Greyson Gove

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<p style="text-align:center">Final Project Critique</p>

In Greyson Gove's *Genki 3*, the would-be mangaka attempts to craft a story which straddles the line between parody and adventure drama. Though in some ways his project succeeds, there are also many aspects of the work which distance the reader from the narrative, or which distract from the intended comedy of the scenario. In everything from the visual style to the use of exposition, there are both good and bad qualities to Gove's work. In this critique, these flaws and strong points will be analyzed in the broader context of graphic storytelling, and parody as a genre. Overall, the short manga is a lighthearted and in many ways effective story, but its lack of clarity and cohesion ultimately cloud the content of the narrative.

The first area for improvement we would like to focus on is the "style," or the visual representation of storytelling. Over the course of the manga chapter, Gove seems to be in the midst of developing a sustainable style. At times this can have entertaining effects, panels jumping between semi-serious depictions of characters and comedic caricatures. While some artists utilize this alternation between styles well, Gove's use of this style-change often feels more jarring than purposeful. This is because, in our view, he never fully develops a visual language through which to tell his story. When mangaka in Japan use a style like hyper realism or the "chibi" style of character which has become well known in the West, these acts of visual code switching always mark something specific and predictable. There are times when Gove

uses style swapping in this way — when setting up a joke, for instance — but just as often he swaps from semi-realism to overly simplistic character models for no narrative reason. This fluctuating art style in some ways muddies the plot, and in turn makes it harder to enhance humor with *purposeful* style switching.

The second area we would like to discuss is the use of exposition, or, more specifically, the "crammed" feeling certain parts of the narrative evoke. While this project is self-described as only a foray into the genre and a gesture at what a full manga might look like, it nevertheless bears the burden of developing a full cohesive plot (in this case just a chapter's worth). While at times this is accomplished well or even elegantly, the climax of the chapter feels crammed and forced in its exposition. From the time Takeshi appears to the moment the dual protagonists transform, dialogue is over-abundant, text boxes appear crammed, and it is obvious to the reader that the author is trying to fit as much information as possible into a very limited amount of space. A more well planned work would benefit from a less frenzied delivery of information, and more relaxed and spaced out exposition.

Finally, we would like the examine *Genki 3* in the context of its genre: parody. In order for a parody to be effective, we believe two ingredients are essential. First, the work must go beyond the scope of the work or works it is a parody of. Second, the points at which the work *is* a direct parody must be clearly apparent to the reader, in order to make their humor accessible and cohesive. The first of these two requirements is accomplished fairly well in *Genki 3* — by putting the *Genki* textbook series in conversation with manga and magical girls tropes, the mangaka does a sufficient job of creating new and engaging content with his source material. The second point, however, is more complex. There are moments in the text where Gove makes

his parody of *Sailor Moon*, for instance, extremely clear, but there are also numerous points where clear references and parodic moments are handled more like "easter eggs." In this context, we use "easter eggs" to refer to the subtle, less than obvious references to other works which are occasionally thrown into media to amuse diligent fans who will find and take notice of them. In *Genki 3*, there are plenty of direct points of parody which feel much more like easter eggs than fully fleshed out jokes or references. These include the character design of Dark Mary, the poses for the protagonists' transformations, and even the evocative "Cenki" as an alternate title for the *Genki* textbook. While readers particularly familiar with the source material will likely notice these references or changes, they lose their full potential for comedy due to the fact that the author hides them rather than featuring them. A lot of what makes parody fun and interesting is the fact that it is self aware and self referential, and these qualities are often lost within Gove's text.

Despite these flaws, *Genki 3* is still a very interesting and (for the most part) engaging attempt at a manga parody. The references, however well hidden, add a tongue in cheek lightheartedness to the work as a whole, and result in a very enjoyable chapter. If Gove were to continue this attempt at manga, however, the work would greatly benefit from attention to the three areas we have identified. If the mangaka were able to establish a clear visual language, pace his narrative effectively, and learn to deal with the genre of parody in a consistent way, both the comedy and drama in *Genki 3* would be greatly improved.