

2013

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Michael Rose

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Recommended Citation

Rose, Michael (2013). God of Manga or Devil of the Medium?. *Undergraduate Review*, 9, 174-176.
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol9/iss1/34

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God of Manga or Devil of the Medium?

MICHAEL ROSE



Michael Rose is a second-year history major. He wrote this paper for his LANG 199: First Year Seminar

Elements of Japanese Culture in Fall 2012 under the direction of Dr. Minae Savas of the Foreign Languages department. He hopes to continue to achieve success over the next few years at Bridgewater State University.

Tezuka Osamu is one of the most accomplished manga artists from Japan. He set the stage for many more artists to come by breaking traditional norms, but the way he went about gaining his fame however could be called into question. *Could it all have been just a guise to take over the market? Osamu was so popular that he practically had a monopoly over the entertainment industry in Japan and became known as manga no kamisama, meaning God of Manga. His domination proved to be crippling to other artists. He was born into a fairly affluent family and would not have needed to become extremely rich from his art. Osamu endeavored to spread his work and educate as many people as he could reach, not only in Japan, but around the world. He had clear messages in his stories about life that he wished to convey to his audience. Believing his values to be important, Osamu strove to make sure that his work was readily available around the world.*

Anime and manga are highly popular forms of Japanese entertainment and art. Anime can be defined simply as “Japanese Animation,” while manga are as “Japanese Comics.” Both media forms are not only for entertainment purposes but are also considered to be art. As Isao Ebihara points out, they have begun to be employed for a variety of other uses, such as driving manuals and business information (256). Thus, manga and anime have been completely integrated into Japanese culture – to the point where both are used for many different forms of literature. Both forms are created in teams of various sizes because each panel or frame created can take hours of work; many artists are not alone in their work, but are a part of a company. Osamu worked with both, anime and manga extensively during his lifetime and was the person in charge of leading the productions.

Tezuka Osamu started his occupation in a rather nonconventional way by obtaining a degree in medicine. This allowed him to incorporate medical concepts into his stories. Despite his choice of study, he preferred he preferred drawing to his more academic musings (Kelts 41). After World War II, Osamu’s cinematic style of manga captured the attention of his audience (Schodt 160). He used many panels and pages to depict one facial expression or one important movement (Norris 243). The animation-like sequences can be seen very clearly in *Phoenix* when Akenamaru is turning into a sea creature and when the Phoenix is flying away (Schodt 169-84). His art style made it so that reading his manga was much like watching a movie or televi-

sion show. Clearly, something about his art works fascinated his readers and viewers and left them always wanting more. Whether it was the cinematic style or the context of the story, once Osamu's art grasped the attention of the audience, he gained an ever-growing fan-following.

Osamu soon began to take over the market as his influence spread, and "by the early 1950s, Tezuka was the most popular cartoonist in Japan" (Power 89). In less than ten years, he managed to ascend to the top of the entertainment industry. This was partly due to the fact that the industry was in shambles after the war (Kelts 41). Today, with a very established market, it would have most likely been much more difficult for him to achieve the same control and influence in the market.

"The Curse of Osamu" was coined by Roland Kelts, author of *Japanamerica How Japanese Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (10). This caused new companies and young animators to be dwarfed by his influence over the market. This was particularly ironic because Osamu's comics were often what inspired children to become anime and manga artists (Power 89). No one could surpass the god of manga and anime. To this day, the curse is still in effect to some extent because of how highly regarded Osamu's work remains. There have been a few different versions of *Astro Boy* released since the original, because people still yearn for his stories even though he is no longer alive. New companies can face major difficulties staying afloat in the competitive sea of Japanese entertainment, thanks in part to Osamu's earlier influences.

Some scholars and large anime companies consider this curse to be an intentional ruse by Osamu. David d'Heilly, the founder of an art and design production company, asserts that there were far better ways to get his message across rather than "strangling" all of the other companies (Kelts 47). He argues that because Tezuka came from a middle-class family and had a degree in medicine to fall back on, he could more easily cope than other artists with the profit losses that came from selling his work cheaply. Some believe that he was purposely "dumping, selling his episodes cheap to keep others out" (Kelts 47). They believe wanted to conquer the industry so that he was the only artist being read and watched in all of Japan. Due to his overt and totally encompassing power in the market, he could very easily get away with selling his work so inexpensively, and people still point to him as the reason they are forced to sell their art for less money than they would prefer to.

Even though his actions may have seemed like a deceitful plot, other scholars argue that Osamu did not intend to shut out

other artists. What he actually aimed for was for his work to be well-known, and in order to do that he had to make sure his work was quickly bought up by companies who could broadcast it to the world. In fact, he also helped to create new talent:

Young artists considered it an honor to help the great master, working with little or no pay. Working for Tezuka also opened gateways for their careers. Tezuka introduced them to publishers and editors, who subsequently offered the young cartoonists their own series. This resulted in a great burst of new talents in Tokyo. (Power 90)

What he truly wanted out of his work and life was to spread his values to the world. This is exemplified by the fact that his stories often include lessons that teach humanism and to care for all life (Schodt 160). For example, in the animation version of *Phoenix in The Sun*, part one, Inugami finds a strange man and decides to help him. He only later finds out as they are sailing away that he is the general that had failed him and caused his face to be replaced by a wolf face. Instead of killing him, Inugami takes him on as his "servant," and they eventually grow close and become friends. The message of "caring for all life" is clear here in that Inugami gave the general a chance to live, and he developed a lifelong friendship that he otherwise would not have gained. This is what Osamu wanted to teach the world—that every life has value, no matter how big or small.

The God of Manga, Osamu Tezuka, was a person to be revered, not detested, for his contributions to the Japanese entertainment and art industries.

It was because of Osamu that many new and young people entered the market in the first place: whether he taught them directly or they were just inspired by his work. Miyazaki Hayao, a prolific director and animator in Japan, is a great example of a young artist who was inspired by Osamu. Miyazaki is known around the world, and he was in fact influenced by Tezuka's work to become an animator (McCarthy 28). What Osamu was trying to accomplish with his art was something that was entertaining for the audience while at the same time teaching them a lesson about life. In order to make sure that the world received his message, he sold his work cheaply so that it would sell quickly. It was not the profit that Osamu was interested in, but rather the flourishing of the art—and flourish it did. Although Osamu died in 1989 from stomach cancer, his legacy continued through his work, which is still popular today. Tezuka Osamu made many specialized and revolutionary contributions to the art, particularly the creation of story manga, "*sutorii manga*," published in a series (like most manga which is released today) the large saucer-like eye style, and characters

breaking the normal “enter on the left, leave on the right format.” Due to these influences, manga and anime exist as they do today: popular art forms and a worldwide commercial and cultural phenomenon.

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