Paradise Lost . . . and Found?

Paul Jackson

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verbal" imagination was the seriousness of the Meiji-period novel (kindai *shosetsu*), which became an almost entirely a words-only endeavor. Perhaps only now, with the success of *Akira* and *Sailor Moon,* are we ready to understand the picture-phobic nature of the modern Japanese novel for what it was: a modern suppression of the grapheme in order to support a wide-ranging conceptualization of mass society that was better accomplished without too many pictures. Only now that we have recovered the sophistication of pictured reality are we ready to give the brilliance of *kibyoshi, this early flowering of "manga,"* its just due.

Whether a direct progenitor to contemporary manga or not, *kibyoshi* are good to know. To recognize the extraordinary burst of creativity that brought the genre to fruition is to gain an important perspective on the creative precedents for Japan's manga and anime artists today. The lacuna between these two phases is a crucial piece of Japanese cultural history that needs to be addressed. Thanks to *Manga from the Floating World,* we can now better understand this puzzling break and the highly illustrated work that lies on both sides of it. Appreciating both old and new manga (choosing to stay with Kern's terms), we can grasp the power of the phonocentrism that aided the development of modern consciousness and made the belittling of illustrated texts necessary.

One thing is clear from reading Kern's painstakingly researched book. Modern consciousness did not welcome the graphemic richness of manga, whether indicated by the transition to *gokan* in the eighteenth century or the transition from *gokan* to the *shosetsu* in the nineteenth. With the return of manga and the flourishing of other forms of visual media during the twentieth century, modern consciousness finally came unglued. As told by Adam Kern, the life and death of *kibyoshi* is an important chapter of the modern story. Knowing the Edo past helps us appreciate the visual splendor of contemporary Japanese culture as a come-from-behind sort of victory. In

the ongoing battle between image and text that W. T. J. Mitchell calls culture, the score in recent innings is Image 7 and Word 6. For the foreseeable future (until the electricity goes off), I would bet on the team with the most pictures.

Review Editors' Note

More information about *kibyoshi,* plus detailed summaries and illustrations, are available in the symposium edited by Adam Kern, "*Kibyoshi*: The World's First Comicbook?" *International Journal of Comic Art* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 1–486.

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PAUL JACKSON

Ergo Proxy. 2006. Murase Shūkō (Director). Geneon Entertainment USA. Long Beach, Calif. 6 volumes. ASIN B000I2JSVM, B000KB48MA, B000MKXEM4, B000NVIGK2, B000N2HD5U, B000P296B2.

Much has been made of *Ergo Proxy*'s superficial similarities to *Ghost in the Shell*. In truth, these amount to little more than reflections of a shared genre lineage, which, although significant, belies *Ergo Proxy*'s true scope and ambition. Here, cyberpunk themes and imagery, still very much present and intact, are used only as a point of departure. From there, *Ergo Proxy* uses intertextuality and recurring motifs of awakening and death to explore very different facets of the human experience. This essay will specifically explore how the series incorporates biblical allusions in its construction of character and meaning.

The story opens in the domed city of Romdo, on the surface a gleaming utopia of individual and collective prosperity, a shining bastion of civilization amid a world of frozen oceans and barren continents. In an anonymous lab, however, a humanoid monster (or Proxy) writhes on an examination table. As onlooking AutoReivs (subservient robots) and scientists try to sedate it, the creature pulsates violently, eventually

frees itself, and escapes. Additionally, Romdo's reliance on AutoRievs is threatened by the Cogito Virus that is thought to imbue infected artificial intelligences with self-awareness. Similarly, immigrants from other domes have created a new underclass that threatens to unbalance Romdo's elaborately maintained approach to population control. Good citizens are grown in artificial wombs, not welcomed from other cities.

Re-l Mayer, one of the two principal protagonists, is an inspector employed by the Civilian Intelligence Office. During a routine job she comes face to face with the escaped Proxy and mounts a personal investigation into its origin and purpose. Under Re-l's supervision is Vincent Law, a brooding young immigrant working toward becoming a citizen of Romdo. He too finds himself tangled in the creature's wake, which sets in motion a series of events that culminate in Vincent's unwitting expulsion from the city. Far from the sanctuary he sought, Vincent finds himself outside the dome.

As a term, cyberpunk originated in a short story of the same name written by Bruce Bethke. Published as part of the *Amazing Stories* anthology in 1983, the tale of school truants running amok in the Net was, by Bethke's own admission, "unremarkable."[1] It did, however, provide a label both vague and evocative enough to represent the literary style and thematic concerns of a collective of authors whose novels depicted near-future landscapes of rapid technological advancement, typically seen through the eyes of characters marginalized within their social infrastructures: hookers, bums, and con men.

Ergo Proxy shares numerous themes and stylistic flourishes with the canonized cyberpunk works but elsewhere diverges greatly. Cyberpunk futures have commonly presented societies so intrinsically connected to technology that boundaries between man and machine become blurred: where does one end and the other begin? *Ergo Proxy* offers a much less homogenous future. Body modifications and cyborgs don't exist; technology and humanity are very much separate entities. As such, the existential search at the heart of the series avoids secular questions of what makes us human and instead probes issues of faith in a technology-dependent future.

In his essay "Notes toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto," Lawrence Person states that "cyberpunk's lasting impact came from the immersive world-building technique that gave it such a revelatory quality."[2] True to this tradition, *Ergo Proxy* presents a fully realized if intentionally opaque worldview. An anachronistic design aesthetic presides throughout, juxtaposing dandy fashions with future technologies, and later incorporating surreal remnants of our present. The series' attention to detail is staggering. With a few telling exceptions, a predominantly dark and subdued color palette casts the world of *Ergo Proxy* in shadow, concealing the mechanisms of a thoroughly convincing future.

The series incorporates two major intertextual allusions, both important to understanding its construction of meaning. In episode 1, tellingly titled "Awakening," the series establishes numerous threads that run throughout its twenty-three episodes. In addition to the awakening of the laboratory Proxy, the spread of the Cogito Virus, and the formative steps of Re-l and Vincent's eventual discoveries, the episode's title more broadly alludes to the biblical awakening of life: Genesis.

Like other anime features and series before it (e.g., *Neon Genesis Evangelion*), *Ergo Proxy* incorporates religious imagery freely but adheres to no one prescribed ideology. In an early scene Re-l laments Romdo as a "boring utopia," establishing the city as an Edenic paradise (shattered by the series' climax). The notion of original sin has no direct equivalent in *Ergo Proxy,* but Vincent and Re-l's awakening shares certain characteristics with Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise. Like Eve, Re-l is driven by the temptation that her "eyes will be opened . . . knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5), visualized quite literally throughout the first episode. Vincent, at

least initially, is content to live true to Romdo's instruction—"Never doubt the system, obey all the rules." But he, like Adam, is banished through circumstances beyond his control before eventually choosing Re-l as a lover.

However, despite its biblical allusions, *Ergo Proxy* isn't simply a religious parable. Again building upon themes of awakening, the series also draws specific parallels between the character of Vincent and the Russian folktale and hero *Ivan the Fool*.[3] Various interpretations of Ivan's story exist, but certain constants remain throughout. Ivan is one of three sons born to peasant parents. His brothers are unsatisfied living off the land and endeavor to seek something more: one yearns for power as a soldier, while the other pursues fortune as a merchant. Ivan, however, is too simple to long for such things and toils day and night in his father's fields, farming what is needed and desiring little else. In social stature, Vincent, an immigrant, is immediately placed alongside Ivan. Both also share the same unquestioning devotion to their designated tasks, Ivan to provide for his family and Vincent to become a good citizen. Also of note, Ivan, like Vincent, embarks on a journey to Moscow aboard a flying ship.

Of further note, in Leo Tolstoy's *A Tale About Ivan The Fool*,[4] Ivan and his brothers become rulers of their own kingdoms. Ivan's siblings rule by taxation and military might, eventually succumbing to greed and losing their wealth as a consequence. During Vincent's journey to Moscow, he finds himself in an abandoned dome, a shattered reflection of Romdo's utopia. High in an imposing tower set amid the barren expanse of urban decay, the city's sole occupant and Proxy, Kazkis Hauer, enjoys copious bottles of wine as his AutoReivs wage war on a nearby settlement. Like Ivan's brothers, this particular kingdom has been lost through greed and military maneuvers. As Proxies, Hauer and Vincent are representatives of the same Creator, suggesting an obtuse sibling relationship that further recalls Ivan and his brothers and hints at Vincent's eventual destiny.

Ergo Proxy's biblical connotations are further developed outside of Romdo. Expulsion from Eden isn't the only consequence of eating the forbidden fruit: with the knowledge of good and evil comes mortality. Throughout the series, Re-l and Vincent's journey of self-discovery pushes them to the same realization, albeit in a very different manner. Episode 11 finds Vincent lost in a suffocating fog, wandering aimlessly before stumbling upon a bookstore. Inside, hundreds of volumes litter the floor and weigh heavily on towering shelves. Their pages are blank. All, however, share the same title: Vincent Law. Like Adam, Vincent has no memories. Significantly, it is here, while confronting the riddle of his missing past (and unwritten future), that Vincent realizes his true identity. He is Ergo Proxy, the proxy of death and representative of an omnipotent creator.

"Awakening" also refers to the natural cycle of life and death to which Vincent, as Ergo Proxy, is irrevocably bound. Inside the bookstore, the first in a sequence of scenes that operate figuratively rather than literally, Ergo Proxy remarks: "Nature halted the circle of life . . . [but] cannot escape the existence of the circle." For the world to exist, man is required to recognize it as such and, as in Adam and Eve's awakening, for life to flourish, so must death. When Vincent and his comrades return to Romdo, the situation has dramatically deteriorated. Man and machine riot in the burning streets. Elsewhere, in a darkened corridor, Cogito-infected AutoReivs are kneeling in prayer. Again, with self-awareness comes fear of mortality. Paradise is crumbling.

Above the disintegrating city, Vincent climactically confronts a doppelgänger who embodies the Creator and the sadness of his rejection. As Romdo's citizens accept the end of paradise, so too must the Proxies accept that the Creator has also deserted his representatives. Empowered by his love for Re-l, when confronted with the choice between his lover and the immortality of an Angelic counterpart, Vincent forsakes the Creator's wishes, choosing human life and the

natural cycle of destruction and regeneration.

By doing so Vincent sheds any associations with Ivan the Fool and for the first time takes control of his destiny. In the final scene, standing amid the devastation as sunlight breaks through oppressive black clouds, Vincent (now an amalgamation of his two previous identities) states: "[here] the real battle begins, for I am Ergo Proxy, the emissary of death." As life returns to Earth, inevitably so must death. Like the consumption of the forbidden fruit, Vincent's (re)awakening ensures that mortality again enters the world. Here, the destruction of paradise isn't so much the end of humanity as its rebirth: "Evening came, and morning came; it was the first day" (Gen. 1:5).

A testament to *Ergo Proxy*'s scope and ambition, many intertextual references remain unremarked upon. Some are purely superficial, amounting to little more than acknowledgment of works admired by the creative staff. Others, however, like those discussed above, add significant depth and meaning to both character and setting. *Ergo Proxy* represents the kind of intelligent and informed storytelling that can be achieved within genre confines and, more generally, by serialized anime as a whole. The possibilities the series projects onto a seemingly familiar canvas offers welcome respite from genre pieces that willingly repackage and resell all-too-familiar stories and ideas.

Notes

1. Bruce Bethke, "The Etymology of Cyberpunk," 2000; http://www.brucebethke.com. nf_cp.html (accessed February 20, 2007).

2. Lawrence Person, "Notes toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto," http://slashdot.org/features/99/10/08/2123255.shtml (accessed February 20, 2007).

3. Arthur Ransome, ed., *Old Peter's Russian Tales: The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship*; http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/russian/oldpetersrussiantales/fooloftheworld.html (accessed May 16, 2007).

4. Leo Tolstoy, "Ivan the Fool," in "*Ivan the Fool,*" "*A Lost Opportunity,*" and "*Polikushka*": *Three Short Stories of Count Leo Tolstoy,* 9–80 (1885; repr., Amsterdam: Fredonia, 2001).

Molten Hot: Japanese Gal Subcultures and Fashions

THERESA M. WINGE

Patrick Macias, Izumi Evers, and Kazumi Nonaka (illustrator). *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno: Tokyo Teen Fashion Subculture Handbook.* San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle Books, 2004. ISBN 978-0-8118-5690-4.

Patrick Macias and Izumi Evers have packed a clever combination of historical overview, ethnographic study, subculture field guide, and fashion magazine into *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno.* This book takes a chronological look at the chaotic and fashionable lifeworlds of teenage "gal" subcultures in Japan from the late 1960s to the present. While some of the gal subcultures highlighted in this book no longer exist, most have been immortalized in manga, anime, live-action television series, and movies. For example, the authors indicate the characters in the film *Kamikaze Girls*[1] were members of gal subcultures—the Lolita subculture and the Yanki subculture (which descended from the Lady's subculture).

The Introduction sets the context for the Tokyo teenage gal-fashion subcultural scene by sharing a narrative about a visit to a Japanese nightclub. Macias and Evers suggest that many Japanese fashion trends can be traced back to single teenage girls or groups of girls. In the Introduction, the authors describe meeting and interacting with some gal-subculture members who are savvy young women and not merely fashion statements. This point is further established throughout the book's interviews with individual subculture members. The Introduction concludes with a foldout gal-relationship chart, which presents the chronological progression