

BLEEDING IN SPORT: THE REPRESENTATION OF JULIUS CAESAR IN THE MANGA EDITION

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Abstract

The plays of William Shakespeare have been adapted into the Japanese Manga form which is a hugely popular cartoon form in Japan. A play like Julius Caesar have been rendered into the manga form keeping the charm and flavour of the original tragedy. The mainly rhetorical nature of the play has been adapted into the scenic and the visual context. This paper will see the way in which this has been successfully accomplished and a classical work has been made suitable for the popular modern audience.

Keywords: Adaptation, cartoon, manga, popular, scenic, visual

The term ‘Manga’ refers to a specific set of comics that are created in Japan. This particular medium covers a wide range of genres such as adventure, comedy, mystery, horror, science fiction et al. From the 1950s onwards this medium has gained huge popularity in Japan and it is enjoyed by Japanese people from almost all age groups. If the word is translated, it will be seen to mean “whimsical drawings” or “impromptu sketches” which have in them the element of spontaneity.

In recent times Manga has, along with depicting wholly Japanese themes, also moved into the area of embracing the classics and adapting them into manga editions. Thus while undertaking this task, the Manga artists have looked no further than the Bard himself. Many famous plays of Shakespeare have been adapted into Manga editions and by doing this, the artists have not only brought William Shakespeare’s works to the common people who may not have had access to his works, but they have revived interest in Shakespeare’s works which have been brought in a completely different medium to them. So, when a play like Julius Caesar is adapted into a manga edition, it not only changes the medium in that it emphasizes the visual element greatly but in a way it serves the other purpose of bringing it to a popular level as Manga is essentially part of the popular culture.

It goes without saying that the adaptation of Shakespeare’s tragedy into this highly popular and acceptable medium brings it even closer to the hearts of the general manga reading public. Thus this flexibility of the play is an important aspect which enables the artist to accomplish his aim of bringing a famous classic in an everyday popular format. It is to be noted of course that the original play written by Shakespeare as we have it in the Arden edition is quite long. It runs

to five acts and five scenes. But the Manga edition, for the sake of convenience and preserving the interest in the readers who perhaps are not so familiar with Shakespearean terms and usages like the academics, has curtailed the play and presented the action in a compact and racy style. Thus we see that the play has been abridged somewhat and the major actions and incidents have been presented within a comparatively short span of five acts without the scenes.. As any Manga edition relies heavily on pictorial representations, the Manga edition of Julius Caesar has also presented the story mainly through picture frames of different sizes and dimensions to bring out the intensity of the emotions expressed by the characters at different points in the play and in different situations. A detailed study of how this classic which has enthralled generations of people through the centuries and has retained its original flavour and at the same time entertained the people in spite of being presented in a different format has been attempted below.

The play, as has been mentioned above, has been shortened into five acts and the major actions and incidents that have been depicted in it by the dramatist has been rendered into black and white frames- pictorial representations of the death of a mighty emperor- and it has been interspersed with important dialogues, speeches and soliloquies delivered by the major personages in the play. So, though the play has been shortened, the Manga artists have been mindful of maintaining the charm and appeal of the original work. As the editor of the Manga edition, Adam Sexton makes it amply clear :

In order to fit our adaptations into books of less than 200 pages, the writers and editors of The Manga Editions have cut words, lines, speeches, even entire scenes from Shakespeare's plays, a practice almost universal among stage and film directors. We have never paraphrased the playwright's language, however, nor have we summarized action. Everything you read in The Manga Editions was written by William Shakespeare himself. (3)

Thus we see that this Manga edition condenses the primary material in hand but it never compromises on the flow of the action, nor does it impose from outside anything which might destroy the play's beauty and charm. If we compare the title pages of the Arden edition and the manga edition, we will find that while the former depicts Caesar's ghost visiting Brutus, the latter portrays the most significant incident of the entire play, namely, the assassination of Julius Caesar by the conspirators. Apart from this difference, we can notice another innovation in the manga edition in that each of the three acts has got the most important speech or dialogue depicted on the front page which serves to set the tone of that particular act right away. The Manga edition begins with the identical incident of Flavius and Marullus driving away the commoners and their subsequent arrest by the Roman sentinels though this latter incident has not been described by the dramatist. Immediately after we see Caesar entering along with his retinue and the picture frame highlights the towering figure of Julius Caesar while the others are portrayed as following him in the background. This obviously focuses the attention of the readers towards the all powerful monarch who appears for the first time. The focus then shifts to the athletic figure of Antony who is about to participate in the run and he is instructed by Caesar not to forget to touch his wife Calpurnia so that she might shake off the barren curse upon her. Right after this picture frame we see a voice calling "Caesar" from the crowd and the Soothsayer comes forward and bids Caesar be wary of the "Ides of March." Caesar does not pay heed to his words and goes way with his followers, with Brutus and Cassius remaining behind.

Cassius tries to persuade Brutus to become aware of his own worthiness and honour. Cassius is portrayed as a shrewd and thin man who tries to instigate Brutus. Casca relates to them

how Caesar had refused the crown which had been thrice offered to him. The next few pages beautifully depict Casca's visions of some of the unnatural incidents that he had witnessed during his walks- the slave walking with his left hand all in flames, the hundred women who had seen men "all in fire", the "bird of night" hooting in the market place at noon and the lion who had gone by without harming him. The first act of the Manga edition ends with Cassius brandishing his sword if Caesar is crowned as a king by the senators. Casca agrees and they decide to visit Brutus before morning.

If we compare the two texts we will see that both the first acts in these texts end with the above resolution of Cassius and Casca but of course in the manga edition, many of the long speeches between the conspirators have been omitted or shortened. But the flow and action of the events remain unchanged and unimpaired. In fact, a reader who takes up the manga edition would not have to read the long speeches to get the feel of the action. In this edition of the play, the readers would be getting a visual treatment- each character in the play, when he or she speaks makes his or her unique facial expressions which are wonderfully drawn by the artist Hyeondo Park. Thus the fear, anger, doubt, disappointment, frustration are all there to be seen as well as read. So, the scenic representation in the Manga edition adds another dimension to the whole play.

The title page of the second act, like the first, depicts another important scene from the play- Brutus's wife Portia who inflicts a gash on her thigh, imploring her husband to reveal his secrets to her. Brutus is dismayed and filled with shame on witnessing his wife's act of courage and his feelings are aptly presented here by the horrified look on his face. The next picture frames depict how Brutus is immersed in thought and how finally he is won over by the conspirators led by Cassius. The next picture frames portray the tension between Brutus and his wife Portia. On the one hand, he is bound to secrecy by his fellow conspirators but at the same time he is disturbed by his wife's entreaties to reveal his secret to her. Brutus is thus a man who is torn between his loyalty to his friends and his personal feelings for his wife and this conflict is pictorially depicted. On page forty eight of the Manga edition of this play the various ill omens which could be seen- the lioness giving birth to her cub on the streets, dying people shrieking and groaning in pain, ghosts moving here and there the loud noise of war rife everywhere. Caesar's famous replies to Calpurnia's entreaties are famous and he dismisses all these ill omens as not capable of hurting a valiant man like him. Though he is at last persuaded to stay at home by his wife after a lot of effort, he changes his decision when Decius Brutus offers a plausible explanation to the horrifying dream that Calpurnia had dreamt. Thus Caesar is welcomed by the conspirators at the Senate House and Artemidorus stands with a letter which he has written to warn Caesar about the conspirators. Act two ends with Portia sending Lucius to the Senate House to bring her news about her husband. The Arden edition also ends with the same scene and thus a parity is maintained with the original text in the Manga edition also. Thus in this second act the play moves on to the climactic scene, the assassination of Julius Caesar in the next act.

Quite fittingly, the title page of the third act of this edition presents Caesar and his closest friend Brutus after the latter has stabbed him with Caesar crying out in disbelief "Et tu Brute? Then fall Caesar". This scene begins with Caesar acting defiantly and Trebonius being prevented by the conspirators to come near Caesar and deliver his schedule to Caesar. Soon the assassination takes place and the whole scene is brilliantly drawn by the Manga artist through a number of picture frames which have various shapes- triangular, square, rectangular, parallel and so forth. The scene where the conspirators bathe their hands in the dead Caesar's blood is presented in one big frame with the advent of Antony's messenger in a small frame on the lower

right hand corner of the page. In the next few pages we see Antony dissembling with the conspirators and devising a plan to take revenge for Caesar's death and when he is alone with Caesar's body, grieving and giving expression to his anger and frustration. This scene is presented in the Manga edition in small, precise picture frames which focuses the attention of the readers on the facial expressions of Antony and thus help the readers to understand the emotions sweeping through his mind at that time.

In the next few pages, we first hear Brutus's reply in self-defence and the Roman public are well satisfied at his reply. But the scene changes when Antony arrives with Caesar's body and sways the mood of the mob with his cleverly constructed speech full of puns and ironies. Here also, the main focus is always on Mark Antony- when he starts his speech, he is seen from a distance but gradually the artist brings him much closer where the readers would be able to notice his face as well as read his speech. The bloody corpse of Julius Caesar is brought into view of the Roman mob and they are shown the many bloody wounds that had been inflicted on his body by the ruthless conspirators. Here, the readers get a close up of the dead body of Caesar and the horrified reactions of the Roman mob who then change their minds and decide to take revenge on the murderers. Again we are taken back to a view of the triumphant Antony's face and right below the readers see Brutus and Cassius chased by the rampant Roman mob. In the next page is depicted how Cinna the poet is killed by the bloodthirsty mob and here the third act ends.

The title page of the fourth act depicts the ghost of Caesar visiting Brutus and Brutus's fearful reaction. Subsequently, the focus shifts to the argument between Brutus and Cassius and the sad news of Portia's death. The next important scene which we see is the vision of Caesar's ghost whom Brutus sees when he is alone in his tent. It is a terrifying scene and it is beautifully drawn with the taper going out and Caesar's ghost appearing in the dark and telling Brutus that he will see him at Philippi.

The title page of the fifth and last act has Cassius exclaiming with his last breath that Caesar, though dead, has taken his revenge on him as he now dies by the same sword with which he had killed Caesar. The last scene is full of action as the armies of Octavius and Antony on the one hand and Brutus and the other conspirators on the other confront each other and fight. But soon the conspirators find the going too tough and Cassius requests his man Pindarus to kill him with the identical sword with which he had stabbed Caesar. The whole scene is portrayed well by the artist. A little later, Brutus comes upon the scene and grieves for Cassius and cries out that it is Julius Caesar who has taken his revenge on the conspirators. The night comes and Brutus now realizes that it is useless to go on resisting and that his hour has finally come. This scene is drawn with skill with the artist blackening the background of the picture frame to bring in the effect of night and he leaves many white dots there so as to portray the starlit night sky. Brutus is depicted as standing on the top of the hill and watching smoke rising from their tents far off below and he resolves to end his life quickly and thus asks Strato to hold his sword while he runs upon it. In the next two pages we witness the death of Brutus as he runs on the sword and kills himself, his blood spurting out. Thus he dies and is laid down on the ground by Strato. His dead body is discovered by Antony and Octavius and is taken for cremation. The last pictures portray he wreath that is placed on his head with the moon shining in the sky.

Thus the Manga edition has successfully presented this tragedy through these illustrations and has really made a commendable effort to bring a classic of the Elizabethan age to the modern day public who have, through this form of the cartoon and visual mode, got the taste of the Shakespearean play and have also been taken back centuries ago to a momentous

event in world history. Thus it might be said that the visual element of this Manga edition has provided a new dimension to the traditional text as Shakespeare had written it. So, we might truly affirm what Brutus had said after the assassination of Caesar-“How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport,” meaning that their courageous and historic act shall be remembered by posterity and this scene will be enacted for umpteen number of times in plays presented by actors to come. The Manga edition of Julius Caesar has thus, in a way, affirmed this statement of Brutus as it has presented the play in a completely new medium which, as it keeps the original rhetoric intact, adds the valuable visual or the graphic representation which has surely brought Shakespeare closer to the popular psyche. Thus it may be concluded that the artist has accomplished this challenging job in grace and style.

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