

Integration and Inversion: Western Medieval Knights in Japanese Manga and Anime*

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At sunset in dark water near a beach, three crosses stand crookedly, the corpses of a man and of a woman and a pet robotic dog drooping forlornly. Poemi—a magical girl whose greatest desire is to become a famous voice actress—returns home from school to find her adoptive father (an anime director) and her mother murdered by an alien invader...

A beautiful young woman, working for a galactic trade organization, part time as receptionist, part time as secret agent, gets dressed for a secret agent mission, donning a red dress with an inverted crucifix cut-out running from her bosom to her belly...

* An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the 2008 MEMESAK International Conference in Seoul on November 7.

A sudden crucifix flashed against the sky or imprinted on an unexpected piece of clothing is not uncommon in Japanese anime (= animated film and television), though it can be jarring for a Western viewer, the incongruity and the opaque meaning of the symbol in its (alien) context. Yet it seems to be the symbolic nature of the cross—not its meaning for the West but its existence as symbol, as an unspecific and potentially endlessly redefined container of emotional and psychological meaning—that appeals strongly to the practitioners of an image-driven genre like animation. It is impossible to say if the summaries above are overreadings of *Puni Puni Poemi* (a gag comedy parodying various anime genres, the magical girl genre among them) and of *Kiddy Grade* (a more serious science fiction drama). The images of the cross leave open possibilities, but the stories do not indicate a specific interpretation or even require one. Yet, in the case of *Poemi*, that crucifixion is the chosen method of execution for the director (and former hero of *Excel Saga*, another parody anime) seems not a little suggestive, the director dying for his art (protecting his daughter the voice actress); though the joke perhaps being that he is martyred for (or perceived by her to be martyred for) a girl who, though she interprets his death as a sign that she must rededicate herself to becoming a successful voice actress (more so than to saving the world), really has no talent, as her late director father continually pointed out. And as for *Éclair*, the heroine of *Kiddy Grade* with the crosses on her dress, there is something about her flesh pinched by the fabric, visible in the frame of the inverted crucifix; something alluring, seductive; also something painful, something nun-like, holy. Is the cross a fashion statement or a statement of self (the clothes which make the girl, the uniform she wears which is she...)? Some twenty episodes later we realize she is the savior of the otherwise non-Christian universe in which she lives—in fact sacrificing herself not just once but repeatedly through the

decades as she is reborn again and again in different bodies (though with only fragmentary memory of her past lives and heroics...).

While there has been mounting curiosity among Western scholars about Japanese animation as a significant pop culture form, little attention has been devoted to the interest Japanese artists have in the Western middle ages (most of the scholarly work in the West on anime and manga being devoted to science fiction and horror stories).¹⁾ However, Japanese anime and manga artists have borrowed and transfigured not just the cross but many other elements of Christianity (stained glass and other trappings of the Church) and of Western medieval culture (the castle, the garden, the knight). In addition to occasional and relatively brief uses of such images, some anime and manga (= graphic novels) make extended use of medieval iconography, narratives, and narrative techniques: numerous titles are set in worlds modeled on the Western middle ages (*Orphen*, *Slayers*, *Sorcerer Hunters*) or retell early western stories by integrating the narrative into a quasi-modern or futurist world (*Chrono Crusade*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Tonari no Shugoshin*). Japanese writers have their own rich (medieval) history and culture to draw on for source material, so there is no pressing need to borrow from western medieval and biblical narratives. Yet as episodic and image-intensive genres, anime and manga have a stylistic affinity with early Western literature and so find creative ways to adapt that alien material for their own cultural and artistic ends.

As I discuss in the second part of this essay (on *Slayers*), anime often uses

1) For an interesting study of medieval images in horror manga, see Pandey. Complex science fiction works such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Ghost in the Shell*, the popularity of Hayao Miyazaki, and sophisticated story telling of writers like Satoshi Kon have resulted in a number of scholarly essays and books about Japanese anime, even a scholarly journal entitled *Mechademia*. See, for example, Redmond, Tucker, Notaro, Ortabasi, Goulding.

medieval literary themes and settings to explore human psychology: fear of control, of the alien, of one's own desire. But first, by looking at two shojo (= girl's) manga—*Prétear* by Kaori Naruse and Junichi Satou; and *Tonari no Shugoshin* (The Guardian Next to Me) by Ako Shimaki—I examine the way in which images and stories of knights and knightly quests have also been made to serve the ethics of Japanese anime culture, an ethics that grants (almost Aristotelian) importance to the concepts of friendship and of social interdependence.

I. Friendship and Knighthood: Readjusting Knightly Virtues in *Prétear*

In Malory's version of the Grail story, Gawayne's vow to seek the Grail results in the other knights at Arthur's court doing the same. The king is moved to tears as he laments to Gawayne:

Alas!... ye have nygh slayne me for the avow that ye have made, for thorow you ye have berauffte me the fayryst and the trewyst of knyghthode that ever was sene togydir in ony realme of the worlde. For whan they departe frome hense I am sure they all shall never mete more togydir in thys worlde.... I have loved them as well as my lyff. Wherefore hit shall greve me right sore, the departicion of thys felyship, for I have had an olde custom to have hem in my felyship. (522)

The assembling of the knights at Arthur's court is an essential element of most versions of the Arthurian legends. In Chrétien and in the Gawain-poet, as well as in Malory, we find the fellowship gathered to celebrate holidays and festivals, feasting together, sharing stories and playing marital games. Arthur is saddened

when the knights leave because, in an Aristotelian sense, he regards these men as “another himself” (*Ethics* 1166a30), loving them, as he says, as much as his own life. He recognizes in them, and they in one another, the virtues upon which their world (political/social/moral) is built, all that is “fair” and “true”, indeed “the fayryst and the trewyst... that ever was” according to Arthur. Arthurian “felyship” in this sense embodies the Aristotelian vision of a community bound together by virtue.

But whether these “fellows” are truly “friends” in Aristotle’s sense or indeed according to our own modern understanding of the term, is unclear. Aristotle, for example, makes a distinction between those who (want) honor and those who (want) love:

Those who want honour from decent people with knowledge are seeking to confirm their own view of themselves, and so they are pleased because the judgment of those who say they are good makes them confident that they are good. Being loved, on the contrary, they enjoy in itself. Hence it seems to be better than being honoured, and friendship seems choiceworthy in itself.

As we see in many of the romances, one crucial function of the gatherings at Arthur’s court is to tell stories about the knight’s virtues, to determine who is the bravest warrior and the fairest maid, publicly to assign honor and confirm the individual’s own view of himself. A knight who defeats a giant already knows what he did, but in this world he needs to send a witness to the court to tell the tale. Seeing and granting honor often seem more significant in these tales than loving and being loved (in the Aristotelian sense) by friends.

But friendship seems to consist more in loving than in being loved. A sign

of this is the enjoyment a mother finds in loving. For sometimes she gives her child away to be brought up, and she loves him as long as she knows about him; but she does not seek the child's love.... Friendship, then, consists more in loving; and people who love their friends are praised; hence, it would seem, loving is the virtue of friends. And so friends whose love corresponds to their friend's worth are enduring friends and have an enduring friendship. This above all is the way for unequals as well as equals to be friends, since this is the way for them to be equalized.

Equality and similarity, and above all similarity of those who are similar in being virtuous, is friendship.... (1159a20-1159b5)

To the extent that (love of) virtue binds Arthur and his knights, establishing their (relative) equality and similarity, the round table is an image of enduring friendship. Though it is not quite the unconditional love of a mother for a child. And for this reason, Aristotle distinguishes between different kinds of friendship:

As we have said, then, every friendship is found in a community. But we should set apart the friendship of families and that of companions. The friendship of citizens, tribesmen, voyagers and suchlike are more like friendships in a community, since they appear to reflect some sort of agreement; and among these we may include the friendship of host and guest. (1161b10)

Much of what one finds in the medieval romances is this sort of friendship of companions, of hosts and guests, a fellowship forged both on shared values (virtues) and on shared social customs (manners); it is a means of organizing a large number of people to promulgate virtue for the ultimate good of the individual and the society. But granted that Arthur feels genuine emotion, even

a kind of love, for his men (and granted that some of them, Lancelot and Gawain, for example, are close companions), is he really a “friend” to each of his many knights (or they to each other)? Aristotle comments that “it seems impossible to be an extremely close friend to many people” (1171a10); this is in part because he believes that friendship requires people to live together closely over an extended period.²⁾

The point here is not that Arthur and his knights are not friends, but that (1) they are not friends in quite the same way that characters in Japanese anime –who either literally live together or form what are basically surrogate families –are; and (2) the issue of friendship, though it may be a part of Arthurian romance, is not as central to those stories as to the Japanese stories about knights.

“Anyone who is to be happy, then, must have excellent friends” (1170b19). Aristotle places great emphasis on friendship and its place in the good life; Japanese anime does the same, though its concept of friendship is not tied as closely to theories of individual and of civic virtue as in Aristotle. Anime friendship may promote virtue, but more importantly it provides happiness and security, a refuge from the existential terrors of modern life: isolation and lack of purpose (of identity). Thus the parts of Aristotle’s analysis of friendship most relevant to the ethos of Japanese anime are the parts that seem less relevant to (or even missing from) the world of Arthurian romance:

Distance does not dissolve friendship unconditionally, but only its activity.

But if the absence is long, it also seems to cause the friendship to be

2) Aristotle suggests that the number of friends must naturally be limited: “the largest number with whom you could live together” (1171a2). For his full discussion of the question of the number of friends, see 1170b20-1171a20.

forgotten; hence the saying, 'Lack of conversation has dissolved many a friendship.' (1157b10)

Surely it is also absurd to make the blessed person solitary. For no one would choose to have all [other] goods and yet be alone, since a human being is political, tending by nature to live together with others. (1169b15)

For in the case of human beings what seems to count as living together is this sharing of conversation and thought, not sharing the same pasture, as in the case of grazing animals. (1170b12)

What the erotic love likes most is the sight of his beloved, and this is the sort of perception he chooses over the others, supposing that his above all is what makes him fall in love and remain in love. In the same way, surely, what friends find most choiceworthy is living together. For friendship is community.... Whatever someone [regards as] his being, or the end for which he chooses to be alive, that is the activity he wishes to pursue in his friends' company. Hence some friends drink together, others play dice, while others do gymnastics and go hunting, or do philosophy. They spend their days together on whichever pursuit in life they like most; for since they want to live with their friends, they share the actions in which they find their common life. (1171b29-1172a8)

Certainly when they are assembled at court Arthur's knights share conversation (or at least stories) and activities that they like (drinking, jousting). But the important point is that the central activity of their lives—or at least the center of the romance narratives which record their lives—is not the activity at court when they are all together. These scenes generally occur at the beginning or the ending of a narrative (as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)*, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*); the central part of the story

is the knight's individual quest. Though there are times when the knights ride together or encounter one another on the road, these narratives are largely concerned with the knight's solitary adventures and his individual honor. Even in Malory's version of the grail quest, though Galahad, Bors, and Percivale meet in the end (and are "glad" to see one another [601]), the full rapturous experience of the Grail is reserved for Galahad alone and it is not clear that he absolutely needed Bors or Percivale. Gawain, famously, completes the adventure of the Green Knight (which starts at the court's Christmas feast) alone. In Chrétien's *Yvain*, which also begins at court, we find that the story Calogrenant tells is about his solitary adventure (when he rode "alone like peasant," that is, without even a squire or other servant [297]); and then Yvain, hearing this story and desiring to defeat the enemy Calogrenant could not, sets out alone, warning his servant to tell no one—because Yvain fears that if, as Arthur plans, all the knights go together to go see the marvel Calogrenant spoke of, then Arthur will grant Kay and not Yvain the right to meet the challenge. And so begins Yvain's solitary adventure.

Notable, then, is that while the implication is that knights (or even the whole court) traveling together was not unheard of or even uncommon, the narratives themselves feature the private journeys of the heroes. "And so on the morne they were all accorded that they sholde departe everych from other. And on the morne they departed with wepyng chere, and then every knight toke the way that hym liked beste" (524). The Grail story begins with an image of communal disintegration, of individualization, as each of the knight's chooses his own path and prepares to meet his destiny alone. Lancelot's response to the King's grief at the knights' departure puts the concept of Arthurian fellowship in perspective: "A, sir, comferte yourselfe! For hit shall be unto us a grete honoure, and much more than we dyed in other placis, for of dethe

we be syker [certain]" (522). The individual's honor, his individual story—the story of his becoming a unique independent individual—is more important than the harmony and the pleasure of courtly fellowship; better to die on this quest alone than in “another place,” namely the court, which offers safety but not the possibility of individual honor, of self-actualization. Thus Joseph Campbell's comment to Bill Moyers in the *Power of Myth*:

Moyers: There is a wonderful image in King Arthur where the knights of the Round Table are about to enter the search for the Grail in the Dark Forest, and the narrator says, “They thought it would be a disgrace to go forth in a group. So each entered the forest at a separate point of his choice.” You've interpreted that to express the Western emphasis upon the unique phenomenon of a single human life—the individual confronting darkness.

Campbell: What struck me when I read that in the thirteenth-century *Queste del Saint Graal* was that it epitomizes an especially Western spiritual aim and ideal, which is, of living the life that is potential in *you* and was never in anyone else a possibility.

This, I believe, is the great Western truth: that each of us is a completely unique creature and that, if we are ever to give any gift to the world, it will have to come out of our own experience and fulfillment of own potentialities, not some else's. In the traditional Orient, on the other hand, and generally in all traditionally grounded societies, the individual is cookie-molded. His duties are put upon in exact and precise terms, there's no way if breaking out from them. When you go to a guru to be guided on the spiritual way, he knows just where you are on the traditional path, just where you have to go next, just what you must do to get there.... (186-187)

By analyzing Japanese anime and manga stories, by taking their narratives and

characters seriously, I want to demonstrate that they are complex and worth attending to closely; hardly cookie-molded, though some observers might assume that, given that there is an inherent simplicity to two-dimensional animation, a certain inevitable repetition of character features and movements. Despite superficial similarities, however, these characters do struggle to be individuals—but, as Campbell's (albeit broad) characterization of Eastern and Western culture suggests, they become complex individuals in different ways. Though not locked in by tradition, these characters still operate within and/or against limits that the Western knights could often ignore; rather than adventure alone and define themselves through that solitary journey, the knights (and warrior princesses) of Japanese anime and manga establish their identities and the meaning of their existence through the friendships they discover and the rules of the community (the new family or fellowship) which saves them from isolation. Inverting the pattern of the medieval romance, knights in anime begin alone and end up as part of a fellowship, one that is often more like a family than like the band of brothers in Arthur's court.

A good illustration of this new kind of knightly narrative is Junichi Satou and Kaori Naruse's *Prétear* (新白雪姫伝説プリーティア *Shin Shirayuki-hime Densetsu Purītia*). It is also known as *The New Legend of Snow White*. A strange amalgamation of several Western fairy tales (primarily Snow White, but also Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and [in the manga version] Rapunzel) and Japanese tentacle monsters, the story replaces the seven dwarves with seven knights from a parallel universe who enter the life of Himeno Awayuki, a Japanese high school girl living an ordinary life, relatively speaking. Her father, having little money and slightly alcoholic, is a former shojo romance novelist who recently remarried one of his greatest fans, an extremely wealthy executrix of a cosmetics company, who has two daughters of her own and lives on an

enormous castle-like estate. Himeno is a little unhappy with her new home and family because she does not quite fit in, wondering what she is doing in such a place and joking, “I’d sure make a lousy princess” (*Vol. 1*, 15)—a verbal joke, too, since *hime* (“princess”) is part of her name. Most troubling is that, “There’s no warmth at all between us” (16).

One day, however, she discovers a greater, or rather more immediate, problem: she encounters a strange group of seven oddly dressed guys who tell her they need her to help them save the world; they are the Leafe Knights, whose mission it is to protect the world’s energy (Leafe); but this energy is being drained by the Princess of Disaster, whose power can only be countered by the Knights in combination with a special girl called the *Prétear*. Himeno, the knights say, is that girl. She must allow them to merge with her, to enter her, so that she can transform and unleash her powers.

Like a good medieval romance, this long serial narrative gets increasingly complicated as it goes along (a paragraph summary does not quite do it justice). But what is especially interesting and relevant here is the portrayal of the knights and their relationship to Himeno. In the manga, after hearing their story, Himeno initially imagines that they belong to a cult; she imagines herself tied down to a stone tablet, surrounded by hooded men in long robes with long sacrificial swords poised above her (31). In the world she is from, to claim to be a knight is to admit madness. Eventually, though, she accepts who they are—accepts that they have dedicated themselves to the mission of protecting the world. Their relation to her is more specific; because she is the powerful *Prétear*, their mission is also to protect her, to develop her powers. At the end of the story she is able to transform on her own (significant, of course, because it is a measure of her own personal strength and her willingness to sacrifice for them, to protect them). Initially, though, she can only transform if they “prét”

or merge with her; their spiritual force then acts as a shield (when she is attacked, the knight absorbs the pain) and gives her offensive capabilities.

This merging is the source of some comedy, as Himeno blushes at the thought of having a man (let alone seven different ones) “inside” her. But the point is a serious one; the merging is especially invasive precisely because it is not sexual; it involves a direct spiritual penetration of her heart. In the transformation scene, Himeno is stripped of her everyday clothes and then, naked, receives the light of the knight’s energy into her breast. The fusion of his light and her heart generates a new outfit (a different one depending on which knight she merges with) and, in effect, a new Himeno. It is the warmth and the intimacy of this merging that, at the beginning of the story, she both desires (but does not receive) from her new family and fears. Fears, because it is at once the end of isolation and the loss of self, the emerging of a new self connected to others with all the frightening responsibilities and problems attending such a relation.

This theme of isolation and reconnection is explored through various characters in the story, including the Princess of Disaster who wants to punish a world in which her love for another (one of the Knights) was rejected. Mawata, Himeno’s step-sister, is so cut off from the world that she is finally literally sealed away in the trunk of a great dark tree whose roots use her negative thoughts to drain the life (leafe) from the world.

While the girls begin their stories in isolation (and end happily by being reconnected), the seven knights begin in unity, as part of a group that acts together. They have different personalities, different specialties, and are of different ages, but for the most part they work together and rarely act alone. When they do try to act alone, the consequences are bad. When Hayate (afraid of what might happen to Himeno) rejects her as the *Prêtear* and intends to face

the Princess alone, Go upbraids him angrily, pointing out that it is impossible for the seven knights, let alone one knight, to defeat the Princess, which is why they sought a *Prétear* in the first place (ep.5). Sasame's decision to renounce his knighthood and abandon the others has even more profound consequences (ep.9). His story has all of the elements of a complex narrative of sin and redemption, of conflicted love and duty, as he has to sort out whether being a knight requires one to serve a mission destined by God or to serve one woman without reserve.

In the end, all of these narrative strands reinforce the image of the knight (and the princess, for that matter) as one whose purpose is realized through their friendship with others to whom they are bound by almost family-like ties. Even as Himeno becomes closer to her own new family, the knights are always with her, both in the city and on her family estate (and, again, inside her when they merge); like the dwarves did for Snow White, the Knights at one point even provide her a small cottage in their own world. For Himeno and the others, the discovery of one's purpose and place in life, one's potentiality and one's gift to the world (as Campbell would say), is not achieved by questing alone and testing one's strength, breaking away from social conventions and connections; but rather by reintegrating oneself into the world one fears having been isolated from and abandoned by.

In these modern Japanese stories from anime and manga, images of the medieval knight are appropriated but then adapted: friendship is given an Aristotelian prominence³⁾ and the medieval narrative pattern (of joyous

3) As I noted, it is the significance granted by Japanese anime to the concept of friendship, rather than the specific conception of what it means to be a friend, that recalls Aristotle. These are western narratives and images that have been adapted by Japanese writers and so, in the end, are Japanese stories. And just like the Arthurian romances (which were medieval European and not classically Greek), they

fellowship followed by the individual knight's solitary quest for self) inverted. The next section examines how another shojo manga, Ako Shimaki's *Tonari no Shugoshin (The Guardian Next to Me)*, takes this transformation of the image of the Western knight one step further, by literally bringing the great medieval knight Lancelot into the modern Japanese world.

II. Lancelot in Japan: Domesticating the Western Knight

When the Grail knights of Western literature enter the dark forest and go their separate ways it may be, as Joseph Campbell suggests, a defining image of the Western individual and a reminder of the emphasis Western culture places on self-sufficiency and self-discovery. But like other Japanese

reflect some but not all the principles of Aristotle. One obvious difference between friendship in anime and friendship in Aristotle concerns the issue of whether one should share one's pain with one's friends. Japanese heroes and heroines, who start out isolated from others often because they are unwilling to share their feelings, to merge with others as intimately as Himeno does, generally find themselves in narratives which force them to unlearn the "manly" lesson of repression taught by thinkers like Aristotle:

The very presence of friends is also pleasant, in ill fortune as well as good fortune; for we have our pain lightened when our friends share our distress.... Nonetheless, awareness of his pain at our ill fortune is painful to us, since everyone tries to avoid causing pain to his friends.

That is why someone with a manly nature tries to prevent his friend from sharing his pain. Unless he is unusually immune to pain, he cannot endure pain coming to his friends; and he does not allow others to share his mourning at all, since he is not prone to mourn himself either. Females, however, and effeminate men enjoy having people to wail with them; they love them as friends who share their distress. But in everything we clearly must imitate the better person. (1171a28-1171b12)

appropriations (Orphen, Chrono Crusade), Shimaki's manga refigures the Western knight's individual quest for redemption and self-definition into a shared experience of friendship and self-recovery leading to social reintegration.

This romance manga concerns Lancelot's love affair with a Japanese girl after he is magically transported to modern day Japan. Rio Matsuki, a high school girl living alone with her young brother after their parents' death, works hard to take care of her brother and to stay in school. But she thinks it is useless to rely on others (1.1.color2); the boys at school accuse of her being "cold-hearted" (1.1.23) and even her girlfriends notice that she has changed of late, becoming much more serious and looking worn out (1.1.1-2). She says that she needs to find a man who is financially stable or at least has good prospects so that he can take care of her and her brother. One day she is out shopping and comes across a magical playing card. (According to the salesman, it was the property of a witch and the only card in a deck that survived a great fire.) It is the Jack of Clubs, whose image is purportedly fashioned after that of the great medieval knight Lancelot. Rio cannot quite remember buying the card, but it is with her when she gets home and she begins having a series of dreams about Lancelot. In one, he cuts her finger with his sword and swears an unbreakable oath to protect her forever. But one afternoon when Rio's new boyfriend Yuuki tries to kiss her and she pushes him away, then suddenly Lancelot is no longer a dream—he materializes and "saves" Rio, his sword cutting Yuuki across the chest.

To Rio's friends, Lancelot at first appears to be a good-looking, if unusual, visitor, a cosplayer (=costume player) from a foreign country. But Lancelot is not playing the role of a medieval knight; he is Lancelot. So for Rio, Lancelot's foreignness represents more than a colorful distraction. He not only guards her but guides her on a path of self-discovery: she realizes that she has been "hard

headed and guarded” (1.4.35) and becomes able to acknowledge her true feelings (for Lancelot, not for the Japanese schoolboy Yuuki). At the end of the first book she literally takes a leap of faith off the school balcony and, of course, Lancelot catches her.

Lancelot is the alien who offers new possibilities: a tradition of courtesy and a world of sexual and romantic love she has never known. But though his behavior and actions are new to her, they nonetheless lead her back to a relatively stable and traditional life. As a modern Japanese schoolgirl, the customs of western medieval chivalry are rather strange (not what she has come to expect from boys), but they have an affinity with traditional Japanese values (hence the reason the old women in the neighborhood like Lancelot so much [1.3.2-3]). And though she is initially uncomfortable with his open display of affection and desire, eventually her acceptance of his advances and of the sexual desire manifest in her own dreams leads to a perfectly natural relationship between the two, no more erotic or exotic than that of any husband and wife.

Importantly, though, in fulfilling both her sexual and romantic desires, he also satisfies her desire to be protected and to recover the stable family that she lost when her parents died. By the end of the second book, she and Lancelot have become a family—not just a dating couple in high school, but living together and taking care of her younger brother Minoru. His foreignness, his alienness, even his medievalness, all work in the end to restore a normal life to Rio.

For Rio to recover normalcy, to become an average Japanese girl again, Lancelot (his alienness, his medievalness) must be modernized and domesticated. First and foremost, of course, he must relinquish his native language. Although in her dreams Rio and Lancelot are able to understand one another (evidence of some sort of spiritual connection, perhaps), when he first

arrives in Japan he speaks only English which neither Rio nor her brother understand. It is only by inscribing the word “Japanese” on back of the card with Lancelot’s image (the Jack of Clubs) that he is able to think in, speak, and understand Japanese. Along with his sword, his knightly cloak and vestments are stripped away; Rio initially gives him her father’s old clothes to wear (already moving Lancelot down the path from knight errant to father/husband figure). And then, like all modern objects and people, he is commodified. He goes from warrior to (relatively) average high school student when the principal of Rio’s school tells her that he thinks Lancelot’s attendance will be good publicity for the school; Rio is reluctant at first, but when the principal offers her money she instantly agrees (1.3.4-6).

Although he appears at times a comic figure (as an actor or a paid celebrity), he does manage to remain a hero of sorts: he protects the girls at school from bullies and carries them to the nurse when they get hurt in gym class; he challenges the teacher who mistreats the students. Still, this kind of heroism is a far cry from his medieval roots, constrained by the much more prosaic world of Japanese high school in which he now finds himself. There is no spiritual quest to undertake and no dragons to slay. As in the Arthurian legends, he is humbled, though not for his sins or his shortcomings. The limiting of his power and the diminishment of his glory serve to make him if not a greater hero then certainly a more successful one than when he served Arthur. Rather than breaking up a family and kingdom, in Japan he restores order, helping Rio find a stable family again. No longer saving an adulterous Guinevere from the stake, we find him saving Rio from burning her hand on the kitchen stove (in a dramatic domestic scene, he puts his arms around an aproned Rio while the young Minoru looks up at them from below [1.3.8]).⁴⁾ In a final blow to his existence as a self-assured independent knight, he

discovers that he needs her too. She literally saves him from being hit by a kendo sword, momentarily becoming herself a protector (though perhaps a needless one). But more importantly she leads him to a discovery he could not have made on his own: not only does he desire her (as he desired Guinevere), but he is made aware of her desire for him, of the Hegelian desire for desire, through the discovery that where in Britain he always protected women, here is a woman who desires to protect him.

Perhaps that is to say that Lancelot overcomes the Hegelian problem of desire—the desire for what others desire, the desire for acknowledgement of oneself by another—by desiring what Rio desires, which is to say, himself. Rio, too, comes to love herself in finding the master (or as she would say, “guardian”) who desires her. This would be a different solution from the Hegelian dialectic which imagines the transcendence of the slave at the end of history (a solution which would presumably require Lancelot to become a slave [which he does not] and also to work [which he also notably does not do in this story]). It is also different from Arthur’s solution (a combination of the Leviathan and a Circle of Equal Masters) to the problem of desire which ends (predictably, from a Hegelian point of view) in the failure of the round table, conspicuously brought about by Lancelot’s desire for what Arthur has (Guinevere) and by the other knights’ desire to be recognized as absolute

4) To the extent that Lancelot does interfere with Rio’s relationship with Yuuki, it is notable that Yuuki is not really Arthur. Yuuki and Rio are dating, and Rio does reflect that he might be better for her because he is “sensible and conservative” and she could live a “fun, untroubled life”(1.4.12); but there is no serious consequence for breaking up their relationship and Lancelot does not steal her away. He tries to force her to choose him, but when she says that breaking up with Yuuki is not up to her alone, he interprets this (in very modern democratic fashion) to mean that everyone must agree—so he consults her little brother and issues a challenge, a “dual”, to see who can get the first kiss from Rio.

masters (not just as equals by the others). Lancelot desires Rio not because Yuuki desires her (Lancelot does not know about Yuuki at first) but because of Rio's desire for himself. In this way the world of shōjo romance (which has no recourse to a philosophy of the Grail and of servitude to a single masterful God) avoids many of the problems inherent in the violent and unstable world of knightly romance.

And so at the end of his adventures in modern Japan, Lancelot becomes integrated both into high school life and into family life. Lancelot's existence as a medieval knight has been transfigured; each aspect which defined his self in that previous life—his knowledge and practice of courteous behavior, his martial skills, his allegiance to a lord (temporal and divine), and his willingness to undertake difficult quests—is reconfigured at the level of plot (so that he can save Rio from the modern crises she faces) and at the level of genre (so that he can serve the ethics of Shimaki's shōjo vision). His courteous behavior is partly retained and encouraged, though Rio makes it clear that she wants him to devote that attention wholly to her. At first his generous behavior gets him in trouble because it does not seem as if he can distinguish between one girl and another, an essential distinction (especially for the girl) in the highly public and competitive world of high school romance. Having not only to repress his chivalric tendencies, Lancelot is forced by Rio to give up his sword, and so no longer cannot prove his worth through his martial skills.⁵ In a shōjo romance, Lancelot's abandoning of his world, his God and his king is actually a positive virtue, rewriting the moral of the Lancelot-Guinevere tale. (Rio would

5) As in many mainstream anime, even the ones that are about war or skilled warriors, there is an anti-war ethos at work here—a nervousness about the return of war and violence to post-WWII Japan (whether brought in from the West, as here, or emerging from within Japan itself)—which seems to reject martial prowess even as such skill is being celebrated in the action sequences of manga and anime.

presumably be a Paolo-and-Francesca-like reader of medieval romance). And to the extent that he is now loyal to one woman, that loyalty is expressed as we saw through his domestication as a husband/father figure. It is by becoming part of her family and helping her to repair a broken family that he serves her. And so his status as knight-errant is also transfigured, as there is no extended quest for him to undertake on her behalf or that of the new community (of high school friends) to which he now belongs. The obstacles he faces are of the everyday domestic kind—and the greatest challenge he faces (having Rio's memory erased so that he can stay in the modern world) he overcomes not through a journey of penance or a quest for a magical cure, but through his offer to accept sadness in her place.⁶⁾ This story line shares a little of the ethos of medieval knightly romances, though in this case there is no reason for Rio and Lancelot to be separated or for such a sacrifice to be the condition of his being able to stay. It is simply the reality of the situation (the magical Joker who controls the card never explains why these rules exist). So there is no element of penance in this story (Lancelot is not being punished and he is not required to recognize his sins); if anything, Lancelot's choice to suffer in her place is a Christ-like gesture, though the Christian context is completely erased here. Rio, too, offered to make this sacrifice and it is not a redemptive sacrifice; it is a purely romantic one since it is not the sacrifice which saves Rio and Lancelot. Rather, it is her power (the power of her love?) to remember

6) In book 2, Lancelot eventually faces the problem of having to return to England and to the past. The card Joker tells him that there are two possible alternatives: kill Yuuki (which he finds he cannot do); or accept either Rio or himself losing their memory of the other. Both Rio and Lancelot desire the other to lose their memory because they believe this will allow him or her to be happy, while they bear the burden of a sad memory themselves. It is Lancelot's wish which is granted by the Joker.

him again after her memory is erased which allows them to live happily together. In the end, Lancelot does not have to bear the sorrow of separation but does give up his medieval world in order to save Rio or, rather, to renew her, in the sense of providing her a stable love and family.

III. Lina as Inverse: Desire and Fear in the Medieval Landscape

I want to turn now to a more common form of appropriation in Japanese popular culture, namely stories which have a medieval European setting (not usually the historical middle ages but rather the world of medieval romance, a mix of feudal and Christian historical elements with magical powers and ubiquitous dragons). The *Slayers* OVAs (= original video animation) I discuss in this section are I think a subtle and surprisingly complex example of this kind of appropriated story. On the surface, the shows are a combination of adventure quest and comedy; but like Monty Python's *Holy Grail*, it is the comic dimension (its willingness to laugh, sometimes nervously, at itself and at others) from which the series' more subversive and self-reflective moments derive.

The series follows the adventures of Lina Inverse and her companion Naga the Serpent, both powerful female magic users who offer their services to those in need, usually for a considerable fee. In one episode (*Slayers Gorgeous*) they help a king whose daughter rebels against him with an army of dragons; in another (*Jeffrey's Knighthood*) they are hired by a mother to protect her clumsy son whom she wants to send out on an adventure to become a knight like all the other men in her family.

In talking about Shimaki's shojo manga, I discussed the idea of Japanese art domesticating and socializing the Western knight hero, but *Slayers* complicates

this notion. Where Shimaki's Lancelot is transformed to be comfortable in modern Japanese society; and where in a more serious and traditional anime adventure series (like *Orphen* or *Sorcerer Hunters*) the questing characters, originally loners and knights who would bear their burden alone, learn to work together and replace an ethics of self-reliance with an ethics of friendship, Lina and Naga represent the individual bound to another by economic and martial necessity. They are not exactly friends, often appearing as rivals or as two people who really do not like one another (but find it profitable to work together). In *The Scary Chimera Plan*, a spell causes clones of Naga to appear; and the powerful Lina falls down in a swoon, defeated by the mere sight of the Naga copies. In the same episode, Lina is saved by Naga, but only by mistake. A running gag throughout the series has Lina using her power to defeat an enemy and yet wounding Naga at the same time.

I take this to be *Slayers'* comment on (and critique of) the more traditional anime story in which friendship is valued over individual success, and harmony is desired above the excitement and adventure generated by conflict between rival individuals and groups. Of course, it could also be a comment on Western culture, on the disharmony which comes from its celebration of the individual. The setting is western and Lina has a western name.⁷⁾ She lives in a rather ugly Hobbesian world, in the sense that it is full of rivalry arising from a constant battle for survival, all against all in the search for better food and more money. There is not much time for friendship (again, Lina and Naga are more business partners than friends) or love (Lina is bored by the romance plot [in which she has no part] in *Slayers: The Motion Picture*), let alone social harmony (Naga dismisses Jeffrey's simplistic image of the knight errant serving

7) In Japanese she introduces herself as Lina Inverse (rather than Inverse Lina), whereas Naga introduces herself as Serpento no Naga.

justice ["Beat up bad guys; save Lina!"] as a "third-rate minstrel song" [*Jeffrey's Knighthood*]). But whether Lina's individualism is the cause of such a world (contributing to its perpetuation) or the result of living in it, is not clear. While *Slayers* may highlight some of Lina's less than admirable characteristics, it also seems to suggest that despite living in a world of dragons and of magic, Lina lives in a more realistic world (or has a more realistic view of our world) than other more idealistic characters whether in anime or western romance. If nothing else, Lina does good when she can (she does save a number of people and towns), even if the opportunity only presents itself during less than selfless searches for her next meal. Taking away (as Japanese anime tends to do) Christian idealism, the violent and sometimes lawless medieval landscape provides an image of a Hobbesian world reflective (to some extent) of the competition and rivalry inherent in a modern capitalist nation like Japan. To the extent that Lina is an independent, powerful, woman ("a girl today" in contrast to the traditional Japanese woman), she follows in the tradition of Western lady knights and sorceresses: the tradition of Spenser's Britomart, of Tolkien's Arwen and Eowyn. But given the world she lives in (and to the extent that it reflects the world we live in) perhaps we are meant to understand that she can only be so noble and so charitable before she has to re-enter the war of all against all.

Whether one sees Lina as a heroine depends in part on how one takes the comedy and on how one reads the reactions of the minor characters to Lina. When Naga is caught up in Lina's powerful spell, witnesses are amazed both by Lina's power and by her carelessness, perplexed that she would "involve" her companion in the blast; and when she interrupts an older man whose speech she is bored with, he complains that he is unable to finish his lines: "What are girls today?" (*Scary Chimera Plan*). Lina makes other people

uncomfortable and although she does not mind the nickname “brigand killer”, she is very upset when people call her “dragon scarer” (*Slayers: The Motion Picture*). Sometimes Lina seems embarrassed by or uncomfortable with her own power, as in *Slayers Gorgeous* when she is hired to fight dragons but, again, does not want to be known as someone who frightens dragons.

If Lina Inverse is a “girl today,” presumably the “girl yesterday” that the old man longs for is closer to the traditional Japanese woman represented by Rio. Lina *is* inverse. To some extent of Rio, who wants to be protected/guarded (her story, afterall, is *The Guardian Near Me*). Lina is also the inverse of the traditional anime girl.⁸⁾ In *Mirror, Mirror* Lina confronts a most powerful object, the shadow reflector, and perhaps her greatest fear. For the reflector has the power to create a shadow being with an opposite personality—to force one to confront what one could be but is not, and so, in a sense, what one is. Lina’s shadow appears as the typical anime bishojo (= beautiful girl) heroine, “so feminine and peace loving”—and Lina herself is angry and embarrassed when she confronts this other. Lagan (a male character) asks her in great wonder, if the shadow has this character, “what kind of person *are* you?”

The bishojo shadow represents the genre of anime girl to which she could have belonged (had the writers so chosen). Yet if Lina dislikes the image presented by the shadow, presumably she should feel relief of some kind because it is a reflection of what she is not. Is Lina embarrassed because part of her wants to be like that? Because she knows other people (in her world

8) As I suggested above, Lina descends from the Western tradition of female knights, but (from an ethical point of view) she is hardly Britomart or Eowyn. So perhaps to some extent she is also the inverse of the Western heroine, setting herself outside traditions, resisting definition by, both east and west.

and in the world of Japanese anime viewers) want her to be like that? Because as Lagan suggests, if the shadow is her opposite, she must herself be an extreme –not just a spirited modern girl, but one who is so powerful or who desires so much power that she cannot exist in the real world (at any time, medieval or modern)? Perhaps the impossible caricatured shadow proves that Lina herself is an impossible (and perhaps equally undesirable?) vision of feminine power and fantasy that exists only in this medieval fantasy world without limits.

The shadow reflector turns out not to be an effective weapon (it merely creates weak shadows of a powerful enemy). Yet Lina insists it be destroyed because “it is too embarrassing to exist”. To her chagrin, though, the shadows do not disappear when the mirror is broken. Why? Perhaps because although they are not a part of Lina, they exist (or persist) in the culture, or at least the desire for them (as opposed to for Lina) does.⁹⁾ Near the end of the story Lina and Naga abandon the shadows even though they are weak and helpless, leaving them to be destroyed. Lina begs in a voiceover: “If you see them somewhere, just forget about it, just say you did not see any such thing, please!” Of course, despite Lina’s plea, people do respond to the shadows and they are not totally without power. At the end the shadows encounter a brigand whom Lina had easily defeated with her power at the beginning of the episode. He is again defeated but not by martial or magical power—this time, he falls off a cliff, surprised when he sees the shadows, disconcerted by their beauty. The last image of the episode is from the edge of the cliff, a moon rising over the valley.

9) Though also powerful, Naga is a striking contrast to Lina—a little older and more mature, taller, stronger, well-endowed, she is constantly flaunting her sexuality (and her sexual power), constantly reminding Lina that however great her magic, she is still lacking in this regard. Thus Naga’s shadow is an image of the shy, submissive (but still seductive) woman in hentai (= erotic) anime. Naga, too, is disturbed by her shadow (though perhaps not quite as much as Lina).

It is an image of the knight's wilderness where Lina wishes to be, to continue her free roaming adventures, to lose her shadow.

Lina and her shadow may or may not be impossible (unreal) women, but their images exist (or persist) in the culture and I suggest *Slayers* uses the medieval landscape—an alien, unreal space (neither the modern world nor Japan)—to reflect on these cultural images of the feminine, to examine the fear and desire of the cultural psychology which produced (and continues to produce) them.

IV. Appropriator and Appropriated

I close here with a final thought about what this kind of appropriation tells us about the appropriating culture and the material appropriated. In the case of *Slayers*, I think, the medieval material is particularly attractive because it is alien, both culturally and temporally speaking. It is a means to reflect on one's own culture by measuring it against another; it is a foreign space in which to question identity indirectly, safely as it were, without having to directly address the cultural setting of one's own day. Though where the modern medievalism of the West is a way of marking change from its own medieval past, Japan's borrowing in *Slayers* marks off the boundary between east and west, highlighting what is missing or radically present in Japanese culture.

In the case of Shimaki's Lancelot story, however, I think there is also something else going on, and it is interesting to consider to what extent Lancelot is made to become Japanese and what that says about the power of cultural appropriation. *Just Visiting*, an American story about medieval time travelers, appropriates medieval characters in order to show how America (at the

Hegelian end of history) can appropriate almost anything, how anyone can become American, or rather, how America has the power to attract people to become American.¹⁰ Monty Python's *Holy Grail*, by contrast, seems to suggest less that post-war Britain can adapt medieval stories for its own purposes or that Arthur can become a modern British man than to suggest that modern England is still medieval—Arthur, constantly trying to silence others around him so that they will obey him, is at the end stopped by the British police, defeated by a force that is simply more powerful, but not necessarily different, from himself.¹¹ Lancelot's situation in Shimaki's romance is interesting in that, on the one hand, in becoming "Japanese" he is still notably a *gaijin*, an outsider—he (with his blond hair) is identified as a foreigner even when he changes his clothes¹² or is complimented on his perfect Japanese; he is sold by Rio to the school as a curiosity to help advertise the school. Yet on the other hand, by adapting Lancelot into a Japanese high school student and a suitable lover for a Japanese girl, the novel seems to suggest that Japan (Japanese culture) has the same power as the West to appropriate and transform. And the medieval knightly romance, with its emphasis on the quest, on the journey of self and of self-discovery, proves especially adaptable and transformable in a modern world still defining itself, if no longer in relation to God or to kings or to the feudal order, then to its own history and politics, to the temporal and geographic and

10) At least, the servant stays to become an American; the (Hegelian?) master returns to his own time to continue his existence as a medieval knight.

11) For an interesting discussion of silence and power in the film, see Levy.

12) When Rio initially dresses Lancelot for school, she gives him an otaku (= extreme anime fan) outfit, ostensibly because she does not want the other girls to like him—but presumably they initially do not like him not just because he is otaku but because he is a foreigner pretending to be otaku. "This is the first time I've seen a foreigner who is an otaku," says one girl. Says another: "Even though he's good-looking, isn't that a bit over-board? It's too lame" (1.3.13).

cultural other which invades it.

And so I find especially interesting these cross-cultural adaptations of western medievalism by Japanese anime and manga, which concern an issue that is becoming more and more urgent for the medieval scholar to confront: the value of modern “medieval” texts and their relation to the works produced in the middle ages. If we take seriously this expansive and influential form of modern pop culture, we can explore what such appropriation tells us about not only anime culture but the nature of medieval stories, what makes them so adaptable, so renewable, so open to resurrection and reanimation in our modern day, in the both the West and the East.

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Integration and Inversion: Western Medieval Knights in Japanese Manga and Anime

Abstract

John Lance Griffith

While there has been mounting curiosity among Western scholars about Japanese animation as a significant pop culture form, less attention has been devoted to the interest Japanese artists have in the Western middle ages. However, Japanese anime and manga artists borrow and transfigure not just the cross but many other elements of Christianity (stained glass and other trappings of the Church) and of Western medieval culture (the castle, the garden, the knight). In addition to occasional and relatively brief uses of such images, some anime and manga make extended use of medieval iconography, narratives, and narrative techniques. Japanese writers have their own rich (medieval) history and culture to draw on for source material, so there is no pressing need to borrow from western medieval and biblical narratives. Yet as episodic and image-intensive genres, anime and manga have a stylistic affinity with early Western literature. This essay explores the way in which these forms of Japanese pop culture find creative ways to adapt the alien material of the Western Middle Ages for their own cultural and artistic ends.

Key Words

Medievalism, Japanese pop culture, anime, manga, cross-cultural adaptation

논문 투고 일자 : 2008. 1. 5.

게재 확정 일자 : 2009. 1. 28.