

## Final Project Critique

Ursula Ku presents in her final project rather irreverent parodies of three well-known manga: the shōjo romance manga *Dengeki Daisy*, the seinen horror manga *Berserk*, and the shōnen slice-of-life manga *Yotsuba&!* Her parodies recast each manga as a manga of a different demographic and genre. As a result, her parodies hinge on exploiting common demographic stereotypes and tropes.

One problem that is immediately apparent upon viewing Ku's project is that she is only one artist. For a project that relies so much on imitating stylistic trends emblematic of manga aimed at different demographics, Ku's personal style definitely shows through, coloring all of her covers with a stylistic similarity that to some degree undermines her work. The fact that Ku limits her parodies to covers also limits the degree to which each genre/demographic can be parodied, as many tropes, such as shōjo full-body outfit shots and floating teary-eyed faces, cannot be gleaned from the cover alone. Nonetheless, Ku's covers do exhibit some hallmarks of the genres and demographics she is parodying, particularly her parody of *Berserk* as shōjo.

Somewhat alleviating the limited scope of only parodying covers, Ku provides blurbs for each parody on the back cover. However, Ku seems to lack a proper text-editing program, as her titles and descriptions are all messily hand-lettered. It is clear that this project does not emulate real covers, but rather only approaches a messy hand-drawn facsimile of them. Her titles attempt to mix up the font conventions of the original but end up just being messy and asymmetrical. Using fonts befitting of actual manga flavor text could have added to the effect of parodying these covers, but perhaps more than that, titles that more closely emulated those of the target demographic would have made the project more believable. Perhaps titles more concretely

grounded in those of titles emblematic of the target demographic would have been good. While the titles are the greatest missed opportunity, as they serve as a brand image for series, the messily hand-lettered blurbs and lack of artifacts that lend to believability (such as publisher and bar code) also detract from the impact of the work, as more fleshed out and realistically rendered covers would have added to the parodic element. Particularly because the content of Ku's parodies juxtaposed with the original manga is so absurd, realistic and detailed cover renderings instead of the hastily written work she has produced would have gone a long way in multiplying such absurdity and lending the project humor.

Each individual cover has its own strengths and weaknesses as well. Ku's shōnen battle parody of *Dengeki Daisy* can be a little difficult to tell from the illustrations alone. Luckily, the description helps, though it is also awkwardly written and, as stated above, its messy nature does not lend the back cover any credence. It is interesting to note how the protagonist Teru is drawn - despite wearing the same girls' uniform as the student council president Rena next to her, she is drawn with primarily straight lines and is standing up straight, while the supporting character Rena is drawn with more flowing lines and is standing somewhat at an angle. This difference in depicting the same thing casts Teru as masculine and Rena as feminine, thus placing priority on the most stereotypical shōnen tropes over the content of the original manga.

This can also be observed in Ku's parody of *Berserk*, which, despite describing Guts as male on the back of the cover, does very little in convincing us that the character depicted has any masculine qualities. Despite the back cover using male pronouns, Guts is drawn with a neotenic face and a billowing skirt. This indicates that Ku used the full gamut of tropes, including gendered ones, with characters explicitly gendered in a different way. This creates a sort of gender ambiguity for the protagonists of her parodies of *Dengeki Daisy* and *Berserk*.

Ku's parody of *Yotsuba&!* seems less a parody of any specific demographic and more of the ecchi comedy genre. This parody could have been strengthened by including members of the ensemble cast other than the eponymous character.

Overall, Ku's parodies lay the groundwork for some humorous subversion, but ultimately fall a little short in execution. Were Ku to do things more carefully and slowly, the parodies would be able to shine as the irreverent subversions of demographic and gender they were intended to be.