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Pictures by CHOO CHOY MAY

Shakespeare's gone manga

DEBRA CHONG learns Manga Shakespeare connects very well with fans of the Japanese comic art, and also, students of the Bard's works.



COLLECT THEM NOW: Kinokuniya is currently offering a discount on all four titles in the *Manga Shakespeare* series.

INSPIRED: Liaw's artworks based on her reading of (clockwise bottom left) the *Loveless* manga, *The Historian* novel and an original composition.

It was a strange crowd that packed Kinokuniya Bookshop on the fourth floor of Suria KLCC one evening.

There were the usual bookaholics: some old and professor-like, some young adults, and some children, but all bespectacled and clutching more books than they could carry.

Then there were those dressed to the nines as if for a party — a Halloween party, that is. A couple of girls looked *tres chic* in their Harajuku punk-loli gear.

Which goes to show that one can never judge a book by its cover. They were attending a talk co-organised by Kinokuniya and the British Council on Manga Shakespeare, a new series of books sweeping Britain and the rest of the literary world like bushfire.

Manga Shakespeare, as its name suggests, is an interpretation of William Shakespeare's plays in manga.

While there have been graphic and novel Western publications of the Bard's plays before, the manga version certainly lends



IMPROMPTU: It didn't take much to wheedle a sketch out of Duffield.

them more pizzazz, all the while still keeping to the original verses.

Just imagine star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet racing through the streets of Tokyo dodging the yakuza's hot on their trail. Or pacing alongside the troubled Hamlet as he confronts his father-king on the steely ramparts, more reminiscent of *Blade Runner* than the old, cold stones of Denmark's castle.

"In manga, especially *shoujo* (girl) manga, the illustration tells the story."



INTRIGUED: Duffield (right) at the manga autograph signing session.

stressed Paul Duffield, the artist for *The Tempest*, who was at the talk.

The 23-year-old wunderkind from London is one of Britain's most celebrated up-and-coming manga stars, having won the Grand Prize in Tokyopop's first UK Rising Stars of

Manga competition in 2005 for *Falling Star*, an 18-page short comic.

He was also the overall winner in the 2006 International Manga and Anime Festival for *Rolighed*, a three-minute animated short.

By incorporating the

evergreen Shakespeare into a new medium for a new generation of rising Western manga artists, the independent British publisher SelfMadeHero has successfully killed two birds with one stone to make reading Shakespeare something the masses can

look forward to reading. Manga maniac Matthew Ken John Davis, 15, came because he wanted to hear about manga.

"I wanted to see how someone could mix manga and Shakespeare. Also, I wanted to see the person who's won prestigious awards in manga."

For Nikki Liaw, an amateur comic artist who had "met" Duffield anonymously in manga forums and on his website (spoonbard.com), it was the chance to finally meet him in the flesh. But it wasn't just the draw of manga that spurred her to attend the rare book talk.

The college student who is now 21 had always been interested in Shakespeare and used to study English literature in secondary school. Like most students, she had found it hard to understand the medieval lingo.

"My teacher used to encourage us to watch the movies but I found them outdated. It was not easy to relate to actors dressed in period costumes.

"But Manga Shakespeare is good. There's a visual beauty in manga that can't be found on screen. Also, you can read manga at leisure; you're not forced to keep up with the movie's pace."

Manga Shakespeare is now available for sale at Kinokuniya Bookshop and selected MPH outlets. There are currently four titles in the series: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III* and *The Tempest*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is expected to be released sometime this month.

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