

Alexander Priest
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Jpnt 179 Graphically Speaking: Japanese Manga and Its Buds
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Final Project Critique

‘Critiquing a Critique’

Alexander Priest’s ‘live action’ screenplay of *Bleach* gives an interesting perspective on why American adaptations of Japanese manga sources have eventually result in failure. While the screenplay is ‘satirical’ and intentionally overhauls the existing plot of bleach, it raises interesting questions on the difficulties that accompany filmmakers in adapting these sources. The shortcomings however, is that the myriad of concerns raised are not adequately addressed or expanded upon. While the screenplay leaves the reader with footnotes detailing his rational, he only scratches the surface of many issues resonate in other films such as *Dragonball Evolution*, *Speed Racer*, and *Astro Boy*. Priest may have better served writing a fully fledged paper or a fully fledged script, his attempt don’t ultimately pan out for the best. Perhaps it was Priest’s intension, but the screenplay feels very much like a parody rather than a fully fledged script. While the screenplay doesn’t completely succeed it what it sets out to do, Priest deserves some form of commendation for providing an interesting look at the pitfalls of American adaptations.

The primary issue of this project that I want to get out of the way is that Priest doesn’t expand on interesting concept that he himself raises. He mentions the challenges and difficulties in adapting existing content, but he is not directly explicit on the nature of said difficulties. There is an overall lack of clarity as a result. One relevant example is when Priest comments on portraying Ichigo as a Caucasian. He gives examples from *Speed Racer and Dragonball Evolution*, in which there were Caucasian protagonists. This raises series of questions. What are

the cultural and racial implications? Why do films prominently feature a Caucasian protagonist? How does this take away from the source material? Priest *identifies* the trends and concepts, but he does not *analyze* and synthesize information. Another example is in Priest's sexist portrayal of Orihime and Rukia's characters. He could have commented upon the issues of character stereotypes or trends in cinema that lead to sexist portrayal. He doesn't tackle this complex and important issues and I am left feeling disappointed. Priest only goes so far in justifying his content.

The action sequences and scene descriptions could have been better written. I understand that was Priest's first time writing a script, but amateur formatting doesn't do any favors. There are particular ways in spacing and separation of character dialogue to events could be properly identified. Another issue is that more detail could have been put into the peculiar trends in action sequences rather than providing a simple description. Priest raises the point of adding 'dimension' to the story. Understandably screenplays are not supposed overly descriptive to leave room for a director's imagination, but this screenplay is fictional. It would have been better to given over detailed descriptions of the actions that would occur because a director wouldn't actually be looking at the screenplay. Specifics relating music, acting, or the special effects would have greatly lent to otherwise bland concepts. The dialogue is there, but the descriptions are somewhat lacking. After unloading my barrage of criticism, I want to touch on what made the screenplay interesting.

The screenplay was quite amusing, but not ridiculous to a point that all subtlety is lost. The reader is able to extrapolate (some obvious, some not) reoccurring issues in American contextualization's of manga. The screenplay takes place in a North American suburban environment neighborhood. It jabs at American audiences that, and raises questions why we

culturally appropriate existing sources for or own purposes. Sappy and cheesy sequences such as Isshin's pep talk to his son or the school locker sequence between Orihime and Ichigo are just awkward (and typical) enough to pass as potentially being part of a movie. This screenplay would pain any reader of *Bleach*, but that is part of the entire point. The screenplay is absolutely ridiculous, but it is not so ridiculous that it just feels like a blunt statement on the failings of American adaptation.

Likewise, the overall plot maintains coherence while trying to accommodate a short format. This attempt of accommodation represents a dilemma that arises for anyone trying to adapt a serialized format over the course of an hour and thirty minutes. Sadly this screenplay (as Priest claims it) would accommodate approximately 25 minutes, but that's already a big fraction of the plot. The narrator provides a haphazard (yet short) summary of hollows at the beginning of the movie whereas the manga has to devote numerous episodes to explain who the hollows actually are. The characters are developed (inadequately), Ichigo's family is introduced, and the story jumps from point to point in a matter of thirteen scenes. Ideally, it would all culminate with Ichigo actually gaining the powers necessary to undergo his trial against the screenplay's "antagonist", Grand Fisher.

It is a little bit disappointing that Priest wasn't able to write an entire screenplay, but a lot of work was evidently put in. At the very least, Priest's research screenplay culminates to an understating difficulties of taking a vastly different format and adapting it for an American audience. Questions are raised in his footnotes, but many questions are still unanswered. Priest manages to convey an awareness of the many issues that purvey filmmakers and their attempts to reach an American audience, but there is still plenty of content to be worked with.