultural," "political," "feminist," "queer," and "mythic" – and a good deal more besides.

Formalism in Comics Studies

In *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History*, Robert C. Harvey opens by arguing

for a formalist approach specifically tailored to the medium:

> Because comics are narratives, many critics and students of the medium treat
>
> comics as they do another storytelling medium, literary fiction. The emerging
>
> critical canon is consequently laced with discussions of plot, character
>
> development, theme, and all the rest of the apparatus of literary criticism. But this
>
> approach ignores the narrative function of the pictures in comics. (Harvey 3)[18]

Harvey concludes, "No serious consideration of the art of the comics can overlook the

narrative function of pictures" and calls for "a vocabulary and a critical perspective

forged expressly in the image of the form" (3). He maintains that "Before we can

properly understand the aesthetic history of the medium—how it emerged and

developed—we must be able to perceive comics in their own terms" (3-4). Indeed, such

medium-appropriate perception is sometimes necessary even for basic comprehension of

a work; as Charles Hatfield observes in *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, the

complexities of which the comics medium is capable sometimes convey mixed messages

even to experienced readers (Hatfield 132).

   The case for formalism in comics studies is also made in part by Duncan and Smith,

who follow the majority of comics scholars in maintaining that the effort to understand

comics in their own terms as a medium begins properly with Will Eisner's 1985 book,

Comics and Sequential Art (Duncan and Smith, *Power* 287). This claim is not quite fair,

as there are two earlier books that are sufficiently formalist in their emphasis that they

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[18] These concerns of literary criticism are not necessarily formalist in themselves; the problem with them is
not that they are medium-inappropriate but that there is no way for an interest in these things to intersect
with any particular medium unless they are combined with a medium-appropriate approach.

warrant brief discussion here. In *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium* (1972) Reinhold

Reitberger and Wolfgang Fuchs do pay some notice to the importance of comics form,

noting that the medium of film has gained increased respect in the critical sphere, and that

criticism of this medium has to give attention to "the manner in which the formalistic

methods of the film are employed. Film is an art in its own terms and so are comics"

(228). In the same year, Walter Herdeg and David Pascal declare that comics are their

own distinct medium and that "It is necessary to shift the emphasis [of comics studies]

from the seeming banality of many comics to a profounder understanding of their content

and mechanics as a yet little explored means of artistic expression" (Herdeg 6). Yet

although the contributors to this work take some preliminary stabs at questions of form,

they are without the advantage of the more systematic comics theory that was to come.

When it comes to comics theory, Eisner is the one whose work initially defines the

field, exceeding all previous work in being vastly more influential, comprehensive, and

analytical. Eisner's major theoretical work, *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), addresses

those formal properties that he regards as essential to the medium. Even this book,

however, does not reach the level of achievement of Scott McCloud who, in his 1993

masterwork *Understanding Comics* and in his 2006 follow-up *Making Comics*, offers a

truly fully-developed theory of the medium, his advocacy for the medium reaffirmed by

the fact that both books are not just about comic books, but actually take the form of

comics themselves. Duncan and Smith regard his work as foundational for comics

criticism (Duncan and Smith 287). According to Neil Cohn in *Early Writings on Visual

Language* (2003) "he [McCloud] provided the first comprehensive descriptive analysis of

the form" (Cohn 68). George Dardess, speaking about the need for a powerful theorist

and advocate for comics announces, "The savior has arrived, and his name is Scott McCloud" (Dardess 219).

Douglas Wolk likewise cites McCloud as a great thinker in the field of comics studies and makes a special point of arguing that comics are "not a text-driven medium with added pictures" or "the visual equivalent of prose narrative or a static version of a film" but that they are rather "their own thing: a medium with its own devices, its own innovators, its own clichés, its own genres and traps and liberties. The first step toward attentively reading and fully appreciating comics is acknowledging that" (Wolk 14).[19] There are theorists who have made useful contributions to the field subsequently to McCloud but McCloud's work remains the most central and seminal that the field has yet produced.

His project is primarily devoted to a descriptive account of the major formal structures and functions of the comics medium, and is aimed primarily at two audiences: the general public, whom he hopes to convince of comics' artistic seriousness and worth by demonstrating its complexity; and aspiring comics creators who might benefit from a technical understanding of its techniques. He does not perform detailed interpretive readings of particular comics, nor does it even occur to him to suggest that literary critics might use his theories as the basis for doing so. Nevertheless, in providing this ground-breaking and ground-laying formalist theoretical account of the medium, he sets the stage perfectly for just such a methodological step, and it is on the basis of his work primarily that this chapter derives its account of the comics medium, and with which this dissertation approaches the rich field of Shakespearean comic books.

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[19] The reference to "its own genres" is slightly troubling—a given genre can occupy various media, with no genre (not even superheroes) belonging exclusively to comics—but otherwise the statement is consistent with the formalist views of Eisner, McCloud, and Harvey.

Panel Transitions: "Closure" and the Gutter in Shakespearean Comics

For approaching Shakespearean comics and seeing how a text intended for visualization

on the stage can take new forms in the very different mode of visualization that is the

comics medium, we need to identify the most crucial features of that medium. In

defining the medium of comics, Scott McCloud makes it clear from the outset that his

definition aims to be "strictly neutral on matters of style, quality or subject matter"

(McCloud, *Understanding* 5). "To define comics," he insists, "we must first do a little

aesthetic surgery and separate form from content!" (5). This statement is accompanied by

an image of McCloud gleefully brandishing a large, sharp axe. The medical noun

"surgery," modified into comfortably safe abstraction by the adjective "aesthetic," stands

in humorous juxtaposition to the fearsome weapon in the image. This ironic combination,

as I will discuss below, would in McCloud's own terminology be termed an

"Interdependent" word-image relationship. It is at once disarmingly humorous in lending

a note of grinning violence to an entirely abstract intellectual procedure, but also

emphasizes the urgency and force with which the separation must be made. After a

quasi-Socratic discussion of the problem of definition, in which McCloud depicts himself

speaking to an auditorium full of objecting interlocutors (many of whose dark silhouettes

look suspiciously like those of famous cartoon characters) he comes up with his basic

definition of the medium of comics: "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate

sequence" (9). This is the most influential definition in comics theory, affirmed by

Duncan and Smith in 2009: "***Comics*** is a useful general term for designating the

phenomenon of juxtaposing images in a sequence" (Duncan and Smith, *Power* 3).

   One must certainly be careful in any attempt to describe the medium, because

emphasizing the uniqueness of comics can sometimes lead to inaccurate

characterizations. Rocco Versaci contrasts comics with film which, as he puts it,

"unspools at a more or less predetermined (and from the viewer's perspective,

uncontrollable) pace," pointing out that "comics creators can play with the design of an

entire page by manipulating the visuals within panels and the panels themselves within

the page to create additional layers of meaning" (Versaci 14-5). This account of the

difference between the two media is accurate, but Versaci missteps in concluding that "a

comic, in addition to unfolding temporally, also exists 'all at once,' and this existence is a

feature unique to this medium" (15). While it is perfectly true to say that a comic exists

spatially as well as temporally in a way that film, at least pragmatically speaking, does

not, it is hard to see this as a unique feature when printed text, painting, sculpture, and

other media share the same feature of simultaneous presence. Seeking to identify comics'

uniqueness in their spatial existence seems misguided.

   The most important aspect of McCloud's argument in *Understanding Comics* comes

with his discussion of "closure," which he defines broadly as the "phenomenon of

observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (McCloud 63). The type of closure that

most interests McCloud occurs in the space between panels called "the gutter" (66). In

McCloud's view closure, and the various ways in which it may occur, constitutes the key

to the "grammar" of comics (67). The gutter, on this view, is the most crucial feature of

the comics medium because it requires the reader to mentally fill in what happens in

between the panels of the comic book. In this view, the reader becomes "a silent

accomplice…an equal partner in crime" because "closure in comics fosters an

intimacy…a […] contract between creator and audience" (68-9). As an example of the

crucial importance of the gutter, McCloud offers two sequential panels, one depicting a

man cowering in fear before an axe-wielding attacker, and the next depicting a city

skyline, with an anguished scream filling the air (68). He points out that although we read in these images a gruesome act of murder, in fact no murder is directly represented. As he puts it, "I may have drawn an axe being raised in this example, but I'm not the one who let it drop" (68). The reader of a comic book must exercise closure – must imaginatively fill in the gaps between panels, in response to textual and artistic cues.

To be sure, the importance of panel transitions is not completely original to McCloud. A very basic version of McCloud's argument was made by Alain Resnais in 1972, who argues that "What happens between two panels is as important as what happens within the panels. [...] Each panel must be privileged to create continuity from one to the next. Comic books are the essence of 'framing' and privileged moments" (Resnais 96). Yet although this statement seems to promise a formalist way into a detailed descriptive account of the structural grammar of panel transitions in comics, Resnais does not venture much beyond this initial statement of the idea. Another early stab at the topic of sequentiality comes from Claude Moliterni in Herdeg and Pascal's 1972 collection, *The Art of the Comic Strip*. Under the heading of "Narrative Technique," Moliterni tries to break down not particular transitions but particular types of comics sequences, although his efforts are not entirely successful. For instance, Moliterni defines the "accelerated narrative," as one that "breaks the action down into a series of frames not far removed from each other in time" – what McCloud might describe as a series of Moment-to-Moment transitions. In the comics medium, however, breaking down the action into a series of frames with a small temporal gap between them is not acceleration but *de*celeration, as the action is thus slowed down and stretched across a greater space on the page.

Additionally, in a 1986 article published in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, Lawrence L. Abbott argues that the most important concern for the comics artist "is not one of individual panels but of multiple panels in succession" (Abbott 168). McCloud's account of the gutter and sequentiality is also anticipated, to an extent, by Will Eisner, who argues that the task of the comic book artist is "to arrange the sequence of events (or pictures) so as to bridge the gaps in action" (Eisner, *Comics* 38) and that the conventions of comics construct or constitute a "contract between artist and audience" (40). Nevertheless, McCloud emphasizes the importance of sequentiality to a much greater extent than Eisner does, and offers a much more detailed and specific account of how this sequencing works. While Resnais and Abbott identify the key idea of sequentiality in comics, with some later commentary from Abbott and Eisner, McCloud is the one who actually works out a system of explaining how sequencing really works in the comics medium, in a way that enables the kind of reading that this dissertation aims to develop and demonstrate.

I should here make an important point about the nature of the gutter in order to prevent confusion, because there are two distinct senses in which the term can be used, and McCloud does not draw attention to the potential ambiguity of the word. In the discussion of comics, "the gutter" can be a term of physical bibliographic description, referring literally to the white space that often appears on a page, between panels. According to this definition, the gutter may in any particular instance be wide or narrow, or even entirely absent; if two panels are separated only by a black line, or by no line at all, one could say that in the literal, bibliographic sense, there is no gutter. Alternatively, "the gutter" can be an interpretive term, referring not to a physical white space on a page, but rather to the conceptual space between two images that the reader must cognitively traverse. McCloud's discussion refers to the latter meaning: regardless of whether or not

a comics sequence has white spaces between panels or not, the fact that it has discernible

panel divisions of any kind means that the reading process involves interpreting the

transitions between panels, and there is always therefore an interpretive gap or "gutter"

between panels.

With its emphasis on closure, McCloud's account of comics has at its center his

classification of different types of panel transition. In presenting these different types of

transition I will draw on examples from two different versions of *Julius Caesar*, one from

the Manga Shakespeare series, illustrated by Mustashrik (the working name of UK artist

Mustashrik Mahbub) and one from the Manga Edition series, illustrated by Hyeondo

Park. These sample pages and panels will serve in part as examples of the different types

of transition, but also as an opportunity to demonstrate how the use of different formal

devices in the comics medium can create strikingly different interpretations of

Shakespeare's dramatic text. McCloud's own examples of the different devices can be

seen in Figures 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6 in the Appendix.

There are six categories of panel transition. The first is "Moment-to-Moment," a

transition that "requires very little closure" (McCloud 70). This might be called the

comics equivalent of slow-motion, depicting a single subject with only a minute change

in time implied between the two. An interesting example of this device can be found in

Mustashrik's Manga Shakespeare edition of *Julius Caesar*, during Mark Antony's famous

speech on the steps of the Capitol (see Figure 1.2). As he discusses the murder of Caesar

by the conspirators (an event which he does not witness, but which he has no

compunctions about describing in detail) Mustashrik presents a series of seven separate

images showing Caesar's death, the minimal changes between images creating the effect

of slow motion. While the actual moment of killing depicted earlier in the book is

relatively brief, the death becomes more drawn out in Antony's dramatic speech.

The second type of panel transition is "Action-to-Action" which features "a single

subject in distinct Action-to-Action progressions" (McCloud 70). An interesting example

of this device can be found in Park's Manga Edition version of *Julius Caesar*, also during

Antony's speech (see Figure 1.3). This page features a series of three panels separated by

Action-to-Action transitions which show Antony delivering his speech to the crowd

before the Capitol: first he is depicted holding his face in a histrionic gesture of grief, then

he is reaching into his toga with his back secretively to the crowd, then he is brandishing

a scroll which he proclaims to be Caesar's will. Showing a single figure in a distinct

series of actions affords the reader a sense of dramatic performance, as Antony runs

through a series of deliberate gestures, accompanied with suitable speech, as part of his

manipulation of the crowd.

This representation of the speech is strikingly different from that in the Manga

Shakespeare version; indeed, given Mustashrik's construction of the sequences in the

book, Action-to-Action transitions are generally difficult to find. Instead he presents

Antony's speech primarily through "Subject-to-Subject" transitions, which are the third

type in McCloud's system. The Subject-to-Subject transition, in McCloud's terms, is that

which "takes us from Subject-to-Subject while staying within a scene or idea" (McCloud

71). He maintains that in this type of transition a greater "degree of reader involvement"

is "necessary to render these transitions meaningful" than that required by the previous

two, as the reader must move from one person or image to another, and over a temporal

gap, while still understanding that the general scene or idea has not changed (71). In this

version, (see Figure 1.9) these transitions shift between a panel depicting Antony

speaking, then to a member of the crowd speaking, and then to three silhouetted raised fists, a clear synecdoche for the crowd in general. Thus in this sequence, although we remain within the "scene or idea" of Antony delivering his speech, Mustashrik presents us with a constantly shifting set of perspectives. To do so is to abandon the sense of continuous dramatic performance that one can find in Park's version, but in losing that, we gain a greater sense of the active and turbulent crowd, as well as the very interesting sequence of words, in which Antony's articulate sentences give way to the simpler articulations of an individual member of the crowd, which in turn gives way to the even simpler collective shouted demand, as the point of the speech, in being disseminated to a large audience, becomes by degrees simpler and more violent.

The fourth transition type in McCloud's taxonomy is the "Scene-to-Scene" transition which "transport[s] us across significant distances of time and space" (McCloud 71). The need to traverse time and space in this manner is obviously an essential component of Shakespearean drama, and there is no comic book version of a Shakespearean play that does not have several examples of this transition type. One such example from Park's *Julius Caesar* occurs in the shift between the second and third scene of Act 2, moving from Caesar's house to a street near the capital (see Figure 1.5). Park signals the Scene-to-Scene transition very clearly by means of a large panel at the top of second page showing the Capitol with careful attention to architectural detail, making the change of location entirely explicit, even without the help of accompanying text. This device is known as an "establishing panel," and I discuss its use in a little more detail later in the chapter. Scene-to-Scene transitions do not necessarily require such a panel, but many comics artists make use of some version of this device, unless they specifically wish their

Scene-to-Scene transition to be obscure, or unless they have another specific effect in mind.

Fifth in McCloud's list is the "Aspect-to-Aspect" transition which "bypasses time for the most part and sets a wandering eye on different aspects of a place, idea, or mood" (McCloud 72). Unlike a Scene-to-Scene transition, an Aspect-to-Aspect transition involves no temporal progression. This transition is perhaps the most controversial within the world of comics theory, and will receive further detailed discussion later in this chapter. In the Manga Shakespeare *Julius Caesar*, when Pindarus follows Cassius' order to go to the top of a hill to seek out Antony's army, Mustashrik presents a series of three panels showing ever more distant perspectives on him in an empty and essentially featureless landscape (see Figure 1.6). The comic gives no indication of temporal advancement, and there is no transition to a new subject or a new scene; the only progression is the intensification of Pindarus' isolation – an intensification that makes the subsequent Subject-to-Subject transition to a military explosion all the more jarring.

Finally, the sixth of McCloud's transition types is the "Non-Sequitur" which "offers no logical relationship between panels whatsoever" (72). Of this type of transition there appear to be no real examples in the corpus of Shakespearean comics. I suspect that McCloud himself includes it mainly for the sake of completeness; one would be hard-pressed to find an example anywhere outside of the most deliberately alienating avant-garde comics. This last category raises the question, acknowledged by McCloud, of whether it is possible "for any sequence of panels to be totally unrelated to each other" (73). He responds in the negative, maintaining that "no matter now dissimilar one image may be to another" there remains "alchemy at work in the space between panels which can help us find meaning or resonance in even the most jarring of combinations" (73).

The categorization of particular panel transitions can sometimes be debatable, but ambiguous transitions can generate fascinating analytical and interpretive insights.

Even this very quick series of examples already begins to draw out some interesting interpretive points about these two different versions of *Julius Caesar*. In the Manga Shakespeare version, Caesar's death scene is brief, and becomes drawn out in painful and dramatic detail by means of a series of Moment-to-Moment transitions only in Antony's speech. This drawing-out corresponds with Antony's desire to incense the crowd with the wickedness of the conspirators' crime. Additionally, the Action-to-Action transitions that allow Park's Manga Edition version of Antony such an effective performer are rare occurrences in Mustashrik's Manga Shakespeare version, which is generally characterized by a constant and sometimes disorienting series of shifts different characters or perspectives – either by means of Subject-to-Subject transitions, as in the examples from Antony's speech, or by Aspect-to-Aspect transitions, as in the example of Pindarus on the hilltop.

McCloud's system of division has gone essentially unchallenged in comics studies, with one important exception. In *Early Writings on Visual Language*, Cohn proposes a fundamental rethinking of McCloud's categories, which he regards as badly flawed. Yet his proposed rethinking is based upon a crucial misreading of the nature of panel transitions as McCloud defines them. After first attempting to disrupt McCloud's authority by citing McCloud's own remark that his categorization system is an "inexact science at best," Cohn makes his key claim:

> [S]ince every transition type is a balanced 'panel-to-panel' pairing, it would imply
> that McCloud is really proposing what *individual* panels should be classified as
> (with the exception of the temporal relation pairings), though only giving them in

ways that transition between two of the same panel types. For instance, would a

panel that contains an Aspect next to one that contains a Subject be a 'Subject-to-

subject' transition, because it moves into an *individual Subject panel*? Or, would

this situation be deemed a variant 'Aspect-to-Subject' transition? (68)

Here Cohn misunderstands the nature of McCloud's theory, which does not seek to define

the nature of individual panel images but rather the nature of the transitions between

them. Cohn's mistake is to suppose that such entities as "Subjects" and "Aspects" could

ever be specified independently of the sequence of which they are a part. Instead he takes

the curiously essentialist view that Subjects and Aspects have an inherent identity, and

concludes that transitioning between them creates a hybrid transition (Subject-to-Aspect).

But it is unclear from his argument how he thinks the status of individual panels could

ever be established. In the case of Shakespearean comics, such an analytic perspective

would require the critic somehow to designate every panel in the comic as a certain type

of image, which has its dramatic and narrative identity independently of what occurs

around it. Is a single image of Antony speaking an Action or a Subject? The question

seems meaningless to ask and impossible to answer.

In McCloud's system, however, an image is only a Subject or an Aspect (or a

Moment, Action, Scene, or Non-Sequitur) in the context of the sequence of images that it

occupies. What makes a transition Subject-to-Subject is that it occurs between two panels

in which each image depicts a different person or thing, but in which each still remains

within the same scene or idea, and in which time is implied to have passed between the

two panels. We may imagine, for example, a transition between an image of Hamlet

stabbing Claudius to an image of Claudius lying dead upon the floor with Hamlet

standing over him holding a bloody rapier. This would be a clear example of an Action-

to-Action transition, not because an image of Hamlet stabbing Claudius is inherently an "Action" (as opposed to being a Subject or an Aspect) but because the transition between panels retains the same figures in a distinct progression. Alternatively, a transition that takes us from the same image of Hamlet stabbing Claudius to an image of Norwegian troops marching through the front gates of Elsinore is a Scene-to-Scene transition, as it shifts to a different location. Thus the nature of the panel transition depends not upon the essential status of the two panels (they have no essential status) but rather in the relationship between them, in the transition that exists only in the gutter. To draw a linguistic analogy, arguing that a particular panel in a comic book could be inherently and necessarily a Subject, independent of the other images in the sequence around it, is rather like arguing that the word "stone" is inherently and necessarily a noun, independently of the grammatical construction in which it occurs. The moment that one encounters a phrase like "stone wall," in which the word "stone" functions as an adjective, the claim falls apart. Consequently, although Cohn seeks to overturn McCloud's formal categories and replace them with his own, thus establishing his own theoretical work as the dominant mode of formalist comics theory, it fails to achieve this aim.

Nevertheless, despite his failed attempt to overturn McCloud's comics theory altogether, Cohn's work does provide some supplementary addenda to McCloud's work, and some of his ideas and distinctions make evident the necessity for some revision and sharpening of McCloud's formal categories. Cohn identifies some image-types of his own, which he regards as additions to McCloud's list (even though, as we have seen, McCloud's list is of transition types rather than image types). Although I maintain that McCloud's list of six remains completely adequate for formalist analysis of comics, some of Cohn's terms are worth incorporating into this descriptive model, although this can be

done perfectly well by subsuming them in McCloud's prior categories. Cohn begins by

arguing that we should understand what he calls "Moment Transitions" (based on

McCloud's "Moment-to-Moment" transitions) as transitions in which "the dominant

factor of change is that of time," as opposed to that of action (Cohn 29). That is to say,

insofar as action is taking place at all in a panel transition, in a Moment Transition that

action is less important than the fact that time is passing. Thus we might imagine two

panels depicting the same object, from the same angle, in which the transition actually

covers an extremely long period of time, but in which the second image barely changes

from the first. This account does indeed constitute a useful revision of McCloud's

"Moment-to-Moment" transitions, defining their key feature not as the short duration of

time between the two panels, but as the primacy of time over action. We might imagine,

for example, a transition between two identical or nearly-identical images of a landscape,

or of a planet in outer space; even if accompanying text informs us that dozen, hundreds,

thousands, or millions of years have passed between the two frames, virtually no visible

action has occurred in that time, and we might reasonably regard the transition as an

instance of Moment-to-Moment. Such a transition would be unlikely in the context of

Shakespearean comics, but is in principle possible, and should be recognized. Although,

for instance, there does not (yet) exist a comics version of *The Winter's Tale*, the sixteen-

year gap between Act 3 and Act 4 could possibly be leaped with such a Moment-to-

Moment transition – such a usage would be unusual, but might well have a place in an

innovative adaptation of that play.

Cohn also draws a distinction between an "Aspect Transition," and a "View

Transition" (Cohn 31). His definition of an Aspect Transition is slightly unclear: it

concerns "aspects of the larger surroundings of the scene" or else occurs when "a whole

image is divided into several parts" (31). A View Transition, however, "changes the perspective at which the elements within a scene or an environment are viewed" (Cohn 31). The implicit definition of "aspect" here is not entirely evident, but it is certainly narrow and I regard the distinction between Aspect and View as an unnecessary one, as the word "aspect" is sufficiently capacious as to accommodate both ideas that Cohn wishes to cover: the word is derived from the Latin *aspectus*, originally refers to "The action of looking at," and in English carries a wide range of related meanings, which refer to both literal and figurative ways of regarding an object or idea, and also to the sides, surfaces, or directions upon which, or from which, one may look ("aspect, *n*"). Consequently, Cohn's View Transitions seems to me to fit easily and comfortably into the Aspect-to-Aspect category.

Cohn also distinguishes an entirely different category of "Cognable Transitions," that is, transitions that move between what Cohn calls "Cognable formative[s]": panel contents that share the same "semantic meaning," but in which that meaning is differently expressed (32). As an example, he offers an image of an eye transitioning to an image of the Japanese word for "eye" (33). It may be somewhat tricky to classify this particular (and extremely uncommon) panel transition, but I think that even Cognable Transitions can also be adequately fitted under the heading of Aspect-to-Aspect, on the grounds that "aspect" could be said to include linguistic or cognitive aspects of an object or idea. Instead of a non-temporal transition from one view of an object to another, or from one part of an object to another, here the Aspect-to-Aspect transition can move a reader from one mode of representation to another. This may be, as in Cohn's example, from a drawing of an object to a word signifying that object; what has changed in the transition is not time or the object being represented, making Aspect-to-Aspect the most appropriate

designation. Although I reject Cohn's recategorization of transitions, it is important to note that his remarks on McCloud do point out gaps and imprecisions in his original definitions, which have benefitted from these modulations.

Word-Image Relationships in Shakespearean Comics

The other crucial aspect of the comics medium that McCloud defines is that of word-image relationships: whenever text and image appear together they must have a particular relationship to one another. While every comics artist must be sensitive to the details of the script and work creatively with the writer's words in order to create effective combinations of word and image, the level of sensitivity and care can never be higher than in the best comics adaptations of Shakespearean drama. McCloud defines seven types of word-image combination that can occur in comics (see Figures 1.12, 1.13, and 1.14 for his examples). My Shakespearean examples will be drawn from the same two versions of *Julius Caesar* that I used previously to demonstrate the types of panel transition.

The first combination is "Word Specific," in which "pictures illustrate, but don't significantly add to a largely complete text" (McCloud, *Understanding* 153). While one might expect this type of word-image relationship to occur often in Shakespearean comics, they in fact tend to occur quite rarely, as illustrators seem eager to accompany Shakespeare's words with interesting images, and are not content to depict (for example) a large block of text accompanied only by a talking head. Yet Word-Specific relationships are not always just a matter of uninspired illustration; one interesting and useful example occurs during Antony's speech in Park's version of the play (see Figure 1.7). This panel contains a substantial piece of text in which Antony anticipates (and thus

helps to dictate) the emotional reaction of the crowd, refers to Caesar's mantle, and then

begins to describe the various wounds dealt by the various conspirators. The image in

this panel shows only a long-distance perspective of Antony standing before the crowd,

conveying only information that the reader of the comic already possesses. Yet the

absence of Caesar's corpse from this panel is significant, given that Antony's forensic

declarations consist of information that he cannot possibly know, because he was not

actually present at the murder. Here the dominance of words in the panel corresponds

nicely with the fact that Antony is, at this moment, all talk: he has no real knowledge to

back up his claims, and the comic therefore provides his words with no very meaningful

visual accompaniment.

The second type of word-image relationship is "Picture Specific" in which "words do

little more than add a soundtrack to a visually told sequence" (153). Perhaps

unsurprisingly, there do not exist many instances of this particular device, as most comic

book versions of Shakespeare do not let a panel go by without some significant piece of

dialogue. A rare example of a Picture-Specific combination can be found near the

conclusion of the Manga Shakespeare *Julius Caesar*, when Brutus is killed by Strato, his

slave (see Figure 1.8). While the first panel in this three-panel sequence[20] is an instance

of an Additive word-image relationship (which I will discuss properly in a moment), the

second, in which Brutus and Strato bid one another farewell, has relatively little

information coming from the dialogue compared to the information in the images: Brutus

turning his back before the crucial moment and Strato having accepted the dagger offered

to him. It is an imperfect example (the farewells do, after all, tell us something about

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[20] This is rare example of a consistent Action-to-Action sequence in Mustashrik's book; here the constantly-shifting perspectives give way for a moment to a sustained performative moment between two characters.

both characters' feelings of honorable resignation) because the Picture-Specific

relationship is a truly rare phenomenon in any comic book adaptation of Shakespeare.

The third word-image combination is "Duo-Specific [...] in which both words and

pictures send essentially the same message" (153). This particular type is not infrequent

in any comic book that is not intended for very young children; when words and images

convey more-or-less identical information, it is usually so that even very weak readers

can make sense of a text. Yet from time to time, comics artists find alternative uses for

this type of word-image relationship. In Park's Manga Edition version of the play, as

Casca describes to Brutus and Cassius the conclusion of Caesar's speech, his speech

balloons are converted into text boxes placed alongside visualizations of the events he

describes; these illustrations are shaded, to indicate that they are flashbacks, rather than

current events in the drama (see Figure 1.9). The text describes Caesar's actions: "He

swounded -- and fell down in the marketplace and foamed at the mouth and was

speechless" (Park 21). The accompanying images show just that: Caesar swoons, falls

down, and foams at the mouth; the only additions in the image are the shocked reactions

of the crowd (barely discernible in the shaded image) and the distress of Calpurnia. One

could argue that these additions make the Duo-Specific identification slightly imperfect,

but I think the example still holds. This doubling of word and image makes Casca's

narration more engaging than text alone would be in the visual medium of comics, and

also helps to reinforce his authority as a narrator, given the lack of discrepancy between

the text and the image.

The fourth type of word-image relationship is "Additive"; in this combination, "words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa" (154).[21] This is a common device in Shakespearean comics, and examples abound. One particularly arresting example can be found in the Manga Edition *Julius Caesar* when Brutus is visited by Caesar's ghost (see Figure 1.10). The ghost is a truly horrific creation by Park, a towering, ghastly figure, whose torso is pierced with multiple daggers that confront Brutus with his complicity in the murder. The words in this sequence of panels convey a little information: the ghost identifies itself to Brutus as "Thy evil spirit" (information that largely overlaps with that provided by the image) and promises "thou shalt see me at Philippi" (Park 123). Alongside this text, the image of the ghost greatly intensifies the horror of the encounter.

In "Parallel" combinations, the fifth type, "words and pictures seem to follow very different courses -- without intersecting" (154). While there do exist Parallel word-image relationships in Shakespearean comics (and elsewhere) as a general rule these do not remain parallel for long: sooner or later (usually sooner) word and image converge into a combination in which the relationship between them is more evident. A sustained Parallel word-image relationship is a very rare thing indeed.[22] One brief Parallel sequence occurs in the Manga Shakespeare text (see Figure 1.11). What begins as an image of a snake and apparently unrelated dialogue by Brutus about the necessity for killing Caesar abruptly come together with Brutus' metaphorical invocation of the adder. At this moment, the relationship becomes Additive, although it borders on Word-Specific

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[21] In *Making Comics*, McCloud changes the name of this category from "Additive" to "Intersecting" but I am retaining the original term.

[22] Chris Ware's short comic "Thrilling Adventure Stories" is a fascinating formal experiment that consists entirely of a sustained sequence of Parallel word-image relationships. The images are those of a 1940s-style superhero comic book, while the text is a disturbing first-person narrative by a victim of childhood abuse. Even in this extreme case, however, one could make an argument that certain connections between text and image do faintly emerge.

as the text makes a reference to snakes far more complex than the simple image of a snake can compete with – the two nevertheless work together in invoking the danger that Brutus fears.

The sixth combination is "Montage," in which "words are treated as integral parts of the picture" (154). In this futuristic version of the play, Brutus, instead of receiving an anonymous letter from Cassius, instead receives an anonymous text message (see Figure 1.12). In this example, text appears not in a balloon or a text box, divided from the visual reality of the images in the play, but is here an integral part of the image in a way that gives a modern spin on the Classical setting. In other contexts, Montage word-image relationships can serve as a means of getting non-Shakespearean language into Shakespeare comics without having to write new dialogue, as on page 12 of the same version in which we see a banner that reads "We Love Caesar" held up by the crowd at the triumphal procession (Mustashrik 12).

Finally comes "Interdependent," perhaps the most interesting combination, in which "words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone" (McCloud 155). The most consistently interesting function of Interdependent word-image relationships is irony, when word and image are either mismatched or oddly matched in a way that changes the meaning of word, or image, or both. Mustashrik's *Julius Caesar* uses this device in its depiction of the death of Caesar (see Figure 1.13). In this case, the image of the dying Caesar is paired with his own line "Then fall, Caesar!" (Mustashrik 93). At first glance, this synchronization of text and image may seem to be Duo-Specific, having merely an explicatory function, conveying with both words and image that Caesar is, in fact, deceased. But Mustashrik's use is more subtle here, as the line takes the form almost of a command, a tone reinforced by the placement of the

comma, which separates the imperative verb itself from its object, which is the speaker of the line. Thus even as the image presents a dead man, the text conveys the notion that even at the moment of his death, Caesar is in some sense in command. Additionally, it is important to note that this piece of text does not appear in a speech balloon: it is not dialogue, but caption. Just as Park converts Casca's speech balloons into text boxes, making him the narrator of depictions of past events, so Mustashrik performs a similar conversion, only this time the event being described has not occurred in the past but is part of the present narrative of the comic book. Thus Caesar becomes the narrator of his own death, not just predicting it in dialogue, but officially announcing it as narrator (however briefly) of this part of the story. This combination of text and image is thus powerfully Interdependent. Image alone shows Caesar's corpse; text alone constitutes a statement of fact, or an announcement of a realization. Together they become a narrated incident – narrated with an air of authority and knowledge that transcends that of a simple participant in dialogue, and instead awards to Caesar a measure of power and authority (however symbolic) even in death.

Once again, even a set of brief examples drawn from these two different versions of the play already begin to point us in interesting interpretive directions. The two different versions make different use of text-as-narration. Park creates a Duo-Specific narrative account of Caesar's epileptic seizure, whose reiterative quality makes vivid a verbal story reinforces the sense of the narrator's authority. Mustashrik, in contrast, creates a brief Interdependent relationship which, although it initially appears merely Duo-Specific, actually creates the strange and ironic effect of Caesar authoritatively narrating, and perhaps even commanding, his own death – remaining a figure of authority even at the moment of his utter defeat. The Manga Shakespeare version is similarly subtle in its

Parallel sequence, that melds into an additive sequence as Brutus pursues a metaphorical line of thought. By contrast, the Manga Edition pairs the same text with an image of Brutus standing contemplatively in his garden: as we saw above in the discussion of panel transitions, Park's version is more performative, emphasizing the actions and postures of its characters as they speak, while Mustashrik's version appears more freely metaphorical, preferring an image that builds upon a textual detail rather than an image depicting the visual expression of a character's feelings.

Panel Transitions and Word-Image Relationships Combined

Perhaps the most significant debate in formalist comics theory concerns whether panel transitions or word-image relationships are more important to the operations of the medium. McCloud maintains that panel transitions and sequentiality are the most important features of comics, that "the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics" (66). Yet not all comics theorists agree on this point. Umberto Eco, although not a specialist in comics research, remarked in 1972 that the combination of pictures and words is crucial to the identity of the medium and that "the fusion of the two forms of expression" has effectively produced "an autonomous idiom with rules of its own" (Eco 118). Bart Beaty echoes Eco's line of thinking when he observes that McCloud's definition excludes single-panel comics such as *Family Circus* (Beaty 68). Robert C. Harvey, in *The Art of the Comic Book*, likewise emphasizes what he calls "the ingredients, the verbal content and the visual content," adopting McCloud's term "closure" and adapting it for his own use, asserting that "the closure I emphasize is the closure between word and picture" (Harvey 246). To discuss panel transitions in terms of closure makes a good deal of sense, but to discuss word-image combinations in

the same terms is highly problematic. In the case of Interdependent word-image

combinations, it can sometimes make sense to think of there being an ironic gap between

text and image, which creates an effect that neither text nor image could achieve alone.

One of McCloud's examples of an Interdependent combination depicts masked, gun-

wielding burglars breaking into a safe, while the accompanying text reads, "After college,

I pursued a career in high finance" (155).[23] Yet even though this irony could be figured

as a gap, it is not necessarily a gap that the reader needs to fill, but rather one that he or

she simply needs to recognize as a gap. And outside of this one particular way of using

Interdependent combinations, it is hard to see how "closure" can apply to word-image

combinations – certainly not without a considerably more detailed explanation on

Harvey's part. Interdependent word-image relationships can create more than one kind of

gap. Sometimes, as in the example from McCloud, and the one I cite from Mustashrik's

Julius Caesar, they can produce ironies of the kind approved by William Empson.[24]

Alternatively, and less interestingly, they can produce the kind of simple irony often

called sarcasm (a handsome person is labeled ugly, or a broken-down shack is called a

palace). Either way, the relationship between word and image falls into the

Interdependent category.

 Charles Hatfield also takes issue with McCloud's treatment of word-image

relationships, maintaining that he "neglects just how much the interaction of image and

---

[23] Although this example is only a single isolated panel, it is easy to imagine how this use of an
Interdependent word-image relationship can affect the meaning of a longer sequence. If the label "high
finance" is here assigned to burglary (an application that itself perhaps a comment on corporations and
banking) then one can only imagine the sort of training to which the speaker's use of "college" might
refer...and perhaps even to the kinds of "retirement" that might be available to such a narrator after his
career is over.

[24] "An irony has no point unless it is true, in some degree, in both senses; for it is imagined as part of an
argument; what is said may be absurd, but it is what the opponent might say" (Empson 56)

word can inform, indeed enable, the reading of sequences" (Hatfield 44). Hatfield makes

a convincing case:

> Verbal cues do help to bridge the gaps within a sequence, as seen in common
>
> transitional captions such as 'Later' or 'Meanwhile' (devices that have fallen from
>
> favor as readers become more versed in reading comics, just as title cards, fades,
>
> irises, and other such transitional devices fell from favor in cinema). In fact
>
> verbal continuity can impose structure on even the most radically disjointed series.
>
> (44)

This point is not treated adequately by McCloud, and can indeed be crucial for

understanding a comics sequence: a few well-chosen words might turn a series of

apparent non-sequiturs into something entirely coherent. McCloud's own initial example

of closure (Figure 1.3) between panel transitions (the axe-wielding thug paired with the

city skyline) illustrates this point effectively: without the scream hanging in the night sky,

the transition between the two figures and the cityscape might seem truly obscure –

readable as a Scene-to-Scene transition or perhaps even as a Non-Sequitur, rather than as

the Subject-to-Subject transition that McCloud labels it (McCloud, *Understanding* 69).

Yet Hatfield is not entirely fair when he argues further that "Verbal/visual interplay often

muddies the pristine categories of transition that McCloud tries to establish in

Understanding Comics" (44). McCloud never once claims that his categories are

"pristine," specifically stating that "this sort of categorization is an inexact science," and

claiming only that his categorizations are "a tool" with which "we can begin to unravel

some of the mysteries surrounding the invisible art of comics storytelling" (McCloud,

Understanding 74). I would argue that the fact that the categories are not utterly pristine

is a crucial part of what McCloud calls "the magic and mystery that are at the very heart

of comics" (66). Even in the brief examples that I have thus far discussed, McCloud's designations must be applied thoughtfully. The fact that a particular panel transition or word-image relationship can so quickly meld into another, or can be an imperfect example of its type only make the process of interpreting Shakespearean comics more interesting. Certainly, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, the Shakespearean stage itself plays with space and scene in uncertain ways; additionally, as I will emphasize even further in Chapter 3, ambiguities of form can be important and fascinating features of a comics text, and can bring out, address, or correspond with the formal and thematic ambiguities of Shakespearean drama.

McCloud, I must admit, does make some questionable remarks about the distinction between words and images. He states that "Pictures are *received* information. We need no formal education to 'get the message'" while "Writing is *perceived* information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language" (McCloud, *Understanding* 49). Hatfield rightly objects to this characterization, observing that "in comics word and image approach each other: words can be visually inflected, reading as pictures, while pictures can become as abstract and symbolic as words" (Hatfield 36). At times McCloud seems aware of this point: he observes that even within the comics industry, writing and drawing have traditionally been "separate disciplines," but he then asks "but just how 'different' *are* they?" and suggests that "words, pictures and other icons are the vocabulary of the language called comics" (47). As Hatfield points out, "This recognition renders McCloud's larger argument incoherent, as it belies his earlier distinction between perceived and received information" (Hatfield 37). Yet while Hatfield here wins the theoretical point, he concedes the pragmatic point, as he admits that "responding to comics often depends on recognizing word and image as two

'different' types of sign, whose implications can be played against each other—to gloss, to illustrate, to contradict or complicate or ironize the other" (37). Whatever we may conclude about the unsustainability of a purely theoretical word-image distinction, we nevertheless "continue to distinguish between the function of words and the function of images" (37). It would be going too far to say that Hatfield undermines his own argument but one can say that his admission that readers can virtually always distinguish between word and image, and that making this distinction is essential to the business of reading comics, does undermine the pragmatic significance of that argument.

Panel Design and Speech Balloons

The question of which is more important, panel transitions or word-image combinations, remains an undecided point in comics studies. In their introduction to *Graphic Novels Beyond the Basics*, Martha Cornog and Timothy Perper explain that "Stories told in sequences of pictures, with or without words, have developed and persisted across history and culture" (xvi) thus implying an implicit preference for the McCloud view. Alternatively, Reitberger and Fuchs argue that "Comics tell their stories by correlating picture and text" (Reitberger and Fuchs 23). Not everyone writing on comics decides clearly on this point, however. In *Graphic Novels Now* Francisca Goldsmith appears to favour Harvey's word-and-image-based definition of comics when she describes the remit of her book as "monographs that present their stories [...] in a format requiring the reader to take both image and word into consideration" (Goldsmith, *Graphic* v). Yet throughout the rest of the book, she consistently refers to comics as "sequential art," implicitly committing herself to the view that panel sequencing is in fact the crux of the medium. Regardless of whether we prefer McCloud's or Harvey's position on this question, the

fact remains that both agree that panel transitions and word-image relationships are the two most essential features of comics, and the apparent undecidability of the point within comics studies suggests to me that it is fair to regard them as equally crucial. Yet there are other formal aspects to comics which, although not quite as completely central, are nearly universal, and operate according to consistent rules in order to achieve important effects.

The panels which a comics artist puts into sequence are coherent units in themselves, and can be discussed individually, much as a single frame of a film may be analyzed. According to Eisner, "the creation of the frame begins with the selection of the elements necessary to the narration, the choice of a perspective from which the reader is allowed to see them, and the determination of the portion of each symbol or element to be included in the frame" (Eisner 41). That is to say, the artist must take his or her chosen subject matter and decide how to divide it into panels. A major part of this decision-making process involves deciding the sorts of transitions that should exist between the panels. McCloud observes that a "plot-driven" story might require mostly Action-to-Action transitions, with a few Subject-to-Subject and Scene-to-Scene transitions; these, he says, "tend to clarify the facts of a scene: who does what, where it's done, how it's done and so forth" (McCloud, *Making* 18). Alternatively, "in more nuanced or emotionally-driven stories" the artist might prefer more Moment-to-Moment and Aspect-to-Aspect transitions, as these often "help clarify the nature of an action, idea or mood" (18). This brief formulation does speak to some of the differences that may be observed between the Park and Mustashrik versions of *Julius Caesar*, although I would submit that the former's preference for Action-to-Action transitions speaks less to a concern with plot than with a concern for character, given the opportunities that Action-to-Action provides for

sequences of performative gestures and expressions. In any case, it is certainly true that there is much more to the panel than simply deciding what sort of transitions it should partake in.

Eisner observes that "In addition to its primary function as a frame in which to place objects and actions, the panel border itself can be used as part of the non-verbal 'language' of sequential art" (Eisner 44). For example, while most panels have a simple rectangular border, a flashback might often be indicated by a wavy-edged border (Eisner 44). While Eisner concedes that "there is no universally agreed upon convention for expressing tense through the outline of the frame" nevertheless "the 'character' of the line [...] creates a hieroglyphic" (44). He offers examples of how a "jagged outline implies an emotionally explosive action" and of how "allowing the actor to burst out of the confines of the panel" can create a sense of powerful movement or threat (44). Alternatively, "The absence of a panel outline is designed to convey unlimited space" and can provide "a sense of serenity" (47). Effects vary, of course: in the series of Moment-to-Moment transitions that Mustashrik uses to depict Antony's account of the murder of Caesar (see Figure 1.2), the absence of panel borders cannot plausibly be said to create an effect of "serenity." Nevertheless, the "unlimited space" implied by the lack of a border does isolate the two figures of Caesar and Brutus as the sole figures on the vast "stage" of Antony's imagined account.

Many other devices are possible, as Eisner observes. Sometimes a panel may consist entirely of a frame that is part of the represented image, such as a doorway; additionally, a cloudlike panel "defines the picture as being a thought, or memory" (47).[25] Even without

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[25] Few artists have been more creative with the panel frame than Eisner himself. For a particularly good set of examples, see: Eisner, Will. *The Best of the Spirit*. New York: DC Comics, 2005.

using elaborate effects for the panel border, the shape of the panel can simultaneously

contribute to the effect: "A narrow panel evokes the feeling of being hemmed in –

confinement, whereas a wide panel suggests plenty of space in which to move – or

escape" (89). Although these factors are usually not as vital to an interpretation as panel

transitions and word-image relationships, keeping them in mind can help a great deal in

the interpretation of comics, and occasionally they can be crucial indeed. If a reader

cannot tell, for instance, that a cloudlike panel border indicates a memory or a fantasy,

and thereby mistakes a dream sequence for an actual sequence in a story, considerable

confusion could result. In Chapter 3 I will devote some attention to a deliberately

ambiguous panel border, designed to make the status of its contents uncertain.

Also of key importance is the angle of perspective that a panel image offers. The

function of the angle might be simply to convey information: for instance, while "a flat

eye-level view" is standard, an artist might favour "an over-head view [...] to give the

reader a clear uninvolved view of the setting" (89). Alternatively "a worm's eye-view"

can encourage "involvement in the action" (89). Angles can also be used to convey

particular emotional effects. Eisner argues that "Looking at a scene from above it the

viewer has a sense of detachment – an observer rather than a participant. However, when

the reader views a scene from below it, then his position evokes a sense of smallness

which stimulates a sensation of fear" (89). McCloud argues similarly that "a 'worm's

eye' view can give weight and grandeur to objects [...] and characters" while an overhead

view "can give readers access to a wealth of info about a setting" as well as providing "a

sense of 'rising above it all' emotionally as well" (McCloud, *Making* 21). Related to

concerns of angle and perspective is the very common device of what McCloud calls "the

establishing shot," that is "a big long-shot panel or two at the beginning of each new

scene, usually followed by some middle ground and close-up panels of individual

characters" (22). Although establishing panels are very common devices, they are not

universal: McCloud observes that "because readers want and expect that sense of place, a

clever storyteller can choose to delay the establishing shot to increase suspense – or to

mirror the thoughts of a character who's temporarily unaware of his or her surroundings"

(23). Duncan and Smith devote some attention to this device as well:

> In most comic books, figures (visual representations of characters) are the focus of
>
> the story and the reader's attention. However, the details depicted behind and
>
> around those characters are essential for establishing setting and mood. Once
>
> setting is established by background details, a vague sense of that setting persists
>
> in the reader's imagination, and details tend to become sparse or drop out
>
> altogether. (141-2)

This detailed opening panel, containing a lot of details that subsequent panels simply

leave out, is a device I prefer to call the "establishing panel," rather than using the entirely

filmic term, "establishing shot," and it can serve important interpretive functions in a

comics text. This is what we saw in the example of a Scene-to-Scene transition in Park's

Julius Caesar (see Figure 1.10); although the establishing panel is a common device, the

Manga Edition series takes particular care with its highly-detailed and architecturally-

accurate panels when establishing the location of a particular scene. It is also an excellent

example of the "over-head view" described by Eisner being used to give the reader a

clear, uninvolved view of the setting before involving him or her in any narrative or

dramatic action. For a striking contrast to this technique, we may consider the way

Mustashrik opens Act 2, Scene 1 of the Manga Shakespeare *Julius Caesar* with the series

of close-up images of a serpent (Figure 1.19). Even though the explanatory text box

which reads, "Brutus at dawn in his home," does convey the location of the scene, the opening image is about as far from a normal establishing panel as it is possible to get, and is entirely typical of Mustashrik's *avant-garde* style.

One nearly ubiquitous feature of comics is the speech balloon which, perhaps because it is so easy to identify, sometimes receives unduly heavy emphasis in comics theory. Particularly notable in this respect is David Carrier whose book, *The Aesthetics of Comics* advertises itself on the first page as, "the first by an analytic philosopher to identify and solve the aesthetic problems posed by comic strips" (Carrier 1). Carrier has a great enthusiasm for speech balloons, which he believes are crucial to the medium of comics and which he even identifies as "a great philosophical discovery, a method of representing thoughts and words" (4). Certainly, speech balloons are very important to the comics medium. Reitberger and Fuchs provide the earliest detailed discussion of the device, giving a sense of its versatility when they observe that "Normal dialogue appears in balloons with an unbroken outline" while "A perforated line indicates whispering" and that if the text appears "in very small letters within a big balloon, it means the speaker is astonished or ashamed" (Reitberger and Fuchs 25). They also point out the importance of the shape of balloons:

> A cry has a spiky outline, and the famous 'telephone voice' has a zig-zag shape, with a zig-zag arrow disappearing into the telephone. Balloons indicating cold or conceited voices have little icicles sprouting from their undersides. Thought balloons are connected with the thinker by a series of small circles which look like bubbles, and if a speech balloon has a little arrow pointing outside the picture, the speaker is 'off'. (25)

This early description of the device emphasizes the wide variety of feelings and tones that the balloon device can signal.

Eisner rather arrestingly characterizes the speech balloon as "a desperation device" which "attempts to capture and make visible an ethereal element: sound" (Eisner, *Comics* 26). He offers a slightly fanciful speculative account of the nature of speech balloons, observing that "Steam from warm air expelled during conversation can be seen" and argues that speech balloons are a combination of "that which is heard within that which is seen," a combination which produces "a visualized image of the act of speaking" (26). This account receives some support from the fact that Italians refer to "speech clouds," and indeed to comics generally, as *fumetti* (26). Eisner, rather like Reitberger and Fuchs, points out the fact that as comics developed, the outlines of speech balloons came to serve not just as "enclosures for speech" but also as devices for "adding meaning and conveying the character of sound to the narrative," by distinguishing the solid curved line of normal speech, the "thought balloon," and the zigzag line of speech from a radio, television, telephone, or other machine (27). He also observes the importance of lettering to the effect of a comic, although he only distinguishes between hand-lettering and typesetting, arguing that while the second "does have a kind of inherent authority" it also has "a 'mechanical' effect that intrudes on the personality of freehand art" (27). It is hard to evaluate this fairly subjective claim, but it is worth noting that hand-lettering is completely standard in the comics medium: it is very difficult to find any comic books at all that use typeset text.

In addition to the kinds of tonal functions described by Reitberger and Fuchs, Eisner observes that speech balloons have a temporal function as well:

The arrangement of balloons which surround speech—their position in relation to each other, or to the action, or their position with respect to the speaker, contribute to the measurement of time. [...] They address our subliminal understanding of the duration of speech. (Eisner 26)

As usual, however, McCloud is the one to provide the most detailed account of the question of speech balloons and time in comics. He begins by offering the apparently commonsensical view that "each panel of a comic shows a single moment in time" and that "between those frozen moments [...] our minds fill in the intervening moments, creating the illusion of time and motion." He then casts that account aside, insisting that "time in comics is infinitely weirder than that!" (McCloud, *Understanding* 94). After all, a comics panel that contains multiple speech balloons and sound effects could not possibly be depicting a single frozen instant, but a sequence of dialogue exchanges that would take at least a few seconds – perhaps much longer (95). Although modern readers may be "conditioned by photography to perceive single images as single moments" that is not necessarily the case in comics, and a sequence of speech balloons, and other text, across a panel can establish a timeline. In the Action-to-Action sequence in Park's *Julius Caesar* (see Figure 1.3), Antony speaks twenty-two words in the first panel, the audience members speak nineteen in the second panel (their speech balloons, interestingly, crossing a Subject-to-Subject gap from the panel at the top of the page), and then Antony resumes and speaks another seventeen words in the third panel. While this speech would, in a stage performance, require several seconds of continuous performance by Antony, here we get only the three images the Park has selected as the most crucial in the Action-to-Action sequence. The speech balloons help to time the progress of Antony's behaviour, as he makes his performative gestures and readies his props.

Early on in *Understanding Comics* McCloud, in the course of an explanation about word-image relationships, poses this question to the reader in a speech balloon: "Do you hear what I'm saying?" (McCloud 25). He follows the question by remarking, "If you do, have your ears checked, because no one said a word" (25). Here McCloud plays on the double meaning of "hearing," which can mean both understanding, and actually taking in an aural stimulus – something his printed book obviously cannot provide, even as its speech balloons signify sound. The joke serves as a reminder of the complexity of the comics medium and of the constant interpretive procedures we must undertake in order to understand it: in this case, the simultaneous recognition of "hearing" as understanding and of silently-read balloons as spoken words appeal to what Catherine Khordoc calls "the mind's ear" (Khordoc 156). Comics artists must keep in mind the reader's "ear" as they manage Shakespearean dialogue in conjunction with their images, creating such effects as a consistent dramatic performance (as Park does) or else entirely different effects, such as Mustashrik's constant shifting to different elements of the crowd (see Figure 1.4), each of whom is allowed only a single still image in which to utter a sequence of words, that one image having stand in for what would on a stage be at least a few seconds of expressive speech – and perhaps a good deal longer, depending upon how the actor playing Antony chooses to present his speech.

Shakespearean Comics in Action: Juliet's Madness

One of the most interesting sequences in the Classical Comics version of *Romeo and Juliet* occurs in Act 4, Scene 3, in which Juliet debates whether or not to take Friar Lawrence's potion, which is meant to make her appear dead the next morning, and thus enable her to avoid marrying Paris (see Figure 1.14). The most salient feature of this

sequence is the parallel composition of the two panels. They are divided by a Scene-to-Scene transition: the first has Juliet lying in her bed and the second has Juliet lying in a tomb. While the first scene is literally true, the second is imaginary. Yet this parallel structure is not as simple as it appears when it is interpreted alongside Juliet's speech. In the left-hand panel, she begins the question, "How if, when I am laid into the tomb, I wake before the time that Romeo come to redeem me?" (Volley127). The word "redeem" is particularly interesting here. Its most evident, literal, and obvious meaning in this passage is "To rescue, save, or deliver (a person or thing) from a particular situation" ("redeem, *v.*" 5). The word "redeem," however, often has a specifically financial signification, a point that we catch sight of in another definition closely related to the first: "To ransom (a person) from slavery, captivity, or punishment; to save (a person's life) by paying a ransom" ("redeem, *v.*" 3). Although Romeo is not, of course, planning to pay a ransom, the economic connotations of the word seem inevitable, given its Latin root in *redimere* (to buy back) and its range of meanings that include "To buy back (a former possession); to make payment for (a thing held or claimed by another)" ("redeem, *v.*" 7). In addition to the economic meaning of "redeem," which situates Juliet as a piece of owned property, there exists also the specifically Christian meaning, in which "redeem" denotes "*Theol.* Esp. of God or Christ: to deliver (a person, a soul, etc.) from sin or damnation" ("redeem, *v.*" 1). When we recall that Juliet's plan is to die (or to appear to die), be placed in a tomb, and then to emerge alive from that tomb again, it is hard not to see how redemption in the theological sense must be heard in this line as well. In light of this range of possible linguistic meanings, the two images together can be read as a kind of exchange in themselves: in these images a live Juliet is exchanged for dead Juliet in a tomb – the consequence of an unsuccessful economic exchange. Read in the

light of the Christian aspect of the words, this failed redemption leaves Juliet in the tomb forever.

Another interesting feature of this passage in the play is the complicated and potentially confusing grammar of Juliet's speech:

> Or, if I live, is it not very like
>
> The horrible conceit of death and night,
>
> Together with the terror of the place –
>
> As in a vault, an ancient receptacle
>
> Where, for these many hundred years, the bones
>
> Of all my buried ancestors are packed:
>
> Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
>
> Lies fest'ring in his shroud; where, as they say,
>
> At some hours in the night spirits resort –
>
> Alack, alack, is it not like that I,
>
> So early waking – what with loathsome smells,
>
> And shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth,
>
> That living mortals, hearing them, run mad –   (4.3.35-47)

"Like" at the end of the first line means "likely," but after introducing "The horrible conceit of death and night / Together with the terror of the place" Juliet slips into an extended simile and then appears to lose track of the grammar of her initial sentence, not quite coming around to exactly what the horrible conceit and terror are "like" to do. Indeed, even her simile should catch our attention too, as it does not really quite end up being a simile after all: if she lives and ends up in the tomb, she will not be "as in a vault": she will, in fact *literally* be in a vault. This function of the word "vault" is

confirmed when Romeo later enters the tomb to see her again and declares, "Here lies

Juliet, and her beauty makes / This vault a feasting presence full of light" (5.3.85-6).

Eventually, at the beginning of line 44 Juliet breaks off with "Alack, alack" and takes

another run at the speculation with another "Is it not like" (4.3.44). But once again she

only manages to list a series of things that will cause the likely event to happen...and then

breaks off and begins a new sentence before getting to the point. In this second attempt,

however, she does give away more information than she did the first time: one of the

causes of the unnamed likely consequence is "shrieks," which are compared to

mandrakes, whose sounds drive mortals mad (4.3.46). Is it madness that Juliet fears? If

not literally mandrakes, what "shrieks" does she expect to encounter in the tomb? Those

of ghosts? Her own? Once again the turn to a simile prevents her from quite having to

articulate the horror she imagines: of being driven mad with fear, alone in the tomb. She

finally arrives at the fear that she has been trying to express, describing the suicidal

madness she imagines she may be driven to:

> O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
>
> Environed with all these hideous fears,
>
> And madly play with my forefathers' joints,
>
> And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud,
>
> And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone
>
> As with a club dash out my desp'rate brains? (4.3.48-53).

Thus from "is it not very like?" down to "run mad" Juliet fills her speech with intervening

clauses (mostly extended similes) that prevent the grammatical completion of the horrible

thought of her own madness; yet these grammatical buffers do not seem to alleviate her

fear but rather intensify it, as she piles up a heap of horrifying imagery, thus providing

herself with further reasons to fear the terror of being alone in the tomb, and ensuring that when her true fear is expressed it comes in full, gory detail.

Volley's visual accompaniment to this speech begins with Juliet in her bedroom and moves by a Scene-to-Scene to her imagined presence in the vault. Here his art helps to reflect and enhance the content of the speech. There is a measure of simple Duo-Specific redundancy to the word-image relationship here: the first piece of text to appear in the second panel is "as in a vault," the image thus providing only a simple and literal accompaniment to the words, conveying the same information. Even though it is a simple device, however, we should note that the literal depiction of Juliet in the vault helps to expose the false simile for what it is: Juliet says "as in a vault," as if the hypothetical situations she imagines would not in fact have her in a vault, but merely some place that rather resembles one. The literalizing image is a reminder that she is not imagining or referring to a vault-like place, but the Capulet vault itself, and the simile structure is an attempt to falsely soften the imagined horror. Even more interesting than this is Volley's placement of the text "where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth, lies fest'ring in his shroud" next to the part of the panel that depicts a shrouded corpse in the tomb: both because of the appearance of the body, and because of this panel's composition being parallel to that of the previous one, it is obvious that this figure is implied to be Juliet, not Tybalt (Volley 127). Volley thus suggests a reading of the speech in which Juliet's reflections on the dead corpse Tybalt, distressing though they are, are masking the real fear of being in the tomb herself, wrapped in a shroud (either alive, or dead and festering herself). The same point can be extended to the "ancestors" that she speaks of in the previous speech balloon: the image reminds us that despite all the other people Juliet describes in the vault, what must really be on her mind is her *own* presence there. Thus

the first part of the text in this second panel appears to be taking part in a Duo Specific word-image relationship, but as the text moves through the panel, a disjunction between text and image appears, revealing the real word-image relationship of the panel to be Interdependent. By having the imagined image and the uttered words coming apart in this way, Volley helps to reveal Juliet's "distraught" mental state, in which she cannot quite bring herself to express her real fear, even to herself.

Perhaps Volley's most ingenious engagement with Juliet's speech comes in the first panel of this page (see Figure 1.15) and this engagement hinges upon Juliet's use of the word "where." Grammatically, "where" here functions as a relative pronoun, and refers back to the "tomb" of a few lines earlier. Alongside this "where" clause, Volley introduces a hallucinatory image of skeletons floating in the air in Juliet's chamber. While these visions do not correspond exactly to any particular line of Juliet's speech, her elaborate imaginings of horrors certainly seem designed to conjure up images for the reader or audience member, and she does declare a little further down, "Methinks I see my cousin's ghost" (54), making the vision of floating skeletons added by Volley a justifiable elaboration. The word-image relationship here is an Interdependent one, not because of the reference to "spirits" in the line (that word alone would create a Duo-Specific relationship) but because of the relative pronoun "where." In Juliet's speech, "where" refers to the tomb; when this line is placed alongside an image of the floating skeletal spirits in the bedroom, the two together express a meaning that neither could do individually. The text by itself indicates that Juliet fears she might see spirits in the tomb and go mad; the image by itself indicates that Juliet sees spirits in her bedroom. Taken in combination, the meaning of "where" becomes disrupted: what Juliet says might happen in the tomb is now happening in her bedroom, a visualization that enables an elaborate

articulation of her fears. For one thing, it (along with the parallel panels on the previous page) likens her bedroom to a tomb – a reasonable association, given her fear that Friar Lawrence might have given her poison: her bedroom might become her tomb. Additionally, this panel helps to reinforce the intensifying build-up of Juliet's fears over the course of this speech. Even as she postpones the precise declaration of them, while (perhaps inadvertently) managing to build them up to a crescendo, Volley's subtle manipulation of the meaning of "where" ensures that the images of skeletons and the ghost in her room make sense: she is not just being driven mad with fear of being in the tomb; she is being driven mad with fear of being driven mad with fear in the tomb. All of these effects add up to a highly complex account of Juliet's fears: she is positioned uneasily as part of a risky economic exchange, which has both economic and religious overtones, and is uncertain of her future, life and death each coming with its own peculiar set of horrors. Juliet is thus consumed with fear, not only of the evil consequences she imagines, but because of the psychological effects that she imagines those consequences will have.

This analysis of one scene in the Classical Comics *Romeo and Juliet* is merely a starting point, and there are a number of directions one might wish to take this reading, depending upon one's critical interests. One ideological reading might wish to pursue the idea that Juliet's madness emerges from her status as owned property, caught up in an infelicitous economic exchange. A critic more interested in religious culture might wish to pursue the Christian aspects of the "redemption" that I have here only briefly gestured towards, drawing out the implications of Romeo's failed efforts to "redeem" Juliet. A more psychoanalytic approach might pursue this reading with an emphasis on the particular nature of her madness, perhaps referring to early modern theories of insanity

(for a more historicist approach) likely to have influenced Shakespeare, or to 21st-century ideas likely to have influenced Volley – or perhaps to the relationship between the two. An approach more concerned with staging practices might take special note of the parallel relationship set up between Juliet's bed and Juliet's tomb, which likely had a precedent in the early modern theatre.[26]

There are any number of approaches one might take in reading this comic, or any Shakespearean comic, and my point here is that an approach to the text that makes use of the analytical categories of the comics medium in conjunction with the more familiar methods of literary close reading, can enable fruitful engagement with a text like this for critics with a very wide range of interests. As Lennard puts it, "To interpret a given use of form, or a rhyme, or some metrical device may involve, for any particular reader, reference to Freud, Marx, de Saussure, or de Beauvoir; it must first be noticed by the reader, and it is much easier to notice things of which you have some knowledge" (Lennard xxii). Although this process of noticing will inevitably be guided by prior interests and values, a knowledge of the formal structures and relationships available in the comics medium can only make the critical engagement with the text more detailed, persuasive, and intense. In the next chapter I will turn to the specific issues involved in transposing Shakespearean drama to the pages of a comic book in terms of both the poetic text and the specific concerns of staging. This chapter will draw heavily upon the formal techniques and structures I have just introduced, and will set the stage (as it were) for the

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[26] See in particular Mariko Ichikawa's discussion of staging *Romeo and Juliet*: "when Juliet drinks the friar's portion [sic], the curtained space must have been used for either thrusting out or revealing her bed. The Shakespearean actors could have visually emphasized the miscarriage of her hopes by using the same place for staging her bed and tomb" (205). See also Leslie Thomson's article, "'With patient ears attend': *Romeo and Juliet* on the Elizabethan Stage."

extended discussions of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Macbeth* in Chapter 3 and Chapter

4, respectively.

Chapter 2

Poetry and Staging in Shakespearean Comic Books

Introduction

Successful Shakespearean theatre combines attention for the play's language with a creativity and ingenuity of staging. Successful Shakespearean comic books do the same, and in this chapter I examine some of the more salient problems and opportunities inherent in adapting dramatic texts to the comics medium. In doing so, I intend to demonstrate that these works provide new and valuable perspectives on Shakespearean drama and are sufficiently complex and sophisticated in their approach as to warrant scholarly attention and, indeed, warrant a place in the performance history of Shakespearean drama. Furthermore, I seek to show that the formalist approach that I advocate in Chapter 1 is vitally useful in order for an interpretive engagement with them to be truly fruitful.

Initially, I will discuss the adaptation of early modern verse to comic books, where the necessary conventions of speech balloons and captions often prevent poetry from taking its normal form on the page, but nevertheless enable other creative and striking visual and textual effects. Then I will move on to questions of how comics handle matters of theatrical staging, first through a discussion of Marcia Williams' adaptations of Shakespearean plays for children and then through a discussion of Neil Gaiman's award-winning comic book version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Both of these establish new ways of thinking about the relationship between the text and the audience or reader in the "staging" of a play in comic book form, and both challenge common conceptions of Shakespeare's canonical "high culture" status. Finally, I will discuss two very different

comic book versions of *King Lear*, which will further elucidate the unique features of converting drama to the comics page, and the powerful possibilities in the comics medium both for reconstructing a version of early modern theatrical experience and for creating effects that are unavailable in any other medium.

"I See A Voice!": Putting Shakespeare in Speech Balloons

Shakespearean prosody is a highly complex subject in itself, and I cannot give it more than a cursory look, but I must address it to some extent here because while some comic book versions of Shakespeare retain his versification, others abandon it, effectively converting it into prose. While this conversion leaves many aspects of the text and its meaning unaffected, there are certainly things that are necessarily lost in this conversion and I must devote some attention to the ways in which comic books may once again rely upon their own special formal resources to either recreate these lost effects, or to replace them with alternative ones, thus creating their own kind of "line breaks" and related effects by means of distributing words on the page.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the adaptation of Shakespearean drama to the comics medium is the problem of converting passages in verse into the peculiar vehicle of the speech balloon. To transfer prose is not such a problem, as unlike poetry it does not rely upon the integrity of the line. In *Shakespeare's Metrical Art* George T. Wright insists upon this integrity as a crucial aspect of the presentation of poetry:

> Poetry is language composed in verse, that is, language of which an essential feature is its appearance in measured units, either as written text or in oral performance. Although other units, larger or smaller, play an important part in poetry, in literature cultures the *line* is the indispensable unit of verse and the one

by which we recognize its nature. Paragraphs of prose lack this essential feature: in different printed versions the separate lines may end at different words without injury to meaning or form; different printed versions of poems must retain the lines as they are. If a line is too long to print on a narrow page or column, the printer must use some conventional means to show that the leftover words belong with the ones they follow. Even when the sense of one line runs over to the next, it is important to the form of a poem that the lines be preserved intact. (Wright ix)

What is most important to note here is Wright's emphasis on the visual dimension of poetry, in addition to its audible dimension. It is this visual dimension—the integrity of the poetic line—that makes its incorporation into a highly visual medium particularly difficult, because verse cannot simply be re-lineated at the artist's discretion in order to make it fit into a series of speech balloons – at least not without eliminating its key visual characteristic. According to this view of poetry, any Shakespearean comic book that does not retain the line breaks of the normal printed text is potentially falling into a serious error. The medium of comics arranges pieces of text visually on the page to create emphasis and variation. It must divide the text of the script into various speech balloons and text boxes, and distribute these in such a way that they work harmoniously with the images. Some of these methods of dividing and aligning text can potentially imitate or replace some of the functions of line breaks in poetry, with the creation of emphasis, interruption, and similar devices, but of course this cannot ever precisely imitate the function of traditional poetic line breaks; these conventions rather replace those techniques with a different set of formal devices, suitable for a new medium.

The problem is not entirely visual, but also aural, as poetry depends upon meter for its effect. Although converting poetry into prose by eliminating line breaks does not

necessarily disrupt the rhythm of any particular group of words (the phrase "to be or not to be" may remain iambic whether it appears after a line break or not) metre is about more than just counting stressed and unstressed syllables; it is also, crucially, about establishing a pattern:

> The *meter* of a line is its inner rhythmical structure, which in English we understand as a relationship between stressed and unstressed syllables. Since poems do not normally change their meter in every line but establish and confirm repetitive rhythmical patterns, often we must read several lines of a poem before we can hear a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that inheres in all of them, without variation. Once we can hear the basic pattern, we can recognize it as it is realized differently in all the succeeding lines; we listen for the returning pattern. (Wright ix)

Without the consistent structure of the line governing the page-layout of verse, there can be no metrical pattern, and therefore no interesting variations from it. This is not to say that it is impossible to insert blocks of properly lineated poetic text into a comic book speech balloon, but this method can create considerable problems, as I discuss shortly.

In his discussion of caesurae, Wright takes as a key example Mercutio's famous Queen Mab speech from *Romeo and Juliet*, and observes the variety of metrical feet that it exhibits. He marks them thus:

> This is | that very Mab
>
> That plats the manes of hor|ses in | the night,
>
> And bakes the elf|-locks in | foul slut|tish hairs. ...
>
> This is | the hag, when maids | lie on | their backs,
>
> That press|es them | and learns them first to bear,

Making | them wo|men of | good car|riage.

This is | she—   (Wright 61)

Wright observes that compared to some of the more regular metrical devices of

Shakespeare's contemporary George Gascoigne, "Shakespeare's passage is much freer

with spondees, pyrrhics, and trochees [...]; it locates the break more variously, and it

begins and ends in midline" (Wright 61). He argues that these metrical manipulations

contribute to our understanding of character, that "These devices, along with the richer

and more playful imagery, help to portray the mercurial excitement of the character

Mercutio" and speculates that "a generation of poets and listeners had to hear with

pleasure the falling together of the natural accent and the metrical beat before the creative

departures from the norm could provide more extravagant pleasures" (61). While it

remains possible to dispute any particular account of the scansion of a piece of verse, it is

nevertheless true that metrical variation exists, and that it can affect how we understand a

piece of poetry. An audience member or reader cannot possibly appreciate new metrical

variation without a stable basis of comparison, and in an adapted version of this speech

that has been converted to prose, there is no stable metrical standard from which a

variation can be noticed, because there is no standard line.

    One of Wright's examples of the importance of line breaks comes in his discussion of

the opening of the second act of *Julius Caesar*:

    CAESAR   Calpurnia!

    CASCA   Peace, ho! Caesar speaks.

    CAESAR   Calpurnia!

    CALPURNIA Here, my lord.   (Wright 123)

Wright's reading of the passage depends crucially upon the line breaks: "Caesar, we note, cannot even speak to his wife without an intermediary; the split line makes that point. All four speeches are brief, but the first three compose an iambic pentameter line. The next does not; it stands alone as Calphurnia does" (123). I am not sure that Casca's interjection constitutes his being an intermediary: that label would imply that he was speaking to Calpurnia on Caesar's behalf, while in fact he is evidently addressing everyone else in the immediate vicinity who might be making noise that could interrupt the profound words of the great and wonderful Caesar. He could be indifferent to the people he is ostensibly addressing and be making his interjection simply to signal to Caesar what a loyal supporter he is, or he could be speaking in order to announce himself to the crowd and establish his own importance as Caesar's master of ceremonies. Various interpretations of Casca's motives are possible here, but the reading of him as an intermediary between Caesar and Calpurnia seems hard to sustain. Nevertheless, the irony of these lines is that, with the information that the text provides us (as opposed to the details a stage production might add) the only person who can actually be interrupting Caesar here is Casca himself. Given the visual format of verse lineation, it is easy to see Wright's point about Casca's intervening statement. I like to think of this problem as a reminder of the visual element of textuality, and of the importance of observing such details as the placement of lines on a page. Regarded thus, it affirms the interpretive potential of comic books: if this simple matter of arrangement can prompt a different reading of the line, then the radical (and carefully deliberate) arrangements possible in the comics medium can create exciting possibilities as well.

In *The Poetry Handbook*, John Lennard observes that "In all speech there are rhythmic patterns which we use to pick out meaning and phrase from the strings of

syllables which we hear, the syllabic beat" (Lennard 1). He adds, "the basic unit of poetry is the *line*, which is clearly visible when you look at poetry and may be defined as a single sequence of characters read from left to right" (2). Verse that has its line breaks removed and thus becomes prose still has a rhythm, but it cannot possibly have metre, because without the unit of the line, there can be no clear way to identify a consistent metrical pattern – it is the establishment of such a pattern, and the occasional deviations from it, that makes metrical reading particularly interesting and interpretively fruitful. Without lines there can be no caesurae, no rising rhythm or falling rhythm – indeed, no metrical scheme at all, and therefore no counterpoint between the metrical template of the poem and the variations required by normal syllabic pronunciation. And although the removal of lineation does not eliminate rhyme, it effectively converts all rhyme to internal rhyme.

As Lennard puts it, "poetry may use one additional form of punctuation, the line-break, a moment of spatial organization different from every other mark and space" (75). Whether a poem exhibits a rigidly traditional form, or free verse, or is even a prose poem, there remains "at every line-break a question of what words will be on either side of it, and whether the line will be end-stopped [...] or enjambed" (75). While it can be very difficult to transfer these textual effects to comics without simply placing all of Shakespeare's verse into large blocks of verse in enormous speech balloons that risk dominating the page and covering all the images, the medium of comics affords devices which, although different from those of poetry, enable the visual arrangement of words on the page to influence how they are read. When dialogue is divided up among different speech balloons or text boxes of variable shapes and sizes, assigned to different characters, and arranged in particular ways on the page, there remains, to borrow from

Lennard, a question of what words will be in which balloon, where the division will take place, and how they will be placed in relation to the images with which they have a relationship. To be sure, transferring passages of verse to speech balloons can transform, perhaps radically, the metrical qualities of the poetry. But instead of regarding Shakespearean comics with dismay at the effects that have been lost, it is worth looking for the new effects and interpretations that the spatial reorganization of the text makes possible.[27]

Speech balloons and text boxes can achieve remarkable effects in themselves by distributing text strategically on the page. An excellent example comes from the Manga Shakespeare version of *The Tempest*, textually adapted by Richard Appignanesi and illustrated by Paul Duffield. The relevant passage of the play appears in Act 1 Scene 2 when Prospero is, at long last, telling Miranda the history of their family, and why they are on the island. In discussing his evil brother, he explains:

> I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
>
> To closeness and the bettering of my mind
>
> With that which, but by being so retired,
>
> O'er-prized all popular rate, in my false brother
>
> Awaked an evil nature. (1.2.89-93)

The crucial poetical effect in this sentence depends upon the distance between the grammatical subject and its predicate. Removing all the line-breaks as well as all the intervening subordinate clauses, it would simply read, "I in my false brother awaked an

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[27] For more on this idea, it would be worth consulting Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) , which places particular emphasis on adaptation across different media, which require different modes of engagement. She divides media into three general categories of "showing," as in film or television, "telling," as in novels or poems, and "interacting," as in video games (21). She does not discuss comic books at any length, but given their combination of words and images I would regard them as poised between the modes of "showing" and "telling."

evil nature." Here it is clear that the "I" is the subject of the verb "awaked," which is a transitive verb, acting upon the object "an evil nature." But with all the intervening material included, the grammatical structure of the sentence immediately becomes less obvious. By the time the reader or listener has passed through forty-one syllables and four line-breaks, it is possible that he or she has forgotten the single, brief "I" at the beginning of the sentence, and to read "awaked" as an intransitive verb, whose subject is "an evil nature." On this (mis)reading, evil becomes its own self-sufficient, and therefore inexplicable, cause – its self-caused nature made all the more vivid by the fact that, in neglecting the initial "I" this explanation is actually a total non-sequitur. Not only does the awakening of evil not have an external cause, but it does not even relate to what came immediately before in the sentence: Prospero's virtuous programme of study. Instead it stands as a simple contrast between Prospero's good and Antonio's evil. To the question of why Antonio is evil, the answer is simply that he became so: evil awaked itself in him, being both its own cause and end. The structure of the sentence thus masks Prospero's actual explanation: that Antonio became evil because of Prospero's unintentional provocation.

Admittedly, this particular misreading is not inevitable; nevertheless, it is one that the grammatical structure of the line encourages, because the line breaks assist in the separation of subject and object. Specifically, the placement of "Awaked" at the beginning of the line presents the reader with the prominent verb and helps him or her to forget exactly how the sentence started. In the Manga Shakespeare version, "I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated to the bettering of my mind..." appears at the top of the page while "In my false brother awaked an evil nature. He did believe he was indeed duke" appears at the bottom, in a separate panel (25). This separation of balloons

achieves two simultaneous effects. First, it imitates the same effect of distancing as in Shakespeare's text, putting distance between the subject and its predicate in order to encourage, or at least suggest, a reading in which evil is self-creating. At the same time, however, by breaking apart a sentence between two distant balloons, it actually draws attention to the device by turning a subtle grammatical distancing into a large spatial gap on the page, both pointing out the distancing that makes the interesting "misreading" possible and also helping to make the comic book reader aware of, and able to appreciate, this strategic distancing.

The subtlety and sensitivity of this effect in the Manga Shakespeare *Tempest* is the kind of thing that convinces me of the effectiveness and flexibility of the medium of comics and the fruitfulness of examining it with the method I have developed. To be sure, not everyone shares this view – not even fans of the medium. In a controversial 1996 article titled "The Inherent Limitations of the Comics Form as a Narrative Medium," Gregory Cwiklik expresses serious doubts about the possibilities for comic books to handle certain kinds of content:

> Comics is a superb medium for envisioning a massive, fantastically armored Heimdal astride the rainbow bridge to Asgard, or the splendor of an exploding sun, but not a very good medium for doing Shakespeare or even for realistically portraying two women in a laundromat discussing their lives and loves for a few hours. Comics' inability to render ordinary conversation or speech of any great length or complexity is an immense drawback. (Cwiklik 118)

Cwiklik's view is not unique, and some of the less successful products in the history of comics may appear to lend some credence to his views. Addressing Cwiklik's argument requires a reasonably detailed discussion of the consequences of using speech balloons,

and other aspects of the comics medium to reformat and interpret the text; to this end it is worth examining two very different versions of the famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy, in two different incarnations of the Classics Illustrated series. The first is the 1952 Classics Illustrated *Hamlet* #99, illustrated by Alex Blum. The second is the newer version of *Hamlet* which was #5 of the newer Classics Illustrated series that started up in 1990.

Cwiklik's complaint, particularly given that he specifically mentions Shakespeare, is clearly an objection to work like mine, which takes the view that the comics medium is capable of great and widely varied literary and artistic effects, but also that Shakespeare can be fruitfully adapted to the comics medium. In particular, there is a potential problem regarding what to do with long passages of verse. Certainly, when a section of verse is simply placed undigested, in the sense of being formally unaltered, onto a comics page, the results can be bad for the effectiveness and readability of the comic. More than one critic has singled out the 1952 Classics Illustrated version of *Hamlet* as a particularly egregious example of a failure to use speech balloons effectively to manage text. Cwiklik, in the course of his more general complaint about comics, singles out Blum's *Hamlet* as a failure in this regard:

> You can only load so much text into a balloon before critical mass is achieved and you end up with some monstrosity like the 'To be, or not to be...' speech in the Classics Illustrated version of *Hamlet*, which is contained in one gigantic word balloon occupying fully a quarter of the page. But breaking up the dialogue into a multitude of talking heads panels can be very boring both to draw and to read. (119)

This example seems to cement his point about the problems of depicting lengthy and complex speech to the comics medium, and requires a serious answer.

The point is not unique to Cwiklik: according to Rocco Versaci in *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature* (2007), Shakespeare is particularly difficult to adapt to the comics medium because "a theatrical setting creates a uniformity of perspective" and that "the nature of the proscenium is that spectators remain a constant distance from the action throughout" (Versaci 191). This would seem to be an unnecessary problem – surely an adaptation of a Shakespearean play to the medium of comics would not feel obliged to maintain a single theatrical point of view, as if the reader were a single spectator in an audience watching a play. And given that the proscenium arch is not a standard feature of the early modern stage, however dominant it may have become in the later history of Shakespearean performance, particularly in the nineteenth century (Schoch 62), this obstacle should surely not seem insurmountable, unless for some reason comics creators feel utterly bound not only by the conventions of performance history, but by a specific segment of this history. Yet Classics Illustrated artist Alex Blum did indeed seem to feel the force of this obligation, likely due to his background in theatre and acting (Jones 50). Blum's treatment of the "to be or not to be" soliloquy occurs entirely in one full-page splash panel, depicting Ophelia in the foreground, Hamlet in the middleground, and then Claudius and Polonius in the background, peering out from behind a curtain (see Figure 2.1). More than a quarter of the page is taken up with Hamlet's famous soliloquy.

Like Cwiklik, Versaci argues that on this page "the reader's attention is monopolized by the text at the expense of the visual" and that since "the visual accomplishes little more than to establish staging; the storytelling duties fall completely to the text" (191). He

maintains that "While this situation works in a written copy of the play, it creates flatness in a comic book insofar as the images—the lifeblood of the comics form—are woefully underappreciated" (191). Even Marion Perret, in her more generous response, remarks that "the solitary speech balloon seems weighed down by a daunting thickness of words" and that "The lines jammed together form a visual mass so dense that we may well be tempted to read only the caption, skip the soliloquy" (134-5). She concludes that "The 1952 Classics Illustrated simultaneously offers all of the famous soliloquy and distracts attention from it" (135). William B. Jones, Jr. in *Classics Illustrated: A Cultural History* maintains that Blum, and his colleague Henry C. Kiefer, were "The proverbial old dogs" who "failed to master—or perhaps even fully to understand—the new medium's capacity for dynamic movement" (Jones 87). Evidently, if we are to have Shakespearean comic books, this is not how they should be done.[28]

Cwiklik is skeptical about the possibility of adapting Shakespeare to the comics medium at all. He sees only two possibilities in the case of a long speech like this one: either break it up into a tedious series of panels, or present it in one monolithic block. Yet these are not the only two alternatives. Tom Mandrake's 1990 version of *Hamlet*, produced for the new (and unfortunately short-lived) Classics Illustrated series, finds a method of presentation that neither presents the text in large, indigestible lumps, nor divides it up into a long series of separate panels that show the same talking head or heads. Rather, Mandrake divides the speech into a series of separate speech balloons on one page, arranging them artfully in order to maintain visual interest and reinforce

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[28] I feel compelled to add, in Blum and Keifer's defence, that although this incorporation of Hamlet's famous speech into the comics medium is not successful, and might perhaps even constitute an instance of "old dogs" failing to master new tricks, I see some value in this treatment of the speech as an experiment in the combination of comics and dramatic poetry.

interpretive points. Versaci cites this adaptation as "a good example of how comic book artists use layout to 'open up' a story"; in this case, "the artists fully exploit the fact that comics can, visually, take the reader anywhere; we are not confined to one spot, as we would be when watching a play" (Versaci 198). Versaci does not analyze the work in detail, but Perret has singled out this version for special attention in her work on Shakespearean comic books. It goes a considerable distance towards countering Cwiklik, and confirming Jones' judgement that the problem with the first Classics Illustrated *Hamlet* is not the medium itself, but rather the failure of its illustrator to fully grasp the possibilities of the medium.

This page, which contains the famous speech (see Figure 2.2), is the subject of what is perhaps Perret's most interesting analysis in her work on Shakespearean comic books. Her analysis traces "the logical steps of Hamlet's internal argument" through the linked speech balloons (142). She points out that Hamlet's balloons are divided into separate chains. In the first chain, consisting of six balloons, "Hamlet considers whether to be or not"; in the second chain of three balloons, Hamlet balances "the torment a suicide might face after death" and "the miseries endured in life" (140). The final chain of seven balloons moves "down the panel to the sea, until Hamlet recognizes that 'dread of something after death […] puzzles the will'" and "the balloons angle across the bottom of the inset panel until, finally, the small balloon that epitomizes the Prince's ponderings ('Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all') passes out of the panel and plunges into the sea, with 'lose the name of action'" (140). The final balloon of the soliloquy thus

"does what Hamlet cannot bring himself to do" (140).[29] Here Perret raises some very

interesting observations on the correspondence between the arrangement of the speech

balloons and the movement of the speech, with the balloons, in her reading, actually

committing a suicide of sorts.

Although Perret's work does not have a great deal to say about panel transitions, in

her discussion of this page she does draw attention to the outer panel (or "superpanel," as

she calls it) which depicts the castle and the cliffs, as well as the sea crashing on the rocky

wall of the cliff. Perret characterizes this outer panel as "the stage"[30] for the

foregrounded panel of Hamlet speaking his soliloquy, and asserts that this outer panel

"allow[s] us to see into the Prince's mind," and that the "parapets of Elsinore in the

background summon the reader's memories of a burden imposed by the ghost who stalks

these battlements" (Perret, "And Suit" 140). Although the point about the reminder of the

ghost is well-taken, it seems to me too literal to assert that the outer panel simply and

directly represents the contents of Hamlet's mind, like one big thought balloon,

particularly without any definite indication of this point in either the art or the words.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the two panels is definitely important for the

understanding of the scene. Perret observes that the inner panel "shows Hamlet walking

in a gallery, whose columns and arches cast a diagonal pattern of shadows, like bars,

across the floor" (140) and adds that the scene in the outer panel reinforces this idea, itself

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[29] If we accept this reading, we might suggest (although Perret does not) that we could read this "plunge" as a hint of Ophelia's death by drowning later in the play – and perhaps even as a hint that we ought to read this death as suicide.

[30] The word "stage" is obviously a loaded word in the context of a discussion of adapting dramatic texts, but Perret here does not seem to intend the term in any theatrical sense, but rather in the sense of a psychological backdrop for Hamlet's soliloquy. Thus it performs the opposite function of the blank early modern stage, which in its blankness can provide no illumination or counterpoint to the words of a scene, but is rather illuminated and filled by them, as the dramatic situation requires. I will have more to say about the early modern stage later in this chapter.

functioning as part of Hamlet's prison. Here Denmark (or at least Elsinore) takes on visual properties of a prison; after all, it really is a prison for Hamlet "who is confined by cliff and castle and sea—by home" (140). And so, one of the crucial questions about this page must be this: what exactly is the relationship between these two panels? Given that they share no common figures and that one is set indoors while the other is outdoors, evidently it must be Scene-to-Scene, Aspect-to-Aspect, or Non Sequitur. One could make an argument for a Scene-to-Scene transition here, moving from the inside of the castle to the outside of the castle. If the two images were unaccompanied by dialogue, then this might well be the most persuasive reading. Yet given that the castle is recognizable as Elsinore and Perret has already identified some of the ways in which the outer panel interacts with the inner one and with the contents of the speech, I think it is best to regard the transition as Aspect-to-Aspect, with the outer panel functioning to display a different aspect of the mood or idea of Hamlet's situation—that is, of feeling suicidal in a royal prison.

By the time we get to the final four balloons in the sequence, Hamlet is already turning away from the idea of suicide and instead towards a reflection on the fear of death that prevents great enterprises. This turn complicates the original speech: apparently, Hamlet's fear of death is preventing him from pursuing a "great enterprise," but it is unclear whether that "enterprise" is the murder of Claudius or his own suicide. Neither of these seems, for very different reasons, to qualify for greatness. Thus when Hamlet's final speech balloon plunges into the sea the suggestion may indeed be of suicide, but it may be an ironic or ambiguous one – Hamlet having failed to resolve to do anything at

all, suicide or murder, even his words lead nowhere, giving up their own ambitions in a sort of suicide of their own.[31]

Of particular interest in a reading of this page is Hamlet's list of unbearable worldly problems that the living must endure, as it appears in the comic book: "For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely...the pangs of despised love, the law's delay, the insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes" (22). One can hardly fail to notice the rigid isocolonic structure of this list, with each phrase not only observing a similar length, but a common grammatical structure. The list consists (until its last item) of a series of genitive constructions, of two kinds. Three of the phrases form the genitive with the preposition "of," as in, "the whips and scorns of time." The other three form the genitive with an apostrophe and an "s," as in "the oppressor's wrong." Thus in the speech Hamlet paints a picture of life as being surrounded and abused by a host of difficulties, all of which take rigidly consistent grammatical forms, and all of which are possessive constructions. On the page of Mandrake's comic book, the situation is intensified as these chains of speech balloons, which themselves contain chains of isocolonic possessive phrases, surround the figure of Hamlet. He is thus hemmed in, not only by the worldly problems that he is identifying, but also by his own speech – the endless speech that seems to prevent action in the play. Thus Mandrake's version conveys not only the notion of a Prince imprisoned in his castle, or imprisoned by a world of problems, but also of a Prince imprisoned by himself, by his own chains of demotivating reasons and

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[31] Although I earlier identified the Interdependent category word-image as "perhaps the most interesting" of the seven types, this instance from Mandrake's version is a good example of the complex effects that can be achieved with the Additive category.

fears that literally surround and restrict him before plunging into the sea. It offers a reading of the character of Hamlet in a way not achievable in another medium.

Unless they are maintained as blocks of text, some of the effects of versification may be lost in the process of transferring Shakespeare's verse to comics balloons. Yet not all of them will be lost, and the medium of comics provides some compensatory devices of its own, which to some extent imitate metrical functions, and even have entirely different, and powerful, effects of their own. In Chapter 3, in my reading of Faye Yong's Manga Shakespeare version of *The Merchant of Venice*, the precise placement of speech balloons becomes an important matter, sometimes blurring character voice with narrative voice, and creating multiple word-image relationships across panel transitions in ways that produce crucial interpretive effects.

"All the world's a stage": Marcia Williams' *Mr. William Shakespeare's Plays* and *Bravo Mr. William Shakespeare*

Interestingly, some of the Shakespearean comic book adaptations that are most attentive to the historical conditions of the early modern theatre are intended for young children: Marcia Williams' *Mr William Shakespeare's Plays* (1998), whose chapters comprise "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Macbeth," "The Winter's Tale," "Julius Caesar," and "The Tempest," and *Bravo Mr William Shakespeare* (2000), which contains "As You Like It," "Antony and Cleopatra," "Richard III," "Twelfth Night," "King Lear," "The Merchant of Venice," and "Much Ado About Nothing." In a subsequent essay titled "Bravo, Mr. William Shakespeare!" Williams describes the process of creating the books, recalling that when she was a child she found reading the plays "truly boring" (29). She also recalls Charles and Mary Lamb's popular

Tales from Shakespeare as the text that was used to introduce her to the plays, noting that

"By 1900 it had been reprinted 74 times and translated into several languages" (31).

Then she poses the blunt and pointed questions: "But why is it still being sold today? Is it

what I should have been given to read in the mid-twentieth century? Should we expect a

book, published in 1807, that is a retelling, not an original work of literature, still to talk

to the twentieth-century child?" (29). Thus Williams implicitly sets herself up here as the

successor to the Lambs, as one who will digest Shakespeare for a new generation of

young children. She regards the theatrical experience as primary in engaging with,

enjoying, and understanding Shakespeare, and regards adapted children's versions, and

even full printed texts of the play, as precursors or supplements to the real thing, arguing,

"What I had always felt lacking in other retellings was the feeling that these were plays to

be performed, not stories for silent reading" (33).

    Williams' creative breakthrough on the project came when she went on a tour of the

new Globe Theatre in London, still under construction at the time, where she acquired a

new awareness of early modern rehearsal practices and of the rowdy, bawdy audience that

a typical performance would attract (33). Williams was determined to get a sense of this

vibrant, living theatrical experience into her work. She states:

> There was no curtain between Shakespeare and his audience. The line between
>
> stage and life blurred as the audience partook of the performance, some from the
>
> stage itself. As Shakespeare wrote, 'All the world's a stage.' That is what I
>
> wanted to capture a sense of, between the covers of my book. (34)

Certainly the key feature of these adaptations is the fact that the audience is incorporated

into the text, placed around the margins of the page, commenting upon the action – or

sometimes upon other topics altogether. These audience members are in early modern

dress, and represent a wide variety of types, male and female, young and old, rich and poor, evidently indicating the breadth of social appeal of the early modern theatre. This depiction of the audience appears to be accurate. As far as scholarship can determine, the very large audience that the theatre attracted[32] tended to represent a very broad social range. The penny admission at the Globe was cheap compared to most other entertainments; the only other diversion that could compete with it on price was bear-baiting (Gurr 264). Yet this fact did not ensure an audience entirely of commoners; as Gurr maintains, "the privileged and underprivileged audiences were not mutually exclusive; rather the rich went to hall and amphitheatre playhouses alike, the poor more exclusively to the amphitheatres" (Gurr 266). The positioning of the audience on three sides of the page, around the main body of panels, approximates the physical space of an early modern theatre like the Globe, although the representation of theatrical space is not entirely straightforward here.

Laura Tosi describes Williams' work as a "recreation of an original performance at the Globe, as the margins of the page become the space of the theater" (Tosi 143), but this is only half-correct. Despite the various historically-accurate features of the book, we must not mistake Williams' pages for a literal re-envisioning of the early modern theatre. For one thing, there are never more than about a dozen audience members depicted on any given page, so that Williams is only presenting a few isolated audience responses, singled out of an audience that would have comprised something more like 2500 spectators on a busy day (Gurr 213). More importantly, while the margins of the page do indeed contain an audience, they are not positioned around a literal stage; rather, they are positioned

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[32] "In 1594 the estimates suggest that the two authorised acting companies were visited by about 15,000 people weekly. In 1620, when six playhouses were open, three of them the smaller private houses, the weekly total was probably nearer 25,000" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 260).

around a series of comic panels which depict key moments in the play's story. This

sequence of panels does not create a physical playing space but rather a narrative

progression through the principal incidents in the play, in a series of primarily Scene-to-

Scene transitions. The audience members who regard the action and comment upon it are

not positioned next to particular areas of the stage but next to particular panels, each of

which encloses a discrete narrative incident. Thus although Williams might be said to be

producing a "recreation of an original performance," she is doing so in an entirely non-

literal manner, and what we see on the page constitutes not so much a depiction of the

early modern theatre as a speculative and playful depiction of an early modern audience's

imaginative experience of Shakespeare's drama.

Tosi specifically discusses the audience comments in Williams' version of *Hamlet*,

which include one complaining, "What a gloomy start" while another replies, "Well,

Denmark is gloomy, stupid" (Williams, *Mr William* 8). Tosi's observations are,

admittedly, not always sufficiently careful. She refers to "a Queen Elizabeth lookalike"

in the audience "commenting 'typical Danish ghost' and then wondering 'did we behead

that person?'" (Tosi 143). Tosi, however, misses the fact that these two statements come

from two different characters, not one (although both are dressed in queenly regalia) and

that the speaker of the first statement is herself a ghost, holding her own pale, severed

head in her hands. The figure on the opposite side of the page, who says the second line,

is Queen Elizabeth I, and she is regarding the headless figure who, given Elizabeth's

remark about beheading, we may reasonably deduce to be the ghost of Mary, Queen of

Scots (see Figure 2.3). Tosi argues that the humour of these audience comments "is used

to (partially) 'tame' the disturbing potential of the play: the murders and tragic deaths are

effectively 'framed,' visually as well as verbally, by the audience's deflating comments"

(143). The comments certainly can be seen as deflationary, ensuring that the sometimes-grim content of the plays never becomes too upsetting for young readers. I would add that they also serve to signal conventional reactions to the play (for young readers who might not necessarily know, for instance, that a tragedy is expected to be gloomy) while simultaneously encouraging readers to have their own reactions that do not necessarily conform to convention, and to make their own comments with a healthy dose of irreverence.

   A major key to understanding the importance and usefulness of Williams' devices is Alan C. Dessen's fascinating concept of unlocalized space:

> But as indicated by the plentiful *as from* and *as in* signals, before the emergence
> of scenes and sets the pre-1642 actor entered to a neutral, unlocalized space. If
> the locale was for some reason important, that actor then, whether through
> dialogue, properties, costume, or distinctive actions, brought that 'place' with him
> or somehow signaled the place-activity he had left behind him offstage. In short,
> the locale did not precede the actor; rather, the actor created or signaled the locale.
> (Dessen, *Recovering* 148)

That the comics medium is actually very congenial to this possibility is not always appreciated; sometimes the praise that comics receive is aimed in precisely the opposite direction. In *The Power of Comics*, for instance, Duncan and Smith tend not to emphasize the ability of comics to depart from the specificity of setting in favour of spatio-temporal fluidity; instead they emphasize the ability of comics to imitate naturalistic, or otherwise highly-detailed filmic devices:

> Film borrowed from theater the concept of mise-en-scène, or 'putting in the
> scene.' Most of the mise-en-scène elements present on stage or screen can be

depicted in a comic book panel: background details, color, 'lighting,' distance,

angle, and 'movement.' Comic books also have some unique elements of

composition: visualized sound, the blending of the pictorial and the linguistic, the

art style. (Duncan and Smith, *Power* 141)

For the purposes of this analysis, even more important than the fact that comics can

achieve the fully-realized and detailed mise-en-scène effect is that they are also able to

not do so when different effects are required. Comics possess a potential for minimalism

as well as for fully saturated detail and can in the blink of an eye (or rather the transition

of a panel) move from one extreme to the other, or to some more moderate intermediary

point.

    Duncan and Smith do sometimes see this possibility in comics too. They argue that

while characters are usually the focus of the reader's attention in a comic book, "the

details depicted behind and around those characters are essential for establishing setting

and mood" (141). They further observe a very interesting tendency in comics that

corresponds very well with the idea of unlocalized space in the early modern theatre:

Once setting is established by background details, a vague sense of that setting

persists in the reader's imagination, and details tend to become sparse or drop out

altogether. In fact, there are times when continued depiction of a detailed setting

can be counterproductive to the author's purpose. 'When you've got a lot of

background detail,' warns artist Richard Corben, 'it can slow down the pacing of

the story and may even detract from what the story is saying.' However, Corben

goes on to say that 'sometimes it may be an important part of the story, such as the

setting and the ambiance.' (141-42)

Just as the early modern stage will have a verbal cue to establish setting and then let the reader's or spectator's imagination maintain it from there, so comics can (if they want) give a visual cue for the setting, in the equivalent of a cinematic "establishing shot," and then let reader's imagination maintain it.

Returning to Williams' text, we can see that although some of the panel backgrounds contain little or no background details, others include a substantial level of scenic detail, which changes in the Scene-to-Scene transitions between panels. Thus in Williams' version of *Romeo and Juliet*, the balcony scene (see Figure 2.3) features a fairly detailed balcony, some convenient greenery for Romeo to climb, a starry night sky, and even Juliet's pet cat regarding the whole exchange with a doubtful expression; the rest of the page, however, depicts a whole series of scenes, from Romeo's meeting with Friar Lawrence, Romeo and Juliet's wedding, the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt, and the fight between Tybalt and Romeo – all in a very quick series of panels. The panels depicting these various scenes have almost no background detail to distinguish them from one another, except that the scenes with Friar Lawrence have the characters standing on grassy ground, while the latter scenes have the characters standing on stone-brick streets (Williams, *Tales* 7). Even these "onstage" panels do not depict a literal early modern stage performance (the players would not, after all, have laid out a sod carpet for Friar Lawrence and then rolled it back up again for the Verona street scenes) but rather an envisioning of the play's story, of what might appear in the imaginative mind's eye of the spectator. Therefore it is fine for some panels to exhibit virtually no scenery at all, the scene requiring no more specific localization than "a street" or "a public place" while others are more fully fleshed out. In Williams' depictions, the space represented in the panel is usually only as specific as it needs to be for the action of the scene, just as in an

early modern production in which a series of scenes might take place in "a street in Verona" - if even that much is specified. We need not necessarily suppose that most of the main characters of a play just happen to pause for a chat at the corner of Via Leoni and Via San Sebastiano in groups of two or three at a time, before departing and being replaced by the next group, in a perfect sequence, without happening to run into one another; rather, we need only suppose that all of these scenes happen in the moderately unlocalized space of "a street."

One example of a notable failure to recognize the importance of unlocalized space in a comic book occurs in the Classical Comics edition of *The Tempest* (2009). Although Classical Comics is normally an excellent series, producing some of the best work in comic book adaptations of Shakespeare, here illustrators John Haward and Gary Erskine make a decision that damages the effectiveness of their adaptation. The book is a beautiful creation, full of brightly-coloured and lavishly-detailed backgrounds. If it were a film, it would undoubtedly receive praise for "high production values." Yet this causes serious problems, given certain ambiguities in the play's text. Perhaps most significant is the exchange among Adrian, Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo regarding the appearance of the island:

ADRIAN	The air breathes upon us here most sweetly.
SEBASTIAN	As if it had lungs and rotten ones.
ANTONIO	Or as 'twere perfumed by a fen.
GONZALO	Here is everything advantageous to life.
ANTONIO	True, save means to live.
SEBASTIAN	Of that there's none, or little.
GONZALO	How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green!

> ANTONIO   The ground indeed is tawny. (2.1.46-55)

The bare early modern stage is crucial to the effect of the scene. If there are elaborate

sets and backdrops (or, in a comic book, detailed background art) that objectively

establish the true appearance of the island, then this dialogue exchange would make little

sense: in light of the explicit and detailed setting, one or the other of the two positions is

evidently false, while the other is evidently true. In Haward and Erskine's version, one of

the pairs, either Gonzalo and Adrian or Antonio and Sebastian, must be simply and

obviously incorrect, and perhaps delusional. Williams' willingness to vary the specificity

of localization in her drawn spaces exhibits her sensitivity to the requirements of the

action, and helps to showcase the impressive ability of comics to accommodate the

particular requirements of Shakespearean drama, when they are in the hands of a

sufficiently skilful and thoughtful illustrator.

Also crucial to a reading of Williams' text is an exploration of the "line between stage

and life" that she seeks to blur (Williams, "Bravo" 34). In her adaptations of Shakespeare

to the comic medium, the gutter is what stands between the panels depicting the story of

the play and the border panel that depicts the audience; this placing of the magic and

mystery of the stage/audience relationship into the gutters is powerfully consistent with

McCloud's argument that the gutter "plays host to much of the magic and mystery that

are at the very heart of comics" (McCloud, *Understanding* 66). In terms of comics

theory, the crucial question is: what type of panel transition does Williams maintain

between the panels that depict the events of the Shakespearean play and the outer border

panel that depicts the audience that watches those events? The transition lacks a temporal

gap, as audience members are reacting to the scene as it happens. It does not even

possess a spatial gap, exactly, given that the transition is not between two physical parts

of the early modern theatre, but between an imaginatively-elaborated performance and the audience (or selected members of the audience) that is both perceiving it and imaginatively elaborating upon it. Thus the transition would be best described as Aspect-to-Aspect, with the gutter dividing not different, spatial parts of a literal scene, but rather different aspects of the theatrical experience: that of the characters in the play and that of the audience watching them.

I will return to Williams in my discussion of her version of *The Merchant of Venice* in Chapter 3. For the time being, I will conclude that although her adaptations are for children, they are among the most sophisticated in their accommodation of the idea of unlocalized space on the early modern stage and in manipulating the stage/audience relationship within the adapted versions of the plays. Despite their appearance of childish simplicity, these adaptations ingeniously configure a relationship between the audience/reader and the text that encourages active engagement with the events of the play, although it admittedly provides limited opportunity to engage with the complexities of Shakespeare's language.[33]

"A Most Rare Vision": Neil Gaiman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Williams' versions of Shakespearean plays achieve extraordinary effects by their creative use of the forms of the comics medium to represent early modern staging. Yet other modes of staging were possible in the early modern period than those provided by the familiar space of the Globe Theatre, and the writers and artists of comic books likewise

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[33] Although the primary focus of this dissertation is not the pedagogical applications of Shakespearean comics, this one is worth singling out as being of particular interest to anyone who wishes to get young children interested in the plays, not least because of its encouragement of active engagement rather than the passive receiving of the goods of high culture. High culture status is a particular interest of the next text I will discuss in this chapter, as is audience interaction, although in a different way than that achieved by Williams.

have other resources for making this staging a fascinating subject for visualization in their chosen medium. Another excellent "staging" of Shakespeare in comics can be found in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* series which, as a whole, stands as one of the great triumphs of modern comics. Its central character is Morpheus (or Dream), the godlike embodiment of the idea of dreams and storytelling. The series as a whole tends not to follow a single, continuous narrative; nor is it a series of self-contained stories about Morpheus and his adventures. Rather, the series consists mainly of unrelated stories, with some recurring characters and themes, in which Morpheus sometimes plays a lead role, and sometimes appears hardly at all. One of the most celebrated issues in the series is *Sandman* #19, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which won the World Fantasy Award for Short Fiction in 1991 (Castaldo 104). The story is set in June 1593, and concerns an imaginary performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by a troupe of actors who are traveling through the English countryside. This performance turns out not to be for a human audience, but for an audience of genuinely supernatural faeries, led by the real Auberon[34] and Titania. Various strange events occur in the course of the performance, and in the end, the actors wake up upon a grassy hillside, believing the whole thing to have been a dream, much like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* itself: "I have had a most rare vision" (4.1.199-200).

Kurt Lancaster reads this comic book as an enactment of "the high art and low art debate" in which "the elite high art world of Shakespeare" is placed alongside "the popular/low art world of Gaiman's comic books" (Lancaster 76). The third element in this equation, argues Lancaster, is the "truth" that artists create when they "write from their own perspectives on life in the medium that affords them the best tools to create

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[34] This is the spelling of the character's name in Gaiman's text.

artistic truth irrespective of what other people may think" (76). Additionally, he makes

some interesting observations about juxtaposed panels, although these lack the precision

that would be enabled by McCloud's detailed descriptive vocabulary. Lancaster takes

particular note of the juxtaposition of two panels that occur during the performance. In

the first, Hamnet attempts to speak to his preoccupied father, but Shakespeare ignores

him; in the second, "Puck playing Puck" stands upon the stage "stating Shakespeare's

lines from the play: 'Lord, what fools these mortals be!'" (73). Lancaster argues that this

juxtaposition of panels produces "a new meaning" because "Puck's lines now represent a

comment on the foolishness of Shakespeare for failing to give attention to his son who

needs the dreams of a father before the dreams of the fey" (73). This is a significant

moment because it helps to provide the setup for Titania's promises to Hamnet, which

implies a correspondence between her and the Titania of Shakespeare's play, who claims

the Indian child (73). The payoff, for Lancaster, comes in the final panel of the story,

when "the dreams of Hamnet get encapsulated in a dry text recording his death set against

a promise of a 'forever summer's twilight' of a 'honeyed amber sky' in the

otherworldliness of fey, a mythological promise for the eternal paradise of childlike

innocence sacrificed for the eternal words of the mighty Bard" (76). Lancaster seems

here to miss the black humour of these final "dry" lines, which resemble nothing so much

as the typical conclusion of a cops-and-robbers television programme, in which a narrator

explains what happened subsequently to the major characters (fictional or otherwise) in

the drama just presented: "Hamnet Shakespeare died in 1596, aged eleven. Robin

Goodfellow's present whereabouts are unknown" (86). Nevertheless, Lancaster's essay

remains the most accomplished and effective analysis of the play published to date.

Julia Round echoes Lancaster's statement about high and low art when she asserts

that "Public perception of both the comic book medium and the genre of fantasy means

that, like many contemporary cinematic productions, Gaiman's rewriting can be said to

return these plays to the realm of popular culture" (Round 97). Yet Round has little more

to add, beyond asserting that both Shakespeare's play and Gaiman's particular adaptation

of it concern blurring "the lines between reality and illusion" (99) and that "the fiction

with which Gaiman surrounds *Dream* begins to collapse into it" (99), which could

possibly be an important point, but is asserted entirely on the basis of a plot summary.

Similarly, Laura Wilson raises the reality/illusion distinction in her discussion of the

comic: "Gaiman constructs new ways of representing the relationship between reality and

performance first by casting the fairies as the audience, then by shifting Puck into an

onstage role, and finally by reworking Puck's epilogue" (Wilson 126). Yet what these

ways are and how they are realized through the medium of comics, Wilson does not say.

The truly ingenious use of the comics medium in Gaiman's *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream occurs in the formal devices of the comic itself. The most striking and original of

these can be found in the use by the players of large painted backdrops – not an accurate

historical feature of early modern performance, and therefore particularly worth noting

for their inclusion in a story that otherwise makes a point of scrupulous historical detail.

These objects first appear in the fourth panel of page 66 (see Figure 2.5) which depicts

Morpheus and Shakespeare in the left foreground; to their right is the series of painted

backdrops, affixed to wagons, providing an indication of the setting of the play. Above

these appear a series of unattributed speech balloons, indicating that the actors are

assembling their props and rehearsing their lines: "Who has moved the ass's head?"

"Where's the lanthorn? And the sticks? My beard! By th' Lord Jesu! Y'art wearing my

beard!" "*The King doth keep his revels here tonight mark not*—i'faith—*take heed the queen come not within his sight...*" (66). This look into the hurried, unglamorous and non-magical world of backstage activity evokes the gritty practicality of early modern performance, particularly out in the countryside.[35] The fact that the balloons are unattributed contributes to the effect of a general backstage bustle: it does not matter who is saying which line; what matters is the general air of noise and confusion that precedes a dramatic performance. The unglamorous and unromantic backstage perspective, combined with the practical and historical grubbiness of the production does much to eliminate the distinction between high and low art evoked by Kurt Lancaster in his reading of the scene.

A crucial feature of these backdrops is their evident artificiality; they are not in the nature of an entirely naturalistic special effect, but rather belong to the world of theatrical convention. In this panel, and in other panels later in the story, particularly during the performance, the wooden supports of the wagons behind the painted scenery are plainly visible to the reader and to the audience of fairies. Their evident artificiality highlights the need for sympathetic imaginative participation, a point made explicitly in the Prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry V*, in which the Chorus modestly describes the theatrical company as consisting of "ciphers to this great accompt" and begs the audience to "let us / On your imaginary forces work" and later pleads with the audience to "Still be kind, / And eke out our performance with your mind" (Shakespeare, *Henry V* 3.Prologue.35). Interestingly, these backdrops are in an identical art style to that of

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[35] It would undoubtedly be fascinating to see Marcia Williams' depiction of the backstage activity of one of her adapted plays; one expects that it would be just as lively as her depiction of the early modern audience. Such a depiction, however, might be out of place in her book, as it might puncture her careful construction of an early modern audience experience.

Gaiman's comic itself; often the wooden wagon supports are the only clear visual

distinction so that the reader can definitely tell that the background landscape of the panel

is in fact a painting within the world of the play, rather than Charles Vess' drawing that

defines the real landscape world of the comic.

The first panel of page 69 (see Figure 2.6) presents the viewpoint of the audience,

facing the grassy "stage," which features painted backdrops prominently in the

background, evidently to be used by the actors to indicate the different settings of the

play. Placed thus in a row, they constitute a series of implied or promised Scene-to-Scene

panel transitions, anticipating the scene changes in the play that the players are putting on.

Significantly, the gutter between these "panels" is not white but green. Northrop Frye

famously describes "the drama of the green world," with its "ritual theme of the triumph

of life and love over the waste land" (Frye 182). According to this theory, "the action of

the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world,

goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to

the normal world" (182). Given that Gaiman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* occurs in a

series dedicated to Morpheus, the god of dreams, it is all the more relevant to note Frye's

further point, that "the green world has analogies, not only to the fertile world of ritual,

but to the dream world that we create out of our own desires" (183). From this point of

view, the transformations of the play occur in the green world of the forest, and in

Gaiman's comic book version, the transformations occur in the green world between

panels – and the point is reinforced by the fact that the green, physical "gutter" between

these "panels" is the actual fairy-occupied woodland in which the characters of the story

really do find themselves. Even the fairies, who possess real magical powers, are willing

to participate in the artificial magic of imaginative audience activity. It is the same

imaginative activity that makes the magic of a theatrical performance work—and, in this case, it is the magic of reader engagement with comic books. Here we find, three years before its articulation by McCloud, a version of the idea of closure, yet here it is specifically applied to Shakespearean performance: the fairy audience must traverse the transformative green space between scenes of Shakespeare's play in a series of imaginative leaps. Thus the real collapse of Gaiman's fiction into Shakespeare's happens not just in simple plot correspondences but in the form of the comic itself, in a way that respects the source material and aggrandizes both it, and itself.

Deficient Sight: Two Comic Book Versions of *King Lear*

In Act 4, Scene 6 of *King Lear* Edgar, in the guise of "Mad Tom" is leading his blinded father Gloucester, who wishes to go to the Cliffs so that he may commit suicide by hurling himself off the edge. Edgar, however, leads him out into a field instead, telling him that they are approaching the Cliffs, even though they are not. Then he launches into his famous description of the Cliffs:

> Come on, sir; here's the place: stand still. How fearful
>
> And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low!
>
> The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
>
> Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down
>
> Hangs one that gathers sampire, dreadful trade!
>
> Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
>
> The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,
>
> Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,
>
> Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy

> Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge,
>
> That on the unnumbered idle pebble chafes,
>
> Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,
>
> Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
>
> Topple down headlong.   (4.6.11-24)

But Gloucester does choose to "topple down headlong," falling not to his death but to the ground in front of him, remaining unharmed. And yet we should linger on this action of toppling in the speech because the grammatical subject of "topple" is neither Gloucester nor the speaking "I" of Edgar but is rather "the deficient sight" itself. Edgar's synecdoche thus has him referring to himself toppling off the cliff as "deficient sight," reducing himself to one of his physical characteristics – a characteristic he does not in fact possess, because there is no real cliff and therefore no real view of distant objects and therefore no queasy turning of the brain taking place. By this means his fiction becomes even more convincing, as he claims to take on qualities that confirm what he describes. Even more importantly, Edgar's invocation of "deficient sight" refers to a key aspect of the early modern theatrical experience itself.

Alan C. Dessen, in *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye*, explains some of the problems directors have faced in presenting this scene, and identifies it as "The most complex example of the obvious fiction on stage" (Dessen 119). Although major alteration of the scene tends to end after the nineteenth century (trying to spare audiences "embarrassment at Shakespeare's naïveté"), twentieth-century critics and directors still tended to assume "that a real fall or a symbolic representation of such a fall (if only from one raised step) is necessary to sustain the dramatic illusion and make sense of Gloucester's acceptance of Edgar's lesson" (119). Dessen opposes this curiously literal

attitude towards the scene, advocating for a simple, non-representational staging, in which "Gloucester's fall would be from a kneeling position to the ground on a perfectly flat stage" (121). In this staging, Dessen argues, regardless of whether or not Edgar adopts a voice different from that of the "Mad Tom" character he had previously assumed, "the continuity of Edgar's role would be obvious to the audience as would the fictional nature of the plummet from the cliff" (121). For Dessen, Edgar's deception in this scene, although convincing to Gloucester, should be completely transparent to the audience, and the obviousness of its falsity should undermine Edgar's subsequent affirmation that "Thy life's a miracle" (4.6.55). As Dessen puts it, "given a simple, nonrepresentational staging, the audience (unlike Gloucester) could not possibly accept Edgar's explanation of the miracle" (124). Thus "the audience is offered substantial evidence that such confidence in the positive intervention of the gods is misplaced" (123). Moreover, the undermining of this confidence should be present even at the moment of Gloucester's falling, which despite the foolishly optimistic interpretation that Gloucester accepts, is never really much more than a pratfall.

To elaborate somewhat on Dessen's reading of this scene, Edgar serves Gloucester as an actor serves the audience, by using his words to summon up an imaginary scene. Gloucester's blindness, which makes him dependent upon the verbal reports of "Mad Tom," represents the imaginative dependency of the early modern theatre audience, which relies upon the actors to establish the reality of the dramatic scene for them. As Bernard Beckerman observes, eighty percent of the scenes in Shakespeare "need nothing but a bare space and an audience, not so much as a stool" and the reality of the scene must therefore be established in dialogue (Beckerman 71-72). The illusion that Edgar sustains, even in the face of Gloucester's objections, only makes sense in light of the fact that on

the blank early modern stage the ground is only as steep as the scene's dialogue allows it to be. The contradiction between Gloucester's and Edgar's assertions about the landscape—that it is or is not flat—in this sense resembles the disagreement between the optimistic Gonzalo and the pessimistic Antonio and Sebastian in *The Tempest* as to the appearance of the island: is it "lush and lusty" and "green" as Gonzalo insists, or is it "tawny" as Antonio has it (Shakespeare, *Tempest* 2.1.54-5)? There is no independent source of authority to which a reader or a spectator (or for that matter a character) can appeal in order to settle the question of whether or not Edgar and Gloucester are really approaching the Cliffs of Dover, except for Edgar's brief aside to the audience, explaining that "Why I do trifle thus with his despair / Is done to cure it" (33-34). One can, of course, add that the outcome of the scene (in particular Gloucester's survival and Edgar's change of roles) confirms that Edgar is engaged in a deception, yet the experience of reading or watching this scene, given an empty stage space whose reality is ready to be defined by the characters' words, cannot depend too much upon the rational, *post hoc* judgement that Gloucester must not actually have fallen off a cliff after all.

Another influential reading of this scene that recognizes how powerfully the scene plays on a truly blank stage space comes from Jan Kott in his 1964 book, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, and I wish to draw upon it at some length, as it articulates the stage situation in this scene very well. "Shakespeare," as Kott evocatively puts it, "often creates a landscape on an empty stage. A few words, and the diffused, soft afternoon light at the Globe changes into night, evening, or morning. But no other Shakespearean landscape is so exact, precise and clear as this one" (101). To create this realistic landscape, Edgar cleverly exceeds the possibilities of entirely realistic description:

From the height of the cliff the sea cannot be heard, but there is mention of its

roar. From the foot of the cliff the lark cannot be heard, but there is mention of its

song. In this landscape sounds are present by their very absence: the silence is

filled with them, just as the empty stage is filled with the mountain. (102)

Given the conventions of the early modern stage, in which the reality of the scene is so

fully determined in the characters' dialogue, "The non-existent cliff is not meant just to

deceive the blind man. For a short while we, too, believed in this landscape and in the

mime" (103). "We" may be a slightly tricky term here: it may be that Kott is going

beyond what can be definitely established about the scene by assuming certain subjective

experiences in the minds of modern theatregoers. But if we temper his remarks with the

cautious skepticism of scholars like Dessen and Gurr, we may reduce them to a somewhat

more precise and reliable point: that detailed verbal description of setting on a blank early

modern stage conventionally defines the *actual* setting of that scene. Even if one objects

that a particular description is false within the reality of the play, it is very difficult to say

by what objective means a reader or spectator might determine that falsity, or avoid the

conventional imaginative activity of accepting that description as the reality of the scene.

Kott himself helps to make the historical point (the one he blurs somewhat with his

use of "we") by observing that this effect is specific to the early modern theatre, arguing

that the ambiguous effect he describes "is not to be thought of outside the theatre, or

rather outside a certain kind of theatre" (103). He maintains that Edgar's illusion is a

theatrically specific illusion:

In film and in prose there is only the choice between a real stone lying in the sand

and an equally real jump from the top of a chalk cliff into the sea. One cannot

transpose Gloucester's suicide attempt to the screen, unless one were to film a

stage performance. But in the naturalistic, or even stylized theatre, with the precipice painted or projected onto a screen, Shakespeare's parable would be completely obliterated. (103)

In terms of presenting this scene to an audience, Kott maintains that "The stage must be empty" if the scene is to make any dramatic sense at all (103). The emptiness of the stage is crucial to the ambiguity of Gloucester's fall. As Kott puts it, "Gloucester does not jump from the top of the cliff or from a stone" (104). The bare playing space of the early modern stage does not require one or the other reality, of an unambiguous long fall from a cliff, or an unambiguous short fall from a standing position, but can hold both simultaneously: Gloucester falls from a cliff *and* he does not fall from a cliff. What saves this scene from being merely a pratfall—a man falling on his face—is the capacity of Edgar's words to create a space that takes on a measure of reality in the minds of the audience members.

A key part of the evidence for this argument comes in the vivid details of the description that Edgar provides, and the consequent verbal dominance of the reality of the scene for both Gloucester and the reader or audience. This dominance begins with the heavy opening spondee, combined with an imperative verb "come" followed almost immediately by another, "hold still." Having thus metrically and grammatically established his authority, when he moves into description, it carries even more ontological weight than a casual setting description normally might. Part of the vividness of the description derives from Edgar's descriptions of sound – although there is a curiously ironic quality to these descriptions. As Winfried Schleiner observes in a later paper that clearly shows Kott's influence, "Edgar evokes sounds, only to deny that they are audible" (Schleiner 341). Thus Edgar asserts that "the murmuring surge, / That on the

unnumbered idle pebble chafes, / Cannot be heard so high" (4.6.20-22) and then, after

Gloucester's fall, "Look up a-height; the shrill-gorged lark so far / Cannot be seen or

heard" (4.6.58-9). The imperative verb "look" is already an entirely inappropriate

instruction to a blind man, and even if it were directed at a sighted person, it would still

be pointless to look up towards the lark that cannot be seen or heard and whose existence,

therefore, Edgar could not possibly know about either. In both cases, Edgar evokes the

sound first, makes it present in Gloucester's mind, and presumably to the minds of

audience and reader (assisted by the vivid assonance of "murmuring surge") and only

then takes it back again with the final clause "Cannot be seen or heard." In this case,

"deficient sight" can include "deficient hearing." The details of the description also

include Edgar's series of comparisons of things to the smaller things that they resemble,

due to distance: a samphire gatherer to his own head; fishermen to mice; a bark to a cock;

and the cock to a buoy. Edgar arranges the items in his list in such a way that they get

smaller and smaller as they recede farther into the landscape, nearly to a vanishing point

"almost too small for sight." This sequence of diminishment extends not only to the

items referred to in the list but to the language that structures it: the words making the

comparison get briefer and briefer as the speech continues. Thus the comparative phrases

are "seems no bigger than," "appear like," "Diminish'd to," and finally no words at all,

the comparative words themselves being so diminished as to vanish completely.

   The problem of realizing the Cliffs of Dover scene in a visual medium is evident.

How can one represent Gloucester's fall on film, or in a comic book, or even on a modern

stage with elaborate set design, without damaging the crucial ambiguity of the scene, and

of forcing an absurd literalism? Shakespeare's text provides a wonderfully detailed and

specific description of the Cliffs of Dover, but what ought the artist to do with this

description? This question brings me to Ian Pollock's *King Lear*, first published in 1985 by Oval Projects, Ltd. At the time of publication, Pollock was already a renowned British illustrator, having worked for many major magazines in Great Britain and North America, and also having produced many book illustrations, Royal Shakespeare Company posters, and a series of postage stamps for the Royal Mail. *King Lear* is his only work in the comics medium. Pollock's style is expressionistic, surrealistic, and grotesque; much of the time, the settings are relatively stark and featureless, although they are less so than a Renaissance stage, because they do feature various buildings and simple landscape backgrounds, as well as vivid weather in the stormy scenes.

As Edgar leads Gloucester, they have the exchange in which Gloucester notices that the ground is flat, rather than sloped as it ought to be, and that he cannot hear the sea, while Edgar replies "your other senses grow imperfect by your eyes' anguish" (Pollock 105). The perspective on Edgar and Gloucester varies in angle and distance (see Figure .7), as Pollock sometimes employs a close-up view of the characters, while at other times prefers a long-distance perspective to give a sense of the vast empty space the two figures occupy. But the transitions between panels all belong to McCloud's category of Action-to-Action transitions, because Pollock stays within the same scene, and focuses on the same subjects at different stages in the progression of their march. In the fourth panel, at the bottom of the page, Edgar's famous speech appears in a series of speech balloons on the left side of the panel, alongside an image of the two characters standing in a vast, bare plain, featureless except for a few frogs and tufts of grass. The effect is not entirely dissimilar to that of the bare early modern stage, except that the relative literalness of Pollock's vision does not accommodate the same possibility for imaginative elaboration.

All the panels on this page provide examples of "Interdependent" word-image relationships, in which "words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone" (McCloud 155). The text alone would convey a trek up steep ground ending at a cliff-top; the image alone would convey a trek across a flat plain ending in a puddle. And yet the relationship is not a Parallel one, because Edgar is purporting to describe the landscape to Gloucester, and the contradiction between word and image is evident. In combination, they establish an irony (albeit a very straightforward one) that neither one could achieve alone. The crucial point here is that in the context of the early modern theatre, the relationship between Edgar's detailed description and the bare playing space is one in which the reality of the latter is defined and filled in by the former. But in Pollock's work, the relationship between Edgar's speech and the drawn image is one in which the visual truth of the latter reveals the verbal lie of the former.

At the bottom of the next page, Gloucester's fall occurs in a series of three panels (see Figure 2.8), linked together by Moment-to-Moment panel transitions. As McCloud explains, this kind of transition offers the minimum opportunity for closure, with only a very brief space of time occurring between the panels. Here they function to stretch out the action, making it last longer. When an action in a comic book is particularly grand, exciting, or significant then this sort of use of Moment-to-Moment transitions can have a heightening effect, dwelling on the spectacular action for longer, like a film that uses slow motion to show a particularly thrilling stunt or, for that matter, a particularly horrifying suicidal fall from a high sea cliff. But given that the action depicted here is Gloucester's undignified fall into the mud, the effect is instead a rather painful dwelling upon the bathos of the moment – a particularly unpleasant bathos, given the preceding panels

which established to the reader, without a shadow of a doubt, that there is no real cliff here. Here Gloucester's fall could indeed be said to play as a pratfall. Without a reader whose imagination could be primed by Edgar's speech (and not dictated by the images) the panels simply depict a man falling on his face in a puddle. Pollock's choices in this scene do not engage with the complex idea of "deficient sight" as it is developed in the verse passage but rather pair the speech with a literal image that contradicts it, and thus sidesteps the possibility of a truly early modern staging.

A very different envisioning of this scene, one that achieves more than a blunt rejection of the complexities of the passage, can be found in the version of *King Lear* published in 2009 as part of the Manga Shakespeare series, textually adapted by Richard Appignanesi and illustrated by Ilya (the pen name of comics artist and writer Ed Hillyer). The Manga Shakespeare *King Lear* is set in the year 1759 in New York State, at the Horicon, or Lake George. King Lear is figured as the chief of a Native American tribe, and the other characters are either members of the tribe, or European colonials. In this version, the Cliffs of Dover sequence is visualized in a way completely different from Pollock's.

The text of Edgar's speech is considerably abridged, and for the first two panels it takes the form of a disembodied narration, hovering over the image of a waterfall (see Figure 2.9). The transition between the first two panels is an Aspect-to-Aspect transition: they do not share any common figures and there is no indication of chronological sequence but they are not sufficiently unrelated to warrant a Non-Sequitur label (a very infrequent device). The first panel contains a Parallel word-image combination, because at least in this early part of the sequence, to recall McCloud's definition, "words and pictures seem to follow very different courses -- without intersecting" (McCloud,

Understanding 154). Here, "Come on sir" is placed alongside an almost indecipherable

image of water splashing into water (Ilya 162).[36] The relationship between word and

image becomes clearer in the second panel, as the ambiguous image gives way to a clear

picture of a waterfall, and the text makes a specific reference to "place." By the time we

get to panels 3 and 4, we are in the realm of "Interdependent" combinations once again,

with word and image working together. To be sure, the words in this sequence provide

most of the information. But we can see the interaction of word and image in such details

as the ironic juxtaposition of Edgar's phrase "cast one's eyes so low" with the

foregrounded image of Gloucester's stitched-up eyelids.

On the next page (see Figure 2.10) the height of the cliffs and waterfall is echoed in

the long, narrow panel shape. Notice that thus far, Ilya maintains a careful ambiguity as

to exactly where the characters are standing relative to this waterfall and to the cliffs.

Their position in the upper, right-hand corner on page 162 subtly implies that they may be

positioned at the top of the waterfall,[37] and the first panel on page 163 shows a shadowy

reflection beneath them. This reflection could be in the water at the top or at the bottom

of the cliff, although the positioning of the figures at the very top portion of the panel

again reinforces the sense of great height (replacing, to an extent, the detailed verbal

description of height that has been largely excised from Edgar's speech).

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[36] Duncan and Smith argue that "The **close-up view** emphasizes character over setting because very little of the setting is visible and the character's **affect displays** (emotions indicated by facial expressions) are more in evidence" (Duncan and Smith, *Power* 143). But in this case, the close-up view *is* of the setting, rather than of a character, providing a reminder that it is important not to confuse formal points (such as the difference between close-up views and long-distance views) with points about content (whether a panel happens to depict a character or something else). Again, the dominantly formal concerns shared by Eisner and McCloud prove to be better for accurate analysis.

[37] This feature serves as a reminder of Versaci's observation that "comics creators can play with the design of an entire page by manipulating the [...] the panels themselves within the page to create additional layers of meaning" (Versaci 14).

Then, on page 164, in a fan-shaped series of three panels, (see Figure 2.11) Gloucester renounces the world, blesses Edgar, and falls. Not until the fourth panel at the bottom of the page is the geography of the scene finally revealed to the reader: both Gloucester and Kent are on the sandy shore at the base of the waterfall, not at the top. With his careful selection of images, and framing of panels, Ilya maintains the ambiguity that is crucial to the scene. The experience of the reader is of Gloucester actually jumping off a cliff, although this experience is blunted somewhat by ambiguous clues, such as the absence of any long-distance perspective of the two men, the watery reflections in the first panel of page 163, and Edgar's private admission that he does "trifle" with Gloucester's despair in order "to cure it" (163). The ambiguity about the positioning of the characters relative to the cliff replaces the theatrical ambiguity of whether the cliff exists at all. Crucially, the relationship between word and image here differs from that in the Pollock example. The sequence of images withholds information in such a way that Edgar's words now *provide* information and context for the image, rather than simply contradicting the content of the image. Pollock's version, for all the potency of its art style, nevertheless fails to manage the ambiguity of the scene, not using the resources of the comics form to convey its effects in the way that the Manga Shakespeare version does. The Manga *King Lear* not only makes use of a broader range of panel transitions and word/image relationships, but also deploys these devices in a way that captures the "deficient sight" so essential to this scene of the play. Indeed there is a danger that sight may be a little *too* deficient here: the third panel that depicts Gloucester's fall does not include the ground towards which he is falling, leaving a blank gap at the bottom of the panel, which is strongly suggestive of a fall from a great height. Here one might argue that Ilya is cheating slightly, not relying just upon ambiguity but

actually upon a false clue. Certainly the flexible space of the comics page, which can imitate the unlocalized space of the early modern stage, allows for this kind of manipulation, and this particular device may go slightly beyond the ambiguity that would be included in an early modern theatrical performance.

This achievement in the Manga Shakespeare series confirms from another angle the point made in my discussion of Marcia Williams: that comic books are uniquely capable of accommodating the particular problems and opportunities posed by the nature of space on the early modern stage and that a specific analytical method is necessary to draw out the complexities of these problems and opportunities. In this case the Manga Shakespeare *King Lear* manipulates spatial perception in a manner that is unique to the comics medium and that is important to the play's effectiveness.

Conclusion

Comic books are able to approximate some of the features of early modern staging, ensuring that aspects of staging can find fascinating treatments in Shakespearean comics adaptations and these adaptations can participate meaningfully in the Shakespearean critical tradition, bringing new perspectives to old questions and problems in the plays. While the final two chapters of this dissertation will address various adaptations of specific plays more comprehensively, this chapter has sought to elucidate some of the major implications of transferring early modern drama to the comics medium. This discussion should enable more general conclusions about the possibilities and capabilities of this mode of adaptation in accommodating, realizing, or altering early modern stage space. Although the conversion to the comics medium almost necessarily involves disrupting the normal verse lineation of a play or poem, comic books are able to draw

upon their own peculiar set of resources and devices to partially compensate for this alteration, and also to create a whole new range of interpretive effects. Comics are also capable of handling the particular requirements of early modern stage space, either imitating the degrees of locational specificity required by unlocalized stage space, as Marcia Williams does, or by more radical manipulations of space, as in Ilya's treatment of the Cliffs of Dover scene in *King Lear*, or perhaps even by the subtle devices of Gaiman, which comment directly upon the imaginative theatrical experience and align it with that of the modern comic book reader.

The texts to which I devote the third and fourth chapters of this dissertation are chosen in order to demonstrate two formal extremes of comics. Both emerge from and draw upon many aspects of this discussion in Chapter 2, particularly with reference to the shape and placement of speech balloons and other textual containers, the dynamic function of the gutter, and the concept of unlocalized space. Yet the two are also designed to function as contrasting examples of the extremely different formal devices and, consequently, artistic and interpretive effects, of which Shakespearean comics are capable. In Chapter 3, the uncertainty of interpretation in *The Merchant of Venice* is enacted with formal devices that are themselves calculated to be similarly undecidable: the manipulable and unstable law is reflected in ambiguous formal arrangements, and anxieties about race are simultaneously invoked and evaded with a depiction of different races in the play that walks a fine interpretive line. In Chapter 4, the choices and confrontations between good and evil in *Macbeth* are represented by means of formal devices that constitute bold, clear statements on the coherence and meaning of the good/evil distinction and on the role that the characters play relative to them.

Chapter 3

Law, Commerce, and Ethnicity: *The Merchant of Venice* in Comics

Introduction

The Merchant of Venice is a play about uncertainties – not just uncertainties of character

and motive but also the uncertainties that lie at the heart of the most basic formulations of

law. In Faye Yong's Manga Shakespeare version of *The Merchant of Venice*, textually

adapted by Richard Appignanesi, the forms and devices of the comics medium are

stretched, twisted, and tested in Yong's insistently ambiguous deployment of them.

Marcia Williams' version of the play in *Bravo Mr William Shakespeare* is very different,

although it likewise recognizes the uncertainties that the play treats. Instead of making

her own comic radically ambiguous in its formal devices (an approach that would likely

not be suitable for her intended young audience) she takes the alternative approach of

finding a new use for the unique theatrical space of her books. Williams exploits the

flexibility of unlocalized stage space, a flexibility that the early modern stage and the

modern comic book have in common, as we have seen in Chapter 2. In this case, her

transformation of the stage fills it with signifying content, subtly transforming the theatre

into a courtroom and the audience (and, by extension, the reader) into a jury, invited to

take a position upon the morality of the play. In both Yong's and Williams' work, the

rules of comics and the rules of theatre are manipulated in strikingly original and

inventive ways that correspond with the artful manipulation of the law in Shakespeare's

play. For this reason, these adaptations of this particular play provide a particularly good

example of how the "law" of comics form can be bent and twisted to create particular

effects – effects that correspond to, or engage with, the bending and twisting of the law in

The Merchant of Venice.

Yong's Manga Shakespeare version of *The Merchant of Venice* opens with a highly

effective sequence that establishes Antonio's perilous and uncertain position within the

legal and economic system of Venice, and suggests, subtly but powerfully, that this

uncertainty is the consequence of the inherent instability of the concept of law in the play.

Both in this opening sequence and in subsequent sequences, Yong's placement of speech

balloons in between panels creates a split narrative voice, melding the subjectivity of

particular characters with the (assumed) objectivity of narration. Additionally, her

creative exploitation of the flexibility of the comics page allows her to fill the blank

"stage" of the comic book page with a range of shifting content: settings that are literal,

metaphorical, or imaginary, as well as images that correspond with the spoken words of

the characters, or clash ironically with them – or hover uncertainly between these two.

From the beginning sequence, the adaptation builds to a complex treatment of the themes

of law and ethnicity in the play. The law, despite its claims to purity and inviolability, is

shown to be dependent upon economic forces that are prior to, and more powerful than,

itself. It is also shown to be highly manipulable, as the precise and technical details that

would appear to make it a fair and impartial system in fact make it supremely flexible in

the hands of an ingenious interpreter like Portia. The matter of ethnicity in this adaptation

is tied up with the matter of law, as there exists a question of to whom the law truly

applies. Yong's visualization of *The Merchant of Venice* engages with a particular

interpretative perspective on the play, according to which the specific treatment of

Jewishness is really just an instantiation of a larger point about ethnicity and otherness in

general. Yet in her representation of some of her characters, Yong skirts dangerously

close to ethnically-specific, and potentially racist, representations that threaten to undermine this more general point. Crucially, these interpretive effects are achieved by means of Yong's selection and placing of panels in specific sequences and pairing of word and image relationships, formal devices that both draw out significances from Shakespeare's text, and also involve them in new ironies and complications.

Marcia Williams' version of the play situates the story to a much greater extent in the literal historical setting of early modern Venice, and does not shy away from a direct representation of real-world ethnicities. The most crucial effect in this adaptation involves the layout of the whole page, based upon the crucial panel transition between the central section of the page devoted to the events of the play and the border, which is devoted to the early modern audience. Like Yong, Williams recognizes the interpretive dilemmas at the heart of the play, and likewise manipulates the stage space to accommodate them. In *Bravo Mr William Shakespeare*, this manipulation involves transforming the space of the early modern stage, depicted in the book, into a courtroom itself. Thus she does not only fill the blank stage space with a vivid imaginary scene (as she usually does, and as early modern theatrical performance usually did) but transforms the theatrical space itself into a courtroom, making the audience function as a jury of sorts in the famous trial scene of Act 4. Thus the audience figures positioned around the edges of the page are poised between two roles: they are simultaneously audience members watching a play, and jurors judging a trial. And just as the commentary in Williams' treatment of other plays is designed to encourage active and thoughtful engagement by the reader, so here the reader is also invited to become a juror and take a position on the questions that the play raises, as active audiences and readers have done for centuries. In her version of *The Merchant of Venice*, rather than taking a clear position on the justice or

injustice of the trial, Williams uses her embedded audience to air competing

interpretations of the scene, and thus to encourage her young readers to take their own

positions, thus putting them into the position of "jury" along with her own early modern

characters. The thematic uncertainties of the play are thus not, as in Yong, mimicked by

a formal uncertainty in the comic, but are rather foregrounded as matters to be decided by

the reader-as-jury.

The Primacy of Ambiguity in the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice*

Like all the Manga Shakespeare editions, this one begins with an illustrated Dramatis

Personae, visually identifying all the play's characters. The comic proper begins with a

page showing a three-panel sequence (see Figure 3.1). The first panel is a detailed image

of a Venetian canal that includes several figures, including, at the bottom of the page,

Antonio and his retinue.[38] This is an example of an "establishing panel" as defined in

Chapter 2, "a big long-shot panel [...] at the beginning of each new scene, usually

followed by some middle ground and close-up panels of individual characters"

(McCloud, *Making* 22). The second and third panels of the page are close-up views of

Antonio, with almost no discernible background detail; thus the page as a whole follows

the principle established by Duncan and Smith that "Once setting is established by

background details, a vague sense of that setting persists in the reader's imagination, and

details tend to become sparse or drop out altogether" (Duncan and Smith, *Power* 141-2).

The relationship between the first panel and the two that stand alongside it is Aspect-to-

Aspect. While there may be a temporal advance, indicated by slight difference of

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[38] A particularly observant reader might be able to identify the figures based on the Dramatis Personae; it seems reasonable to suppose that most would have to wait for subsequent panels before being able to definitely recognize the fairly small figures in the first panel as Antonio, Salerio, and Salanio.

Antonio's posture, and some overlap in the figures the panels contain, nevertheless the principal function of the panels crucially differ, and the purpose of their juxtaposition is not to move from one Action to another, but from one aspect of a scene (its setting) to another aspect of the scene (its main character). This shift from setting to character becomes important in light of the placement of the speech balloon, as we shall see in a moment.

The text on this page is Antonio's opening speech, as he reflects, "I know not why I am so sad. How I came by it, I am to learn" and then in a separate balloon, "I have much ado to know myself" (Yong 12). Crucially, both balloons span the panel border, indicating that the line does not only have a relationship with the images in the second and third panels, from whence it emerges, but that a word-image relationship also persists between the words and the image in the first panel as well. The relationship between word and text in the second and third panels is easily identifiable as Additive, the category in which "words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa" (McCloud, *Understanding* 154). In these panels both text and image provide overlapping but non-identical information; if anything, the weight is more on words than on image, making this example lean slightly towards the Word-Specific category. Yet in the first panel, text and image stand side-by-side in what can best be described as a Parallel word-image relationship, the two components of the comic apparently functioning independently, with no obvious reference to one another. Yet a word-image combination is never simply irrelevant or meaningless: just as McCloud maintains that the cognitive work of reading over the gutter enables readers to "find meaning or resonance in even the most jarring of combinations" (73), likewise even the most jarring combination of word and image has a meaningful effect. Prior to the reader looking at the second and third panels, the sadness

and need for self-knowledge in the text do not seem to directly apply to anything in particular in the image, but they do hover over the image, colouring the whole Venetian scene with a sense of sadness and uncertainty. The precise placement of the speech balloon is essential for producing the initially Parallel relationship that is so ambiguous and unsettling; it is a tone that persists throughout the work, thanks to Yong's skilful manipulations of the comics medium.

Yong soon introduces another, more difficult ambiguity. "Your mind is tossing on the ocean," explains Salerio, "where your argosies with portly sail, like pageants of the sea, do overpeer the petty traffickers" (Yong 13). This piece of text initially seems to be a straightforward metaphor, but after Salerio's main clause we quickly learn that although the likening of Antonio's mind to a ship is metaphorical, the purpose of the comparison is not merely to describe his distressed state of mind, but to do so in a way that links this state of mind to its cause. Thus what initially appears to be a simple, evocative comparison becomes something more elegantly forensic, characterizing Antonio's mind as a ship tossing on the same sea where his actual merchant ships are currently (and uncertainly) sailing. Salerio certainly offers what is, at least *prima facie*, a very complimentary account of these ships, and therefore of Antonio's mind, embedding a simile within his metaphor to liken them to "pageants of the sea." The reference is a theatrical one: "pageants" refers to the decorated, movable outdoor stages that were traditionally used in the performance of open-air mystery plays in late medieval and early modern Europe ("pageant, *n*."). Thus the metaphor is a layered one: within the analogy of mind-as-ship, Salerio also offers the metaphor of ship-as-pageant.

It is also worth noting the sense of "pageant" as "a performance intended to deceive; a trick" that is an extension of its specifically theatrical sense ("pageant, *n*"). We might regard Yong's representation of the ships in her panel as a "pageant" of this kind (see Figure 3.2), Shakespeare's word undergoing yet another twist of meaning as it now comes to apply not only to the contents of the drama but to the format of this particular performance of it. Thus even as Salerio praises the grandeur of Antonio's ships, he does so by likening them to theatrical devices, implying not only a worrying degree of physical flimsiness but also hinting at their dubious status, indeed to the general dubiousness of Yong's representation of them. How real are the ships in this panel? And, by extension, what is the real nature of Antonio's mind, at least according to this speech?

In this adaptation Salerio's imaginative account of Antonio's ships at sea is accompanied by an image of them, sailing proudly along, making the "petty traffickers" look petty indeed by comparison. This is another instance of an intriguing placement of a speech balloons, for once again we find a balloon crossing a panel border. In the second panel of the page, the balloon simply contains a piece of Salerio's dialogue, but in the third panel, the balloon hovers over the action that it narrates, itself overpeering Antonio's ship, which in turn overpeers the others on the sea.

This is an instance of unlocalized space being used in a way that is significantly different from its normal theatrical function. While the actor on the blank early modern stage would rely entirely upon his words to fill the space of the stage and create a vivid scene for the audience, the comics artist does not just have words but can supply images as well, fleshing out, altering, or replacing the mental images that the words create – even images of people, places, and objects that are remote or imaginary. Just as the speech of early modern actors can conjure up elaborate images (such as *King Lear*'s Cliffs of

Dover, discussed in Chapter 2) so the speech of comic book characters can come with elaborate images to accompany it. There is in general considerably less to say about word-image relationships on the early modern stage, because the images are to such a large extent constituted by the words. In this case, the grandeur of Antonio's ships in Salerio's words corresponds nicely with the grandeur of the background image that the speech, it seems, unproblematically conjures up. Yet on the next page Salerio takes his description along far more distressing lines, and this description comes with a correspondingly different set of images: "Should I go to church and see the holy stone, and not think of dangerous rocks, which, touching my vessel's side, would scatter all her spices on the stream, enrobe the waters with my silks ... and now worth nothing?" (14). These lines accompany a series of three panels (see Figure 3.3) which depict one of the grand ships crashing violently into rocks and sinking, sending sailors and valuable cargo tumbling into the sea.

Like film, comics can readily switch from a speaking character to an entirely different image while still retaining that character's dialogue – or can even depict the speaker and the other image together in the same panel at the same time. This is one of the ways in which comics can readily exploit the highly flexible space of the comics page. Yet while the words spoken by an actor on the early modern stage are filling an imaginary blank space, making the visualization of the dramatic scene almost entirely dependent upon the dramatist's words, the comic book artist is not so constrained, and may include images that deviate from the text in crucial details. Here in Figure 3.3, the comic confronts the reader with some significant questions about the precise word-image relationships at work in this panel. It is first worth observing in the image the tiny figures of the crew members, who are being hurled to their deaths in the sea; these sailors appear nowhere in

Salerio's speech. Therefore, although at a quick initial glance we might have been tempted to characterize this word-image relationship as Duo-Specific, in which text and image convey essentially the same information, these sailors may prevent us from that easy assignation. The point is an important one, because although the text thus initially tempts the reader into seeing an easy correspondence between text and image, close examination reveals it to actually be one of subtle contradiction, as Yong suggests something that is, in light of the image, suspiciously absent from Salerio's words. These tiny shipwrecked figures, although they are a small visual detail in the picture, perhaps easy to miss, they inject a human dimension into the tragedy which in Salerio's speech is entirely financial. The relationship between word and image here thus becomes Additive, with the image elaborating on the text. Salerio certainly does not say, "you are worried about the safety of your ships because of the wealth they carry and specifically *not* because of the human cost of a shipwreck," but the not quite Duo-Specific word-image relationship that Yong creates here constitutes a subtle comment on a certain cold selfishness in the motives that Salerio attributes to Antonio. Is he more concerned with money than with human life?

Additionally—and here a more pressing uncertainty presents itself—when we regard this sequence of images are we seeing a set of imaginary events that exist only in Salerio's mind (and which he imagines exist in Antonio's mind)? Or is Yong here shifting the scene of the action to Antonio's *actual* ships at sea? These, as we later learn, really do sink. The relationship between the previous image of Antonio's ships and this sequence of them sinking could be a relationship between an optimistic and a pessimistic imagining (Salerio imagines that Antonio's ships are sailing safely; Salerio imagines that Antonio's ships are sinking), or between a falsely optimistic imagining and the terrible

truth (Salerio imagines they are sailing but in fact they are sinking), or between two true images separated in time (they were safely sailing but now they are sinking). The question is complicated by the fact that the panel depicting the first image of the ships is bounded by a swirling, watery pattern, which provides an uncertain clue as to the panel's status. Will Eisner, after all, notes that a "cloudlike enclosure" for a panel often "defines the picture as being a thought or memory" (47). Thus this method of framing might lead us to suppose that the first image, at least, is an imaginary one. Alternatively, however, we might suppose that the watery border simply reinforces the nautical theme of the image. In the second sequence, the one of sinking, there is no watery border, which might give us reason to suppose that we are seeing images of true events; yet the image of Salerio himself functions as the left-hand border of the panel, a device which might suggest that the series of images could be emerging from him just as the accompanying speech balloons emerge from him. This reading of the panel suggests that the image of the sinking ship might possibly be a creation of his imagination, and is not actually the thing itself. Additionally, we should note that Salerio's speech does not just refer to the images of ships that it either describes or conjures up; it also stands side-by-side, after all, with the images depicting the friends in the gondola, with Antonio, significantly, standing at the prow. As the ships toss on the treacherous and uncertain sea, so Antonio stands on the potentially treacherous waters of the Venetian canals. Given that he is standing up in the boat he may be said to literally "overpeer," even as he is unaware of the financial and legal dangers into which his sinking ships will soon plunge him.

Thus this opening sequence, with its complex play of image sequencing and word-image combinations, sets up a sense of instability and uncertainty in the text on multiple levels. First, there is the application of Antonio's opening dialogue to the establishing

panel, which effectively colours the whole setting of Venice with his own declared confusion and lack of self-knowledge. Second, there are ambiguous images of sinking ships which at first appear to be a simple metaphor, then turn out to be a complex, layered metaphor, and then turn out to be, potentially, quite literal, although Yong's careful construction of panel borders and word-image relationships makes it impossible to tell for sure. Third, there is the subtle implication in the shipwreck sequence of a critique of Antonio's moral values, although the uncertain status of these images makes it impossible to say whether this critique comes from Salerio or Yong (and if it does come from Salerio, it seems to be an entirely internal thought that Antonio could not possibly construe from his speech). Fourth, there is Antonio's obliviousness to his own precarious position in the commerce and (consequently) in the law of Venice. This is an extraordinary opening sequence, one which casts aside any certainties about the possibility of sure knowledge, the distinction between truth and imagination, the morality and motives of characters, and the stability of law and commerce. By opening the play with a deeply ambiguous sequence that raises doubts about almost every aspect of the drama, Yong establishes the tone and style of the rest of the comic book, which is consistently devoted to ambiguity and uncertainty. This ambiguity and uncertainty culminates in the climactic trial scene in which the fourth theme—the nature and operation of the law, and the ways in which its ambiguity allows for an extraordinary degree of manipulation—is of particular concern.

Understanding the Law in Shakespeare's Venice

The nature of law in *The Merchant of Venice* has been of persistent interest to critics, yet most of it has shown little interest in the subtlety and ambiguity that the Manga

Shakespeare version identifies and explores. Indeed, much of the criticism that has taken

an interest in the nature of law and its uncertainties in *The Merchant of Venice* has been

curiously literal in its focus and much of it has been the work of lawyers and judges with

an amateur's enthusiasm for the Bard. Sir Dunbar Plunket Barton, in *Links Between*

Shakespeare and the Law (1929) devotes a full chapter to *The Merchant of Venice*,

discussing whether or not the famous trial of Act 4 is "duly conducted according to the

strict rules of legal procedure" (146) with reference to sixteenth-century English law. In

the end, however, he effectively negates his entire argument by reflecting, "But why

should a dramatist's law, where the scene is laid in France or Venice or Navarre, be

supposed to be strictly conformable to the Laws of England?" (Barton 150). Why

indeed? One might expand the point: why should a dramatist's law be strictly

conformable to *any* real-world law? And why should we assume that Shakespeare knew

or cared anything at all about the specifics of legal procedure? It is not fully clear

whether Barton sees that the excellent rhetorical question with which he concludes largely

voids his entire prior discussion of the play, but some of his successors have missed this

insight. Certainly Barton's conclusion did not stop George Keeton in 1967 or O. Hood

Phillips in 1972 from continuing the discussion. Keeton, for no very obvious reason,

speculates about what defences would be open to Antonio if the case "could be tried in a

modern law court" (Keeton 132). Phillips, like Barton, sets himself the task of testing

"the soundness and fairness of the legal proceedings arising out of the forfeiture" (Phillips

92) and wonders exactly how it is that Portia is permitted to participate in the trial. He

concludes his discussion by declaring, with stern judicial authority, that as she is "the

wife of Bassanio, the principal debtor for whom Antonio (the defendant) went surety; and

is housing Shylock's daughter [...] Her position is thus most prejudicial" (92). Prejudicial

it may be, but engagements with the legal themes of the play are not always well-served by such a literal attendance to practical legal questions.

Indeed, we must not simply kill all the lawyers, as we may find some very interesting work by practicing attorney Daniel J. Kornstein in his 1994 book, *Kill All the Lawyers?: Shakespeare's Legal Appeal*. Kornstein's reading of *The Merchant of Venice* focuses on the play's treatment of two different attitudes towards the formal rules and structures of the law, and represents a turn to many of the less literal and more complex questions that Yong picks up on in her comic book version. Kornstein cites Shylock's repeated appeal to his "bond" throughout the trial scene and argues that "Shylock here symbolizes literalness, and technicality in the law, divorced from common sense, prudence, and practical wisdom" (Kornstein 68). But Shylock's insistence on "literalness and technicality" leaves him vulnerable to Portia's counterattack (69). She promises, "Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest" (4.1.317) and delivers on this promise with the observation that "This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood" (4.1.306) and the warning, "if thou cut'st more / Or less than a just pound [...] Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate" (4.1.326-32). In Kornstein's view, this argument is obviously absurd: "Portia's interpretation is like granting an easement on land without the right to leave footprints" (70). But the absurdity of Portia's reply is part of her strategy: her judgement "seems to be a quibble, a ludicrously literalist reading of the contract; an empty, hypertechnical [sic] legalistic interpretation that is illogical, useless, impossible, and absurd" and thus she demonstrates that "law, literally construed, can be nonsense" (Kornstein 71). As Dessen puts it "Portia [...] out-shylocks the Jew, meeting and defeating him on his own terms" (241). Kornstein's argument is persuasive, and there is some overlap between his position and that of Terry Eagleton from a few years earlier.

Eagleton's position resembles Kornstein's in its recognition of the absurdity of

Portia's demands upon Shylock, and he relies on a similar counterexample:

> No piece of writing can exhaustively enumerate all conceivable aspects of the
>
> situation to which it refers: one might just as well claim that Shylock's bond is
>
> deficient because it does not actually mention the use of a knife or specify whether
>
> Antonio should be sitting down, suspended from the ceiling or dressed in frilly
>
> knickerbockers at the time of cutting. (37)

Eagleton's examples do not quite correspond with the matter of quantity that the play

emphasizes—that Shylock must take *exactly* one pound—but they are relevant to the

requirement that he spill no blood. If such an incidental requirement must be written into

a contract ("Shylock may take a pound of flesh as well as whatever amount of blood is

necessary") then there is no limit to the number of incidental requirements that must thus

be written in. What about skin, hair, organs? Is he allowed to cause any pain? Or fear?

How much? Is he allowed to cause Antonio's heart to stop in the course of exacting the

pound of flesh? One could keep up the line of questioning indefinitely. Unlike

Kornstein, Eagleton theorizes this problem in poststructuralist terms, observing that "Any

text [...] can be understood only by going beyond its letter, referring it to the material

contexts in which it is operative and the generally accepted meanings which inform and

surround it. Portia's reading of the bond, by contrast, is 'true to the text' but therefore

lamentably false to its meaning" (Eagleton, *William* 37). Eagleton cites Shylock's

insistence that if the court denies his bond, then "There is no force in the decrees of

Venice" (4.1.102) to suggest that "It is almost as though Shylock is defying the court to

deny him in order to expose its own hollowness. Either way he will win: by killing

Antonio, or by unmasking Christian justice as a mockery" (38). Eagleton asserts that

"What is at stake in the courtroom [...] is [...] the law of Venice itself: will it maintain its proper indifference to individuals, penalize one of its own wealthy adherents at the behest of an odious Jew?" (38). He answers himself that "of course [...] it will not; but in order to avoid doing so it must risk deconstructing itself, deploying exactly the kind of subjective paltering it exists to spurn" (38).

In *Shakespeare's Language* (2000) Frank Kermode sees the play as treating "the theme of Justice in the light of a supposed distinction between the Old and the New Law" (Kermode 71). In this view the Old Law "is represented by Shylock and lacks any tempering by Mercy, as opposed to the 'gentle' Gentile dispensation, which embraces the idea of forgiveness and redemption" (71). According to this interpretation, Shylock's error is his complete commitment to the law, independent of any concern for mercy or grace: "refusing to accept payment of his loan, he has refused a bid for a secular redemption that would have echoed Christian doctrine" (Kermode 71). Kermode points to Antonio's line "Hie thee, gentle Jew" (1.3.173) in which the epithet "gentle" is doubly ironic, for being inaccurate both in the sense of being a complimentary remark about Shylock's kindness, nobility, and social rank and also in the punning sense of "Gentile" – with the clear implication that the lack of the latter quality inevitably indicates (and perhaps even causes) the lack of the former. Although Kermode does not make additional connections here, Antonio's pun should also put us in mind once again of Salerio's opening speech, in which he imagines how, if he were in Antonio's position, the stone walls of the church would make him think of his ships at sea, and of treacherous rocks touching "my gentle vessel's side" (1.1.32). Although the reader or spectator does not necessarily know it yet, Shylock will soon become the rock that threatens the "gentle" (or gentile) vessel – a point more heavily ironic given that in the context of the speech,

the hypothetical rocks Salerio refers to are ones he was put in mind of by a Christian church, "the holy edifice of stone" (1.1.30). As far as Christian citizens are concerned, an ungentle Jew may corrupt a society to such an extent that even church stone evokes dangerous sea rocks, to sink a "gentle vessel."

In his 2004 book, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*, Neil Rhodes also sees religion as a crucial point in the play's attitude towards law, observing that although "Christian equity" should theoretically guarantee an impartial legal process, Shylock's status as a Jew is evidently sufficient to disqualify him from receiving such equity (Rhodes 109). Rhodes's reading leans heavily on Alexander Silvayn's *The Orator*, a text published in 1596 which comprises one-hundred judicial "Declamations" and whose ninety-fifth entry is a likely source text for the play: "Of a Jew, who would for his debt have a pound of flesh of a Christian" (Silvayn 400). In this text, the Jew appeals to the impartial procedures of the law in relation to the general economy order to justify his claim:

> Impossible is it to breake the credite of trafficke amongst mē without great detriment vnto the Commonwealth: wherfore no man ought to bind himselfe vnto such couenants which hee cannot or wil not accomplish, for by that means should no man feare to be deceaued, and credit being maintained, euery man might be assured of his owne. (401)

Here the Jew appeals to the necessity of preserving the law on the grounds that doing so ensures the stability of trade, and therefore of the state. Here he anticipates (or, perhaps more likely, inspires) Antonio's explanation of the social underpinnings of the Venetian legal system and of why the Duke, whatever his own feelings, cannot simply dismiss Shylock's bond:

> The duke cannot deny the course of law:
>
> For the commodity that strangers have
>
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,
>
> Will much impeach the justice of his state;
>
> Since that the trade and profit of the city
>
> Consisteth of all nations. (3.3.26-31)

I will discuss this speech in more detail later in this chapter; for now, it will suffice to observe that both Silvayn's Jew and Shakespeare's merchant observe that the proper procedure of the law must be upheld in order to maintain a stable, functioning economy and government.

In Silvayn , the Jew's Christian opponent, instead of replying with legal argument, offers a stream of dehumanizing vitriol, insisting that the Jew has no right to "dispute of equitie" when he has "no faith at all" and that his demand is an "abhomination" (404). Rhodes reminds us of the etymological roots of "abhominable," which derives from *ab homine* "to mean 'away from man, inhuman, beastly'" and argues that the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* follows much the same form as that in *The Orator*, concluding that "humanity understood as mercy or generosity has to be predicated on an acknowledgement of the humanity, in the more fundamental sense of the word, of the different parties concerned" (110, 111). That is to say, although Christian law may have to treat everyone equally, it seems that in this play a Jew like Shylock does not necessarily count as part of "everyone" in the first place. Although this is a persuasive reading of this section of *The Orator*, there is a problem with Rhodes' application of this reading to *The Merchant of Venice*. Indeed, his reading of the play depends hardly at all on the words of the play itself but rather upon the text of one of its likely sources. In

placing the word "abhominable" in quotation marks he rather neatly detaches it from *The Orator*, and thenceforward applies it freely to *The Merchant of Venice*, as if it actually appeared there.

Furthermore, Shylock differs crucially from the Jew in Silvayn's *Orator* in that although he does receive a stream of dehumanizing abuse (from Gratiano, rather than from Antonio or Portia) this abuse does not appear to have anything to do with why he loses his case. His failure results rather from Portia's "hypertechnical" reading of the law, which makes a mockery of his determined insistence on the precise terms of his bond. It is in this insistence (not in being called 'abhominable'' by an angry Christian) that he truly resembles the Jew in *The Orator*. Silvayn's character actually spells out the point in considerable detail, listing reasons why he might legitimately want to claim the pound of flesh, before pointing out that those reasons are actually redundant, given the essential legality of his claim:

> A man may aske why I would not rather take siluer of this man, then his flesh: I might alleage many reasons, for I might say that none by my selfe can tell what the breach of his promise hath cost me, and what I haue thereby paied for want of money vnto my creditors, of that which I haue lost in my credit: for the miserie or [sic] those men which esteeme their reputation, is so great, that oftentimes they had rather indure any thing secretlie then to haue their discredit blazed abroad, because they would not be both shamed and harmed. Neuerthelesse, I doe freely confesse, that I had rather lose a pound of my flesh, then my credit should be in any sort cracked: I might also say that I haue need of this flesh to cure a friend of mine of a certaine maladie, which is otherwise incurable, or that I would haue it to

> terrifie thereby the Christians for euer abusing the Iewes aniemore hereafter: but I
>
> will onelie say, that by his obligation he oweth it me. (402)

As far as he is concerned, whatever reasons one might dream up to justify the claiming of the flesh-bond in moral terms, these reasons are ultimately irrelevant. The Jew's opponent has a legal obligation, and the stability and security of the state depends upon the maintenance of the law, whose integrity in turn depends upon the enforcing of this legal obligation.

Shylock, in contrast, is considerably less patient than Silvayn's Jewish character, and does not even bother speculating about imaginary excuses he could conceivably offer. When Antonio and Salarino appeal to him a short time before the trial, he is insistent almost to the point of absurdity:

> I'll have my bond; speak not against my bond:
>
> I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond.
>
> [...]
>
> I'll have my bond; I will not hear thee speak:
>
> I'll have my bond; and therefore speak no more.
>
> [...]
>
> I'll have no speaking: I will have my bond. (3.3.4-17)

Kornstein notes Shylock's repetitive insistence here (Kornstein 68) and indeed it seems that the moneylender's anger leaves no room for nuance, subtlety, or (at this point) even much thought. Unlike Silvayn's Jew, who is sufficiently composed to construct a rather elegant series of hypotheticals, which he can then triumphantly dismiss all at once by invoking the iron rule of legal "obligation," which is itself based upon broad considerations regarding the well-being of the state, the enraged Shylock is locked into

near-mindless repetition, the verbal equivalent of furious foot-stamping, demanding his bond, bond, bond, bond.

In the trial scene itself, Shylock's insistence on the literal letter of the law begins to slide into outright, self-conscious comedy:

> PORTIA   It is not so express'd: but what of that?
>
> 'Twere good you do so much for charity.
>
> SHYLOCK   I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond. (4.1.255-7)

It is easy to imagine the moneylender archly and minutely examining his contract, pretending to seek diligently for "charity" as a required term of his bond. It is this extreme commitment to the letter of the law, extreme to the point of becoming quasi-comedic, that Portia so adroitly exploits in her hypertechnical reading of the bond, whose absurdity is a parody of Shylock's own absurdity. Nevertheless, throughout her argument Portia is careful never to abandon the crucial fiction that the trial is about Justice taking her majestically impartial course based on appeals to formal procedure, rather than being about the defeat of a villainous Jew.

So how does Manga Shakespeare approach the legal themes of obligation and charity the play, and how does it deploy the formal devices peculiar to the medium of comics in dealing with them? Returning to Yong's opening sequence in light of these larger readings of Shakespeare's text, we can see how potently and specifically Yong sets up a particular perspective on the thematic issues of the text. The reader's first exposure to Venice in the book is to a city vividly realized and highly recognizable – the architecture, canals, and gondolas are intensely distinctive. Yet the careful placement of Antonio's dialogue, his speech balloons straddling the first two panels of the opening page, colours the immediate perception of these familiar images with sadness and uncertainty. The

uncertainty is intensified by the ambiguous images of ships that accompany Salerio's speech, ships that may or may not exist entirely in Salerio's imagination, corresponding with an economic context in which wealth can depend upon the anticipated payment of debts with money generated by the sale of goods that at the time of dealing may have already been destroyed. Furthermore, although it is certainly possible to portray Shylock as the clear villain of the play, these opening panels also implicitly critique Antonio's moral character, although, as we might expect from a place of danger and uncertainty, it is unclear where this critique is coming from or how aware of it Antonio can possibly be.

In Salerio's speech, the proud and peerless ships that represent Antonio's mind are also flimsy theatrical "pageants," and when the image of the sinking ship shows men falling to their deaths, the only concern that Salerio attributes to Antonio is concern for his expensive textiles and spices. Appropriately, when Antonio fails to deliver on his legally-enforced financial obligations, the threat that he faces is not to his wealth but to his life, his own living flesh becoming a substitute for money and trade goods. Indeed, the uncertain status of these images disrupts matters even more, as the text remains carefully ambiguous on the status of these images, as to whether they depict real or imaginary events. Finally, the fact that Salerio's speech also accompanies the images of Antonio standing up in the gondola which is floating in the canal only reinforces Antonio's precarious position in relation to the law of the city of Venice. Far from being a place of perfect stability, Venice becomes as dangerous and uncertain as the treacherous ocean waters that that capsize Antonio's ships. Just as in Salerio's speech (and, by his imputation, in Antonio's mind) where even the holy stone of the church transforms into treacherous rocks, so the human-built, regulated canals of Venice are a dangerous sea. The legal concerns of the characters in the play may indeed center on whether (and how)

one should read the law literally, but here the very world (legal, financial, psychological, physical) that the characters occupy is thrown into considerable doubt and it is hard to say what a literal reading of it could even be.

What Does a Jew Look Like?: Reading Ethnicity in Manga Shakespeare's Venice

One key aspect of the critical conversation surrounding this play is the question of anti-Semitism, and that of racism more generally; the intensely visual nature of the comics medium prioritizes the question even further, as a representational question on which a comics artist must make a definite decision. This is one of the classic questions in the history of discussions of anti-Semitism: what does a Jew look like? This facet of the criticism includes discussions of the play's early performance history. Although there exists a famous account that Shylock was originally played in a clownish red wig and false nose, John W. Mahon observes that this idea is mainly derived from a ballad by Thomas Jordan published in 1664 titled "The Forfeiture: A Romance." As Mahon rather drily observes, "this is hardly a contemporary account" (Mahon 21). Indeed, the ballad is a poorer source of theatrical evidence than even Mahon gives it credit for, as a closer investigation reveals that the poem was not only written decades after than the original staging of the play, but does not even purport to be a description of a stage performance. Rather, it is a fresh adaptation of the story, making the physical description of its Jewish antagonist even more irrelevant to our understanding of the specifics of Shakespearean theatrical practice at the end of the sixteenth century.

In "The Forfeiture" Jordan describes a villainous Venetian Jew:

His beard was red, his face was made

Not much unlike a Witches;

> His habit was a Jewish Gown,
>
> That would defend all weather;
>
> His chin turn'd up, his nose hung down,
>
> And both ends met together. (Jordan 11-16)

In Jordan's version, the disguised woman at the trial who turns the case against the Jew is not Portia but the Jew's own daughter (the equivalent of Shakespeare's Jessica) who is described as having "a Christian soul / Lodg'd in a Jewish body" (23-24). The poem might be an interesting glimpse into early modern anti-Semitic attitudes, but it remains a decidedly slender reed on which to rest any certain claims about *The Merchant of Venice*. The fact that this particular performance convention is mentioned nowhere in Andrew Gurr's authoritative *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* is also telling. Certainly openly anti-Semitic depictions were standard in Nazi Germany[39] and the play's performance history can potentially cause anxiety for modern critics and adaptors of the play who are anxious to avoid appearing racist.

Harold Bloom, for instance, declares that "One would have to be blind, deaf, and dumb not to recognize that Shakespeare's grand, equivocal comedy *The Merchant of Venice* is nevertheless a profoundly anti-Semitic work," though he adds that "every time I have taught the play, many of my most sensitive and intelligent students become very unhappy when I begin with that observation" (171). The position that the play is anti-Semitic is a common one, yet Daniel Kornstein insists that a key factor in the play's appeal is generalizable nature of its theme. He maintains that "Shylock is not only a Jew; he is a symbol for any group that feels itself oppressed. Substitute African-Americans,

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[39] For a detailed discussion, see Bonnell, Andrew G. *Shylock in Germany:Antisemitism and the German Theatre from the Enlightenment to the Nazis.* New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008.

women, or any other such group, and we understand the strength of their impatient

feelings for full equality. We are all outsiders now, and Shylock looks better to us" (81).

The coercive use of "we" is a common hazard in the business of literary interpretation

and claims so phrased are inevitably vulnerable to refutation by any reader or audience

member who replies with a simple denial of the feelings, thoughts, beliefs, or desires thus

imputed to him or her. There might also be reason to pause at the easy assumption that

any and all readers or audience members can readily understand the frustrations of a

minority, outsider, or Other. Nevertheless, Kornstein's conclusion does represent an

interpretive view worth noting: that the specific ethnicities represented and discussed in

The Merchant of Venice are incidental to its themes of legality and prejudice. The Manga

Shakespeare version exhibits the same attitude in its careful de-specification of the play's

treatment of ethnicity. That is to say, although Appignanesi's textual adaptation does not

erase the references to Shylock's Jewishness, Yong's envisioning of it effectively does so

by converting Venice from a historically and geographically literal place to a fantastically

altered version of itself, populated by characters whose pointed, elfin ears identify them

as not precisely human. Although the city retains many of its recognizable features,

including canals and gondolas, these features are recognizable only because of what we

know about the real-world city of Venice, not from any particular details in the text of

Shakespeare's play. More importantly, Yong refigures ethnicity in the play in a way that

removes it from the zone of historical and religious specificity in order to convert the play

into one that makes a more general point about racism and otherness. One of the tools

that Yong employs in this effort is the cartoon.

In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud defines the cartoon as "amplification through

simplification," explaining that "by stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning,' an

artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't" (McCloud, *Understanding* 30). He argues that we tend to regard a photograph or a detailed, realistic drawing of a face as the face of a person who is distinctively other than ourselves, but that a simple cartoon face, consisting only of a few dots and lines, is easy for us to identify with (36). The phenomenological thrust of this claim may make it impossible to prove definitively (we cannot reasonably purport to know the subjective experience of all readers in their encounters with various representations of human faces). Nevertheless, McCloud's argument does draw attention to questions of how figures are represented and the attitude that the artist invites us to hold towards them. The Christian characters in the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice* are uniformly white-skinned and fine-featured, distinguishable from one another primarily by their clothing and by the length and shade of their hair. The Jewish characters are similarly pale-skinned, but stand in sharp contrast to the Christian characters in having long, braided black hair; thus they are clearly and visually marked as different from the Christian characters, but in a way that does not obviously correspond to any literal, real-world stereotypes about Jews, except perhaps remotely, with the correspondences between the appearance of the Jewish characters and the appearance popularly associated with vampires.

In *Shakespeare and the Jews* James Shapiro notes that the "roots of the belief that Jewish men lost blood and needed Christian blood to replace it" can be traced back at least as far as the thirteenth century and that versions of this idea "continued to circulate throughout late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe" (Shapiro 38). Shakespeare may have had such theories in mind when he wrote *The Merchant of Venice*. Robert Alter, in his essay "Who is Shylock?", argues that the Jewish moneylender fulfills the archetype of the vampire and indeed even claims this role "for himself in his first

speech to Jessica—'I'll go in hate, to feed upon / The prodigal Christian" (Alter 31). Yet this reading is somewhat disrupted by the fact that Shylock never once in the play says a word about Antonio's blood. In the trial scene in Act 4, it is Portia who raises the question of blood in her observation that Shylock is entitled to "no jot" of it (4.1.301). At the very least there is an irony in Shylock being stymied by the fact that his bond does not permit him any of Antonio's blood, when the blood itself is entirely incidental to what he actually wants: Antonio's flesh. This fact rather undermines the idea of Shylock-as-vampire. Indeed, it even suggests a reading that parodically undermines the association of Jew and vampire: Shylock does not want Antonio's blood, and his defeat in the trial comes from the fact that he cannot and will not take it.

It is true that Antonio refers to Shylock as his "bloody creditor" (3.3.34) and that a little while later Bassanio, still hopeful of preventing disaster, declares "The Jew shall have my flesh, blood, bones and all / Ere thou shalt lose for me one drop of blood" (4.1.111-12). Gratiano also joins in, describing Shylock's "desires" as "wolvish, bloody, starved and ravenous" (4.1.141-42). But even insofar as we read these references to blood as characterizations of the moneylender as vampiric, they constitute a misrecognition of Shylock's nature and desires - a misrecognition that Yong echoes in her artwork. In the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice* Shylock and Jessica are initially depicted standing under a starry night sky, dressed mainly in purple and black (Yong 5). Their skin is pale and they have long, pointed ears. Yet all the other characters in the play (with one notable exception, which I discuss in a moment) are also pale-skinned and pointy-eared. Yong thus creates an effect of uncertainty on the point of real and imaginary ethnicities that corresponds with some of the uncertainties in the play. In the text of the play, Shylock is described as a vampire but does not speak or behave like one:

in the Manga Shakespeare version he looks like one, but it is hard to tell whether Yong is

confirming the attitudes of Antonio, Bassanio, and Gratiano, or whether she is

representing their misidentification. The point is complicated further by the fact that

Jessica, who is never identified as a vampire, is given the same ethnic markers as

Shylock. These accumulated ambiguities of representation enables Yong to walk a fine

line as her artwork evokes and echoes some of the anti-Semitic language of the play while

still making a larger point about otherness that corresponds with that of Kornstein: the

Jewish characters in this version are marked as ethnically different from the others, but

not in a way that can be easily identified with real-world Jewishness.

In discussing this topic we must not look just at Jewish and Christian characters; as R.

W. Desai observes, "besides Shylock as the Other, there are other Others like the first two

suitors who make a bid for the hand of Portia and have, in general, been eclipsed by

Shylock" (304). In the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice* these characters are

physically marked as Other – yet at least one of them is not marked by any means that

corresponds obviously to real-world ethnicity. The Prince of Aragon has large webbed

ears and webbed feet – features neither typically nor stereotypically associated with

Aragon, nor with anywhere else outside of fantasy. The Prince of Morocco, however, has

a much clearer ethnic position: he wears a keffiyeh, which unmistakably identifies him as

Arabic. However, in the opening Dramatis Personae pages, which depict all the major

characters in colour, his skin is not swarthy, but green – a point that speaks against his

being readily identified with a real-world ethnicity. Yet given that the black-and-white

colouring of the rest of the book gives him skin that is straightforwardly dark, it is hard to

maintain that Yong does not identify him pretty straightforwardly as Arabic. It may be

that Morocco's green skin in the opening pages is designed to throw a suspicious reader

off the scent and give Yong a plausible claim not to be depicting real-world ethnicities, even as she relies upon real-world markers to establish the character's otherness.

The Prince of Morocco is a particularly interesting character to investigate in this adaptation, because Shakespeare's text makes pointed reference to the blackness of his skin. When Portia first learns of his arrival as a suitor, she remarks to Nerissa, "if he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me" (1.2.123-25). Upon their first encounter Morocco, evidently sensing or anticipating her distaste, urges her, "Mislike me not for my complexion, / The shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun, / To whom I am a neighbour and near bred" (2.1.1-3). Here, in characterizing his complexion as indicative of his close relationship with the sun, Morocco might be seen as engaging not only in geographical identification (he is from a place where there is a lot of sun) but also a certain self-aggrandizement (he looks the way he does because of his intimacy with a heavenly body). It is also worth noting here that although the more dominant and obvious meaning of "mislike" here is simply "dislike," an early modern text may well be drawing on the more archaic alternative meaning of "displease" or "offend." On the former reading, Morocco is urging Portia not to be dismayed or displeased at the colour of his skin; on the latter, he is urging her not to displease *him*. On this reading, Morocco's statement becomes not a plea for favour but an instruction, perhaps even a warning. In this regard, Morocco's remark should remind us of Shylock's famous speech on the humanity of the Jew, which includes among its pointed rhetorical questions, "if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" (3.1.56) – not just an appeal to common humanity, but an implied threat. Morocco does not promise revenge, but his remark perhaps contains a hint of defiance that puts him in a position much like that of the Jew.

In the play, Portia twice makes disparaging remarks to Nerissa about Morocco's dark skin. The first is the one quoted in the previous paragraph, which she makes upon first hearing of him, and the second upon his departure: "A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. / Let all of his complexion choose me so" (2.7.76-77). These remarks directly contradict the praise she gives Morocco to his face in their earlier encounter: after reminding him that "the lottery of my destiny / Bars me the right of voluntary choosing" (2.1.15-16), she assures him that if she were allowed to choose her own husband, "Yourself, renowned prince, then stood as fair / As any comer I have look'd on yet / For my affection" (2.1.20-22). Desai reads this passage as Shakespeare's own unusual love of blackness shining through in his writing, reconciling the apparent contradiction between the statements of praise and disdain by reasoning that this must be evidence that "the negative capability Keats attributed to Shakespeare does break down occasionally" (313). He supports this argument with what he seems to regard as a perfect *reductio ad absurdum*: he maintains that the only alternative to supposing that Shakespeare loves blackness and allows that love to spill out into his characters' dialogue is the unthinkable notion that Portia's contradictory statements are evidence that she is "a hypocrite and a dissembler" (313). This is evidently an imperfect argument. Given Portia's behaviour in the trial scene, in which she disguises herself as a man and presents herself falsely as a legal scholar, and given also her subsequent teasing deception with Bassanio regarding the ring she gave him, it should be perfectly plain to even a careless reader that she *is* a dissembler, at least part of the time. Furthermore, even if we lacked this evidence for Portia's willingness to deceive, an insincere compliment to a visiting suitor might reasonably be said to fall under the heading of politeness, rather than that of dishonest

hypocrisy. Finally, although Desai may hold her in high regard, there is no inherent reason why Portia could not possibly be a hypocrite and a dissembler.

Significantly, in the Manga Shakespeare version, Appignanesi removes Portia's first complaint about Morocco's colouring but retains the second. Thus although he maintains her disdain for Morocco's race, the line about him having a "devil's face," which by early modern standards directly implies blackness, is removed. The retained complaint refers only to his "complexion," which in the visual context of this comic version can only refer to Morocco's greenness. Appignanesi also abridges Morocco's appeal (or warning) to Portia, retaining the opening line, but removing any reference to "the burnish'd sun" to which he attributes his blackness. The much-shortened speech simply reads, "Mislike me not for my complexion. I tell thee, Lady, this aspect of mine hath feared the valiant" (Yong 50). Thus the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice* retains the fact of Morocco's visible racial difference from the other characters in the play, yet removes any reference to the specific real-world details of that difference. In this version, the problem that Portia has with Morocco is not that he is black, but that he is different, and the text thus realizes Kornstein's interpretation of abstracting the idea of racism and otherness from a play that is, in his view, not essentially about the specifics of blackness or Jewishness.

The treatment of the Jewish characters in the play is necessarily somewhat different, as the text indicates their lack of any skin colour for the Christian characters to object to. Lorenzo, in fact, actually confirms this point when he praises Jessica for her fair skin. As he reads her letter, her remarks, "In faith, 'tis a fair hand; / And whiter than the paper it writ on /Is the fair hand that writ" (2.4.12-3). The fact that he lauds the whiteness of her skin (an entirely conventional piece of praise) indicates that despite all the problems that

the Christian characters have with the Jewish characters, skin-colour, at least, is not among them. Yet at one point, Salerio angrily informs Shylock that he and his daughter are different: "There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory; more between your bloods than there is between red wine and Rhenish" (3.1.33-35). Despite the lack of a literal difference of melanin-levels, he still wants to attribute Shylock's wickedness to his Jewish body, and he does so by means of an image of stark dark-and-light contrast. In the Manga Shakespeare version of the play, Jessica's ethnically-specific appearance does not change at the end of the comic. She marries Lorenzo and becomes a welcome and included member of the Christian group of friends, but is still allowed to retain the black braids that are the distinctive mark of Jewishness in Yong's imagined world (Yong 205). Therefore the problem with Judaism, in both Shakespeare's textual version and Manga Shakespeare's comics version, seems not to be racial but theological; the point is also confirmed when Shylock is given the chance to avoid seizure of all his wealth by converting to Christianity (4.1.381).

The problem of visually marking Jewishness in the medium of comics has been famously confronted by Art Spiegelman in his great work *Maus*, a Holocaust memoir about his father's time in Auschwitz. In this comic book, Spiegelman performs the darkly Aesopian transformation of representing the members of the various nations involved in the Second World War as different animals. Thus Americans appear as dogs, Poles as pigs, Germans as cats, and Jews as mice. A feature of the text particularly worth noting is that its Jewish characters are *always* mice, regardless of the particular country in which they happen to live. Yong's representation of the Jewish characters in *The Merchant of Venice* is similar to Spiegelman's insofar as she appears to reinforce the immutability or unassimilability of ethnic identity: the non-Christian characters in the play are, after all,

marked with evident, physical differences. To be sure, the Manga Shakespeare version

lacks the element of allegorical fable that *Maus* exhibits, and by making the difference

not one of species but of relatively superficial skin-colour and hairstyle, it somewhat

softens the ethnic essentialism of the text which, as we shall see in a moment, is rather

complex.

    No discussion of law and ethnicity in *The Merchant of Venice* would be complete

without reference to the most famous speech in the play:

> I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions,
>
> senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons,
>
> subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by
>
> the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if
>
> you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong
>
> us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in
>
> that. (3.1.49-57)

This passage relies heavily on rhetorical questions, which begin as an appeal to a

common sense of humanity, but gradually modulate into a threat. When the threat comes,

it comes as part of a comparison with Christian behaviour, implicitly denying any

Christian claim to a moral high ground: both groups commit revenge. The speech

concludes with a neatly simple if-then logical structure: if Jews resemble Christians in

their common humanity, then they shall also resemble Christians in their desire for

revenge.

    The Manga Shakespeare version abridges this speech considerably (see Figure 3.4)

yet retains the neat isocolonic structure of the initial series of questions: "Hath not a Jew

eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt

with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases..." (98). As he speaks these lines, Shylock appears in the top left corner of the page. On the top right of the page are Solanio and Salerio, looking shocked and concerned. Driving up between these characters is a triangular grouping of panels showing a flashback sequence. It is worth pausing here over the question of whether Shylock, Solanio, and Salerio share the same master panel, or whether they rather occupy separate panels. This is not just a question of technical labeling, but of interpretation: what is the nature of the gap between these characters, which corresponds not necessarily to a spatial gap on the page but rather to a social or attitudinal gap? The ambiguity of the example may in itself constitute the best answer to the question. I would argue that the characters occupy separate panels between which there exists an Aspect-to-Aspect transition: this would be an instance of this transition type being used to divide a more-or-less complete or continuous image into smaller frames to indicate that the different components of that master image are in some sense separate from one another. Shylock is not divided from Solanio and Salerio by great gap of physical space but by a great gap of values and social circumstances, given concrete form in this case by the thick-bordered and monolithic cluster of panels that juts up between them. The Jewish character and the two Christian characters are here insurmountably divided by the sequence of past events that looms between them.

This triangular grouping of panels forms a sequence that has a Scene-to-Scene relationship with the rest of the page. This sequence depicts Antonio and Bassanio walking past Shylock on a snowy winter day; Antonio strikes Shylock with his shoulder on the way past, knocking him down. This incident consists of four panels, separated by two Action-to-Action transitions, followed by a Subject-to-Subject transition. The closure between the panels in the initial two transitions, however, is sufficiently small that

the transitions approach Moment-to-Moment status, with the consequence that the sequence is a slow one, and (this is an inevitable concomitance in the comics medium) takes up a larger portion of the page. Sheer surface area signals its importance, as this sequence takes up well over half of the page, in addition to the emphasis placed by the slow-motion effect of the moment-to-moment transitions. The border is thick, black, and slightly messy, giving the entire sub-sequence the appearance of a massive, monolithic structure.

The transition between the third and fourth panels in the sub-sequence is primarily Subject-to-Subject, moving from an image of Antonio and Bassanio grinning to themselves while walking away from the fallen Shylock, to a close-up image of Shylock's resentful face. Placed directly on the gutter between these two panels is the next section of Shylock's speech, continuing from his previous clause: "warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is?" (98). The word-image relationship here is an interestingly Interdependent one. Even as the text literally argues for a common humanity between Jews and Christians on the grounds that they react to weather and to seasonal changes in the same manner, it plays upon the snowy image, as Shylock is both physically cooled and emotionally heated in the snow where he has been knocked down. In this way, this early part of the speech is made to anticipate the threat of revenge that Shylock has not yet made: with this image, Shylock's early line of questioning, with its nonthreatening appeal for decent treatment, is already tinted with anger and a desire for vengeance. Finally, the triangular shape of this panel (itself containing a collection of panels) creates a point which thrusts up between the Jewish and Christian characters. Thus the encounter between Shylock and Antonio is represented as a slow-motion sequence in a panel border that casts its reality into a degree of doubt, is placed in such a

way as to make it both the literal and figurative wedge driving between the Jew and the Christians.

It is not necessarily just the Christian characters who rely upon the law for their well-being and sense of security. In her article "Contesting Constancy in *The Merchant of Venice*," Jane Blanchard maintains that Shylock's reliance on the law is not just opportunistic but is rather an essential part of his character. She argues:

> Shylock, as Shakespeare's Jew, is uncomfortable with a court or a culture that prefers love to law, mercy to method, and effort to effect. Since he operates best by fixed bonds of obligation, not by flexible bonds of affection, he becomes "not well" (4.1.8) after his shocking defeat and forced conversion because he has lost his sureties in law, in trade, and even in religion, and he does not know how to function without them. Shylock is Shakespeare's extreme example of someone who professes and practices Hebrew rigidity as opposed to Christian adaptability. (Blanchard 209)

This moment at the conclusion of the trial recalls the very first scene of the play in which Antonio discusses his sadness with Salerio, and Graziano remarks, "You look not well, Signior Antonio" (1.1.73). In this scene, as I have discussed above, Antonio does not know why he feels this way, but the Manga Shakespeare version indicates his precarious position in the legal and social system of Venice by means of the visual metaphor of the boat on the canal. By the end of the play, however, it is Shylock whose life and livelihood turns out to rest on sand (or on shifting seawater) at the very moment that he believed it to rest on the ironclad surety of the law.

Justice and Commodity: Bearing the Scales

The recognition of some of these categories in Yong's envisioning of the opening scene of the play has already provided us with valuable interpretive insights into how the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice* operates with regards to the theme of law. We have seen Antonio precariously floating, both literally and figuratively, on uncertain waters, unaware of his tenuous position (and with the word-image relationships and the placement of the speech balloons themselves often hovering uncertainly between clear identifications). Yet as the play moves along, he becomes more and more aware of the exact nature of the trouble he is in, explaining the legal situation to Salerio. This speech is key in highlighting the qualities that distinguish *The Merchant of Venice* from other Shakespearean comedies. As Tiffany Grace observes, "Shakespearean comedy is notable for the blitheness with which, in some latter acts, rulers overturn laws they have previously described as inexorable" (Grace 384). A particularly striking example of this willingness to overturn the law comes in *The Comedy of Errors* which opens with Duke Solinas informing the hapless Egeon that he is condemned to death because the law forbids merchants of Syracuse to enter the port of Ephesus. After hearing Egeon's sad story, the Duke declares:

> were it not against our laws,
>
> Against my crown, my oath, my dignity,
>
> Which princes, would they, may not disannul,
>
> My soul would sue as advocate for thee. (1.1.142-5)

Yet at the conclusion of the play, when the truth about Egeon's identical twin sons has been revealed and all the confusions of the plot sorted out, Antipholus of Ephesus offers the Duke money to buy his father's life, and the Duke simply replies, "It shall not need; thy father hath his life" (5.1.392). So much for his crown, his oath, and his dignity.

Such reversals, however, are not an easy matter in Venice, perhaps in part because here the Duke appears to have more than just his dignity at stake:

> The duke cannot deny the course of law:
>
> For the commodity that strangers have
>
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,
>
> Will much impeach the justice of his state;
>
> Since that the trade and profit of the city
>
> Consisteth of all nations. (3.3.26-31)

On its face, the word "justice" may appear to refer to a transcendent principle of absolute moral order, yet the fact of its impeachability works against that reading, particularly when the source of that impeachment is "commodity" – a word with a range of meanings related to property, profit, and wealth ("commodity, *n*.") . Although it can carry a more general sense of a benefit or advantage, the dominant sense here is economic. If "commodity" has the power to "impeach the justice of his state" then we see that justice is therefore contingent upon trade, and is not divine, absolute, or self-sufficient. We should take note of the polyptotonic echo between "deny" and "denied." "Deny" is attached to "the course of law" (its grammatical object) while "to be denied" is attached to "the commodity that strangers have / With us in Venice" (again its grammatical object, even though it appears in a subordinate clause). Thus the connection between the two verbs reinforces the point that the two denials, one of law and the other of commodity, are in fact identical. To deny law *is* to deny commodity; that is to say that Venetian law is effectively identical with the Venetian economy. It is also worth pausing over the word "his" in the phrase "his state." Although the use of the genitive pronoun implies mastery and control of the state, it is evidently in the power of "strangers." Not only is "justice"

here undermined by being subject to external forces and relegated to the realm of economic contingency, but even within this sphere, the official political head of the city is not in charge either. It may be officially "his state," but the true guarantors of both its economy and its morals are both diffuse and external.

The Manga Shakespeare edition features a somewhat abridged version of Antonio's speech (see Figure 3.5). It is split between two balloons, the first containing "The Duke cannot deny the course of law" and the second containing "For the commodity that strangers have with us in Venice, if it be denied, will much impeach the trade and profit of the city" (Yong 126). The first balloon is positioned on the divide between two panels, the one a small panel depicting a close-up view of Antonio's worried face and the second depicting the figure of the Duke, proffering a set of scales, looming over a shadowy version of the city of Venice. This transition is Subject-to-Subject, showing two very different images but remaining within the same idea: that of Antonio discussing the nature of Venetian justice. Yet it is worth noting that the transition is only this coherent because of the shared speech balloon: on the basis of images alone, it would be hard to discern a definite connection between the two. This is the point that comics critic and theorist Charles Hatfield has observed: understanding panel-to-panel transitions depends not only on the images of a comic but on the words that accompany those images (Hatfield 44).

This splitting of a speech balloon between two panels relies significantly for its effect upon the way that it jumps the gap between dialogue and narration. Typically, lines of dialogue simply emerge from a character and are unambiguously an expression of a particular point of view; narration, in contrast, by its very nature, possesses (or aspires to)

an omniscient or objective status.[40] The switch from dialogue to narration on this page

sends a clear signal that we are to read Antonio's speech not just as the worried

expression of a particular character (although it certainly is that) but also as a general

comment on the theme and situation of the play, although the image of Antonio in the

small panel at the top left corner of the page never quite lets us forget that this speech

emerges from a single, and therefore potentially partial, point of view.[41] Again, because

the same piece of text spans two panels it participates simultaneously in two different

word-image relationships. The smaller of the two panels contains primarily a Word-

Specific relationship, in which the text conveys most of the relevant information and the

image plays a secondary role – in this case it indicates only which character is speaking

(admittedly an important enough piece of information, but a simple one). From here we

transition to the larger panel, which contains a fascinating Interdependent word-image

relationship in which words and images go hand-in-hand to convey an idea that neither

could convey alone. Although in the image the Duke towers grandly over the city in a

posture of apparent mastery and bears the scales in his outstretched hand as if to show

that he is the master of the city's law, the text makes clear that he is actually powerless to

interfere with this law's operation. Although he presides over the city as its official ruler,

its welfare really depends upon the economic activity of "strangers," whose business he

dares not disrupt. Significantly, Appignanesi here slightly abridges the Shakespearean

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[40] While there do exist unreliable and fallible narrators, what makes these interesting is the assumption of objectivity and correctness inherent in the fact that they are narrators. That is to say, unreliable narrators are interesting only because narrators are normally reliable; there is nothing remarkable at all about an unreliable character.

[41] This instance of a piece of text straddling two panels works in nearly the opposite way as that in the opening pages of the book, discussed at the beginning of this chapter. There the comic starts with a piece of text hovering over an image to which it bears no obvious relationship; from there it moves to a second panel which identifies the identity of a specific speaker, which grounds the previously unconnected speech in something definite. In this instance, the movement is from a piece of dialogue spoken by a specific speaker to a more general scene.

text, converting the object of the verb from "justice" to "trade and profit," thus foregrounding the Duke's economic concerns: in this grammatical revision, justice does not just serve commodity but is literally replaced by it. This refocusing of the textual passage creates an ambiguity in the illustration, in which we may wonder whether the scales really serve as a symbol of justice or rather as a tool of commercial trade. The abridgment also removes the ambiguous "his" in Shakespeare's text, but we might regard the possession or domination implied by the genitive case as somewhat substituted in the grand figure of the Duke; on this reading, the irony is retained.

The Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice* continues to make intriguingly ambiguous use of the image of scales throughout, and sometimes deliberately avoids the image in scenes where we would normally expect it. When Shylock declares in the trial scene, "I stand here for law" (Shakespeare 4.1.146), he means that he demands and awaits the proper fulfilment of the law, but the phrase "stand for" also conveys the idea that he *represents* the law. At the climactic moment of the trial, when Antonio "must prepare [his] bosom for the knife" (4.1.257), Portia confirms with Shylock that he has his "balance" ready (4.1.270) and, as Theodore Ziolkowski points out, it is hard not to see "Shylock with his knife and balance" as "a striking image of Justicia" (Ziolkowski 174). The opportunity to represent Shylock as a parody of Justice would seem tempting to a comics artist, yet Faye Yong avoids taking this opportunity. In fact, not only do we never see Shylock bearing the scales in the comic but scales never once appear in the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice* except as an entirely metaphorical image: no literal scales ever appear in the book. At the moment of the trial in which Portia asks for the balances, Yong provides an image of the scales alone in a panel with a black background, free from any of the immediate, literal context of the play's action.

The question of what sort of panel transition we have here, moving from the trial scene to the isolated scales, and back again, is somewhat difficult. It is not quite a Subject-to-Subject transition, as it does not simply switch to a different subject within the scene, but to a subject quite outside the immediate reality of the courtroom. Yet neither is it a Scene-to-Scene transition, as we are not moving to a new location *per se*, but to an object just referred to in the dialogue. Although this question might spark some debate among comics theorists, I would argue that this transition best fits within the McCloud's category of Aspect-to-Aspect transitions, in which we switch not to a different spatial aspect of the current scene but to a different thematic aspect, regarding the scales not so much as a physical object in the courtroom but as a symbol of law whose function threatens to become gruesomely literal in a moment, as promised in the dialogue: "Are there balance here to weigh the flesh?" (149). Placed thus before the black background, the scales here become a visual realization of precisely what Eagleton describes: the law progressing according to its literal letter, independently of the "material contexts in which it is operative" (37). Here Justice is truly blind, that is to say, operating in darkness, according to the strict text of the bond, without concern for context – although this fact turns out to be Shylock's downfall rather than his triumph. Throughout the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice*, Yong makes it clear that although the characters of the play rely upon the law and assume its power to preserve and protect them and their assets, the law of Venice is built upon the potentially unstable ground of finance – the finance of "strangers."

Marcia Williams: *Bravo Mr William Shakespeare*

It is worth here devoting some space to discussion of Marcia Williams' version of *The Merchant of Venice* in *Bravo Mr William Shakespeare* (2000). While the Manga Shakespeare version is somewhat abridged, it includes most of the text of the play and does not remove any whole scenes. Williams' much more restricted format, in which each play she adapts only occupies between four and six pages, forces her to select crucial narrative moments to depict, with far more stringent selectivity than a longer adaptation would require. In this respect Williams' text lacks much of the kind of leisurely ambiguity that characterizes the Manga Shakespeare version: in a text of this length there is no room for a drawn-out sequence of uncertainty about the nature of the setting or about the ontological status of the images presented. In contrast to the drawn-out and ambiguous introduction to the play in Yong's version, Williams' introductory panel is highly compact, relying upon a single image, accompanied by a long textual caption:

> Bassanio, a poor nobleman from Venice, was in love with Portia, a rich heiress from the country. To travel to her estate and court her, he needed three thousand ducats. His friend, the merchant Antonio could not help. His wealth was with his ships at sea. So they asked the Jewish money-lender, Shylock. Shylock had long hated Antonio. He agreed to lend the sum, on one condition. (Williams, *Bravo* 30).

The accompanying image shows the inevitable gondolas, canals, and stone bridges that identify the setting unmistakably as Venice (see Figure 3.6). In the foreground are Antonio and Bassanio exchanging friendly looks, while the background shows Shylock, dressed all in black, glowering under the rim of his black hat, uttering the line (borrowed from Act 1, Scene 3) "I hate him" (30). In terms of basic plot coverage and character motivation, Williams thus manages to summarize much of the first act of the play, and

even does so despite the fact that there is a degree of repetition in the Additive word-image relationship between image and caption, although nowhere near enough to make the relationship in the panel truly Duo-Specific.

Given that this version is explicitly intended for children, one might expect it to be designed specifically for the purpose of cultivating what E. D. Hirsch famously termed "cultural literacy." Hirsch argues that "literacy is far more than a skill and [...] it requires large amounts of specific information... [a] network of information that all competent readers possess" (Hirsch 2). He calls this network "cultural literacy" and argues that its function "is to foster effective nationwide communications" (Hirsch 2). It is not my purpose here to explore Hirsch's ideas in detail, but to observe that a certain version of the idea of cultural literacy may inform adaptations of Shakespeare, particularly heavily-abridged versions for children. In deciding what to keep and what to save, an adaptor may be tempted to produce a version that provides a distillation of the most popular conventional notions of the play, or in Margaret Jane Kidnie's more precise terms, the most popular and conventional notions of "the work" (Kidnie 7-8). An artist with such an aim in mind might well create a version that is essentially a distillation of the play that most educated citizens carry around in their memories; it would be a composite of the most famous lines and images from the play, with the aim that the next time the child reader hears someone say "Friends, Romans, countrymen" or sees an image (serious or parodic) of someone raising a skull and addressing it, he or she will be able to say "ah,

yes, that's from Shakespeare."[42] Yet Williams is evidently not aiming at such a

distillation but at something more innovative and specific.[43]

Williams devotes a full page to the courtroom scene, and opens it very dramatically

with a panel that spans the top of the page, in which the grand pillars and archways of the

courtroom form the border of the panel, establishing a sharp contrast with the previous

pages, which consist mainly of essentially featureless panels in which the setting does not

impinge upon the characters and their dialogue. We should recall from Will Eisner that

"the panel border itself can be used as part of the non-verbal 'language' of sequential art"

(Eisner 44). In this case, having the border of the panel (and the page) constructed out of

the grand architecture of the courtroom makes the entire first panel resemble a sort of

decorative frieze, defining the architecture of the entire page. Throughout the book,

Williams places columns in the page borders alongside the audience members, indicating

the support pillars of the Globe Theatre, but now these pieces of theatrical architecture

become subsumed in the idea of the courtroom established by the top panel (see Figure

3.7). Reinforcing the correspondence, the two sets of columns, the ones in the outer

border panel and the ones in the top panel itself, actually share the same spiral design.

Thus the entire courtroom scene is not just placed upon a stage but defines the whole

structure of the theatre, with audience members now effectively sitting in a courtroom

watching a trial (although they do not abandon their habit of maintaining a running

commentary on the action). This design feature thus establishes, subtly yet potently, a

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[42] To be fair, Hirsch would prefer that students actually read Shakespearean plays in their entirety rather than rely on simple summaries, but even he concedes that there is no general agreement among educators on which particular plays it would be most suitable and useful for students to study (Hirsch 128).
[43] Notably, Williams' version omits the most famous speech in the play, Shylock's famous appeal for recognition of the common humanity of Jewish people. Yet unlike the Manga Shakespeare version, Williams' *Merchant of Venice* does not shy away from the historical specificity of early modern Jewishness: Shylock is distinctively bearded and during the trial he wears a kippah.

thematic point not emphasized in the Manga Shakespeare version: the theatrical nature of the courtroom and the way in which the play effectively makes members of the early modern theatre audience into direct observers on, and perhaps even participants in, the trial.

The judge sits at the center of the panel, the back of his chair providing the highest point of the panel border, demanding of Shylock, "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?" and receiving the reply, "What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?" (Williams 30). The shared structure of these sentences makes them isocolonic: both consist of a main clause, followed by a subordinate clause after a comma; the fact that the two subordinate clauses are metrically identical reinforces the correspondence further. The isocolon indicates the balance of the two arguments, and that Shylock's reply is evidently entirely equal to the task of countering the judge's appeal. In the unabridged text, Shylock's statement is the first line of a much longer speech, in which he forges an analogy between the right of any Venetian citizen to own slaves and treat them as he wishes and his own right to Antonio's flesh (4.1.89-97). In this case, Williams recognizes the rest of Shylock's argument as an extension of the point made in the first line, and retains only that first line; thus we lose an interesting discussion of slavery but keep the basic and intractable ideological and isocolonic disagreement between judge and moneylender. Shylock, believing himself to remain within the precise and literal letter of the law, assumes that he has no need of mercy.

The first panel of the page is followed by a series of eight small panels showing the main events of trial, with text captions explaining Portia's clever maneuverings and the characters speaking some of the more important lines. These panels are divided by Action-to-Action transitions, mostly featuring a handful of the same characters in

different postures. Because of the size of the panels, they appear only from the shoulders up, and their variations in posture are minor: Shylock raises or lowers his knife, and the characters turn their heads to face different directions. The main action of these Action transitions occurs in the text as Williams makes transitions such as the one from "Shylock steadied his knife and Antonio prepared to die" to "The lawyer warned Shylock to take a pound of flesh *exactly*" (32). Thus Williams moves fairly efficiently through Portia's manipulations in turning Shylock's desire for the precision of the law against him. Although only fragments of the original dialogue remain, Williams manages to draw out some of the scene's irony. In the fourth panel of the sequence Shylock rejects Christian mercy with the declaration, "I crave the law"; the caption of the seventh panel in the sequence explains Portia's argument: "If he spilled one drop of blood, he would break the law" (32). The repetition of "law" is key to the effect here. In this speedy version, the path to fatal contradiction is a mercilessly short one, as we witness that an intense desire for the precise execution of the law that cannot itself survive the precise (or hyper-precise) execution of the law.

Williams cannot resist a little winking irony in the border, as one of the seats has a "POST NO BILLS" sign prominently affixed to it while, just below, another seat features an equally prominent sign: "Buy your buns in Pudding Lane Bakery" (32). More pointed is Williams' reference to the scales of justice. As in the Manga Shakespeare version, this courtroom scene also avoids any literal appearance of the scales, but they do appear in dialogue, as one audience member regards this eight-panel sequence with a satisfied expression and remarks, "The scales of justice are tipping" (32). Evidently in his judgement Shylock is getting what he deserves, and that is Portia's manipulative reading of the law. Williams' reading is more careful than that of Neil Rhodes; while he is

distracted by the idea that Shylock loses the trial thanks to dehumanizing abuse (as occurs in Silvayn, which he blurs with the play) Williams pares down the events of the trial to Portia's basic legal maneuverings, which as we have seen is the real source of Shylock's downfall. She eliminates Gratiano's abuse, which, although it is valuable for indicating the character's attitude (and the general public's attitude) towards this villainous Jew in their midst, is not directly relevant to the actual strategic procedures within the trial.

Most important is the format of the page that conflates the space of the theatre with the space of the fictional courtroom in the play; combined with the details in the outer audience panel and the implied complicity of the audience, the truly strange judicial procedures of the play is evident. While the relationship between the inner and outer panels is still Aspect-to-Aspect, the divide between the two spaces (the imaginatively-elaborated idea of an performance and the selected audience members) becomes blurred. We have already seen in the previous chapter how Williams uses this audience-in-the-borders in several ways, and one of the most important is to have them express various attitudes towards the play, encouraging young readers to form their own responses, and to make it clear that there is considerable room for variety in these responses. Now that the courtroom has extended beyond the "stage" panels into the outer audience panel, the audience members have become, in a sense, jurors as well – participants in the trial. Thus the encouragement to the reader to engage with the play and form judgements is intensified. The man who remarks "The scales of justice are tipping!" is clearly on Antonio's side of the argument, while at the bottom left corner of the page a different man remarks, "Well, I feel sorry for Shylock" and a woman adds, "He was only doing his job" (Williams 32). Here we see again the conflict between a particular concept of abstract justice which is measured, at least theoretically, in the impartial mechanism of

the scales, and the orderly conduct of economic business in Venice, which depends upon the honouring of contracts which are drawn up and signed by consenting participants who are doing their jobs. Like the Manga Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice*, Williams' version, despite the fact that it is intended primarily for an audience of children, makes sophisticated use of the unlocalized space that the comics medium shares with the early modern theatre. This formal flexibility allows her not only to fill her audience's stage space with any specific setting (to the extent that specificity is required) but also to transform the stage itself and the implied role of the audience from spectator to participant, simultaneously inviting her readers to likewise become participants.

Conclusion

While Yong's *Merchant of Venice* grapples with coherence of law in the play and its dependence upon forces outside of itself, Williams' *Merchant of Venice* uses the judicial ideas and situations of the play as opportunity to prompt for reader involvement and discussion, carefully showing both sides of the legal argument. Both do so by relying upon the enormous formal flexibility of the comics medium, Yong by creating a series of highly ambiguous effects that correspond with the ambiguous themes of the drama, and Williams by transforming the entire site of dramatic performance into a forum for the reader to make his or her own judgements. These techniques distinguish Yong's and Williams' works from the versions of *Macbeth* produced by Alex Blum, John Haward, and Robert Deas which I will discuss in the next chapter. Instead of enacting thematic ambiguities in their formal construction or presenting them for consideration in a format that places the interpretive burden upon the reader, they embrace a formal approach that

is much more straightforward in its presentation of moral situations and decisions, but is

at no point less fascinating and valuable from the perspective of the literary critic.

Chapter 4

"Strange images of death": The Moral Universe of *Macbeth* in Comic Books

Introduction

In the case of the comic book versions of *The Merchant of Venice* many of the most

important and potent effects derive from uncertain use of the forms of comics that reflect

the uncertain status of law in the play. In the case of the versions of *Macbeth* discussed in

this chapter, the most potent effects tend to derive not so much from teasing ambiguities

as from ironies, sometimes ironies of violent bluntness, suitable to such a violent play.

This formal difference corresponds to a thematic difference: *Macbeth* is less about law

than it is about good and evil, and although the two sets of themes do share some of the

same vocabulary, they remain distinct. When Macbeth refers to "even-handed justice"

(1.7.10) he uses a phrase that Shylock might well have appreciated for its implication of

impartiality. Yet the justice that preoccupies Shylock is that which is codified in human

systems of law, whereas the justice that Macbeth refers to is that imposed by God or

Nature on the universe. While the former, as Shylock learns, is subject to manipulation

by creative interpreters and is therefore perhaps not so impartial after all, no character in

Macbeth appears to be under the impression that the moral order of the world is

manipulable in the slightest, even if they occasionally suspect that it might be wicked or

absent. Consequently, the interesting literary treatment of these does not here depend

upon hypertechnical manipulations of formal rules but rather in direct confrontations and

engagements with moral statements and decisions.

In the comic book versions of this play the relationship between word and image is

easier to determine than those in Yong's and Williams' versions of *The Merchant of*

Venice, but they are not necessarily easy or comfortable to interpret, as this set of artists tends to present stark visions either of a world with a stiflingly rigid moral order that dominates the actions of individuals, or else a world in which that order is badly disrupted, becoming either worryingly uncertain or, perhaps, entirely meaningless. The formal realization of these readings of *Macbeth* are achieved through panel transitions and word-image relationships that are not trickily undecidable (like the endlessly reinterpretable letter of the law) but that are rather powerfully determinate, forcefully visualizing a particular version of morality. These two bodies of texts—comic book versions of *The Merchant of Venice* and comic book versions of *Macbeth*—provide a neat balanced sample of what might be considered the two ends of the spectrum in comics form: supreme undecidability versus supreme determinism. To articulate the distinction in another way, while in comic book versions of *Macbeth*, good and evil are difficult to distinguish, this difficulty is not expressed by means of interpretively uncertain formal devices of the kind favoured by Yong in her *Merchant of Venice*. Rather, the effect of moral uncertainty in these *Macbeth* versions is achieved by means of formal devices that are themselves entirely clear, even though the effect that they are creating is that of foregrounding the thematic uncertainties and contradictions in the play in a way that forces the reader to recognize them.

In this chapter, therefore, I will examine a selection of comic book adaptations of *Macbeth* with a specific emphasis on how they visualize the moral structure of Macbeth's universe, in particular the nature of evil. These interpretations I will place alongside some significant critical works that have commented on this aspect of the play, in order to demonstrate the correspondences between the interpretations performed by adaptors in the comics medium and those performed by significant Shakespearean critics. I preface

the discussion of the comics with a brief treatment of James Wootton's 1750 painting, *Macbeth and Banquo meeting the Weird Sisters*. This painting serves as an example of a pre-comics attempt to visually present Shakespearean drama, whose non-sequential nature requires it to use strikingly different techniques from those of the comics medium. Nevertheless, the painting anticipates many of the concerns and ideas of later criticism and of later visual adaptations: in addition to providing an interesting counterpoint to the comics, it establishes a consistent set of concerns surrounding the play which both scholarly criticism and artistic visualization take up and deal with in different ways. Alex Blum's 1955 Classics Illustrated version of *Macbeth* is, perhaps predictably, a relatively conservative interpretation of the play, in many ways echoing the seminal critical positions of A. C. Bradley in the early twentieth century. In Blum's version, the moral world of the play is one in which evil exists, but is clearly distinguishable from good (although there are a few complicated factors at work here, as we will see) and is ultimately contained and defeated by a Fate whose operations do not depend upon moral actions and decisions by individual characters. Later comics adaptations of the play do not have nearly such a cut-and-dried vision of morality in this play, in part, as we shall see, because they are produced at a time when the American comic book industry is no longer constrained by the 1954 Comics Code Authority. These versions are deeply skeptical of any simple binary between good and evil, and likewise of any moral system that would make such a binary possible. Jon Haward's Classical Comics version of *Macbeth* forwards an interpretation of the play reminiscent of that offered by Harry Berger Jr. and Stephen Orgel, in which there are no clear moral distinctions among the various characters in the play. Robert Deas' Manga Shakespeare version takes the point

even further, offering a version of the play in which good and evil are not just potentially equivalent, or difficult to distinguish, but might actually be meaningless.

The point of this comparison between different versions is twofold. First, I want to demonstrate the potency of these comic book versions of *Macbeth*, in their ability (like the James Wootton painting) to echo and even anticipate or exceed scholarly understanding of the play. Haward's problematizing perspective on the moral universe of the play is every bit as radical as that of Harry Berger Jr. and Stephen Orgel, and Deas' perspective moves beyond that, casting all moral categories into doubt and revealing them to be built on sand. Second, I want to demonstrate how the interpretations of *Macbeth* presented in these different versions are achieved by means of the special formal techniques unique to the comics medium, and demonstrate further (as has been the mission of this project as a whole) that a formally-sensitive reading method is necessary in order for a reader to fully understand and appreciate these interpretations. Certainly at least some of the effects of the various panel transitions and word-image combinations, in conjunction with the comics creators' sensitivity to Shakespeare's text, will make themselves felt even for a casual reader. Nevertheless, a full analytical and scholarly understanding of their operations is only possible by means of the formalist approach to comics criticism that I advance in this dissertation.

Macbeth as a Moral Agent in James Wootton's *Macbeth and Banquo meeting the Weird Sisters*

In 1750, the English artist John Wootton painted *Macbeth and Banquo meeting the Weird Sisters* (see Figure 4.1). Stuart Sillars observes that this painting owes a great deal to the artistic theory of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, and his 1713

monograph, *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tabulature of the Judgement of Hercules*. The Judgement of Hercules or the Choice of Hercules is an artistic trope, found in many early modern paintings, in which Hercules stands between the allegorical figures of Virtue and Pleasure and is in the process of choosing between them. As Shaftesbury says, "'Tis on the issue of the Controversy between these *two*, that the Character of HERCULES depends" (Shaftesbury 6). Sillars observes, "Wootton follows the essay's advice in narrative terms but neatly inverts the moral implication by showing the moment when Macbeth turns away from the honest, doubting Banquo towards the witches" (3). Crucially, in this version of the moral choice, Macbeth is evidently choosing the wrong option, and Wootton's use of the Choice of Hercules convention suggests a reading of the play in which this moment of choice is the one on which the character of Macbeth depends.

In order to create a sense of narrative in a necessarily static and singular image, Wootton relies upon what Shaftesbury calls "the *Rule of Consistency*," according to which an artist may retain "*Unity of Time* and *Action* [...] by setting in view such Passages or events as have actually subsisted, or according to Nature might well subsist, or happen together in *one* and the *same* instant" (Shaftesbury 10). This requirement of unity, so evidently necessary in the single image of a painting, is a sharp contrast from the sequentiality of the comics medium. The painter must compress his or her entire interpretation of Shakespeare into a single image rather than a sequence, and is very strictly limited in the textual accompaniments that he may provide; usually there are, as in this case, no words at all. Nevertheless, like any highly capable creative artist, Wootton manages a remarkable achievement within the suitable boundaries of his medium. This image includes the witches' cavern from Act 4, Scene 1, and inside it the "brindled cat"

(4.1.1). Above it there is a magpie, which Sillars argues recalls the "maggot-pies" that

Macbeth regards as bad omens (3.4.124). Next to the magpie is an owl, which, Sillars

points out, refers ahead to the murder of Duncan, which is immediately preceded by "the

owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman / Which gives the stern'st good-night" (2.2.3-4). An

owl also features in the ill omens described by the Old Man in Act 2, Scene 4: "A falcon,

towering in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd" (2.4.12-3).

In addition to standing in for Macbeth, the owl also later represents the murderers he hires

to kill Macduff's family, as Lady Macduff declares to Ross, "the poor wren, / The most

diminutive of birds, will fight, / Her young ones in her nest, against the owl" (4.2.9-10).

Sillars does not cite "the obscure bird" that "Clamour'd the livelong night" after the

murder of Duncan, but the owl certainly corresponds with that omen as well (2.3.55-6).

Another detail that alludes to a later passage and thus broadens the narrative significance

of the painting is the pair of dark birds at the centre of the image, flying towards the trees

on the right-hand side. In Act 3, Scene 2, when the night is falling right before Banquo's

murder, Macbeth refers to "the crow" that "Makes wing to the rooky wood" while "Good

things of day begin to droop and drowse; / While night's black agents to their preys do

rouse" (3.2.51-5). The wind-bent tree on the right, Sillars further suggests, "is a

statement of the many references to the storm on the night of the murder" (Sillars 4).

Thus, he argues, "the atmospheric landscape [...] is turned into a major critical reading of

the play's direction" (5). In his interest in landscape, Wootton anticipates Bradley, who

argues in 1904 that "the desolation of the blasted heath, the design of the Witches, the

guilt in the hero's soul, the darkness of the night, seem to emanate from one and the same

source" (Bradley 333). Sillars concludes, "far more than a simple representation, this is

an image that narrates the play's pivotal moment of action and mediates its larger

movement of language and morality to offer a consistent and suggestive critical reading"
(Sillars 5). We should keep in mind James Wootton's painting. As Sillars says, "It
stresses the collapse of Macbeth's moral universe as implicit within the first meeting with
the witches; it suggests later events by the use of emblematic detail in the presence of the
owl, magpie and crows; and it visualizes the language of the disturbance of the natural
world and its order" (Sillars 30).

This reading of the play that Wootton offers is a thoroughly traditional one: that
Macbeth's world is characterized by a divine order, which his turn to evil temporarily
disrupts before order is restored once again through bloodshed. Over a century ago, A. C.
Bradley argued that the witches are "the witness of forces which never cease to work in
the world around [Macbeth], and, on the instant of his surrender to them, entangle him
inextricably in the web of Fate" (Bradley 349). Like Wootton, Bradley emphasizes this
crucial moment of choice for Macbeth, and all the subsequent evil in the play as
contained in and caused by this moment of entangling. Sillars is particularly anxious to
note that "Wootton's painting makes these critical points with striking visual immediacy a
hundred and forty years before Bradley lectured on *Macbeth*" (3). Original and valuable
literary interpretations are thus not exclusively the realm of the literary critic, but can also
emerge from the realm of visual culture.

Alex Blum's Invisible Art in the Classics Illustrated Edition of *Macbeth*

The Classics Illustrated *Macbeth* (1955) was among the first comics to fall under the rules
of the Comics Code, which had been drafted the previous year by the Comics Code
Authority, and which contains several prescriptions that would make any production of
Macbeth decidedly problematic:

General Standards Part A

1. Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.

2. No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.

3. Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.

[...]

6. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.

7. Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gun play, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.

[...]

General Standards Part B

[...]

2. All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.

[...]

4. Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly nor as to injure the sensibilities of the reader. ("Comics Code")

These requirements must have raised several practical questions for Blum and the rest of the team producing the Classics Illustrated *Macbeth*. Are readers liable to feel "sympathy

for the criminal" in *Macbeth*? Do medieval sword fights count as "knife play"? And (perhaps the key practical question) would the potent, high-culture associations of the name "Shakespeare" effectively defuse any objections to the potentially lurid contents that simply *must* be present in any adaptation of a play like *Macbeth*?[44]   Most interesting for an interpretation of the play is the third injunction of Part A, which raises the highly pertinent question of what exactly counts as established authority in the world of *Macbeth* – a question that cuts right to the heart of the play's moral structure, and one with which many interpreters, both scholarly and artistic, have grappled. One suspects that the authors of the code would not welcome the question, although it is safe to assume that Blum and Graham probably never put it to them.

If we turn to the section of Blum's version devoted to Wootton's favourite scene, Macbeth and Banquo's first encounter with the witches, we can see that this adaptation is significantly different from that of the eighteenth-century painter (see Figure 4.2). The abridged version of the text retains the first part of Banquo's speech, "What are these so withered and so wild in their attire, that look not like the inhabitants o' the earth and yet are on't?" (Blum 3). These lines are, of course, not directed at the witches themselves, but at Macbeth. Omitted entirely are the second part of Banquo's speech and Macbeth's following line, both of which are direct addresses to the witches (more on this point in a moment). The word-image relationship between Banquo's questions and the image that accompanies them in the panel proves to be rather complex, for instead of a Duo-Specific relationship, in which the picture simply depicts exactly what Banquo's words describe,

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[44] It may be that by the time the Classics Illustrated series reached *Macbeth*, this question had been effectively answered in the affirmative. After all, the series began with *The Three Musketeers*, which includes quite a lot of "knife play" (or swordplay). Prior to *Macbeth*, the series had also adapted such titles as *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* and *Kidnapped*, and it is hard to imagine a more unrelentingly violent book than *The Iliad* (#77 in the series).

we find a set of images that do not exactly match the text. The witches depicted here do not look particularly wild or supernatural: they are simply grey-haired women. And their robes, while rather shapeless, cannot really be described as "wild."

The word "wild" in the context of Banquo's speech may carry several different senses, and the Oxford English Dictionary provides a number of relevant significations, including "Uncivilized, savage" ("wild, *adj*." 5), "taking one's own way in defiance of moral obligation or authority" (7a), and "Fierce, savage, ferocious; furious, violent, destructive, cruel" (8). "Wild" here is therefore not just a visual cue, but a moral one. Significantly, "wild" can also convey a geographical meaning, hinting at the bleak Scottish landscape that both Bradley and Wootton find so significant: "Of a place or region: Uncultivated or uninhabited; hence, waste, desert, desolate" (4a). This usage corresponds with the "heath" upon which the text indicates this scene is set. Yet although the terrain depicted in the image is evidently uncultivated, it is hard to assign dark moral weight to the rather benign, brightly-coloured rolling hills in Blum's visualization. This panel thus serves as an example of an Interdependent word-image relationship, in which text and image together produce an effect that neither can create alone. Here the effect is one of ironic tension between the word and image: what about these witches is withered and wild? In what sense are they "not like the inhabitants o' the earth"? Evidently, Banquo's vision and insight here are not really visual at all, but moral: their wildness is explicitly not a feature of their clothing, but entirely a matter of their moral status in the play, in opposition to the proper order of the Scottish state. Evidently, this is a judgement that can be made by Banquo prior to his having heard them say or seen them do anything evil, seditious, or even inappropriate.

The absence of explicit visual cues indicating Fateful evil is not the only significant difference between the Classics Illustrated edition and the Wootton painting. Between the second and third panels of the page we have a Subject-to-Subject transition, moving from a close-up image of the red-robed witch to a wider panel that includes both other witches (now all three of whom are relegated to the background) and Macbeth and Banquo in the foreground on the left-hand side, who have just entered the scene on their way from the battlefield. Crucially, the next panel transition completely elides the grand moment of decision that so completely occupies Wootton. This transition is not Subject-to-Subject as all the subjects are retained from the previous panel: Macbeth, Banquo, the three witches around their cauldron and the Scottish landscape. Instead we have an Action-to-Action transition: Macbeth and Banquo have moved to stand at the cauldron, surrounded by the witches and their prophecies. Here, what for Wootton is the crucial narrative event of the entire play, the one that he selects as the subject of his painting to encapsulate the entire action, Macbeth's approach to the witches, occurs instantly and silently in the gutter between panels. Even the look on Macbeth's face seems to indicate something like surprise and confusion at how he has suddenly found himself here among the witches. While an Action-to-Action transition that elided the moment of choice might have at least pointed more suggestively towards what happened in between panels, the Subject-to-Subject transition simply inserts Macbeth into a situation that has, effectively, already occurred, even a hint in the previous panel at his voluntary participation. This moment of narrative compression does not allow Macbeth to fill the role of a choosing agent: rather than making a deliberate, dramatically-emphasized decision which entangles him in the web of Fate, the web of Fate rather surrounds and entangles him without his really acting, or even speaking, for himself.

There is a danger in leaning too hard upon Wootton's visual interpretation of the scene. After all, it is somewhat difficult to say how this moment of choice for Macbeth corresponds with the evidence in the text of the play. There is, after all, no stage direction declaring "*Macbeth approaches the witches with an evident air of acceptance for their evil nature.*" The only approach definitely indicated in the text is a verbal approach, which is initiated, interestingly, not by Macbeth but by Banquo. He appears to be the first to notice the witches and begins by speaking not to them but about them: "What are these / So wither'd and so wild in their attire, / That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth, / And yet are on't?" (1.3.37-40). Then he actually addresses them directly, asking, "Live you? or are you aught / That man may question?" (1.3.40-1). It is only after Banquo sees the witches and attempts to engage them in conversation that Macbeth adds his brief question, "Speak, if you can: what are you?" (1.3.45). That the weird sisters reply to Macbeth, and not Banquo indicate that he is the one they are interested in addressing (although they still fail to answer his actual question). Furthermore, after this first round of prophecies it is again Banquo who addresses the witches, not Macbeth, and Banquo who pointedly requests that they tell his fortune too. In short, if Macbeth here becomes entangled in a web of evil, it does not seem as though he chooses to become so, but that evil, in the form of the weird sisters, explicitly chooses him. If the dialogue indicates anything, it is that Banquo is the one approaching the three witches; they just do not appear to be so interested in him.

Macbeth's non-choosing role continues throughout the play: even his death scene occurs between panels. He and Macduff hurl themselves into furious combat on the bottom of page 43, and on the top of page 44 we find the result of an Action-to-Action transition in which Macduff stands victorious. Interestingly, this omission does not just

occur in the images (an artistic decision that might indicate a simple squeamishness about violence on the part of the illustrator) but is equally present in the text. The narrative text box on the page maintains the visual elision: "For a time the swords clashed. Then Macbeth lay dead at the feet of Macduff" (44). In this powerfully Duo-Specific word-image relationship, Graham's added text repeats the informational content of the images – indeed, repeats not just the content but the form, mirroring textually the visual structure of the panel transition. While the images provide one panel showing the clashing swords of the fight and the other showing the results of Macduff's victory, the text provides two independent sentences conveying the same information in the same order, and with the same crucial elision of the actual act of killing. Image-text relationships do not get any more Duo-Specific than this, as both the content and structure of both word and image drive home the same point: that Macbeth's defeat is not an action performed by a character in the drama, but a narrative event that simply occurs, independent of any visual depiction of, or textual reference to, specific character agency.[45] This version of the play could be argued to be highly faithful to the text of the play, as Macduff's killing of Macbeth occurs offstage – presumably this was at least in part to relieve the actor playing Macduff of the necessity of actually decapitating one of his fellow actors onstage in order that he might brandish his severed head.

Derek Traversi in *Approaches to Shakespeare* (1938), reads *Macbeth* as a play concerned "with the overthrow of the balance of royalty [...] and with the restoration of natural order under Duncan's rightful successors" (Traversi 87-88). G. Wilson Knight,

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[45] Von's 1982 version of the play, Jon Haward's Classical Comics version, and the Robert Deas' Manga Shakespeare version all follow Blum in not showing the killing. In contrast, The Manga Edition *Macbeth*, illustrated by Eve Grandt and Candice Chow depicts the killing of Macbeth, with enough gruesome spraying blood that it would surely have made any enforcer of the 1954 Comics Code turn pale (Grandt and Chow 181). Puffin Graphics' *Macbeth: the Graphic Novel* also depicts the killing (Tamai 147).

writing in 1931, similarly states that "Scotland is a family, Duncan its head. A natural law binds all degrees in proper place and allegiance" (Knight, *Imperial Theme* 126). This concern with the natural, and its close link with the actions and condition of the monarchy is also evident in Margaret Mahood's *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (1957), in which she observes that the "fertility of the land and the health of the body natural or body politic are dependent alike on the recurrent rhythm of times and seasons. Macbeth suffers in his single state of man all the disorder he has brought upon the greater organism of the state" (Mahood 140). In Classics Illustrated, this natural law and order is so firmly in place that both its disruption and restoration remain quiet, unostentatious events, driven not so much by character decisions as by the formal structure of the storytelling. This is true to such an extent that even the thematic reinforcement provided by the Scottish landscape, an aspect of the play that fascinates both Wootton and Bradley, is effectively excluded from the adaptation. The landscapes in Blum's version function as fairly neutral sound stages upon which the drama can be played. Likewise the weird sisters do not need to be hideous hags; perfectly normal-looking people are perfectly adequate to fill in the needed roles. Fate works its influences upon Macbeth so completely and yet so subtly, that it does not require the influence of gloomy barren heaths and dark forests; the Fateful manipulation occurs instead in the silent and subtle manipulation of the comics medium itself, in the sequencing and word-image pairing of what McCloud terms "the Invisible Art." It is worth recalling that this term, which is the subtitle of *Understanding Comics*, refers not just to the disreputable status of comic books and their consequent invisibility in discussions of art and high culture (less true now than when McCloud first made the point) but also in the subtlety of the devices of comic art, in which the most important effects are not to be found in big splash panels and colourful block-lettered sound-effects,

but in the invisible space between pictures, and between words and pictures. Thus in the Classics Illustrated *Macbeth*, the protagonist is not a great hero making the wrong decision, but a true pawn of Fate. The collapse of his moral world occurs not in a grand moment of moral choice but in the gutter.

Moral Ambiguities in Jon Haward's Classical Comics Edition of *Macbeth*

2008 saw the first publication of *Macbeth: The Graphic Novel* by Classical Comics.[46] In this version, the encounter with the witches occurs on page 14, which begins with a wide panel that spans the width of the page, showing the Scottish army at the left and the witches on the right, with Banquo and Macbeth in the middle, between these two (see Figure 4.4). Thus this panel somewhat evokes the Wootton painting, but instead of dramatizing a moral choice, it rather indicates a narrative progression from the battlefield to the witches on the heath. Banquo spots the witches in the first panel and expresses his curiosity. This time, in contrast to the same scene in the Classics Illustrated version, the witches do not simply stand still waiting to be approached (or, rather, they do not wait for the panel transition to simply bring the characters together). Instead an Action-to-Action transition takes us to the second panel, in which the witches make a dramatic supernatural intervention in the form of a magical green explosion. This intervention makes the nature of the next panel transition ambiguous. It would seem to be an Action-to-Action transition: now that the witches have appeared before Macbeth, something has brought them close together, standing face-to-face. But which one approached the other? And was the approach voluntary, or forced by the magical intervention? Here the moment of

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[46] This series of literary adaptations includes *Macbeth*, *Henry V*, *The Tempest*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and a *Midsummer Night's Dream*, with a *Hamlet* and a *Julius Caesar* forthcoming, in addition to several other non-Shakespearean titles.

approach is not isolated and emphasized, as in Wootton, which would make Macbeth's action a matter of unambiguous, personal moral choice. But neither is it skipped-over completely as in Blum's version, which implies that real moral choice is unavailable or a foregone conclusion. Instead, this moment of Macbeth's encounter with the witches is curiously obscured.

After Banquo questions the witches about his own future, the comic moves through a series of Subject-to-Subject transitions, extreme close-up panels showing the witches' red, glowing eyes. Again, the comic has an Interdependent word-image relationship as the threatening nature of the image is at odds with the respectful formality of the salutation. Because the witches do not really honour the Scottish lords at all, this triple hailing is in the text a relatively subtle irony: Haward's illustrations here foreground that irony. This emphasized effect should encourage a retroactive awareness of the irony above in their hailing of Macbeth with the titles of "thane" and "king" (14); as he realizes later, these titles bring him only "doubtful joy" (3.2.9).

The doubtfulness of the joy is not something that only occurs to Macbeth after Duncan's murder; he also has considerable doubts beforehand, and expresses these doubts in a famous passage from Act 1, Scene 7:

> If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
>
> It were done quickly: if the assassination
>
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
>
> With his surcease success; that but this blow
>
> Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
>
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
>
> We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases

We still have judgment here; that we but teach

Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return

To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice

Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice

To our own lips. He's here in double trust;

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,

Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,

Who should against his murderer shut the door,

Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been

So clear in his great office, that his virtues

Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against

The deep damnation of his taking-off;

And pity, like a naked new-born babe,

Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed

Upon the sightless couriers of the air,

Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,

That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur

To prick the sides of my intent, but only

Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself

And falls on the other.   (1.7.1-28)

There is a great deal more that one could discuss in this speech than I will address in this chapter, but certainly one of its most pointed and effective devices is the repetition of "done" in the first three lines, in which the precise meaning of the word shifts slightly in

repetition. Macbeth's first use of "done" takes the word in the sense of "truly and definitely finished" (an extended project that has truly reached a terminus), while his second use of "done" take the word in the sense of "performed" or "executed" (referring to a particular action). His third use emphasizes the second meaning, but also contains the first, bringing the two meanings together in words in a way that he is unable to do in action. Macbeth's consistent problem in the play is that once he has *done* something he wants it to be truly *done* (i.e. utterly completed). But although Macbeth is always "done" in the sense of having performed an action, he is never "done" in the sense that his kingship is never really secure. Although the distinction between the two meanings of "done" is subtle, it is nevertheless crucial if the speech is to make any sense. One can also appreciate the additional irony that having thus declared his desire to be done done done, Macbeth's speech is far from done. Having made his point about being "done," Macbeth then repeats the same point twice again with the metaphors of trammeling up the consequence, and delivering a final, decisive blow,[47] his own anxious repetitions contradicting the content of the hope he expresses – the hope of being truly *done* with violence and uncertainty.

This scene in the play is a crucial opening skirmish in what Cleanth Brooks, in *The Well-Wrought Urn*, terms, "Macbeth's war with the future" (41). Macbeth wants to control the future through action in the present, wants to perform an act that will "trammel up the consequence." Even a basic knowledge of the plot of the play will

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[47] Macbeth's hope that "this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all here" can hardly help but evoke the battle between Satan and Michael in Book 6 of *Paradise Lost*; each of them wants to end the battle at the first stroke, and each therefore attempts to strike a blow "That might determine, and not need repeat" (Milton 6.318). This desire to settle matters once and for all and forestall any future conflict in one almighty blow is nearly identical to the desire expressed by Macbeth, both in its ambition and in its utter lack of success. The war in heaven will not end until God wishes it so, and Macbeth's trials and tribulations will not end until Fate (or perhaps the bloodthirsty playgoing audience) is satisfied.

confirm that Brooks is right when he argues that "There is no net strong enough to trammel up the consequence" (42), but what exactly is the nature of the consequence that Macbeth tries so unsuccessfully to manage? Is the consequence, as Macbeth suggests, a product of "even-handed justice" which "Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice / To our own lips" (1.7.10-12) or is it rather a matter of chance and accident? Or to put the question another way, is Macbeth's war with the future an unwinnable war against divine justice, or an unwinnable war against random contingency? The Classics Illustrated version of the play provides a clear affirmation of the former position, with the structure of the comic itself functioning as the invisibly subtle, but utterly ineluctable, workings of Fate. The Classical Comics version, however, is not nearly so unambiguous. Haward's envisioning of this scene shows Macbeth wandering alone in the dark corridors of his castle, in the grips of his inner moral anguish (see Figure 4.5). Haward maintains visual interest by varying the angles and distance of the various panel images; these transitions are all Action-to-Action, as we see Macbeth in a series of distinct stages in his tormented walk through the castle. The first panel presents us with Macbeth on the battlements. In the second panel, when Macbeth speaks of "This even-handed justice" that "commends the th'ingredients of our poison'd chalice to our own lips" we see in the corner of the panel, a glimpse of the revelry that he has abandoned: the silhouette of a partying Scotsman lifting a drinking horn, a literalizing echo of the sentiment that shows how Macbeth's evil influence taints even the normal, everyday activities of his world.

Act 2 Scene 2, in this version as in Shakespeare's text, keeps Duncan's murder offstage. Instead of a bloody murder scene, we are treated to an image of Macbeth emerging from the pitch blackness of an archway, with mist swirling around his feet and a bloody dagger in each hand (Haward 33). Macbeth himself is shrouded in gloom, but the

blood on the daggers is a bright, shocking red, and Macbeth's hands are bloodstained as well. Keeping the murder scene "offstage" in this way enhances its horror by leaving its details to the imagination of the reader. The Classics Illustrated version of the play similarly does not depict Duncan's murder, although this decision might also be forced by the Comics Code's injunction against showing the details and methods of crime. Additionally, the rule against depictions of blood and gore ensure that the daggers are not bloody, which robs a little of the horror from the scene but also avoids certain ironic ambiguities that I will discuss in the next paragraph. In both cases, a reader familiar with McCloud's *Understanding Comics* might well think of McCloud's example of the raised axe and the chilling scream, which elides the moment of violence while unmistakably indicating it. It is here easy to see the applicability of the title of McCloud's chapter on panel transitions: "Blood in the Gutter."

In Act 2, Scene 3, just after Macduff discovers that Duncan has been murdered and raises the general alarm, Macbeth rushes into Duncan's room to pretend to confirm the discovery of his body, and kills the two grooms, whom he has carefully framed as Duncan's murderers. When Macduff asks Macbeth why he killed them, Macbeth has to come up with a good reason, and therefore offers this account of the sight that met his eyes in the royal bedroom:

<div style="text-align:center">Here lay Duncan,</div>

His silver skin laced with his golden blood,

And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature

For ruin's wasteful entrance; there, the murtherers,

Steep'd in the colors of their trade, their daggers

Unmannerly breech'd with gore. (2.3.108-13)

Of course, this passage is already ironic: Macbeth has not killed the grooms because he was overwhelmed by moral outrage at the crime of regicide; rather, he has committed regicide himself, and now feigns moral outrage. His killing of the grooms is not an act of vengeance, but an attempt at a cover-up. Therefore the monarchial language of this passage should already be heard as problematic. Cleanth Brooks draws upon Caroline F. E. Spurgeon's discussion of clothing imagery in *Macbeth*, and draws his reader's attention to the fact that the imagery of clothing also occurs in this passage. He observes that "the body of the king is dressed in the most precious of garments, the blood royal itself" and that the daggers are naked "except for their lower parts which are reddened with blood [...] like men in 'unmannerly' dress" (38). For Brooks, it is through this clothing imagery that the irony of the scene emerges most fully, for the daggers "have been carefully 'clothed' to play a part […] Yet the disguise which they wear will enable Macbeth to assume the robes of Duncan—robes to which he is no more entitled than are the daggers to the royal garments which they now wear, grotesquely" (38-39).

The metaphor of clothing that Macbeth invokes here has a broad application within the speech. The crucial point is that the "golden blood" with which Duncan's corpse is "lac'd" is exactly the same substance as the "gore" with which the daggers are "Unmannerly breech'd." When the king wears it, it is a golden, "lac'd" garment, but when the daggers wear it, it becomes unmannerly "gore." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "gore" had come to mean "blood" by the 1560s, yet for eight centuries prior to that, "gore" meant not "blood" but rather "Dung, fæces; filth of any kind, dirt, slime," and this usage survives well into the nineteenth century ("gore, *n*."). The quality of the blood (gold or gore) is not determined by its inherent nature, nor even by its royal source, but rather by its appropriateness, as a garment, to its wearer.

When Macbeth offers his explanation for his killing of the grooms, Haward presents us with a large, half-page panel close-up of Macbeth's face, giving strong visual emphasis to the close scrutiny under which he suddenly finds himself (Figure 4.6). He raises his bloody hand and anxiously offers the explanation of how his "violent love" overcame his "pauser reason." Like Blum, Haward does not accompany this speech with an image of Duncan's slain body, but keeps the murder completely, and horribly, out of sight. The contrast between "golden blood" and "gore" is not undermined by literal images of a bloody corpse and dagger; the two are allowed to remain morally distinct from one another. It does not represent Duncan as a flesh-and-blood corpse, but allows him to retain his status as a divine king, a moral principle, a man of silver and gold – whose murder is an unvisualized act that occurs somewhere in the misty, gloomy world beyond a pitch-black archway.

The climactic battle between Macbeth and Macduff is evidently long and brutal. Instead of dividing it into several panels, Haward includes multiple Action-to-Action transitions within the same panel, on a blood-red background, depicting seven separate images of combat. Here the normal sequencing of images becomes confused, as we cannot tell in exactly what order these actions occur. The sequencing problem becomes even more acute with the inclusion of images of the heads of the two characters – in whatever order the images are read, it would require Subject-to-Subject transitions to give them a place in the series. The indeterminacy of the sequence gives a strong sense of the confusion of the battle, far from the brief, orderly, and nearly bloodless fight that concludes the Classics Illustrated version. This panel is followed not with an Action-to-Action transition that takes us from the battle to its conclusion, but rather with an abrupt scene-to-scene transition to the cool blue shades of the courtyard of Macbeth's castle,

now successfully occupied by Malcom's forces. The consequence of the battle does not

appear for another five panels, with the entrance of Macduff, bearing Macbeth's head on

a pole – recalling Macdonwald's fate back at the beginning of the comic (9). Indeed, the

entire climactic battle is a clear visual echo of the play's early scenes, in which Haward

depicts the battle between Macbeth and Macdonwald, reported by the soldier, and then

the battle between Macbeth and the traitorous Thane of Cawdor, reported by Ross (9, 11).

This pairing of Macbeth and Macdonwald has textual justification, analyzed most

persuasively by Harry Berger Jr. Berger observes that both Macbeth and Macdonwald

are assisted by Irish Kernes, and that when Macduff kills Macbeth he steps into

Macbeth's role, killing "a properly appointed king, 'named' and 'invested' at Scone"

(73).[48] Berger also notes that "Malcom's final reference to being 'crown'd at Scone' may

remind us that while Macbeth was a regicide he was not a usurper (which Macduff, at

5.9.21, wrongly calls him), and this means that Macduff is also a regicide" (73).

Furthermore, he cites the soldier's description in Act 1, Scene 2 of Macbeth and

Macdonwald battling, as "two spent swimmers, that do cling together / And choke their

art" (1.2.10-11) arguing that "clinging together produces a dysfunctional solidarity" (75).

Although the Classical Comics version of *Macbeth* resembles the Classics Illustrated

version in severely curtailing Macbeth's agency in the play, it does so not by invisibly

eliding his moments of choice, but by openly usurping them with supernatural activity. If

Macbeth here lacks free will, then it is because of the intensely present and unmistakable

action of supernatural agencies. This version also offers serious opposition to any reading

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[48] One can speculate (not entirely flippantly) that if the Comics Code Authority had had the chance to read *Making Trifles of Terrors*, they just might have judged Macbeth, on the basis of Berger's arguments, to be an "established authority," given that his coronation at Scone was apparently conducted with immaculate correctness, and therefore concluded that Classics Illustrated's version of the play was guilty of cultivating "disrespect for established authority," a violation of the Code.

of the play that sees it as a simple matter of a disruption and restoration of moral order. If

Macbeth is a parallel figure with Macdonwald and Cawdor, then it is simply not the case

that Duncan is an unimpeachably good king whose orderly rule is disrupted by Macbeth:

after all, the play opens with his kingdom in rebellion, and there are clear parallels

between the rebels that Macbeth defeats, the rebel that Macbeth becomes, and the defeat

that the technical rebel Macduff, in turn, achieves over him. Thus the Classical Comics

version of the play seems inclined to follow the subversive readings of Harry Berger Jr.

and Stephen Orgel, according to whom "the witches are in fact right, and are telling the

truth about the world of the play—that there really are no ethical standards in it, no right

and wrong sides" (163).

After the Apocalypse: Manga Shakespeare's Edition of *Macbeth*

The third version of the play that I will discuss belongs to the Manga Shakespeare series,

and was also published in 2008, illustrated by Robert Deas. It is an even more radical

reading of the play than the Classical Comics edition, declaring its unconventionality on

the very first page, with a text box identifying the setting as "a future world of post-

nuclear mutation" (1). The encounter between the Scottish lords and the witches begins

on page 27 (see Figure 4.7), with a subject-to-subject transition between an extreme

close-up panel view of the left eye and ear of one of the witches, to a view of Macbeth

and Banquo approaching on horseback. The witch's cry, "A drum! A drum! Macbeth

doth come!" (27) is placed precisely between the two panels, a positioning that creates

two distinct word-image relationships. The former is Additive, with the image showing

the witch's eye and ear and the text providing the additional information of what she

hears and then subsequently sees. The word-image relationship in the second panel, still

using the same piece of text, is essentially duo-specific, with the words and text conveying the same information: that "Macbeth doth come." Interestingly, the verbal signal and the panel change invite us into the perspective of the witches, as the second panel is in fact a point-of-view perspective. This intimacy with the witches is not a device that I have encountered in any other version of this play, comic book or otherwise.

The first panel of the next page depicts Macbeth and Banquo, not yet aware of the witches (see Figure 4.8). Panel 2 comes with a subject-to-subject transition that reverses the angle of perspective and thus introduces the witches into the panel, raising the question of why Macbeth and Banquo did not see them before. Here the borders of the panel seem to define the visible world, and until the witches come into the frame where we can see them, they are not visible to Macbeth and Banquo either. Thus this sequence continues to develop a distinct sense of incomplete perception: no one in this play, not even the witches, has a full or omniscient perspective on the action. And, as the rest of this sequence makes evident, neither do we, because the subsequent series of subject-to-subject transitions maintain a careful ambiguity about the spatial relationship between the witches and the Scottish lords. Unlike Wootton's treatment of the scene, which makes the position and posture of Macbeth relative to the witches a crucial aspect of the visualization, and unlike Blum's and Haward's depictions, which bring Macbeth to the witches ambiguously, or against his will, here Deas prevents us from even being able to tell exactly where the characters all are in relation to one another. The relationship does not become clear until the bottom of page 29 (still Figure 4.8) where, in a truly remarkable move, a subject-to-subject transition moves us from a panel of Banquo's snarling face to one including both him and one of the witches, who appears startled and discomfited by his sudden approach in a way utterly unlike any witch in any other version

of *Macbeth* that I have ever seen (29). Thus this sequence creates certain crucial effects: it denies a complete perspective to both the human and supernatural characters and it emphasizes the aggressive power of human action. This is not a Wootton-esque structure in which the witches represent a moral position to which a human, by approaching them, declares his allegiance. Rather, the witches are here characters, and an approach to them (by Banquo, not Macbeth) does not signify an entanglement in the web of Fate, but rather one character making an aggressive demand of another, who evidently does not expect it.

The text maintains this subversive reading of the play in Act 1, Scene 7, in which Macbeth is contemplating the morality of murdering Duncan. In the first panel (see Figure 4.9), Macbeth considers the possibility that performing an immoral act will bring evil consequences for himself, referring to an "even-handed justice" that "commends the poisoned chalice to our own lips." Then, a subject-to-subject transition takes us to an image of Macbeth's castle, which sits at the centre of a blasted cityscape of crumbling, half collapsed skyscrapers, surrounded by a vast wasteland. Right next to the castle is the speech balloon in which Macbeth expresses concern about his social obligations: "He's here in double trust – first, as I am his kinsman and his subject." The panels on the subsequent two pages (see Figure 4.10) continue this line of thought, again placing its text alongside Macbeth's immaculate dwelling, which clearly represents the order and civilization that Macbeth's social obligations are meant to maintain. Macbeth, as we have just seen, is concerned with the formal ethical obligations that he bears to Duncan, and he sees these obligations in terms of "even-handed justice." But this speech, full of the language of social roles and offices and the responsibilities that attach to them, rings very hollow when juxtaposed with the ruined cityscape of collapsing buildings, heaps of rubble, and abandoned vehicles. Unlike John Haward's Classical Comics version in

which the text dominates and Macbeth's concerns about "even-handed justice" are allowed to stand without being explicitly undermined, here the words and images together create a darkly ironic effect – a particularly powerful example of an Interdependent word-image relationship. The remnants of nuclear holocaust stand as a perpetual, insistent reminder that nothing underwrites civilization. Despite Macbeth's talk of a divine justice that punishes wrongs and guarantees social order, everything about his surroundings speaks of an entirely human society that stands or falls on the contingencies of power and violence.

We can find a similar perspective on *Macbeth*'s moral universe in Deas' envisioning of Act 2, Scene 2, in Macbeth's explanation to Macduff of why he killed the two grooms. Deas' version of this scene is crucially different from that in both Classics Illustrated and Classical Comics in that his treatment of Act 2, Scene 2 actually depicts Duncan's murder instead of keeping it offstage (Deas 81). Furthermore, Macbeth's explanation of his killing of the grooms is not accompanied by an image of Macbeth, but rather by close-up images of the murdered king's bloodied, wide-eyed face (see Figure 4.11). That is to say, the reader does not just get Macbeth's dishonest account of what he has seen, but actually gets to see the literal sight of the murder scene. Here text and image stand in sharp contrast to one another: while Macbeth declares, "Here lay Duncan, laced with his golden blood," the image of the murdered king is not golden in the slightest: it is simply and literally gory (92). The juxtaposition is another instance of an Inter-dependent word-image relationship in which the image undermines the elevated principles invoked in Shakespeare's text. Just as "even-handed justice" was nowhere to be discerned in the post-nuclear landscape, so Duncan is here not figured as a golden-blooded symbol of divine order: he is just a murdered man. Furthermore, Richard Appignanesi, in his textual

adaptation, has abridged this scene: there is now no mention of the daggers being "unmannerly breech'd in gore." Instead we have the simplified irony of the contrast between the phrase "golden blood" and Duncan's bloodied face, and then of seeing Macbeth's dagger, stained with the same blood. By making the blood look the same, regardless of whether it adorns a king or a murderer's dagger, Deas erases the textual distinction between the two kinds of adornment: "golden blood" and "gore." Blood is just blood. Not only is Macbeth's monarchial imagery ironic in its opportunism, but its combination with Deas' images undercuts the idea of divine monarchy in the text altogether.

This passage from *Macbeth*, and the accompanying images, provide a particularly good example of the crucially important role that Shakespeare's language can play in the adaptation of his plays to the comics medium and why it is so important to continue to attend to the details of that language, even when applying a method that focuses upon the visual aspects of the medium. If Macbeth's speech about the slain Duncan is "translated" into more accessible English to make it easier for young people or other people inexperienced with Shakespeare, then important effects are lost. The series No Fear Shakespeare, published by Sparknotes, is devoted to exactly this kind of translation, announcing on its website, "No Fear Shakespeare puts Shakespeare's language side-by-side with a facing-page translation into modern English—the kind of English people actually speak today" ("No Fear"). As this description indicates, the No Fear Shakespeare series consists primarily of copies of the play consisting of parallel versions on facing pages. Yet recently No Fear Shakespeare has expanded into the arena of comics, producing "Graphic Novel" versions of *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Macbeth*.

These versions of the plays do not pair Shakespeare's text with a translation, but rather uses only the translated text.

In the No Fear Shakespeare comics version of *Macbeth*, the speech describing Duncan's corpse abandons Shakespeare's figurative language, transforming the account into a more literal description: "There he lay, his white skin splattered with his precious blood – his gashes were unnatural, inviting destruction to seep into him, and then there were the murderers, dripping with blood, their daggers rudely covered in gore" (Hoshine 70). This revision creates certain confusions in itself. While saying that the wounds are "unnatural" is one way to interpret Shakespeare's description of them as "a breach in nature" (2.3.110), saying that destruction can now "seep into" Duncan makes considerably less sense than that enabled by Shakespeare's more complete simile, in which "ruin" enters into nature, not just into Duncan. Similarly, the changing of "unmannerly" to "rudely," while it makes some sense in terms of the denotation of the two words, becomes absurd in this context, with the removal of the metaphor of clothing in the passage that so interests Brooks. What is "unmannerly" about the daggers in the original passage is not their being covered in blood; the blood is horrifying. What is unmannerly is the wearing of inappropriate clothing, and the relatively mild epithet of "unmannerly" is therefore only appropriate in the context of the clothing metaphor. When the metaphor is abandoned, then the idea of unmannerliness (or, in the translation, rudeness) that is left behind is applied directly and literally to the bloody daggers, and thus becomes a ridiculous understatement, as if the killing of a king is not a horrific mortal sin but more of a faux pas.

More importantly, however, this version of the speech removes the references to golden skin and silver blood, converting them into literal skin and blood, the adjective

"precious" remaining as the only vestige of the precious metals named in Shakespeare's text. While conveying the idea of great value is certainly one of the functions of this image, when Hoshine places the translated version alongside an image of the bloodied corpse of Duncan, the effect (unlike that achieved by Deas in the Manga Shakespeare *Macbeth*) is less Interdependent than simply Duo-Specific (see Figure 4.12). This word-image relationship does not create an intriguing irony between the idea of an idealized king and the literal fact of a king's dead body; here there is only a fairly simple correspondence between word and image, with Macbeth's moralizing adjectives of "unnatural" and "precious" quite unable to carry the rich meaning of Shakespeare's verbal imagery. With this version as a point of comparison, it is not hard to see that Manga Shakespeare Macbeth, despite its radical alterations to the setting and, more to the point, its abridgement of Shakespeare's text, is not just sensationalizing its source material, but engaging with Shakespeare's words in a way that creates a very particular effect – one not possible if his figurative language is abandoned or drastically altered. These effects culminate in a savagely anti-moralistic reading of *Macbeth*, one that presents the distinction between good and evil in the play not just as something muddy and uncertain but, perhaps, as something entirely meaningless.

Strange Images of Death

In both the Classics Illustrated version and the Classical Comics version of the play, Macbeth is allowed minimal agency of his own. In the former he is simply caught up in a structure of narrative sequencing that does not offer moments of real decision, while in the latter he is openly manipulated and controlled by supernatural forces. The Manga Shakespeare *Macbeth*, however, undermines any idea of a universal perspective (moral or

otherwise) on the action of the play, and powerfully emphasizes human agency, rather than Fate, in the confrontational encounter with the witches, and in the deeply ironic treatment of Macbeth's own invocation of Justice. The Classics Illustrated edition mainly seems to follow Derek Traversi, Margaret Mahood, and G. Wilson Knight in the tradition according to which the play concerns the disruption and restoration of a good and natural order. The Classical Comics version prefers the sort of reading offered by Harry Berger Jr. and Stephen Orgel, which doubts that there are any moral standards structuring Macbeth's universe. The Manga Shakespeare edition, however, takes us into new territory altogether, in which the witches represent neither Fate nor chaos, and perhaps do not represent anything at all, other than one more limited perspective on the action of the play. In its representation of a world already in ruins, ruled by contingency, and powered by destructive human action, we may find in Manga Shakespeare a truly radical reading of *Macbeth*, and one whose imagery inevitably suggests an identification of it as a Shakespearean production of the post-9/11 era. The Manga Shakespeare interpretation can thus be considered subversive of traditional moralistic readings of the play to an even greater extent than Orgel's. Most importantly, these contributions to the debate on morality in the play are not achieved by critical introductions to the volumes, nor through textual notes, nor through the insertion of an oppressive narrator offering interpretive judgements on the action. These readings are achieved entirely through the text of the play in conjunction with sequential images and, in their successful examples, combine a sensitive response to the text with an effective use of the formal devices that belong peculiarly to the medium of comics, that it would be impossible to effectively analyze and appreciate without the kind of formalist understanding of the medium that this dissertation provides.

Conclusion: Turning the Next Page on Shakespearean Comics Criticism

It is a commonplace among admirers of Shakespeare to observe that every generation reimagines Shakespeare in a new way, but we are not always quick to recognize these new ways and understand how they work. Shakespeare comic books have now existed for over 60 years, with an explosion of publications in the last decade, and have as yet received almost no critical attention, despite the fact that comic books are becoming an ever-more dominant medium in our increasingly visual culture. This project draws attention to these works, demonstrates how to read them formally in their own medium, and draws attention to the range of techniques of which they are capable, as well as the value of the critical insights and interpretations that the deployment of these techniques can produce.

The achievements of Shakespearean comics have been possible only via their artists' skilled work within the formal structures of the comics medium; the effects and interpretations that result are the product of visual techniques unavailable in theatre, and also different from film and other media and which therefore require a specialized approach. Yet this approach is readily available in the seminal work of great comics theorists. One of the reasons that I give such detailed attention to the descriptive theoretical work of Eisner, McCloud, and others, as well as to the analytical method that I derive from this work by using its formal and structural designations as part of my own close readings, is to make this method and, therefore, these texts, more fully available to readers who are interested in Shakespeare in popular culture, but who have no particular background in comics studies. In my readings I have tended to emphasize ambiguities and ironies because I find such textual moments among the most interesting in

Shakespeare, and also because they provide particularly subtle occasions for demonstrating both the complexity of these adaptations and the capacity for formal analysis to engage with that complexity. Gaiman's staging of a comic-within-a-play-within-a-comic, although subtle, does not seek to create an ambiguity but to celebrate the power of the comics medium. Similarly, Mandrake's re-displaying of Hamlet's most famous soliloquy, and Alex Blum's careful maneuvers around the edges of the Comics Code Authority create robust and fascinating engagements with Shakespearean language and staging that do not depend upon ironic problematizing of conventional values – although, again, such problematizing does form some of the most interesting aspects of Shakespeare's work.

These hybrid texts may be of interest to us for several reasons. Shakespearean comics constitute a new mode of visualization for early modern drama, and are in some ways uniquely capable of working with texts that were written for the unlocalized space of the early modern stage, with all the problems and possibilities that this stage possesses. Additionally, since virtually all comics involve an interplay of words and images, the script of a comic accounts for approximately half of its interest and value. When that script is authored by Shakespeare, the potential for a highly interesting comic book is greatly increased, and the opportunities for a complex interaction of word and image become multiplied. As a consequence, Shakespearean comic books may well contain some of the most sophisticated examples of comics art currently available in the medium, and aficionados of modern visual culture should take note. Furthermore, Shakespearean comics, like other historical modes of visualizing Shakespeare, are capable not just of representing the action of a play, but of engaging interpretively with that play and producing fascinating readings that sometimes achieve insights comparable to those of

literary scholars.   Anyone interested, for example, in the capacity of modern theatre to interpret Shakespearean drama might take great interest in how comic books are also doing so, in ways just as sophisticated, and in a medium that has an increasingly strong claim of being a mass art. Finally, although I have not emphasized pedagogy in this dissertation, given the over-emphasis in comics studies on how works in this medium may be used as classroom aids, there could be great value in incorporating Shakespearean comic books more into the mainstream of English literary instruction. Doing so could help to encourage a broader concept of modern Shakespearean performance and visualization to include a new medium, and could also help to bridge the gap between the traditional field of Shakespeare studies and the emergent field of Visual Culture – a gap that is already being bridged by research into such areas as Shakespeare on film.

As yet there exists astonishingly little scholarship on this fascinating body of work, and a universe of possibilities remains available for any number of approaches to them. What I have done here is trace the general outlines of this body of work, laid out the tools for its profitable analysis, demonstrated the wide range of powerful interpretive effects that its formal flexibility makes possible, and provided some specific readings of some of the best works that this use of the comics medium has to offer. Now that Shakespearean comics are so plentiful, and have attained such significant artistic and interpretive heights, they can and should stand proudly as an increasingly significant part of the grand history of the visualization of Shakespearean drama.
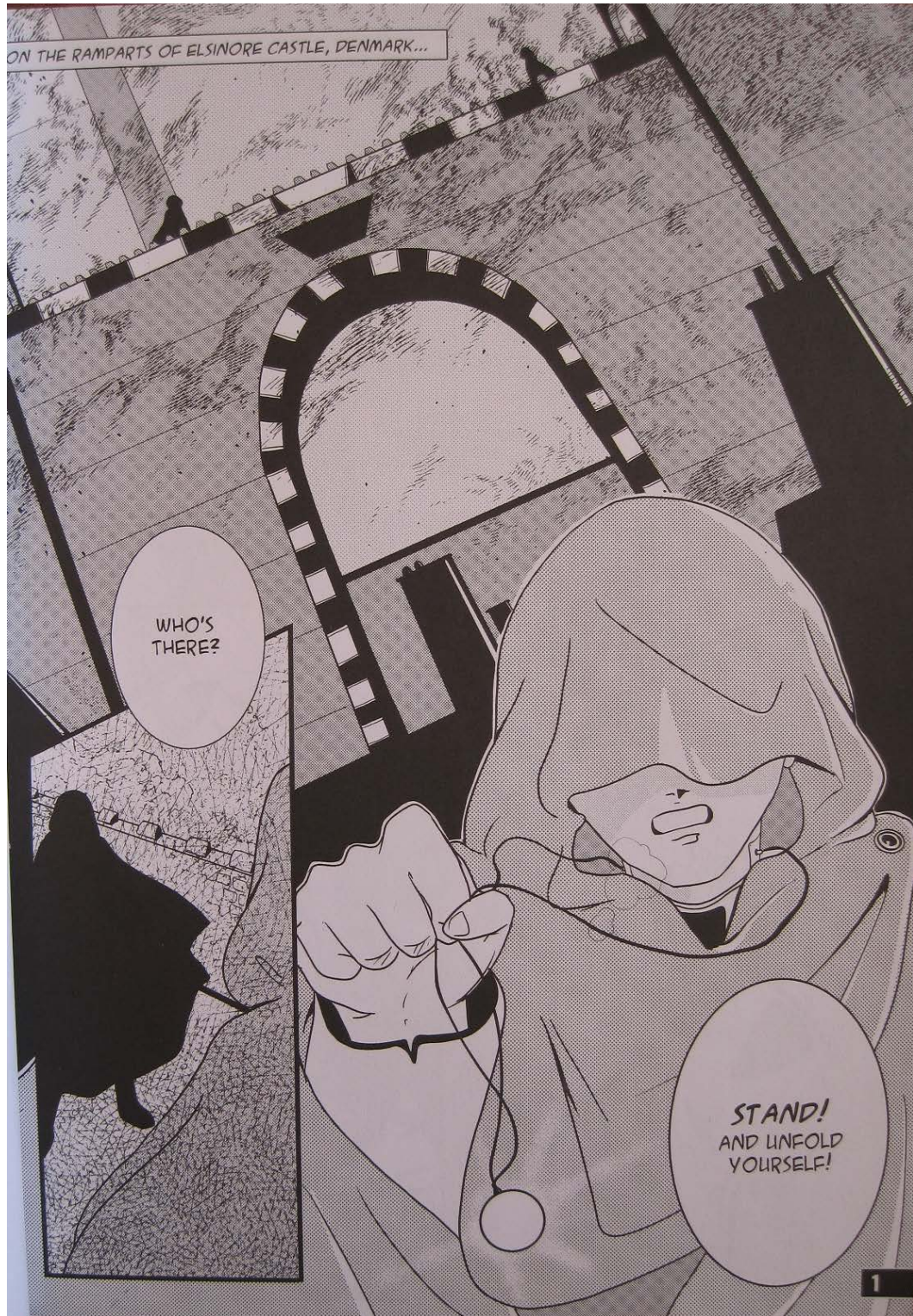
Appendix

Figure 1.1 (Vieceli 1)

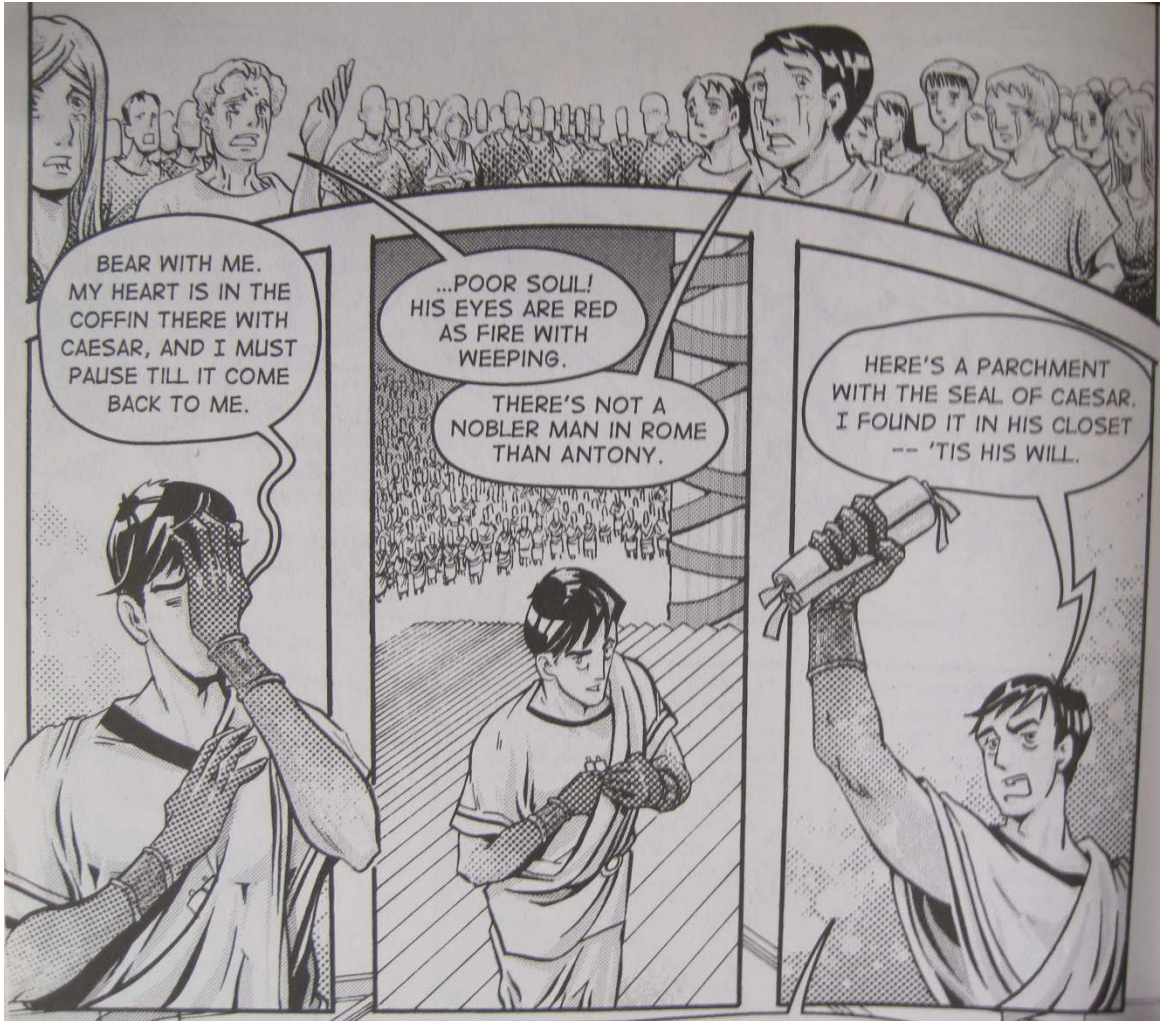Figure 1.2 (Mustashrik 124-5)

Figure 1.3 (Park 90)

Figure 1.4 (Mustashrik 120)

Figure 1.5 (Park 56-7)
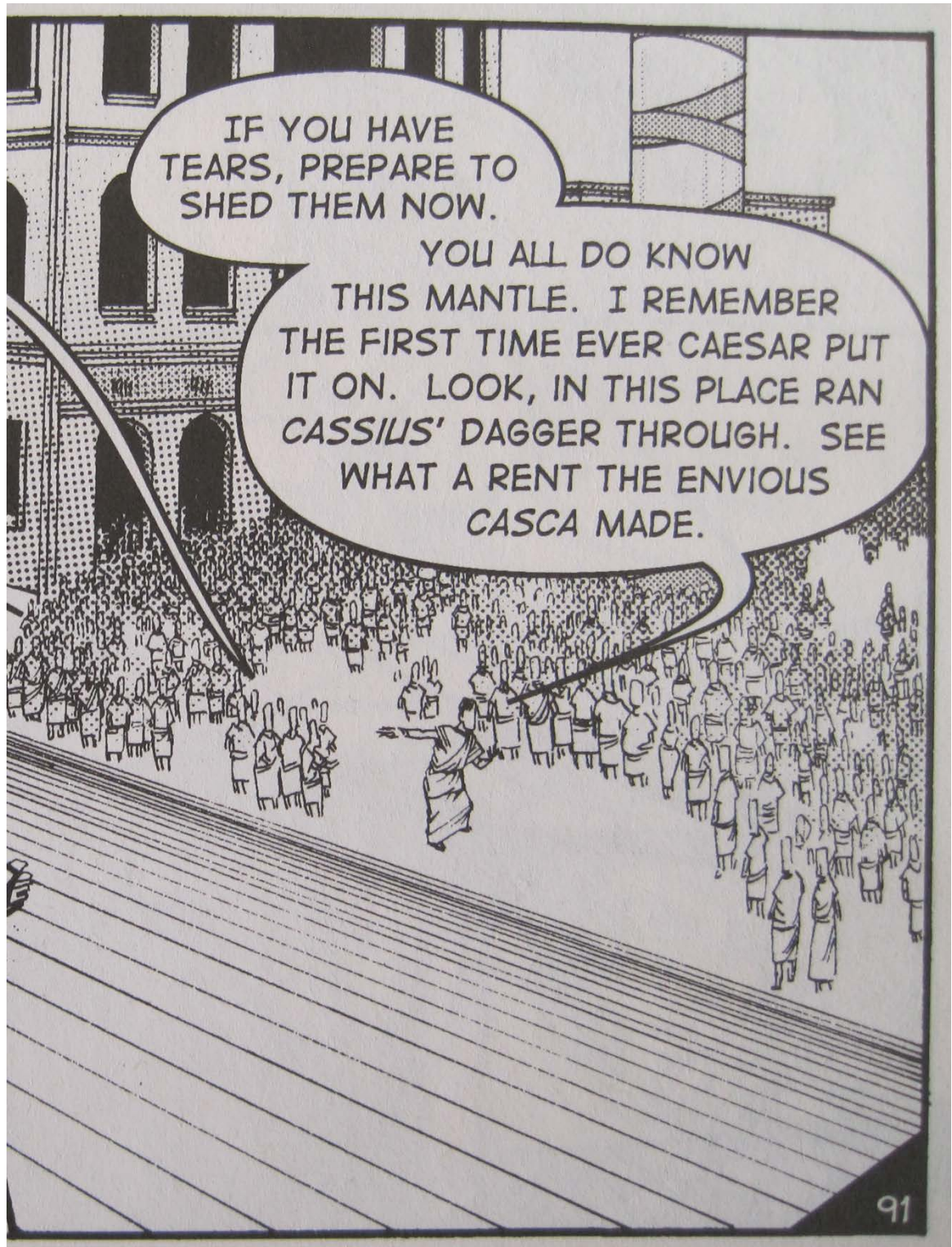
Figure 1.6 (Mustashrik 184)

Figure 1.7 (Park 91)
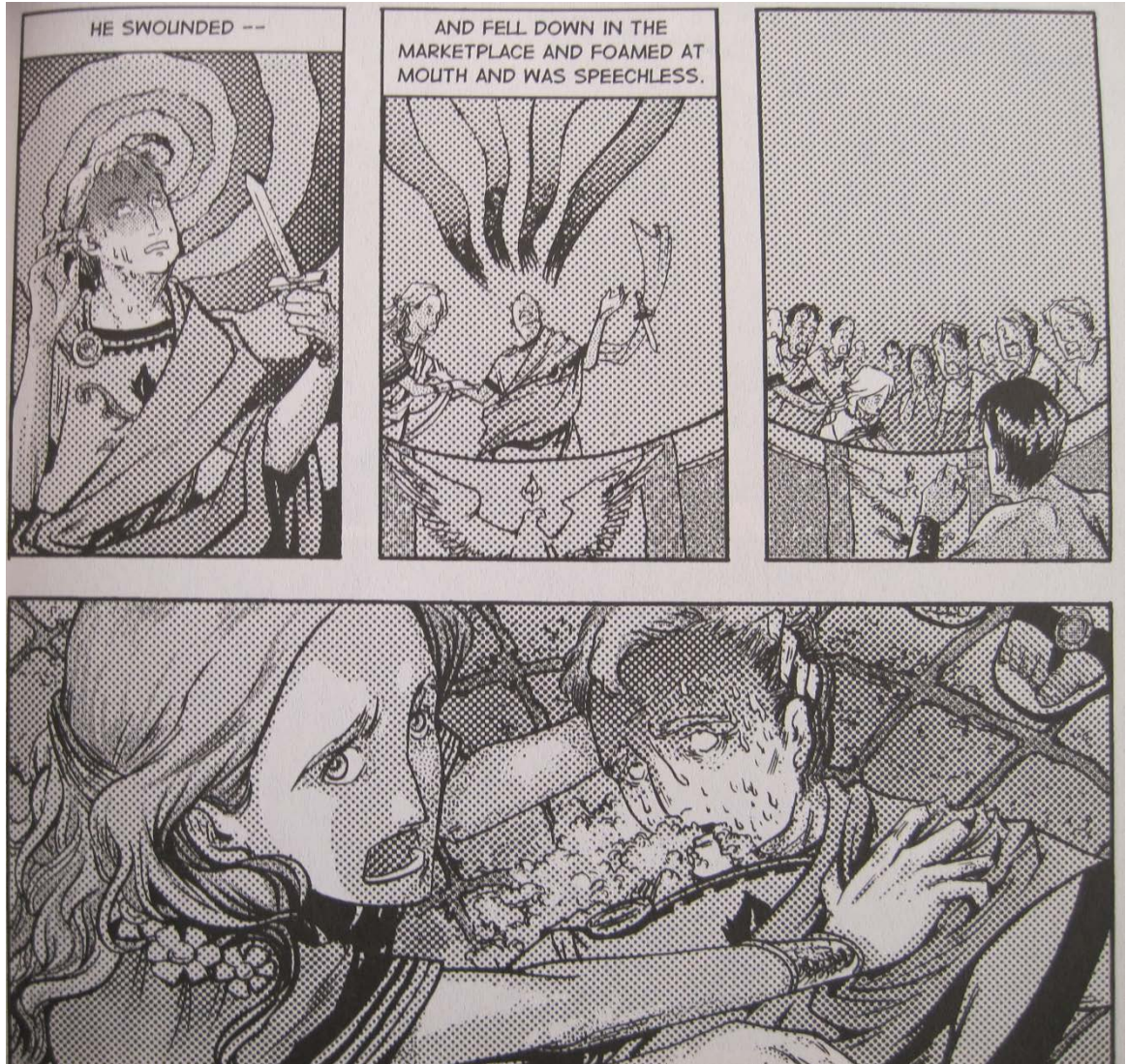
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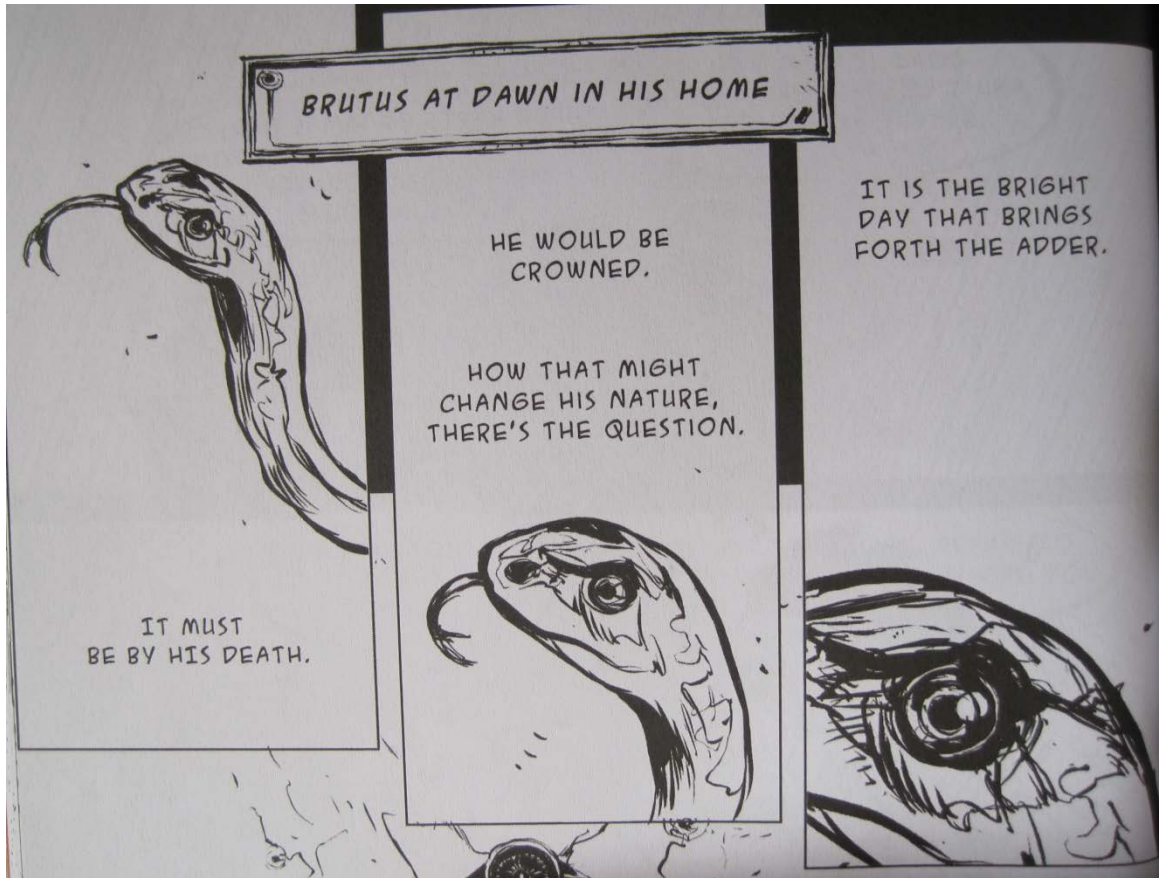
Figure 1.9 (Park 21)

Figure 1.10 (Park 123)

Figure 1.11 (Mustashrik 46)

Figure 1.12 (Mustashrik 49)

Figure 1.13 (Mustashrik 93)

Figure 1.14 (Volley 127) © Classical Comics Ltd

Figure 1.15 (Volley 128) © Classical Comics Ltd

Figure 2.1 (Blum, *Hamlet* 22)

Figure 2.2 (Mandrake 22)

Figure 2.3 (Williams, *Mr. William Shakespeare* 8)

Figure 2.4 (Williams, *Mr. William* 6)
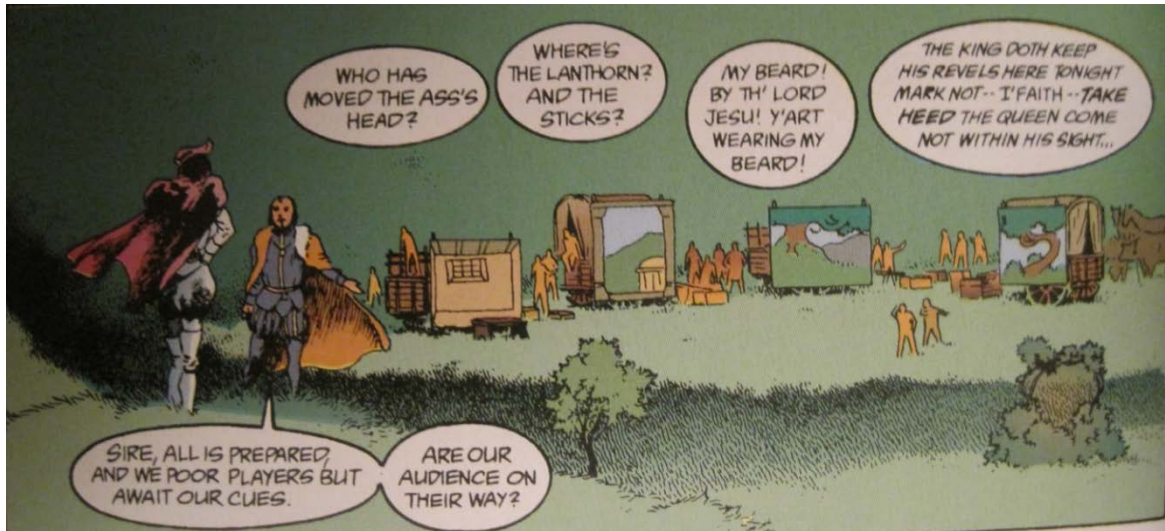
Figure 2.5 (Gaiman 66)

Figure 2.6 (Gaiman 69)
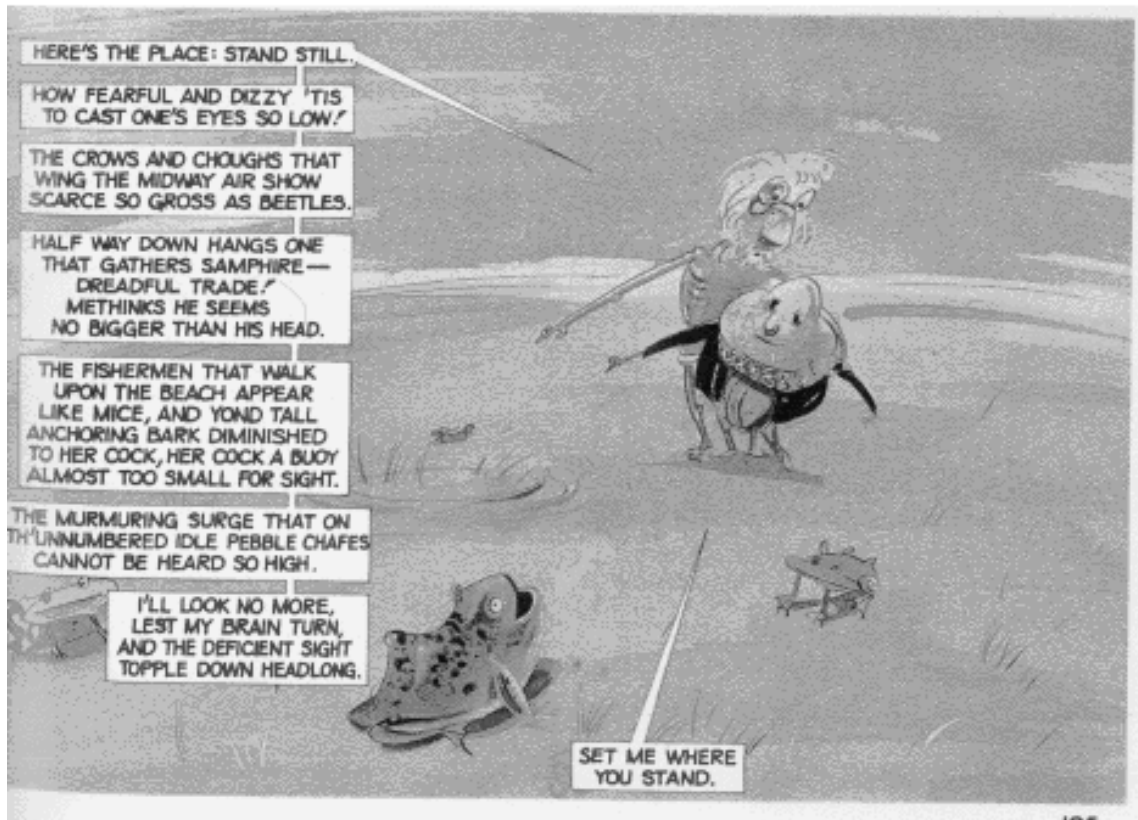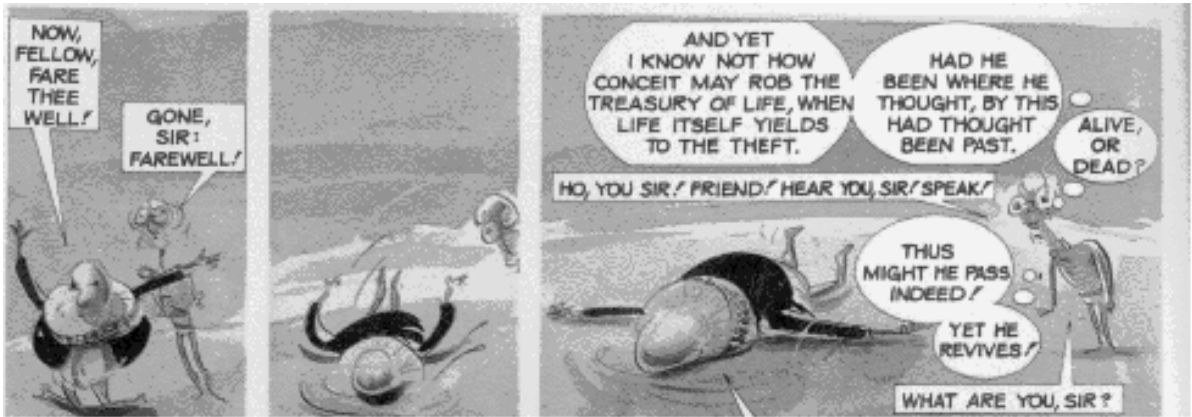
Figure 2.7 (Pollock 105)

Figure 2.8 (Pollock 106)

Figure 2.9 (Ilya 162)

Figure 2.10 (Ilya 163)

Figure 2.11 (Ilya 164)
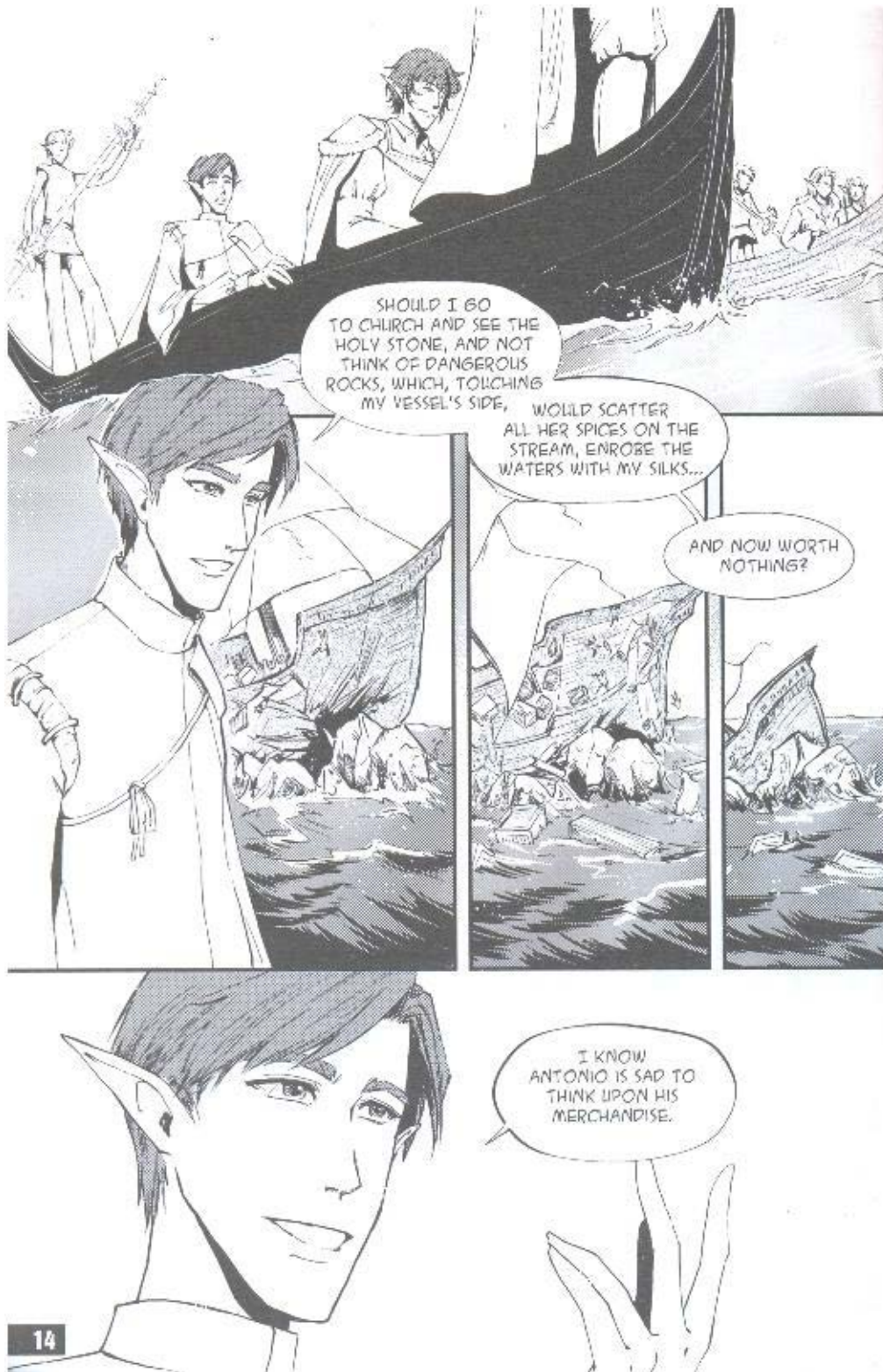
Figure 3.1 (Yong 12)

Figure 3.2 (Yong 13)

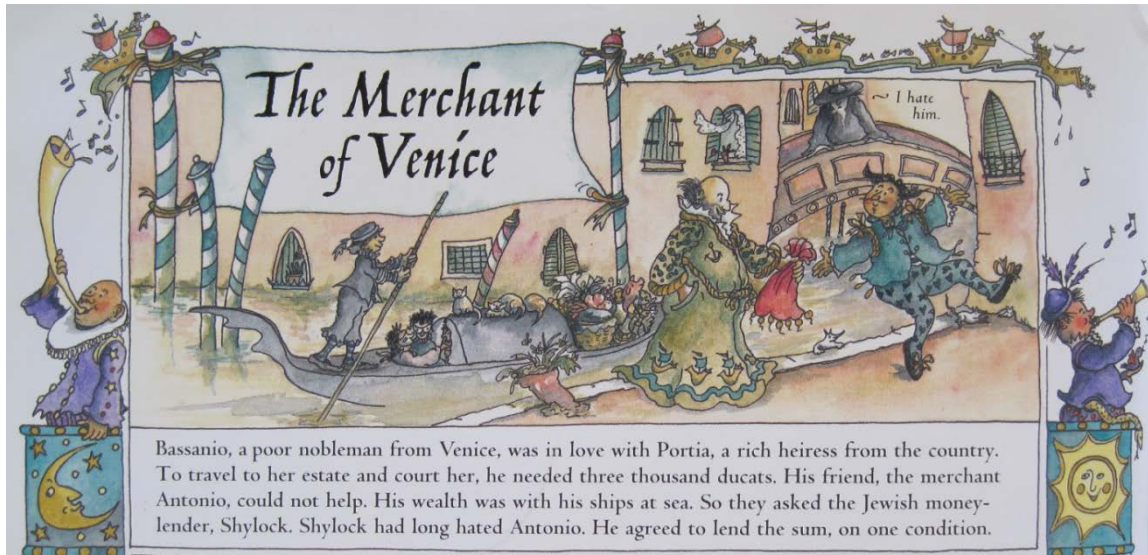Figure 3.3 (Yong 14)

Figure 3.4 (Yong 98)

Figure 3.5 (Yong 126)

Figure 3.6 (Williams, *Bravo* 28)

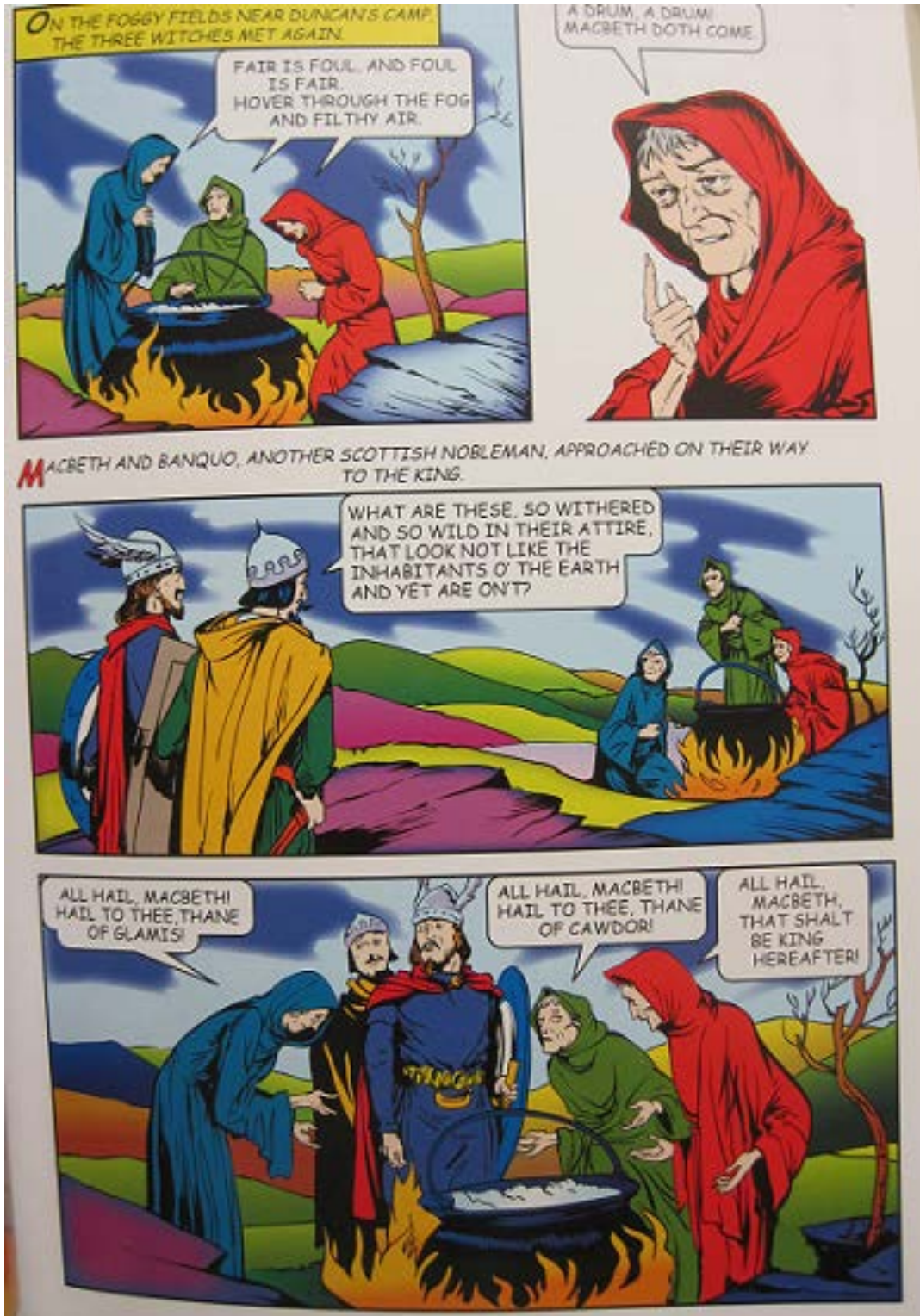Figure 3.7 (Williams, *Bravo* 30)

Figure 4.1 (Wootton)
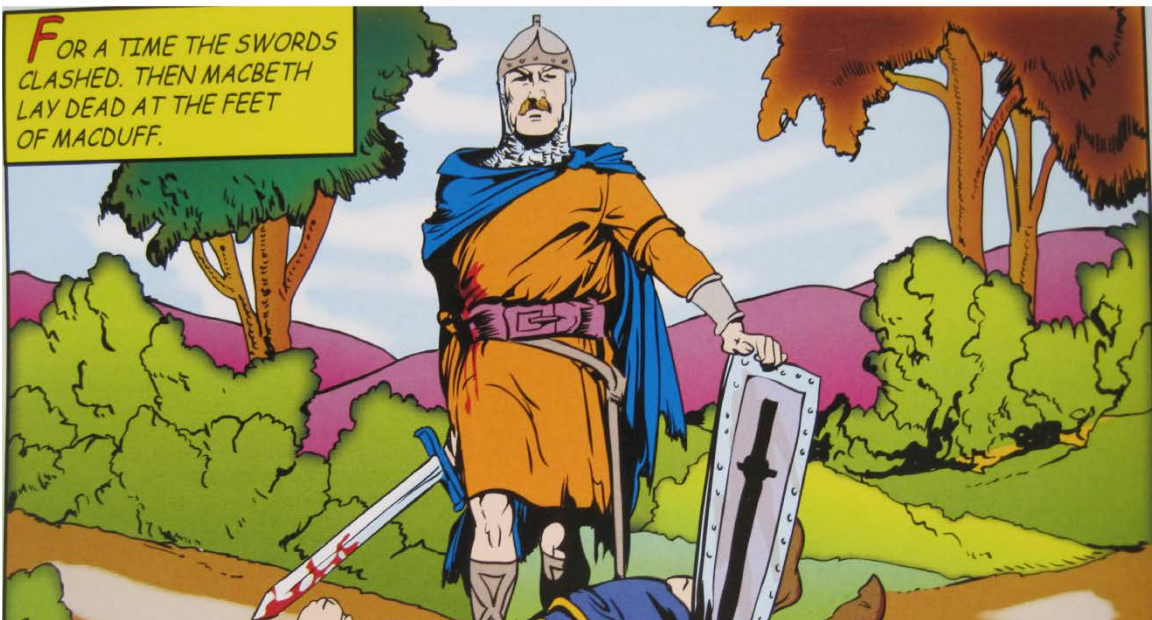
Figure 4.2 (Blum, *Macbeth* 3)

Figure 4.3 (Blum, *Macbeth* 43, 44)

Figure 4.4 (Haward 14) © Classical Comics Ltd

Figure 4.5 (Haward 25) © Classical Comics Ltd

Figure 4.6 (Haward 43) © Classical Comics Ltd

Figure 4.7 (Deas 27)

Figure 4.8 (Deas 28-9)

Figure 4.9 (Deas 59)

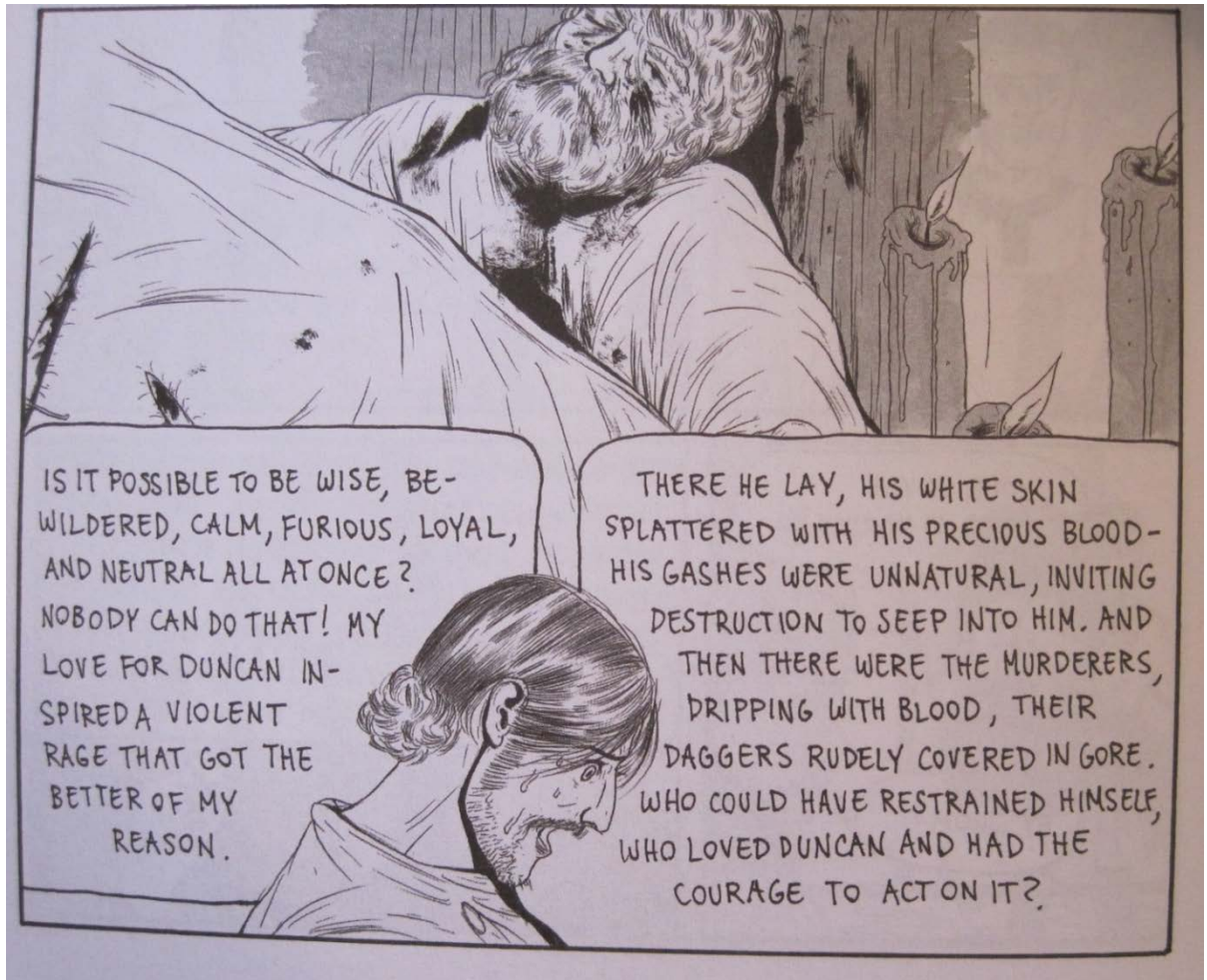Figure 4.10 (Deas 60)

Figure 4.11 (Deas 92)

Figure 4.12 (Hoshine 70)

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	2007-2008 M.A.
	The University of Western Ontario
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	2007-2013 Ph.D.

Honours and	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Doctoral Awards:	Fellowship
	2011-2012
	Ontario Graduate Scholarship
	2010-2011

Dean's Entrance Scholarship, University of Western Ontario

2008

Louise McKinny Scholarship

2005

Undergraduate Merit Award

2005

Jason Lang Scholarship

2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

Related Work   Teaching Assistant

Experience   The University of Western Ontario

1993-1995

Publications:

"Antipholus and the Exorcists: the Biblical Secularization of *The Comedy of Errors*."

Renaissance Papers 2012

"'I stand here for law': Reading *The Merchant of Venice* in Sequential Art." *New*

Readings of the Merchant of Venice. Ed. Horacio Sierra. Newcastle: Cambridge

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