

**REUTERS.COM****Bible, Shakespeare get Japanese manga treatment****By Deborah Haynes****March 27, 2007**

LONDON (Reuters Life!) - A growing craze in Britain for manga, a Japanese style of comic packed with big-eyed, wild-haired characters, has inspired publishers to produce manga versions of William Shakespeare plays and even a manga bible.

British artists are also trying their hand at recreating Japan's traditional brand of comic art, while demand for English-language copies of Japanese manga stories like "Fruits Basket" and "Astro Boy" is rocketing.

The interest in manga -- already popular in the United States, France and Germany - - is encouraging more people to learn about Japan, which should ultimately provide a boost for the Japanese economy, experts say.

"The manga scene in the UK is on the serious climb," said upcoming comic artist John Aggs, who won a prestigious manga-drawing competition in Britain and Ireland in early March run by manga publisher Tokyopop.

"It is the exoticism of manga. Japan is very far away, it is trendy, it has got a lot of neon lights and it appeals to people," said "Rising Stars of Manga" winner Aggs.

Satirical art in Japan can be traced back to medieval times. But the word manga, which literally means "whimsical picture", is often linked back to 19th century Japanese woodblock artist Katsushika Hokusai who used it to describe his work.

Manga developed its modern meaning -- to describe a whole genre of Japanese animated art -- at the beginning of the 1900s when artists in Japan were influenced by imports of political comic strips from the United States and Britain such as "Punch".

The style really caught on after World War Two thanks to the work of Osamu Tezuka, often known as "the god of manga", who created iconic characters such as "Astro Boy".

"In a way, what is happening now a century later here with us doing our own manga, is no different to the Japanese doing their own comics at the turn of the last century," said manga expert and freelance journalist Paul Gravett.

## MANGA MANIA

Manga-style characters feature in many of today's computer games and animations, making them the default look of cartoons for children. Appetite is also strong for manga books -- the equivalent of a lengthy comic -- which come in a variety of themes from horror and romance to comedy and even pornography.

"We have gone from nothing in the UK to a business that doubles every year," said Dennis McGuirk, director of Tokyopop's British operations, which opened more than three years ago.

The company, which publishes translated versions of Japanese manga books as well as stories penned by non-Japanese artists, generated revenue of 2 million pounds (\$3.93 million) last year in Britain alone and looks set to make 4 million pounds in 2007.

The popularity of manga is inspiring publishers to use the genre to reach a new audience. David Moloney, editorial director for Christian books at Hodder & Staughton, decided to release the first manga version of the bible in English.

"Manga is a form of story-telling that is very popular at the moment so why not try to use it to put the contents of the bible across," Moloney told Reuters in an interview.

Siku, a London-based illustrator known for his work on Judge Dredd in British comic "2000 AD", was hired to do the artwork.

He created a manga-fied "New Testament", which was published in February in Britain and is drawing a complete manga bible, which is due for publication in July. Publisher Doubleday is due to launch the manga bible in the United States next year.

Shakespeare is also getting the manga treatment.

"Manga is a perfect medium because it is a dramatic and a visual medium," said Emma Hayley, director of publishing company Metro Media, who came up with the concept of manga Shakespeare plays two years ago.

Manga versions of "Romeo and Juliet" and "Hamlet" were launched in Britain on March 1. They are also being published in the United States and Japan, Hayley said. She will next release "The Tempest", "Richard III" and "Midsummer Night's Dream", with an ultimate goal of publishing the whole set.



The popularity of manga along with a love of Japanese food such as sushi and growing appeal of Japanese fashion is serving to demystify Japan, said Professor Marie Conte-Helm, director general of the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, a charity that supports links between the Britain and Japan.

"The whole youth culture phenomenon does lead to more young British people going to Japan and in doing so many of them get hooked on other aspects of Japanese culture and that in the long term has to be good for business," she said.