

“An *iris* by any other name would smell as sweet”: adapting Shakespeare in *Romeo x Juliet*

by *Valentina Rossi**

Abstract

This paper aims to explore what emerges from the collation of the Shakespearean play, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the episodes of *Romeo x Juliet* (2007), the Japanese anime inspired by the tragedy of the “star-crossed lovers”; and to reflect upon the effects of the cross-pollination across genres that underpins the process of rewriting, leading, in some cases, to an *unShakespeareing* of Shakespeare.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Anime, *Romeo x Juliet*, Multimodality.

The present paper investigates the peculiar relationship between William Shakespeare and Japanese animation, considering that the retranslation of the canon in the quintessentially Japanese form of entertainment is not limited to faithful reproductions of the originals, as inherited from the Bard. As a matter of fact, in the world of Japanese anime, ‘mirror reproductions’ of the canon are rarely present; rather, the originals are rewritten and, in the most extreme cases, the English model is completely subverted. This is the case of *Romeo x Juliet* (Yoshida Reiko, 2007)¹: an animation series that, although apparently based on the eponymous Shakespearean tragedy², revolutionizes the plot, distancing itself further from its source as the series progresses.

I

Shakespeare’s Reception and Adaptation in Japan

After being socially closed for more than two centuries, with the outbreak of the Meiji Era (1868-1912), “the Japanese were frantically occupied in learning about – imitating, if one will – the West” (Keene, 1994, p. 14). Such a lively revolution also invested the artistic tendencies that were spreading among the nation. As a matter of fact, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the works of the most prominent European and American authors came to be known by the Japanese population. In this regard, William Shakespeare was considered the most refined example of the playwright (Kishi

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& Bradshaw, 2005, p. 3); such conviction brought Tsubouchi Yūzō and Odashima Yushi to translate his whole canon, from English to Japanese, between the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Their efforts produced an efficient repertoire that dramaturgical companies could rely on to present some of the Bard's plays to audiences, "convinced that he [would assure] them of a fuller house than any Japanese playwright living or dead" (Milward, 1974, p. 228). Moreover, the Elizabethan blank verse was exquisitely rendered, in accordance with both the peculiarities of the national language and the main features of the current dramaturgical tendencies:

[Yūzō's] translations are remarkable not only for their literary quality but also for their lexical accuracy. [...] there are various technical respects in which Shakespearean poetic drama is closer to traditional Japanese drama like Noh or Kabuki [...] many speeches are translated almost verbatim, although they tend to be longer and more verbose. It lacks the speed of the original version but it is far more musical as it makes full use of a Japanese metrical system which depends on a combination of seven-syllable and five-syllable phrases. [...] [Yūzō] was able to describe the characters' thought more freely and extensively. [...] Odashima is widely (and rightly) recognized as *the* translator who has made Shakespeare acceptable and familiar to the reading public and theatre audiences of Japan. [...] As a translator he tried to shorten whatever distance there was between Shakespeare and the Japanese. He chose vocabulary and expressions which are not too alien to his readers and audiences (Kishi & Bradshaw, 2005, pp. 2; 4-5; 7; 68).

This initial phase, defined as the 'Shakespeare boom' (Milward, 1974, p. 228), was followed by World War II, which made it virtually impossible for the actor troupes to perform. Yet, the last two decades of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a phase of sustained study of Asian Shakespeare performance as a marginalized cultural phenomenon. According to Huang (2011, p. 1), we have now entered the so-called "Asian Shakespeare 2.0" landmark, that is

an age in which performing Shakespeare in Asian theatrical styles generates incredible artistic and intellectual energy. It is an age in which certain Asian practices are foreign at home and abroad, while Shakespeare is proclaimed, once again, the bearer of universal currency. It is an age in which Asian performance and Shakespearean interpretations foster symbiotic and antithetical relationships with equal force and ever-increasing pace – fueled by the efficacy of virtual media [...] and by rapid localization of globally circulating goods, ideas, and art works.

From 2000 on, the artists of the archipelago have progressively tried to integrate Shakespeare into their aesthetic works. Such contamination is particularly evident on a multimodal level, and it has given birth to some remarkable products that have been received with enormous success by the audiences. In particular, anime³, which is one of the most authentic means of expression in Japan – together with *manga*, that is, the comics – variably include the artistry of the Bard in their structure, while still preserving the quintessence of Japanese culture. Such productions are exposed to

contamination but, at the same time, they are endowed with a peculiar “fragrance,” or with a strong “smell,” to recall Iwabuchi’s renowned concept of “cultural odor” (2002, p. 27), understood in the sense of a deep connection with the specific culture of the nation in which they are made.

Occasionally, the Shakespearean elements constitute a minimal part of the overall product, and they serve merely as embellishments to implement an already solid structure. That is the case of *Psycho-Pass* (Naoyoshi Shiotani, 2012) and *Kishuku Gakkō no Juliet* (Seiki Takuno, 2018), for instance: the former includes some references to both *Twelfth Night* (ep. 6) – where a group of students is shown to read lines taken from the comedy during a class – and *Titus Andronicus* (ep. 8) – when Toyohisa Senguji, the cyborg villain of the series, quotes some lines of the tragedy⁴ after killing Rikako, a young student –; the latter explores the love story between Inuzuka Romeo and Juliet Perushia, the leaders of two opposing school clubs – the “Black cats” and the “White dogs,” respectively. Besides the protagonists’ names, the rivalry between the groups reminds the spectators of *Romeo and Juliet*⁵.

Under other circumstances, the use of Shakespearean references is more noticeable, as it helps build the plot. This is particularly evident, to provide an example, in *Zetsuen no Tempest* (Kyo Shirodaira, 2013), where

a young witch [is] expelled and left alone on a deserted island, suggesting an apparent similarity to *The Tempest*, while the first episode of this animated TV series starts and ends with the quotation from *Hamlet*, “The time is out of joint – O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!” [...] Such quotations provide its recipients with the keys to understanding those characters. As the story unfolds, it turns out that the relationship between the three leading characters (Yoshino, Mahiro, and Mahiro’s sister Aika) resembles that of Hamlet, Laertes, and Ophelia, while at the same time these Japanese characters sometimes display correspondences with other Shakespearean characters such as Hamlet, Macbeth, and Prospero respectively (Minami, 2016, pp. 120-1).

Likewise, in *Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon I* (Manabu Ono, 2011) and *II* (Manabu Ono, 2012) as well as the second season of *Sword Art Online* (Tomohiko Itō, 2014), several references to Shakespeare are blended within the stories, being strategically modified in order to please the target audience. Both seasons of *Kyoukai*, for instance, abound in Elizabethan references, with several characters’ names deriving not only from Shakespeare’s plays, but also from the history and the literature of that era: Walter Raleigh, Double Bloody Mary [*sic*], Anne Boleyn, Mary Stuart, Ben Johnson [*sic*] and Milton – a bird. Not to mention that a consistent part of the plot develops in a futuristic England, where it is possible to detect the Tower of London, and several characters are enrolled at the so-called Oxford Academy. Furthermore, the audiences make the acquaintance of a character named Thomas Shakespeare, who is, surprisingly, transformed into a female playwright – probably to attract the male spectators primarily, as Minami (2016, p. 131) claims: “over the last decades in Japan, the feminization of

historical male figures is common.” As far as *Sword Art Online*, season II, is concerned, we are projected into a magical and mysterious forest to acknowledge Oberon and Tiffany: the king and queen of the fairies that unequivocally refer to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Nevertheless, a remarkable interpretation of a Shakespearean play is to be detected in *Romeo x Juliet*, the anime TV series of 24 episodes directed by Yoshida Reiko and produced in Japan by Studio Gonzo in 2007⁶, and inspired by the prominent Shakespearean tragedy⁷.

2

Case Study: *Romeo x Juliet*

Romeo x Juliet detaches itself from the Elizabethan tragedy and reinvents it creatively, starting from the setting: the fictional city of Neo-Verona. Dominated by the Montagues and shorn of the Capulets for fourteen years, Neo-Verona presents itself as a sort of dystopian non-place. It is governed by Leontes Von de Montague, whose name is evidently borrowed from *The Winter’s Tale*; he is Romeo’s father and an authentic post-modern tyrant that exercises his power with the force of terror along with the repressive and violent action of special psych police bodies: the “Carabinieri.” The only one to oppose such abuse and injustice, in the guise of a mysterious masked hero named “the Red Whirlwind,” is Juliet herself, who fights in defence of the miserable and the oppressed citizens and immediately disappears after every action without leaving a trace, occasionally accompanied by Romeo.

Their names emblemize the inner nature of the lovers: Romeo is *Romeo Candore de Montague*, with the term “candore,” that is purity, to underline the role of the innocent and “typical Petrarchan lover” (Conti Camaiora, 2000, p. 15) that he embodies⁸. His features are often hesitant and “effeminate” (3.I.II6). Indeed, throughout the episodes, we see him not disposed to act; confined to the margins of the scene⁹; paralyzed by sentimental pauses that break the action into pieces and loosen the tension while, at the same time, enhancing the suspense – a strategy that was well-known by the Elizabethan audiences. On the other hand, Juliet is *Juliet Fiammata Arst de Capulet*, an impetuous and valiant heroine¹⁰ who is also the milestone of her clan and, eventually, the citizens of the city.

Though depleted of the unfortunate coincidences that bring the young lovers to premature death, the romantic sub-plot of the Japanese anime under examination is the part that best preserves most of the relevance with the Shakespearean text, particularly in some crucial scenes where it is possible to detect some cross-references from the hypotext: the ballroom scene (ep. 1), for instance, where we testify the blossoming of the love between the young protagonists. However, in the Japanese adaptation, we notice a singular inversion: differently from the Elizabethan plot, here the ceremony is held in the Montagues’ mansion, where Juliet introduces herself wearing “a visor” (1.iv.30).

Significant references to the famous “balcony scene” can be detected in episodes 7 and 8: in the former, we see the lovers standing on two different heights, with Romeo down on the street and Juliet on a skyway; in the initial minutes of the latter, the young adults are together, on a bridge in the center of Neo-Verona, straightforwardly discussing their conflicting origins:

ROMEO: I love you, Juliet.

JULIET: Romeo, no...

ROMEO: I want us to be together.

JULIET: Romeo, our love can never be-

ROMEO: Is it because I’m the heir to the House of Montague and you’re the heir of the House of Capulet?

JULIET: Oh! You... you knew?

ROMEO: (*nods*) I don’t care about your family’s name! To me, you are just my Juliet. (ep. 8)

The audience will witness another balcony scene in episode 10. Here, the dialogue proposes the identical attempt of the erosion of a name, yet without the rhetorical artifices that abound in the Shakespearean lines:

JULIET: Oh, Romeo... Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? I am the last daughter of House Capulet and you are the only son of Montague. Why did fate demand our paths to be crossed? And why... do we have to love each other?

ROMEO: Are you having regrets?

JULIET: No, not at the moment. I can’t feel any regret when you stand so near to me. And yet, there is an insurmountable wall between us that we cannot deny.

ROMEO: I will not bow beneath it! Juliet, for you, no storm can flow my compass. Through the darkest twilight forest, I would walk through, and across a vile fiery tempest I’d gladly live. For you, I deny Montague and refuse my name: I am Romeo, only Romeo!

JULIET: Romeo...

ROMEO: Juliet, will you do the same? (ep. 10)

As for the rest of the plot, we seldom detect any references to the original tragedy; although they are not frequently employed, it is still possible to detect some direct references to *Romeo and Juliet* throughout the series, or some other renowned quotations taken from other Shakespearean plays¹¹. However, in some cases, quotations are strategically altered to fit the dialogues better and the context in which uttered, as in the example I hereby propose.

In the fourth episode, we hear Juliet say, “an *iris* by any other name would smell as sweet” (my emphasis), bringing to the spectators’ mind the famous line pronounced by her homonym character during the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*: “[...] That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet” (2.II.43-44). Nonetheless, the author decided to operate a variation, opting for an autochthonous species of flower, the so-called *iris japonica* – whose presence in the whole anime is dominant and that also

happens to be the emblem of the House of Capulet – that is undoubtedly familiar to the Japanese audiences. Thus, such contamination of Shakespearean lines with elements that are proper to the receiving nation has a precise function: it dissolves the distance between the source text and the target text, promoting the diffusion of Western aesthetic products by preserving, respecting, and exalting at the same time, the distinctive traits of Japanese culture.

Two major lines divide the plot, grafted onto an animistic and magical substratum: the former proceeds under the spur of a pervasive desire for revenge, that is fueled by a complex network of parental bonds – whether hidden or denied – which activate a bloodthirsty and redundant feud; the latter distils the selfish and destructive sentiment of the vengeance into the generous and altruistic one of self-sacrifice, that must be accomplished in the name of a common good: the wealth of Neo-Verona.

In *Romeo x Juliet*, revenge follows a labyrinthine path, and involves three figures: Juliet, Leontes Montague and Tybalt. Leontes Montague, for instance, who was born as a Capulet and repudiated and defrauded of a nobility that belonged to him by right when he was a child, grew up harboring a profound hatred towards anyone who bore that surname. Then, he was adopted by a Montague and, thanks to his resourcefulness and the extraordinary abilities he nurtured, once an adult, he became Lord of the House. After earning such an influential and respected position, he felt ready to exercise his personal justice. One night he burst with the militias into the castle of the Capulets, that is, the ones responsible for the woe suffered by his mother and him, and killed everyone:

LORD CAPULET: Lord Montague... you villain!

LORD MONTAGUE: Tonight ends the House of Capulet. When the citizens of Neo-Verona awake, they shall call Montague their king! [...] Kill them all! The House of Capulet must fall tonight. (ep. I)

In so doing, Leontes manages to get his revenge by slaughtering all his enemies except Juliet, who was saved thanks to the intervention of a dear friend of her family: Conrade, once again a name with evident literary resonances.

That night, another person was illegitimately deprived of her precious life: Volumnia Capulet, whose name sheds light on another intertextual reference¹² – this time to the Roman play, *Coriolanus* – with whom Leontes had had an occasional relationship, from which Tybalt was born. In episode fourteen, we hear the young boy narrate his secret story to Juliet and her men:

TYBALT: My father was none than Leontes Capulet.

JULIET: It can't be! You can't be the son of Montague!

TYBALT: He seduced my mother, and when he grew tired of her, he abandoned her and after Montague married Romeo’s mother, Portia. My mother was pregnant with me when he abandoned her. She died giving birth; no one was sure what Montague would do if my existence was discovered, so I was delivered into the care of Camio, and raised on the grounds of this estate. (ep. 14)

Therefore, replicating a destiny already experienced, Tybalt too was reneged by (and like) his father and soon after he lost his mother. For these reasons, he has an unquenchable hate toward his father. Such an adverse feeling pushes him to join Juliet, hoping to realize, together with her, the dream of seeing Leontes dead, killed by his purifying hand: “I will be the one to kill prince Montague. You know I have earned that privilege.” (ep. 22)

At the head of this triangular relationship, we find Juliet, who discovers that she is the only survivor of the House of Capulet on her sixteenth birthday, during a visit to her parents’ grave. Such news is revealed to her, with great effort, by the devoted Conrade, and it awakens in her heart the memory of that appalling night of fourteen years ago when her whole family was taken away from her atrociously:

CONRADE: The House Capulet once ruled Neo-Verona, but fourteen years ago Lord Capulet, our peerless prince, was struck down by the darkened asp who now is on the top of his throne. My Lady, this same Lord Capulet was your father. Montague put them all to the sword: not only your father, but your mother, your brothers... every member of the House suffering and doted alike. Lady Juliet, you are the only one who survived, the heir of a slaughtered House! [...]

ALL: Your Highness, Princess Juliet Fiammata Ars de Capulet! [...]

CONRADE: After your father’s death, those who served him shared his fate: the families, the children... every last one was hunted down and brutally slayed. Those of us who managed to escape swore that we would devote our life to protecting you, for you are the last survivor of House Capulet. (ep. 2; 3)

Such agnition marks a fundamental turning point in *Romeo x Juliet*. No longer just a bold protector of the people, Juliet now feels invested with an additional mission, this time a private one. After overcoming the initial shock provoked by such a traumatic discovery, and the terror that initially refrained her mind to exert revenge³, she summons her courage and is determined to both expose and punish the murderer of her household, restoring honor and power to the Capulets:

ALL: Neath the standard of the iris!

JULIET: Neath the standard of the iris! [...] I swear upon this sword I will destroy Montague and bring peace to Neo-Verona! Even until my dying breath!

ALL: Yeah! [...] I will slay Montague, for mother and father, and all who met their end for the love of their name Capulet. [...] My resolve is true. [...] Montague will die and Neo-Verona shall be released from her bondage! (ep. 9)

Concerning the above mentioned task, however, the spectators soon notice that Juliet will prove to be inadequate:

TYBALT: If that's your ideal of punishment, you'll never be able to bring down Montague.
 JULIET: I can't! I can't bring myself to kill another! (ep. 8)

Three times, she will have the opportunity to cleanse the dishonour suffered by her family through bloodshed; three times, she will fail, instigating Tybalt's anger: "[...] Your naivety has brought this down to everyone's head. Did you think your victory could be purchased so cheaply? I pity those who pinned their hopes upon such an empty child. Just sit quietly until the storm passes. Montague will find the daggers held by steadier hands. [...] You'll be a burden, except the fact that there is nothing you can do" (ep. 10). Nevertheless, it is not only the inability to kill that hinders her initial intentions, but the additional discovery that Romeo's father is indeed responsible for what happened. Although she had shockingly confessed to herself that she had found love in a place where love should not grow, she ends up being influenced by that romantic feeling, and because of it, she is induced to look at both her condition and her enemies with an indulgence she did not think she could feel:

TYBALT: That man murdered your family, stole your birthright and forced you to live a lie!
 Just admit that you hate him!
 JULIET: I love him because of my love for his son. I cannot master my hate, not after Romeo. Not anymore. (ep. 17)

Hence, in the penultimate episode of the series, being resolutely convinced that "nothing good can be built by hatred," (ep. 22) Juliet will renounce her revenge against Leontes: "[t]he time for swords has passed. Fourteen years ago, you butchered my entire family: with that, I have made my peace. Understand that I have no intention of taking your life, no desire for revenge, nor any taste for the politics of resurrecting my House"¹⁴ (ep. 22). In turn, Leontes will at last fall, wounded by the poisoned tip of Mercutio's sword – a detail easily ascribable to *Hamlet*. As for Juliet, too noble a soul to be stained by such a blind and individualistic instinct, she will be able to forge an alternative fate for herself. Not surprisingly, in the final episode, we find her character thoroughly changed: she is more assertive and more decisive, almost indifferent to the emotions that had weakened her determination throughout the anime. Unhampered by the desire for revenge, Juliet places herself at the center of a tragic scene that immediately takes on the contours of a sacrificial altar: "I plan to sacrifice myself [...] I have the power to end this, forever" (ep. 22).

The cause of this sudden change can be related to the state of danger that Neo-Verona is facing. In fact, the spectators are aware that the city derives strength and prosperity from Escalus, an enormous tree¹⁵ nourished by the blood of the daughters of the House of Capulet, who have been offered to him for centuries. The revenge

perpetrated by Leontes Montague had deprived the tree of its lifeblood; consequently, the roots, now weak, begin to wither, causing earthquakes and landslides that crumble the buildings and undermine the foundations of the city.

Once the ambition of reviving the House of Capulet has passed and being conscious of having failed as an avenger, Juliet decides to redeem herself by performing an act of both extreme sacrifice and generosity: merging with Escalus for the salvation of the people. Still, as she sets off towards a mortal and salvific destiny, Romeo will try to stop her, determined to prevent her from committing the gesture that would divide them for eternity. Running into him, evidently not at all willing to accept that farewell, surprises the female protagonist, who reacts by uttering: “My destiny was set at birth: championing this world, protecting the innocent people of Neo-Verona. My task was preordained: If you insist on trying to stop me, (*drawing her sword and pointing it to Romeo*) I swear I’ll run you through!” (ep. 23) As dismayed but always enamored as he may be, Romeo refuses to move, answering instead with angry words: “Then to Heaven I will send thee! [...] Oh, my beloved, to hell gladly I’ll go!” (ep. 23). The clash between the lovers begins, but it is a short-lived dispute: against her will, Juliet is unexpectedly captured by the energy of Escalus, and Romeo dies in an attempt to save her. Thanks to the young blood of a Capulet, the city shines again; political power is entrusted to a new family (the Frescobaldis¹⁶), while the two lovers are placed in separate tombs, without any statue being erected in honor and remembrance of those who gave their lives for Neo-Verona.

Conclusions

Comparing the animation TV series with the Elizabethan drama, we argue that, from many points of view, *Romeo x Juliet* is an emblematic work, in which it is possible to detect a typical trend of Japanese animated seriality, that is reinterpreting iconic literary works by relocating the focus of the narrative from thought to action, from rhetoric to duel, in a puzzling yet singular game of contamination, which marks and shapes the myth of the West in Japanese culture. Moreover, from the 1960s, many Japanese authors – whether they are related to traditional forms of expression, or confronted with more innovative methods such as *manga* and, as in the present case, *anime* – have constantly found a valid source of inspiration in the Shakespearean canon; by exploiting such a variegated range of situations and characters, they managed to adapt or rewrite the Bard’s repertoire in accordance with their native expressive, cultural, and behavioral codes. As García-Perego (2016, p. 185) claims: “All the modern-day adaptations explored highlight the need to have popular appropriations of the play – beyond straightforward literary productions – which reinterpret and rewrite the Shakespearean play in an Asian context in order to make it their own.”

In this respect, the *liaison* between the English tragedy and the anime has gradually become loose, discreet, and episodic. In fact, Jennifer Wallace (2007, p. 88) underlines that adaptation can be considered as ‘the subaltern response to classical, Western

tragedy' that needs to be somehow dismantled. Such a process is evident, above all, in the delineation of the characters, who programmatically end up reflecting (and transmitting to the audience) some principles that are utterly divergent from the ones that encrypt the English model, but that are typical of the receiving culture, on the other hand.

In *Romeo x Juliet*, the above-mentioned multimodal adaptation is elucidated by the female protagonist: transformed from a girl who lives with awareness of the factuality of desire, into a heroine; an irresolute revenger but ultimately ready, thanks to both her virtue and inner strength, to challenge the man she loves while keeping faith to the principles and the mission she has decided to complete. In other words, a revised version of the *shōjo* heroine, who sets aside her feelings and ambitions to pursue a higher and nobler purpose; a necessary duty that she is determined to perform at any cost, even that of self-sacrifice¹⁷. Thus, the animated series presents the image of an adamant, inveterate, and proud Juliet, far beyond the margins of the Elizabethan mold: a real Red Whirlwind, to resume the name she chose for the heroine behind whose mask she had hidden her desire for truth, solidarity, and justice.

Notes

1. All the references to the dialogues of *Romeo x Juliet* are taken from the English dubbed version released by Funimation, in 2007.

2. All the references to *Romeo and Juliet* are taken from Shakespeare (2012).

3. The term 'anime' refers to the animation TV series that originated in Japan from the 1960s on. The genre is mainly characterized by animated design (mostly computer graphics, nowadays) and it reached its climax between 1977 and 1984, during the so-called "anime boom" (Pellitteri, 2008, pp. 106-7). As for the evolution of the Japanese serial animation, Teti (2016, pp. 176-7) distinguishes three main epochs: the "industrial" one, that goes from the 1960s to the 1980s; the "postmodern" one, that begins in the 1980s and lasts until 2010; and the "experiential" one, that goes from 2004 to the present day.

4. "The hunt is up, the morn is bright and grey, / The fields are fragrant and the woods are green: / Uncouple here and let us make a bay" (2.2.1-3). The references to *Titus Andronicus* are drawn from Shakespeare (2017).

5. The tragedy of the young lovers is also explicitly recalled by the titles of some episodes, such as the seventh (*Romeo and Juliet and the Sports Festival*), the eleventh (*Romeo and Juliet and the Birthday*) and the twelfth one (*Romeo and Juliet*).

6. 2007 was a remarkable year for the reception of *Romeo and Juliet* in Japan. Apart from the above-mentioned anime, it is worthwhile to indicate two additional releases that helped define the fortune of the English tragedy: *Romeo x Juliet*, the *manga* realized by COM; and the filmic adaptation *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Taro Otani, that "constitutes a still evolving Shakespeare [...]. [It] parodies Shakespeare and finally [the young protagonists] claim that they are not Romeo and Juliet after all" (García-Perego, 2016, p. 191).

7. Though one might argue that questions regarding the relevance or cultural importance of Shakespeare are general and applicable to the major plays, *Romeo and Juliet* carries the additional baggage of being recognized as the play about and for youth – and at a time when youth are widely, and oftentimes reasonably, believed to be imperiled or "at risk." If it is increasingly well recognized that *Romeo and Juliet* has become a pop culture metonym for romantic love in the age of romantic cynicism, it might also be said that it is a metonym for doomed youth in the postmodern world (Semenza, 2016, p. 15). Moreover, it is worth underlining that, nowadays, the term *romijuri* "has become part of the Japanese youth culture" (Yoshihara, 2013, p. 92), as it stands for a love story, though not alluding specifically to Shakespeare's lyrical tragedy.

8. Such an epithet could also refer to the initial naivety displayed by the dramatic character: “Shakespeare’s intention, however, was to show Romeo’s immaturity at the opening of the play so as to reveal his growth” (Dash, 1981, p. 78). On the other hand, with reference to the transcendent romance that is embodied by the young protagonist, Hazlitt (1930-1934, p. 254) remarks that: “Romeo is Hamlet in love. There is the same rich exuberance of passion and sentiment in the one that there is of thought and sentiment in the other”.

9. This is particularly true if we consider that Romeo will be banished from Neo-Verona in episode fourteen, and sent to work in the Gradisca Mines – a fictional place that does not correspond to any of the settings we detect in Shakespeare’s tragedy. Consequently, he will be the leader of his own sub-plot – mainly related to the activities that concern his new surroundings – rather taking distance from Juliet and the major problems she is called to face. He will come back to the city during the twentieth episode.

10. In this regard, it is essential to remark that Juliet is indeed considered by the scholars as Shakespeare’s “first tragic heroine” (Shakespeare, 2012, p. 3).

11. Such as the line “Sad hours seem long” (I.I.159), pronounced by Romeo in the third episode; or, in episode 18, we hear Shakespeare’s *cameo* pronounce “my kingdom for a horse” (5.4.7), evoking the famous line of *Richard III*, while being in the saddle of a puppet horse, during the rehearsal of one of his shows.

12. “*Otaku* and general audiences will easily find that many characters in this anime are taken from other Shakespeare plays: they encounter Portia, Antonio, Tubal and Lancelot, Cordelia, Regan, Emilia, Hermione, Camilo, Ariel, Francisco, Curio, Titus, Conrade, Petruchio Benvolio, Balthazar, Ophelia, and so on. Obviously the creators introduced these characters to add some Shakespearean atmosphere to their counterparts in this Shakespearean anime, expecting *otaku* to do research on the anime and share the significance and significations of these Shakespearean characters in *Romeo x Juliet* on Internet sites and blog. Some fans went on to read those plays by Shakespeare to which the anime alludes. They do this in order not only to confirm the references and associations between the anime and Shakespeare’s tragedy, but also to read between the lines or find out further possible hidden significations of the Shakespearean characters in *Romeo x Juliet*” (Minami, 2016, p. 3).

13. CONRADE: [...] One would think you’d exercise more conscious now that you have assumed the name. / JULIET: The name? / CONRADE: Your name! You are the last Capulet! Once we rip Neo-Verona of the Montagues- / JULIET: Then what? Say we slaughter the entire Montague line, what good would it truly do everyone? [...] *It’s revenge! And I refuse to be a part of it!* / CONRADE: It’s not about revenge! It’s about claiming your birthright! [...] None of this matters in the face of what must be done. (ep. 4, my emphasis)

14. The spurs of such inclination are also to be found in episode 20, when Juliet visits the grave of her family and says: “Father, mother... I do this not to avenge your death, or to settle old scores, but for the future of the people of Neo-Verona, where all of them may live in happiness and peace. But the foundation of this new world must be just: I will not have a future built on bloodshed. No House Montague, no House Capulet, no axe of hatred, no thoughts of sorrow... Romeo and I will work side by side to build this city anew.”

15. The *topos* of the secular tree whose lymph nourishes the planet clearly takes inspiration from the Yggdrasil and its Germanic legacy, but we notice that it has also been displayed in several Japanese audiovisual products across the years. As a matter of fact, it constitutes the core of the famous eponym *manga*, *Yggdrasil* (2011); it appears in various anime and their related movies or videogames. For instance, in the famous series *Sousei no Aquarion* (2005) it preserves the mythological name; in some formats of *Pokemon*, we find the Tree of Beginning; in *Digimon x Evolution* (2005), we find The Server Tree; finally, in *Sword Art Online II* (2014) it is named Alfheim.

16. This could be interpreted as a reference to Italian literature, being the Frescobaldis were well-known Medieval poets.

17. “A princess disguised as a man to fight against the usurper is a very familiar characters to the fans of Japanese anime since the 1960s” (Minami, 2016, p. 135 n12). Apart from her fierce bravery, Yoshida’s Juliet also gathers some of the major physical features of the so called “beautiful fighting girl”: namely her red hair, that is typical of characters such as, for instance: Asuka Langley Soryu from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996), Yoko Littner from *Black Lagoon* (2006), Risty from *Queen’s Blade* (2009), Morgiana from *Magi: the Labyrinth of Magic* (2012-2013), Kushina from the famous *Naruto: Shippuden* (2007-2017) and Ezra Scarlet from *Fairy Tail* (2009-2019).

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