



CHAPTER VIII

Shakespeare in Animation

Murat ÖĞÜTCÜ

Shakespeare's works have been used through a variety of media both for the edification of people and enlarging the commercially big market surrounding him, which have been contributing to the pre-eminence of Shakespeare in the consciousness of people. Although animations have been yet another important media, they have been overshadowed by their more serious counterparts in movie adaptations, which is why there is no substantial work on the history of Shakespeare in animation. Only some references are given as part of adaptation studies, mostly in negative way, which criticise animations as "reductive kitsch" of "low culture" and as apocalyptic because they abbreviate the original text and seem to substitute and, thus, triumph over high culture (Brown 1992: 12; Osborne 2003: 121; Osborne 1997: 142; Coursen 1997: 100; Eggert 2003: 74). Nevertheless, the problem with literary minded critics is that they think that students should be protected from 'incorrect' signification. Concepts about memory, loss and reconstruction in the mind are not considered in analysing Shakespeare in animations, although they might stimulate creativity. Therefore, this paper will analyse how animation reflected Shakespeare's legacy in parodies, re-creations and relatively straightforward adaptations, especially through references to *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

To start with, parody is a literary device that uses subversion for comic effect where the level of appreciation is determined by the amount of knowledge of the original ("parody" 2013; "parody" 2006). Yet, even without foreknowledge, the situational and verbal comedy in a parody may still create laughter. Thus, even though critics consider parodies as bastardisations, they are "far more

successful” (Bristol 1996: 90) to catch, at least momentarily, audience attention. The exposures of Shakespearean references cumulate so that he remains in the consciousness of people which not just subvert but also promote him. In particular, there are two types of parodies: in title and in the form and content. In the first one, only the title refers to a Shakespearean work almost without any other relation. Duffy Duck’s *To Duck or not to Duck* (1943), Casper’s *To Boo or not to Boo* (1951), Roadrunner’s *To Beep or Not to Beep* (1963), Popeye’s *Rodeo Romeo* (1946), Pepe le Pew’s *Scenti-mental Romeo* (1951), Bugs Bunny’s *Rabbit Romeo* (1957), *The Flintstones*’ “Dino and Juliet” (1964), *The Smurfs*’ “Romeo and Smurfette” (1981), and *The Simpsons*’ “Rome-Old and Juli-eh” (2007) are among those animations which use puns in their titles where Romeo may stand for a romance relationship, whereas the other may refer to any conflict situation. The second type of parody relates to subversions of form and content, where Dyer’s burlesque series of Shakespeare’s works were the first of their kind. Unfortunately, only *Oh’phelia* and a part of *Othello* have survived (Brooke 2013: par. 2), whereas for the others we have reviews. For instance, Dyer’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1919), which featured cartoon versions of Charlie Chaplin as Romeo and Mary Pickford as Juliet with a happy ending (Gifford 1987: 60; “Romeo and Juliet”), started a tradition of comic Romeos in animation. Here, rivals substitute the family feud as antagonistic force and try to attract their Juliet. Felix the Cat’s *Romeeow* (1927) and Oswald the Lucky Rabbit’s *Rival Romeos* (1928) depicted Romeos serenading for a Juliet. While Felix succeeds; in Oswald, a third Romeo appears with whom Juliet elopes. Likewise, Popeye’s *Shakespearian Spinach* (1940) depicts a love triangle where the antagonism starts with the substitution of Bluto with Popeye as Romeo in a Broadway musical of *Romeo and Juliet* and Bluto’s efforts to molest Olivia and beat Popeye. First, Bluto takes over Romeo’s role and then Popeye takes over the role of Juliet. This cross-dressing creates a dichotomy between Shakespearean diction and Popeye physical comedy, seen when Bluto as Romeo flings Popeye on the floor but assumes to be shocked to see Juliet unconscious. Yet, interestingly enough, the farcical final beating of Bluto creates excitement in the theatre audience who has been silent throughout the original performance. Similarly, “Droopio and Juliet” (1990) shows how Droopio and his rival McWolf contest for the hand of Juliet. Droopio wins all contests because, as seen in the final scene, he sits on the lap of Shakespeare and has been writing the whole episode. Consequently, while the rival Romeo tradition subverts Shakespeare’s Romeo to depict a love triangle, it also sustains the interest in Shakespeare’s works through several animations in different periods.

Besides, early Warner Brothers cartoons created yet another tradition that used pastiche and would dominate parodic animations of Shakespeare. For example, Bugs Bunny's *A Witch's Tangled Hare* (1959) comically alludes to Shakespeare's writing process, seen when he writes *Macbeth* after he reads it on a post-box. In the main plot, where Hazel the Witch tries to catch Bugs Bunny for lunch, several references to Shakespeare's works create laughter, seen when Bugs Bunny tries to distract Hazel by wooing her as Juliet. Likewise, *The Muppet Show* (1976), in many episodes, uses wordplay and refers to Shakespeare in a light way, seen when Kermit the Frog in a panel asks if "William Shakespeare [was] in fact Bacon?" which, however, offends Miss Piggy about "bad joke[s]" on pigs and "bacon." Similarly, the *Tiny Toon Adventures* (1991), which depicts Babs Bunny's struggle to "prove" Shakespeare that she is a "great actress" through parodic depictions of his plays like *Romeo Juliet* and *Macbeth*, *Toy Story 3* (2010), where Mr. Pricklepants and one of the LGMs' perform the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, and *SpongeBob SquarePants*' episode (2011), where he is attacked by Romeo and Juliet robots in a tunnel of love, are further examples of pastiche. Yet, pastiche is also used to target criticism to the pedagogical function of Shakespeare, such as to the possible dullness of traditional productions as in *South Park* (2001), the emphasis on the written text and the memorisation of well-known phrases just to show off as in *American Dad!* (2013), and the limits of memorisation seen in *Family Guy* (2009) when Peter alludes to Duncan being betrayed by Lady Macbeth and creates an amalgam of *Star Wars*, *Macbeth* and the bear from *The Winter's Tale*.

Furthermore, there have been some parodies that remake Shakespeare's plays, mostly selecting some of the most important scenes of them and bending the original plot line to characteristics of certain characters or a recurrent plot outline. For instance, "Johnny-O and Juliet" (1999) shows the mock heroic feud of Johnny Bravo's mother with her new neighbour and the neighbour's daughter, Julie's, rejection of Johnny. Moreover, "Melancholy Brain" (1998), where almost all of the other characters look like those from Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990), refers almost to the entire play in a condensed way. In the mock heroic remake, the Brain's plans to conquer Denmark by leading to a fall out between Hamlet and Claudius turns out to be a rehearsal of a proto-*Hamlet* and the mice's efforts "to take over the Globe Theatre." In *The Simpsons*, however, a burlesque of *Hamlet* (2002) is presented in the segment "Do the Bard, Man" in a frame tale where Homer reads from *Hamlet*. Apart from equating the storyline to the movie *Ghostbusters*, first by making Old Hamlet, Homer, disappear from walls leaving

a slime just like Slimer in the movie and second by Homer's assertion that the play "also became a great film - *Ghostbusters*," colloquialism is used to parody the original play, seen finally in Hamlet's accidentally death by slipping on the "bloody" floor and Gertrude's housewifery motive in committing suicide not to "[clean] up this mess." However, such burlesque is abandoned in the segment "Lady Macbeth" (2009), marked by what could be termed as "mock heroic [...] serious[ness]" (Hight 1962:103) where Macbeth turns to a henpecked husband who has not a good job and is incited by his wife to take over the position of his rivals. In the frame tale, Marge bewails her condition to be the wife of Homer who is not playing a good role and is just a tree. Macbeth is played by Krusty's sidekick, Sideshow Mel. Marge incites Homer to kill Mel to get his role, which he achieves. Yet, Homer is such a poor actor who constantly forgets his lines and gets bad reviews. Marge's insistence on improving her husband's career for self-satisfaction is as serious as in Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth*. When Homer is the last to survive and nobody is around, Homer plays very well and the ghost of Marge wants him to play all of the lead roles in Shakespeare. Yet, Homer commits suicide as for him "reading all these plays would be the real tragedy," which is in accordance with the mock heroic situation created through the fusion of high culture, Shakespeare's work, and popular culture, the stereotypes of American working class Homer embodies.

Apart from such parodies, there are re-creations of Shakespeare in animation, where either the superstructure is altered yet the infrastructure of the story remains almost the same or missing parts of a story are tried to be filled by artistic imagination. As for the first, the story of *Romeo and Juliet* is used to depict the destructive force of hatred and the connective force of love in tragic or comic endings. In *Romie-0 and Julie-8* (1979) and *Astro Boy's* "Robio and Robiette" (1981), robots capable of human feelings replace and contrast insensitive humans. Likewise, seals in *Romeo and Juliet: Sealed with a Kiss* (2006), dogs in *Roadside Romeo* (2008) and garden gnomes in *Gnomeo and Juliet* (2011) replace humans and tell the same "story" "again, but different" as a gnome in the prologue of the last maintains.

The other type of re-creation is marked by the artistic recycling of material found in Shakespeare's works, theoretical discussions, or sources of Shakespeare he might have used, in a creative way. For instance, *DuckTales'* "Much Ado About Scrooge" (1987) contains many elements of wish fulfilments for Shakespearean scholars, such as the discovery of "original editions once owned" by "Drakespeare" and a note about a missing "first play" hid in his own house on an island which

has a library and personal indoor theatre still in use by the descendants of his players. When Scrooge McDuck finds out that the play, *McDuck*, is about one of his “ancestors” who is a miser “who cheated and lied”, he considers the comedy a “tragedy” and hides it again, not to damage his and the bard’s “reputation”. The function of this animation cannot be looked down upon if we consider the recent authentication of a long-lost copy of *Cardenio* and the construction of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse built by using a similar creative reconstructive vein. Beside these artistic wish fulfilments, *Gargoyles* (1994-7) has many Shakespearean allusion and mixes history, literature, mythology and popular culture in order to create a creative amalgam, especially through characters like Macbeth, Puck, and the Weird Sisters. Among many themes, the series shows the vicious circle of revenge prompted by reciprocal betrayal of Demona, a gargoyle, and Macbeth that lasts for ages. The Weird Sisters, who had appeared in different shapes as children, young adults, or maid servants, appear as gargoyles to Demona and as witches to Macbeth, both to unite their fates and show that revenge is no solution to solve problems.

Moreover, there are animations about Shakespeare in a straightforward manner. These adaptations usually try to observe the original text as much as possible and relate a part or the whole play in a relatively shorter form to initiate younger audiences to the study of the written text (Blockside 2005: 27-28, 48; Reynolds 1991: 189-203; Rozett 1997: 208-209, 213-214). Simplification and colloquialism may occur, especially when the animation is aimed at children or teenagers. What has been observed for comic strips about familiarity, entertainment, and the creation of mental pictures and interests in younger audiences (Steinberg) is valid for animation, as well. For instance, although the “Monsterpiece Theater” series (1978-2001) parodies the *Masterpiece Theatre* series, it has a similar educational purpose. In the episode about *Hamlet* (1993), Mel Gibson is doing the scene about “Words, words, words” with Elmo who tries to figure out what he reads but eventually gets his own book from the library, through which an interest in Shakespeare’s work is created, different facial expressions are illustrated and visiting libraries is encouraged with a character like Elmo whom children appreciate. On the other hand, the segments of *Animaniacs* (1993-8) about *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are marked by the use of an interpreter for young audiences who may not “understand” Shakespearean diction, as in the segment “Alas, Poor Skullhead” about *Hamlet* (1993) where Dot translates Yakko’s words into colloquial language and in the segment about *Macbeth* (1994) where Yakko functions as an interpreter in a cooking show in which the ingredients comically include Batman. Similarly,

the element of laughter for edification is used by the series *Histeria!* (1999), where in a segment a chorus presents all plays in a condensed way. Wordplay along with the appearance of contemporary or historical persons like Mike Tyson or Thomas Jefferson further add laughter to the rhythmic song. The use of music makes the texts referred more memorable. Yet, there are also commentaries about Shakespeare, animation and the position of young audiences, which makes the segment more analytical. Throughout, the difficulties to understand the content of Shakespeare's plays and their violent content not suited for children is pointed out, which shows the difficulty to combine Shakespeare and animation.

Apart from segmental educational videos about Shakespeare's plays, there have been also video series, intended for students of literature, which analyse entire plays. The *Video SparkNotes* series (2010-2) present unanimated cartoon-tableaux through zoom-technique to create an illusion of action, where no further informative explanations of who is who is given, as the aim of the narration is to give a brief synopsis. Except for *Romeo and Juliet* where the female narrator uses varied intonation, male narrators relate the synopses through quick pace and monotonous intonation. Abbreviation and simplification are used to direct the audience to sparknotes.com "to learn more," which, unfortunately, renders the series a cheap commercial of the website. Although the *CliffsNotes Films* (2011) seems to be similar to the *SparkNotes* version, Cliff, a superhero-like character, introduces and narrates his "notes" on Shakespeare's works, which are really animated. Each episode begins with Cliff who relates a catch phrase of the play and a (part of the) character of the play who is in the library gives the major theme or a brief overview. Layouts of designs of characters are used interchangeably in different plays, which are not only for economic reasons, but emphasise the theatrical aspect of mimetic representation. Yet, contrary to *SparkNotes*, more information on Shakespeare's sources, themes, and messages are given like an annotated text and comedy and colloquialism are used without simplifying the text to make the notes more memorable. For instance, at the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, Cliff states several critical suggestions for the reason of the couple's death, like the family antagonism, "Friar Laurence's meddling," and "the Stars" and rhetorically asks the audience about their opinion after which the dead Juliet comically and colloquially asserts she will "switch to online dating". Likewise, Hamlet's procrastination is emphasised and illustrated with the repetition of Cliff's verbal irony regarding Hamlet's resolution throughout the episode. Similarly, the equivocality regarding Macduff's birth is referred as a "technically" determined phenomenon, which understatement makes the scene more comic and memorable.

Hence, edifying Shakespeare animations that live up to their name can be used for educational purposes to teach while giving delight.

Although adaptations as art are valued over other animations, the problem of brevity and fidelity can also be observed in these, such as in Barry Purves' *Next: The Infinite Variety Show* (1990) which shows all Shakespearean plays in just five minutes. Yet, through several techniques, major themes are dealt in these adaptations in a short time and in a very artistic manner. One other example is the highly acclaimed series, *The Animated Tales* (1992), a joint project between BBC Wales and Russian animators where each episode lasts for 30 minutes. For instance, *Romeo and Juliet* uses cel animation marked for bright colours contrasting the sense of doom which is constantly reminded through the mechanical clock on a clock tower where the cleric matches the fatal intervention of Friar Laurence. Similarly, *Macbeth* uses cel animation but is marked by fluidity in transformation (Osborne 2003: 111) that emphasises equivocality and shows the disintegrating force of ambition in the play whose fatal consequences are reminded by a skull-head fool that functions like the "idiot" referred in Macbeth's soliloquy. *Hamlet*, in this sense, is overshadowed by the darkness created through "[t]he oil on glass technique" where just "one sheet of glass" is used, erased, and used again and again, which foreground issues regarding the memories of the past and the efforts in the present to remember erased happenings (Holland 2007: 43-4). Here some characters look similar to their former counterparts in movies where, for instance, Hamlet, although with the haircut of his Richard III, looks like Olivier's Hamlet (1948), which makes the animation both a continuation of the tradition regarding adaptations of *Hamlet* and an effort to remember that tradition similar to the overall theme of recollection (Holland 2007: 44; Osborne 1997: 109-10). Ophelia stands out from the rest of the characters with her white clothing which not only reflects her innocence and passive obedience to the dictums of the dark male world surrounding her, but also emphasises the very darkness of the male world foregrounded through the dark colours used in the oil on glass technique. Towards the end, she liberates herself from this dark world in a very artistic manner when a white crane flies away towards the sun after hearing the splashing sound of Ophelia's falling into the river. Thereby, not only darkness and brightness, but also, as Rozett commented, the roles of "descent" and "ascent" are foregrounded and set against each other (1997: 210). Thus, artistic adaptations with or without spoken lines may be as effective as Shakespearean texts to convey meaning.

In conclusion, animations about Shakespeare imitate, are "beautified with" Shakespeare's "feathers" and creatively recycle the material they have found which contribute to the pre-eminence of Shakespeare in the consciousness of

people. Academic scorn and prescriptive handling should be avoided to describe the effects of animation on the reception of Shakespeare, whereby new media usages of animation along with fan-fiction will be placed onto a solid tradition of Shakespeare animation making the former more meaningful for depicting reader response in the form of animations.

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