

FROM *PARADISE LOST* TO THE THRONE OF CREATION: RE-IMAGINING THE JOURNEY TO GODHOOD THROUGH A JAPANESE “SUI GENERIS” IMAGINARY

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Abstract

The alignment system is a feature that allows us, as spectators, to gain an understanding in each constructed world of Shin Megami Tensei (“Metempsychosis of the True Goddess”) through a unique lens by various interactions with supernatural entities depicted across the globe. When compared to the other three endings offered in the “Canon of Creation” arc, the more chaotic route appears to be portrayed somewhat biased by its developers. Therefore, despite the absence of Amaterasu, who is considered Japan’s mythological chief, patriotic ideals stemming during the Edo period (1603-1868) seem to resurface in this creative work to reinforce a “distinctly Japanese” perspective. However, why would such nativist motives even be relevant for this title in particular? Can it be assumed that Japanese made products try, in a way, to manifest the country’s presumably uniqueness?

Keywords: Transmediality, comparative literature, religion studies, Japanese identity, role-playing game (RPG).

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1. Reincarnation of the True Tokyo

Atlus Co., Ltd is no stranger in utilizing more obscure mythological figures and placing them as central characters in their ludo narratives. These choices tend to ponder players to delve into what might have gone through the writers’ minds in reaching such conclusions during development, and how they ultimately correlate to the overall story line with a now given more significant role. While several franchises draw, to some extent, on mythology, *SMT* (acronym) is arguably the only one well-recognized for its extraordinary dedication to its source materials. Not only are the designs drawn by how the people depicted their revered gods, but important plot points are also often taken directly from their epic tales or, at least, from the literature to which they are referred to. This thinking can be defined as a “collective interpretation”, which aims to reproduce how the original group of believers would have imagined their local idols, rather than the design in game being entirely the product of the artist’s whims, or have been contaminated by the prejudices of an

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external group. In the following article, I will analyze how the fifth entry in this series – released on November 11, 2021, exclusively for the Nintendo Switch – excels in this regard, focusing primarily on the depiction of some of the “demons”² relevant to one of the game's four possible outcomes, as well as an evaluation of some of its central elements.

The events of *SMT5* are divided between two settings: a post-apocalyptic landscape of the Japanese capital – which was originally the metropolis before it got destroyed in a war between the Creator's herald and Lucifer's army – and a copy of the contemporary Tokyo created through a miracle. The true Tokyo has been swallowed up during a phenomenon called The Conception, 18 years before the awakening of the Nahobino, becoming the renamed alternative version Da'at³ (Hebrew: Knowledge). During the opening scene, we are informed how these people's current livelihood was generated by the God of Law and, as it does so, strives to show us the fruits of His creation: a thriving civilization in a bustling subway station populated by countless humans. It is further conveyed that this technological advancement is due to the grace of the Lord as the sole responsible for the order that allowed humanity to achieve this level of success through His accomplishments and not our own. This connects with the idea that this kind of development, provided thus far by His assistance, is a visual manifestation of the Shekinah Glory. However, God is killed by the hands of the fallen angel, slowly waning the effect of His presence, since He can no longer sustain His re-creation. As a result, His order collapses, rendering the status quo unfit for His purpose, by triggering a power vacuum where all deities that were subordinated to Him and have had their Knowledge stolen, would seek to reclaim it and attempt to ascend to the Throne.

1.1 Nahobino: A God beyond Gods

Nietzsche (1974) believed that philosophy had progressed to a point that essentially rendered religion outdated due to the clear distinction between the natural and the supernatural. This would, in turn, lead people to slowly, but surely, find the idea of God being “unworthy” of belief which would, consequently, result in His death⁴. However, religion still functioned as the ethical backbone of society, meaning that, to question God was to, indirectly, question one's entire way of life. For this German philosopher, such realization would shatter people's perception of reality, thus his solution for it would be to reject the established order because, while it was undeniable that not knowing what the future held would drive people to despair, it

² In this universe, the term refers to all manner of deities and monsters that serve as both enemies and potential allies.

³ A mystical state in the branch of Jewish mysticism known as Kabbalah where all ten sefirot unite into one.

⁴ Sometimes referred to as Theothanatology, deriving from the Greek *Theos* (god) and *Thanatos* (death).

would also give them the freedom to define it for themselves. This is the exact scenario *SMT5* was made to address as prior to the game’s events, the Creator declared the Condemnation, which was essentially a consecrated class system that allowed Him to consolidate power by demonizing the other deities and deprive them of their true forms. However, when He was eventually murdered, His followers did not know how to move forward without Him, leaving Tokyo in decline whereas the archangels were forced to continue fighting a war lost nearly 20 years ago. The emergence of the Nahobino originates from the classics *Kojiki* (712; Records of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon Shoki* (720; Chronicles of Japan), works that compiled various stories and legends where, after forming the islands of Japan, the creator deities consummated their marriage and then had a series of children. One of them was the fire god Hi-no-Kagutsuchi and, unfortunately, his mother was not immune to his flames, making her perish during childbirth. Wanting to see his wife once more, Izanagi traveled to *Yomi no Kuni* (Realm of the Dead), but when he found her, he could not bear the sight of Izanami’s decayed face and quickly fled. After leaving, Izanagi had to purify himself and, as the filth (*Kegare*) attached to his body separated from him, it began to amalgamate birthing new beings: the Magatsuhi-no-Kami (gods of disaster). To counteract them, the restorative Naobi-no-Kami arose by transforming catastrophes into fortune, hence their duty to repair or right the calamities through a purification process. This alludes to a Shinto ritual called *Misogi*, where the body is often washed under a waterfall, as throughout the world prior to the development of modern medical procedures, similar traditions can be found, especially with the discovery of germs, since water was still loosely understood to have some sort of healing property, in other words, a kind of spiritual purification.

These coalescing ideas are strongly embodied by the protagonist, given that his role is to rebuild Tokyo by cleansing it of “Magatsuhi”, or in this context, the despair left behind by the Creator’s death. This element plays a crucial role in the presentation of the main character’s design when fused with the artificially made proto-fiend Aogami⁵, also known as the god of storms and seas Susanoo-no-Mikoto – the one sometimes said to have been born from the waters of Izanagi’s ceremony⁶ – immediately apparent from how navy blue dominates his color palette, evoking the image of a rushing river from the cobalt stripes that stretch across his body. This is noticeably clear during his running animation, due to how flowy his hair moves as if it is floating, pushed and pulled against the ocean tides. In this sense, it can be considered a physical representation of the rejection of the God of Law as, once such forbidden merger is confirmed at the summit, the imposed facade immediately crumbles, since the other deities realize there is no longer a holy threat imposing

⁵ A combat unit whose codename either translates as “Blue God” or can be a clever pun on “Blue Haired”.

⁶ Likewise, it is said he may have arrived in Japan via an area in Korea called Soshimori (Bull’s Head).

them to stay united: being finally free to chase their true calling by whatever brutal means it may require them to. Therefore, it is particularly important to stress that in the context of *SMT5*, only by becoming a Nahobino and regaining their primal forms can one take the role of not simply removing the established, but to replace what is outdated in someone's image, as the act of creation is inherently an affirmation of who you are, and what you believe in by projecting that onto the world. While it is easy to view Aogami's patient and calm characterization, in stark contrast to the wrathful and hot-tempered Susanoo-no-Mikoto in the myths, it cannot be denied that his role is deeply intertwined with the game's theme of combining Nietzschean philosophy of the Death of God with the Shinto conception of ritual purity. Nietzsche (1968) referred to this as the will to power, alleging that this desire could be found deep within every human being, and was even stronger than the will to live, seeing it as neither negative nor positive, merely as a fact of life that justified any decision to harm or help someone. Fundamentally, this was his response to Nihilism, as he thought it was a psychological weakness that left the subject as a submissive actor incapable of changing aspects of their life, and that the future should be defined by people who were able to actively take control of their lives, by defining its access on their own terms.

2. In the Absence of God

Compared to His previous appearances, Yahweh is never mentioned by name in *SMT5*, but this Abrahamic deity is a common threat in the series: consistently presented as a higher entity who harbors only hatred and a lack of respect for Humanity. In His eyes, humans are incapable of persevering on their own as they are inherently imperfect leading inevitably to failure and so only by the guidance of One True God could they thrive. Emphatically crucial to the action of *Paradise Lost* (published in 1667) is the fairly omnipresent concept of Theomachy, defined by Chaudhuri as “war with God, a struggle either literal or figurative against the heavenly powers” (Chaudhuri, 2014: 6) and, these altercations, constitute most of the events in Milton's epic poem: Satan's rebellion, the war in Heaven, and the fall of Man. These clashes reflect how the world was originally determined and then later redefined, in response to the theomachic act, and how those definitions have brought their players to the present-day, shifting the attention from the outcome of the battle to the conflict itself (a moment of collision and confusion of beliefs that clarify how the universe should be shaped). As a prominent feature of Ancient Greece and Judeo-Christian stories of the primordial, Theomachy centers its etiological enterprise by explaining how the prelapsarian Eden transformed into a world in which suffering is ubiquitous. The answer in both cases is that one or more individuals – Prometheus or Adam and Eve – committed a crime against the original order – the classical pantheon or Shamayim by disobeying the Great Will – who reaffirms His dominance by punishing the theomachic(s), and the people who follow them, for positioning themselves as champions or progenitors. Chaudhuri, in his discussion, argues that these narratives concern notions of “ascension to the heavens and overcoming the

obstacles of nature” (Chaudhuri, 2014: 4), emphasizing their ability to act as “a suitable image for... cultural and power struggles” because the “assumption that fighting the gods entails also a violent attack on the standing order” (Chaudhuri, 2014: 8) by closely scrutinizing the authority from the place and time in which the author lives.

SMT has always aimed to tell metaphorical narratives by using its characters, and in-game affairs as vehicles, in order to tell a larger story with even bigger viewpoints. When the lawful and chaotic stances become more evident, they are being presented as in a psychological sense, as well as in the sense of comparative mythology, showing how across the world, humans have developed similar archetypes for their deities. This can be surprising given that many of these cultures would not have had the opportunity to interact before they even formed such thoughts thus arising organically. Therefore, in this game series, Law and Chaos are universal as people have temperaments that incline them more towards one or the other. However, they do not literally represent good and evil but instead Law not only symbolizes the established way of life, hierarchy, security, stability, and peace, but also the oppression of the individual, despotism, inability to grow or adapt, and stagnation. Chaos, on the other hand, signifies freedom, self-determination, rejection of the imposed structures, and the ability to succeed or fail on one’s own merit, while at the same time, has the potential for all disputes to be resolved through violence, with a higher risk of exploiting weaker individuals by the strong. This is relevant since in the entire franchise and consequently the spin-off *Persona*, gods are personified by philosophies, ideologies, and even unconscious human desires. For instance, Lucifer is usually seen as a spirit of rebellion against the constraints of a divine and cosmic order. The final boss in *Persona 5* is the demiurge Yaldabaoth, a gnostic false “God” representing the corrupt and tyrannical nature of the extreme order. In *Persona 4*, Ame-no-Sagiri⁷ is the manifestation of Humanity’s unaware longing to remain deliberately blind to unpleasant realities, displaying the human tendency to keep everything hidden in a fog for fear of what might lie in there. However, the most obvious example is the Reasons (*Kotowari*) of *Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne*, which are not just philosophies metaphorically represented by a deity, but rather philosophies literally championed by one. More than in any other game, the latter makes it clear that “demons” and ideologies are inextricably linked since they are practically the same thing⁸. This is why, in *Shin Megami Tensei IV*, the distribution of books by Lilith transforms the people of the Eastern Kingdom of Mikado into demonic beings, as they become possessed by their newly obtained ideologies. These

⁷ Deity of the mist, meaning “edge of a hill”, who governs the borders and peaks along with Kuni-no-Sagiri.

⁸ “Even though humans are part of the universe, nobody knows why the universe exists, or how humans came into being. A philosophical approach is the only way we can reach some kind of conclusion. That’s exactly what myths are philosophical explanations of the universe and man.” (Moore, 2010)

philosophies, as gods, integrate their identities into those individuals, becoming avatars of the beliefs that those deities wish to propagate. Therefore, both Law and Chaos are fundamental aspects of this co-relationship.

In *SMT5*, a worldwide alliance of human agents and divine entities is formed to prevent the demons emanating from Da'at from penetrating the now-fragile false Tokyo. The members of the Bethel organization (Hebrew: House of God) are divided into branches dedicated to distinct regions around the world, led by their respective predominant local deities. After its dissolution, the motivations of the various factions become clear, despite the angels' attempts of preserving the current order, by clinging desperately onto the principles of a God that has already fallen. Tsukuyomi, masquerades as the Prime Minister of Japan, probably to conceal his divinity and to communicate articulately with the Japanese, both through his professional demeanor and the distinguished formal attire that he wears. He also serves as the head of the Japanese Bethel branch introducing himself as Hayao Koshimizu even when he has to walk into meetings with the other deities. In his public persona, the people of Tokyo and the team he manages see him as an unexpected candidate who appeared out of nowhere and was able to deliver unprecedented results: praising his efficiency and leadership. He is a nationalist who wants Japan to be ruled by the Japanese believing that his home country has separate interests that would be best served by its own deities and by considering that the other higherups should have no saying in such matter. Since, with the death of the Creator, the ancient gods could resurface and guide their people according to their distinctive customs and traditions, and by aligning with Koshimizu, the ending *Reformation* is the one in which "gods as representatives of philosophies" is the most apparent. However, Tsukuyomi is not without flaws and insecurities, being particularly obsessed with restoring the former glory of the heavenly Shinto gods – not necessarily his own – to the point of making it quite clear that he does not want to create a world where he is the base numen, but rather one where the universe is ruled by a myriad of deities. This would be a cosmos of vastly diverse views where no single moral authority would determine right from wrong as without a unifying principle that supersedes and subordinates all other beliefs, a state of constant conflict would be inevitable. Koshimizu, who always maintains a cool demeanor, possesses an affinity considered "chaotic", since he is willing to defend – not for his own benefit – the interests of the inhabitants of his country's capital and the original deities of his nation at all costs, rejecting the opinions of the gods of other regions. His vulnerability makes sense when we consider his past: after being exiled by his sister, he was spared during the destruction of what was once the real Tokyo, which allowed him to finally emerge from the shadows and assume the leadership role he had been deprived of. Though, despite his many triumphs, Tsukuyomi's older days still weighs heavily on his conscience as he was essentially banished from his own family due to a single "mistake": murder, which meant that Amaterasu's decree against him robbed Tsukuyomi of what was rightfully his as one of the three most powerful deities in Shintoism. This banishment and unexpected rise to power made

him more careful not to make another slip and ruin his second chance. That is why, despite remaining steadfast in his goals, he hides his godly nature by using a pseudonym and appearing as an ordinary human politician due to his unwillingness to risk rejection. Therefore, he adopts what would be quite the “respectable appearance”, to seem more approachable and trustworthy.

2.1 The Messian Moon-Hades

Rooted in the two oldest books of Japanese semi-mystical historiography, *SMT5* relies heavily on the distinction between *Amatsukami* who live in heaven and *Kunitsukami* who live on earth, as would be expected based on the meaning of these terms. However, in reality, their usage was often ambiguous in religious practice and legal documents as, between the 11th and 16th centuries, gods were generally classified based on their placement in syncretic Buddhist networks: as representations of some primordial form of enlightenment; as enlightened beings through their own salvational efforts; and as unenlightened entities who, in some cases, were hostile to Buddhist teachings. It should be noted that the categorization also varied between where they were enshrined and, even parts of a single complex, could have divergent views on how to catalogize the same deities. Digression aside, the *Amatsukami* are strongly linked to Amaterasu, and as a result, the members of this race in *SMT* are generally demons that correlate to narratives pertaining the sun goddess: establishing her rule over the celestial deities after her birth. However, two aspects of the myth vary, whether the children emerge as expected through a rite, or an act of ablution by Izanagi alone, and which areas they are appointed to administer. In one version, Tsukuyomi rules over the Sea Plain and Susanoo the Earthly Land – or rather he is supposed to govern it – but the youngest sibling engages in his usual antics instead and refuses to do his job. In another, Tsukuyomi is delegated to the *Yoru no Osukuni* (Otherworld of the Night), which is sometimes identified as the everlasting domain *Tokoyo* – a place of perpetual darkness where people never grew old – and Susanoo the Sea Realm. Finally, in another passage from the *Nihon Shoki*, Tsukuyomi is sent to the heavens alongside Amaterasu – a role that will be temporary, and while it technically makes sense to group him with the *Amatsukami*, it is important to note that in religious worship, he does not have a strong connection with Amaterasu compared to Susanoo (despite residing in the same place for some time). Aside from several accounts of his birth, alongside that of his more notable siblings, and some references to legendary or historical occurrences involving humans performing oracles, Tsukuyomi is rarely a dramatic character – usually speaking – basically only appearing in one folkloric story that is neither particularly detailed nor part of a longer episodic cycle. According to the premise, Amaterasu sent Tsukuyomi as her representative to visit Ukemochi, a goddess of food, who serves him a banquet of all sorts of delicacies from her bodily orifices. Tsukuyomi then feels deeply disgusted by the depth of his own curiosity and, in a fit of anger, decapitates the goddess for her unsanitary way of “cooking”, which he considered to

be such an unclean act for a guest like himself. Still, her death would not be in vain, as from the corpse, seeds necessary for human survival would sprout for its future use in cultivation⁹, and by discarding the leftovers of the meal, wherever they landed, the remains would germinate, eventually ripen during autumn and give rise to the Moon-gazing Festival (*Tsukimi*).

Upon ascending back to the *Takamagahara*, Amaterasu learns of the crime, triggering the goddess to never speak to her brother again due to his inappropriate behavior. In a fit of revolt, possibly more justified, she declares him as evil and banishes him from the firmament. Ever since, both have lived at opposite ends of the sky, explaining why the moon chases the sun for “forgiveness”, that is the difference between day and night. It is worth noting that at no point, in any of the classics, does Tsukuyomi interact with Susanoo: the one who “plays an important role with the solar goddess”. In syncretic Ise texts, an additional cosmological dimension was added making Amaterasu represent Buddha-nature while Susanoo opposes it as there is not much material about Tsukuyomi elsewhere, especially nothing that justifies placing him in the position you would expect of his sister. He is briefly mentioned in the Waka poetry collection *Man'yōshū* (compiled sometime after 759 AD during the Nara period), in connection with the elixir of longevity *Ochimizu*¹⁰, which seems an echo to Chinese mythical motifs related to Cháng'è. Furthermore, famous narratives concerning the moon, such as *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* or *Hagoromo* (Feather Mantle), do not even allude to him. Supported by Kawai (Kawai, 1986: 73), Tsukuyomi was equally significant but was purposefully left out so that struggles between opposing principles could revolve around him, since he does not appear in conflicts between Amaterasu and Susanoo. The only time that he shows up, his portrayal is relatively violent, seeming like a considerable step backward. According to his article, Kawai (Kawai, 1986: 73) asserts that the *Nihon Shoki* was a “political” piece, while the *Kojiki* was simply a primordial manifestation of the truly Japanese spirit that was not limited by trivial matters such as historical context. He emphasizes that both works were composed by a similar group of people around the same time and that the *Nihon Shoki* is the one that frequently lists multiple versions of each event, even if they end up being contradictory, which by the standards of 8th century royal propaganda as both manuscripts ultimately are, seems much more unbiased. In contrast to his general irrelevance, Tsukuyomi has only gained some prominence in modern imaginary thanks to pop culture, exemplified by series such as *Naruto* or [*Oshi no Ko*]. Despite the fact that prior to the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1873, the reference calendar was based on the lunisolar

⁹ head - cattle and horses (no clear information is provided as to why they arose in this way); forehead - millet; eyebrows - silkworms; eyes - barnyard millet, belly – rice; genitals - wheat, soybeans, adzuki beans.

¹⁰ Saeki no Sukune Akamaro, a middle-aged man, fell in love with a young lady who refused his marriage proposal. Despite being reprimanded by her for wanting to use the girl's sleeve as a pillow, he maintains a positive attitude towards his graying hair, as the solution to the problem just lies in the search for the potion.

Chinese calendar due to its agricultural monitorization occupying a somewhat significant role in the daily lives of people in ancient Japan. In modern times, its agrarian purposes are virtually ignored being limited to Chinese and other Asian immigrant communities in the country.

In the game, Tsukuyomi seems to have been so traumatized by the loss of his family and the metropolis he has overseen growing, that he fears losing even what little he has left thereby deeply resenting the fact that Tokyo was not saved by the God of Law. While the safety that the "misguided dictator" established was de facto positive, it was doomed to failure, because relying on the protection of a single god would inevitably lead to favoritism. Tsukuyomi as Koshimizu have shown doubts about His so-called "justice", as the diverse groups on Earth should not trust in a single political ideology to sustain them, declaring that he hoped things should return to the way they were before the God of Law had assumed the Throne of Creation. Such a decision would generate a world ruled by a multitude of deities, offering people the freedom to worship whomever they covet and allow them to be guided by their own "deities" – those they chose for themselves, that is, the political philosophy they believed that would work best for them, rather than having everyone bowing before a single supreme entity. Though this offers a contrary impression of past *SMTs* beldom conclusions, in which the universe is shaped by the strong, leaving the weak to die, Koshimizu considers this to be the fairest, as the cosmos would belong to a host of the divine, and not to a single political doctrine imposed by a global hegemony. For this reason alone, after feeling that the Creator failed to properly protect Japan, Koshimizu believed that the best way for the current world to move forward would be for each deity to return to command their own region of origin thus allowing this multiplicity of faiths to coexist. However, gods, like humans, are envious by nature, and if each of them felt that the current state of affairs was unfair, or have simply become power-hungry, no one would be satisfied with just their share. As a result, rules would cease to exist, emphasizing that they would fight among themselves for their own gain, as these irreconcilable differences in thought would naturally give rise to immeasurable disputes, as these various deities would suddenly pursue the profits taken from them without any restrictions: this was the situation before the current order. Such can be immediately verified when internal disagreements erupt with the other Bethel divisions once it is revealed that the capricious God who they had to obey had been dead for quite some time, leaving a seated void. Despite recognizing this truth, Koshimizu judges that the restoration of the infinite deities would be worthwhile because even if they are not equal all gods would receive the same respect and reverence they so much deserve. Thus, even if the political ideas and the respective communities that follow them, compete for dominance and consequently gain and lose power relative to one another, it is far better than being forced to follow an ideology imposed on them and put them at a disadvantage compared to absolutism. Koshimizu then has a clear propensity for a future that does not ally with the motivations of the failed Bethel, considered to be an association of deities that is constantly eager to betray one another and obtain

power for themselves alone. What he seeks is not to form a chaotic utopia but something that can be functional for his own territory without hindrances.

3. Upholder of Order

Typically described as lawful/chaotic/neutrality, in *SMT5*, these aftermaths are more about monotheism/polytheism/atheism with various pros and cons for each approach, as the God of Law separated all demons from their Knowledge, and made it so that no one could ever be powerful enough to challenge His rule. Chaos are the primal deities who were once driven away by Yahweh for disrupting His order while Law are the demons transformed into angels who have striven to maintain the status quo. Thus, part of the goal for choosing this pantheism is to revert things to how they were before this one God sat on the Throne, as it would be something quite unique for the franchise: a true window into the pre-Yahweh affairs, not just an exposition dump, but a direct access on the possibility of restoring that chaotic state and its implications. While it is implied that the current human development is a byproduct of the peace brought about by the Lord's rise, this can be thought more of in the sense of an Old Order suggesting that humanity once its nature as a Nahobino was common, in the form of local deities, was relatively well-off despite engaging in fierce matches. The Nahobino were likely the standard before His reign, where a great diversity of gods suffered from a constant warfare, since this divine myriad was primarily an era of warring states, but with magic. It would be a throwback to the world before the implemented law, focused on geopolitics, depicting the gods in a battle royale that completely dismantled all efforts of the angelic faction. However, if every "homo sapiens" that contains the divine ability of some demon, and the process of becoming a Nahobino is by merging with one, humankind would eventually cease to exist entirely as they would either become a monstrosity, or de cease while preventing their rivals from reemerging. Thus, the Knowledge taken straight up from *Paradise Lost* that the game makes reference to, would be constructed on the incorporation of the deities beyond their cultural symbolism but on philosophical ideas and representatives of governmental systems – not political parties per se – with humans as their supporters. Hence, these archetypical endings would also align with the Authoritarian, Republican, Anarchic (for regular neutral), and Democratic (for the secret one) regime styles, respectively. Its plot makes a point of showing that, upon being freed from the oppressive God of Law's authority, the various leaders of Bethel would just fight for their cut. Therefore, it is better for them to have the responsibility of deciding that their own paths fall on those who sincerely wish to choose for themselves, even if it leads to disorder, than to be ruled by those who follow an inherently contradictory ideology however fragmented and flawed it may be. Rather it is preferable for people to willingly praise those they know and understand. This may not be the ideal finale for this Tokyo, but it is one its citizens can at least be proud of.

The only character, in *SMT5*, who attempts to maintain some unity in this facade is Abdiel (Hebrew: “Servant of God”), a seraph from Milton’s own creative mind, who renounced Lucifer’s temptation against the Lord, maintaining his loyalty due to the ignominy he felt after considering joining his revolt. Although the source material traditionally portrays Abdiel as a man, in the game he appears and is described as a woman whose tattoos on her arms, legs, and neck represent her devotion to the God of Law. Those were inscribed by Abdiel herself when she felt ashamed of having been deceived by Lucifer – almost becoming a fallen angel – with the intention to visually resemble prison bars as a reminder of her repentance¹¹. Thus, Lucifer’s originality – his primacy – is intimately linked to the motivations of his theomachic enterprise, in which the justice of his sedition is defended by the idea that he was the first, and not the “second”. For that reason, Lucifer owes no deference to Yahweh’s mandate since He is not his author: “His ‘puissance is [his] own’, which he means to prove by ‘besieging’ the Throne of God” (Milton, 1674: 864-69). Consequently, Yahweh would prevent Lucifer’s legions from approaching by stealing their Knowledge, and hide it in the form of a Fruit in His own paradise. Meanwhile, a serpent – believed to be Lucifer himself – would infiltrate the Garden and tempt the resident mortals to eat from that Tree under the pretext of reviving the previous Armageddon of the countless gods. In a fit of rage, the Creator banished those humans from His Eden for having a demon’s Knowledge infused into them which offered the opportunity for the other deities of becoming their former selves again by uniting with those sinners. Although this is an act that violated the God of Law’s order, with His removal from the Throne, the existence of the Nahobino was once again permitted: this rebirth being the proof that His supremacy is truly extinguished. The purpose of the Miltonic universe is then the Chaos in All, a state of non-opposition to another, since the act of creation imposes limits that, at the end of time, will be broken between the Creator and His creation, manifesting the hostility of the Father, who anoints the Son as the Messiah and threatens to condemn any who withstand Him. However, Abdiel’s tenure as the commander of Bethel did not go smoothly, for as soon as she assumed this post, Lucifer announces his victory against the Creator and disappears without a trace. During the following years, she does everything she can to try to live up to the expectations of the archangels, but her zealots are unsuccessful and, at best, barely manages to preserve the extant circumstances by keeping demons out of the human realm and secretly ordering the assassination of individuals who may possess the Knowledge of previous rulers embedded within them. In a way, Koshimizu serves as a mirror for Abdiel, who, like her, has been thrust into a leadership role he would otherwise hardly have occupied. Unlike Abdiel, Koshimizu is praised for his performance without desperately fearing he won’t live up to anyone’s hopes. This adversity weighs heavily on Abdiel’s perception, to the point that she appears to suffer from impostor syndrome, which is further reinforced by the fact that she is modeled after a fictional character, seeing

¹¹ From a Masayuki Doi’s (demon designer) comment. Retrieved from [x.com/Atlas_West/status/1435342106604851209](https://www.atluscross.com/Atlas_West/status/1435342106604851209). Accessed on 28 April 2026.

herself as a fraud or failure, amplified even further by the change of her original gender for *SMT5*'s reinterpretation. Therefore, she acts imperiously and coldly toward others, pretending to be a strong, confident commander-in-chief. Her human supporter, despite being quite charismatic, bids to illustrate the type of person who would succumb to a "deity", someone who does not seek to think by himself, just blindly subservient to their political group. Koshimizu is also a singular leader who believes that someone should be elected and that the next one should be chosen fairly, being important to emphasize that both he and his supporter only care about Tokyo and thus their faction would be in favor of the Japanese capital's liberation.

A social group relies on monotheistic doctrines or polytheistic myths in order to explain its origins and legitimize its various social institutions – including those of political control – through a network of relationships and thus the meaning of their folkloric tales cannot be properly understood without the social structure. Matsumura (1998) explained that men would be the members of society who particularly required this kind of systematic body by holding responsible positions to establish and administering the means of their social power. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the representation and status of women within the mythological body as a product of male self-legitimation. Simply put, the portrayal of Amaterasu, as an imperial deity, should not be interpreted as indicative of a historical period in which women held greater power than men. Instead, it should be assumed that men were responsible for her creation, not as a goddess considered to be the ascendant of the entire Japanese nation, but rather as a mother goddess who would function as the ancestral of a predominantly privileged male clan group, known as the emperor's patrimonial lineage. After his wife Izanami dies while giving birth, Izanagi descended to the underworld in hopes of bringing her back, but upon his return after failing said attempt, he bathed to purify himself of the pollution from the Yellow Springs, laboring a variety of gods. As a result, Amaterasu was born not of her mother, but of her father, becoming dissociated from natural birth. Thus, rather than representing the equation "woman = nature", she is presented as a product of "man = culture". As a way of establishing their own superiority, men portrayed women as an inferior sex, since they were more closely tied to the natural (menstruation) than to the cultural world. However, Amaterasu is free of this negative value, imposed on women by men, becoming a divine matriarch preserved in a state of eternal virginity (not too different from the Greek goddess Atenas), untouched by the contamination men imputed onto women – sexual activity, conception, and childbirth – remaining innocent of the physical experience of her own gender. It is peculiar that not only Tsukuyomi/Koshimizu, but also every other character that would be expected to feel the need to mention Amaterasu, simply does not do so (not even any of the *Kunitsukami*), as she is essentially erased from the *SMT5*'s storyline entirely without even being given a justification for her disappearance, turning her concealed brother into a bootleg version of her for no apparent reason. Assuming that the decision to use him, instead of the heavenly ancestor of the imperial family, was linked to the idea of making the deity's alter ego the Japanese prime minister, which would be a

very large suspension of disbelief, it would still be easy enough to declare that he is, in fact, Amaterasu in disguise as she occasionally does so¹². Despite being described as a woman in several sources, due to her elevated position, the goddess is not prevented from appearing as a figure apparently masculine¹³. Thus, within syncretic contexts, it is not that surprising that she is associated with entities such as Dainichi (Vairocana), Aizen Myō-ō (one of the Wisdom Kings), and even Enma (Hell’s ruler), as proposed in Dolce’s paper (2006). Therefore, until proven otherwise, the game offers no reason to consider the possibility of the character Tao Isonokami being Amaterasu reincarnated despite her design attempting to evoke an allusion to the goddess. Furthermore, when Tao announces that she is a saint whose sole purpose is to guide the protagonist to the Throne of Creation, she is mentioned by the name Panagia – mostly associated with the Virgin Mary – and not as an Amatsukami because it would make absolutely no sense to have Amaterasu assisting someone who has fused with her brother Susanoo, and whom she has always displayed frequent disagreements. His image as an “evil god” was formed not by medieval theologians, but rather by 19th century nativist authors, who saw him as an antithesis to Amaterasu, and consequently the imperial house that represented the epitome of all that is good, establishing Susanoo as her “canon” rival.

3.1 A Nipponic “Knowledge”

After Tokugawa Ieyasu’s victory at the Battle of Sekigahara on October 21, 1600, the lengthy period of Japanese civil war came to an end, and this stability saw a flourishing of intellectual activity with the emergence of National Learning (*Kokugaku*) encouraged by Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728) during the 17th century with a focus on literary study of antiquarians. However, by the early 19th century, it also began to carry a powerful political message as it developed in a context of conscious opposition to Chinese Learning (*Kangaku*), within which Confucianism was rooted, by asserting the superiority of Japan and its culture. The Japanese intellectual circles were heavily influenced by Chinese thoughts, which was acceptable at the time, given that China was seen as a cultural keystone in the eastern sphere. However, Japanese Neo-Confucianism highlighted loyalty to the ruler over one’s father so, when the Chinese Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) was established by the Manchu after the fall of the Ming reign, it lead some Japanese thinkers to conclude that, if the once Great China could be so easily conquered by foreigners, then perhaps it was not truly the center of the world. Thus, Japan experienced an intellectual renaissance, considering itself as the new-fangled civilizational midpoint, believing that its culture was grander compared to the rational and chaotic Chinese culture since, unlike China, this sun-blessed nation was able to maintain stability through its

¹² Especially after hearing that Susanoo was invading her domain, arming herself in order to confront him.

¹³ Her undoubtedly recognizable modern image, as a white-robed maiden, is partly derived from Uhō Dōji: one of Amaterasu’s, distinctly masculine, Buddhist counterparts.

imperial lineage having never been overthrown. Sun worship is something that comes natural to the Japanese undeniably making Amaterasu the precursor of the emperor and the source of their authority. Even after becoming increasingly identified closely with the origins of the Imperial Family, she did not lose the noble attribute of sustaining all living beings and illuminating the entire world. No longer bound by Sinocentrism, nativists like Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) were prepared to accept anything and everything from other traditions in order to contribute to arguments that could validate Japan's dominance. For example, in astronomy, the Copernican Revolution provided with evidence for correctly adjusting the solar system models, further helping to prove the veracity of Japanese ancient scriptures by placing the Sun (Amaterasu) at the center instead of the Earth. Upon getting to know the Noah's Ark story, which he learned through some Jesuit translations, it served to demonstrate that since Japan had never experienced a flood at such a scale, it could only mean that it was positioned on a higher level than other countries. This revival during the Meiji Restoration actually supported an assertion that he was not engaging in an act of interpretation but merely revealing meanings already present in the *Kojiki*. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), another expert in this philological field, stated that the teachings recorded in the *Kojiki* constituted the *michi* (way; instead of the Sino-Japanese usage *dō*). Therefore, rather than accepting the usual reading of the title, he insisted on avoiding Chinese phonetic derivations by substituting it to purely Japanese words (spelling it as *Furu Koto Bumi*), asserting that to succumb to the innovations introduced into the Japanese language was to lose the pure Japanese heart (*Yamato Gokoro*) in favor of a wandering devotion, running the risk of accepting a foreign tradition of formalism and dishonesty. Kada no Azumamaro (1669-1736) argued that the *Man'yōshū* was largely free of Chinese influence because it was "the natural expression of our ancient heritage, the voice of our divine land" and the evocation of emotions found in the anthology which captured the Japanese spirit best through their simplicity, which directly contrasted with the rigid forms of Chinese poems. This allowed him to claim that there was a kind of language, later known as *Yamato Kotoba*, that predated the cultural contact with China and was specifically Japanese. Hence, if Japanese poetry was the core of Japanese expressiveness, its natural essence was in general feminine, due to their principle of sensitivity to the transience of life (*Mono no Aware*; an appreciation for the impermanence), since it is women who generate it, existing since time immemorial, long before the arrival of Buddhism.

Teeuwen (2002) concluded that this point of view concentrated heavily on the ancient practices, leading its scholars to give little importance to the medieval period. This "Proto-Nationalist", or more precisely, "Nativist movement", had followers who believed in an imaginary and immaculate era that needed to be reclaimed by purifying the outsiders' unwanted influential culture, since its enthusiasts argued that the Japanese "Middle Ages" were a "corrupt era" unworthy of study where primitive customs were forgotten due to harmful foreign influences (ironically originated from Neo-Confucian crowds). Thus, this "utopian" past, centered on texts compiled for

the sole purpose of validating the royal orthodoxy of the Yamato Dynasty, offered the desired image of Japan according to the imperial court, rather than the absolute historical truth, however valuable those resources may be. To comprehend Meiji Conservatism, it is necessary to look back to the beginning of *Sakoku* (1639-1854) as, at that time, China was the only country with which Japan was officially permitted contact with. Therefore, it had been its most important model throughout history from its sophisticated writing system by the adoption of *Kanji* (Chinese characters) and its values that backboneed Japanese philosophy, religion, science, and government. However, by reestablishing its identity against Westernization, Japan's driving force returned behind the ruling oligarchy, as the nationalists thought the "true soul" of their country had been "muddied". According to them, the challenge that Japan was facing was nothing less than an invasion from the West, who was assaulting the island with new and unfamiliar technologies. Seeing Japanese culture, as a whole, at risk they feared that the Western powers were about to conquer and destroy what had been considered authentic and precious for ages. While the progress was meant to help Japan to become a modern state, the nativists vehemently rejected what had become repudiated overwhelming with the uncritical imitation of anything displaying the Western made label, and although they appeared to be the highest form of civilization – in terms of scientific and political achievements at the time – being Japanese required more than mere adherence to new rules, that were virtually abandoned to develop their own culture and refine their traditional values within a feudal system. However, there was no way to keep these new ideas out, some of which seemed actually quite useful, thus Japan's supposed "uniqueness" is repeatedly emphasized to justify the very existence of a country previously isolated amidst the influx of new "truths". The advent of Western democratic morals of reason and logic defied the already established Japanese traditional ethics (influenced by Confucianism, Zen Buddhism, and Shintoism) by contradicting the paternal kingship, subordination of other family members, and lower social status of women whose hierarchical societal formation was, allegedly, due to the contribution of the irrigated rice farming. But then, faced with the sudden crucial shift in the country's reopening to the Western mode of social conduct – which many viewed as superior, Japanese national identity seemed to be at stake in surviving the experience of this new world order, after they have helped emancipate the Chinese cultural orbit, as there were no doubts that Japan had to adopt or even imitate certain features from the West.

4. Conclusions

Conversely, the old powers (Daimyō and Samurai) who based their power on strict obedience for fidelity, voiced a reinforcement of traditionally "unique" Japanese customs and ideals to preserve their national pride. Thus, all of social and political

organizations within the island were questioned, such as the kinship bonds (*Ie*¹⁴) emphasized on filial piety and unconditional subordination of women: which were at odds with Western equality and individual freedom. The *Kokugaku* movement, even by the standards of its time, had an incredibly authoritarian bent, with its leading figures arguing that “graceful submission to a superior power” is the “essential virtue of man”, and from this sentiment, Treatises on Japaneseness (*Nihonjin-ron*) thrived. It was understood as the ideological stance of Japanese cultural nationalism that the “pure-blooded” Japanese were seen as the only rightful bearers of their genuine culture and excluded all non-Japanese from a complete apprehension of it, as its “true” ethos could not be mastered or grasped by outsiders, granting the authority to judge Japanese behavior only to its native-born citizens, as it warded off anyone who attempted to criticize any of the Japanese customs. It is easy to see how this statement could serve the goals of an aggressive and militaristic state, whenever it finds itself in conflict with foreign nations, because this assumption of homogeneity and racial purity among the Japanese used the “near-complete” two thousand years of isolation, from any external influences, as the main basis to project their own “preserved roots”. Therefore, unlike the franchise’s tendencies, mythology is not the main concern of *SMT5*. All that truly matters is the construction of the concept of the Nahobino and the entire associated world building of a forged Tokyo since every time a plot-relevant demon appears, it reminds us that all it longs for is to become a monstrosity thus its cultural context ends up being irrelevant. Hence, Tsukuyomi, as Hayao Koshimizu, likely took it upon himself to continue this kind of legacy in his sister’s stead, possibly as a way of redemption, because this nationalistic consciousness is a byproduct of the culture that surrounds the region in which the game was made being impossible to remove itself from it. As a social imaginary, Japanese visual media always envisages nodal points that give a totalizing identity for their society by appropriating certain key lexical concepts that structure a chain of interrelated discourses centered on the idea of *Kotodama* (power of words) which constitutes the Japanese speech, attributing its exclusivity on the *Tamashii* (a metaphorical mindset), not found in other languages and is only accessible to native speakers, appealing to an awareness supposedly possessed by all Japanese: an innate sense of what it is and should mean to be *Nihonjin/Nipponjin*, solely comprehended by their own kind. Fundamentally, it brings together signifiers that connect modern Japanese identity to an idealized, and possibly invented past, through added symbols that are strengthened by an association of images of a romanticized Japan (a richness linked to positive elements alone).

¹⁴ System that represented the Japanese family organization of cooperation structure and mutual obligation.

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