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Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*: from the Play to Three Graphic Novel Adaptations

Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Shaul Bassi

Assistant Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Laura Tosi

Graduand
Jessica Caretta
Matriculation Number 836679

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

The Act, Scene, and Verse format will be used to signal all the quotations from *The Merchant of Venice* to be found in this paper, taken from the following edition:

Shakespeare, W. (2020). *The Merchant of Venice* (J. Drakakis, Ed.; Third). The Arden Shakespeare: Bloomsbury Publishing.

As far as the three examined graphic novels are concerned, the editions to which this paper refers are:

Shakespeare, William, and Gareth Hinds. 2008. *The Merchant of Venice: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*. Somerville, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press

Shakespeare, William, Richard Appignanesi, and Faye Yong. 2019. *The Merchant of Venice*. London: Self-Made Hero

Shakespeare, William, John F. McDonald, Vinod Kumar, and C.K. Anil. 2019. *The Merchant of Venice: A Graphic Novel*. New Delhi, India: Campfire Graphic Novels.

Throughout the text, the three adaptations above are respectively identified as Hinds' edition, the *Manga Shakespeare* version and the *Campfire Classics* adaptation, according to the collection they belong to.

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The status of literature is commonly reserved to those works that have already proved their value and have therefore been included in what is now known as the "literary canon", a classification where the most respectable position is held by Shakespeare's works. In fact, the Playwright's legacy to the English linguistic and cultural national heritage has made of him the most widely taught English author of all times, an example of great poetry and literary success that is deemed to last for many more centuries to come. However, literature has never been and will never be set in stone, it has always been inspired by pre-existing elements and will always encourage the creation of new works. Hence, as much as Shakespeare himself was an adapter, many authors over the years have set aside the reverence and utmost respect that are usually associated to the Shakespeare's works to adapt them into new formats, catering to the individual needs of their time's society, aiming their works at specific audiences, and even using new and innovative media such as comic books and graphic novels.

This thesis aims to explore the intrinsic value of adaptations as texts in themselves, as opposed to the general misconception of them as merely derivative works to be considered inferior to their source text, as well as to show the literary value of new visual media such as the graphic novel. Namely, the analysis of three different graphic novel adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* is provided in order to observe how this visually anchored medium can purposefully adapt a text born to be represented in theatre, strengthening the word's power through their interrelation with images and encouraging a more active and dynamic relationship between the author, the work, and the reader. Furthermore, the possible use in class of graphic novels as a pedagogical tool is investigated in order to prove that they are not just simplified versions of Shakespeare's text, to be used as a stepping stone to introduce the reader to the 'real' literary text, but rather an effective way to make Shakespeare's works relevant to younger generations, thanks to their ability to bridge the gap between classic literature and the visual culture young adults are steeped in every day.

In order to ensure a general theoretical framework of the topic, **Chapter One** provides a definition of adaptation, considering its value as a text in itself rather than just as a secondary work inspired by the source text. Additionally, an overview of the

main elements contributing to the creation of a derivative text is given, with particular attention to the role of adapters, audience and social context. The genre and form of the destination medium are also studied, together with the motives behind the process of adaptation, so as to illustrate the symbiotic relationship between hypotext and hypertext and the complex network of textual interrelations that allows new literature to be created from the continuous reworking and reinterpretation of previous texts.

Then, a brief outline of the main categories of adaptation is provided, marking the difference between adaptation and appropriation and exploring the categories of transpositions, commentaries, and analogues. The evolution of adaptation in view of specific and more modern media such as digital ones or illustrated printed media is also taken into account, with a focus on the graphic novel and its status as a hybrid medium that combines high-quality sequential art and text in the format of a book, meant to convey deeper and more mature contents than its comic book counterpart – which is traditionally relegated to the role of vehicle to tell the stories of superheroes. Additionally, the graphic novel's specific visual language and its value as visual literature, equally in itself and in quality of literary adaptation, are researched.

In the second half of this Chapter, the history of Shakespeare's visual representation over the years is explored, underlining the shift from an almost photographical recreation of theatrical scenes to more creative representations. In detail, it is observed how Shakespeare's plays were at first turned into paintings strictly inspired by their theatrical interpretations to later evolve into actual engraved illustrations that allowed more imaginative power to the artists and were bound as frontispieces to new, illustrated editions of Shakespeare's works, starting with Rowe's collection in 1709. Furthermore, the evolution from scene selection and composition tied to theatrical convention to an increased concern for the representation of human characters and events or the historical and geographical elements of the play is studied. Lastly, the shift from engravings bound as frontispieces to illustrations bound within the text is investigated as well as the exhaustion of the phenomenon of the collected, illustrated Shakespeare's plays; furthermore this Chapter observes the replacement of these editions by high quality children illustrated books, printed in luxurious editions, that paved the way to the modern-day adaptation of Shakespeare's plays into visual media such as comic books and graphic novels.

Next, **Chapter Two** considers three different graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* produced and published by Gareth Hinds in 2008, by Self-Made Hero for the *Manga Shakespeare* collection in 2009 and by Campfire's Graphic Novels imprint for the *Campfire Classics* series in 2011. The three different adaptations are compared and contrasted in a synoptical analysis with a particular focus on their macroscopical elements in order to observe how they influence the play's reception on the readers' part. Namely, the role of colour as an ally to the reading experience is observed, underlining how it can clarify the passage of time, direct the readers' focus and attention and highlight the importance of specific elements for the general economy of the panel. Furthermore, the use of manga-style techniques such as half-screen toning, meant to give the impression of colour to a black-and-white product thus enhancing the power of the visual elements, is investigated. Similarly, the artists' ability to bend structure to convey meaning thanks to either regular layouts or more irregular ones, combined with the presence – or absence – of the gutter and its size, is taken into account; additionally, panels' shapes and size, their organisation in strips and pages as well as the presence of full-page panels or of figures bleeding outside the panels' margins are analysed to stress their outcomes on the reading experience.

Then, the adapters' choices in relation to Shakespeare's verses are investigated, highlighting whether the source text has undergone significant changes in terms of modernisation and updating of language and contents. In detail, the choice to modernise the Playwright's verses or paraphrase them for more accessibility is taken into account alongside the decision to abridge the text accordingly to the medium's shorter length. Likewise, the authors' resolution to avoid a controversial reception of the play and the subsequent abridgement of the text is investigated, especially in relation to the theme of Jewishness and racial otherness. Additionally, seeing that the graphic novel is a medium where image and text are given equal importance in the construction of meaning, the image-text relationship is considered in order to determine whether the analysed works present a disproportion on either side or are built upon a balance of the two elements, thus resulting appealing and effective in communication at the same time. Furthermore, considered the great role played by setting in *The Merchant of Venice*, this Chapter deals with the analysis of Venice and

Belmont's visual representation, as well as with the dichotomy between the mercantile world of the former and the fairy-like, romantic green oasis constituted by the latter. Comparably, it is shown how the adapters' choice to reproduce the historical feel or to update the context and set the play either in a modern society or in a fantastic world can influence the reader's understanding, especially in light of Venice's policies towards Jews.

The focus is then shifted on the main characters' design and on the benefits provided by the visual representation in the recognition of their multifaceted personality. Namely, this analysis emphasises whether Shylock's religious identity is made evident through unescapably Jewish traits and garments, or "sanitised" into a subtler and less recognisable representation to avoid controversial reactions; similarly, the choice to visually represent the other character's association of Shylock to the devil or to leave it out is presented as another fundamental element to build the Jew's identity. Additionally, the depiction of Shylock's process of humanisation resulting in his transition from an almost devilish entity to a vulnerable man that, by the end of the play, has lost everything is also examined. Likewise, Jessica's character is studied, with particular attention to the typical gender polarisation that sees ugly male Jews *vis-à-vis* beautiful Jewesses, an element so inherently visual to be perfect for a graphic adaptation. Jessica's inner self-division is also studied, in order to determine whether pictorial representation can visually convey her being an outsider both before and after her conversion to Christianity and marriage to Lorenzo. Then, Antonio and Bassanio's personalities are observed, to show the graphic treatment of the former's progressive marginalisation and the latter's continuous requests of money despite the true affection that ties him to his friend. Then, the relationship between the two is investigated, in order to prove whether the visual medium contributes towards its interpretations as friendship or a deeper kind of love, if not a queer attachment. Lastly, Portia's journey of empowerment is taken into account, comparing her initial representation as a passive, meek, and submissive woman to her transformation in stance and facial expressions signalling her being reborn, becoming active and independent.

Chapter Three brings the analysis to scene-level, examining the adapters' visual and textual choices in relation to the play's major scenes, and how they can influence the experience of the play even though reworked as little as possible. In

detail, the scenes related to the casket game are studied so as to highlight both the different stances in the representation of the caskets and the diverse visual devices used to give Morocco and Arragon a unique identity while showing their attachment to appearances. Additionally, Bassanio's choice is examined, as well as how the pictorial representation reflects his inner nature of a giver and the alleged inner advantage that Portia offered him upon his process of evaluation of the caskets. Then, Shylock and Antonio's confrontation at trial in Act 4, Scene 1 is analysed, paying particular attention to the pictorial representation of setting, characters' stances, attitudes, and emotional reactions. Great consideration is also given to Portia's quality of mercy speech as well as to the scene's upturn, in correspondence of Portia's legal and verbal quibble to prove Shylock's vicious intentions, and to the Jew's final condemnation to forced conversion.

The second part of the Chapter focuses on the depiction of some scenes that could be considered minor, as they are shorter and less famous than the aforementioned ones, but that are nonetheless important for the general economy of the play. Here adapters show greater creativity and decisional power, as they choose whether to keep the scenes in place, to reduce and condense them, or to altogether cut them off their work. In detail, Lancelet's soliloquy and his association of Shylock to the devil will be examined, as well as his interaction with his father, Old Giobbe, that is often removed from adaptations despite representing the play's comic relief. Similarly, moving to Act 3, Scene 1, Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech is studied, highlighting how a well-balanced combination of text and visual elements can strengthen the Jew's words, opposite to an imbalance of the two that could result in a significant toning down of his anger. Likewise, Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet in Act 5, Scene 1 is taken into exam, focussing on the lovers' relationship as well as the interruption of their romantic retreat by secondary characters, in order to prove how the reader's perception of the couple is deeply conditioned by the adapters' visual and textual abridgement choices. The ring quarrel originated by Bassanio and Gratiano's letting go of their rings and taking place upon their wives return in Belmont during Act 5, Scene 1 is then investigated, to further show the power of the visual medium especially in the representation of highly theatrical scenes based on the characters' emotional reactions. Lastly, this Chapter examines the visual representation of off-scene instances and their

ability to clarify the play's plot, if well exploited; in detail, Shylock's angry outburst after finding out Jessica eloped with Lorenzo, taking away his money and jewels, is taken into account, as well as the pictorial depiction of the three marriages happening in the play, which in Shakespeare's verses are not described but only implied. To the same purpose, the *Manga Shakespeare*'s graphic rendition of visual imagery, metaphors and moments ignored by the other two adaptations, such as Antonio spitting at Shylock, are examined.

Finally, **Chapter Four** makes a case for the use of graphic novels in the classroom as they can prove to be a great educational tool if used properly and with moderation. Hence, after a brief overview of the possible perplexities on the part of teachers, schoolboards and parents at the introduction of sequential art as part of the school curriculum, the graphic novel's benefits are examined. Namely, being a medium deeply rooted in the visual culture, graphic novels directly speak to the students' interests, proving to be a familiar medium that can provide them with greater motivation to read both inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, it will be investigated how the graphic novel's multimodality not only engages readers but also enhances their critical skills, especially those related to visual literacy. Then, it is observed how graphic novels aid the acquisition of new vocabulary and grammatical structures, in addition to providing a more accessible presentation of difficult contents, rooting them in reality as well as in theory, thus facilitating memorisation.

Additionally, this Chapter investigates the use of graphic novels for the creation of an inclusive learning environment, that can grant the same level of interest and participation to both the most talented and gifted students and to those with learning disabilities in reading, such as dyslexia; similarly, struggling readers in general, including the less participative and motivated ones, can profit from the use of comics as reading materials. Lastly, the graphic novel is proposed as an effective tool to teach Shakespeare in secondary school, mainly because of the medium's natural connection to poetry and theatre, seeing its ability to visualise Shakespeare's verses and present them in a context that better suits the interest of younger students. It is also observed that this alternative teaching method bridges youth culture and literary education, thus erasing the students' general perception of Shakespeare as dull and inaccessible, relegated to a high-culture context that younger people do not feel connected with.

CHAPTER ONE

All the world's a page: from the play to the graphic novel

Introduction

The practice of adaptation as a self-conscious form can be dated back to the Renaissance, when it was commonly known as 'imitation' and used as a practical exercise aimed at the development of one's own personal style through the replication of classical Latin authors. Since, as Sanders notes, "art creates art" and "literature is made by literature" (2015, 1), over the years this process of imitation has been complemented by the flourishing development of new interpretations of pre-existing sources, often with the intent to make them fit to a new social context (Sanders 2015, 58). Despite the different stances to be found in this process of reinterpretation, all the resulting works have one shared feature: they all are a form of "repetition without replication" (Hutcheon 2013, 7), an innovative form of art that, from the Restoration onwards, has been defined as 'adaptation', a term derived from the Latin *adaptare* – to make fit (Fischlin and Fortier 2000, 3).

It has been shown that adaptations have a long tradition, which is most evident when Shakespeare's works are considered. On one hand, Shakespeare himself was considered an adapter and imitator (Hutcheon 2013, 3), as he appropriated a variety of sources ranging from myths and folklore to the historical Chronicles of Holinshed used for Macbeth and to Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses, adapted for Prospero's speech in The Tempest (Sanders 2015, 59). Moreover, Fischlin and Fortier have stated "as long as there have been plays by Shakespeare, there have been adaptations of those plays" (2000, 1), starting with historical Shakespearean adaptations that include the works of Nahum Tate and William Davenant, two playwrights who – from the 1660s onwards – adapted Shakespeare's texts, altering characters and plotlines. Other period adaptations were aimed at children, like *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb (1807), *The Family Shakespeare* by Thomas Bowdler (1807) or *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* by Mary Cowden Clarke (1850). On the other hand, possibly driven by the symbolic value attached to Shakespeare in relation to English cultural national identity (Sillars 2019, 60), the long history of Shakespearean adaptations also bleeds into modern times and media. This

process is further supported by the fact that, rather than just being texts, Shakespeare's works are a true network of connections and different understandings, thus inherently fit for adaptation (Lanier 2014).

1. Adaptation: a definition and a brief theorisation

Defining what an adaptation is proves to be quite difficult, if not controversial, due to the variety of elements that such a term encloses and to the equal importance that should be given to both the final product and the process undertaken in order to obtain it (Hutcheon 2013, 7). Namely, an adaptation is a form of "collaborative writing across time, and sometimes across culture or language" (Sanders 2015, 60). That, according to Hutcheon, can fundamentally be described in three broad statements: it is an acknowledged transposition, a creative and an interpretive act, and a form of intertextual engagement. As a matter of fact, even if an adaptation is an announced transposition, it is also a "derivation that is not derivative", a work that – despite resulting from the imaginative process of (re-)interpretation of another is not secondary to it (Hutcheon 2013, 8–9) – and maintains its own distinctive identity. Hence, adapters are also creators who, by filtering another's story through their own interests, sensibility, and even talents (Hutcheon 2013, 18), design a text meant to be appealing and relatable to new audiences (Sanders 2015, 22–23) and fit for the necessary changes a shift in medium, genre or context such a transposition entails.

The process of adaptation, especially when it comes to highly valued authors such as Shakespeare, takes two opposite stances: one leaning towards reverence and extreme respect, virtually assimilated to a tribute (Hutcheon 2013, 93); the other more oriented towards creativity and the quest for new meanings and perspectives. In detail, the former could be considered as a sort of honorific approach (Sanders 2015, 59), a conservative attitude that frequently originates close adaptations mostly meant for text circulation, characterised by a certain reluctance to alter or paraphrase Shakespeare's words due to their being almost an embodiment of English culture itself (Lanier 2014, 21). This approach is parallel to that of Self-Made Hero's Shakespeare specialist, when he collaborated on the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays for the *Manga Shakespeare* collection. Specifically, during an interview with Sabeti – later transcribed in her article *Shakespeare, Adaptation and 'Matters of Trust'* – the Shakespeare scholar

stated that "[y]ou can't paraphrase Shakespeare, that's the point. It says what it says and it doesn't say more or less. […] To explain and to help people understand, yes of course. But you can't change it" (2017, 344), suggesting the need for fidelity to the original language and content. However, the act itself of adapting a play into a new visual media, such as a graphic novel in the style of a Japanese manga, demands a creative take on the source text due to necessary alterations, additions and adjustments in setting, length, plot, and cultural traditions, turning it into a new product with its own distinctive features, notwithstanding its close relationship to the hypotext. Conversely, the latter stance is overtly imaginative and productive, offering as a result works that, instead of being symbiotically co-dependent on the source text, recreate and reinterpret it (Hutcheon 2013, 84) in a mutually cathartic process where both the original and the adaptation evolve toward each other (Lanier 2010, 14–15). According to this approach, every adaptation is an interpretation and vice versa; therefore, as much as there can be no literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation as it will always be influenced by the adapter's ideological standpoint, temperament, and individual interests (Hutcheon 2013, 16, 84). Thus, every staging of a printed play could be thought to be an adaptation from the telling mode to the showing mode as the source text contains only a rather small number of directions in regard to the use of gestures and tones on the part of an actor, on whom falls the ultimate responsibility to interpret such text and adapt it into a convincing performance (Hutcheon 2013, 39, 92). Hence, adaptation is to be considered as a form of productive art and, especially in the Shakespeare industry, a self-generative one since the constant renewal of Shakespeare's plays not only "reinforce[s his] position in the canon" (Fischlin and Fortier 2000, 6) but also contributes to the creation of further works, spawned by the economical lures of a well-established legitimation deriving from the association with the Playwright's works as well as by the desire to move upwards the cultural level of one's work and by the eventual pedagogical implications such an adaptation may carry, seeing as one of the largest markets and audiences receptive to Shakespearean adaptations are students and teachers (Hutcheon 2013, 85–92).

Adaptation as a product is subject to multiple demands exceeding those of form, medium, and genre; namely, since even a short stretch in the temporal or geographical context can produce a big change in the production and reception of an adaptation,

time and society are relevant elements to be examined when analysing such a product. Specifically, updating the context of a Shakespearean play contributes to making it once again relevant and relatable to a more modern audience (Sanders 2015, 23), shortening the gap between the audience's personal frame of reference and the historical details or power dynamics that could otherwise remain unobserved to an insufficiently-learned spectator (Hutcheon 2013, 144–46). This type of textual reworking can also include changes in the geographical setting of the play or in the culture described in it. If the shift in time, place, and eventually in cultural references is meant to be nearer to the receiving audience, there is an instance of transculturalisation. If there is a change in the characters' nationalities – and therefore in the system of values underlying the action – there is a case of indigenisation, as the play is changed to fit to the receiving society (Hutcheon 2013, 145–53). Adaptations often offer new perspectives on a source text – whether it is because of the revised context or the different point of view assumed in telling the story – highlighting whatever "gaps, absences and silences" might be present on the original (Sanders 2015, 126). However, an adaptation – especially when it involves a modern-day context or medium – also entails the risk of being perceived as lowering the story itself, therefore it might generate a negative response, in view of a commonly accepted hierarchy that grants a greater legitimacy to the historical context and the traditional media – mostly books, novels and plays (Hutcheon 2013, 3).

Adaptations heavily rely on their relationship with the audience, not just in terms of reception and (possible) popularity but also in terms of experience of the final work *as an adaptation*. As a matter of fact, audiences can be knowing – having a previous experience of the source text – or unknowing – experiencing the work for the first time, bringing different experiences and "mental stances" to the interpretation of the text thus forcing adapters to be mindful of all the different perspectives in order to create a product that could be accessible and appealing to both types of audience. The appeal of an adaptation mostly comes from "the intellectual and aesthetic pleasure of understanding the interplay between works" (Hutcheon 2013, 117), the combination of the adaptation and adapted text in a complex interrelation of meanings that allures the knowing reader or spectator to the pleasure of repetition and variation, familiarity and novelty, together with greater accessibility and the chance to fill in any possible

gaps with previous knowledge. In addition to this, an adaptation should be pushing the knowing audience to further the creative process and see the source text in a different light after experiencing the adapted version, in a conceptual back and forth between the two (Hutcheon 2013, 114–23). However, to engage unknowing audiences while still fulfilling the needs of someone acquainted with the text, an adaptation has to stand on its own and to offer a complete experience as a work in itself, framed in a specific time, place, social, and cultural context so as to allow full understanding. This is an act of reaffirmation of the possibility for multiple versions of the same story to exist laterally instead of vertically and therefore be enjoyed on their own, even if severed from the pleasure of the intrinsic duality and intertextuality an adaptation usually brings to the table (Hutcheon 2013, 127, 169).

1.1 Types of adaptation

Adaptations offer a very wide panorama, first because of the wide range of motives behind the choice of what to adapt and secondly due to the various forms they can assume depending on whom they are adapted for, how faithful they are to the source text, and on the eventual change of medium between hypotext – or source – and hypertext – or derived text. Consequently, the relationship between two or more texts can be analysed in a number of different ways, despite having been neglected for several years and labelled as "second-rate". For the sake of giving a broad account of the different categories of adaptations, this Chapter will take into account Sanders theorisation, who in the first place took inspiration by Cartmell and Whelehan, with some further insights acquired from Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests*.

The first fundamental distinction to be made is that between adaptation and appropriation: while the first usually signals its relationship with the informing source text through its title or other intrinsic features, an appropriation is instead "a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (Sanders 35). Hence, its relationship with the source might seem more sideways and difficult to identify if compared to a straightforward adaptation such as filmic transpositions of canonical Shakespearean plays, retaining their titles and main features. Appropriations usually foster new cultural and aesthetic possibilities with a taste for creative borrowings and citations that almost verge on plagiarism if not

correctly recognized. However, the interplay and the intertextual awareness between appropriation and its sources enriches and deepens the network of meanings and possible responses produced by a new work that stands alone in its own right, as it happens in the case of the *West Side Story* musical; in fact, it can be fully enjoyed even without having a previous familiarity with its source, but the awareness of its implicit intertextuality with *Romeo and Juliet* allows the spectator to have a richer experience (Sanders 2015, 36–37, 43–53).

Appropriations and adaptations are generally categorised in light of how they deal with the original source; the former can be divided into embedded texts and interplays or sustained appropriations, while the latter are organised by their way of relocating, commenting, enriching, or cutting the source text. It is to be noted that, while most theories of adaptations assume the plot is the common denominator and the core of every derivation, in truth the various elements of the story are frequently treated separately and some of them – such as themes and characters – are easier to adapt, especially across media (Hutcheon 2013, 10–12). Bearing in mind these elements, it is most evident how adaptation studies should engage with the process of adaptation together with the ideology and methodology underlying it rather than just encouraging polarized value judgements based on the fidelity to the source, which proves almost impossible to be thoroughly tested. Hence, adaptations are argued to belong in three broad categories: transpositions, commentaries, and analogues (Sanders 2015, 24–25; Cartmell and Whelehan 1999, 24).

First, transpositions "take a text from one genre and deliver it into a new modality and potentially to different or additional audiences" (Sanders 2015, 25). Thus, every visual representation of a written work (i.e., a screen – or comic book – transposition of a novel or play) is a transpositional adaptation that develops on multiple layers. Specifically, transpositions relocate the source text in geographical, cultural, and temporal terms, frequently following the aforementioned process of updating otherwise known as proximisation. They also include transmediations – shifting from one medium to another – and transmodalisations – changing the genre from the source to the adaption – both commonly used for Shakespearean adaptations.

Secondly, commentaries provide a new reading of the source text commenting on its politics, usually through addition or alteration, turning the simple process of

proximisation into a more culturally loaded practice. In this case, the full impact of the adaptation depends on the audience's knowledge and awareness of their relationship to the source text, hence they usually carry the same title in order to be easily recognised as a "new version" of an older text.

Lastly, analogues are fairly similar to appropriations seeing that – though they offer an enhanced and elevated experience to those audiences who can grasp the shaping intertextual references – a previous knowledge of the source text might not be necessary in order to enjoy the new derived work independently. Furthermore, opposite to appropriations, they still signal some kind of relationship with the original instead of completely moving away from it (Sanders 2015, 25–33).

Nonetheless useful, the categories discussed above are not set in stone, meaning some adaptations could be borderline between two or more of these classifications and most of all that there are many more adaptational processes that could equally result in a work belonging to either one of the three proposed groups. As a matter of fact, abridgements and simplifications, together with amplifications and substitutions, are more than just a prerogative to appropriation but also the foundation to many adaptations. Similarly, the act of providing added motivation mainly originates commentaries, but is not impossible to be found in other types of adaptation as much as some other processes such as grafting, which is mostly typical of appropriations as it creates transtextual characters that develop their own plotlines, can be found in combination with other less specific ones and produce a transposition or an analogue (cf. Genette).

All in all, "[b]y their very existence, adaptations remind us there is no such thing as an autonomous text or an original genius that can transcend history, either public or private" and put the emphasis on the relation between texts, at times even challenging the value of the original source because, seeing as literature is made with and from other literature, it ought to be kept in mind that earlier is not necessarily better, thus value in itself should not be attached to originality above everything else (Hutcheon 111).

2. Modernity and adaptation in new media: the graphic novel

In the last thirty years, media industries have undergone a paradigm shift that led from the rhetoric of the digital revolution (1990s), assuming that new digital media were going to push aside old ones, to the new convergence theory, emerging in the twenty-first century and still in elaboration, stating that "old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways" (Jenkins 2006, 5–6). Specifically, media convergence – or the flow of the very same content across different media, facilitated by the advent of technological updates and digital platforms – has contributed to the development of the concept of participatory culture and thus to the production of contents aimed at a newly empowered spectatorship, more socially connected and longing for an active perspective on the product (Jenkins 2006, 15–19). Besides convergence culture, or transmedia, cross-media – or different narration formats that, despite sharing the same narrative and imaginative elements, change to meet the requirements of the editorial media they are going to be published in – has also seen a leap forward (Giovagnoli 2013, XVI). This has been possible especially thanks to the blossoming of adaptations across the typical platforms of the digital era, such as YouTube, interactive apps, webtoons, webcomics, but also comic books, and graphic novels, frequently not only for entertainment but also with educational purposes (Sanders 2015, 193) as it happened back in the day with collections such as the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare*.

Even with the contemporary trend towards convergence-culture and the ever-growing popularity of cross-media translations and adaptations, graphic novel adaptations of classical literature are still surprisingly scarce (Baetens and Frey 2015, 151). This phenomenon could be explained by the need of the medium to acquire a greater social and cultural prestige before being completely recognised as an equal counterpart of a literary work (Baetens and Frey 2015, 151). However, the existing literary graphic novels have proven to be a popular way to attract a wider audience to their source text, often giving the readers an opportunity to reframe their views of what literature is (Baetens 2008, 87) and to appreciate a text otherwise so heavily loaded with scholarly implications to be considered almost out of reach, as in the case of Shakespeare's plays. Additionally, like every other media, adapting into a graphic novel poses very specific challenges, further enhanced by the need of translating the story into the language, structure and set of genre conventions typical of comics

(Hutcheon 2013, 35). To this matter, being the field of visual storytelling still an object of study, many contrasting voices are to be found, especially when it comes to the definition of graphic novel and to what differentiates it from its comic book counterpart. Alongside Baetens and Frey's opinions, the graphic novel is not to be considered as a genre but as a format or medium, part of a bigger field (2015, 7–8) – that of visual literature – and to be declined following the conventions of the genre it embodies from time to time, be it literary, (auto)biographical, historical or other non-fiction proposals, or leaning towards science-fiction or other fiction genres (Tabachnick 2017b; Tosti 2016, 613–14).

As the name *graphic novel* suggests, this format entails a combination of well-crafted text and sequential art – often high quality – that reads as a book and contains a full story (Campfire Graphic Novels 2019). Academics tend to disagree on the choice of the term graphic novel to describe this "hybrid genre", both visual and literary, because it generally does not privilege text over image, while the use of the word novel immediately reconnects to the novel as a genre, wrongly privileging the textual dimension over the imaginative one and, therefore, strengthening the high-low contraposition generally associated to the text-image one to be found in comics (Labio 2011). Due to the lack of a better, less hierarchical term, the locution graphic novel will be used throughout this thesis to identify this new form of visual literature, characterised by the added value of creative collaboration of visual and textual elements (Baetens 2008, 79), employing the same techniques as traditional comics but differentiating itself thanks to its contents, associated with a different form or structure that lead to a different publication format and, therefore, to an altered production and distribution (Baetens and Frey 2015, 8; Tabachnick 2017b, 2).

2.1 Main features of the graphic novel

The graphic novel has become more and more important thanks to the long-running debate on what is and what is not a graphic novel, that contributed not only to the perception of this new form as something newsworthy, but also to its acceptance – begun in the late 1980s and still ongoing at the present day – as a medium fit for literary creativity and adaptation (Baetens and Frey 2015, 74–86). In graphic novels, language is always but half of the story – the other half being images – and good language in

itself is never enough, not even if combined with good illustration: "it is the interplay between the two that has to work" for a product like this to be good in its complexity (Baetens and Frey 2015, 149). Hence, the first element to be considered in graphic novels is their form: they follow the conventions of the comic book sequentiality, arranging their drawings in grids and panels, but at the same time they explore them, trying to turn away from their limitations and pushing the medium beyond the restraining limits it has when it comes to comics. Graphic novels often privilege unusual layouts, characterised by the comprehence of smaller and bigger panels, sometimes even full- or double-page panels, instead of the more classical grid made of nine same-sized panels arranged in three strips, to form visually identical pages from start to end. This emphasis on the visual storytelling dimension allows more creativity and personal expression on the part of the author, which is then combined with the attempt to foreground more individual and recognisable styles while keeping the narrative dimension given by juxtaposed images (Baetens and Frey 2015, 8–9). Moreover, graphic novels are differential texts, products existing in different material versions, none of which is the definitive one, since they usually cannot count on a predefined format or volume size in publication, opposite to what happens with comic books. Thus, the relationship between the image and the upper level (strip, page or whole book) is never fixed but always exposed to changes that may influence the perception of the final product by the audience and, accordingly, how the work in itself is received (Baetens and Frey 2015, 106–7). Finally, in opposition to the comic book's more design- and visual-oriented approach, the graphic novel's exclusive form calls for an active reader, an act of greater participation in assessing if the dominant element is to be found in the text or in the visual storytelling, together with their possible autonomy or interdependence liable to changes throughout both the creative process and the act of reading (Baetens and Frey 2015, 108, 129–30).

In the graphic novel, content matter is adult and more mature, almost too sophisticated to be interesting for a juvenile audience, as from its very start this medium has dealt with very serious issues, including the meaning of life itself (Tabachnick 2017a, 33). Moreover, graphic novels tend to be prone to realism, though not limited to it, and fit the label of "adult contemporary comics", approaching genres such as "social narratives, autobiographical stories, memories, travelogues, and even

tales about illness, not to mention literary adaptations" (García 2015, XII) in the wake of Will Eisner, the first author to label a work of his as a 'graphic novel' upon the publication of *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (1978), and to decline the theme of holocaust in comic language in *Maus* (serialised: 1980-1991), the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 (Tabachnick 2017a, 36). The creation of the term graphic novel is then subordinated to the attempt to distinguish this new form of comic – culturally engaged, dignified, and dealing with "heavier" themes – from the old one – deemed to be childish, limited to simplistic if not superficial narrations and thus not worthy of literary consideration (Tosti 2016, 12, 543). However, it is important to note that notwithstanding their association with content restrictions and children readers, albeit light-heartedly, comic books have sometimes treated important matters, even by relating them through the eyes of invented characters or superheroes (Tabachnick 2017a, 28).

Building upon their essentially narrative base, graphic novels manage to encompass the full spectrum from fiction to history, passing through memoir, intimate or journalistic reportage, and more, giving the idea of a substantial work and hence generating a greater interest in adult readers (García 2015, 153–68). The ability of the medium to capture and combine the best of both words and images, by suppressing lengthy character descriptions and showing their features and expressions instead of telling them, for example, elevates the intensity of reading, turning an experience generally thought to be prolonged in time into something that could be done in a single sitting if need be, opposite to its novel counterpart and to the comic book, which is usually serialised (Tabachnick 2017b, 2). In addition to this and in contrast with the conventions of the traditional comic book, the longer narrative calls for a more detailed character development, offers more scope for atmosphere and tension-building and generates a new kind of literature where complex narrations are addressed through the almost-simple form of sequential art, though elevated to a new status where the drawing is more curated, since the quality of the whole work is supposedly higher (Baetens and Frey 2015, 81–85).

In essence, even though the boundaries between different forms of visual art are quite blurred, the graphic novel is associated to greater cultural openness and visual sophistication (Baetens and Frey 2015, 91) and, in many cases, it shows a certain

literary subtext (specifically in the case of adaptations) or even presents itself as "the visual development of a literary text that is *completely reproduced* within the graphic novel" (Baetens 2008, 77). This idea of literariness, supported by the reappropriation for the general public of content matters that used to be addressed to specialised niches of readers, such as high literature, memoirs, history, and non-genre fiction in general, contributed to the popularity of the graphic novel as a product aimed at all kinds of non-specialist readers (García 2015, 151). Likewise, the graphic novel's status as a cultural product – dissimilar from and yet connected to the previous stance of the comic book, supported by its engaged contents, has contributed to its respectability, much higher than the one accorded to comic books (Baetens and Frey 2015, 2). In consideration of this, in the distinction between "popular visual art" and "serious visual art", comic books are still relegated to the former while the graphic novel has gained enough social privilege to be part of the latter category (Tosti 2016, 588), a statement reflected even in its other two characterising elements: its publication format and consequent production and distribution.

In compliance with its inclination to discuss heavier contents, the graphic novel tends to prefer a denser publication format and to purposefully avoid serialisation, in opposition to the flimsier comic book, hence achieving a special privilege to the book form (Baetens and Frey 2015, 13; Tosti 2016, 579). As in the case of the novel, this publication format has proven to be crucial in the process of expanded cultural acceptation of the contents enclosed and, at the same time, it contributed to the immediate visual distinction of the graphic novel from comic strips, slimmer and often interrupted by sponsored advertisements, and from picture books for children. Although similar to the traditional and to the illustrated novel in size, cover, paper, number of pages, and other elements, the text-image relationship in a graphic novel is unique and not to be compared to other formats. In fact, in contrast with picture-books for children or illustrated novels where either text or illustration are placed on a lower level than the other, a graphic novel is meant to be at once read and looked at, text and illustration working together to deliver a complex meaning reinforced by the visual form of the words – speech bubbles, onomatopoeias, symbols and special fonts included – and even by their placing inside the panel or onto the page in what could

be considered a strong tendency towards grammatextuality (Baetens and Frey 2015, 152–53).

Furthermore, this format's substantiality mirrors the open craving for prestige on the part of the graphic novel and its willingness to almost sever its association with its less serious counterpart (Baetens and Frey 2015, 13) so as to attract the preference and attention of adult readers (García 2015, 153–55). As a matter of fact, graphic novels are often accompanied by a substantial amount of paratext, including introductions, characters' presentation, "behind-the-scenes" pages and much more, or published in luxurious editions, featuring hardcovers or dust jackets, frequently presented during special signing sessions with the author(s) (Tosti 2016, 617). Opposite to regular novels, that often make use of their paratext for pedagogical purposes – i.e., prefaces, introductions, epilogues – or relegate it to the function of an embellishment as in the case of the cover, graphic novels present a visual continuity between text and paratext, with cover illustrations sharing contents with the text if not directly quoting a panel and maintaining the same grammatextuality throughout the whole book (Baetens and Frey 2015, 155).

Up until the 1980s, the supply chain of comic books and graphic novels was mostly dependent on small independent publishers' efforts (Baetens and Frey 2015, 17) and the final products were meant to be distributed at newsstands or to those few existing specialty shops. This entailed higher costs for publishers and almost no risk for the sellers, since they could return unsold copies (García 2015, 117–18), with a certain gamble on the part of publishers that, in order to avoid losing too much money in case of an unsuccessful publication, refrained from investing in projects considered too innovative or too experimental. However, partly thanks to the promise of the graphic novel, the comics industry was changing, and distribution shifted from being an exclusive prerogative of specialty shops – hence appealing only to a repeating clientele – to direct market distribution, becoming wider and extended to bookshops (Weiner 2017, 45). This expansion implied that, contrary to the generalised distribution decided by publishers and allowing returns that had been in place up to that moment, booksellers and specialty shops could choose what to order based on the clientele's interests, even though it meant being more mindful of the quantity to order as returns were not an option anymore. Such a system placed the final monetary

speculation on the seller instead of on the publisher, leading the latter to an increased willingness to experiment with formats and contents, pushing the development of new formats such as the graphic novel itself (García 118–21). Even though small independent publishers – including authors who choose to self-publish to immediately access the market – still play a great role when it comes to the general amount of titles published as graphic novels, bigger publishers have also started to show interest in such a medium and have consistently used it to bring back older, serialised stories in a new, more appealing and luxurious form in addition to the creation of new lines specifically thought for more serious contents, such as the *Vertigo* collection by Diamond Comics (DC). Then, throughout the 1990s and later into the 2000s, graphic novels grew to acquire the same social status of a novel, being considered equal in prestige to a proper book, to the point that they were even included in public library collections (Weiner 2017, 49–51). In this environment, the graphic novel was able to satisfy the public's requests for something new and, at the same time, to change how a book is received and perceived. Furthermore, it still has the added advantage of being a format that offers a better experience when held in the form of a physical copy rather than of a digital one, a stance nowadays less and less common (Weiner 2017, 51) even in the comics industry, where the comic book is now offered both in a physical and a digital form, often through specific apps or websites such as Comixology.com.

All in all, it can be said that "the graphic novel today has evolved into an exciting literary and artistic genre that is equal to any other genre of literature, art, or film in terms of its range and quality" retaining a set of unique characteristics that contribute to making it captivating to its readers' eyes (Tabachnick 2017a, 37). Moreover, when used as a medium in literary adaptations, graphic novels invite the reader to actively participate in the experience, addressing to a wider audience and providing a bridge between generations and cultural levels, filling the gaps that could have been left by the source text and expanding on characterisation, motivation, allusions, and much more, often offering alternative readings and thus stimulating the reader's return to the original text for further analysis (Bendit Saltzman 2017, 155–56), especially in the case of literary adaptations. No matter how adherent or journeying away from their source text, graphic novel adaptations underline how crucial narrative interpretation

and its role in the "meaning equation" are, almost paralleled to that of the word-image relationship (McNicol 2014, 136).

However, visual storytelling and the ability of graphic novels to showcase a meaning equation where images are not mere illustrations that could be taken out of the balance but rather contribute – alone and in their relationship with words – to the meaning of the story as much as the textual part (Baetens 2008, 80) were not always the standard. As the next paragraph will show, the path towards the ability to imagine, let alone actually produce, a graphic novel adaptation of Shakespeare's plays is a very long one, that started with an extensive tradition of illustrated plays, where images were nothing more than just an extra, a fancy accompaniment to a text already good in its own, that nonetheless paved the way to the modern-day conception of stories told through images.

3. An evolution of the illustrated Shakespeare in history

At first, Shakespeare is represented rather than imagined, resulting in a set of paintings and prints that either directly recreate a certain performance or allude to stage conventions, designs, and actions (Sillars 2019, 25). However, the illustrated Shakespeare has a long tradition that contributed to the Playwright's popularity among a more and more diverse and wide range of readers. Beginning with Rowe's illustrated plays in the 1700s, it developed in the attempt to involve also unqualified readers and, with the advent of Romanticism, Shakespeare began to be properly imagined and imbued with the illustrator's creative power. Hence, illustrations moved away from the sole purpose to complement the play and started to occupy larger spaces in printed editions, assuming a precise role in the process of reading. Consequently, the negative conception of an illustration as a mere facilitating element was set aside in favour of a more worth-oriented approach, in which the illustrated edition was considered to be something luxurious and worth sharing when having guests or even making a beautiful gift. This evolution and newly found worth of the visual medium have contributed over the years to the realisation of special illustrated editions featuring texts specifically adapted for children such as the aforementioned *Tales from Shakespeare* (Sillars 2008). Later on, imagination has gained even more importance in visual representations as it could contribute to raise children's interest in classical literature

while presenting it in an age-appropriate form as shown by the end of the nineteenth century's heavily illustrated books for children, mainly designed as gift-books, and by contemporary series such as Andrew Matthews and Tony Ross' *A Shakespeare Story*, featuring many of Shakespeare's plays – *The Merchant of Venice* included. As a matter of fact, if nowadays it is this easy to find Shakespeare's plays visually adapted into comic books or graphic novels and into children illustrated books, it is thanks to this rich visual tradition developed over the last centuries.

No matter if declined into an illustrated edition, be it historical or modern, or into a graphic novel or comic book adaptation, the process of giving Shakespeare a visual representation always presents some factors that remain unchanged in time and medium, first of all the key decision underlying every process of illustration: the choice of the scene to be represented (Sillars 2019, 22). In fact, when illustrating a play, not all scenes can be complemented by a drawing, therefore the decision of which scenes to include and which to overlook heavily influences the reading of the play, providing some kind of direction and first impression on how the play's action is going to unravel (Sillars 2019, 22). Moreover, as much as plays were not only seen by the affluents, prints were also available in both an expensive, often coloured, version and a cheaper, uncoloured one to be sold and bought individually as well as bound into illustrated editions. Hence, considering that illustrated editions – such as Bell's – often outsold scholarly ones in and outside London, it can be inferred that "for a very large proportion of the public, Shakespeare plays were experienced [not in theatres but] in print, and with illustrations", thus influencing the reception and interpretation of the play through the text-illustration combination (Sillars 2019, 4–6).

As patterns of performance develop and change, so do illustrated editions, that tend to follow the cultural frames and social customs of the period they appear in, mostly reflecting the growing tendency to perceive plays as "modes of psychological and human interaction", vicariously experienced by readers and spectators through the plays' main characters (Sillars 2019, 10). While simplicity and immediacy have always been the main feature in illustrations, this cultural change reinvented not only illustration in itself but also the vision of Shakespeare it offered to its readers (Sillars 2008, 4), causing a shift from a more dramatic to a more naturalistic representation of frontispieces and in-bound scenes, progressively leaving aside the theatrical elements

in favour of a lifelike representation. Furthermore, the discovery of new techniques of engraving, shifting from copper to wood, and later on the expansion of print implied a change not only in how many images an illustrated play could fit, but also how big they were, and in their placement on the page.

3.1 Shakespeare illustrated: the eighteenth century

The first illustrated edition to be considered is that edited by Nicholas Rowe in 1709, featuring frontispieces engraved by Elisa Kirkall after François Boitard's designs, as it marks the move from a frontispiece bearing the book's title to a new, pictorial one, "bound facing a typographic title-page", an approach that is still frequent (Sillars 2008, 25). Because of its placement, the frontispiece usually defines a key concept or event in the play and, being frequently displayed in bookseller's windows, it is also meant to entice the attention of the potential reader (Sillars 2019, 29–30). Boitard's designs for the frontispieces recall the theatrical tradition, often making use of its tips and tricks to show movement – such as an upturned chair to signal a character standing up quickly, as in *Hamlet*'s frontispiece – although transforming them into compositional elements. However, the frequent allusions to the stage are paired with some typical elements of illustration like lines and lights, showing the attempt to recreate rather than reproduce the play, making it fit for the printed medium and offering an overall different experience if compared to performances or non-illustrated editions (Sillars 2008, 6–9).

Thus, despite the presence of compositional elements like curtains alluding to the stage and the adoption of the point of view a spectator would have had in theatre, the act of illustration is essentially an alternative form to present the play rather than a proper transmediation. As a consequence, the static image produces a different effect than the performed play (Sillars 2008, 8–16), offering the reader a series of initial assumptions set in motion by the frontispiece that need to be either discarded or validated throughout the reading process. Thereafter, readers are called to make an effort in the attempt to decrypt these theatrical conventions, in order to understand their larger function and, therefore, perceive their full suggestive power. In this respect, printed media and performance evidently have two separate identities where the former is not just trying to imitate the latter but rather attempting to make the reader

aware of the deep interrelation between text and image (Sillars 2008, 38), almost originating a new level of performance (Sillars 2019, 48).

For example, in Boitard's frontispiece to *The Merchant of Venice* (fig. 1) structural and compositional elements, together with the choice of the trial scene, contribute to comment on the play. In detail, the curtain at the top suggests the idea of the stage while the characters being placed in a niche, with the Duke sitting enthroned at centre stage to immediately catch the eye and to visually represent the concept of justice, recall the figure of Solomon in paintings of the Judgement, orienting the reader towards a reading of the play focussed on the concept of justice rather than on the more recent ethnical concern with Shylock's Jewish identity or on the Victorian concern for Portia's character development (Sillars 2008, 45). It is the first time that *The Merchant of Venice* gets visual representation and the topography, so important as to be featured in the play's title, is completely set aside in favour of the emphasis on the theme of governance (Sillars 2019, 198).

FIGURE 1: François Boitard, engraved by Elisha Kirkall: Frontispiece to The Merchant of Venice *(Rowe's edition, 1709)*

Still sketching the text's trajectory in advance through the use of frontispieces is Rowe's second edition of his *Works of Shakespear*, which appeared in 1714 and featured illustrations by Louis du Guernier. Many of the designs and engravings simply reproduce Boitard's ones produced for the previous edition, numerous of them

reversed in the copying process, and some others simplified or given new settings. However, these engravings present far more naturalistic characters: a single, large change that will be reflected in the subsequent development of illustrated Shakespeare, moving from stage allusions towards narrative realism (Sillars 2008, 63–66).

Later on, in the 1740s, two more illustrated editions were issued: Lewis Theobald's, with frontispieces designed by Hubert Gravelot and engraved either by Gravelot himself or by Gerard Vandergucht, and Thomas Hanmer's, illustrated by Francis Hayman with some interferences by Gravelot, who also took on the engraving process. Theobald's edition marks a new stylistic and conceptual field for Shakespeare's illustration as it moves to newly designed images, many of which presenting scenes and events previously neglected while illustrating the same plays, thus providing its readers a fresh graphic treatment of something they were probably already acquainted with. However, opposite to Rowe's intention to provide both images and textual scholarship, the implicit assumption still underlying Theobald's edition is that images could only be included in wider market editions, meant for an audience lacking the necessary cultural education to enjoy the authentic text, as the true intellectual and aesthetical engagement with Shakespeare had to be experienced through commentary and textual annotation, rather than visually (Sillars 2008, 73–74). Notwithstanding Theobald's stance, Gravelot's touch still managed to introduce into the realm of Shakespeare the force conveyed by the elegance in line and the "plausibly lifelike stances and exchanges of [the] figures" (Sillars 2008, 75), qualities that – despite the different placements they had in regard to the text – used to belong to the world of the novel's illustrations, instigated by Gravelot himself through his works for *Pamela* and *Tom Jones*. These features contributed to bring to life the play's engagement together with the emotional and intellectual involvement of the reader (Sillars 2008, 75, 85).

The move towards stylised naturalism continues with Hanmer's edition, thanks to its character- and event-oriented stance. As a matter of fact, the twenty-three frontispieces by Hayman and Gravelot enclosed in this edition mainly focus on setting, as if the illustration were a painting rather than a stage design, accompanied by the attention toward character design and accuracy in terms of age, appearance, clothing and, lastly, by the rendition of contemporary character types, defined by details of

costume as it commonly happened with society's stratifications (Sillars 2008, 91). Albeit important because of its stance, Hanmer's edition has been received with mistrust due to its unusually big format and to its very large illustrations, that caused it to be considered less respectable than a traditional scholarly edition (Sillars 2008, 86).

As Sillars notes while analysing the evolution of the historical Shakespeare's illustrations, the genuine newness of these engravings is offered by their attempt to "present character and action as real human events", represented in settings closer to, if not contemporary with, those of the readers rather than to those of the plays they illustrate, producing an aesthetic difference with the previous tradition of illustration, tied to the text's setting and, at the same time, stressing "both the immediacy and the artifice of the form" (2008, 75). Though this tendency to naturalism serves the purpose to attract new readers in order to involve them in the interplay between visual and verbal text, qualified readers must be taken into account as well; hence, "the engraving's subtle treatment of the surroundings makes the symbolism clear for a qualified reader", dignifying once again the text and providing elements of interest for both types of audience (Sillars 2008, 78).

While for the new readers images are suggestive of events or even concerns within the play, for the qualified readers they challenge or reinforce their earlier ideas on the play (Sillars 2019, 29) not only because of the choice of scenes and their representation, but also because of the way they are bound into the editions themselves. This latter element is most evident in John Bell's two editions – commonly known as Acting and Literary editions, respectively published in 1774 and 1788 – where illustrations were often bound differently according to the buyer's preference; this caused a significant shift in the general placement of engravings in illustrated editions, together with the subsequent reading experience derived by their relationship with the text (Sillars 2008, 111). Both these editions combine notes on staging and characters provided by Francis Gentleman with scenes from the plays and, for the first time, portraits of the actors in costume; in the Acting edition, engravings were still meant to be bound as frontispieces but, being the images sold independently from the serialised issues containing the plays, purchasers started to have them bound according to their preference, either before the text – as frontispieces – or within it (Sillars 2019, 32). In

view of this, the material structure taken by the bound book becomes fundamental to cede control to the reader, who is invited to imagine the performance with the added psychological involvement produced by reading, in a new form of performativity quite distinct from that of the theatre, despite Bell's recognition of his editions' debt to the theatre and their claim to have been realised under the regulations of performance (Sillars 2019, 49–52).

After Bell's Acting edition, the placing of images within the text became the norm, to the point that Bell's Literary edition included a sheet, provided by the publishers, giving suggestions on where engravings should have been bound in order to provide the best possible reading experience. In fact, as it also happens in modern adaptations such as graphic novel ones, the placement of images highly influences the reading of the text, to the point that the word-image relation itself has been redefined accordingly. Namely, four main arrangements can be identified when analysing the binding of illustrations in Bell's editions: the first, and most straightforward one, sees the image bound opposite to the title-page, according to its frontispiece function; the second one, which is also the most common, privileges the importance given to performers over the one given to performance, in a reflection of the growing cult of celebrities, and sees the portrait and the scene corresponding to each play bound opposite to one another as a double frontispiece; the third one could be considered the proper seed of the interrelation between image and text of the play as it sees the scenes' illustrations bound as frontispieces opposite to the title-page and the actors' portraits bound opposite to their characters' lines. Finally, the fourth and last is the most suggestive one and proposes a major innovation in the text-image interrelation, thanks to portraits being bound as frontispieces and scenes being interspersed within the play, opposite to the actual happening of the event they depict (Sillars 2008, 122). Moreover, the physical placement of the images forces the readers to break the pattern of the usual left-right reading process, changing their experience of the play because of the fluid exchange between the textual and visual elements; consequently, if images are bound on the right of the text, they suggest a faster pace forward while if they are bound on the left, they slow the reading rhythm, following a slower, backwards pace (Sillars 2019, 36–37).

Bell's Literary edition in 1788 aims to be "a Shakespeare [offering] the social prestige of an edition of fine intellectual provenance at an affordable price", a way to further erase the boundaries between text, illustration and scholarly apparatus while recognising the value of the private, imaginative reading offered by the images bound within the text (Sillars 2008, 128–29). The reading experience now becomes an almost simultaneous engagement with the play through both word and image. Furthermore, while the portraits show a performance related stance, the illustrated scenes show a combination of both immediate and naturalistic images, more concerned with feelings in themselves and as a mediation of setting than those of the Acting edition, hence leading to a greater empathy in the reader, also suggested by the right-hand placement of the images within the book (Sillars 2008, 133–34, 142). Then, being the reader in control in both Bell's editions, the reading performativity is constructed individually through the accordingly redefined word-image relationship, that originates a new understanding of Shakespeare's plays, at the same time linked and detached from the theatrical one (Sillars 2019, 49, 53). Nonetheless, this stance gives way to the paradox of Bell's editions: a reading constructed in such an individual manner is simultaneously a departure from the traditional, almost national-emblem, experience of Shakespeare while it also becomes the very performance through which the greatest part of the public assimilates both Shakespeare the text and Shakespeare the cultural phenomenon (Sillars 2019, 60).

Comparably to Bell's editions, Bellamy and Robarts' illustrated edition also appeared in the 1790s, published both in serialised and single-volume form. Following the reconfiguration between reading and performance proposed by Bell, Bellamy and Robarts' edition also proposed its illustrations as bound within the text, opposite to the passage they depicted, though with a slight difference: actors' portraits disappeared to leave place to two illustrated scenes per play, thus severing one of the direct links with the theatre. Despite it being less known, this edition is still object of interest as its images – that were also sold separately – embody emotions and feelings more firmly, reflecting not only popular taste but also the underlying intent to increase the reader's emotional awareness to a before unachieved degree (Sillars 2008, 143). Lastly, between Bell's or Bellamy and Robarts' editions and the Victorian illustrated ones, illustration developed in several different ways, one of the most interesting enterprises

in this sense being *The Shakespeare Gallery* by Aldermann John Boydell, a massive collection of approximately 167 paintings specifically commissioned between the 1790s and the 1810s to the purpose of proposing an elephant illustrated folio edition containing roughly 100 large prints engraved after said paintings (Sillars 2008, 148). The intent of Boydell's edition is to be a statement of national identity and its plates reveal a considerably extended approach to the Picturesque – in its early, more general meaning of something appropriate to visual representation – not anymore limited to landscapes but also including the dominant mode of the emotional engagement. Once again, the imagining of Shakespeare is both reflecting the growing interest in feelings and guiding larger tastes, in this specific case mostly tied to wealthier people as the edition was produced as a costly and luxurious one (Sillars 2008, 181–99).

3.2 Shakespeare illustrated: the nineteenth century

As the nineteenth century develops, the performance and illustration of Shakespeare undergo significant changes, mainly driven by the willingness to be more and more realistic to provide the play with greater illusive power. The most evident variation is probably that shared by acting and portraiture: the expression of feelings through gestures and facial expressions, together with increased attention to bodily posture. These physical representations of emotional elements prove to be fundamental in the new, enlarged theatres but also in prints and paintings as they allow not only a greater involvement but an increased immediacy and thus understanding of the scene (Sillars 2019, 74–77). Moreover, all editions of this century, despite not always presenting innovations as big as the previous century's ones, reflect the changing stature of the plays in the audience's national and personal cultural life, especially considered that the larger readership of illustrated edition was still composed by those not familiar with the plays (Sillars 2008, 148–49).

In 1805, A.C. Chalmers published his illustrated edition including frontispieces designed and engraved by Henry Fuseli, "one of the most astute visual interpreters of Shakespeare" (Sillars 2019, 2); an innovator in style, allusion and narrative, Fuseli manages to take advantage of this edition's unusually elongated format to produce in his images a series of different situations ranging from conflict to enclosure or concentration (Sillars 2008, 157). At the time, this edition was praised because of

Fuseli's critical knowledge of the text, that conferred to its illustrations a certain degree of respectability and a convincing engagement despite it still relying solely on the force of frontispieces instead of interleaving illustrations within the text. This placement choice is also furthered by Charles Tilt's 1838 miniature edition, increasingly popular due to the growth of reading as an intimate experience and marketed mainly towards women and non-specialist readerships. To this purpose, it includes a glossary and a short life of Shakespeare but no notes or commentary, even though the illustrations are based on very careful and complete readings of the play, proving to be rather accurate (Sillars 2008, 161–64).

On the other hand, most of the nineteenth century illustrated editions exploit the new placement of illustrations to give them new meanings and functions, turning them into immediate reflections of the action and, sometimes, expanding on its cases or consequences (Sillars 2008, 221). An example is provided by Charles Heath's Shakespeare, first published in 1807, whose main appeal is the leisure it provides upon reading or display of such expensive and large quarto volumes. Only eleven of the included plays have any engravings, some remarkable for the moment shown while others because of their interpretive qualities, among which *The Merchant of Venice* is unusually included. Opposite to Rowe's 1709 edition, the scene's choice seems to exploit more the theme of love and money rather than that of justice; namely, the engraving represents Bassanio's reaction upon Antonio's loss of his fleet rather than a merrier moment, such as Bassanio's choice of the right casket. This particular engraving attempts to reject the earlier tradition of stereotyped gesture and to propose a more spontaneous display of feeling; however, the faint gestures almost undermine the representation, weakening the intensity of the characters' feelings (Sillars 2008, 164–65, 219).

Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare stands on four major editions: Charles Knight's *Pictorial Shakespeare* and Barry Cornwell's *The Works of Shakespeare* with Kenny Meadows' illustrations – both dated around 1838-1843 – together with the editions produced by the fusion of Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke text, illustrated by Henry Courtney Sealous or by Cassel, and Howard Staunton's one, with images by Sir John Gilbert. All of the abovementioned editions could be considered multiform constructions as they were published in serial parts, in order to attract every level of a

rapidly growing and stratifying readership, and only later bound into volumes, often with significant changes in the illustrations' placement and subsequent meaning in terms of reading experience (Sillars 2008, 253–54).

Knight's edition and Cornwell-Meadows' are radically different in terms of approach to the plays and final results, nonetheless they are both expressions of their time: the former almost being the reflection of Victorian ethics, concerned with factual knowledge opposite to the latter, showing the violent, almost corrosive half-comic, half-satiric and sensual side of the Victorian illustrations (Sillars 2008, 287–88). In detail, Knight's *Pictorial Shakespeare* displays a certain didactic zeal and aims to educate the readership, offering an imaginative though critical reading of the play through the combination of annotations meant for textual elucidations and topographically situated images intending to offer an historicised frame, almost providing evidence of the reality underlying Shakespeare's imagination (Sillars 2008, 254–57). This stance is demonstrated even in the initial page of *The Merchant of Venice* that, instead of representing a scene, a character or a place mentioned in the play, such as Rialto, offers a realistic view of Piazza San Marco (fig. 2), preferred because of its immediately recognisable symbolic value (Sillars 2016, 203).
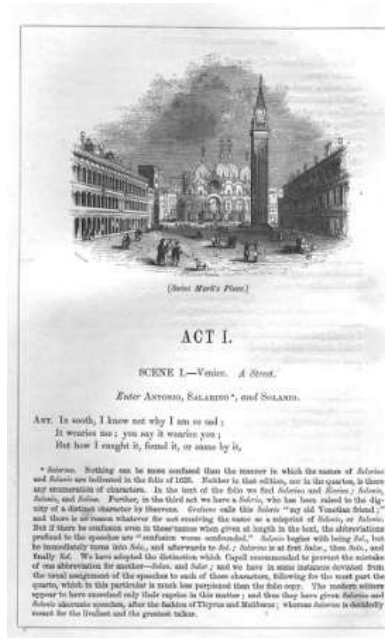
FIGURE 2: Initial page of The Merchant of Venice *from Knight's* Pictorial Shakespeare *(1838-43)*

Knight's choice not only puts the emphasis on the place over the play, but also contextualises the Venetian setting in the Victorian society, divided between the taste for exoticism and the growing importance given to material knowledge fostered by popular education (Sillars 2019, 203). Furthermore, the didactic purpose of this edition is also reinforced by the placing of illustrations – title-pages and persons represented excluded – mostly in the sections of notes, where they mainly serve a function of visual clarification or textual reference (Sillars 2008, 257).

Alongside the idea of an "English love affair with the Italian city" (Sillars 2016, 208), Knight's attention for the geography of the plays led in the subsequent years to a great reconfiguration in their visual representation not only in illustration but also in performance, especially in the case of Charles Kean's 1858 production. In fact, Kean stages *The Merchant of Venice*'s opening in a stage reproduction of Piazza San Marco, openly citing Knight's edition as his source, and uses the Shakespearean text as a point of departure to represent Venice through the use of practicable buildings, bridges and canals, complete with real gondolas and water. All these scenic elements were enlivened on stage by the play's characters, as seen in a surviving engraving representing Jessica and Lorenzo's elopement published in the *Illustrated London News* of 7 August 1858 (fig. 3), in a depiction of what the English thought to be the average Venetian life (Sillars 2016, 209–11).
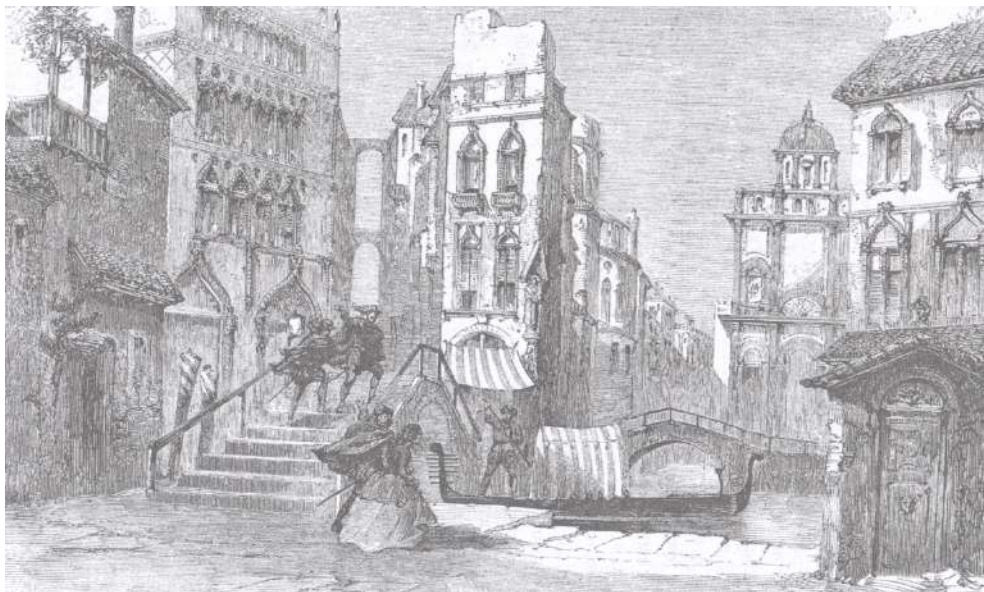
FIGURE 3: Unsigned engraving of a scene from Charles Kean's production of The Merchant of Venice *(1858)*

Opposite to Knight's topographical pursue of the plays, the Cornwell-Meadow edition approaches them through characters, often with the use of exaggeration and almost caricatural figures. Due to Meadows' eccentricity, his images are more static and prone to the use of emblems, immediately decoded by the reader, to suggest the unfolding of the play, resting on compositional elements or half-seen characters behind barriers such as doors. Furthermore, in a complex amalgam of the sinister, the freakish and the comic, darker element are often countered by comical ones, resulting in a tendency to a grotesque use of the visual form to the purpose of moral enquiry (Sillars 2008, 272–82, 287–89).

The editions produced by the Cowden Clarkes with Sealous' images and by Staunton with Gilbert's illustrations approach the plays rather differently, including a large number of illustrations fully integrated within the page design, thanks to their larger formats. Though in markedly different ways, both these editions offer an immediate and invigorating experience of the plays thanks to the integration of text and image, aided by the progresses in both technique and stance of illustration, now available through wood engravings that allowed placement within the page together with the text, allowing a greater involvement on the readers' part, opposite to the previous copper engraving that required a whole page to itself as it could not be fitted in the press machine (Sillars 2015; 2008, 323). The most effective in this regard is the Staunton-Gilbert edition, whose positioning of the images propels the action while also suggesting a critical reading as the large page-format invites to an unhurried reading, balanced by the distribution of the text in two columns and the absence of footnotes for the achievement of the perfect balance between the moving along of the events and the possible holding back of the attention caused by the image. Furthermore, for the first time, colour plates were included as frontispieces in the Library edition of 1873-75, complementing the contemporary aesthetics typical of the Victorian imagery and designs, also evident in the already present wood engravings by Gilbert (Sillars 2008, 292–313).

On the other hand, while Gilbert's work could be associated to the idea of pictorial journalism, Sealous' illustrations are more concerned with "the emotional choreography of the period" and thus with locating the characters and the events within it. Similarly, *Cassell's Illustrated Shakespeare* relying on the same text produced by

the Cowden Clarkes, tends to move the plays it treats into the emotional landscape of the Victorian society and novel, being particularly concerned with touching situations such as marital complexities. The Cassell volume follows a scheme of illustration for every play, including nine to twelve images each, generally accompanied by a caption; however, differently from the other editions taken into account, images are distanced from the text as they occur a page or more further than the event they depict, causing a number of problems for the readership as, if they appear before the event they create a double narrative while if they appear after it they slow down the reading process, resulting to be way less effective than the Staunton-Gilbert approach (Sillars 2008, 289–92) that became by far the most familiar one to the wider part of the public (Sillars 2015, 216–127).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the trend was closer to the idea of illustrated magazine rather than to that of a complete illustrated edition of Shakespeare, a form that had effectively run its course. As a matter of fact, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, narrative representation has displaced its primary modality from emblematic encryption to simplicity and naturalism, evolving according to the tastes and needs of its public (Sillars 2019, 10). This development led to a different process in scene selection and illustration as much as in their placement, moving from frontispieces representing individual episodes to a variety of different scenes placed within the text in a sort of embryonal visual narrative system, culminating in the creation of a true reading performance. In detail, it has been shown in this Paragraph how the rhythm of images can direct the tempo of the narration, at times halting the reading process but also accelerating the move towards the climax if need be. In the end, it might be easy to overlook the aesthetic value of the illustrations, but it is a fundamental element that contributes to the different approach to the play not only between those who look at it afresh and those already familiar with it, but also between people more or less acquainted with a certain visual style, as it may catch attention or go unnoticed, heavily influencing the critical reading of the text they complement (Sillars 2008, 334–41).

4. Illustrious illustrated Playwright: from children books to graphic novels

Despite the exhaustion of the collected illustrated plays tradition, illustration never ceased to be one of the major features in the expansion of the Shakespeare franchise; this, together with the new developments in colour printing, led to the appearance of a fairly new form of Shakespeare publishing: "the single-play, heavily illustrated gift book", clearly addressed to child readers (Sillars 2015, 217). Despite being realised to attract younger readerships, this editions are usually richly produced and heavily illustrated, making for the perfect gift-book appreciated both by its recipients and their parents; moreover, the adult reader is also taken into account, often thinking of a parent reading the book above their child's shoulder, proving to be far more than a mere gift-books through the choice of illustrations that frequently make significant statements on the play's workings instead of simply complementing it (Sillars 2015, 218).

The physical form of this type of books introduces a new ceremonial quality to the reading process as illustrations are printed separately, "tipped in to a page of slightly stiffer stock and covered by a semi-transparent sheet of tissue or galassine" (Sillars 2015, 219) that needs to be turned for the image below to be seen, thus enhancing the reader's expectations and the pleasure upon its reveal. Once more, text and image work closely in the progression of the story, the rhythm with which the images occur altering the reading pace as they are rarely close to the scene they depict, being more frequently positioned a few pages before the actual happening of the event. These books offered such a new and unique experience of the plays, livened by the variety of approaches to the illustration style reflecting the dynamism of the English art of the period, that they soon became a specialised niche of illustrated Shakespeare publishing, calling to them any sort of artist, including renowned ones such as Arthur Rackham, an established water-colourist who was the first to have his designs reproduced this way (Sillars 2015, 218–19). Namely, Rackham's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with forty colour plates and several line drawings, was published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1908, immediately redefining Shakespeare illustration and serving as a model for the subsequent publications of this type. Rackham's illustrations, due to his career and to the target audience, approached the text at a character and event level more than at a language one, with the fairy world dominating as evident from the frontispiece itself; however, the edition's quality appealed to adult

and mature tastes as well, a choice that combined with the cost – not excessive though not even cheap – established this type of books in the market as something appropriate for an indulgent Christmas or birthday present (Sillars 2015, 220–23).

Every volume belonging to this specialised niche approaches the play it illustrates in a different way: some keeping close to the fairy-tale tradition, some others steering away from it in a move towards a more serious and critical reading, some others simply reflecting the artistic taste of the period. Despite having been fairly short-lived, this tradition has produced some of the most visually striking interpretations of Shakespeare's plays, among which the most remarkable is undeniably James Linton's *The Merchant of Venice*, published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1909. While at first Linton's designs might seem characterised by an apparent conservatism underlying the historical accuracy in costumes and the intricacy in the key-motif patterns, together with the rich-in-colour, almost pre-Raphaelite designs focusing either on a single character or a small group, they actually suggest a certain exoticism and a most careful approach to the play from the very start. The frontispiece to the play (fig. 4) depicts Shylock and Jessica, showing first of all the human interaction between them, furthered by their family likeness and postures suggesting a certain familial relationship, underlining the key theme of the father-daughter dynamic, though anticipating its disruption through the lack of eye contact. Such a frontispiece offers the new reader a motive to proceed with the reading, a sense of uncertainty supposed to stimulate the willingness to know how the events are going to unravel, while for the familiar one it offers a new insight into the play, often reduced to its theme of justice or to the comedy of the riddle, departure and elopement (Sillars 2015, 232–33).

FIGURE 4: Frontispiece to The Merchant of Venice *by James Linton (Hodder and Stoughton, 1908)*

Furthermore, a distract reading of the final image could suggest a happy ending although to the careful eye it appears evident that this is not a wedding feast (fig. 5). In this illustration, several typically Victorian concerns can be retraced, starting with the women's submissiveness in performing their wifely duties, together with a general uneasiness in the characters that suggest a grim, dark supper more than a happy weeding celebration (Sillars 2015, 234–36).

FIGURE 5: Final illustration of The Merchant of Venice *by James Linton (Hodder and Stoughton, 1908)*

Short-lived but well-received, the tradition of the single-play, heavily illustrated children gift-book provided the necessary push for the Shakespeare industry to seek new media for its expansion. Then, gradually, the novelisation of Shakespeare extends from novels, illustrated children books – both in colours and in black and white such as Andrew Matthews and Tony Ross' *A Shakespeare Story* – and filmic transpositions to the field of sequential visual art, including comic books and graphic novels. This shift bestows upon the image an enhanced and improved role: producing meaning and telling a story; hence, comic books and graphic novels are entirely different from the illustrated picture books as in the former two the image is an essential element, playing a fundamental part in the telling of the story than unravels thanks to the iconic dimension and to its relationship with the text rather than being just supplementary to the text as in the case of illustrations (Labio 2011, 125; McNicol 2014, 137). Thus, sequential art is driven by imagery rather being complemented by it and its rhythm and dynamism mark a natural connection to verses (Thomas 2011, 196) proving to be the perfect medium to adapt theatrical plays such as Shakespeare's ones. Then, the graphic novel is yet another medium to tell a story, whose specific format, entailing a

collaboration between textual and visual adapter as well as between the text and the readers themselves (Thomas 2011, 194–95), results appealing even to the most reluctant readers, providing an alternative tool to draw them to the pleasures of classical literature that could otherwise be considered off-putting (McNicol 2014).

The rise of the Shakespearean comic book starts with the American *Classics Illustrated* series, published by Albert Kanter from 1941 onwards, and continues with other collections such as the *Oval Projects*, English full-length adaptations of Shakespeare in several different visual styles published in the 1980s, and the *Pendulum Illustrated Stories* by Pendulum Press, an American publisher who in the 1990s decided to illustrate some classical literature titles, including eight of Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* included. From this moment onwards, Shakespeare's novelisation sees a huge expansion in the graphic novel field with many publishers deciding to produce specific collections meant to adapt the Playwright's works, taking up and extending the conversion of such works to a visual form, that begun through films, while allowing a more expressionistic visual style and a fuller control of visualisation thanks to the absence of actors to work with, opposite to their filmic counterparts (Lanier 2010, 110).

When it comes to more recent graphic novels, one of the most well-known series is *Manga Shakespeare* by the English publisher Self-Made Hero. This collection is well respected among educational circles as it was developed alongside Shakespeare academics and rather popular in class, also thanks to the publisher's website offering additional teaching resources (Manga Shakespeare by Self-Made Hero 2022; McNicol 2014, 139). Furthermore, despite the setting update and the process of 'mangafication', entailing an assimilation of the typical manga conventions and visual styles and the adoption of an Asian-like perspective if not even setting (Lanier 2010, 112), this collection proves to be rather faithful to the source text even though slightly abridging it to make it fit for the size and main features of the graphic novel medium.

Similarly, the English *Classical Comics* series proves to be a very effective tool to teach Shakespeare in class, being specifically thought in order to overcome reluctance to reading and to be used for educational purposes alongside the paired teaching materials. However, even though the visual narrative remains stable, these volumes are realised in three different text versions: original, or the complete,

unabridged Shakespeare text, plain, or a sort of translation into modern language of the complete script, and quick, featuring reduced and simplified dialogues to appeal younger readers as well (Classical Comics 2022). This approach reverses the relationship between performance and text as it is usually the latter one to change, though in the *Classical Comics* the visual narrative remains unchanged while the three texts differ from one another; hence, the authority of Shakespeare's verses is subsequently redesigned, offering a greater role to the images in the configuration of meaning while almost reducing Shakespearean language to a stylistic option instead of retaining its usual function of primary source of narrative (Lanier 2010, 111). Furthermore, opposite to *Manga Shakespeare*, that aimed to universalise the form and potential of manga combining it to the power of English as the global lingua franca, *Classical Comics* opts for a period take on the performance, avoiding the common practice to resituate Shakespeare in a different context or setting (Lanier 2010, 110).

Several other publishers have taken on the idea of adapting Shakespeare's plays into graphic novels, bringing to life collections such as *Shakespeare Graphics* by Capstone Press – a series of hardcover graphic novels now also available in interactive options, *Shakespeare: the Manga Edition* by Wiley Publishing – offering a black and white, distinctive eastern interpretation, combined with period setting and abridged text, *No Fear Graphic Shakespeare* by Scholastic and *Saddleback's Illustrated Classics*, including some Shakespeare's plays, by Saddleback Educational Publishing in the United States, who claims to turn classics into something easy and interesting to read at all levels through age-appropriate contents and a variety of styles (Saddleback Educational Publishing 2022). Similarly, in the United Kingdom it is possible to find publications such as the *Shakespeare Comic Book series*, created by Simon Greaves, and the *Graphic Shakespeare* series by Can of Worms Publishing. Furthermore, the *Campfire Classics* by Campfire Graphic Novels, an award-winning publisher, is printed in New Delhi, India, but is distributed worldwide – especially in Europe, North America and South-East Asia. Analogously to *Manga Shakespeare* and *Classical Comics*, this specific edition of Shakespeare's plays is also tailored for classroom use and recommended by Indian schoolboards (Campfire Graphic Novels 2022).

Lastly, this field has proven fertile ground not only for bigger publishers but also for independent authors realising such adaptations, in a reciprocal act of legitimisation

where Shakespeare offers the graphic novel format an opportunity to prove its capacities to handle serious literary material while they bring the Playwright closer to the demands of youth culture, in a recalibration of his cultural authority fit to the needs of the educational as well as to the leisure market (Lanier 2010, 112). The most famous short series of independent publications in this respect is certainly that by Gareth Hinds, an American author whose version of *The Merchant of Venice*, published in 2008 and set in the contemporary business world of Venice, offering a simple yet stylish adaptation of the original play, will be thoroughly analysed in the next Chapters. In addition to this play, Hinds also produced and published his own adaptations of *King Lear* in 2009, *Romeo and* Juliet in 2013 and *Macbeth* in 2015.

The increasing number of comic book and graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare plays should then be unsurprising considered how these forms of visual storytelling have carved themselves a fundamental place in the reading preferences of both younger and adult audiences. In fact, graphic novel adaptations are often seen as an engaging and accessible medium for people to approach the linguistic complexities of Shakespeare through a more immediate form of storytelling that engages the reader in a process that does much more for the original text than just simplifying it in order to make it more attractive to reluctant audiences. Aiming to uphold this line of thought, the next Chapters will provide a synoptical analysis of three different graphic novel editions of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* – the *Manga Shakespeare*, the *Campfire Classics* and Gareth Hinds' version – not only to prove that they are derivations with their own value as texts instead of simply being derivative, but also to show how different approaches to the same verses, language and scenes can completely change the perception of the play in itself together with the representation of its main themes and characters.

CHAPTER TWO

Envisioning *The Merchant of Venice* for the graphic novel

Introduction

Written around 1596-97 and first published as a Quarto in 1600, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* could be considered a sort of adaptation, if not appropriation, of *Il Pecorone*, an Italian novella by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino dating back to 1378. It is thought that Shakespeare got to know Fiorentino's work thanks to a later reworking by Antonio degli Antoni, first published in Italian in 1558, that provided him with the general plotline and the main characters for his *Merchant* (Perocco 2016, 38). Notably, Shakespeare made a number of variations not only in the names of the characters, with Ansaldo – the merchant – becoming Antonio and the nameless Jewish moneylender assuming Shylock's identity, but also in the general context of the play, to provide it with a more credible Venetian setting, seeing that since 1516 Jews were allowed to live in Venice's newly instituted Ghetto instead of being forced to live on the mainland (Bassi and Chillington Rutter 2021, 11).

The Merchant of Venice opens on Antonio's unexplainable melancholy and on his friend Bassanio's subsequent request to lend him three thousand ducats so that he could fund his journey to Belmont in order to try his luck to win the fair – and richly left – Portia, lady of the island. Namely, the heiress is bound by the will of her late father to marry only the suitor who, presented with three caskets – a gold a silver and a lead one, will choose the chest containing her portrait thus delivering him her hand and all her fortune. However, since Antonio's whole is fortune invested in his argosies currently at sea, the merchant has to turn to Shylock, the Jewish moneylender, for help despite his hate for usurers and the antisemitic behaviours he had previously kept towards the Jew. Notwithstanding the ancient grudge between the two, Shylock agrees to provide Antonio with the requested sum for three months, even though he asks for a very unusual security: the money will be lent with no interest rate but, were the bond to be forfeited, the Jew will have a pound of the merchant's flesh.

Meanwhile, Shylock's daughter Jessica schemes to flee from her father's house bringing with her his money and her mother Leah's ring. Taking advantage of the masque and of the subsequent confusion, Jessica disguises herself as a boy and elopes

with her future husband Lorenzo, a Christian friend of Antonio. Rumours of shipwreck start circulating around Venice and Shylock, whose want for revenge against Christians is now embittered by his daughter's betrayal, rejoices at the idea of seeing a bankrupt Antonio bound to pay his debt with flesh. In the meantime, after many suitors failed the casket test, Bassanio reaches Belmont and manages to choose the right casket, the lead one, therefore obtaining the chance to marry Portia. Yet, celebrations are cut short by the arrival of Lorenzo and Jessica, bringing with them news that Antonio is bankrupt and thus his life is in great danger.

Provided by Portia with twice the sum Antonio owed to the Jew, Bassanio sails at once for Venice in the attempt to save his friend's life. However, no plea or monetary offer can persuade Shylock to give up his bond. The contract is legally binding, thus not even the Duke of Venice, who is presiding over the trial, can stop Shylock; Antonio seems to be doomed but a legal expert comes in. The 'learned doctor', that goes by the name of Balthazar, is none other than Portia herself who, disguised as a man, came to use her wit in Antonio's aid. At first the contract seems to be in Shylock's favour but, since it makes no mention of blood, its literal interpretation prevents the Jew to collect his due. Proven that Shylock was attempting at the life of a Venetian citizen, he is condemned as per the Venetian law; however, the Duke spares the Jew's life and only takes a fine instead of half his possessions. Similarly, Antonio foregoes his other half of Shylock's fortune but obtains from him a forced conversion to Christianity and that his entire estate will be left to Jessica and Lorenzo upon his death. After the trial, Portia returns to Belmont where she is later joined by Bassanio and Antonio; she confesses her disguise, used to save the merchant's life, and brings him good news of some of his ships having made it back safely, together with the news of Jessica and Lorenzo's new inheritance.

"Is this a comedy, a tragedy, or something else entirely? *The Merchant of Venice* is an enigma that seems to evade any kind of definitive discourse" (Hatchuel and Vienne-Guerrin 2021, 1) and continues to raise questions in regard to its treatment of topics such as racial otherness and antisemitism, that could be interpreted very differently by a modern reader or spectator, especially in the wake of the Holocaust (M. L. Kaplan 2020, 1). It could be said that it is first and foremost a romantic play, as it shows love winning over hatred and evil, ending happily with three different

marriages: Lorenzo and Jessica's, Bassanio and Portia's, and Gratiano and Nerissa's. On top of that, the *Merchant* mostly relies on the characteristics of comedy such as the action revolving around a group of characters rather than a single one, the typical use of disguise, mockery and, of course, the lack of deaths on or off stage (Stelling 2021, 199), even though Shylock's forced conversion could be seen as some sort of metaphorical death (Cartwright 2016, 168). Intriguing because of its structure and themes, the *Merchant* proves to be one of Shakespeare's "most distinctly global and topical works", especially in its representation of Venice (Tosi and Bassi 2016), proving once more that his works are suitable to all times, perfect material for the ongoing process of literary adaptation (Marsden 1991a, 1) and appropriation, and still mined for what they can tell about the reality of Shakespeare's times if not of his imagination (Orgel 2003, 37). Moreover, the interest in this process is further enhanced with the advent of visual media such as the graphic novel, as Shakespeare's plays were always conceived to be seen rather than read as scripts (Orgel 2003, 1) and this particular medium allows the reader to experience a type of visual imagination and interaction with the author very similar to those put in place by playgoers.

1. *The Merchant of Venice* in graphic novels: a macroscopical analysis

Even if when adapting a literary work fidelity is most often the adapter's acknowledged strategy (Fedderson and Richardson 2014, 212), when the destination medium is the graphic novel fidelity might need to be subordinated to the medium's imperative needs. Namely, space becomes an issue as graphic novels tend to have a reduced number of pages – usually around the mark of one-hundred, one-hundred and fifty – that must accommodate images as well as the original or adapted text. Commonly, Shakespeare's words are accordingly cut or reworked in shorter blocks to make them fit into the balloons while leaving enough place on the panel for the image with which it should have a dialogical relationship. In order to demonstrate that graphic novel adaptations can provide a bridge between the current preference for visual storytelling and classical, culturally loaded literary works this Chapter will provide a macroscopic synoptical analysis of three almost contemporary graphic novel versions of *The Merchant of Venice*. Technical and visual aspects will be examined, together with their interrelation with the verbal ones, focussing on how this image-text

collaboration either enhances or softens, almost blurring, some of the play's characteristics.

Gareth Hinds' *The Merchant of Venice* was first published in 2008 thanks to his collaboration with Candlewick Press in Somerville, Massachusetts; here the author assumed both the role of illustrator and of textual adaptor, clearly presenting his work as a graphic novel adaptation, whose nature is stated right on the cover page. Aimed mainly at adult readers, this eighty-pages long graphic novel is available both in a hardback edition and in a paperback one, which will be studied throughout this thesis. The slim book format features a subtle, grayscale cover page (fig. 6) representing a hand opening a casket, a frame that the knowing reader can immediately relate to Bassanio opening the lead casket but that is a little less intuitive for someone approaching the play for the first time, at least until the exact same frame is repurposed in the form of a panel on page 30. Since the physical appearance of a book is as important as its content when it comes to its status as literature (Kidnie 2009, 12), in line with the intended target, this edition gives an almost classy feel thanks to the slightly embossed title, enclosed in the frame that will later on contain Portia's image, together with the internal cover flaps and the heavy, glossy paper. The paratext is minimal if compared to the other adaptations that will be examined, mainly consisting in a Venice's double splash-page map proposed both at the beginning and at the end of the book, the dramatis personae page – composed by small square tiles portraying the characters, side by side to their names and role, and the final author's note and acknowledgements.

FIGURE 6: Cover page of Gareth Hinds' The Merchant of Venice *graphic novel adaptation (2008)*

The *Manga Shakespeare* edition of *The Merchant of Venice* was first published in 2009, then reprinted in 2019, in London by Self-Made Hero and encloses the work of Richard Appignanesi, the textual adapter, accompanied and complemented by Faye Yong's illustrations. Meant to be appealing for young and young adult readers, especially students, this edition's format recalls the traditional Japanese *tankōbon*, typically used for manga, even though slightly larger in size and thicker, thanks to its 207 pages. Even though lacking a dust jacket – and therefore appearing as a seemingly cheaper edition, at least to the eyes of the habitual manga reader – the volume presents good quality paper and print, with opaque pages that hold well the blackness of the ink. The paperback cover page is in colours and immediately attracts the reader's attention thanks to the opposition of warm, golden yellow tones and darker, black and purple ones; namely, on the left there is a close-up portrait of Shylock, characterized by dark tones and a grim facial expression, in heavy contrast with the dreamier atmosphere surrounding the half-body representations of Antonio, Bassanio and Portia on the right, complete with Venice in the background (fig. 7). Furthermore, following the genre conventions of manga, the paratext is here given more importance, with nine full-colour pages used to present the characters, immersed in the play's setting. These very detailed, full-figure portraits and the direct quotes of Shakespeare's verses accompanying them, provide the readers with the tools to better distinguish the characters while instilling a preliminary curiosity for the relationships they have with each other. Additionally, the last three pages are used to respectively provide a plot summary for the play, a brief bibliography of Shakespeare, and a word on the authors of the adaptation.

FIGURE 7: Left to right: cover page of The Merchant of Venice *graphic novel adaptations by* Manga Shakespeare *and* Campfire Classics *(2019 reprints)*

Lastly, the *Campfire Classics* graphic novel adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* represents a sort of middle-ground, positioning itself mid-way between the two aforementioned editions. First published in 2011 and reprinted in 2019 in New Delhi by the Graphic Novels imprint of Campfire, it is adapted by John McDonald, illustrated by Vinod Kumar and coloured by C. K. Anil. Overtly targeted at students and younger readers, it positions itself on the same segment of the market as the *Manga Shakespeare* edition; however, it resembles in presentation to Hinds' work as, not only they are both eighty-pages long, but they also both rely on a format that reminds of the American comic book. Upon a direct comparison, the *Campfire Classics* edition stands out as less sophisticated but more appealing to a younger audience thanks to the full-colour cover page, presenting a portrait of Shylock's half-face, once again grim, very contrasted and almost alive due to the positioning on the page's margin, akin to *Manga Shakespeare*'s cover. Shylock here is wearing a red hat that contrasts with the heavy grey clouds over the sea on the left of the page, that opens on the sight of one of Antonio's argosies leaving the dock (fig. 7). The paratext, as in *Manga Shakespeare*, is aimed at people approaching the play for the first time and therefore presents the reader with a single page enclosing the full-body portraits of the four main characters for better understanding. At the end of the play, a page is left for Shakespeare to come back to life and tell the reader something about his biography through comics, followed by two pages of riddles unrelated to the play and a double splash-page advertising other Campfire works, both included or not in the Shakespeare Collection.

1.1 The role of colour in the reading experience

"Colour can be a formidable ally for artist in any visual medium" as it sets the dominant mood and enhances the feelings and emotions conveyed by both words and illustrations, while at once capturing the reader's attention by adding depth to any panel (McCloud 1999, 185, 190). However, in the world of comic books and graphic novels, colour hasn't always been used to its full potential, be it for technological, economic, or market issues. Through the comparison of the three different products taken into analysis, it will be argued that the difference between black-and-white or grayscale and colour comics is profound and greatly influences the reader's experience not only in details but also on a more general level (McCloud 1999, 192).

Gareth Hinds chooses a realistic art-style, drawing his characters from a live cast of models and his backgrounds on location in Venice, and pairs it with the use of cool grayscale tones intensified by the use of shadows and points of light. Moreover, the use of grey is extended to deliver the passage of time, rendered with a sort of colour veil bleeding over the whole page – including the usually white external border around the panels' frames – to discriminate between scenes happening in different moments of the day.

FIGURE 8: Use of colour to signal the passage of time in Hinds' The Merchant of Venice. *Left to right: day (p. 2), evening (p.5), and night (p. 14)*

Specifically, as shown in fig. 8, the traditional white page is kept for events happening during daytime, a mélange grey tone is used for scenes occurring at dawn and in the evening, while a flat grey with a blue-green undertone identifies the actions taking place at night. However, even if the use of different tones and shades of grey provides an element of distinction between scenes, it softens the contrast between characters and backgrounds thus reducing the potential dynamism of the narration and resulting in a less engaging experience for the reader.

On the other hand, according to the format and target of the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, Faye Yong illustrates *The Merchant of Venice* in black-and-white, heavily relying on halftone screens (fig. 9), with the only exceptions of the initial character and setting presentation pages which are in colours. This technique consists in enhancing the shading through the use of tiny dots and is most often used in Japanese

shōjo manga – those revolving around romance – in order to create a stronger distinction between foreground, middle ground, and background but mostly to graphically convey the characters' deepest emotions, their inner thoughts, and personalities (McCloud 2021a, 697).

FIGURE 9: Use of halftone screens in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation of* The Merchant of Venice. *Left to right: pp. 40, 68, 71, 91*

Especially common is the use of black to underline evil thoughts or actions, marked shadows to highlight the difference between planes or white star-like shapes to simulate light rays and to emphasise happier moments. The result is a very lively and dynamic narrative that keeps the readers hooked to the page thanks to the stark contrast created by the opposition between deep blacks, glaring whites, and halftones giving body to the scene and keeping the action going. Even though all of these choices take away from the images' realistic power, they still allow the illustrations to complement the play's words in a process of "amplification through simplification" (McCloud 1999, 30). In fact, stripping down the image to its essential meaning allows the illustrator to focus only on those specific details that favour the intended reading, thus guiding the readers through the plot and accentuating to their eyes any important change.

Lastly, the *Campfire Classics* adaptation is a full-colour graphic novel where Anil's colours grant a higher expressive power to the images created by Vinod Kumar, intensifying the narrative plot as well as the visual storytelling. In this volume, colours provide information about the characters, helping the reader to distinguish them and to better follow their adventures through the use of differently coloured clothes. The

passage of time is achieved through the colour changing sky, according to the moment in which the action is taking place, that clearly differentiates scenes happening during the day from those happening at night (fig. 10).

FIGURE 10: Use of colour to enhance the passage of time and to clarify the reading flow in the Campfire Classics *adaptation of* The Merchant of Venice*. Left to right: day (p. 5), memories (p. 13), night (p. 22), and dawn (p. 68)*

Opposite to what happens in Hinds' version, the gutter and the external border of the page remain white, even when the idea of dawn is rendered through the desaturation of all colours with the addition of a sort of purple-blue coat over every object and person, mirroring the concept of moonlight at the nearing of dawn. Moreover, colours here also help readers better understand the actions' flow, therefore achieving the highest possible level of clarity (McCloud 1999, 192), thanks to the use of a different colour palette for panels representing events happened in the past, such as Bassanio's arrow-story or the foibles of Portia's suitors. Namely, while the whole graphic novel uses saturated colours enhanced by shades and touches of light, when the characters are recalling something happened in the past – off-scene, before the beginning of the actual play – colours are limited to different hues of dove grey, as to visually represent the concept of a memory rather than an actual event (fig. 10). In sum, even if upon a first glance the use of highly saturated colours, both in warm and cooler tones, could be considered distracting, it actually reinforces the reader's engagement to the play, strengthening the sense of place through the use of different colour palettes for different settings and moments of the day while suggesting a more involved perception of the events.

1.2 Structure as a tool to convey meaning: panels, strips and pages

The identity of a dramatic work of art, such as *The Merchant of Venice,* is continuously reconfigured in relation to the interpretative response of its readers and spectators; correspondingly, the graphic novel's potential as a literary work consists of the combination of words' meaning with the page's visual effect, joint with the reader's experience and consequent reaction to the finished product (Kidnie 2009, 12, 32). Hence, writing and illustrating a graphic novel, even in the case of an adaptation, entails a process of selection of the moments to present to the reader and of the most suitable structure, angle, and setting to complement the plot and guide the reader through it, paying particular attention to clarity, persuasion and intensity (McCloud 2021a, 492). In comic books and graphic novels, time and space are indissociable dimensions (Groensteen 2013, 12); consequently, the flow of uninterrupted images – if not for the gutter – produces meaning both in space and time, where the latter is marked by the rhythm obtained thanks to the page's division in panels and strips, a multi-frame structure meant to create specific responses in relation to the chosen spatial configuration (Groensteen 2013, 34).

Graphic novels rely on the same structural elements and anthropocentric narrative scheme of comic books, a structure that sees the same human figure – usually the protagonist – moving across the different sections of the page while performing different actions, in order to tell a story (Groensteen 2013, 36). From general to particular, the comic book page is then divided into strips or tiers, composed by juxtaposed panels. Panels perform the same function of a picture frame: usually square or rectangular – even though irregular and more unusual shapes can be found, especially to answer the need of expressing peculiar concepts – they are meant to limit space and time, containing the image in a pre-set position on the page. While panels fracture time and place giving a staccato rhythm to the narration, the gutter – or the blank space in between panels representing the passage of time – plays much of the magic of a comic book page. In fact, the gutter stimulates the reader's imagination and puts in place a process called closure, during which separate moments and actions, at first seen as a multitude of parts on the page, become connected and are thus perceived as a continuous reality and a unified whole (McCloud 1999, 63–67). Closure is what

gives agency to the readers, fostering an intimate and collaborative relationship between them and the graphic novel's creators (McCloud 2021b, 263).

In Hinds' *Merchant* the gutter is completely absent, panels are framed by a very thin black border but there is no blank space between them, thus giving the impression of a very fast, almost agitated rhythm and taking away much of the reader's agency in connecting the panels. The author prefers to use a small number of panels per page, usually five or less, generally organised in not more than three strips, with one occasionally being composed by a single landscape panel stretching across the whole width of the page – as per the graphic novel general convention (Groensteen 2013, 45). This structure is then discarded in the representation of the more distressing scenes in the play, such as the trial scene (Act 4, Scene 1) where a higher number of smaller panels is used to express not only anguish but also the approaching of the play's climax, creating a quicker ostinato rhythm and capturing the reader's attention thanks to a different layout, that almost stands out as irregular because of its different structure from the rest of the play (Groensteen 2013, 139, 148). All Hinds' panels present a regular square or rectangular shape and, with the exception of a couple of landscape panels and of the single, full-page panel dedicated to Bassanio's choice of the lead casket, the graphic novel lacks spectacular devices such as splash-pages, panels depicting characters or objects breaking through the fourth wall, or other destabilising elements. Furthermore, the majority of panels makes use of a mid-distance framing, placing the focus on the contents rather than on the setting or on the illustration's details (McCloud 2021a, 502).

Even though less entertaining than other adaptations that make us of sensational devices, such as the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, the constant rhythm and the absence of irregular elements provides a reading experience almost free of complications, adhering to the unwritten agreement between author and reader stating that a comic book page should be read following the Z-path: left to right and top to bottom (McCloud 2021a, 514–16). Considering the regular form of the panels, another way to give dynamism to the narration consists in working with different types of panel-to-panel transitions; in the case of Hinds' work, the prevalent types are the action-to-action transitions – showing a single subject in a series of actions (McCloud 1999, 70) – and the moment-to-moment transitions – depicting a single action in more than one

panel in order to slow down the rhythm (McCloud 2021a, 493); some aspect-to-aspect transitions allow minor details to sink in and to catch breath when the narration needs a more relaxed pace (McCloud 2021a, 498).

Opposite to Hinds' regularity, the *Manga Shakespeare* edition features an extremely varied array of panels in an irregular alternance of open-frame, closed-frame, and borderless ones. Embracing the Asian conventions typical of the manga, even though still relying on the Z-path reading pattern instead of the traditional eastern right-to-left mode, Faye Yong makes frequent use of sensational elements meant to bestow a certain vitality upon her characters and her representation of Shakespeare's plot. Namely, the use of borderless panels bleeding into a destructured hyperframe and off the page or characters and inanimate elements bleeding out of the panel's frame into the gutter create a marked dynamism that keeps the reader entertained thanks to the constant variation in rhythm (McCloud 2021a, 644–45). This style, that Groensteen defined as neo-baroque, has the tendency to deploy "a whole arsenal of unsystematic effects" (2013, 46) resulting in a more sensational reading experience than its classical, non-ostentatious counterpart to be found in Hinds' work. Despite panels being mostly framed by a conventional straight line, they present an absolutely irregular disposition, and no page exhibits the typical grid-structure of a western or American graphic novel; rather, they are disposed in relation to their contents and of the message they have to convey. As an example, panels disposed in a descending diagonal line usually represent an action in progress, hence giving the impression of the time it takes for it to be complete (fig. 11).

FIGURE 11: Use of an irregular layout in the representation of Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo
*(*Manga Shakespeare*, pp. 74-75)*

As a consequence, readers feel involved thanks to the solid process of closure this disposition entails, almost as if they were living the plot together with the characters (McCloud 1999, 63–66, 69). Matching the variety in panels' shapes and sizes, usually moulded around the content rather than the opposite, a great range of framing is to be found as well; namely, full-width or landscape panels are placed alongside mid-distance framings, as in Hinds' version, but also next to long-distance ones and close-ups, used to convey the characters' feelings and emotions (McCloud 2021a, 497–500). Accordingly, transitions are quite assorted as well, with moment-to-moment and aspect-to-aspect transitions being rather frequent in comparison to the American style comic book, which is usually more concerned with showing actions rather than the characters' internal psychology. However, throughout the volume the reader can also find action-to-action transitions as well as subject-to-subject – moving the focus from one character to another – and scene-to-scene transitions – that cover great distances in time and place (McCloud 1999, 70–80), for example when switching from Belmont to Venice and vice versa.

Lastly, not as regular as the grid of an American comic book but neither as irregular nor as spectacular as the *Manga Shakespeare*, the *Campfire Classics* edition uses an elaborated rhetoric structure consisting of a maximum of three strips – of varying height – per page, in order to accommodate panels of variable width, built around their content (Groensteen 2013, 46). To aid the readers' understanding of the events, panels representing actual actions are framed by a black linear border while panels representing the characters' memories, things they imagine or things happening off-scene – such as Salarino imagining Antonio's ships being damaged or Shylock supposedly running around while screaming "My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter!" (2.8.15) – are represented in panels enclosed by an irregular wavy line (fig. 12). Furthermore, to obtain a wide-ranging rhythm, at once engaging and useful in the interpretation of the play's action, the illustrator juxtaposes some pages structured following the traditional grid with regular gutters between panels to other pages where the gutter is almost absent and matches them with the use of inset panels, superimposed to longer ones or overlapping full-bleed images (Groensteen 2013, 58) to keep an almost equal focus on both the action and its background. Hence, closure and the author-reader relationship are greatly enhanced keeping the interest high throughout

the plot's unravelling even though the Z-path might at times be disturbed by this play with the panels positioning.

FIGURE 12: Use of panels with wavy frames in the Campfire Classics adaptation. Left to right: imagined perils menacing Antonio's ships (p. 6), Jessica and Lorenzo's departure (p. 34) and Shylock's outburst (p. 35)

Similarly to Hinds' *Merchant*, Kumar's focus for the *Campfire* Classics edition is mainly on the setting and content of the panels rather than on the characters' emotions; therefore, long- and mid-distance framings are preferred, relegating close-ups to a secondary role (McCloud 2021a, 502). Very efficient thanks to the prevalence of action-to-action and subject-to-subject transitions, almost every panel marks an advancement in the plot, establishing a fast-reading pace throughout the volume. However, when the original play calls for some suspense or in order to create anticipation, the reading rhythm is slowed down thanks to the addition of moment-to-moment transitions that guide the reader through a more detailed experience while allowing the rest of the events to sink in, so as to be better prepared for what is yet to come (McCloud 2021a, 498–99), as in the case of Bassanio's choice of the casket in Act 3, Scene 2. Except for the presence of the initial double-spread pages meant to present the setting and give the reader a strong sense of place, there are no splash-pages or full-page panels. Nonetheless, some more airy moments are still created thanks to the use of landscape panels and introductive framings (Groensteen 2013, 45), usually placed at the beginning or end of a scene, continuously keeping the reader focus on the place where the action unfolds, hence providing a greater understanding.

2. Adapting Shakespeare's verses for the graphic novel

As Nabokov wrote in his *Strong Opinions*, "[t]he verbal poetic texture of Shakespeare is the strongest the world has known" (as cited in Gross 2003, 23), an element that has helped the Playwright's popularity up until modern days but that also makes it difficult to find the adequate balance between fidelity and the medium's needs. As a matter of fact, seeing the limited number of pages the medium calls for and the fact that they must of course include the illustrated panels, the adaptation of a longer text such as *The Merchant of Venice* requires some necessary cuts and reworkings, that can be made at a more general level, removing entire scenes or characters, or at a more specific ones, for example reworking verses into prose, summarising them so that they could fit the new medium, or even adopting both strategies at once (Fischlin and Fortier 2000, 1). Consequently, adaptation as an act "features a specific and explicit form of criticism: a marked change form Shakespeare's original cannot help but indicate a critical difference" (Fischlin and Fortier 2000, 8).

Among the three graphic novel adaptations taken into analysis, Hinds' *Merchant* presents the most significative changes. The author himself states that the "text is greatly altered from the original" with "a large amount of text [being] cut, including whole scenes and characters" (Shakespeare and Hinds 2008, 80), as in the case of Lancelet Giobbe and his father, a creative choice justified both by the common attempt to reduce the characters' cast (Tosi 2021, 221) and by the willingness to cut out one of the clearer and hence most controversial Jew-devil associations of the play. As a matter of fact, the author openly avoided taking a position in regard to the play's elements in need of critical assessment, inviting the readers – in his final author's note – to eventually "look further into [those] questions for [themselves]" (Shakespeare and Hinds 2008, 80). For the same reason, Shylock's aside in Act 1, Scene 3 is changed into direct conversation with Bassanio and the Jew's words of hate for Antonio – "I hate him for he is a Christian" (1.3.38) are left out, together with his unwillingness to forgive him – "Cursed be my tribe if I forgive him" (1.3.47-48). The same scene is heavily abridged also when it comes to the subsequent verses, where Shylock and Antonio's dialogue is strictly toned down both by the use of prose and by the summarizing of almost a hundred verses into a single statement by Shylock:

> Antonio lends money gratis and brings down the interest rates; he hates all Jews;
>
> in the marketplace he curses me and my well-won thrift, which he calls usury.
>
> Many a time he has called me cur and spit upon me.
>
> <div align="right">(Shakespeare and Hinds 2008, 7)</div>

Many other cuts and abridgments have been made throughout the volume, sometimes less noticeable, as in the case of Bassanio's story of the two arrows (Act 1, Scene 1), sometimes more evident such as the missing conversation between Antonio and Gratiano (also in Act 1, Scene 1), and sometimes following the almost 'sanitising' line mentioned above, as in the careful omission of love as one of the possible causes for Antonio's sadness (also in Act 1, Scene 1).

On a linguistic level, "many passages have been changed from verse to modern prose" (Shakespeare and Hinds 2008, 80), probably in order to make it more appealing and easier to understand to a first-time reader of the play. However, the author progressively incorporates more and more of Shakespeare's original verses in order to maintain intact the feel and recognisability of some the play's most famous dialogues, such as those occurring towards its end and especially Shylock's famous "Hath not a Jew eyes" monologue (3.1.47-66), which is maintained intact even in adaptation, and the speeches during the trial scene (Act 4, Scene 1). Due to the characteristics of the medium and the necessity to fit the text into the balloons, some of the verses have undergone slight changes, even though the author declares he has made a "strong effort to preserve the iambic pentameter" (Shakespeare and Hinds 2008, 80) so that, if read out loud, the rhythm of the language could be as close as possible to the source text.

Opposite to what readers might expect from a neo-baroque adaptation such as the *Manga Shakespeare*'s *Merchant*, the textual adapter for this edition – Richard Appignanesi – took great care in keeping the source text as integrally as possible in a show of utter fidelity, therefore producing a compelling rendition of Shakespeare's original play. Opposite to Hinds' choices, Appignanesi and Yong avoid cutting scenes or characters keeping intact the Shakespearean plot including the antisemitic subtexts, the hints at a possible queer attachment involving Antonio and Bassanio, and all of Shakespeare's visual metaphors, that are often graphically represented for better clarity. As an example, the negative associations attached to Shylock, such as Antonio insulting him and Shylock's later affirmation "Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst

a cause, // But since I am a dog, beware my fangs. The Duke shall grant me justice."
(3.3.6-8) are taken further thanks to visual tricks such as the representation of a wolf-like dog with his its mouth open to show its threatening fangs (fig. 13).

*FIGURE 13: Visual representation of Shylock's metaphorical comparison with a dog (*Manga Shakespeare *adaptation, p. 124)*

However, despite the fidelity in the choice of scenes to represent, the intended target is never forgotten, resulting in a sensible reduction of the mythological occurrences that could result obscure to a younger reader, unless they are strictly necessary for the play's general development. Namely, in Act 1, Scene 1, while talking about Portia to Antonio, Bassanio uses mythological reference such as "sunny locks" that "Hang on her temples like a golden fleece" hence "many Jasons come in quest of her" (1.1.169-172) while in the adaptation she is just presented as a "lady richly left" (1.1.161) and it is "for the four winds" that many renowned suitors are "blown in from every coast" (Shakespeare, Appignanesi, and Yong 2019, 24) to try and obtain her hand. Similarly, the references to disguised Portia as a new Daniel both per Shylock's and Gratiano's mouths during the trial scene are cut in favour of more direct appreciations of her being a good and learned judge; conversely, the references to (unhappy) mythological couples to be found in Jessica and Lorenzo's dialogue in Portia's garden (Act 5, Scene 1) are partially kept, still featuring Troilus and Cressida but cutting any reference to Medea and the rejuvenating of Jason's father, Aeson.

From a linguistic point of view, this edition keeps the feel of the seventeenth century language and verses while making them more accessible for students and younger readers, mostly lifting directly from the source text's verses and slightly

reworking them. However, to fit the medium, longer dialogues, monologues, and soliloquies are broken down in multiple subsequent panels, in order to favour not only legibility but also their interaction with the illustrations, as it happens for example in Shylock's aside in Act 1, Scene 3. Nonetheless, when it is not possible to keep the verses intact, be it because of excessive length or difficulty, Appignanesi condenses them as, for example, in Act 1, Scene 1 where Antonio's expression of melancholy is abbreviated but still rendered through Shakespeare's words, thus becoming "I know not why I am so sad. // How I came by it, I am to learn. //I have much ado to know myself" (Shakespeare, Appignanesi, and Yong 2019, 12).

*FIGURE 14: Antonio's melancholy in Act 1, Scene 1 and Portia's mirroring sadness in Act 1, Scene 2 (*Manga Shakespeare *adaptation, pp. 12, 26)*

Likewise, Portia's show of sadness in the opening lines of Act 2, Scene 1 is also condensed, keeping the connection between the two character's emotional state, reinforced by their similar stance, with their right hand reaching their forehead to express distress and hence keeping intact the structural hinge that connects Venice and Belmont (fig. 14).

Positioning itself in between Hinds' heavily abridged version and the almost integral one offered by *Manga Shakespeare*, the *Campfire Classics* edition features most of the original play's scenes with some exceptions made by scenes reduced in length or altogether cut, once more probably due to the reduced length of the volume in itself. For example, the adventures of Portia's suitors at the casket game (Act 1, Scene 2) occupy a single page – significantly less than the rest of the scene; Lancelet's "stage time" is also reduced as, while his soliloquy in which he associates Shylock's

with the devil is still represented, his father is cut off the adaptation's cast, hence it is him directly that bumps into Bassanio and begs for employment at his house. In this way, Act 2, Scene 2 results to be very condensed, summarising nearly two-hundred verses in merely two pages and thus causing the reader to perceive it as faster-paced than in the source text, all while completely erasing the comic relief like in Hinds' adaptation. Furthermore, as in the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation, references to mythology are reduced to the bare minimum; hence, in Portia's description the mention to the golden fleece and Jason's quest is substituted with a subtler and more immediate "Her hair is like gold, and adventurers are flocking to Belmont in pursuit of that gold" (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 10). Similarly, only the allusion to Troilus and Cressida, and that to Dido and Aeneas are kept in Jessica and Lorenzo's dialogue in Act 5, Scene 1.

Kumar's – the illustrator – choice to also represent memories and off-scene effects grants the graphic novel a very theatrical effect that prompts the readers to form their own ideas on the play while providing them with all the necessary tools for a clear understanding. Thanks to these visual strategies, the main themes of the play remain mostly intact and there is no displacement of meaning despite the use of a reworking of *The Merchant of Venice*'s verses in mostly modern English prose. However, the adapted text never actually mentions the Jewish identity of Shylock, Jessica and Tubal – despite them being recognisable to the knowing reader's eye thanks to their typically Jewish garments and headdresses. Antonio's Christianity is also omitted, as it can be noted in Shylock's aside in Act 1, Scene 3 (fig. 15) where "I hate him for he is a Christian" (1.3.38) becomes a plain "I hate him!" (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 18). Likewise, Lancelet's calling of Jessica "Most beautiful pagan, most sweet Jew!" (2.3.10-11) is simplified into "Beautiful Jessica, sweet girl…" (fig. 15) and, most obviously, Shylock's most famous speech (Act 3, Scene 1) is turned into a first person monologue instead of continuously referring to Jews as opposed to Christians, a narrative choice that has an almost estranging effect on the reader, who cannot fully understand the communicative power or the motive behind such a speech if not already acquainted with Shylock's Jewish identity because of his clothes or thanks to a previous reading of the original play.

*FIGURE 15: 'Sanitisation' of Antonio's Christianity and of Shylock and Jessica's Jewishness (*Campfire Classics *adaptation, pp. 18, 24)*

2.1 The text-image relationship

As much as drama has the ability to bridge text and performance (Kidnie 2009, 28), graphic novels combine together text and images. In comic art, the text has to obey the rhythm imposed upon it by the succession of actions, frames and panels visually represented on the page (Groensteen 2013, 133), hence there can be no inherently good graphic novel or comic book unless writing and drawing, author or adapter and illustrator, can harmoniously express a shared concept (McCloud 1999, 47, 202). This text-image relationship is a dynamic balance where, at times, words overpower more subdued images while at others, images take control, especially in the polysemy of a silent panel (Groensteen 2013, 30). In a sight-based medium such as comic books and graphic novels, speech is framed into what Eisner, in his *Comic Books and Sequential Art*, called a "desperation device": the balloon (as cited in McCloud 2021a, 624). As a matter of fact, the balloon is nothing more than a writer's attempt to capture sound, an invisible element that needs to be graphically represented on the page, floating above reality even though not part of it (McCloud 2021a, 624). Furthermore, when the sounds needing representation are onomatopoeias or other effects beyond proper speech, sound icons or sound words step into the equation: typographical devices, often in varied fonts recalling the sound they are trying to describe, they hover inside the panel, usually near the object, animal or person emitting the noise they recall. Finally, if balloons and sound words have a certain directness and immediacy, for those words that do not belong to the characters or the plot itself, such as mentions of place, time,

or even an external narrator's words, a more distanced device is needed and this is where captions come into play, as an expedient to transmit the coolness and authority of real prose (Groensteen 2013, 119).

In Gareth Hinds' *Merchant* the balance between images and balloons most definitely tends towards the latter, activating a process that McCloud calls "neutrality of the image" and causing the graphic novel to look more like illustrated prose rather than a productive combination of the two elements (2021a, 625). In detail, in this adaptation the text tends to give all the necessary information, prevailing over images that are almost relegated to an illustrative function instead of complementing words to give a wider perspective on them (McCloud 2021a, 612–13). Despite offering some advantages, such as the clarity of information that cannot be misunderstood as clearly stated in words instead of having to be inferred from images, this stylistic choice can result off-putting for readers akin to the medium, that will find themselves wondering whether to skip over some of the balloons in hope to find another, more interesting page from a visual point of view (McCloud 2021a, 625). Furthermore, the need to condense a great number of actions and events in a rather thin volume led Hinds to use bigger-sized balloons, in the hope to accommodate all of Shakespeare's verses – or his own reworking of them – in the small number of panels he was working with. However, this causes balloons to be too heavy, sometimes to the point of hiding some part of the image, taking away any room for a potential background, if not some characters, or occupying a significant part of the panel (fig. 16). This tendency of words to overpower the images' narrative force is more and more evident as the graphic novel goes on and the author's reworking of the text leaves place to Shakespeare's original verses in the most famous scenes.

FIGURE 16: Shylock discussing the bond with Antonio: an example of the balloon-image imbalance in Gareth Hinds' The Merchant of Venice *(p. 9)*

Lastly, words appear in a font that makes use of both upper- and lower-case letters – opposite to traditional comic books which are usually 'noisier' and make only use of full-upper-case fonts. Yet, the absence of emphasising lettering and of differently framed balloons to express different voice tones, such as shouting or whispering, or to represent thoughts and memories generate a rather monotonous reading experience if compared to the medium's full potentiality. The only exception to this quite essential use of balloons is represented by the song accompanying Bassanio's choice of the lead casket.

Quite on the opposite side of the image-word relationship spectrum, the *Manga Shakespeare*'s *Merchant* relies on smaller, less invasive balloons, positioned as to not cover the images and hence creating a well-adjusted collaboration between them and the panels in which they are enclosed. This intersecting – and at times interdependent – relationship presumes the image amplification through the use of words or vice versa and proves to be a useful combination not only to keep the readers' interest alive, making them feel part of the play's environment and plot, but also to grant better comprehension of the characters' adventures thanks to the interrelation between the words' poetic force and the images' communicative power (McCloud 2021a, 612–18). However, images occasionally assume a preponderant role, specifically when a parallel relationship is established, allowing words to describe one scene and images to illustrate another, as in the case of Antonio's letter to Bassanio and the latter's marriage to Portia before leaving for Venice in Act 3, Scene 2 (fig. 17).

*FIGURE 17: Parallel relationship between words-balloons – telling the contents of Antonio's letters – and images – showing the double wedding celebration (*Manga Shakespeare *adaptation, p. 123)*

Out of the three examined adaptations, the *Manga Shakespeare* is the only one to treat the play's text as a unified whole instead of as a script, avoiding the use of captions to signal the interruption of a scene or an act and rather creating a continuous reading flow where images sometimes give the readers all the information they need. Upon these occasions, a prevalence of image over word is put in place, as exemplified in silent panels, whose polysemy is reduced thanks to the clever use of unique and strong facial expressions meant to clearly show the intended reading even without accompanying words, or through the use of peculiar layouts that guide the reader's eye in the right direction. Furthermore, a number of graphic expedients are set in place in order to give words a higher expressive power; specifically, despite being the font a full upper-case one, as typical of manga, bold and italic are used for emphasis and at times associated with differently shaped balloons indicating the characters' voice tones. In detail, pointy balloons are used for exclamations, balloons enclosed by a dotted or dashed line indicate whispers, while balloons with blurred borders and a greyish filling are used for thoughts and words spoken in asides. It is also interesting to underline that, when someone is speaking as if in a voiceover, balloons are assigned to the speaking character thanks to the addition of their face in a more stylized style; moreover, some unusually shaped balloons – for example spiked ones, or an entirely black, almost bleeding balloon – can seldom be found throughout the narration, as to provide ulterior stress to some verses. Lastly, these graphic devices, combined with the emotionally expressive backgrounds featuring hearts, stars, flowers and other icons borrowed from the Japanese manga conventions, enhance the reader's involvement despite the absence of onomatopoeias or other sound words (McCloud 2021a, 698).

Once more representing some sort of balance between Hinds' and the *Manga Shakespeare*'s edition, the *Campfire Classics* version of *The Merchant of Venice* offers a poised relationship between image and text, an intersecting correlation sometimes blurring into an equivalent one, where images tend to explicate the word's meaning without adding too much information to it, similarly to children's illustrated books and hence quite in compliance with the intended target (McCloud 2021a, 617). To enhance clarity, especially when it comes to younger readers, different balloon types are used to distinguish between spoken words, identified by the conventional black line, whispered words, marked by a dashed line framing the balloon, and thoughts, whose

balloon has the typical cloud-like shape that differentiates it from words actually uttered. Despite the essential line followed for the graphic representation of text, including a font with both upper- and lower-case letters but lacking any emphatical variations, this edition makes use of a light lettering to graphically represent onomatopoeias or exclamative words, accompanied by the use of musical notes to signify music is being played. Meant to be read in class, the *Campfire Classics'* *Merchant* keeps in place the play's division into scenes and acts signalling the beginning of each new scene with a scroll-like caption positioned on the top left corner of its first panel. Different in shape, but also in colour, from every other balloon or caption, this device allows the readers to better grasp the structure of the original play, providing them with a form of reference to go back to a specific point if the need were to arise, while making clear that the plot transcends the scene division. Similarly, each change in setting or location is signalled by a square caption, projecting a small shadow, as to underline its presence only for informational purposes and not as a proper element of discourse. Furthermore, to give a different feel to words uttered off-scene, a third different type of caption is used, a rectangular parchment-like shape into which the characters' words assume the same authority that an external narrator would have had (Groensteen 2013, 119). Lastly, positioning themselves in between balloons and captions are the messages found inside the three caskets, which are either inscribed on a proper scroll or into a square balloon with rounded corners to confer them the prestige they deserve in quality of given messages.

3. From Venice to Belmont: visualising the play's setting

John Jay Chapman, in his *Greek Genius and Other Essays* writes that in every Shakespearean play there is an entire world, a little local universe that creates a unique atmosphere despite the recurrent use of similar stage devices (as cited in Gross 2003, 163), a statement that proves to be particularly fitting to *The Merchant of Venice*. In fact, Venice, the city of myth, grows out its older, almost intolerant version that used to confine Jews on the mainland – and that is to be found in Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone* – in order to become the city *par excellence*, symbol of a new urban reality, made of modern globalisation and of contact between different cultures (Bassi 2021a, 26; Tosi and Bassi 2016, 3). Remarkably tolerant in relation to religion and politics, Venice is

a place where people of all nations can co-exist at once, giving birth to a new, multicultural population that well represents the myths Venice had always been so well known for (Holderness 2016, 130). In fact, Venice, the '*città galante*' famous for its carnival and represented by many writers over the years as the city where moral transgression could take over, has also three other most famous sides: that of the Rich, the Wise, and the Just (Holderness 2016, 127) – and it is upon the intermingling of these four facets that Shakespeare built the Venice he brough to life in his *Merchant*.

However, even though tolerant and more open-minded than it used to be, Shakespeare's Venice still shows a distinctively ambivalent attitude towards Jews, a sort of suspicious tolerance based on commercial and convenience grounds (Tosi 2016, 155) that from 1516 onwards allowed Jewish people to stay in Venice at two conditions: they had to remain confined within Ghetto during the night and, in line with the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council, they had to be recognised thanks to specific pieces of clothing when they left it during the day (Holderness 2016, 135). This ambiguity is clearly evident in Antonio's antisemitic behaviours towards Shylock even when he seeks his financial help to borrow money for Bassanio's sake. Specifically, when the Jew laments the Venetian merchant's habit to insult him, worsened by the fact that he even "spit upon [his] Jewish gaberdine" (1.3.108) – a scene visually represented only in the *Manga Shakespeare* edition (Shakespeare, Appignanesi, and Yong 2019, 40) – Antonio nonchalantly answers that he would likely do it once again, as if it were a common and totally acceptable behaviour for the time. The Ghetto should then be seen not only as a contested place but also as a contact zone (Bassi 2020, 186), a place where a wealthy Venetian merchant like Antonio could find a loan when all the other 'respectable' bankers had already given or denied him credit, a place where a Jew like Shylock could carry out his business.

Considering the setting's importance in *The Merchant of Venice* and the cultural implications it bears in itself, it might come as unexpected to see that Gareth Hinds' adaptation opens on a very realistic and modern-day Venice, inhabited by businessmen wearing suits and thus completely changing the socio-historical circumstances underlying Shakespeare's text. Like the textual adaptation choices made by the author, a twentieth-century setting is less likely to stress Shylock's identity as a Jew as he appears as a regular businessman among many others; therefore, the risk of

highlighting overt antisemitism is significantly reduced as it is mostly perceived as a more generic rude behaviour rather than hate driven by racial identity (Gilbert 2020, 21, 26).

FIGURE 18: Gareth Hinds' realistic representation of Venice. Left to right: pp. 19, 23, 39

Exploiting the medium's potentiality, Hinds plunges the reader into the Venetian atmosphere from the very start of the volume, that opens with a double splash-page – repeated at the end of the slim book – depicting an aerial view of a slightly 'cartoonified' Venice island, its fish-like shape highlighted by the addition of scales and an eye, cleverly hooked to a fishing line to connect it to the mainland. Lastly, instead of using landscape or introductive panels to give sense of place, the author prefers to keep all of his backgrounds fairly detailed and, if not as recognisable as Piazza San Marco and the Ponte di Rialto, still quite familiar and immediately recalling Venice to someone who has been there or has seen pictures of it (fig. 18).

On the opposite side, and completely disconnected by reality is *Manga Shakespeare*'s fantasy interpretation of Venice, where characteristic architectural structures such as the Ponte di Rialto are taken over by climbing plants and other natural elements, as seen in the colour plates at the beginning of the volume. Moreover, due to the presence of many arches, columns and open spaces, or to the action being moved indoors – as in the case of Shylock's and Antonio's discussion before the bond is stipulated, here taking place in Shylock's office – Venice is quite difficult to

recognise if not for the canals crossing it and for some elements that explicitly set the action there – as the Inn called *The Drake of Venice*. As frequent with manga, Yong keeps backgrounds to a minimal level in most panels, if not absent at all, unless the setting actually plays a role in communicating the meaning of the unfolding action; in such cases, backgrounds can be very detailed and they include elements such small gondolas or open shops on the Ponte di Rialto, meant to recreate an atmosphere similar to the Venetian one (fig. 19).

FIGURE 19: Faye Yong's interpretation of Venice for the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation. Left to right: Venice's landscape (p. 11), Rialto's shops (p. 36), and Venice's buildings (p. 57)*

Lastly, the *Campfire Classics* edition features an historical setting, rooted both in the characters' costumes and in the lifelike representation of Venice, meant to provoke a certain reader's response, entailing the attachment of particular significances to the chosen location and unusual garments (Fedderson and Richardson 2014, 212), in order to recall Shakespeare's original setting. Backgrounds here are less detailed than in Hinds' adaptation even though present in almost every panel, opposite to the frequent absence of them in the *Manga Shakespeare*; in addition, they are coloured in with lighter, sometimes flatter, tones so as to allow characters to stand out, reducing the risk of them blending in with the environment as it sometimes happens in Hinds's *Merchant*. Accompanying the captions with an indication of place, at each variation of setting there are introduction or landscape panels, usually a single one per scene, occupying the whole width of the page – and therefore taking the place of a strip – that proceed to visually describe the place in which the action is taking place, allowing the reader to have a slower-paced moment to acknowledge where the characters are. This

choice, in addition to the initial double splash-page depicting a view of Rialto and the Canal Grande – contributes to the representation of Venice as a mercantile city, also underlining its taste for masques and the new urban reality of the Ghetto – that is surely implied even if never openly mentioned in Shakespeare – through the depiction of Shylock's house in a different style from the other Venetian buildings and with a yellow star above its door (fig. 20).

FIGURE 20: Kumar's representation of Venice (pp. 15, 50) and Shylock's house (p. 23) for the Campfire Classics *adaptation*

Though the play bears Venice's name in its title, the city of myth is not its only setting; in fact, opposite to the mercantile city's "crudity and crassness" and its taste for wealth and riches, the play partly unravels on the island of Belmont, a "romantic green world" (Nguyen Tran 2020, 148) home to fair Portia and theatre of the multiple marriages occurring in the play. Hinds visually represents Belmont as an island where buildings have dome roofs and battlement walls, rich in gardens and trees despite not as luxuriant as one would possibly expect from a romantic place that serves as the play's love nest. Consequently, Venice and Belmont are quite easily distinguishable in this adaptation even though the contrast they create is not as stark as it could be, mostly because of the use of greyscale instead of colour. Such a distinction is even more blurred in Yong's designs for *Manga Shakespeare*; namely, despite Belmont's depiction as an overly lavish island where Portia's huge villa stands surrounded by orderly gardens and wild nature including trees and waterfalls, Venice too is represented as taken over by climbing plants, at times making the distinction of difficult interpretation,

especially because of the presence of classical looking columns in both locations. Oppositely, thanks to Kumar and Anil's combined use of images and colours, the *Campfire Classics* edition is the one that most enhances the contrast between the two settings. Essentially, Portia's palace – also presented as a double splash-page, this time bearing the adaptation's title and authors – has a very different architectonic style in comparison to Venice's buildings and it is always accompanied by a green element, be it an outside garden, ivy climbing up the palace's columns or an indoor plant. Finally, being the graphic novel in full-colour, it is easier to make a distinction between a landscape where the buildings' greys and browns, together with the blues of the canals' waters, are prevailing and one where the vivid green of gardens and plants dominates the scene, also being often recalled in Portia's or Nerissa's garments as well (fig. 21).

FIGURE 21: Top left: Belmont in Hinds' adaptation (pp. 4, 6); top right: Belmont in the Campfire Classics *adaptation (pp. 11, 53); bottom: Belmont in the* Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (pp. 76-77)*

4. Dramatis personae: bringing the play's characters to life

As Pushkin declared, Shakespeare's characters were and still are living beings, each of them showing the spectators – or, as in this case, the readers – "their varied, many-sided personalities" (as cited in Gross 2003, 72), compacted of many passions and vices at once instead of being a typification of just one of them. In addition to this, Shakespeare's women are almost never meek or fully passive, mostly disagreeing with

the idea belonging to the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century of modest, devoted and submissive women to which adaptations of the time tried to make them adhere (Marsden 1991b, 45–46). Both the great attention to the character's personality and the agency bestowed upon women are to be found in *The Merchant of Venice* and make of it an interesting play to be adapted even in the twenty-first century, allowing a great degree of variation and representation, especially in visual media such as graphic novels. It is also to be noted that some of the minor characters' names have undergone slight variations over the years and in different publications (Drakakis 2020, 40–43), with Lancelet Giobbe being also known Launcelot Gobbo – as in both the *Manga Shakespeare* and the *Campfire Classics* adaptations; similarly, Salanio and Salarino, two Venetian gentlemen friends with Antonio, have kept their names in the *Campfire* edition while being referred to as Salanio and Salerio in Hinds' and in the *Manga Shakespeare*'s versions.

On a general level, Hinds' choices in terms of character design are fairly subtle: all of his characters are life-like both in facial features and in postures or movements, a result achieved thanks to the technique of live-modelling matched by the cast's composure and poise. However, due to the style used, more similar to a sketched line than a proper line-art, together with the slight flattening of the differences due to all men wearing a similar suit, none of them is really unique or standing above the others, almost falling into the clone-stamp effect (McCloud 2021a, 552). This stylistic choice coherently complements the modern-day setting in the creation of a more tolerant atmosphere, seemingly de-emphasising Shylock's and Jessica's Jewishness, as they blend in fairly well with the rest of the characters if not for the fact that they both wear glasses. Moreover, with the exception of the Duke, who wears a sash that symbolizes his powerful position, minor characters like Morocco and Arragon look fairly ordinary, in spite of the fact that they come from far away countries. All in all, this character design proves to be interesting for an adult reader as it could aid identification but less so for a younger reader, because of the more challenging reading experience caused by the difficulties in following the cast throughout the action.

On the other side, Faye Yong's character design is heavily varied and makes each character absolutely unique and easily distinguishable from all the others, with the exception of Salanio and Salarino, that willingly look very similar to each other,

reinforcing the idea that they could be a single character with two mouths, or worse a double-faced character (Watt 2021, 153), and of the two messengers, Stephano and Balthasar, designed as twins. In detail, the characters' different features allow the reader to immediately visualise the age gap between Antonio and Bassanio, often reduced or non-existent in other graphic adaptations, and to identify the Jews thanks to their eye shape, darker hair partially combed into braids, and clothing style and colour. Even minor characters such as the Duke, reminding Antonio in style and thus hinting at their shared status of noblemen, Morocco, and Arragon have their distinctive features in both clothing and physical appearance. As in most manga, facial expressions, stances, and poses are almost exaggerated, sometimes 'cartoonified' and taken to the extreme, to make them easily understandable while providing the reader with a sort of visual mnemonical aid to recall their personality traits (McCloud 2021a, 553).

In the *Campfire Classics* adaptation, characters are easier to recognise and to follow than in Hinds' edition, thanks to the use of specific items of clothing in the case of the Jews and of different facial features and hair for the rest of the cast, even though less diversified than in the *Manga Shakespeare* edition. Specifically, Shylock always wears his Jewish gaberdine and the red hat that any Jew had to wear upon leaving the Ghetto during daytime (Gilbert 2020, 17; Holderness 2016, 135), with the exception of Act 1, Scene 3 where he wears a blue headdress suggesting that the scene is probably happening inside the Ghetto itself. Similarly, Jessica is depicted with the same dark and curly hair also Shylock has. Moreover, Gratiano and Lorenzo, who look quite alike, can be distinguished because of the latter's moustache, a difference enhanced by the use of colour, that underlines the dissimilarities in clothing between the various men surrounding Antonio, as in the case of Salanio and Salarino who are here dressed respectively in purple with green overcoat and hat or in yellow with red coat and hat, making them more distinguishable. In terms of facial expressions and body language, the characters still maintain a certain composure even though they are more markedly expressive than in Hinds' version as to make the interpretation of their emotions easier to the younger public for which the graphic novel is intended in the first place. Less dramatic than the *Manga Shakespeare*'s overly intense emotional representation paired with a neat line-art, Kumar's drawings aim at the reader's possible identification

with the characters, which are still perceived as humans, while at once keeping the play's theatrical feel thanks to the use of vibrant colours enrichened by shadows, light points and expression lines, that underline how feelings change the characters' facial features.

4.1 Shylock the Jew, the devil, and the man

Despite appearing in only five scenes throughout the play, Shylock almost swallows it entirely (Hatchuel and Vienne-Guerrin 2021, 5) and remains the character that mostly attracts the interest of literary critics. An Ashkenazi Jewish moneylender (Bassi 2020, 173), over the years Shylock has come to epitomise the idea of otherness in itself, beginning with his name, that has always been fertile ground for discussion. In fact, while most critics have attempted to rationalise it as intrinsically Jewish, connected to the Bible – probably "deriving from Shiloh, a word for the Messiah" (Orgel 2003, 151) – as the names Shakespeare chose for Leah and Tubal, Shylock is actually an English name, native since Saxon times, and meaning 'white haired' like its most common equivalents Whitlock and Whitehead (Orgel 2003, 151).

The sense of the other is strongly dependent on our relation to it, as it is only understandable as such if compared and related to something we already know but do not recognise as belonging to our identity (Orgel 2003, 19); because of this reason, Shylock's otherness has most often been represented through his Jewish gaberdine, the wool robe that covers up all his clothes making him distinctively different from the other characters on stage. Moreover, he has often been assigned the features of the horrendous and terrifying villain (Orgel 2003, 145), whose viciousness was usually reflected into his physical features in compliance with the Middle Ages idea of the monstruous Jewish body (Bassi 2020, 237). Among the three graphic novels taken into exam, the one that most recalls Shylock's traditional iconography is surely the *Campfire Classics* adaptation, where the illustrator gives Shylock a beard, long dark hair peeking out of his red skullcap, and a dark gaberdine very similar to those that can be seen in historical illustrations and portraits of actors that played Shylock's role in theatre, such as Henry Irving in 1879 (fig. 22).

FIGURE 22: Side-by-side comparison of Henry Irving as Shylock (left: unsigned print, ca. 1880, The British Museum Collection) and Campfire Classics' *interpretation of the Jew (right)*

Shylock's otherness is fairly clear in the *Manga Shakespeare* edition as well, where he has characteristic dark hair and darkly outlined eyes that he shares with the other Jews, even though their markedly distinctive representation is not immediately associated to Jewishness by a first-time reader of the play, but rather with a more general sense of diversity. Conversely, in Hinds' edition, Shylock looks almost exactly as any other character: he wears glasses, sometimes a hat, and a coat instead of a suit's jacket but this is not enough to identify him as inherently different from the others, let alone to mark him as a Jew among Christians.

Because of his otherness, Shylock is often represented as scheming and vindictive, a devilish and bloodthirsty figure (Holderness 2016, 136). Sketched as the knife-whetting monster that hates for no particular reason aside from his Jewishness, Shylock's character plays into "age-old anxieties surrounding Jewish bloodlust" (Fowler 2020, 54–55) and fear of contamination, to the point that by the end of the play the Jew is proven to be an alien trying to take the life of a Venetian citizen, openly contrasting the laws of the city that had previously welcomed him despite his Jewishness. The characters themselves relate Shylock with evil: Lancelet refers to him as "the very devil incarnation" (2.2.24), Antonio calls him "misbeliever, cut-throat dog" (1.3.107), Salanio, while talking with Salarino, advises his friend of Shylock's arrival with "lest the devil cross // my prayer, for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew" (3.1.19-20), and even his daughter refers to their house as hell (2.3.2). Hence, the Jew's evil facet is undoubtedly the easiest to show when adapting for a graphic

medium, especially if the illustrator brings to life the characters' words and imagined associations. This is particularly evident in the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, where Shylock most often has an angry, stern gaze associated with evil stances meant to graphically explain his thirst for revenge, his scheming against Antonio and, most of all, his hate towards him and the Christians in general, strengthened by black shadows taking over his clothes, the background and even his speech balloon when he speaks of revenge. Moreover, his being bloodthirsty and attached to money is highlighted by the visual representation of a pound of flesh on a scale, bleeding over a pile of coins (fig. 23), an interesting choice to be found only in this adaptation, seeing that the play is virtually bloodless thanks to Portia's intervention.

FIGURE 23: Shylock's evil depiction in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation, including the visual representation of the bleeding pound of flesh (Top: pp. 42-433; bottom, from left to right: pp. 97, 121, 140)*

In the *Campfire Classics* edition, Shylock's evil side is less dramatic, coherently with the general tone of the graphic novel, but some graphic tricks still help to associate him with the devil, especially in correspondence to Lancelet's and Salanio's overt comparisons, where the Jew is represented either as coming out of flames or upon a red background, that reminds of the stereotypical hell representations (fig. 24). Moreover, his scheming and vindictive side is made clear through his stances both while pondering whether or not to give Antonio a loan and on occasion of the trial, where he constantly has an angry, decisive frown, especially when whetting and brandishing his 'knife', that here looks more like a sword.

FIGURE 24: Shylock's evil side in the Campfire Classics *adaptation (left to right: pp. 21, 39, 40)*

Lastly, in Hinds' version, the more life-like stances and expressions make the Jew look more moderate, less angry. Even when Salanio and Salarino compare Shylock to the devil, the Jew is still represented as his usual self, toning down the strength of the comparison and reducing it to a malicious, trivial handle more than a heart-felt insult. However, Shylock's anger and viciousness are bound to burst during the trial scene, where he lets out all his hate, especially when he is about to cut into Antonio's flesh, a quite unexpected turn in favour of emotional expressivity that contrasts with the image of Shylock given in the previous panels, where he almost looked like an out of context surgeon, with his knife in one hand and purse in the other, rather than an angry man craving revenge (fig. 25).
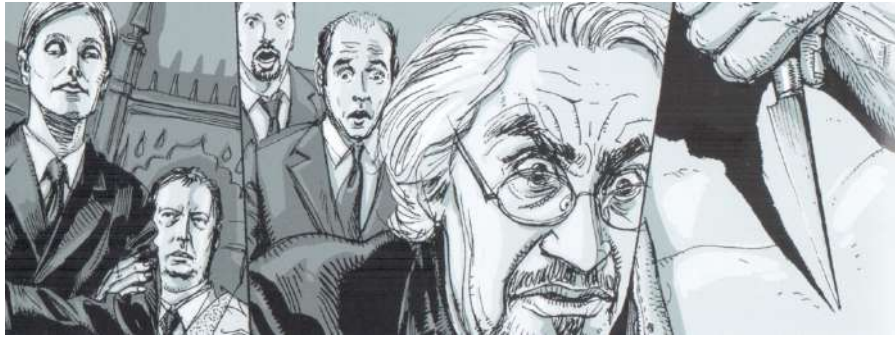
Shylock the man, with his sad, almost vulnerable side, has been acknowledged since Charles Macklin's 1740s interpretation of Shylock as a tragic figure, contributing to the gradual evolution of the Jew's iconography from the initial idea of an angry, devilish Jew to Kean's notion in the 1850s of a human, sympathetic Shylock (Orgel 2003, 146), whose villainy is rooted not only in his Jewishness but also in his personal anger (Bassi 2021b, 94). Shylock is hateful first and foremost because he is Shylock (Bassi 2016, 241), even though his Jewishness is not just an incidental occurrence. It is because of his religious beliefs that the Jew has become the object of Antonio's antisemitic behaviours, that contribute to exacerbate his hate towards Christians; moreover, it is because of his Jewishness that Shylock excludes himself from the joy of music and of eating together with Christians – rooting his choice in the kashrut regimen, that restricts him from eating pork (Stelling 2021, 204–5) – therefore opposing resistance to positive emotions (Schülting 2021, 114). As a result, on top of being angry, Shylock is a lonely, unhappy, frightened, and unloved man – both because his wife Leah is dead and because his daughter perceives him as someone she has nothing in common with but blood (Bassi 2016, 241). Shylock the man, with all his vulnerabilities, first surfaces when he finds out about Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo by Salanio and Salarino's words: his heart is now alarmingly exposed, his reaction is unexpected, dramatic, almost uncontrollable – as well represented by both *Manga Shakespeare* and *Campfire Classics* in their devilish Shylock representations – because of the profound grief he feels upon losing his daughter (Drakakis 2021, 30). However, even in his utmost moment of misery, Shylock's love comes down to wealth as he is reported running around the city claiming his daughter *and* his ducats have been stolen. The Jew's vulnerability is ulteriorly shown in his regret when he finds out

his daughter also stole the turquoise ring Leah gave him when they were betrothed and swapped it for a monkey, symbol of mischief, mimicry and cunning on top of the animality so frequently associated to Jewish people (Wolfe and Kleijwegt 2012, 33). Shylock states "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I // would have not given it for a wilderness of monkeys." (3.1.110-111), a sentence that paints his humanity, underlines how much he loved his wife, a love that had no connection whatsoever to wealth as that ring for him was unvaluable, and that voices how much he misses his wife, how lonely, unloved, and vulnerable he is without her (Coonrod and Moss 2021, 60). This scene, missing from the *Campfire Classics* adaptation, has a quite literal visualisation in the *Manga Shakespeare* edition that features a monkey, the ring and Shylock's shocked eye on the same panel, followed by a second one in which the Jew falls to his knees in desperation (fig. 26).

*FIGURE 26: Shylock discovers his late wife's ring was traded for a monkey (*Manga Shakespeare *adaptation, p. 104)*

Conversely, in Hinds' adaptation, despite the pathos created by his words – "No, no. Thou torturest me, Tubal!" (Shakespeare and Hinds 2008, 25) – Shylock gives his back to the readers, preventing them from seeing his expression and therefore hiding his newly exposed humanity and frailness. Lastly, the moment in which Shylock's hatred reaches its limit, leaving the place for extreme vulnerability is the outcome of the trial scene, when he is stripped of his own identity and beliefs and forced to convert to Christianity. In all three adaptations, Shylock's facial expression during this scene well

represents his internal struggle, his sadness, fear, and solitude, in a perfect closure of his process of 'humanisation'.

4.2 Jessica: *la belle juive* or the Christian convert?

As much as Shylock's name is not Jewish but English, neither Jessica is a typical Jewish name. As a matter of fact, the oldest written record of this name is to be found exactly in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of* Venice, despite the numerous attempts to associate it to a derivation of Iscah, the biblical name of one of Abraham's daughters in Geneva's Bible, also written as Jisca in Bishop's Bible, or to a diminutive of Jesse, meaning wealth, which was the name of David's father. However, the most rated opinion sets once more on a common name, this time Scottish, probably diminutive of the woman's name Jessie (Orgel 2003, 152).

Despite the innovative name, making of Jessica's character a sort of blank canvas upon which she can write her own identity instead of immediately relating her to one of the Jewish stereotypes, she still falls into the cliché known as *la belle juive.* Such label indicates the traditional polarisation of gender in the representation of Jews and has produced a number of physically ugly, evidently Jewish, and almost monstruous Shylocks – or male Jews in general – vis-à-vis beautiful Jessicas (Bassi 2021a, 28). Apparently passive but ultimately hiding a threat, the Jewess is as multi-faceted as her father since she cannot be fully controlled (Bassi 2020, 176–77), not even after the conversion to Christianity that could allegedly save her. This structural polarity between the ugly, wicked Shylock and his desirable, strikingly beautiful daughter is underlined in the play by Lancelet, who refers to her as "Most beautiful pagan, most sweet Jew!" (2.3.10-11), and well depicted in both the *Manga Shakespeare* and the *Campfire Classics* adaptations, even though less so in Hinds' work. Namely, the first two adaptations picture a beautiful, attractive, and sweet Jessica, whose kinship with Shylock is made clear through physical similarities as well as thanks to her clothes, while Hinds' adaptation presents us with a dark-haired Jessica – the only woman to have dark hair in the play – whose kinship with Shylock is only depicted through words, and not through physical resemblance; moreover, she is perceived as less gracious than the other two Jessicas since she is shown leaving all her clothes on the stairs' floor after having undressed to go change herself into boys' clothes (fig. 27).

FIGURE 27: Jessica's depictions. Top and bottom left: Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (pp. 62, 71); top right: Gareth Hinds' version (p. 13); bottom right:* Campfire Classics *adaptation (p. 24)*

However, the Jewess' beauty hides a sort of otherness and liminality, her feeling of alienation, being trapped within her own self-division between the Jewish daughter and the girl who wants to be a Christian wife, and therefore the need to reconstruct her own persona (Valls-Russell 2021, 140–41). Perceiving her father's house as hell, ashamed to be Shylock's child and feeling "a daughter to his blood, // [but] not to his manners" (2.3.18-19), she "longs to escape her cloistered Jewish life" (Coodin 2020, 90) and manages to do so by unleashing her cross-gendered potentiality (Valls-Russell 2021, 140–41) dressing up as a boy in order to make her agency count. Hence, Jessica schemes against her own father to flee with Lorenzo, she lies to him, "gild[s herself] // with some [more] ducats" (2.6.50-51) and disguises as a boy to safely escape towards her dream of marrying the Christian Lorenzo – who will never be approved by her Jewish father – thus revealing just how dangerous she can be under the appearance of passive beauty (Bassi 2020, 174). During all this process, the tension between the two sides of her identity never disappears, as revealed in her shame to be seen in such clothes, an emotion visually represented and reinforced by words in both the *Campfire Classics* and the *Manga Shakespeare* edition but cut out of Hinds' interpretation.

Though assimilated into the Christian community thanks to her conversion and marriage with Lorenzo (Schülting 2021, 121), Jessica never stops feeling trapped within herself due to Christian people being constantly suspicious of her and treating

her as the outsider, the stranger. In fact, when Jessica and Lorenzo enter Portia's palace, Gratiano still refers to them as "Lorenzo and his infidel" (3.2.217); similarly, a couple of scenes later, Lancelet still openly tells Jessica he believes she will be "damned both by father // and mother" (3.5.13-14) implying that there will be no heaven for Jessica despite her conversion.

4.3 Antonio and Bassanio: a friendship that knows no boundaries

Titular character of the play even though long neglected by the literary critics, Antonio is a man whose identity is established right from the title, defined by his social status as a merchant in a world where one's personality is made to coincide with their wealth (Tosi 2016, 151). However, seeing that a merchant's character clearly depends on his wealth and reliability, Antonio's progressive impoverishment due to his sinking ships at sea is perceived as a form of dishonour tampering with his very identity (Perocco 2016, 40). In fact, Antonio not only fails in his role as a merchant but also undergoes a process of progressive marginalisation, almost alienation, from the Venetian society, his status as a good man leaving place to what Shylock defines as "another bad match: a bankrupt, a // prodigal, who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto, // a beggar" (3.1.39-41) – a status that only the *Campfire Classics* edition chooses to graphically represent to emphasise this moment of identity loss on Antonio's part. This new position as the insufficient man (Tosi 2016, 151–52) makes of Antonio an outsider as much as the Jew, thus providing the grounds for Portia's later question in court: "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.170). Because of his financial defeat, Antonio's emotional strength diminishes as the plays goes on until, in Heinrich Heine's words, he becomes "a weak soul without energy, without strength to hate and thus […] to love" (as cited in Gross 2003, 199), plunging right back into the melancholy that clenched him at the time of his opening lines.

By the trial scene, Antonio loses his willingness to live and his reasons to be the proud, confident, and composed person the readers were used to see leaves place to a meeker, submissive version of himself, that quietly accepts his fate. This change is most evident in the *Manga Shakespeare* and in the *Campfire Classics* graphic novels, in the former thanks to the use of multiple close-up panels showing Antonio's sad, surrendering eyes and in the latter due to the merchant being always depicted with his

hands tied behind his back, hence losing the expressive power granted by body language. In Hinds' adaptation instead, despite Antonio being one of the protagonists of the scene, he is mostly represented giving his shoulders to the readers or in the background, standing behind other characters such as Shylock or disguised Portia, on some occasions even covered by the speech balloon of another character, his submissiveness only evident when a sentence is pronounced in Shylock's favour (fig. 28).

FIGURE 28: Antonio's meeker self (top line: Gareth Hinds, pp. 40, 42; centre and bottom left: Manga Shakespeare*, p. 134; centre and bottom right:* Campfire Classics*, pp. 55, 58.*

This submissiveness could be justified by the fact that Antonio is willing to give all he has for Bassanio's happiness, in a relationship that gives way too many different interpretations, going from sincere friendship to would-be lover/patron of a younger, free-spending Bassanio (Cartelli 2020, 199) or even to a (possibly reciprocal) queer attachment. Upon everything else, the pound of flesh Antonio has agreed to bargain for Shylock's money is a symbol of how close he and Bassanio are: despite the debt being took up for Bassanio's sake, it is in the end Antonio who (almost) has to pay with everything he has for his friend's debt, contracted to allow Portia's return to life and agency after the casket game (Cartwright 2016, 168, 176), and subsequent happiness. Moreover, even though already saved once by Portia's witty trick in court,

Antonio vouches his life for Bassanio a second time just to assure Portia that her ring will never again be given away, an act that transcends even the stronger of friendships.

Critics have often noted how manifestations of affection between Antonio and Bassanio go beyond the physical or verbal expressions of love that could be categorised and accepted in a male-male friendship at the time, reaching quasi-erotic peaks (M. L. Kaplan 2020, 14), for example when, upon Bassanio's request for yet another loan, Antonio answers "my purse, my person, my extremest means // lie all unlocked to your occasions" (1.1.138-139). Namely, the word purse, on top of being used according to its literal meaning and as a metonymy for Antonio's money, has been proved to have some underlying sexual innuendos that, paired up with Antonio's behaviours throughout the play, could lead to think of a possible homoerotic attachment for Bassanio. This hypothesis is also rooted in Antonio's behaviour when Salanio and Salarino, trying to detect the cause of his melancholy, suppose he might be in love: on this occasion, instead of refuting his friends' suspects like he had done when denying any commercial worry for his argosies at sea, he simply dismisses the idea with a "Fie, fie" (1.1.46), almost as if he had something to hide (Cartelli 2020, 197). This moment is greatly emphasised in the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation where Faye Yong depicts Antonio first with a surprised expression and then slightly blushing, as to confirm his friends' suspects (fig. 29), validating Salanio's later "I think he only loves the world for him" (2.8.50).

FIGURE 29: Antonio's "Fie, fie" in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (p. 15)*

Furthermore, Lorenzo describes Antonio as Bassanio's "dear lover" (3.4.7), and when the merchant realises his inability to repay Shylock's loan, he writes his "sweet Bassanio" (3.2.314) a letter to inform him of his imminent danger, hinting at the strong feeling that connects the two of them within its closing lines: "if your love do not persuade you to come, // let not my letter" (3.2.319-20). In the three examined graphic adaptations, Antonio and Bassanio's most equivocal behaviours are treated very differently; namely, in Hinds' work, Bassanio grasps Antonio's hand trying to stop him from sealing the bond with Shylock, in the very same way he will later hold Portia's hand (fig. 30), giving to the attentive reader a reason to think that there's more between the two than just friendship, an hypothesis sustained by the way in which they grasp each other's hands in court, when Antonio is willing to pay with his whole heart even though this probably means he will die by Shylock's hand (Greenstadt 2020, 229).
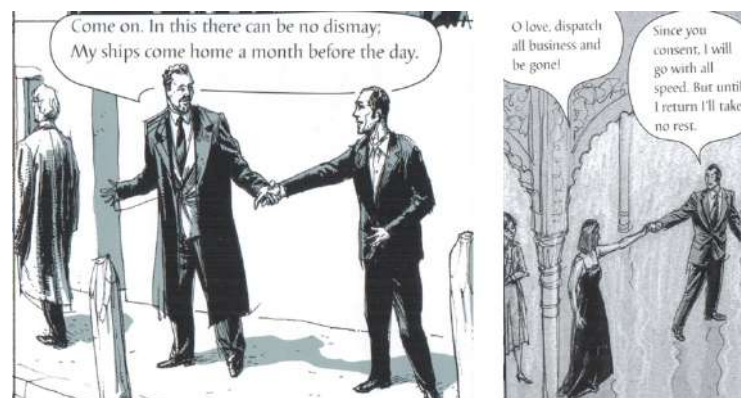
FIGURE 30: Parallel between Bassanio grasping Antonio's (left, p. 9) and Portia's (right, p. 35) hand in Gareth Hinds' adaptation

This same occurrence is similarly represented in the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, where Bassanio is depicted as he lovingly bends over the bound Antonio, their hands tenderly touching (fig. 31), while the merchant asks him to "say how I loved you, […] bid [your wife] be judge // whether Bassanio had not once a love" (4.1.271-273), thus reinforcing the idea that he might have been in love with his friend. Oppositely, in the *Campfire Classics* adaptation, the relationship between the two is almost sanitised and explained as simple friendship both textually and visually.

FIGURE 31: Antonio and Bassanio showing affection towards each other at court (left: Gareth Hinds, p.48; right: Manga Shakespeare*, pp. 150-151)*

As much as Antonio has been defined at once a friend and a lover, also Bassanio's behaviour can give either the vibe of a treasure seeker, a friend or a lover. Namely, some critics have deemed Bassanio to be just a liberal spender, someone who, once acknowledged Antonio's affection towards him, exploits it to convince his older friend to lend him more and more money despite knowing to be a bad risk (Cartelli 2020, 199, 206). This line of thought would be proven by the lost arrow fantasy, an act of self-determination by which Bassanio tries to convince Antonio to "manage the consequences of risk by taking even more risk" (Nguyen Tran 2020, 147). Moreover, even though Bassanio knows to be living beyond his means – something that the *Manga Shakespeare* edition cares to actually show to the readers, depicting his momentarily fantasy where he, in ragged and patched clothes, has to stand up to his richer rivals, he still asks Antonio to invest more money on him so that he can pursue Portia or, as Heine wrote, "bag a rich wife and a fat dowry" (as cited in Gross 2003, 199).

However, despite his greediness, Bassanio proves in more than one occasion to dearly love Antonio, his "dearest friend, the kindest man" (3.2.291). First of all, Bassanio actively tries to stop Antonio from agreeing to Shylock's conditions, as it is too dangerous, even though this would mean not standing a chance at wooing Portia; later on, thanks to Portia's richness, now shared with him thanks to their marriage, Bassanio tries to bribe Shylock to let go of the bond and accept his offer of twice the sum Antonio owed him, showing how little he cares for money when his friend's wellbeing is at stake. Lastly, Bassanio gives away Portia's ring not by his own will or

out of gratitude towards the lawyer who helped his friend, but because of Antonio's request to do so (Greenstadt 2020, 235), hence reinforcing the idea of an affective triangle that sees Bassanio at its top while Antonio and Portia are placed at either side of the base, competing for the exclusive love of the young man.

4.4 Portia's journey towards empowerment

At the beginning of the play Portia is presented as the 'golden fleece', waiting for her heroic Jason, Bassanio, to come and save her. Living in a state of life-in-death, she has no freedom of choice, she is "aweary of // this great world" (1.2.1-2) and "curbed // by the will of a dead father" (1.2.23-24). Forced to undergo her father's rules and the casket game he designed, marrying whoever manages to choose the right one, she is almost an "heavenly angel to be reborn" by Bassanio's choice (Cartwright 2016, 168–72). In the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, Portia's forcedly passive status is strengthened by her representation as a blindfolded, enchained woman, restricted from every movement (fig. 32), a visualisation than instantly makes clear to the reader how strongly constricted she feels in her golden cage (Bassi 2021b, 97).

FIGURE 32: Portia's curbed will is graphically represented through chains and a blindfold in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (p. 27)*

While not as visually immediate as allowed by the manga style, the other two adaptations still paint Portia as quite moderate and self-restrained, not showing too

many emotions – exposing her free spirit only when she discusses her suitors with her maid Nerissa (Tosi 2021, 221) – until Bassanio comes to woo her and she cannot contain her feelings anymore. In Hinds's work, Portia is represented in subtly elegant clothes, slightly richer than Nerissa's to suggest a difference in status, a distinction enhanced in the *Campfire Classics* volume, where she wears more luxurious clothing and accessories than her maid's ones (fig. 33).

FIGURE 33: Portia's visual representation in Gareth Hinds' adaptation (left, p. 5) and in the Campfire Classics *edition (right, p. 14)*

Furthermore, sticking to Portia's comparison with the golden fleece, all three adaptations depict her with blond hair, even though the *Manga Shakespeare* edition takes it further by drawing Portia as an ethereal, almost angelic woman wearing rich and flowy gowns; additionally, she is even portrayed with her hands clasped as if in prayer and a halo behind her head when she declares she will die as chaste as Diana unless someone manages to obtain her hand at her father's game (fig. 34).

FIGURE 34: Idealised, almost angelic and sanctified Portia in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (left to right, pp. 23, 33, 133)*

However, Portia tries to take ownership of the risks that the casket game entails by trying to guide Bassanio's choice asking her orchestra to play a song for him: composed of words rhyming with lead, it is supposed to counsel Bassanio and attract him to her portrait (Nguyen Tran 2020, 145). This alleged advantage is given to Bassanio thanks to his position as an insider, someone that Portia already knew and liked (Romack 2020, 78–79), and is graphically represented in all three editions: in the *Manga Shakespeare* and *Campfire Classics* it is rendered with the use of musical notes icons, meant to represent music playing, while Hinds's work goes as far as having the actual song's words, in bold and in a different font, superimposed over the panels and floating above a white pentagram emulating the music sheet (fig. 35).

FIGURE 35: Visual representation of the song played during Bassanio's choice of the casket in Gareth Hinds' adaptation (p. 28)

After Bassanio makes the right choice, Portia's sunny locks turn into Medusa-like hair in the portrait he finds inside the lead casket (Valls-Russell 2021, 129–31). Next, Bassanio asks her to confirm and ratify her willingness to marry him instead of just claiming her as her father's note suggested, effectively allowing Portia to take her agency back. As Jessica's shift from passivity to action is expressed through her cross-gendered polarity, Portia's empowerment through her love for Bassanio is further

aided by her choice to disguise herself as a young lawyer named Balthasar, whose legitimacy is allegedly vouched by her cousin Bellario, a real lawyer from Padua, to try and save her husband's friend. Once in court, Portia proves to be clever and witty, thus saving Antonio's life while, at the same time, obtaining benefits for Lorenzo and Jessica as well. This transition is very fast in Hinds' work, where Portia already has a suit in her closet despite asking her messenger to go and fetch some clothing Bellario is supposed to lend her; on the other hand, the transition in the *Manga Shakespeare* and *Campfire Classics* editions is somewhat slower and easier to grasp (fig. 36). In detail, in both these adaptations the journey from Belmont is depicted in a panel representing a horse-led carriage even though the *Manga Shakespeare* volume makes use of the subjective motion technique, having the reader identify with the moving object through a background full of lines, representing the landscape in motion, to strengthen the idea of hurry, while the *Campfire Classics* adaptation represents it with more common motion lines (McCloud 1999, 110–14).

FIGURE 36: Portia's journey towards complete agency represented in the three different adaptations (left to right: Gareth Hinds, p.38, Manga Shakespeare*, p. 129,* Campfire Classics*, p. 55)*

Lastly, Portia's ultimate expression of her newly found independence and freedom is to be found in her choice to put her husband to the test: cloaked in her disguised, she pushes Bassanio to surrender the ring she previously gave to him and that he promised to never part from. As already mentioned, even if at first Bassanio refuses to do so for his wife's sake, he then lets himself be convinced by Bassanio, hence having to explain his reason to Portia upon the final scene of the play and giving her a motive to hold it against him if she ever wants to, thus putting her in a power position and him in a weaker one, opposite to the traditional idea of passive, submissive wives under their husbands' authority.

CHAPTER THREE
Taking the play from stage to page

Introduction

Literary adaptations, even of the same source work, offer very different reading experiences thanks to a series of concurring factors involving both the plot and the medium of destination. Namely, these adaptations can be of the storytelling type, focussing only on the reworking of the main plotline and characters, or medium-specific, meant to exploit its full potentialities and thus bringing out the comics features. The latter case, most common in adaptations for visual media such as graphic novels, often results in a change of the reading experience and in a reframing of the source texts in the reader's mind – especially seeing that, no matter the degree of fidelity, an adaptation is "always in some sense a distortion of its source" (Fischlin and Fortier 2000, 17).

The creation of a visual product, such as a graphic novel or a comic book, always follows the same process, starting with an idea and moving towards the form, structure, and surface selected by the authors to present their concept to the readers (McCloud 1999, 170). However, when adapting a literary work, with the exclusion of appropriations, authors have a rather limited acting power upon the source work's original concepts and ideas, though counterbalanced by virtually countless combinations of words, images, and structural elements. Hence, the authors guide the reader's perception of time and action in the play right from the choice of the moments to represent (McCloud 2021a, 492), furthering their influence according to their own personal choices as adapters in depicting the chosen actions. As a result, through their adaptations, the authors bring to life a multitude of unique works of art even though all derived from the same source text, as in the case of the three graphic novel adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* taken into exam.

The process of adaptation of Shakespeare's *Merchant* poses a number of specific challenges that go beyond the characters' ethnic representation and the depiction of the setting, especially in relation to some of the most iconic moments in the play. In fact, at storytelling level the three adaptations object of analysis are all created with the purpose to give the play a new life, identifying themselves as derivations right from

the title. Because of this, especially when it comes to the play's most famous scenes, the plotline devised by Shakespeare is mainly kept intact, with the exception of the occasional reshaping undertaken by the hypertext to fit the destination medium. This method allows knowing readers to fully appreciate the interplay between source and adaptive text while providing new readers with an experience of the play in itself (Sanders 2015, 57). On the other hand, at a structural level, the author's agency manifests itself through drawing style, framing choices, layout, and panels' shape and size, together with the individuation of the "fruitful moment" – that moment that projects the action in time, summarising what happened prior to it while also suggesting future developments (Tosti 2016, 39, 70–72). Thanks to the combination of these elements, specific moments of the play's plot are highlighted and enhanced, while others are deemed less important if not altogether cut, accordingly impacting on the dynamic, participatory process of reading and the subsequent reader response (Sanders 2015, 75).

1. The casket test

One of the main elements in *The Merchant of Venice*'s plot is most definitely the casket game, derived from an ancient story with which Shakespeare probably came into contact thanks to Richard Robinson's 1595 edition of a selection from the *Gesta Romanorum*, that was initially compiled in the fourteenth century as a collection of allegorical stories (Ozark Holmer 1978, 54). Comparably to the changes made to *Il Pecorone*'s plot, Shakespeare significantly altered the casket riddle as well, not only in his decision to turn it into a courting test to obtain Portia's hand in marriage, but also in the choice to revise the caskets' contents to add a scroll to each of them, so as to underline the symbolic value of each suitor's choice (Ozark Holmer 1978, 55–56).

The casket plot has long been controversial in its interpretation as either a lottery, a riddle, or a mixed game in between the two options (Klingspon 1986, 42) up until nowadays interpretation of it as deep play. Namely, it is viewed as a scheme where what Portia's suitors "stand to gain is less than the marginal disutility of what they stand to lose" (Bentham, as cited in Nguyen Tran 2020, 135) since, due to the one in three chances of succeeding, they all risk self-destruction just to marry the lady of Belmont. Ultimately, *The Merchant*'s casket riddle is a wisdom test devised by Portia's

father to find someone who sees the world as he used to (Donow 1969, 90–91), thus proving Portia's suitors' internal worthiness (Akhimie 2020, 160). Meant to separate takers from givers, in this riddle the choice in itself – even more than the actual result – is a projection of the chooser's moral and a tool to accordingly qualify him (Lickorish 1969, 178; Ozark Holmer 1978, 59). Moreover, even though this device forces Portia to look helpless and dismayed, effectively making her an object to be chosen by the right man, she still maintains her wish to choose for herself, shown in her alleged attempt to give Bassanio an insider vantage at the moment of his choice as well as when she mocks her suitors in conversation with her maid Nerissa in Act 1, Scene 2 (Nguyen Tran 2020, 144). In detail, Portia underlines the various faults of the Princes who came to woo her before the Prince of Morocco, hence setting out the requirements of the perfect husband by what her previous suitors lacked (Novy 1979, 143).

Portia's disdain towards the Princes proves to be fundamental to define her personality as well as to explain her later evolution into a more active and independent character; nonetheless, this scene is treated very differently in the three graphic novels. In detail, Gareth Hinds' *Merchant* reduces the dialogue to just two lines, with Nerissa asking "Don't you like any of the suitors?" and Portia answering her that "Each one is worse than the last" (Shakespeare and Hinds 2008, 6); on the other hand, both the *Manga Shakespeare* and the *Campfire Classics* adaptations, even though in different styles, give the dialogue a proportionate number of panels in relation to the rest of the scene. In the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, the conversation between Portia and her maid is turned into a comic moment, where the Princes are either cartoonified or depicted as portraits in a gallery, their features revealing the fault of theirs that Portia is lamenting. Lastly, in the *Campfire Classics* volume, the dialogue maintains a rather realistic feel at image level, signalled as a memory rather than an actual action thanks to the dove grey colour palette and the wavy panel frames.

However, the real question raised by the casket test, and the one to be answered to unlock the means to pass it, is whether the outer appearance conceals or rather suggests something about the inner contents, since lead is the only casket that demands rather than promising to give something like the other two (Kállay 2005, 179). Namely, this test debases gold and exalts a common metal such as lead (Donow 1969, 90) in the attempt to find he who rightly loves and who will be able to appreciate surfaces

more deeply, choosing according to meaning instead of according to the metal's shine (Watt 2021, 104). Consequently, the meagre lead's unattractive exterior proves to be concealing the most valuable contents and Bassanio's ability to weigh it up instead of solely judging its appearance feels like poetic justice, proving that it is indeed the best man to finally win Portia's hand (Lickorish 1969, 209, 212; Watt 2021, 164).

At a pictorial level, the different appearance of the three caskets provides fertile ground for varied graphic representations not only in terms of colours but also in shapes and richness of decoration, together with the tag enclosing each motto. Gareth Hinds gives the caskets slightly different shapes, with the leaden casket's trapezoidal lid being the most different, as to mark the contrast between it and the other two; however, the greyscale colour palette used throughout the volume, together with similar decorations on all the three caskets, and the lack of the motto's tag somewhat blur the distinction. Similarly, Faye Yong designs different casket shapes for the *Manga Shakespeare* volume, with the leaden casket once more being the one with a trapezoidal lid; moreover, the different amount of jewel stones and decorations, together with close-ups of the motto tags containing legible, full upper-case words, allow the caskets to be easily distinguishable to the reader's eyes despite the graphic novel being in black-and-white. Finally, the *Campfire Classics* adaptation is the one marked by a greater legibility of the caskets' differences thanks to the use of colour combined with different shapes and degrees of decoration, that compensate the illegible mottos engraved on the caskets.

1.1 Choosing by the show: Morocco and Arragon

While one of the most recognised scenes of *The Merchant of Venice* is Bassanio's choice of the right casket in Act 3, Scene 2, the casket riddle develops during more than just a single scene. Namely, the choices of the Prince of Morocco – Act 2, Scene 7 – and of the Prince of Arragon – Act 2, Scene 9 – prove to be rather important for the economy of the caskets plot because, through the insights they give on the characters' personalities, they provide the spectator – or the reader, as in this case – with the necessary tools to better understand its functioning and all the moral implications beneath it, together with an insider's vantage in knowing before Bassanio which casket contains Portia's portrait. As a matter of fact, both Morocco and Arragon

choose by the show, the former of the metal and the latter of the motto, proving just how self-centred they are (Ozark Holmer 1978, 56–58). With both of them, Portia focuses more on the game's rules rather than her own feelings about it, exposing their tendency to focus on material aspects and their "susceptibility to the possession-oriented mottos" (Novy 1979, 143), thus leading them to choose following their self-absorbed personalities. Ironically, despite Morocco's plea to not be judged solely because of his appearance, he lets himself be fooled by the glister of gold and by his view of Portia as an object to be won rather than a woman to be loved, consequently choosing the casket that fits his aggressive nature, underlined by his continuous references to his life full of conquest and by the importance he bestows upon himself (Lickorish 1969, 207). Comparably to Morocco's lack of wisdom and judgement, Arragon as well is misled by the caskets' appearance and, most of all, by their mottos; considering himself better than the "fool multitude that choose by show" (2.9.25), and feeling to deserve Portia's hand, he quickly dismisses gold to choose silver instead, expecting to be rewarded. However, when his choice proves to be the wrong one, he reacts like a pampered child who has never been denied a wish before (Lickorish 1969, 208), clearly proving his nature of taker rather than the giver Portia's father wanted his daughter to marry.

All three graphic novel adaptations give an equal amount of space to both scenes, letting the images underline the physical act of choosing while word balloons enrich the psychological aspect thanks to the characters' soliloquies. In Gareth Hinds' volume, Morocco almost looks pensive, in contrast not only with Shakespeare's portrait of an aggressive Prince who feels to be one of the greatest conquerors ever, but also with his idea to be deserving Portia in birth, fortune, graces, and breeding expressed in the original *Merchant*'s text (2.7.31-34) and here cut for abridgement purposes. Both Morocco and Arragon, are depicted like regular businessmen, even though the former has a darker complexion according to Shakespeare's original idea and to his geographical origin. In addition to this, Arragon appears to be quite self-confident and has an air of presumption to him, underlined both by his stance and gestures as well as by his words. A greater difference in characterisation is to be found in the *Campfire Classics* edition, where both Princes are richly depicted – as to show their superficiality through their interest in wealth and external appearances – and

given different costumes to identify their coming from far away to try their luck at the casket trial. Here, both Morocco and Arragon look very confident in themselves and in their choices, an attitude underlined by their stances and facial expressions, even though the illustrator often chooses to frame them from a lower level, thus giving the experienced reader an ulterior motive to weigh them for their real worth rather than for the one they perceive to have. Moreover, the distribution of colours and the attention to the Princes' facial expressions highlight their true nature, reinforcing the strength of the words revealed by the scrolls – even though they are paraphrased instead of being kept in verses. Similarly, in the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation the Princes are very well characterised as they present different complexions and physical traits on top of costumes quite different from the other characters; the psychological sphere is also well rendered thanks to eloquent poses and facial expressions, underlined by close-ups and expressive backgrounds that grant a greater legibility of Morocco's aggressive nature of conqueror and of Arragon's spoiled child attitude. Moreover, despite the utter expressiveness of images, words still maintain their importance, in an interdependent relationship that grants clarity and provides the reader with a remarkable point of view on the deeper meaning of the casket game.

1.2 Bassanio's choice

Bassanio's lifestyle is in marked contrast with that of the two Princes: he is prepared to give and to woo, he is attentive towards other people and his nature is fundamentally generous and spendthrift. According to this, he makes no reference to himself during his soliloquy in front of the caskets but just weighs them in their entirety, remaining wary of their appearance while concentrating on making a choice independently from external fancy (Lickorish 1969, 210–12) and therefore choosing the meagre lead above the lavishly decorated gold and silver. However, in addition to his nature guiding him towards the right choice, Bassanio's success at the casket game could also have been influenced by the insider's vantage Portia has provided him with. In fact, critics have often discussed that, on top of the song's words rhyming with lead, Portia's spontaneity of speech, focussed on her feelings and her unwillingness to lose Bassanio's company, could have reinforced his love for risk and led him to choose lead (Novy 1979, 143–44). This idea is also backed by Portia's use of "hazard" (3.2.2),

"venture" (3.2.10) and "sacrifice" (3.2.57) during her speech with Bassanio (Ozark Holmer 1978, 58), recalling the lead casket's motto: "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (2.7.9).

From the visual point of view, Bassanio's choice is given a great amount of space in all three graphic novel adaptations, a first element meant to underline the importance of this instance for the general plot and to maintain the proportion between scenes of the original play. In Gareth Hinds' version, the greater part of Bassanio's soliloquy is cut and substituted by him mumbling and reading the caskets' mottos, a choice enhanced by the prevalent role images assume over words. During this moment, the author slows down the reading rhythm thanks to the use of almost silent panels, accentuated by the occurrence of moment-to-moment and aspect-to-aspect transitions paired with the use of close-ups to show Bassanio's eyes and hands. Thus, the atmosphere feels almost cinematographic, little to no closure is required, and the reader is pushed to focus on the passage of time, the suspense, and the tension created by such a difficult choice (McCloud 2021a, 498). Being silent panels often perceived as timeless, not only they affect the readers' perception of time but also their attention towards the event as, because of their unresolved nature, they tend to linger longer in the reader's mind (McCloud 1999, 102). However, this picture specific combination where words add to the story, but it is the image that actually tells it – with the exception of the song, which is made part of the picture thanks to the montage technique – is reverted to a more balanced, interdependent one upon Bassanio's actual choice of the lead casket (McCloud 1999, 153–54).

The scene's climax is highlighted in a full-page panel depicting Bassanio reaching the key to the chosen casket, in an accentuation of rhythm due to the bigger size of the panel, compared with the smaller and shorter ones to be found immediately before and after (Groensteen 2013, 153). Here, the last lines of Bassanio's speech are kept, paraphrased in the case of his dismissal of gold and unchanged in the case of the reference to lead (3.2.104-107, as shown in fig. 37). Furthermore, while Bassanio opens the casket, the readers are presented with a wider, horizontal panel in which Portia expresses her newly found sensibility to feelings, even though she looks more worried than ecstatic, almost as if she feared for the outcome despite already knowing the lead casket is the right one.
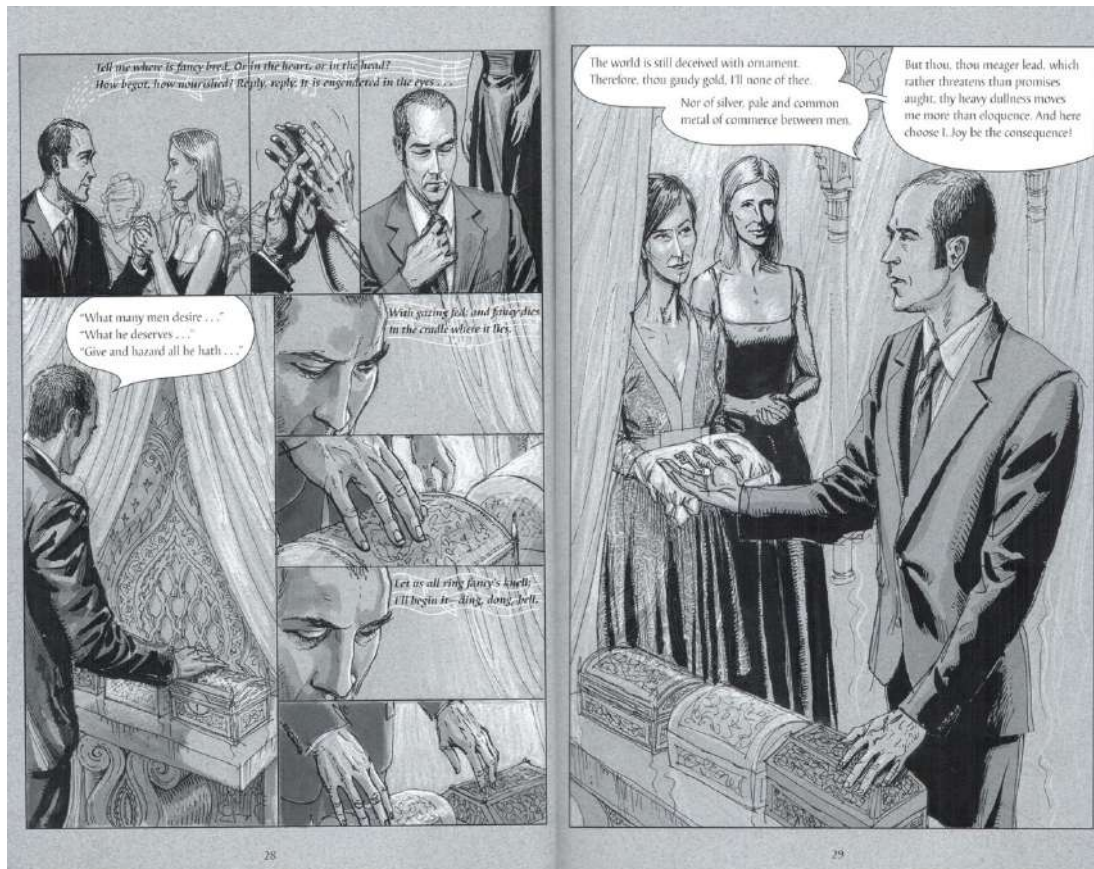
FIGURE 37: Bassanio's choice of the lead casket in Gareth Hinds' adaptation of The Merchant of Venice *(pp. 28-29)*

The narration then returns to smaller panels organised in strips to accelerate the reading pace and, to enhance this quicker rhythm, dialogues are heavily abridged even though the scroll's content still uses Shakespeare's original verses (3.2.131-138). Similarly, despite the presence in the source text of two separate kisses – one initiated by Bassanio to "receive", after line 3.2.140, and one initiated by Portia after line 3.2.148 – Hinds decides to cut Bassanio's "until confirmed, signed, ratified by you" (3.2.148) aimed to verify Portia's willingness to marry him, and presents the reader with a single kiss, the first one, thus taking away part of Portia's agency and making it appear as if Bassanio actually claimed her, as stated by the casket's scroll (fig. 38). A choice similar to that made in the case of Bassanio's soliloquy is taken in regard to Portia's love declaration, which is also cut short to keep the focus on her delivering herself and her estate in Bassanio's hands. As a token of her affection, Portia gifts her future husband a betrothal ring, a symbol furtherly emphasised by the point of light and subtle accenting lines surrounding the ring itself while Portia puts it on Bassanio's finger.
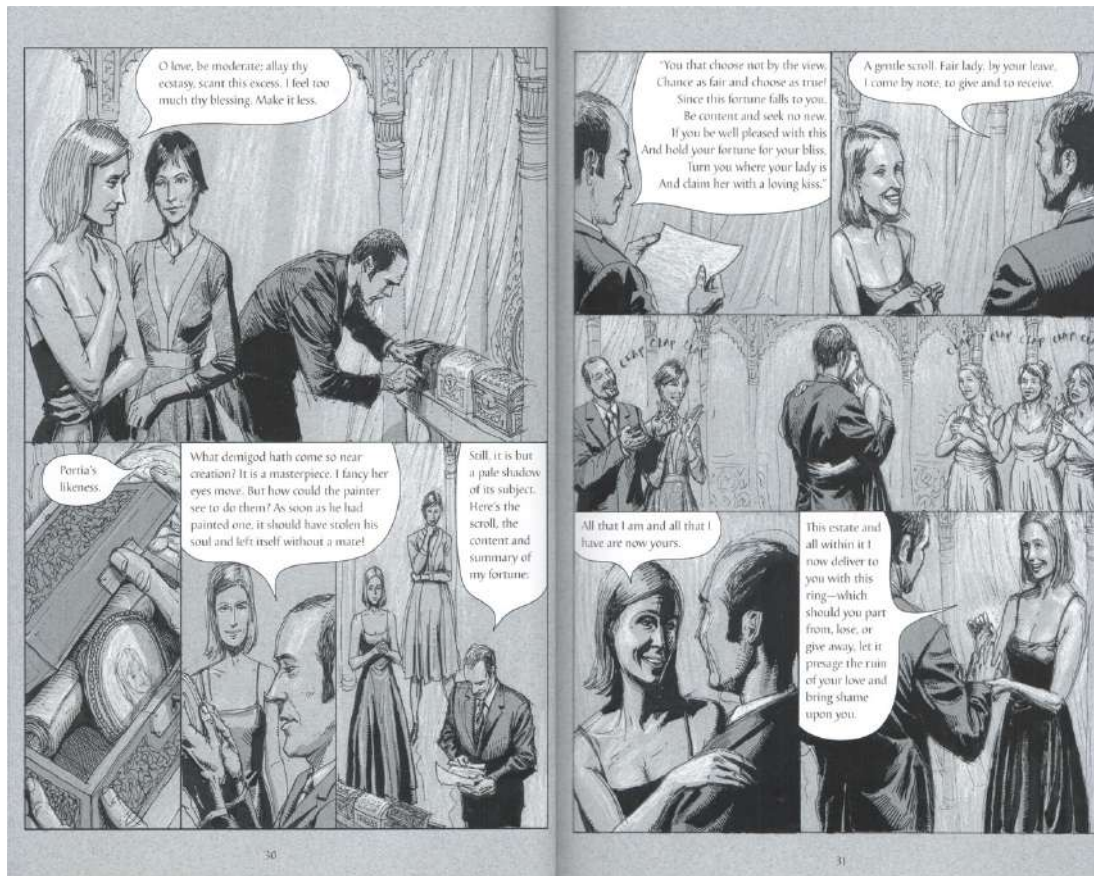
FIGURE 38: Bassanio and Portia's exchange of love vows in Gareth Hinds's volume (pp. 30-31)

In the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, this scene presents a very irregular layout, even more than the rest of the play, because the panels are mainly used as picture frames, emphasising some details, and inset over a main illustration bleeding on the whole page. The use of longer, horizontal panels alternated with thinner, vertical ones provides a contrast between the more dilated perception of time provided by the former ones and the shorter, quicker time lapse given by the latter ones (McCloud 1999, 100–103). Evident right from Portia's speech and Bassanio's initial soliloquy, this layout contributes to give a greater emotional impact focussing on the characters' feelings, as in the case of Portia's eyes, and to emphasise important details, as when Bassanio stands in front of the caskets. Here, the caskets are shadowed and put in the very foreground, highlighting their importance, Bassanio's figure bleeds out of its panel as to enhance his physical presence in the room and is also reposed as a free figure on the bottom right corner, giving the idea of a moment-to-moment transition and of a slower passage of time.
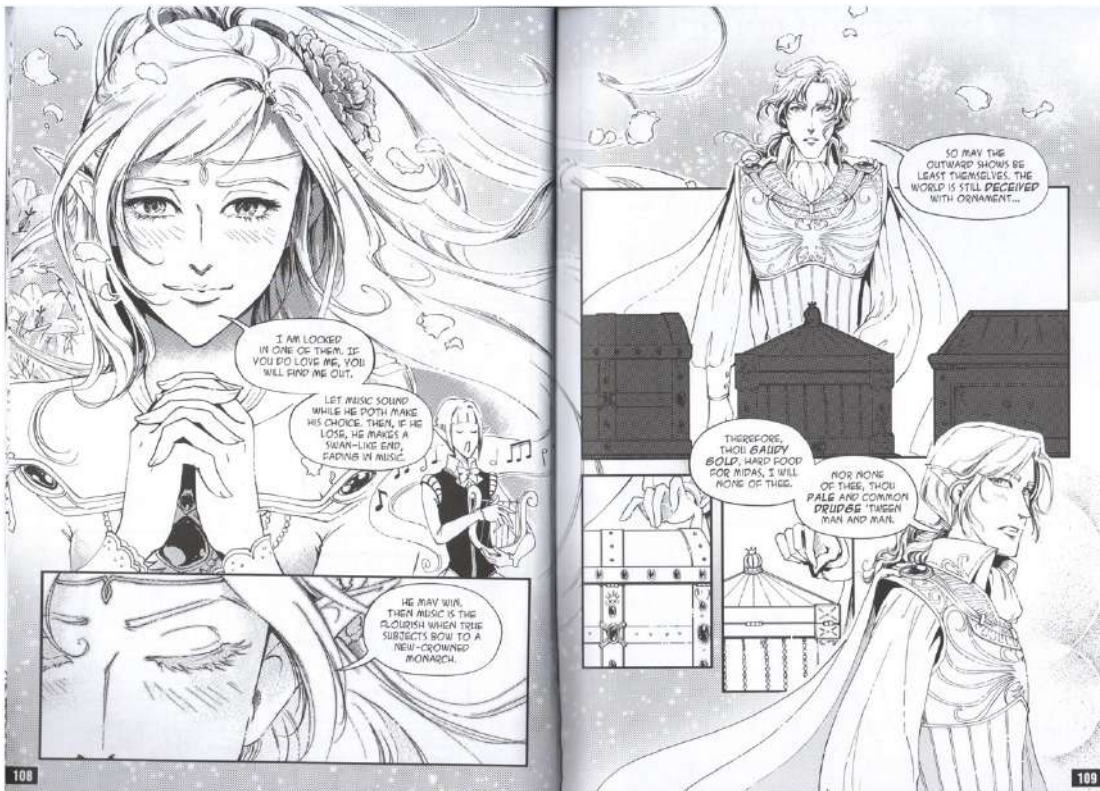
FIGURE 39: Bassanio's choice of the lead casket in the Manga Shakespeare *volume (pp. 108-109, 110-11)*

As in Hinds' version, Bassanio's soliloquy is abridged according to the medium's general economy, but here *The Merchant*'s original verses play a greater role; in detail, as Bassanio stands in front of the caskets, he declares "so may the outward shows be least themselves, // the world is still deceived with ornament" (3.2.73-74) using the poetic strength of Shakespeare's words to create an interdependent relationship with the panels, allowing the reader to fully perceive the power of the scene together with Bassanio's tension. Likewise, while Bassanio dismisses gold and lead, a close-up of his hand moving away from the caskets is used to give greater clarity to Shakespeare's verses (3.2.101-107).

Likewise, the climax is underlined through a combination of visual storytelling and the Playwright's words, not because of a different panel size as in Hinds, but rather thanks to a series of close-ups: first of Bassanio's face and of his hand softly touching the leaden surface, and then by Portia's outburst of emotions, her clearly happy albeit surprised expression in finding out Bassanio is making the right choice (fig. 39). Portia's attitude truly shows the reader that, at this point of the play, she already knows which casket is the one containing her portrait and the swiftness of her emotional awakening is conveyed through the use of thin, vertical panels that usually imply a shorter reading time (McCloud 1999, 100–103). Moreover, in this adaptation, Portia's agency is well rendered as, after reading the scroll's contents – expressed once more through the original Shakespeare's verses – Bassanio lovingly kisses her hand and then asks for her confirmation before claiming her, thus effectively transferring the scene's original structure into the graphic medium. This second kiss, meant to make the reader feel the force of the couple's feelings, is represented twice on the page, recurring to a visual trick commonly used in mangas to stress emotional upturns (McCloud 2021a, 698). Namely, the action in the foreground is represented from a wider point of view, in this case a half-figure depiction corresponding to a mid-range framing, and a closer detail of it is depicted in the background, specifically a close-up of the kiss, ulteriorly reinforced by a smaller, vertical panel showing the moment immediately before their lips touch. Similarly, Portia's betrothal speech presents a reduced number of verses but still transmits her idea of marriage as a reciprocal show of love, a relationship in which she wishes to better herself for Bassanio, rather than just an institution, an idea that is enhanced by the emotionally expressive backgrounds.

FIGURE 40: Portia and Bassanio's love vows in the Manga Shakespeare *edition (pp. 112-113, 114-115, 116)*

In a subject-to-subject transition, the focus of attention is then shifted over to Portia and to her gift of the betrothal ring to Bassanio; here, even more than in Hinds' *Merchant*, the ring is given a major prominence in the panel as it is enclosed in two light circles with lines irradiating from them, a characteristic device used to indicate shine, hence capturing the reader's attention despite its lateral positioning in the panel (fig. 40).

As in the other two adaptations, the *Campfire Classics* one also abridges the text reducing its overall amount in order to grant a more balanced relationship with the images. However, as for the rest of the scenes in this volume, Shakespeare's verses are fully paraphrased into modern English, thus forcing the images to convey most of the scene's poetic tension. In detail, the scene is given a certain uniformity thanks to the use of action-to-action transitions for most of the panels, depicting a pensive Bassanio going through the different stages of his soliloquy. The panels enclosed in a somewhat regular layout distributed on three strips, allow the illustrator to guide the reader through each of them, also thanks to the use of visual strategies related to the distribution of colour, to be noted especially in Bassanio's bright blue garments that catch and maintain the reader's attention throughout the scene. Moreover, despite the focus on the content of the action established by the prevalence of mid-range framings, rhythm and perception are nonetheless quite varied thanks to the alternance of events viewed from eye-level and instances viewed from a slightly heightened point of view, granting the readers a vantage point thanks to the wider perspective, but also giving the feel of the readers' emotional superiority as they already know which casket is the right one (McCloud 2021a, 502–3). Bassanio here is depicted as very dubious, carefully weighing each casket before choosing, while Portia and Nerissa in the background clearly show their previous knowledge of the caskets' contents. In fact, while Bassanio thinks about gold, Portia brings her hand to her mouth in a surprised motion, while he considers silver, Nerissa covers her eyes and lastly, when he chooses lead, Nerissa sort of hugs Portia while smirking in satisfaction, reinforcing the reader's perceived moral superiority due to their advanced knowledge, acquired upon Morocco and Arragon's choice (fig. 41).

FIGURE 41: Bassanio's choice of the lead casket in the Campfire Classics *adaptation (pp. 44-45)*

The scene's climax is marked by a change in layout that makes the choice in itself stand out among the other panels; namely, the strip is divided into three vertically oriented and narrower panels, thus signalling a change in pace. Moreover, these three panels are silent ones, shifting the text-image relationship towards the latter element and allowing the reader to better take in Bassanio's choice through the moment-to-moment transition going from his hand taking the key to the lead casket and then unlocking it, to finally opening it to reveal Portia's portrait. As in Hinds' version, Portia's newfound emotional strength is quite toned down, in this case because even though she expresses her feelings in a whisper, she gives her back to the readers while Bassanio chooses the casket, preventing them from fully perceiving her moment of emotional upheaval. Lastly, after the casket's opening and the reading of the scroll, actions follow a slightly different course in the graphic novel adaptation than in Shakespeare's verses, as Bassanio not only asks for Portia's permission before "giving [himself] to [her] with a kiss" (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 46), but also waits for her to

express her love vows and to give him the betrothal ring before kissing her. In this adaptation, as well as in the other two, the ring is given particular emphasis even though not through the use of visual tricks, but rather thanks to the panel's composition, that sees the ring at its exact centre naturally drawing in the reader's gaze (McCloud 2021a, 506). The lovers' kiss is also given particular importance, underlined not only by colour and light distribution but also by the choice of a strip-wide horizontal panel that depicts the slightly decentred couple in the foreground, hit by a ray of light, accompanied in the background by Nerissa and Gratiano on the left and by a multitude of people all looking alike and wearing dimly coloured liveries, probably being Portia's servants, on the right (fig. 42).

FIGURE 42: Portia and Bassanio exchange their love vows and kiss in the Campfire Classics *adaptation (p. 46)*

2. The trial scene

The trial scene taking place in Act 4, Scene 1 is the climax of the play and probably one of the most iconic moments of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, revealing the deep conflict not only between Christians and Jews but also between justice and mercy. Once discovered that Antonio's ships have all sunk and that he his bankrupt, Shylock has him arrested and takes him to court, wishing to retrieve the pound of flesh they had previously agreed upon if the bond were forfeited. Nonetheless, the resolution of the conflict proves to be a more complicated matter than anticipated: Shylock has a case in law, as his and Antonio's bond is valid, but allowing the Jew to take a pound of the merchant's flesh would almost certainly result in the death of one of the most respected and esteemed Venetian citizens. Hence, if the Venetians were to obey the law as they know it, they would legitimate Antonio's murder but, at the same time, if they were to break it, they would jeopardize both their commerce and Venice's reputation of a fair and impartial city, where all cases are resolved in justice (Klingspon 1986, 39). Moreover, both the Duke and Bassanio try to mediate in Antonio's favour but they are too openly hostile towards Shylock to obtain any other result than pushing him to be even more firmly willing to have his bond instead of any other sum of money; the only possible mediation can be that of an outsider's point of view, later provided by Portia, disguised as the young lawyer Balthasar (Novy 1979, 145).

The graphic representations of this first part of Act 4, Scene 1 generally focus on rendering Antonio's meekness side by side Shylock's excessive resolution in having his bond, yonder marked by his speech about slaves. Furthermore, the Duke is given a prominent position in almost all representations as he is the physical embodiment of justice. In order to give the reader a better sense of place, Gareth Hinds' *Merchant* opens the trial scene not with a single landscape panel but with an entire page dedicated to this purpose, presenting three different views of Palazzo Ducale: an outside one and two inside scenes where the characters are seen making their way to the room where the trial will take place. Next, the strip-wide, horizontal panel giving the first insight of the actual courtroom recalls the enthroned Duke seen on Boitard's frontispiece for Rowe's edition in 1709, a reference that might not be recognised by most readers but nonetheless produces the same outcome of its older counterpart, that of underlining the scene's justice-oriented reading. Antonio – portrayed from behind

– is delivering his speech to the reader-facing Duke in paraphrased words, both for better clarity and to reduce its size, even though the pathos is kept intact thanks to Antonio's declaring he "will oppose [his] patience to [Shylock's] fury" (4.1.10). At this stage, Hinds lifts more and more directly from Shakespeare's verses to maintain the play's feel and most famous speeches, even though this causes an imbalance in the word-image relationship, where the higher density of text and the balloons' size and heaviness overpower the panels' graphic contents. Moreover, panels so rich of words, they require a longer reading time thus losing the readers' attention; namely, panels too rich in text will cause the reader to either skip them to look for more visually interesting ones, or to focus longer on them paying less attention to the antecedent and subsequent panels, consequently jeopardising the general reading experience, especially in relation to details (Tosti 2016, 553).
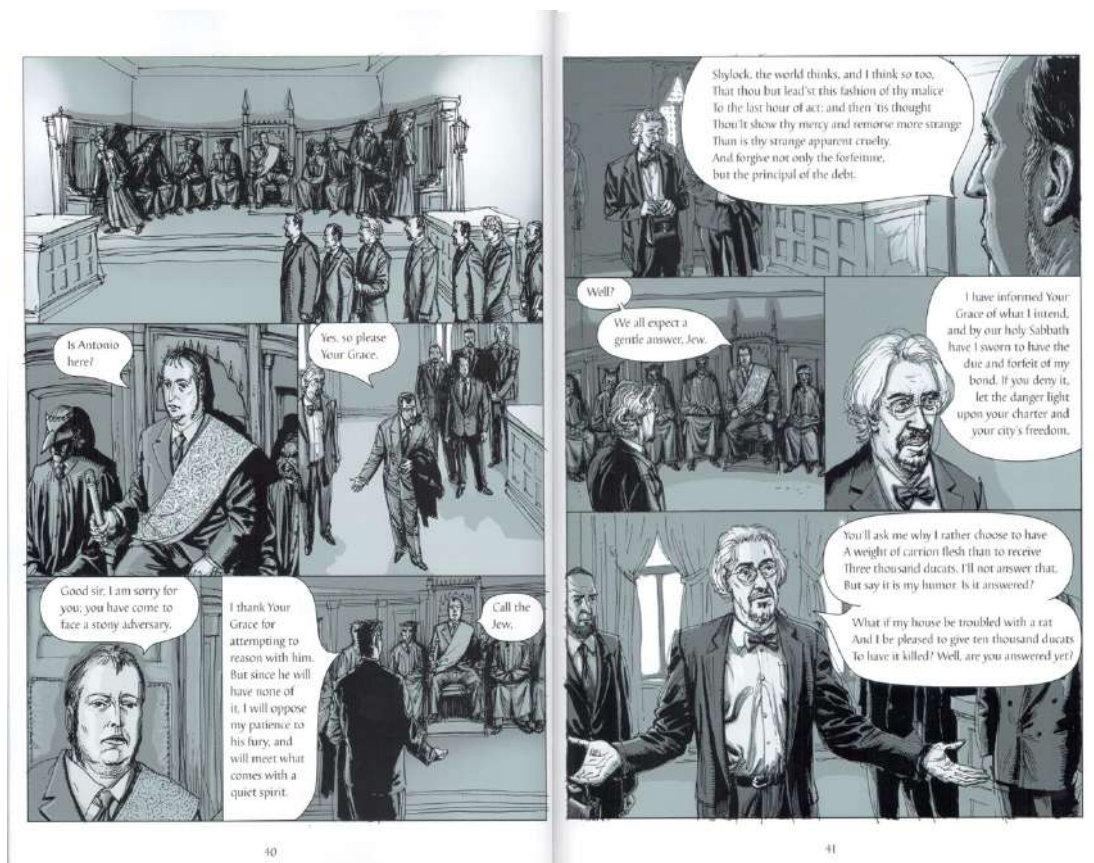
FIGURE 43: The beginning of the trial scene in Gareth Hinds' volume (pp. 40-41)

Namely, at a linguistic level, minor reductions are made to the Duke's speech to Shylock, preserving the verses most loaded with meaning while summarising in a paraphrase the request to forget not only the forfeiture but also the principal (fig. 43), ending his lines with "We all expect a gentle answer, Jew" (4.1.33) hence keeping the play's contraposition between Jews and the idea of mercy associated with gentiles – or, as in this case, Christians. Even the following exchanges are quite faithful to the source text, sometimes presenting minor alterations for clarity reasons, despite Shylock's reference to the serpent stinging twice, and therefore his unwillingness to stand still and wait for a second offence to be committed against him, being cut. On the other hand, Shylock's loathing towards Antonio and his humour to just have the bond are literally transposed, as well as his speech of comparison between his freedom to do whatever he pleases with the pound of flesh, which is "dearly bought" (4.1.99), equal to the Venetians taking their liberties with their purchased slaves and using them "in abject and slavish parts" (4.1.91). Interestingly, Bassanio's attempt to offer his flesh and to cheer Antonio is not present in this adaptation; consequently, Antonio's meekness in death, expressed through his self-comparison to the "tainted wether of the flock, // meetest for death; the weakest kind of fruit [that] // drops earliest to the ground" (4.1.113-115), is also missing, watering down the merchant's resignation to his fate. Throughout the development of this section of the plot, Hinds uses a prevalence of subject-to-subject transitions, shifting the focus from the Duke, to Antonio, and to Shylock based off the character currently speaking; furthermore, the author reduces backgrounds to just the necessary details, such as the Duke's seat and possibly a window in airier panels, thus allowing a better legibility of the image even though word balloons still make the panel feel too small and crowded for it to be fully expressive.

In the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation, the layout is once more irregular and presents an alternance of open and closed panels, some of them inset over images freely bleeding upon the page, in order to underline a specific facial expression, detail or moment. Subject-to-subject transitions are used to push the reader to empathise with one character at a time – while at once making the dialogues and speeches easier to follow – and are paired with moment-to-moment transitions meant to take the characters' emotions to the extreme thanks to the close-up framings of their eyes or

hands in specific gestures. The scene opens upon the enthroned Duke who is framed according to a lowered point of view, a technique used to convey his power and magnificence (McCloud 2021a, 503). These visual tricks, paired with the importance given to facial expressions and other elements such as the casket containing the six thousand glistering ducats that Bassanio offers to Shylock in place of Antonio's flesh, deeply contribute to the general economy of the scene, creating a balanced, interdependent image-text relationship. Halftone screens, motion lines and the variety in panels' shapes and sizes add depth and rhythm to the scene and underline the poetic force of Shakespeare's verses, especially in relation to Antonio's meekness and Shylock's resolution. Namely, Antonio – his eyes closed and with a serious countenance – shows his acceptance of the forfeiture both upon his initial conversation with the Duke (fig. 44), when he states to be prepared to "suffer with a quietness of spirit, // the very tyranny and rage of his" (4.1.11-12), and in his self-comparison to the weakest fruit, which is here maintained.

FIGURE 44: The Manga Shakespeare *interpretation of Antonio and Shylock's speeches to the Duke of Venice during the trial scene (pp. 134-135)*

Similarly, Shylock's unmoving determination, is well rendered in his stern, decisive expressions and gestures, that turn into utmost anger once the Duke accuses him to have no mercy, while trying to convince him to give up the forfeiture. At this point, Shylock is the focal point of the page despite occupying its lower half as he is depicted pointing furiously at himself while yelling "if you deny me, fie upon your law: // there is no force in the decrees of Venice. // I stand for judgement: answer, shall I have it?" (4.1.100-103).

FIGURE 45: Abridgement of Shylock's speech about slaves in the Manga Shakespeare *volume (pp. 138-139)*

At a linguistic level, the dialogues of this scene are slightly condensed, even though the words uttered by the various characters are mainly reproductions of *The Merchant*'s original ones, with some due alterations aligned to the target audience's age and literacy, seeing that it is aimed at students and younger readers. In detail, while the words of both Antonio's and the Dukes' initial speeches are mostly kept as is – with the exception of the Duke's mention to Shylock's malice that is removed – Shylock's words are somewhat abridged, still proving that he wants his bond over

money only out of spite and because of his loathing to Antonio, but losing all the references to the other things men are allowed to consider hateful and dispose of (4.1.43-58), including Shylock's refusal to wait for the "serpent" to sting him a second time. Furthermore, the collaborative work of Yong and Appignanesi also leaves out the gentile-Jew contraposition surfacing from the Duke's words as well as Shylock's speech about the Venetians' treatment of their slaves as properties despite emphasising Shylock's claims of possession upon the pound of flesh, thus erasing the association of Christians with malicious and unmerciful behaviours and reinforcing the idea that the Jew is morally inferior to the others because of his statements (fig. 45).

In the *Campfire Classics* adaptation, language is abridged and paraphrased in this scene as much as in the rest of the volume, even though the meaning is mostly kept intact. According to the decisions made while adapting the whole play, any specific reference to Shylock's Jewishness as much as to Christianity is cut and made into direct appellatives, like when the Duke's expectation for a gentle answer from the Jew is turned into a "We all expect a positive answer from you" (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 55) addressed at Shylock and accompanied by the Duke pointing his finger at him. Furthermore, as in the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation, the Duke's allusion to Shylock's malice and the Jew's list of hateful animals are taken out, even though here the mention to the twice-biting snake is preserved; Antonio's lines of self-comparison with the weakest element of the flock or fruit are equally cut, hence toning down his moment of total submissiveness to his fate, emphasising in its place Bassanio's offer of his own flesh, reinforced by the addition of Gratiano's trying to stop him and declaring he too deserves to die for Antonio's sake. Nonetheless, the general atmosphere of Shakespeare's scene is still conveyed despite the reworking of verses into prose, in particular because of the textual adapter's choice to still expose the Venetians' cruelty in Shylock's speech about slaves, even though toning down the allusions to their being perceived as possessed objects to a simpler vision of them doing the "dirty work".

At a visual level, as in Hinds' adaptation, the scene opens on a landscape panel depicting the courtroom from an aerial point of view to underline the impressiveness of the place together with the change of atmosphere, departing from the previous scene. The distribution of colour proves to be fundamental throughout the whole scene

as, added to a layout that mixes panels of various sizes, it guides the reader's eyes towards the characters – especially the Duke wearing bright blue, his judges clothed in red robes and Shylock's red skullcap and garments – separating them from the background, that relies on earthly, dimmed tones.

FIGURE 46: The beginning of the trial scene and Shylock's speech about slaves in the Campfire Classics *adaptation (pp. 55-56)*

Aside from the initial speech between Antonio and the Duke, no panel adopts an eye-level framing rather opting for an elevated or a lowered one to communicate through visual choices as well as words. In fact, instead of just being focussed on contents as in the case of eye-level mid-range framings, lowered perspectives enhance the characters' role in the panel, while elevated ones contribute to give a general view of the context as well as to promote the reader's emotional superiority, as in the scene where Bassanio notes Shylock's extreme cruelty, rooted in his idea of killing what – or who – he dislikes, including Antonio (fig. 46). Furthermore, the action-to-action

transitions paired with the occasional subject-to-subject ones enhance clarity while also promoting dynamism, therefore taking the scene to a level easier to interpret even for a younger readership, allowing them to form their own opinions on the case and to try and advance hypotheses on the possible outcome of the trial.

2.1 The "quality of mercy" and the turning of the law

Convinced to have won the case, Shylock is already whetting his knife when Portia, disguised as Balthazar, enters the courtroom to completely change the course of the trial. At first, Portia tries to mediate with the Jew, encouraging him to show mercy, a quality "twice blest: // it blesseth him that gives and him that takes" (4.1.182-183) and possibly referring to the acquired virtue of mercy typical of Christians (Akhimie 2020, 169); however, despite her moving speech about forgiveness, Portia proves to be lacking such a quality herself, exposing the fallibility of the Christians, on top of that of the Venetians, as she keeps identifying Shylock as racially other (Akhimie 2020, 170; Klingspon 1986, 42). Accordingly, as Shylock's knife is about to descend upon Antonio's flesh, Portia turns the law against the Jew in a cool, controlled, yet inexorable fashion, transferring Shylock to Antonio's place under the spotlight (Klingspon 1986, 40). Using a verbal quibble to her advantage as she probably had in mind from the very instant she set foot in court, and notwithstanding the false hopes she gave to Shylock, Portia gives a literal interpretation of the bond, stating that it allows the Jew to take a pound of the merchant's flesh but not a single drop of blood, hence preventing him from claiming the forfeiture without going against its terms (Greenberg 1985, 162; Newman 1987, 30). Therefore, in a parody of Shylock's legalism, Portia beats him at his own game, not only proving that his hatred has limits (Bassi 2021b, 94) but also discarding the idea of inherent physical inferiority of Jewish people due to her citing legal instead of medical evidence (M. L. Kaplan 2020, 7).

Defeated and crushed by the same instrument he had invoked against Antonio (Greenberg 1985, 162), Shylock is now to be judged by the Duke and by Antonio himself for attempting at a Venetian's life. However, once more ratifying the Venetians' inadequacy when it comes to forgiveness, Antonio "professes to be extending an unmerited, unconditional gift of love to his enemy" (Klingspon 1986, 42) while his decisions are actually led by personal interest hidden behind makeshift

mercy. In fact, making Shylock will his estate to Lorenzo and Jessica, on top of the fine imposed on him by the Duke, entails leaving the Jew with no capital; additionally, forcing Shylock to convert to Christianity takes away from him even the chance to rapidly increase what is left of his riches through usury, thus taking out the merchant's business competition (Oldrieve 1993, 97). Furthermore, the extreme punishment of forced conversion seems to be an extension of the dialogic relationship between the fear and the hate for what is diverse, something that can only be managed by erasing the other (Gilbert 2020, 40; Novy 1979, 147). The scene thus created is tremendously tense, perfect for visual representation since most of its dynamics depend upon the characters' non-verbal reaction (Oldrieve 1993, 95).

At a visual level, each graphic novel typically follows a structural and adaptational pattern similar to the one used for the first part of the scene, with some changes due to the need for more tension, especially at the turnabout point. Consequently, Gareth Hinds still follows the line of a toned-down anger for Shylock, who – opposite to what can be inferred by Shakespeare's verses – is not yet whetting his knife at the moment of Portia's entrance. Similarly, Gratiano's definition of the Jew as an "inexecrable dog" (4.1.127), a "wolvish, bloody, starved and ravenous" (4.1.137) being is cut. On the other hand, Portia's quality of mercy speech, is delivered in a reduced number of verses to meet the medium's need even though the remaining ones are integrally lifted from Shakespeare's play, and it is depicted in vertical, bigger panels than the rest of the scene. Underlined by the panels' shape, Portia's stance – looking at the sky, with open arms and hands as if in prayer – enhances the expressed concept of mercy as an almost divine quality, something coming down from above as gentle rain, an attitude turning to moral superiority towards the end of her talk and when she examines the bond (fig. 47). After finding out that Shylock can have his pound of flesh, the scene's tension is furtherly heightened by Bassanio's remark about his wife. In fact, by telling Antonio "life itself, my wife and all the world // are not with me esteemed above thy life. // I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all // here to this devil, to deliver you" (4.1.280-283), Bassanio shows once again his spendthrift nature, making the most liberal offer he could ever have made, even though Portia herself is rather sceptic about this attitude of self-sacrifice (Ozark Holmer 1978, 69).

FIGURE 47: Portia's "quality of mercy" speech and her examination of the bond in Gareth Hinds' visual adaptation (pp. 46-47)

At this point, Portia reframes the action almost becoming Shylock's ally for a second because of their common despise for Christian husbands, provoked in Portia by Bassanio's statement (Klingspon 1986, 40; Novy 1979, 146), hence momentarily breaking the illusion for the audience – or, as in this case, for the readers – as she uses her resourcefulness and vitality to come back at Bassanio. Her hands on her hips in an irritated way, backed by Nerissa who is whispering her own irritation at Gratiano's similar offer behind her hand, in an ulterior involvement of the audience in the pun, Portia notices that Bassanio's "wife would give [him] little thanks for that // if she were by to hear [him] make the offer" (4.1.284-285), a complaint that is as witty, detached and literal in language as to be perfectly in character with the young lawyer whose role she is playing (Novy 1979, 147).

Once back to Shylock and Antonio, the scene reaches its climax in a full page of silent panels of different heights and widths presenting mostly aspect-to-aspect transitions, with some moment-to-moment intrusions, in a depiction of Shylock

approaching Antonio's breast to cut into his flesh. This structure contributes to the dilation of time and to the readers' involvement, making them fear for the merchant's life as much as he is, a tension lifted in the bigger panel depicting the actual upturn moment, the instant in which Portia asks Shylock to "tarry a little" as "this bond doth give [him] no jot of blood" (4.1.301-302), giving way to the exposure of Shylock's vulnerability (fig. 48).
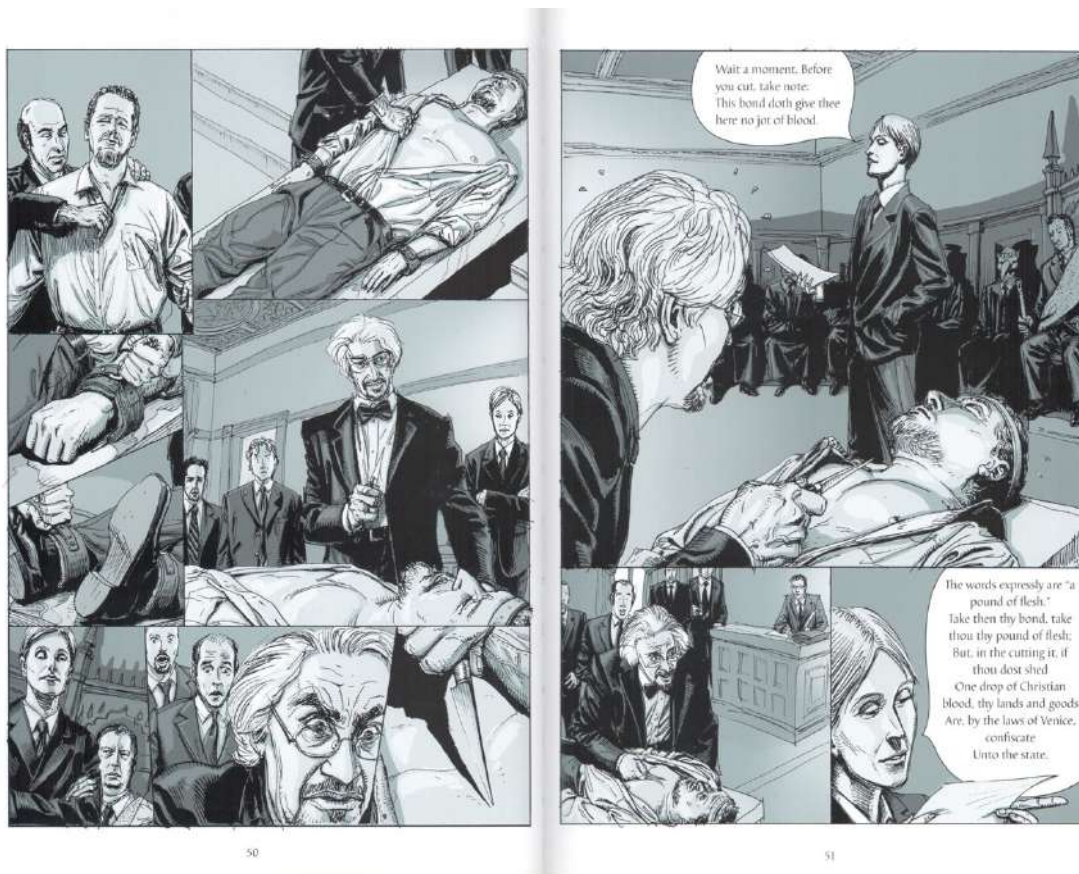
FIGURE 48: Shylock's knife descending upon Antonio according to Gareth Hinds visual representation (pp. 50-51)

The focus of the panels now shifts to Shylock, always put in a decentred position but looking towards the centre, thus catching the reader's eye, aside from a small, single vertical panel featuring a close-up of his scared face immediately after discovering he will have to give up his riches as well as his religious faith. This moment of utter vulnerability is then reinforced by a depiction of Shylock on his knees, shaking at the idea of having to forcedly convert and then sadly and submissively leaving the courtroom while all the Venetians laugh, rejoice and cheer for Antonio's victory over

the Jew (fig. 49), clearly showing their lack of mercy through the power of their non-verbal reactions.

FIGURE 49: Gareth Hinds' depiction of Shylock's condemnation and vulnerability (p. 55)

On the other hand, the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, like in the previous part of the scene, intensifies the reader's emotional involvement thanks to the clear visualisation of overpowering emotions, as in the case of Shylock, who is depicted while scornfully testing the blade of his knife right before Portia's entrance. Similarly, Portia's speech on the quality of mercy is conveyed through Shakespeare's verses – even though verses 4.1.185-190 are paraphrased and shortened for better clarity, being otherwise too convoluted in qualifying the king's attributes. Additionally, Portia's discourse is enhanced by the close-up framing on her face and hands, and by visual artifacts such as the graphic visualisation of the "gentle rain" falling upon a flower, expressive backgrounds and two smaller inset panels to showcase Antonio, Bassanio and Shylock's reactions at her speech. Later, upon her declaring that the bond is lawful, Portia is depicted as a free, full-figure character, taking over the panel with the others' reactions, making the reader feel the power bestowed upon her legal advice by the

court and thus concentrating the page's highpoint on her. Furthermore, the unique, tripartite structure used in the next page mirrors the characters' varied perspective, starting with Portia's prayer for mercy, then showing Shylock's resolute demand for justice, and lastly Antonio's meek plea for judgement suggesting the readers to either take sides or empathise with all three viewpoints (fig. 50).
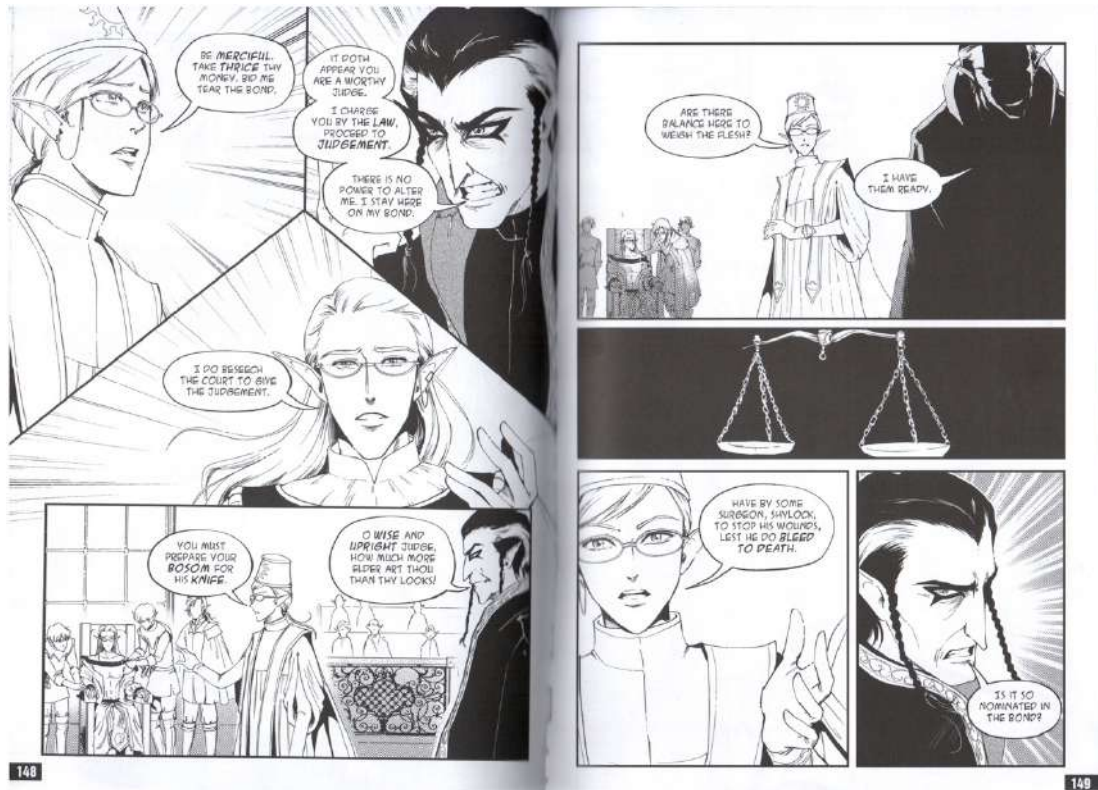
FIGURE 50: Expressive backgrounds and layout conveying the characters' emotions and points of view upon the declaration of the bond's lawfulness in the Manga Shakespeare *edition (pp.148-149)*

The scene's rhythm and psychological strain is further heightened by the representation of Antonio bound to a chair, Bassanio lovingly leaning over him, and by his willingness to pay his debt "instantly with all [his] heart" (4.1.277), followed by Bassanio's offer to sacrifice all he has to try and save his friend's life. Even more than in Hinds' edition, Faye Yong clearly depicts Bassanio's utmost desperation and fear for Antonio's life, the only reason behind such a liberal offer, and makes Portia's annoyance at it rather obvious. Highlighted by clusters of light breaking through a black background and by the icon commonly used in mangas to express furious irritation, Portia is given a close-up panel in which she glances sideways at Bassanio

while coming back at him for his offer to sacrifice his wife, involving the readership in the short break of the illusion and reminding them Bassanio's wife is indeed present in court even though he has no idea.

FIGURE 51: Shylock's knife descending upon Antonio and the turning of the law against him in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (pp. 153, 154-155)*

The scene's climax makes use of strategic positioning of the panels, showing Shylock's silhouette lifting his knife up into the air at the bottom right corner of the right page (fig. 51), a place where the reader is forced to stop and to turn the page before moving on to the subsequent moments, enriched by the variety in transition types. In fact, subject-to-subject transitions are used to draw the attention back and forth from Shylock to Portia, while moment-to-moment ones dilate the time and create suspense, especially when paired with aspect-to-aspect transitions showing Antonio's fear and Shylock's anger, his hand rapidly approaching the merchant's breast and the knife's blade stopping just an inch short from it. However, the emphasis shifts on Portia's confident and decisive stance when she forces Shylock to stop for a moment in order to better consider the terms of his bond, immediately making him vulnerable, as shown both by his disappointed and distressed expression and by the fact that the Jew re-sheaths his knife. Once more, emotions play a central role in the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation, therefore Portia's resolution in condemning Shylock to have neither the principal nor the forfeiture is made evident both in the lowered angle framing and in the "cracked" backgrounds that visually show the power of law upon the Jew's life.

Similarly, Shylock is forced to beg mercy of the Duke, a condition highlighted by the use of a peculiar halftone screen upon his entire body as to show his inner petrification at the news of his being punished for allegedly attempting at Antonio's life. The Jew's defencelessness is shown in his extreme desperation, rendered through a close-up of one of his eyes and a half-body framing of him falling to his knees and pleading "Nay, take my life and all […] you take my life // when you do take the means whereby I live" (4.1.370-373); however, Antonio is depicted differently here than in Hinds' adaptation as he seems more resolute to have Shylock pay for his wrongs rather than happy to condemn him (fig. 52). In fact, by the end of the scene, when he decides what punishment to inflict upon Shylock, Antonio looks quite pensive, as calm and collected as the Duke and even upon Shylock's forced conversion and deed of gift, there is no overview of the other characters' reactions in the background, opposite to Hinds' almost festive and cheerful atmosphere. Instead, Shylock is shown from behind, leaving the courtroom defeated and effectively subordinated to the power of the Christian society (M. L. Kaplan 2020, 7).

FIGURE 52: Shylock's vulnerability upon his condemnation in the Manga Shakespeare *volume (pp. 160-161, 162-163)*

At last, the *Campfire Classics* adaptation abides by the abridged and paraphrased language already used in the rest of the volume and employs visual and compositional techniques to convey the force of Shakespeare's original verses. As a matter of fact, Shylock has his scales ready in hand from the very beginning of the scene, reinforcing the allegorisation of justice together with the resolution to have his pound of flesh; additionally, the moment of Portia's speech on mercy is framed from above, enhancing the reader's feel of moral superiority conveyed by her words, a sentiment then reversed in the subsequent panels. Namely, when Shylock refuses any mediation – including twice the sum of money offered by Bassanio – the reader is presented with a strip composed by three vertical panels, all framed from mid-range to focus on contents but, at the same time, sharing a lowered perspective that gives the idea of powerlessness, adding to the frustration caused by the inability to somehow help saving the merchant's life (fig. 53).

FIGURE 53: Shylock's refusal of any mediation and decisiveness in wanting his bond in the Campfire Classics *adaptation (p. 59)*

The distribution of colours and the rays of light filtering in through the courtroom windows all contribute to guiding the reader's eyes along the z-path. Because of this, greater consideration is paid to Shylock and the Duke since, on top of both wearing brighter colours than the rest of the characters, they are often placed at the sides instead of at the panels' centre, resulting nearer and heavier to the readers' gaze than the central figures and thus capturing their attention. Furthermore, the scroll containing the bond is given a prominent representation both in Portia's and in Shylock's hands, underlining how the whole scene revolves around that particular document. Furthermore, the uneasiness and concern caused by Antonio's fate is additionally intensified by the depiction of Gratiano and Bassanio in tears, held still by the courtroom guards, when the latter offers to sacrifice his wife and everything he owns for his friend; on the other hand, Portia and Nerissa's witty responses to their husbands' remarks are left out of the adaptation, hence preserving both the illusion of Portia's disguise and the tension of the scene even though taking away from the characters' wittiness.

Targeted at younger readers, this adaptation avoids representing Shylock's assault at Antonio too crudely, despite substituting the knife with what looks more like a sword because of its increased length; therefore, even at the scene's climax and at the upturn moment, the reader is prevented from feeling Antonio's anxiety and fear too deeply. Notwithstanding the use of horizontal panels, meant to elongate the time of the action, Shylock's victorious moment is fairly short and immediately interrupted by Portia's appearance at the left side of the panel, as if she were walking towards the other characters, first showing the bond and then pointing her finger at a law book to demonstrate that it is the Jew who has to be condemned. Assuming a power stance that shows off her resolution and her assertiveness in being backed by the law, Portia often uses her pointer finger to underline her reasons – aiming it at either Shylock or the objects that prove her right – visually displaying how, despite her words on mercy, she still shows none. Additionally, the upturn moment is underlined thanks to yet another heightened perspective, in a panel where Portia and Shylock occupy the centre, therefore catalysing the reader's attention, a composition intensified by the light directly hitting Shylock's bright red skullcap, while Antonio has his hands freed on the side. However, according to the adapter's unwillingness to expose the Jew-

Christian controversy and because of the subsequent cuts of any mention to religious faiths, Antonio's conditions for Shylock's pardon are here heavily abridged. In fact, the only condition imposed upon Shylock by the merchant is that the Jew's estate and fortune are willed to Jessica and Lorenzo upon his death. Consequently, seeing that no mention to a forced conversion is made, Shylock's vulnerability to the loss of his wealth is clearly exposed but the power of Christians – and the resolution of their fear and hate towards the other, which is only possible through its removal – is overlooked, depriving the play of one of its most controversial events. As a consequence, Shylock is angry because of his financial loss but he still manages to keep his identity intact, opposite to the other two adaptations where he is helpless, dismayed and stripped of his deepest trait: his faith (fig. 54). Finally, the varied layout used throughout the scene adds to its rhythm, accelerating it with vertical panels – especially if lacking the gutter, as in the case of Shylock's punishment – or slowing it down to build tension with horizontal ones, giving the whole scene a more dynamic presentation despite the prevalence of action-to-action transitions.

FIGURE 54: Shylock's condemnation at the end of the trial in the Campfire Classics *graphic novel (pp. 63-64)*

3. Minor scenes

While "fidelity is a necessary, and cogent, critical approach to understanding and appreciating adaptations as such" (Harold 2018, 91), thus being the most followed principle when it comes to the adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*'s longer and better-known scenes, there can be no such thing as "global fidelity" since it is in the adaptation's nature to include necessary departures from the source. These creative alterations are most evident in shorter scenes as well as in the ones including secondary characters, that are often severely abridged if not altogether cut in order to shorten the plot and reduce the number of staged characters, an option often used in adaptations for children and comic books, mostly because of the medium's length and target readership (Tosi 2021, 221). Namely, in the three examined adaptations of Shakespeare's Venetian play, the authors have made distinctively different decisions in relation to the characters of Lancelet Giobbe and his father – as well as their stage time – but also in the different representation of Shylock's famous "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech, of Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet, and of Portia and Bassanio's fight upon the given away ring, right before the lovers' reunion in the final act of the play.

3.1 Lancelet's soliloquy and the play's comic relief

Lancelet's internal debate upon whether or not to leave Shylock's service has often been underestimated and considered a mere verbal quibble, a foolish interlude relying on the typical verbal strategy of Shakespearean clowns. However, the soliloquy included in Act 2, Scene 2 is far from being simply humorous as it allows Lancelet to express contradictory and ideologically subversive concepts (Newman 1987, 30). Namely, Lancelet says to himself:

> To be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master, who, God bless the mark, is a kind of devil; and, to run away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the fiend, who, saving your reverence, is the devil himself. Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation, and, in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience, to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew. The fiend gives the more friendly counsel: I will run, fiend, my heels are at your commandment; I will run.

> (2.2.20-28)

Lancelet's racist inferences and perceptions of his Jewish master contribute to the general economy of the play in the measure that they enhance the association of Shylock, and by extension of Jews as well, to the devil himself, adding to the reader's perception of him as an evil figure who is to be kept away and reinforcing the idea of fear for the racial and religious other.

Nonetheless, Gareth Hinds chooses to cut Lancelet's character from his adaptation and, consequently, he removes one of the play's most powerful Jew-devil associations, significantly watering down the themes of otherness and antisemitism. While this decision goes well with the more modern setting chosen for his volume, set in a period where such a behaviour could not be tolerated, it still takes away one of the elements that make the play so interesting yet so controversial even in contemporary times (Hatchuel and Vienne-Guerrin 2021, 13), thus changing its overall perception and the reading experience. On the other hand, both the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation and the *Campfire Classics* one visually represent Lancelet's soliloquy, even though abridged in order to make it shorter and more fitting to the medium's structure and needs.

FIGURE 55: Lancelet Giobbe's soliloquy in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (p. 52)*

In detail, in the *Manga Shakespeare* edition the soliloquy is shortened and slightly paraphrased for clarity, even though still using Shakespeare's words where possible. To give the clown's words further power over the reader, instead of visualising an evil Shylock, Faye Yong depicts a pensive Lancelet walking around Venice while his internal division is graphically rendered employing two smaller versions of himself, an angelic and a devilish one, floating above his head as in the typical manga trope of the conscience's good advice clashing with more transgressive and overall bad decisions. Lastly, Lancelet is shown to be almost mortified in having to follow the fiend's bad advice and to run away from Shylock's house, as if he had no other choice but to do something his good conscience disapproves (fig. 55). On the other hand, the *Campfire Classics* adaptation reduces even more Lancelet's appearances as the panels representing this specific scene are very small in size, especially if compared to the previous landscape panel giving no other information than a representation of a night spent at a tavern in Venice. Lancelet's soliloquy is accordingly paraphrased into a very short, modern English speech even though his words maintain their strength in the association of Shylock with the devil. In fact, the clown is less cartoonified, while Shylock's devilish facet is graphically represented in a horizontal panel that depicts Lancelet running away from the Jew, who is coming out of flames, his fists in the air to show how evil he can be in his anger.

Likewise, the slapstick interlude between Lancelet and his father is also frequently cut from adaptations, following an economy of abridgement put in place to reduce the number of potentially distracting occasions to focus on the play's central events. However, Lancelet's concealment of his identity to his old, sand-blind father, convincing him of his death only to later on lift the man's spirits by resurrecting himself, is more just a clownery or an uncalled display of cruelty, as it provides a double perspective on serious issues, a sort of perceptive commentary anticipating future contexts (Cartwright 2016, 168; Newman 1987, 30). As a matter of fact, when Lancelet tells Old Giobbe "Nay, indeed, if you had your eyes you might fail of the knowing me: it is a wise father that knows his own child." (2.2.70-72), he might be hinting at Jessica's subsequent trickery of Shylock to elope with Lorenzo, thus implying that the Jew does not know his own daughter, or else he would have realised her intentions and tried to stop her (Hennedy 1973, 405–6).

FIGURE 56: Lancelet and Old Giobbe's slapstick interlude in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (pp. 53, 54-55)*

At a visual level, this scene is absent from both Gareth Hinds' adaptation and the *Campfire Classics* edition, but thoroughly represented in the *Manga Shakespeare* one. The slapstick side of the scene is made even more comedic thanks to the graphic rendering of the clown giving confusing directions to his father and spinning him around as he does so; moreover, Lancelet is laughing really hard at his own mockery, enhanced by the theatricality of his facial expressions and gestures despite their uselessness, considering that Old Giobbe is blind (fig. 56). The dialogue regarding "master Lancelet" is reduced, even though the comic interlude is maintained in Old Giobbe's mention of his horse Dobbin, while he thinks to be touching Lancelet's beard, and in the clown's stomach growling, paired with suddenly visible ribs, to underline that he feels to be famished by Shylock. Lastly, Lancelet's appealing for a workplace at Bassanio's house is still approached comically, by father and son together with the latter bursting into exaggerated happiness, to the point of dancing around when his request is granted. The layout used emphasises Lancelet's emotions through the superimposition of background framings with smaller, foreground ones of the same moment and thanks to the expressive backgrounds, picturing a rainbow and stars to show his happiness.

FIGURE 57: Lancelet's request to serve Bassanio instead of Shylock in the Campfire Classics *volume (p. 22)*

Conversely, the *Campfire Classics* edition represents Lancelet alone, bumping into Bassanio in a succession of three vertical panels with no gutter, as to show the rapidity of the action; additionally, he looks to be calm and collected, not even remotely theatrical but rather eager to leave the house of a master that starves him (fig. 57).

3.2 Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech

Probably one of the most quoted passages of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock's speech addressed to Salerio and Salarino in Act 3, Scene 1 bears some of the most eloquent lines against antisemitism in all of literature (Greenberg 1985, 161). In fact, Shylock has always been made a scapegoat because of the Venetians' fear of contamination even though in the end he is no different from any other human, a statement he tries to demonstrate listing a series of similarities between him and the people who are constantly abusing him (Novy 1979, 139; Tosi 2016, 156). The force of Shylock's words lies in the semantic strategies used throughout the whole speech, such as the use of all passive-form verbs countered by a single active one, repeated twice: revenge (Kállay 2005, 175). However, despite Shylock's attempt to have people – and consequently the audience or the readers – empathise with him, anger is most likely considered as one of the seven deadly sins by any listener, thus causing the opposite effect and turning Shylock even more into an outsider, justifying the hostile treatment he receives and setting the basis for further exclusion (Novy 1979, 140).

In Gareth Hinds' adaptation, Shylock speech takes a full page and, even though some of his lines are cut, the author uses as much of Shakespeare's original words as possible. In fact, while Shylock's possible use of Antonio's flesh "to bait fish withal" (3.1.48) is removed, his "if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge" (3.1.48-49) is maintained, alongside with the speech's most powerful verses identifying him as equal to Christians. As a consequence, words overpower images both in the physical space they occupy inside the panel and in the meaning they convey, as Shylock's anger is mostly shown through subtle visual strategies such as his in-panel movement, his shaking his fist in the air, and a close-up on his grim, resolute, and almost vindictive expression when he states: "Why, revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" (3.1.64-66). Furthermore, the alternance of smaller panels with two longer, horizontal ones gives the idea of the time

elapsed during the Jew's speech while drawing the readers' attention to it, in opposition to the moment-to-moment transitions that could otherwise be perceived as almost timeless due to the absence of background (fig. 58).
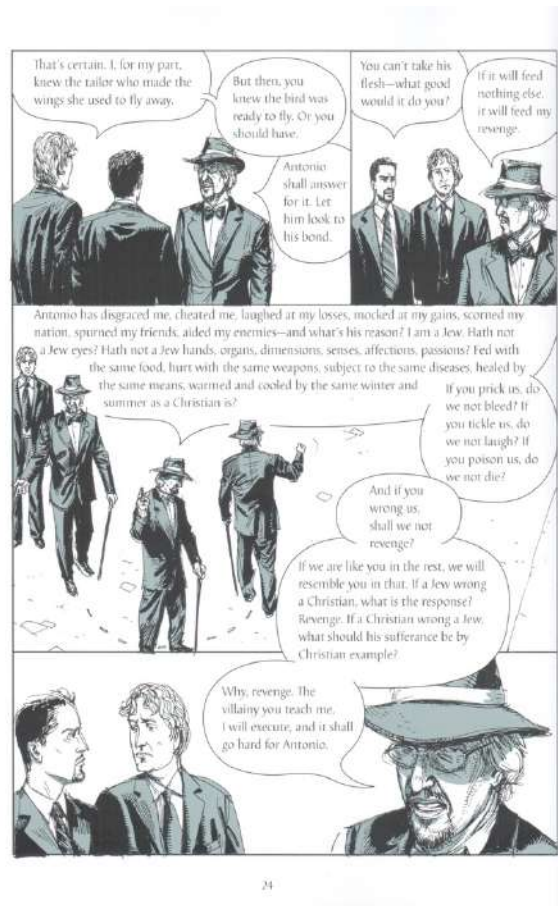
FIGURE 58: Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech in Gareth Hinds' graphic novel (p. 24)

In the *Manga Shakespeare* volume, Shylock's devilish anger is utterly evident, especially thanks to the visual underlining of his want for revenge with a black, almost bleeding balloon. Moreover, his words are divided into a great number of smaller balloons, opposite to Hinds' bigger and heavier ones, to grant more expressive power to images as well. Here, Shylock's speech, delivered in Shakespeare's verses, is framed by an innovative pyramidal layout that provides an almost cinematographic representations of the wrongs Antonio committed towards Shylock; namely, when the Jew says "warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is" (3.1.57-58), the panels inside the pyramid show Antonio bumping into Shylock with his shoulder and leaving him on the ground, during a snowstorm (fig. 59).

FIGURE 59: Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (pp. 98-99, 100)*

Similarly, the layout of the next page underlines the rhythmic succession of Shylock's questions – "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?" (3.1.58-60) – through the use of a diagonal succession of panels that guides the readers' eyes towards the final, borderless panel, where Shylock – hand in the air in anger – makes it clear that if Jews are like Christians in all the rest, so they are in revenge as well. Additionally, the Jew's determination to get vengeance is made even clearer when he smacks his fist on the table while expressing his feelings in words as well, almost making the reader fear him and his moment of extreme anger as much as Salanio and Salarino, that are taking part to it.

FIGURE 60: Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech in the Campfire Classics *edition (pp. 40-41)*

Lastly, the *Campfire Classics* edition keeps Shylock's speech and graphically represents it even though it removes any mention to his Jewishness or to Christians in general, almost making the Jew's outburst feel exaggerated and out of place. In fact,

the whole speech is paraphrased and transformed into a first-person one, erasing any suggestion of antisemitism and thus sensibly toning it down, proposing a sanitised version fit for younger readers. Nonetheless, Shylock's anger is still well represented, as he is shown pointing his finger at Salanio and Salarino, while some masquers group around them and form a circle, confused but interested to try understanding the reason behind such an outbreak of resentment. Words and images associate in an additive combination, where the illustrations reinforce, amplify and elaborate the underlying sense of the speech rather than expanding it (McCloud 1999, 153–54). The use of colour and structure complement this relationship and give the speech a dynamic feel through the alternance of wider, horizontal panels and more elongated, vertical ones in addition to the range of framings used to shift the perspective of the scene while never taking the focus away from Shylock, who is at literal centre stage when he utters the last words of his speech, surrounded by a multitude of masquers (fig. 60).

3.3 Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet

The missing love duet of the play takes place between Jessica and Lorenzo in Act 5, Scene 1 and is the only scene in which the two lovers are seen together alone on stage – or on page. Set in the moonlit gardens of Belmont, it recalls the medieval trope of the *locus amoenus*, theatre of the characters' erotic retreat, and almost compensates for the couple's previous lack of effusiveness (Valls-Russell 2021, 133). In fact, some critics have argued that is very likely that Lorenzo is after Jessica's money rather than deeply in love with her (Coonrod and Moss 2021, 60), a position reinforced by his telling Gratiano that, in her letter, Jessica has also "directed […] what gold and jewels she is furnished with" (2.4.32). Furthermore, Lorenzo is late for their elopement, he appoints Jessica the torchbearer – which was quite a dangerous position in Venice's dark nights – and, when he and Jessica discuss of Portia and Bassanio's marriage in Act 3, Scene 5, he seems to be more interested in going to dinner than in paying attention to his wife. Therefore, Lorenzo's love for Jessica seems to be more strictly related to her financial worth rather than to her personal qualities, supporting the idea of love as some kind of wealth to be also found in Shylock's attitude towards his daughter (Drakakis 2021, 32).

Likewise, rather than having the positively romantic force of Romeo and Juliet's love duet or of Portia and Bassanio's pledges of true love, Jessica and Lorenzo's words mention several couples far from being inscribed in the happy ending tradition but rather alluding to unhappiness, deception, treachery, broken vows, and sometimes even death (Newman 1987, 32; Valls-Russell 2021, 134–35). However, the references to pagan love affairs – from Troilus and Cressida to the stories of Thisbe and Pyramus, Dido and Aeneas, and Medea and Jason – turns into a more timeless and less profane speech as soon as Stephano announces Portia's return and they begin to focus on the stillness of the night, "the floor of heaven // thick inlaid with patens of bright gold" (5.1.58-59), and the harmony brought by the music produced by the moving stars (Donow 1969, 92). After Lorenzo's request to welcome back Portia with merry music, Jessica's impossibility to enjoy it hints at the fact that even in Belmont, as well as in Venice, things are not as they appear (Drakakis 2020, 70).
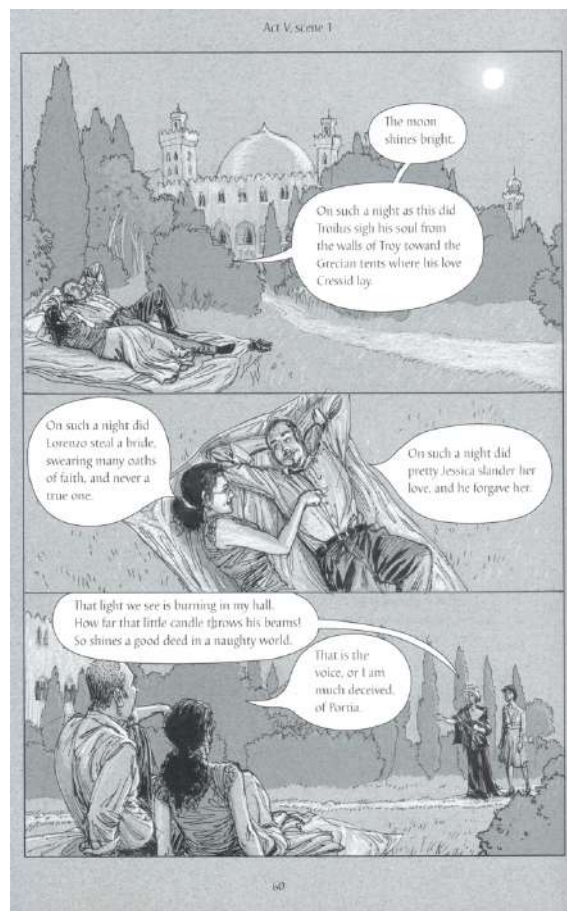
FIGURE 61: Gareth Hinds' vision of Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet (p. 60)

The scene's atmosphere and the dim moonlight are visually rendered by Gareth Hinds thanks to the use of a mélange grey colour veil bleeding over the whole page, external frames included. Likewise, the lovers' intimacy is conveyed through three horizontal, strip-wide panels that produce a slower reading rhythm, thus calling for a calmer approach fit for a tender retreat. The couple is depicted laying on the grass and looking at the moonlight, Jessica lovingly touching Lorenzo's breast, appearing as regular newlyweds, happy and serene, in contrast with the perception given by Shakespeare's original verses, that in this adaptation are heavily abridged. In detail, in addition to the reduction of Jessica and Lorenzo's list of other couples of lovers to just Troilus and Cressida, Lorenzo's hints at Jessica's "steal[ing] from the wealthy Jew" (5.1.15) before running with him and his calling her a shrew (5.1.21) are left out (fig. 61). Furthermore, the scene does not include Lancelet – already cut out from the entire adaptation – nor Stephano, hence Portia's arrival is not previously announced by any servant. Likewise, Lorenzo's request for music is also suppressed, thus eliminating both Jessica's impossibility to enjoy it and the consequent hint at her internal division, preventing her from doing so.

In the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, the atmosphere is conveyed thanks to the initial landscape panels giving a view of Portia's gardens at night, the moon shining bright and high in the sky. Right after, the focus is shifted to Lorenzo, who is shown while theatrically declaiming his verses in reference to Troilus and Cressida. Opposite to Hinds' adaptation, only Medea is missing from the couples they compare themselves to and even Lorenzo's reference at Jessica's theft of Shylock's riches is kept in place. The lovers here are not laying on the grass but rather taking a walk, their intimacy evident in the way they look at each other as well as in their gestures, but they are also depicted in a jokingly quarrelsome mood, underlined by Jessica's wry expression when she points out that Lorenzo stole "her soul with many vows of faith, // and ne'er a true one" (5.1.18-19), a statement hitting Lorenzo as an arrow in the chest – an association shaped by the actual visual depiction of that arrow. Similarly, when Lorenzo praises himself for his forgiveness of Jessica's slander of his love, he is represented with a halo around his head, to strengthen the power of his words (fig. 62).

FIGURE 62: Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (pp. 174-175)*

As in the rest of the volume, emotions are given great emphasis through close-ups of facial expressions, expressive backgrounds, and the use of moment-to-moment transitions, especially in the inset panels. On the other hand, the longer, horizontal panels showing either Stephano or Lancelet coming into the scene interrupt the idyllic moment and bring back the sense of time and place. Additionally, at a linguistic level, Shakespeare's verses are slightly reworked and sometimes reduced but not abridged in content, as not only the minor characters are still included in the scene, but also the shift in Jessica and Lorenzo's discourse and their listening to music are comprised. Music plays a great role even visually, as it is represented with notes and a pentagram flowing out of Portia's house and into the sky above the gardens in a double splash-page. Horizontal inset panels are here used to show Stephano and Balthasar, the messengers, playing music but, more importantly, to illustrate Jessica's sadness upon hearing such sweet music and Lorenzo's explanation of what he believes to be the reason behind her sadness. Namely, he believes Jessica cannot appreciate music because her spirits are attentive and tranquil rather than unrestrained, an idea he backs

by comparing it to the power of music on a wild herd of stallions, graphically changed into a unicorn tamed by music, as if it were played by the pied piper (fig. 63).

FIGURE 63: Jessica, Lorenzo and the sweet music in the Manga Shakespeare *volume (pp. 180-181)*

The *Campfire Classics* adaptation treats the mythological references like the *Manga Shakespeare* one, cutting off the mention to Medea but keeping those to Troilus and Cressida, and to Dido falling in love with Aeneas. However, as in the rest of the volume, the dialogues are paraphrased and somehow sanitised, thus Shylock "the wealthy Jew" (5.1.15) is simply referred to as Jessica's rich father, from whom she just ran away to be with her "poor lover", avoiding any reference to the fact that she stole money from her own father. Similarly, the sincerity of Lorenzo's vows of love is not doubted but rather proven by his tender attitude towards Jessica, and by their walking together holding hands as perfectly happy love doves (fig. 64). The idea of idyllic intimacy is also promoted by the use of mixed framings, from the close-ups and half-body framings on Jessica and Lorenzo to convey their newfound intimacy, to the initial landscape panel meant to plunge the reader into the romantic atmosphere of Belmont's moonlit gardens.

FIGURE 64: Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet in the Campfire Classics adaptation (pp. 68-69)

Less visually expressive than the *Manga Shakespeare* edition but still closer to Shakespeare's original scene than Hinds' adaptation, the *Campfire Classics* volume maintains the presence on scene of both Stephano and Lancelet, thus justifying the subsequent shift in the nature of the discourse between Jessica and Lorenzo. Likewise, Jessica's sadness upon hearing the music coming from the house is still present, even though Lorenzo's explanation of why he thinks she feels like that is deeply paraphrased into a much simpler version:

> That's because your soul is listening to it. Music has the power to change the mood of trees and stones, and even the sea itself. The person who has no music in his soul has no emotions.
>
> (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 70)

The distribution of colours and the pages' structure also have an important role in the transmission of meaning to the readers; in detail, the desaturation of colours and the purple-blue coat bleeding over every panel, as much as the use of moment-to-moment transitions, contribute to the creation of a more intimate, tranquil atmosphere. On the other hand, the shift from vertical panels to horizontal ones and the switch to action-to-action transitions to mark the entrance of Stephano first and then of Lancelet breaks the rhythm of the narration, thus signalling the intrusion of the minor characters into the romantic interlude. Furthermore, the readers' attention is drawn to the newly arrived characters thanks to their placement along the lines converging into the vanishing point and by Lancelet's red garments, balanced out by Jessica's red headdress, in contrast with the colder undertones of the surrounding landscape.

3.4 The ring quarrel and the lovers' reunion

When Portia pledged her ring to Bassanio in Act 3, Scene 2 she established a bond with him, a relation and a vow of love visually represented by the ring itself (Newman 1987, 20, 25). However, in this newly built relationship Portia is far from powerless and submissive as the typical wife should be, and she rather takes on the role of gift-giver, giving Bassanio more than he could ever reciprocate – as she will later do with Antonio and the city of Venice itself by solving the case and saving the merchant's life (Newman 1987, 26). In *The Merchant of Venice* even lovers mistrust and put each other at constant trial (Watt 2021, 161), an instance most evident when Portia puts her husband to the test, forcing him to choose between two extremely important bonds to him: amity and matrimony (Greenstadt 2020, 230). In fact, at the end of Act 4, Scene 1, upon Bassanio's insistence to show gratitude, disguised Portia asks for his wedding ring, clearly stating she would accept no other token of appreciation. At first dubious and reluctant to surrender it, Bassanio at last lets himself be convinced by Antonio to offer the ring to Balthasar, because of the merchant's insistence upon the added weight of his friend's love for him (Greenstadt 2020, 234). Once Portia has received her husband's ring, disguised Nerissa likewise tricks Gratiano to see if her husband is as generous as Bassanio in relinquishing the only item they had promised to never let go of. At a visual level, this moment of Act 4, Scene 1 is represented in all three the adaptations with a focus on the intimacy between Antonio and Bassanio, showed by

the merchant's hand on Bassanio's shoulder in the *Campfire Classics* edition as well as in Hinds' volume and in a strip enclosing a close-up of Bassanio's compliant expression while he unwillingly lets go of the ring in the *Manga Shakespeare* one.

Both husbands fail the test by giving up their rings, hence bestowing upon Portia and Nerissa power and control over them, almost creating a form of temporary female dominance (Novy 1979, 149) that leads to a quarrel once all the main characters are back in Belmont in Act 5, Scene 1. The returning wives make their husbands account for the lack of their rings using strongly sexual tones (Novy 1979, 148) and demanding promiscuity and possessiveness as payment for their irresponsibly broken promises, even though the scene never loses its comedic spirit thanks to the involvement of the audience in the joke. As a matter of fact, the spectator or the reader imagines that the wives' threats cannot but be dispelled in a final reconciliation in compliance with the comedy's rules, as their husbands truly gave the rings to whom they thought to be men. Nonetheless, the quarrel provides a great comedic and visual input for the adapters, that often depict it in a very expressive way, taking the medium's possibilities to the extreme.

Accordingly, Gareth Hinds himself makes use of very eloquent facial expressions, as opposed to the more moderate countenances seen throughout the rest of the graphic novel. In detail Gratiano tosses his hands in the air in helplessness, Nerissa angrily points at him, almost hitting his chest, and both she and Portia stand with their hands on their hips, showing how annoyed and angry they are at their allegedly unfaithful husbands. Similarly, Gratiano and Bassanio, who know to be at blame, are visibly sweating, trying to explain themselves to their wives. Furthermore, the readers feel involved in the trick as they see Portia cunningly smirking, both when Bassanio tries to justify himself and when she suggests she could share her bed with the doctor that now has her ring (fig. 65). At a structural level, the off-centre positioning of characters creates movement and a dynamic rhythm, enhanced by the frequent change in framings from mid-range ones to close-ups when emotions need to be highlighted, as in the case of Portia's smirk or of Bassanio's extreme surprise when he finds out that the new ring given to him by Portia is indeed the old one. Additionally, the enhanced expressivity of this scene's panels is further increased in the horizontal silent panel preceding Portia and Nerissa's final reveal of their disguise as lawyers,

seeing that the male characters look rather shocked at the idea that the two women might have slept with the lawyer and the clerk to have the rings back; namely, Antonio, Gratiano and Bassanio are all shown with a surprised expression and with floating exclamation and question marks floating above their heads. However, the choice to keep Shakespeare's verses almost integrally, aside from some smaller sections that are paraphrased because of the limited space on the page, causes once again an imbalance between words and images, where the former appear to be too heavy and too dense on the panel, diverting the reader's attention from the characters to focus on their words.

FIGURE 65: Part of the ring quarrel's depiction in Gareth Hinds' volume (pp. 62-63)

In the *Manga Shakespeare*'s edition, the dialogues between the couples during the quarrel are marginally condensed, in order to give more space to the images, that sometimes prevail over the text, seeing that they are so eloquent and communicative to be almost able to narrate the story by themselves. Nonetheless, even though reduced in number, the words uttered by the characters are mostly lifted from Shakespeare's

Merchant, thus keeping the scene's feel even at a linguistic level. As an example, Bassanio's "Sweet Portia, // If you did know to whom I gave the ring, // If you did know for whom I gave the ring, // and would conceive for what I gave the ring" (5.1.192-195) is cut and just reduced into the subsequent verses, which are themselves paraphrased and simplified in Bassanio's unwillingness to give the ring away, that should be enough to "abate the strength of [Portia's] displeasure" (5.1.198). Opposite to what can be inferred by Shakespeare's play and in contrast with what other adaptations do, the scene is here set inside Portia's estate in Belmont as, in the few panels where the background is present, the only visible elements are windows and curtains, even though this change in scenery does not take away from the scene's overall theatricality. Faye Yong, the illustrator, conveys the dramatic vibe through ostentatious gestures, such as Nerissa's taking Gratiano by the ear, her sobbing and sniffling in Portia's arms, or even Portia running away in tears (fig. 66) while screaming to Bassanio "By heaven, I will ne'er come in your bed // until I see the ring" (5.1.190-191). Emphatic icons and emotional backgrounds, paired with a varied layout that highlights the character's expressions in multiple close-ups, and their gestures thanks to free figures taking up the pages' margins as well, add to the discourse thanks to the importance given to certain elements such as the visual depiction of Portia's half-naked body in bed, overlayed with the same checkered halftone screen used to express Bassanio's dismay in explaining himself to Portia. Similarly, the ring is given a higher significance thanks to its representation in a horizontal panel that catches the reader's eye both because of the decentred position of the ring and because the piece of jewellery is surrounded by a halo of light. Lastly, this scene makes an abundant use of cartoonified expressions and visual tricks to express emotions, as in the case of Portia and Nerissa having little devil horns on their heads when they put their husbands to the test or, for example, when Bassanio is shown covered in sweat drops because of his anxiety and pointed at by three attention-catching arrows when Gratiano exposes his broken promise. These visual strategies typical of the manga style (McCloud 2021a, 698), in addition to the multitude of panels' shapes and sizes, accentuate the wide-ranging rhythm of the scene, according to the moment-to-moment transitions shown by panels diagonally ranged and to the faster paced action-to-action or subject-to-subject transitions put in place in the most feverish phases of the quarrel.

FIGURE 66: Part of the ring quarrel as represented in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (pp. 190-191, 192-193)*

Upon the final reveal, to the dismay of their husbands, Portia and Nerissa once again wear the glasses they had while disguised and, to make the disclosure even more sensational, they are depicted as themselves in the foreground and as their disguised counterparts in the background (fig. 67).

FIGURE 67: Portia and Nerissa's reveal of their disguise in court in the Manga Shakespeare *volume (p. 197)*

Lastly, the *Campfire Classics* edition also adds to the scene's theatricality, especially in the figure of Nerissa who, in her anger towards Gratiano, slaps him in the face – an occurrence never mentioned in Shakespeare's verses and particularly surprising seeing the more collected attitudes generally represented in this adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*. Moreover, Portia grabs Bassanio's hand to see if the ring is there even before his "you see my finger // hath not ring upon it: it is gone" (5.1.187-188) adding to the scene's frenetic rhythm, already emphasised by the sudden absence of the gutter. At first, the layout is almost regular, composed by three strips of equal height, each of which containing two different panels separated by the traditional gutter, meant to

signal the passage of time; additionally, the use of mid-distance framings leaves enough space in the panel to clearly show gestures and stances while also displaying the characters' facial expressions, thus bestowing much of the narration's expressive power upon the images themselves. However, as soon as the rhythm becomes quicker and more hastened, the gutter disappears and with it the somewhat regular layout, leaving the place to an alternance of heightened and lowered framings; in particular, when Bassanio falls to his knees begging for Portia's forgiveness, the panel frames them from a lowered point of view, making Portia appear taller and mightier and thus underlining her power over her husband, as well as clearly showing her anger thanks to her movements and gestures (fig. 68).

FIGURE 68: Representation of the ring quarrel in the Campfire Classics edition (pp. 72-73)

Similarly, the layout changes again when Portia and Nerissa reveal their disguise to their husbands, leaving the place to a four-strip page, in which each strip is composed of a single horizontal page-wide panel, thus changing the reading pace and creating

some suspense even though the reader already knows what the male characters are about to discover. Furthermore, the text-image relationship is very well-adjusted, interdependent and additive, in a combination where both words and illustrations give the reader new and important information. At a linguistic level, despite the modern English paraphrase, the *Campfire Classics* adaptation is the only one of the three taken into exam to maintain Bassanio's "I swear to thee, even by thine own fair eyes // wherein I see myself–" to which Portia follows with "Mark you but that! // In both my eyes he doubly sees himself, // in each eye one. Swear by your double self, // and there's an oath of credit!" (5.1.242-246), thus implying Bassanio's alleged double-facedness in swearing to have given the ring to a man. However, in compliance with the sanitisation politics of the volume, Portia and Nerissa's allusions to promiscuity and sexual intercourse – be it with their husbands or with the doctors that now possess their rings and, by extension, them as well – are removed from the dialogue and substituted with blander words. In detail, Portia's willingness to never again come in Bassanio's bed is turned into "I'll never love you until you get the ring back!" (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 73) as well as her threats of promiscuity and liberality, to the point of 'knowing' the attorney and sharing with him her husband's bed, are rendered through a milder "Since you were so generous to the young lawyer, if he ever comes here I'll be equally generous to him. He can have anything he wants from me" (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 74), a sentence devoid of any sexual connotation and therefore fit for younger audiences.

Finally, at the end of the scene, the quarrel is resolved, and the threats of promiscuity are dispelled, leaving the place to the scene's instructive force and to the lovers' reunion closing the play. In fact, Belmont returns to assume its status of earthly paradise (Donow 1969, 93) even though the happiness of the three newlywed couples is not equally matched by Antonio's mood, who still feels uncomfortable both for having put Bassanio in the situation that caused the quarrel in the first place and because he is the only one not to be accompanied by his love-interest. The merchant's emotional exclusion from the enclosure of marriage makes him return to his melancholy, the antisocial condition that affects him from the beginning of the play, as he goes back to feeling alienated and marginalised from his own society: not married nor richer than he was before this adventure, he must be content with just the

restoration of his original wealth, thus having to renounce to the fairy-tale dream the other characters managed to obtain for themselves (Tosi 2016, 152; 2021, 226).

FIGURE 69: The final lovers' reunion as represented in the three examined adaptations (top left: Gareth Hinds, p. 68; top right: Campfire Classics, *p. 76; bottom:* Manga Shakespeare, *pp. 204-205)*

At a visual level, this marginalisation is less evident in Hinds' edition, as the merchant is alone but still walking among the group, while it is made clear in the other two adaptations. Namely, the *Manga Shakespeare* volume shows Antonio lovingly looking at Bassanio leaving with Portia, before presenting the reader with a final double splash-page in which the three happy couples are reunited in Belmont's gardens and Antonio is sitting alone on a bench behind them, looking far in the distance as in the typical manga love trope. Finally, the *Campfire Classics* edition closes upon a landscape panel showing the group walking back towards Portia's estate, with Antonio walking alone in the back while all the other couples walk arm-in-arm or hand-in-hand (fig. 69).

4. Bringing off-scene episodes onto the page

The principles of fidelity might be considered as constraining the textual adapter's agency in relation to the visual representation of *The Merchant of Venice*'s major scenes as well as minor ones, even though in lesser measure. However, off-scene episodes, characters' memories and the possibility to depict visual metaphors through graphic devices reinstate the adapters inventiveness. In fact, seeing that the play mentions off-scene events that are seldom staged, the adapter can freely decide whether to cut them, according to the economy of abridgement generally put in place while adapting a text into a graphic novel, as for example in the case of Gareth Hinds' work, or to represent them on the page. In this latter case, adapters also have to decide how they wish to depict these instances, either including them into the narrative and letting the reader figure out their character of memories, imagined thoughts or off-scene occurrences from the text – as in the case of the *Manga Shakespeare* edition – or signalling them through the use of a different colour palette or panel shape as in the *Campfire Classics* volume, thus granting greater clarity.

4.1 Shylock's outbreak after Jessica's elopement

The Merchant of Venice's world is an environment where love is a kind of wealth and the motor of economic exchange, with Shylock representing the evil side of money's power, leading to greed and dissatisfaction (Drakakis 2021, 32–35; Schülting 2021, 123) as opposed to the possible freedom it can provide if used correctly, as in the case of Bassanio's ability to reach Portia to woo her. Accordingly, Shylock has a wealth-

oriented attitude even when it comes to his relationship with his daughter; namely, he only values Jessica in relation to his own ducats which he reluctantly entrusts her with before going out on the night of her elopement (Donow 1969, 98). Furthermore, Shylock's attitude towards paternity is so conditioned by greed, that once Jessica flees with his ducats, the Jew conflates the two into a single thing (Romack 2020, 78). In fact, in Act 2, Scene 8, Salanio and Salarino report him to be running around Venice calling out "My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter! // Fled with a Christian! O, my Christian ducats!" (2.8.15-16), underlining how his ducats are newly Christianised, thus now Lorenzo's property, instead of emphasising his daughter's conversion (Donow 1969, 89). Shylock's greed is later reinforced in Act 3, Scene 1, when – after finding out from Tubal that Jessica stole and traded away Leah's ring – he wishes his daughter were "dead at [his] foot and the jewels in her ear" or "hearsed at [his] foot and the ducats in her coffin" (3.1.80-82), highlighting how the importance he gives to money is greater than the one he gives to his own daughter's life.

At a visual level, Hinds completely removes the scene from his adaptation, both in graphic representation and in textual allusions thus toning down Shylock's rage and greediness.

FIGURE 70: Shylock's dismay upon the discovery of Jessica's elopement in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (p. 85)*

On the other hand, the *Manga Shakespeare* volume gives proper space to the visual representation of the scene, emphasising Shylock's misery not only through structure but also thanks to visual additions such as the rain pouring over him. The Jew is placed in a borderless panel on the top half of the page providing a double view of him, in a sort of moment-to-moment transition from the distanced framing of him on his knees, hands in the air in despair, to the close-up of his face, tear-streaks mixing with raindrops and his fist clenched in anger (fig. 70), successfully conveying the scene's pathos. However, if not for Salanio and Salarino's words, the panel would not be easily identifiable as an off-scene occurrence and, in contrast to Shakespeare's original vision, Shylock stands still in dismay instead of running around Venice, as well as the kids mimicking his gestures are also missing. At a linguistic level, the peculiar conflation of Jessica's Christianisation and of the stolen ducats into "Christian ducats" is missing, but the emphatic bold used for the words 'daughter', 'ducats' and 'Christian' acts as its substitute.

FIGURE 71: The Manga Shakespeare*'s graphic depiction of Shylock wishing Jessica were dead to retrieve his jewels (p. 101)*

Furthermore, Shylock's desire to see Jessica dead and be allowed to retrieve his riches is still present in this adaptation, textually in the case of the "jewels in her hear" occurrence and visually, in a depiction of Shylock's jewels and ducats in Jessica's motionless hand, resting over what could be interpreted as a pool of blood (fig. 71).

Lastly, the *Campfire Classics* edition signals Shylock's outburst as happening off-scene through the combination of the panel's positioning, its wavy frame, and the slightly dimmed colours that clarifies its status as a recalled image by Salanio and Salarino. Shylock's anger is evident from his dynamic stance, he is running, throwing his fists, and shouting while – as in *The Merchant*'s verses paraphrased in the caption – all the boys in Venice follow him mimicking his gestures (fig. 72). However, the wealth-love relationship is here less evident seeing that in the modern English paraphrasis Jessica is put on the same level as Shylock's ducats but there is no mention of Christianity, thus removing also the moment of conflation so important to underline the Jew's level of avarice. Furthermore, in Act 3, Scene 1, Shylock still wishes Jessica "were dead at [his] feet" (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 41) but in doing so the avoids talking about his lost riches, therefore ultimately severing the connection between Jessica's worth and his money's value.

FIGURE 72: Shylock running around after discovering Jessica's elopement in the Campfire Classics *volume (p.35)*

4.2 The play's marriages

Despite featuring three different marriages, *The Merchant of Venice* makes no mention of on-stage scenes featuring the actual ceremonies or the following celebrations. In detail, Jessica expresses the wish to "become a Christian and [Lorenzo's] loving wife" (2.3.19-21), therefore the reader infers that she and Lorenzo will get married at some point in the play. However, seeing that there is no overt indication of Jessica and Lorenzo's marriage, there is no certain way to know when it happened even though they are surely already married by Act 3, Scene 5, when Jessica says to Lancelet that she "shall be saved by [her] husband; he hath made [her] a Christian" (3.5.17-18). Similarly, the attentive reader might also infer that Bassanio and Portia get officially married before he leaves Belmont to try saving Antonio's life, as Portia declares "first go with me to Church and call me wife" (3.2.302), even though in Shakespeare's *Merchant* no description of the ceremony is to be found, as well as there are no stage directions indicating the moment of marriage. Likewise, Nerissa and Gratiano allegedly get married during Portia and Bassanio's ceremony, seeing that upon their declaration of love, Bassanio tells them that Portia's and his "feast shall be much honoured in [their] marriage" (3.2.212).

Considering the uncertain timing of these marriages, showing them on page in a graphic novel adaptation might prove to be tricky, even though necessary to make sure the readers fully grasp the plot's development. In relation to this, Gareth Hinds avoids representing any of the three marriages, thus strictly following the source text's indications, while both the *Manga Shakespeare* and the *Campfire Classics* editions follow a different path. Namely, in the former adaptation Jessica and Lorenzo's wedding is not shown, opposite to Portia and Bassanio's and Nerissa and Gratiano's ones that simultaneously happen on a page's span (fig. 73). Here, text and image have a parallel relationship, since the text tells the reader about the contents of Antonio's letter – providing a faded portrait of the merchant on the background, as to connect the words to the person who wrote them – while the images show some salient moments of the double wedding ceremony in Belmont. The weddings are celebrated in church, as shown by the background of the first panel, depicting Portia and Nerissa walking down the aisle while their future husbands peek from the panel's sides as silhouettes.

The layout used underlines the action-to-action transitions, taking the reader from the brides' entrance to Nerissa and Gratiano lovingly hugging and almost kissing – supposedly after becoming husband and wife – and then to Portia sliding the wedding ring on Bassanio's finger. This last inset panel is used to give ulterior emphasis to both the institution of wedding and the ring in itself thanks to the representation of the same moment from a double perspective, featuring a close-up of the couple's hands where the ring is enhanced by a halo of light, paired with a half body, mid-distance framing of the couple's ring exchange, almost anticipating how important the symbol of their union will prove to be in the play's denouement.

On the other hand, the *Campfire Classics* volume departs a little from Shakespeare's words as it depicts all three weddings happening at once. Furthermore, the ceremony takes place inside Portia's palace instead of being celebrated in church, despite being a religious wedding, as indicated by the Christian liturgical garments worn by the pastors. As in the *Manga Shakespeare* edition, the weddings occupy a

whole page even though here it is only composed by two panels, separated by a very thick gutter meant to communicate to the reader that a significant amount of time has elapsed between them. Namely, the first panel depicts the wedding ceremony while the second one shows that "the celebrations went on into the night and Antonio's situation was forgotten, at least for the time being" (Shakespeare et al. 2019, 49), a very different take than both Shakespeare's and the *Manga Shakespeare*'s one. Additionally, the use of warmer colours transmits a serene feel, almost mirroring the characters' happiness in being finally tied in marriage with their respective loved ones. This emotion is further enhanced by the depiction of the three couples happily dancing all together in the bottom panel, that nonetheless maintains the focus of the attention on Portia and Bassanio thanks to the distribution of colours, as they are the only ones to wear bright red and teal (fig. 74).

FIGURE 74: Campfire Classics*' depiction of the triple wedding celebration (p. 49)*

4.3 Use of visual imagery in the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation

Taking full advantage of the manga style, the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation makes use of a number of visual tools meant to enhance the readers' emotional involvement and identification with the characters, such as communicative expression, cartoonified eyes showing peculiar emotions, environmental details, halftone screens, expressive background and, most of all, the chance to visualise metaphors, allusions and suggestions taking to life the characters' words even when they are not strictly tied to an action (McCloud 2021a, 698). As it has already been shown, this type of visualisation has been used to strengthen Shylock's comparison to a dog with fangs, as well as his wish to see Jessica's dead rather than losing his riches or even in Portia and Nerissa's tricky scheming against their husbands, rendered through devil horns. However, there are many other occurrences in which the characters' statements are given a graphic counterpart, as in the case of the tragic mask used to reinforce Antonio's comparison of the world to a stage where he has to play a sad part (1.1.77-79) and Gratiano's subsequent interpretation of those who "only are reputed wise // for saying noting" (1.1.96-97) as puppets with their mouth sewn shut (fig. 75).

*FIGURE 75: Visual representation of Antonio's reference to the "sad part" he must play and of Gratiano's idea of "wisemen" (*Manga Shakespeare*, pp. 18-19)*

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Metaphors and allegories are also graphically rendered, as in the case of the Neapolitan Prince, whose denture and ears look like those of his horse – underlining how he cannot stop talking about it as it is his only interest, or Gratiano gaining a pair of angel wings and a halo when he swears to put on a sober habit if Bassanio agrees to take him to Belmont, or even in the visual representation of the Duke's allegorical representation of justice, traditionally conveyed through the scale (fig. 76).

FIGURE 76: Graphic visualisations meant to enhance the words' strength in the Manga Shakespeare *edition (left to right: p. 29, 61, 126)*

Thoughts and dialogic elements turn into graphic elements as well, in order to let the reader focus on the poetic force of the words while also enjoying the visual experience, for example when Portia suggests to Nerissa that they should turn into men and the maid visualises strong, manly, and muscular versions of her lady and herself. Likewise, when Lancelet expresses his scepticism towards converts while talking to Jessica, he states that "this making of Christians will raise the price of hogs" (3.5.21-22) because of the higher demand, a declaration underlined by a full-page panel depicting a group of non-identified, supposedly Christian people holding up their forks and knives while running after a distressed pig (fig. 77).

*FIGURE 77: Lancelet states the price of hogs is going to raise because of the sudden wave of converts to Christianity (*Manga Shakespeare*, p. 131)*

Lastly, the most important visual addition made by the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation is surely Antonio's spit on Shylock's Jewish gaberdine. The antagonist personal history the Jew and the merchant share with each other is evident since their first scene together, when they exchange heated words and Antonio, in his attitude, proves to be very different from the other Christians. In detail, even though none of the other characters is well-disposed towards Shylock, Antonio is the only one to be so openly hostile and aggressive towards him right from the start. Not only the merchant proves to be direct business competition for the Jew as he loans money without interest, but he also insults him, calls him names and spurns him with his foot, a list of offenses that Shylock meticulously tracks, hoping one day to be able to get his revenge (Cartelli 2020, 208; Nguyen Tran 2020, 142). However, among the numerous faults Antonio committed against Shylock, the one that offended him the most was certainly the aforementioned spit, visually represented only by the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation. Here, while weighing whether to grant Antonio the loan he needs or not, Shylock

recalls the merchant's previous offenses, that are visually brought to life in a series of three inset panels, one showing Antonio insulting the Jew and the other two emphasising first Antonio's act of spitting upon Shylock's gaberdine and then the stain resulting from it, enhancing the frustration, anger and humiliation Shylock must have felt through the use of a moment-to-moment transition combined with the halftone screens conveying his emotions (fig. 78).

FIGURE 78: The spit scene in the Manga Shakespeare *adaptation (pp. 44-45)*

CHAPTER FOUR

Graphic novels: a bridge between education and entertainment

Introduction

"Although basic literacy has been on the increase for the last century, the demands for literacy have been rising faster" and many people have proven to be lacking the necessary skills to "handle the complex literacy demands of modern society" (Krashen 2004, 14). Far from entailing a growing number of illiterate people, this "literacy crisis" stems from the need to supplement basic reading and writing skills with more complex, multimodal ones, fundamental to decode the messages conveyed by the more and more popular visual media. This crisis is further aggravated by literature school-programs, that tend to foster the students' disinterest – if not overt dislike – for the subject rather than encourage their love for it. As a matter of fact, students perceive literature as difficult, boring, and something that reflects "big ideas" that other people deemed "good" or "important" for them to know. Hence, students feel left out from the decision of what is considered to be worth of literary merit and perceive literature in general as something to passively accept, a bitter "medicine" they nonetheless have to take in order to become better people (Versaci 2001, 61).

Because of these reasons, some students state they hate reading, while some others say they love reading but hate assigned readings, often because of the teachers' tendency to overanalyse the books and thus ruining them (Bakis 2014, 19). Moreover, younger students quickly dismiss texts they find uninteresting and even put off reading them if they feel the language is too difficult (Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer 2014, 21–22). These attitudes are most evident in the case of Shakespeare, "the most well-known English language author of all time", who however elicits a number of frustrations, in both teachers and students (Gorlewski and Shoemaker 2013, 111). Namely, despite Shakespeare's fame as the most taught English author (Sabeti 2017, 337), students find his works "difficult to grasp, uncool, and boring" (Maynard 2012, 96), in addition to the stiff, intimidating and "dull" class materials used to teach them (Maynard 2012, 107).

According to Krashen, this literacy crisis can only be solved encouraging students to do more free voluntary reading, which means reading for pleasure, as most

of the highly literate adults do, instead of having to concentrate on subsequent assignments and book reports (2004, 15). Free voluntary reading, in fact, allows children to develop all the most common language skills, thus becoming adequate readers with a larger vocabulary, while enjoying their reading experience. Hence, if literature programs in school can spark enough motivation for students to engage in free voluntary reading once at home, the two can complement each other and provide an effective educational tool to increase literacy (Krashen 2004, 281–83).

1. Sequential art as an educational tool

To engage students and stimulate their interest in literature both inside and outside of the classroom, it is fundamental to present them with alternative voices and points of view, so that they can diversify their experience and discover that literature takes many forms beyond the traditional novel, even that of comic books and graphic novels (Versaci 2001, 66). Furthermore, contemporary young adults grow up in a highly visual environment, dominated by videogames, television, websites and social media, thus becoming naturally visual learners (Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer 2014, 5; Carter 2014, 9). Consequently, they approach print media looking for strong and enticing visual qualities, setting aside more traditional, text-based books (Bucher and Manning 2004, 67) in favour of media that expand beyond traditional literacy, such as graphic novels (Schwarz 2006, 58). Seeing that reading comics is an almost universally liked out-of-school activity (Sones 1944, 233), the introduction of graphic novels as an educational tool in school curricula promotes harmony between children and young adults' life interests and school activities (Hutchinson 1949, 236), thus contributing to their engagement during lectures.

Comics and graphic novels, as visual-based print media, notably have five identified strengths that contribute to making them suitable for classroom use: motivation, visual character, permanency, popularity, and their acting as an intermediary between text and student. Namely, the graphic novel's visual character, its popularity, and the shared burden of the story between text and image make the medium appealing to every type of reader, even reluctant ones. As a consequence, graphic novels entice the students' drive towards the text, acting as a bridge "between their lives in and out of school" (Yang 2003). Following this trend, many graphic novel

literary adaptations have come on the market to be used as educational tools, especially those derived from Shakespeare's plays, thanks to the Playwright's popularity in literature programs (Lanier 2010, 105) and to his being integrally part of the intermedial and multimodal culture – in addition to the theatrical, visual, filmic, and narrative culture – of the twentieth and twenty-first century (Tosi 2014, 78).

However, graphic novel literary adaptations are often relegated to the role of stepping stones to the real text, an alternative and easier way to introduce younger students or reluctant readers to a work whose complexity in language, setting, and theme could be off-putting (McNicol 2014, 132). Considering graphic novels as mere transitional, conduit materials, educators have often used them solely to scaffold the readers' transition into the field of literary elements, helping them to visualise the most difficult literary concepts and to better grasp notions of tone and mood before moving on to the source text (Dallacqua 2012). As a consequence, before gaining enough literary respect to be considered valuable texts in itself, graphic novels have been used by teachers only as an introductory means to the literary work in its original form, almost as a first step in the approach to more print-intensive works in the hope to stimulate the readers' interest for prose books (Weiner 2004, 115–16), if not even poetry, thanks to their ability to bridge conversational and academic language (Ujiie and Krashen 1996, 51).

On the other hand, some other educators recognise the intrinsic value of the graphic novel both as a product in itself and as an educational tool, especially thanks to its unique function of connection between the narrative text and the image-soaked paradigm in which the students are used to live (Pagliaro 2014, 46). In fact, thanks to their characteristic image-text relationship, graphic novels promote literacy offering value, variety, and an alternative to both traditional texts and modern mass media. Namely, graphic novels as a medium openly acknowledge the power of the visual impact while at the same time using it to introduce young adults to literary works that they might otherwise have dismissed as uninteresting (Bucher and Manning 2004, 68). Additionally, graphic novels give unconventional views of historical and cultural topics, together with human life in general, making them accessible to younger targets (Carter 2007, 8) even though retaining a form and contents worthy of literary value, as demonstrated by graphic novels winning literary awards usually reserved for non-

illustrated books including the Hugo Award and the Pulitzer Prize (Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer 2014, 39). Then, graphic novels help students become "active, critical, and engaged readers" (Versaci 2001, 62) and enhance appeal and accessibility, positioning themselves in opposition to the "mind-numbingly dull" New Critical approach, that is generally seen so negatively by students that it frequently leads to complete rejection of literature – and, by extension, of Shakespeare's works – especially after school hours (Gorlewski and Shoemaker 2013, 111).

Lastly, establishing themselves as an effective bridge towards non-illustrated texts rather than a simple entry point to later approach them (Tosi 2021, 216), graphic novel literary adaptations motivate even reluctant readers, especially boys – for whom the hook to comic strips is even stronger, to interact with the text (Carter 2007, 10; Ujiie and Krashen 1996, 52). Similarly, they foster visual literacy, and they help students struggling with spatial intelligence as well as English language learners, who are aided in the reading comprehension by the clarifying potentiality of the image (Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer 2014, 39; Pagliaro 2014, 36).

1.1 The graphic novel's motivating power

Motivation has a proven positive effect on reading comprehension (Jimenez and Meyer 2016, 424), thus, in order to achieve the best possible results, it is necessary to maintain the students' interest in the literary text, an objective that can be more easily achieved thanks to the use of an educational but also enjoyable medium such as the graphic novel (Maynard 2012, 104). In fact, while adolescents nowadays tend to complain about "dull, irrelevant, or both" classroom materials, the graphic novel's ability to blend words and pictures, and to "put a human face" on its subject allows readers to see the characters through the illustrated panels instead of only having to read their adventures in printed text (Versaci 2001, 62). As a result, students are forced to reconcile the visual and textual means of expression in order to analyse how the standard literary devices operate in this peculiar blend of text and image, thus developing analytical and critical skills in an energised environment, that facilitates their asking – and answering – questions that go beyond the page and right into the intersection between art and life (Versaci 2001, 64).

Furthermore, graphic novels are strong motivators for students approaching literary works because they actually read them instead of pretending to do so, especially because the aesthetic experience with a visual medium is a pleasurable one, as opposed to the more anaesthetic feel generally associated to scholarly readings. Graphic novels are particularly well-received also because of the interpretive nature of the medium, that facilitates a participatory, active, and constructive reading, leading not only to a more invested approach, but also to a more authentic and passionate class discussion and writing of possible subsequent assignments. Finally, length and permanency are the other two factors weighing in favour of graphic novels; in fact, being shorter than traditional print texts they are suitable to be reread, underlining the recursiveness of the reading process (Bakis 2014, 20–22). Similarly, their permanent character – as opposed to filmic adaptations, where the time and pace are dictated by the medium – bestows total control upon the reader, who can decide to go back to the same page more than once if the need arises (Yang 2008, 188). Moreover, studying reduced length texts means that teachers can go through a greater number of titles during the school year – thus ensuring a variety in stories and genres that will keep up the students' willingness to read – and possibly also have the students read them in class. This last option proves to be very useful in the creation of a social environment that builds a situation of sustained attention, where even struggling readers concentrate better as all their peers are reading, and the application of reading strategies can be facilitated by the educator to provide an experience as enjoyable as possible (Bakis 2014, 20–22).

1.2 Enhancing critical skills through multimodality

"Growing up in a world that is saturated with visual images" children and young adults easily become unengaged if presented with a big block of text lacking a visual stimulus (Maynard 2012, 103). As a consequence of the social environment, younger readers have a natural affinity with and attraction to comic books and graphic novels (Yang 2003) because they satisfy the need for a visual and somewhat lighter approach towards literature. Images are part of an innate sign system and therefore need less instructions to be understood, in opposition to words, that compose a built sign system requiring education to be developed; however, not all visual messages are of

immediate interpretation. The ability to negotiate, interpret, and make meaning of information conveyed by images is called visual literacy (Bakis 2014, 26), a skill particularly needed in the media-dominated modern-day society as even adverts and social media communicate through visual elements rather than textual ones, proving that traditional literacy is no longer sufficient for functional interactions (Schwarz 2006, 59). Graphic novels, presenting meaning through a complex system of pictorial interrelations, are far from being just an easy, leisurely read but rather reveal themselves to be the ideal tool to sharpen visual literacy skills (Dallacqua 2012, 368) as they require more sophisticated cognitive abilities than the reading of a plain text (Schwarz 2002, 262–63). Therefore, graphic novels bring visual and critical media literacy into school education, implementing new ideas and practices as the students approach the new medium and adopt new perspectives towards traditional literary works and themes (Schwarz 2002, 263; 2006, 62).

Graphic novels are multimodal products that embed text within image in a synergistic relation, thus providing many levels of meaning-making (Boerman-Cornell 2016, 327). Namely, this medium has the ability to intersect three different semiotic systems: the linguistic one, involving words and their meaning, the visual one, comprising images and their significance, and lastly the spatial one, including both the panels' layout and the spatial positioning of words within them (Jimenez and Meyer 2016, 427). As a result, an increased demand is placed on the readers' cognitive skills (Boerman-Cornell 2016, 328; McNicol 2014, 138), especially in relation to the identification and subsequent decoding of the action's progression as well as of the events happening between panels and sequences, marked by the presence of the gutter (Bucher and Manning 2004, 67). Therefore, readers are required to make inferences and to make choices in relation to graphic features (Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer 2014, 14) in a cognitively intense activity.

While expert readers of traditional print texts focus on words to comprehend the text's meaning, the graphic novel's multimodal nature turns readers into viewers as well, pushing them to merge the understanding of text to that of visual features (Wolfe and Kleijwegt 2012, 32). To this regard, viewers can either passively receive a text or actively perceive and interpret it; in detail, passive reception is most common when readers are presented with an illustrated book, where images are merely registered as

an accompanying element, in a two-dimensional assimilation that sees the text prevailing over the visuals. On the other hand, graphic novel and comic book readers are found to be actively perceiving the images and the meaning embedded in the visuals, recognising the role played by them in the story's progression (Wolfe and Kleijwegt 2012, 30). Hence, to construct meaning, the graphic novel reader has to take on four different roles at once, ranging from navigator to interpreter, interrogator, and designer. Readers are navigators in the measure that they conflate the more traditional, print-based modes of meaning-making with the interpretation of visual elements and structures to obtain a unified meaning cue; similarly, the reader is considered to be an interpreter because of the simultaneous use of different semiotic systems at once to decipher the text's significance. Additionally, the reader also needs to reinterpret the text in relation to the socially mediated context in which it is experiences, thus proving to be an interrogator. Lastly, the readers' ability to interpret the text using their prior knowledge to situate it in a context is further broadened by the new role of designer bestowed upon them, almost conferring them the power of co-creators thanks to the multitude of decisions about timing, panels' importance, interpretation of layout and colour, and synthesis of visual, spatial and textual resources in general they are called to make, resulting in a unique reading experience (Jimenez and Meyer 2016, 433–36).

Graphic novels prove to be a good multimodal medium, especially for literary adaptations, as they carry further the meaning usually held in symbols, metaphors and other imageries typical of literature giving them a visual counterpart and therefore revealing those concepts and tropes underlying the text's surface. Through the reading and possible analysis of a graphic novel, students are thus offered the opportunity to expand and deepen their reading comprehension (Wolfe and Kleijwegt 2012, 37), especially in the case of a difficult text, while at once developing their multimodal literacy skills, to the benefit not only of their school curricula and results but also of their everyday life, constantly immersed in an environment that makes consistent use of multimodality (Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer 2014, 40).

2. The use of comics in the classroom

"Comics and education are linked and have been for decades" (Carter 2014, 9), nonetheless their use in class as didactic materials has encountered some perplexities,

even though all disproved. Most notably, Fredric Wertham in his *Seduction of the Innocent* published in 1954, proved to be one of the biggest detractors of the comic book's benefits, as he declared that they interfered not only with reading – dissuading from the approach to more serious and worthier print-based texts – but also with linguistic development, keeping the children's language level below average (Krashen 2004, 186–87). However, over the years, Wertham's theories have been refuted by several studies that not only demonstrated how comic book reading does not replace other kinds of print-based readings, but also that, in some cases, comic book readers are significantly more avid readers than their peers who do not appreciate visual texts (Ujiie and Krashen 1996, 51), even when more "serious" texts are taken into account (Krashen 2004, 187). Hence, far from being educationally harmful, comic books and graphic novels lead to a greater cognitive development and to a better, pleasure-oriented attitude towards reading in general (Tosti 2016, 553–54).

However, the use of graphic novels and comic books in the classroom is still object of a number of obstacles to overcome, mainly because of the overall negative attitude towards sequential art. In fact, some educators consider graphic novels inferior to traditional media and therefore exclude them from the outset because of their format (Bucher and Manning 2004, 68); similarly, when graphic novels overlap with traditional literature, as in the case of literary adaptations, they are often debased and deemed watered-down versions of the original (Alexander and Lupton, as cited in Thomas 2011, 193). Additionally, parents and members of some schoolboards have reportedly taken offence at the inclusion of sequential art in the school curricula as they considered it to be fit only for recreational reading, seeing that to them comic books are just "substandard literature", mere picture books that would better suit children rather than young adult learners (Maynard 2012, 98). In their view, comic books do not fit the classroom workflow, that should revolve around the rigorous and analytical study of traditional texts instead of wasting time with products that make learning too easy as they approach literature with too much levity and what they deem to be an improper language for the school context (Hutchinson 1949, 244). To solve this issue, teachers have often decided to use graphic novels instead of comic books because, thanks to their greater respectability in the literary field, they are more easily

accepted by parents than their "picture strips" counterpart that is still thought to be inappropriate for educational purposes (Tosti 2016, 621).

However, "although many readers compartmentalise graphic novels and comics into a pleasure reading column, when placed in an academic setting, they [become] academic" (Dallacqua 2012, 372), proving to be sophisticated and challenging in themselves as well as "to stand equally with print-based literature" in their abundance of literary elements and devices (Dallacqua 2012, 376). Thus, many educators still choose to use them to engage their students and offer them alternative views on school-assigned readings, even though they have to overcome their own challenges to be successful in this process of assimilation. Namely, teachers often lack a proper training in visual literacy to effectively implement the use of graphic novels in their programs, they cannot properly define the medium – often attempting to compare it to other visual media such as comic books and videogames but not knowing the differences between them – and lastly, they struggle with deciding whether a specific genre, such as non-fiction, should be included among their possible choices or not (Pagliaro 2014, 34). Therefore, teachers need to receive support and invest time in learning how the medium works and how to properly read graphic novels to be able to teach their students how to do so and produce effective reading practices and experiences, because the image-system might as well be innate, but the reception of visual and spatial cues is neither natural nor easy or fast to grasp, unless someone is already acknowledged with the world of visual narratives (Jimenez and Meyer 2016, 440).

Nonetheless, even if educators manage to successfully overcome the resistance they face from parents, colleagues, and superiors as well as to extend their competence to this multifaceted form of literacy, the alignment of school curriculum and standard testing can still be an overwhelming obstacle seeing that state and national tests are still based on standard texts and do not include alternative options such as graphic novels (Schwarz 2006, 63). To overcome this last difficulty, academics have suggested that comic books need not be the whole literature program but can provide a good basis "for direct instruction of some skills or knowledge that can be taught as easily from comic books as from a less interesting source" (Koenke 1981, 592). In detail, rather than fearing that graphic novels will gradually supplant traditional textbooks, they should be seen as a support to provide more variety during lectures thus creating a

more exciting and engaging learning environment (Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer 2014, 12). Furthermore, Carter argues in favour of an augmentative take on the use of graphic novels, one that would consider them as equal to print-based texts so that to increase the number of texts to choose from when designing a literature course, rather than the more common supplemental take, where graphic novels are seen as secondary and less accepted than the canonical textbooks and, therefore, deemed good only as far as they accompany them instead of being presented on their own (2007, 17).

2.1 The benefits of visual learning

Despite the difficulties in implementing alternative and innovative teaching techniques, mainly related to the parents and collaborators' reactions, educators still try to include graphic novels in their programs whenever it is possible because of the great benefits they have proven to bring to the whole class (Carter 2013). First of all, graphic novels allow students to enter a new world that they have yet to explore (Weiner 2004, 117), a mental place where the dichotomy between showing and telling – the former prerogative of theatre and, nowadays, television and other technological media, and the latter typical of narrative (Tosi 2014, 8) – is resolved as they mingle into a single product that nonetheless maintains the main perk of narrative: the ability to show every possible world, action, and setting (Tosi 2014, 22). Additionally, graphic novels also push students to recognise that the opposition between high and low culture is more an artificial designation than an actual contrast, inviting them to appreciate the potentiality of a medium typically perceived as "non-literary". In detail, students are encouraged to participate meaningfully to class discussions and, thanks to the perception of graphic novels as something not yet belonging to the literary canon, thus less fixed and inaccessible than traditional texts, they might even be more forthcoming and expose their personal opinions rather than what they think is the right thing to say (Versaci 2001, 66).

Reading and language activities are welcomed and entered with greater zest and enthusiasm when they involve textual supports that already pique the students' interest outside of school (Hutchinson 1949, 239), thus producing effective learning opportunities that benefit "various student populations, from hesitant readers to gifted students" (Carter 2007, 1) and provide them with an education enriched by a broader

definition of arts and culture, including elements that new generations are already familiar with alongside the traditional ones (Carter 2007, 3). The greater advantages granted by graphic novels are tied to their visual and multimodal nature that makes of them great supports to build critical skills through a popular and widely appreciated format (McLaughlin and Pilgrim 2018, 46). In fcat, graphic novels promote multimodality, fostering the ability to make meaning from various intertwined systems at once (Dallacqua 2012, 365) thus contributing to the development of the students' higher-level reading skills and enhancing their literacy capacities (Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer 2014, 16; McLaughlin and Pilgrim 2018, 53) as well as their linguistic ones.

For example, when learning English as a foreign language (EFL), vocabulary is an important segment of the education and, together with grammar, the one where students struggle the most; as a consequence, reading a proper novel might be a discouraging task for EFL learners as they struggle in the attempt to make meaning of new or unusual vocabulary items and grammatical structures (Cimermanová 2015, 2453). In order to address these problems, educators have started to include graphic novels in their language programs, as the intensive support provided by pictures and visual cues promotes educate guesses at the meaning of new vocabulary, and fosters the acquisition of newly-encountered lexical items because of the visual associations made while reading (Aldahash and Altalhab 2020, 20–22). In addition to being appealing for EFL learners thanks to the reduced load of text (Sardone 2012, 67), graphic novels are an effective tool to facilitate reading comprehension and bridge any linguistic deficit (Berninger 2010, 249), consequently allowing a definite improvement in weak learners who previously showed poor reading comprehension skills (Aldahash and Altalhab 2020, 19–20). The benefits of using graphic novels in an EFL class are not limited to vocabulary and the use of specific or idiomatic expressions, but are also extended to grammar, conversational and compositional skills, and to a better approach to the foreign culture (Cimermanová 2015, 2454). Namely, EFL learners are more interested and motivated in reading graphic novels than they are in approaching print-based novels, and therefore they tend to apply themselves and make greater efforts in order to fully grasp the text's meaning while at the same time improving their focus

and attention to details instead of giving up when they are faced with some difficulties (Aldahash and Altalhab 2020, 23).

3. Visual elements for an inclusive learning environment

Studies have not yet answered the question "of the types of students best served by the format", yet many academics have assumed that graphic novels visual power could act as a scaffold for marginalised, reluctant and unmotivated readers and therefore ease their reading experiences (Jimenez and Meyer 2016, 424). In fact, once the outdated and erroneous assumption that graphic novels and comic books are easy readings only suitable for children has been disproved and set aside, educators have recognised the medium's possibilities. Thus, it has been shown that the individualised and personalised instruction that this medium allows, in combination with the teacher's support, is especially successful in helping certain categories of students, as the visual character speaks directly to those students who do not enjoy reading, to slow readers in general, to those who fear failure and therefore are reticent to approach literary texts, and to visual learners (Yang 2003). Namely, even the most gifted students benefit from the contact with several different interpretations of the same text, making them aware that no version is the dominant one (McNicol 2014, 148), while the presence of already formed images strongly supports readers with low spatial intelligence (Maynard 2012, 108). Furthermore, slow readers are usually older than the rest of their group and have to face a shortage of reading materials that suit both their interests and their reading level, since what should be age-appropriate in terms of contents is not in relation to the reading complexity, while what fits their reading ability is often too childish for them to be engaged in it (Sones 1944, 234), a situation in which comics prove to be an excellent resource to provide contents that deal with more mature interests combined with a more accessible language level (Hutchinson 1949, 240). Similarly, the increased interest elicited by graphic novels is fundamental to engage even those students who are commonly defined as non-academic, or bored and rebellious no matter their brightness and literacy level (Sones 1944, 234).

Although very little research has been done on the perks of using graphic novels in specific classroom contexts, it has been proven that they contribute to the creation of an inclusive learning environment as they better cater to the needs of students with

text-specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia (Fenty and Brydon 2020). In fact, struggling students sometimes find reading tasks so challenging that they give up, preferring to sit passively in class and to avoid participating in class activities in order to escape the shame of being compared to their better prepared peers (Alvermann et al. 2007, 32). To make up for underachieving learners' skill deficits, educators often assign them a lower number of texts but a multitude of subsequent worksheets to fill in during the year (Allington 2013, 527); however, struggling readers find these activities dull, uninteresting and unmotivating as they cannot perceive a connection between theory and reality (Bolton-Gary 2012, 389) and therefore feel to be wasting their time and efforts. On the other hand, readers that might be underachieving in school assigned readings, might nonetheless identify themselves as readers out of school; as a matter of fact, many of them have demonstrated to voluntarily – and joyfully – engage in literacy activities if they involve texts belonging to the youth popular culture, personally chosen by them in relation to their own interests, such as comic books (Alvermann et al. 2007, 36–37). Hence, thanks to the use of graphic novels in the classroom, teachers can create a "positive affective context" even for struggling learners, generating in them a greater interest towards reading that results in a reported enjoyment to learn (Bolton-Gary 2012, 393–94) as well as in a lighter and funnier approach towards the usually daunting literary and critical analysis (Boztakis, Savitz, and Low 2017, 316). Lastly, the pedagogical effectiveness of the graphic novel as an instructional tool is also proven by the fact that low-level students generally score higher when given a high-level text supported by a comic strip than just the print text (Carter 2007, 6) because it is easier to connect and identify with pictorial stimuli rather than with plain textual ones (Boztakis, Savitz, and Low 2017, 313). Moreover, seeing that graphic novels are perceived as popular and "à la mode", as opposed to the uncool textbooks, using them in the classroom could result into social benefits as well, such as a sudden confidence boost increasing the engagement towards the text, especially in the case of struggling readers who will finally feel at the same level than their peers, reading the same "trendy" book instead of the special versions often used as remedial texts (Maynard 2012, 102).

3.1 Dyslexia and other learning disabilities

Traditional, print-based literature assumes that readers have a strong, fervid imagination that will allow them to visualise the characters and the plot unfolding beneath their eyes. However, people dealing with learning disabilities experience weaknesses that hinder their ability to visualise what is described throughout the text, thus taking away the pleasure of reading; this issue can partially be solved by turning to visual media, such as graphic novels and comic books, that better cater to these difficulties (Hamamoto 2017), hence proving to be engaging educational tools even for those students who experience reading deficits (Fenty and Brydon 2020, 278). In detail, students with learning disabilities see reading as an intimidating, difficult, and undesirable activity, and therefore they struggle to keep their attention, get easily disengaged and give up the task – thus falling more and more behind their classmates (Fenty and Brydon 2020, 278).

Students with learning disabilities in reading obtain great benefits from fluency instructions, since it is fluency that grants the ability to quickly and accurately decode words and their meanings for a better reading comprehension. To increase their students' fluency, educators have to put in place "fluency interventions" that entail repeated practice; as a consequence, teachers have to find materials that not only are suitable to their students' level but that are also interesting to them, so that they do not get bored or disengaged during the repeated activities necessary for vocabulary improvement. Graphic novels are perfect texts for this purpose because, by boosting the students' interest in the analysed text, they lead to increased motivation that turns into greater self-efficiency in reading and subsequently improved textual comprehension. As a result, students moved from an "at-risk" status to a "some-risk" status, showing better results not only in their text scores, but also in their attitudes towards class materials and tasks (Fenty and Brydon 2020, 279).

Considering the text-related learning disorders, dyslexia is the most addressed one as it affects almost 10% of the general population and therefore is commonly encountered in any classroom (Themelis and Sime 2020). Dyslexia is a term used to define a "pattern of difficulties with word recognition and spelling despite adequate intelligence", causing reading impairment often associated to attention and memory deficits, as well as issues with spelling and handwriting (Smith et al. 2021, 128).

Consequently, the processing of words is slower and reading out loud becomes difficult both in terms of enunciation and comprehension; furthermore, people with dyslexia get easily tired when they have to read a certain amount of text, thus making the experience less enjoyable (Bagnariol and Tramacere 2020, 142). Among the possible options to create an inclusive learning environment for dyslexic students there are the switch to silent reading, together with the proposal of shorter texts and activities in order to avoid excessive tiredness, and the adoption of a combination of visual and verbal materials, where keywords are highlighted in order to allow the student to grasp the general meaning of the text first and then to move on to the smaller details (Bagnariol and Tramacere 2020, 144–45). Graphic novels, especially if realised in the manga style such as the *Manga Shakespeare* edition of *The Merchant of Venice* analysed throughout this thesis, perfectly respond to the aforementioned needs as they can be considered texts including intrinsic visual aids – to be found in the images but also in the boldened or italicized words – that can increase reading abilities (Smith et al. 2021, 128). Since "children with dyslexia are more visually and spatially oriented, [and] have better pictorial memory" than their peers (Smith et al. 2021, 130), using a combination of visual and textual stimuli betters their attention and their memory. Therefore, the graphic novel proves to be the perfect tool to teach across different subjects and to the class as a whole, seeing that it graphically symbolises visual metaphors and conflates text-based information into image-based ones, thus aiding in the comprehension of more complex curriculum contents (Fenty and Brydon 2020, 284; Smith et al. 2021, 128, 138). Nonetheless, it is to be noted that graphic novels are particularly useful if used in smaller sections, rather than as a continuous story, so that the students may get familiar with the contents (Smith et al. 2021, 129) without having the medium lose its specific appeal – and the play deriving by the intrusion of popular culture in the classroom – because of its reiterated use (Berninger 2010, 249).

All in all, using graphic novels to teach provides educators with an instrument to create a learning environment that stimulates the curiosity of all their students, regardless their difficulties in reading, therefore triggering greater engagement and subsequent comprehension, catering to those with learning disabilities as well. Hence, stress and tension, that could interfere with memory and attention, are avoided and kept out of the class in favour of a more relaxed atmosphere that nonetheless

encourages planned as well as incidental learning (Themelis and Sime 2020). To promote this stance of innovation and the use of comics in education, Michael Bitz founded *The Comic Book Project* in 2001, an American after-school workshop meant to help student reach the reading and writing standards even though in unexpected ways (Bitz 2004, 584). In fact, students are first asked to read and study comic books and then to produce both text and images for a comic of their own, in an effort that showed its most marked results in those students with limited proficiency in English and for whom the comic book manuscript represented more writing than they had achieved during a whole school year (Bitz 2004, 585). Similarly, in 2019 academics Themelis and Sime have ideated a project called Comics for Inclusive English Language Learning (CIELL), an app designed to be used both in and out of classroom and meant to promote flexible and alternative ways to teach and learn English through the use of comic books as a tool to improve proficiency and reading comprehension (Themelis and Sime 2020).

4. Teaching Shakespeare with graphic novels

For most young adults, the first contact point with Shakespeare's works is in secondary education, during lectures and classroom activities that essentially become a "site of resistance" to the Playwright, where he is perceived to be just another boring and inaccessible element of high culture; as a consequence, educators need to find progressively more innovative strategies to make him relevant to the youth culture (Hulbert, Wetmore, and York 2006a, 1–2). In fact, Shakespeare is worth teaching no matter the manifold difficulties and remonstrations encountered with contemporary students (Sabeti 2017, 337), especially because of the educational potential carried by his works, both in relation to the aesthetic response to the dramatic power of his language – which constitutes a great part of the English linguistic and cultural legacy, and to the ethical implications hidden in his plays' analysis of the human complexities (Sabeti 2021, 114). All of the strategies to make Shakespeare relevant to the youth culture are based on the underlying concept that his works must be mediated for younger audiences, in order to make them more accessible and engaging that they supposedly are (Sabeti 2021, 113). In detail, these methodologies could be regrouped into three broad categories: translation – entailing a change in language, reduction of

the plays to their core elements, and reference – or quoting and referring directly or indirectly to Shakespeare's characters and plotlines while embedding them into an alternative context (Hulbert, Wetmore, and York 2006a, 3–4).

According to what extent these techniques are put in place, there can be different teaching approaches to Shakespeare, such as the New Critical approach, the parallel-text technique, and the presentation of Shakespeare's works through popular culture mediums such as graphic novels, film versions or performance representations. The New Critical approach is based on close readings and literary analysis, a method that provides direct mediation on the teacher's part but is most often negatively perceived by secondary students who do not feel sufficiently interested or engaged in it; similarly, even the parallel-text version approach has a major drawback, since students find it useful and more accessible in relation to unfamiliar words, but tend to only read and focus on the modern paraphrase, losing Shakespeare's poetry unless they are closely followed by the teacher's support. On the other hand, students have proven to obtain higher test scores and to engage more pleasurably with Shakespeare's works when popular culture media are included in the lectures, either as a supplement to one of the other teaching approaches or on their own (Gorlewski and Shoemaker 2013, 111–13). In fact, even though popular and youth culture Shakespeare's adaptations "might at first glance be dismissed as immature, trendy, silly, or insignificant", they are actually indicative of Shakespeare's dominance and popularity even outside of the more "classical", academic environments (Hulbert, Wetmore, and York 2006a, 1).

The use of comic books and graphic novels to teach Shakespeare in class is especially effective thanks to the sequential art's natural connection to poetry, which is in itself driven by visual imagery (Thomas 2011, 196), and because of the playful approach they entail, relying on the readers' engagement and decision-making process (Schwarz 2006, 59). The best Shakespeare is not the one to be dutifully read but the one that can be seen and "propels itself off the surface of the page" (Mortimore-Smith 2012, 83); therefore, graphic novels – providing a representation and a type of reading that closely emulates performance – are arguably one of the most faithful media to convey a play's atmosphere and theatricality (Mortimore-Smith 2012, 84; Müller 2013, 96; Wetmore 2006, 180). In graphic media, words become visible to the same extent of images and are given more resonance thanks to the interrelation between the

two elements (Perret 2004, 88); as a result, students are granted a more accessible experience that combines the dimension of reading to that of seeing (Sabeti 2021, 115). Not only the text is easier to comprehend if it is seen as well as read, but experiencing Shakespeare through new media gives a fresh insight and bridges the high-low cultural chasm (Perret 2004, 72, 89), thus embedding a potentially off-putting text in a familiar context that allows it to become gradually more popular among younger readers and students (McNicol 2014, 135; Sabeti 2017, 338).

Furthermore, even though graphic novels are mostly used to "avoid getting lost in [Shakespeare's] complex language" (Sardone 2012, 67), they are much more than an "easy option" to lure readers into Shakespeare, as they interpret and inform as well as illustrate the Playwright's works (Perret 2004, 72). In fact, thanks to specific creator-guided instances such as layout, graphic novels add to both the play's temporal and visual dimension and call the readers to make a series of equally valid interpretations based on their own experience rather than providing them with a single, absolute meaning (McNicol 2014, 133–36). The visuals in the graphic novel expand the characters and the plot, proving to be particularly useful for those with lower spatial intelligence or imaginative power, but they do not always make the plot more explicit; therefore, the teacher's guidance remains fundamental to make use of the medium at its best, exploiting its ability to develop agility of mind and visual literacy while making sure that images do not overpower the text in the students' experience of the play (Perret 2004, 90). However, having to deal with parents and schoolboards' concerns over Shakespeare's substitution by a comic book counterpart, some of the more educationally-oriented graphic novel collections, such as the *Classics Illustrated* series, explicitly invite readers to approach the original text after reading the adaptation (Wetmore 2006, 174–75). As a consequence, Shakespearean comic book adaptations still have the tendency to almost overstate their roots, as if they were trying to prove the medium to be a legitimate means to the end of making Shakespeare more accessible and appealing (Müller 2013, 101).

Nonetheless, thanks to the growing literary prestige of the medium, graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare's works have seen a great increase in market thanks to their being suitable for both unknowing readers approaching the play for the first time and knowing audiences, that can better appreciate the changes and visual

representations in relation to the source text – especially under the teacher's guidance (Hulbert, Wetmore, and York 2006b, 277). As a result, educators can now put in place a careful selection process that takes into account not only how the specific adaptation caters to their students' (special) needs but also how it deals with the source text. Consequently, bookstores and libraries' shelves are now packed with simplified adaptations aimed at struggling students, sometimes with different text versions available for the same graphic apparatus as in the case of *Classical Comics*, or just paraphrased as it happens with the *Campfire Classics*, alongside with adaptations meant for an older audience such as Gareth Hinds' ones and extremely visual versions in the manga style as the *Manga Shakespeare* series.

The *Manga Shakespeare* collection, alongside the *Classical Comics* series, is one of the most frequently used to teach Shakespeare in class because, despite being born for the educational market and therefore asserting the manga's pedagogical worth, it is also marketed at individual teenage-readers and manga fans, thus embracing a wider target than its competitors (McNicol 2014, 138; Sabeti 2021, 110). Furthermore, the manga style used for this series is potentially more visual than stage itself, capable of depicting any situation – be it real or fantastic – while maintaining the readers' focus on emotions through facial expressions and lettering choices that recreate emotions and voice tones, therefore quite fitting to adapt a theatrical play (Müller 2013, 102). Moreover, this series is characterised by a certain balance of text and image, as opposed to the visually dull and unappealing experience of graphic adaptations dominated by big blocks of text – as Gareth Hinds' *Merchant* – and to the lost complexity of extremely condensed and simplified adaptations. Hence, the *Manga Shakespeare* collection opens the door to a privileged, demystified Shakespearean world that would have otherwise been inaccessible through traditional media (Mortimore-Smith 2012, 90) while at the same time respecting and valuing Shakespeare's works in the process of textual adaptation (Sabeti 2017, 344). As a result, readers are presented with a form of "pocket-book theatre" where they can dictate their own reading pace (Sabeti 2021, 115–16), a permanent version of a Shakespearean performance where the setting is updated – as in the elven world used for *The Merchant of Venice* – but the "words are all Shakespeare's, though not all of Shakespeare's are included" (Perret 2004, 73).

<u>CONCLUSIONS</u>

This thesis provided a comparative analysis of three different graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in order to make a case for the literary value of adaptations as products in themselves – even when derived from a much-respected source text such as the Playwright's works – as well as the possible use of graphic novels as effective pedagogical tools to teach Shakespeare in school curricula. At first, comics were considered lesser media, hence the subsequent adaptation of literary works into such a format was deemed to be yet another way to simplify the plays for younger audiences, and therefore considered just a stepping stone towards real literature. However, this paper has shown how a well-realised graphic novel adaptation can properly convey not only the meaning but also the theatrical feel of a Shakespearean play, thus confuting the erroneous conception of its inferiority to traditional literature. Namely, I have argued that when a graphic novel encloses authentic dialogue, uttered by expressive characters in a detailed setting, and conveyed through a form that functions, it allows the same level of literary criticism elicited by a traditional, print-based text while at the same time being more familiar, connected with reality and thus more interesting, especially to an unknowing reader approaching the play for the first time. Furthermore, the graphic novel's multimodality and its deep reliance on the visual element make of it the ideal medium to stimulate the interest of younger readerships; indeed, comics satisfy the young adults' need for a media capable of speaking to their preference for visual storytelling, derived by their being born and raised in a highly visual environment that makes traditional print-based texts look dull and uninteresting.

The inclusion of graphic novels in school curricula and their use as classroom materials have often generated some perplexities, not only among schoolboard members and parents – claiming that the medium was inappropriate for educational purposes, but also among teachers themselves, that more often than not needed to expand their knowledge of comics before appreciating their worth. Nonetheless, over the years many educators have recognised the benefits in the use of such a multimodal and interactive medium in their classes, thus contributing to both the graphic novel's recently gained prestige and to the production of more and more graphic novels aimed

at the educational market. In detail, allowing students to read comic books and graphic novels in class, as part of the activities for a literature course, makes them feel involved in the decision of what is worth of literary value, as well as offering them alternative voices to help them understand the continuous evolution of literature and the many forms it can assume, including those traditionally belonging to popular culture. Furthermore, the graphic novel's multimodality contributes to the creation of an engaging and stimulating learning environment that not only energises class discussion thanks to the renewed, more active student participation but also contributes to the development of a set of critical skills tied both to traditional and visual literacy, thus being applicable out of school as well.

In addition to their visual character, the main strengths of graphic novels used as classroom materials are to be found in their popularity, permanency and motivating power. Namely, the graphic novel's permanency makes it fairly easy to reread them if need be, while its popularity makes student feel at ease in the attempt to discuss the text, thus fostering greater interaction even in critical analysis. Opposite to more traditional approaches, where students feel oppressed by the need to overly-analyse a literary text and might fear to expose their ideas in relation to a well-established and respected text belonging to the literary canon, comics promote an honest and open-minded discussion that greatly stimulates the students' interest and motivation to learn as well as to complete subsequent tasks. Moreover, graphic novels compel students to reconcile both text and image in order to make meaning and therefore to interpret both semiotic systems at once; nonetheless, the interrelation between the two elements contributes to a better understanding of difficult contents, promotes educate guesses at new vocabulary items, and helps students retaining new words thanks to the association to the visual element.

Furthermore, this thesis has shown how the benefits provided by the use of graphic novels are applicable to the whole student population, including struggling and unmotivated readers – that can find in this innovative medium a language level suitable to their needs as well as interesting and more mature contents suitable to their age – and EFL learners – who greatly profit of the graphic novel's facilitating role in the assimilation of new vocabulary and grammatical structures. Lastly, graphic novels prove to be useful even for students more spatially and visually oriented because of

learning disabilities such as dyslexia, as well as for slow readers; in detail, educators can use this medium to create a more inclusive learning environment that also caters to special needs and helps students anchor the theoretical contents in a reality made concrete by the visual stimulus.

Considering the overarching benefits that graphic novels can provide, using them to teach Shakespeare's plays is nothing but a natural step to give students a new perspective on the Playwright's works. Successful in making Shakespearean plays relatable to modern life experiences, the medium's intrinsic connection to poetry and theatre, as well as its potentialities to encourage class interaction and students' interest, also promotes reportedly better levels of enjoyment as well as higher test scores, thus proving particularly effective in the educational context. However, the sensible growth in the market of Shakespearean graphic novel adaptations requires an even more careful choice on the teachers' part in relation to the material they wish to use, as not all graphic novels are meant for the educational market and even among those that are, there is no guarantee that the adapters' choices are correspondent to the educator, classroom or curriculum's necessities. In fact, as it has been shown trough the comparative analysis of the three adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice*, there is a number of questions in relation to the influence of graphic style and textual adaptation that has to be raised and answered before deeming an adaptation suitable for teaching.

The adapters' textual and visual choices deeply influence the readers' final perception of the plot and, more in general, of the entire play; namely, even though cuts, abridgements and reworkings are the main prerogative of adaptations, if the final product needs to be used to introduce the students to Shakespeare's plays or to support more traditional teaching approaches, it still has to be somewhat faithful to the original text. As Chapters Two and Three argued, despite being adaptations of the same source text, the three analysed graphic novels are completely different products not only because of their intended targets but mainly because of the adapters' choices in relation to the use of colour, to the visual representation of setting, character design, layout, and most importantly textual adaptation. If the pedagogical intent is taken into account, at a textual level the *Manga Shakespeare* edition is probably the most well-suited for the use in the classroom as, even if targeted at students and teenage individual readers, it retains Shakespeare's original language and all the plot elements, even the minor

ones, despite operating a necessary reduction in the number of verses – and sometimes a slight reworking of them – in order to fit the medium' needs. On the other hand, the *Campfire Classics* adaptation completely paraphrases Shakespeare's verses into modern English, as well as sanitises the controversial religious dichotomy between Jews and Christians, hence taking away at once both the poetic power of the Playwright's language and one of the most important themes of the play. Therefore, this edition proves to be valuable in itself if approached by very young readerships, that could struggle in understanding the religious topic, but only suitable as an introduction to the play or as a reinforcement tool to aid comprehension of particularly difficult passages when it comes to students at a higher level of education. Finally, Gareth Hinds' work could be suitable for classroom teaching, but it will require a deeper analysis and greater teacher's guidance in its comparison to the source text than the other two adaptations, seeing that the author has decided to operate major cuts to the play's plot and characters – as in the case of Lancelet and Old Giobbe – as well as to progressively shift from the initial modern paraphrase to keeping more and more of Shakespeare's verses towards the end of the play. Because of this reason, unknowing readers could feel disoriented by the switch from a linguistic level to the other as well as form an incomplete opinion of the play's themes and events because of the major abridgements made by the adapter, in addition to the significant toning down of the most controversial instances of the play that were made in order to avoid a contradictory reception of the adapted work.

However, the textual element is only half of the product, hence educators have to operate a choice that also takes into account the visual element, including the difficulty of interpretation in layout, the amount of closure needed, if the characters are well designed and therefore easily recognisable and, most importantly in the case of *The Merchant of Venice*, how the setting is represented and whether the difference between Jews and Christian is graphically depicted. At this level, the *Manga Shakespeare* editions proves to be far more appealing than its "rivals" thanks to the manga style's inherent theatricality that calls for an extreme emotional representation and well-designed characters. In detail, each character has some distinctive features as well as some common ones that allow the reader to recognise any possible kinship, as in the case of Jessica and Shylock, and to distinguish between Jews and Christians. In

fact, despite the updating of the setting into a fantasy world inhabited by elves and other fantastic creatures, the use of darker colours for the Jews' hair and garments, as well as their different eye shape, and the peculiar attributes of Morocco and Arragon provide extreme variety, resulting in an interesting narration even from the visual point of view. Furthermore, the immediately visible emotions on the characters' faces, as well as the use of halftone screens to reinforce them, strengthen not only the words' poetic power but also the readers' empathy and subsequent response, thus resulting in an engaging and interactive visual experience most suitable for younger, visually oriented audiences. However, the teacher's guidance is still needed not only to remind the students that the play's setting has been altered, but also in order to guide readers who are less familiar with the manga style through the heavily irregular layout that sometimes breaks the traditional z-path reading convention. On the other hand, the *Campfire Classics* edition compensates the lessened appeal that derives by a much more regular layout with the use of colour and of different panel shapes and sizes, making them one of its major strengths. In fact, the use of a different colour palette to indicate whether an event is happening on- or off-scene, as well as to signal the passage of time, provides greater clarity and a better textual comprehension. Furthermore, giving differently coloured garments to the characters allows the reader to better follow them in their adventures and, despite the textual sanification, Shylock is still represented as Jewish and wears his typical Jewish gaberdine and red skullcap. Lastly, Gareth Hinds' version proves to be the less appealing of the three examined adaptations because of the imbalance between text and image, creating a setup in which balloons occupy too much of the panel's space, as well as because of the painterly, almost impressionistic drawing style that might appear to be visually dull to younger audiences, especially since it is combined with the use of grayscale instead of colours. Moreover, because of the setting update to a modern-day, realistic Venice inhabited by businessmen all very much alike, it is fairly difficult to distinguish between Christians, Jews, or characters coming from abroad such as Portia's suitors, and therefore some clarity issues might arise.

All in all, Hinds' work proves to be aimed at a more mature target and therefore to be more relatable to an adult audience, showing its worth as a high-quality reinterpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* rather than as a faithful adaptation to be

used for its pedagogical implications. Oppositely, the other two editions are specifically tailored for the educational market and cater to the students' needs while better responding to the teachers' research of new and innovative materials. In detail, the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation offers a rather faithful yet original way to present *The Merchant of Venice* to the classroom, while the *Campfire* Classics edition provides a simplified version of the play's text, suitable to be used with lower level classes or as an introduction to the proper play.

Finally, this thesis has argued that the concept of literature evolves over time and continuously broadens to include new formats and media that encounter changing tastes, thus resulting in repeated use and in a multitude of new products being issued. It has also shown that "Shakespeare's relationship with specific media or arenas of culture tends to be invested with energy at certain moments and social contexts, and that energy shifts from medium to medium, context to context, over time" (Lanier 2010, 105). In detail, before entering the realm of comic book and graphic novel adaptations, Shakespeare's works have had a long history of illustrated editions, beginning with Rowe's edition, that dates back to 1709, and moving away from frontispieces realised only to entice the possible spectators' interest when walking past the shops' windows towards a progressively more prominent communicative role bestowed upon images. As a consequence, scene selection and composition have progressively changed, in order to set aside the theatrical conventions and make full use of the images' creative power, paying more attention to the geography of the plays as well as to the representation of characters' emotions, gestures, and facial expressions. This evolution, together with the engravings being bound within the text from Bell's Acting and Literary editions of 1774 and 1788, allowed images to add to the information given by the text and thus marked the first step towards the modern-day idea of visual literature. Lastly, the shift from collected editions of plays complemented by engravings to the richly bound and heavily illustrated children book versions of the Playwright's works has given the Shakespeare industry the final push towards visual media, that led Albert Kanter to publish the very first comic book adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for the American *Classics Illustrated* line.

If not for all these evolutions and continuous changes in the idea of what was deemed worthy of being called literature, Shakespeare's legacy would have probably

been lost long ago, buried among texts too old to be relatable or too difficult to be read and understood by the common public, when Shakespeare's works are actually still quite relevant, and popular nonetheless, even to younger audiences. If back then illustrated editions would have been ignored, considered unworthy or inferior just because of their early attempts to communicate through a different semiotic system, nowadays those visual media that populate our everyday life would probably be a lot less diffused and surely not so well-respected. Then, suggesting easing the younger generations' encounter with Shakespeare's plays through the use of new, innovative media that they can understand more easily and be interested in, does not mean "losing Shakespeare" and therefore should not be object of concern. Rather, mediating and transforming the Playwright's works to draw connections between them and their latest adaptation into a movie, a comic book or a graphic novel entails "translating, reducing, and referring him for today – which means that Shakespeare is not only relevant to today's youth, he's also pretty cool" (Hulbert, Wetmore, and York 2006b, 229).

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