

Adolf: Osamu Tezuka's Masterpiece compared to Metropolis

By: Jon Wisniewski

Osamu Tezuka is known as the “God of Comics” by the majority of the manga culture in Japan. He revolutionized the way that comics were written, evolving the art form from the standard four-panel comic strip to a serialized graphic novel. As with any novel Tezuka realized that character development and plot twists are critical to the success of the graphic novel. In an ongoing series, character development is more important because character developments are what drive the action of the series and maintain reader interest in the series; although complexities in the plot and character development also allow the author to make thematic comments. Osamu Tezuka utilizes intense character development, plot twists, and other stylistic devices to comment on humanity in the *Adolf* series and in *Metropolis*.

Metropolis is the tale of an artificial being named Michi that is unaware that she (although Michi can change gender at the touch of a button, I will refer to he/she as female) is different from any other people in her life. As Michi ages she starts to discover some of her special abilities such as her immense strength and ability to fly. Michi merely stumbles upon her powers, mostly discovering them by helping others such as her friend Kenichi or the violet girl⁶. Early on in *Metropolis* Michi symbolizes innocence and naivety; she grew up not knowing her potential and is pure of heart because of it. As Michi discovers her true identity as an artificial being she realizes that she can alter the world in a major way, particularly with the treatment of robots, the other artificial beings in *Metropolis*⁶. Tezuka was greatly influenced by the events of World

War II, thus he used Michi as a figure that can represent the transformation of a person from an innocent and benevolent child to a powerful force that uses their power for evil deeds. Michi goes haywire and begins attacking Metropolis in a furious rage that could not be stopped short of a tragic downfall. Tezuka proves that absolute power corrupts absolutely with Michi and her development, yet in the end Michi realizes the error in her actions and is forgiven by the people of *Metropolis* just before she dies showing that it is never too late to ask forgiveness and change the way that one views life.

Michi and the black sun spots are also representative of technological advances, particularly in the twentieth century and the dangers that they present. Michi was created by an evil organization, The Red Party, which sought to use Michi as a weapon for their malevolent aims, however when Michi was thought to be destroyed and their creator killed, the Red Party quickly gave up their dream of an ultimate war machine⁶. Michi is representative of the atomic bomb; she has the power to destroy anything in her path, yet the weapon (Michi) must be in the possession of willing hands in order for the destructive force to be realized. Michi is made up of radioactive material, the black spots on the sun, which further suggests that she is to be compared with the destructive force of the atomic bomb⁶. The advancement of technology to the point of having a creation that can destroy humanity, the makers of the device, is a real threat that must be cautioned against by governments and other powerful organizations such as the United Nations. Michi's apology represents the United States remorse after the fact for using the atomic bomb on Japan to end the war because it became clear that Japan would have been forced to surrender without using a device of war on innocent civilians. Tezuka emphasizes this

message at the end of *Metropolis* when the narrator says, “Perhaps, might the day not come when humans also become too advanced and, in actuality, as a result of their science, wipe themselves out?”⁶ much like in the way that Michi was destroyed as the result of a technological improvement, removing the black sun spots from which she was created.

While *Adolf* is much more complex than *Metropolis*, the importance of character development is critical to the success and the effectiveness of thematic messages found in the work. *Adolf* contains four major character plots, each centered on a main character. Of the four main characters only one has pure ancestry, Sohei Toge, who is a Japanese man who gets caught up in an international scandal through his brother and happens to be a member of the communist party in Germany. Sohei was in Berlin on business in 1936 during the Olympic Games and decides to visit his brother only to find him dead, a course of events follows in which Sohei is irreversibly caught in the scandal with which his brother was involved¹. The three remaining focal figures are all named Adolf, each character containing some sort of mixed lineage or race, even Adolf Hitler, who, according to the series, is one quarter Jewish. The other two Adolfs, Adolf Kamil and Adolf Kaufman do not have nearly as controversial lineages, but they contribute equally to the direction and the message that Tezuka aims to teach his readers. Adolf Kamil is half Jewish, half Japanese whereas Adolf Kaufman is half German, half Japanese; both combinations of mixed heritage create conflict between characters as well as internal conflicts within each of the protagonists.

The majority of the plot twists around the little known ‘fact’ about Hitler’s Jewish ancestry; it is the controversy that got Sohei’s brother killed as well as a driving theme of the series. Sohei’s brother was the one who uncovered controversial documents that proved that Hitler was at least part Jewish; eventually Sohei’s brother planned on publishing the documents in order to bring about the downfall of the Nazi regime. Once Sohei discovered that this was the reason that his brother lost his life, he vowed to avenge his brother by completing his life’s work¹. As a result, Sohei endures everything from physical torture by the Nazi party to mental torture from the Japanese secret police; yet Sohei never gives up his goal and is very cautious about whom he shares information with. Tezuka shows that the easy way out typically isn’t the best course of action through Sohei Toge and the way he handles the secret documents. Sohei could have easily given the documents to a foreign minister from Russia or the United States early on in the series, yet he chose to give the documents to a more trusted source and endure all the pain that came with that decision.

The irony of the Sohei’s caution is that just as the documents are to be published, his publisher is exposed for crimes and the documents are confiscated by the Nazi party. For a short time Sohei is anguished because he failed his brother after years of pain and suffering; yet this anguish ends quickly because news quickly reaches Japan of Hitler’s death and the end of the war in Germany with the end of the Nazi party. Sohei is relieved that he got to see his brother’s dream become a reality even though his actions had no part in how the Nazi party fell⁵. The anguish that Sohei feels shows how revenge as a motivating force brings about little sense of fulfillment when the task is completely,

leaving that character (or person) wanting more, leading them to seek revenge from others who did them wrong along their journey. This is where Sohei deviates from the norm and illustrates humanities greatest ability, the capacity to choose their actions. Sohei realizes that enough pain has come out of his quest to expose Hitler's ancestry and he fades into the background content with a life knowing that revenge is unsatisfying despite the human tendency to want that revenge⁵.

The two childhood friends, Adolf Kamil and Adolf Kaufman, never realize the problems with revenge that Sohei discovered through his own experience. Kamil and Kaufman come to hate each other through a series of complicated events that progress throughout the course of the series including the murder of Mr. Kamil by Adolf Kaufman³ and the seeming betrayal (in the eyes of Adolf Kaufman) by Adolf Kamil when he married the girl that Adolf Kaufman loved, Elisa⁵. After the war, their hatred still flows ending in the cold-blooded murder of Adolf Kaufman by Adolf Kamil, in which Kamil tells Kaufman after he has shot him to "Go and ask forgiveness of [his] father in the next world"⁵. Adolf Kaufman seeks revenge of Adolf Kamil (both for Elisa and for the death of his wife and child at the end of the series) up until his death; with his revenge actually creating the confrontation that ends in his death. This proves that revenge ends in pain and suffering rather than the 'good' feeling that each character seeks when they attempt to exact their revenge. Even though Adolf Kamil won their duel and avenged his father, his face is anguished as he left the scene and sped off in his truck. Perhaps Adolf Kamil remembered how he and Adolf Kamil were once friends as children, therefore making killing a former friend difficult, but necessary. Revenge

destroys relationships in *Adolf*, which is representative of how revenge actually works in the real world.

Revenge is also a key component of the *Metropolis* as we have seen in *Adolf*, but Tezuka places less emphasis on revenge in *Metropolis*. The protagonist Michi's transformation from the benevolent, innocent child to the super-human, artificial being at the end of *Metropolis* demonstrates how revenge can change a person for the worse. Once Michi learns the true history of her past and observes first hand the maltreatment of robots by humans, she snaps and wants to avenge her robot brethren⁶. Her destructive revenge ends with nothing productive coming from her actions suggesting that revenge is fruitless. Rather she is the one who becomes the monster that she observed in humanity through their treatment of the robots and a reversal of roles ensues⁶. Revenge brings out the worst in people, which is seen clearly in both *Metropolis* and *Adolf*, but the relationship is much clearer in *Adolf* than *Metropolis* mainly because of the length the work and the emphasis that *Metropolis* places on technological problems rather than interpersonal conflicts.

Character development is one of the major aspects of the *Adolf* series and is crucial to the thematic devices that Tezuka presents within his work. Tezuka intentionally created each character with a serious flaw that causes internal conflicts for each character that they struggle to resolve throughout the series. Even the minor characters are flawed and make decisions that negatively affect the people around them. For example, Mr. Kaufman is a respectable member of the Nazi party that is a consulate

to Japan through the German embassy. However, he, like many men of power, is corrupted by their power and he seeks the pleasure of a geisha when on business. When word of his relationship with the geisha is about to be released, he strangles her and leaves her in a park¹. From this point on you see the angry Nazi official and no longer see the loving father and husband figure that was initially portrayed.

Other minor characters that have significant flaws include Mrs. Kaufman, Herr Lampe and the Japanese secret service detective. Mrs. Kaufman is generally portrayed as a positive character, but sends her son to the Hitler School despite her son's wishes. Herr Lampe is the Nazi officer that tortures Sohei to try and discover information about the secret documents and uses his own daughter to try and obtain the information. The use of his daughter ends with her committing suicide, leading Herr Lampe to drop his goal in favor of avenging his daughter's death. The detective becomes crazy after his failed attempts at trying to get Sohei to give up the documents, leading him to commit arson. Tezuka creating each minor character with a flaw is significant because it shows the imperfections of humanity and makes the flaws that he gives to the major protagonists valid. This technique also adds to the realism of the series, allowing the mood of the series to be consistent within each setting that Tezuka uses, from Hitler's private mansion to the U-boat.

Adolf Kaufman has several character flaws and internal conflicts, but the most important is the conflict between his relationship with Adolf Kamil and other Jewish characters. When Adolf Kaufman is sent off to the Hitler School for the Hitler Youth he

is initially vehemently opposed to going to Germany to join the Nazis, however once he arrives in Germany he is forced to change his views⁴. *Mein Kampf* is the central teaching of the Hitler youth in addition to their military training, which is a complete reversal of his views of Jews when he was in Japan and friends with Adolf Kamil. Adolf Kaufman is also agonized when he is taken aside and forced to kill Jews to prove his loyalty to the Hitler Youth, one of these Jews being Mr. Kamil. Adolf Kaufman exhibits many physical signs of an emotional struggle, such as profuse sweating as well as the closing of his eyes as he fires the gun⁴. This experience converts Adolf Kaufman to part of the Hitler Youth and forever changes his outlook on Jews, despite him helping a Jewish girl (Elisa) that he liked to escape from being placed in the concentration camps. Adolf Kaufman retains his good characteristics throughout the series, but his ability to see both sides of the Jewish argument is lost with the shooting of Mr. Kamil.

Adolf Kamil is portrayed in a much more positive light than Adolf Kaufman, but he is not absolved of any wrongdoing. Adolf Kamil frequently gets into fights, especially with Adolf Kaufman after he returns from Japan³. The two Adolfs fight over Elisa on multiple occasions and Adolf Kamil lets his pride ruin any chance of his relationship with Adolf Kaufman to be repaired. While Adolf Kamil serves Japan in a positive way through helping with the bomb shelters and other key services related to the war effort and civilians, his pride leads to personal detriment to those around him, the main example being the rape of Elisa by Adolf Kaufman. Has Adolf Kamil been more kind and not fought Adolf Kaufman, Kaufman might not have brutalized his wife, though that is merely speculation. Adolf Kamil's flaw represents humanity's unwillingness to

Sohei Toge is the closest thing in the *Adolf* series that resembles a pure character that does no wrong. He is constantly taking on the Nazi regime which he has decided to be an evil organization as well as trying to uphold his brother's honor after he died. However, Sohei's relationship with women prior to his engagement to Mrs. Kaufman was not positive. He did not treat them well, from Herr Lampe's daughter¹ to his naivety in his relations with Mieko². Domestic problems with men treating women poorly is a problem in all societies, thus Tezuka wanted to put several different type of domestic situations into perspective in *Adolf* as seen through Sohei Toge and the Kaufman family. Sohei is the narrator, thus his experiences are representative of the constant action of the series, but Tezuka ensured that Sohei Toge was not perfect because that is not representative of humanity.

At the opposite end of the spectrum we have Adolf Hitler, the most interesting portrayal of an Adolf in the series. One would expect Tezuka to portray Hitler as a maniacal devil with no ounce of goodness, yet this is not the character that we observe in the *Adolf* series. Tezuka does portray Hitler as a confused individual that does go on his crazy rants, but for the most part we see a side of Hitler that is normally neglected from popular belief. Hitler, despite his skewed view of Judaism, is well educated and very insightful when he interacts with the other characters, particularly Adolf Kaufman. Hitler is drawn in more typical cartoon fashion, with goofy smiles and more of a round face, similar to the art style found in *Metropolis*. Tezuka uses this older art style to contrast the appearance of Hitler as a literate and refined man to his actual character, very silly

especially when it comes to his theories. His cartoony figure also emphasizes the ridiculousness of his rants that are frequently seen throughout the series. However, Hitler is seen in a more positive light than is expected; he constantly struggles with his Jewish ancestry and with problems pertaining to the war and politics. You also see the romantic side of Hitler when he expresses his feelings towards Eva Braun⁵. Through Tezuka's interesting portrayal of Adolf Hitler we can see that everyone has human feeling and that even the most intense, evil people have good qualities.

Osamu Tezuka does an effective job at portraying the evils of humanity while maintaining that all people have good qualities through the characterization and plot twists of *Metropolis* and the *Adolf* series. Tezuka shows how personal choice is what determines how we view individuals, whether they are good or bad people. Life presents us with unique situations that challenge our human ability to choose; the decisions that are made shape our perception in the public eye as well as amongst our peers. Making the wrong decision will not condemn a person as a 'bad' person', however repeatedly making the same mistakes without learning from them is the worst crime that anyone can make to the people around them.

Works Cited

- Ardith, S. "Tezuka: God of Comics." *Hanabatake.com: Anime. Manga. Life. Blog*. 2006. <<http://www.hanabatake.com/research/tezuka.htm>>.
- Leger, Jackie. "The Osamu Tezuka Manga Museum: A Cultural Monument." *Animation World Magazine* August 1998: 3.5.
<<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue3.5/3.5pages/3.5leger.html>>.
- Schodt, Frederik L. *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*. New York: Kodansha International, 1983.
- ¹Tezuka, Osamu. *Adolf: A Tale of the Twentieth Century*. Trans. Yuji Oniki. San Francisco: Cadence Books, 1995.
- ²Tezuka, Osamu. *Adolf: An Exile in Japan*. Trans. Yuji Oniki. San Francisco: Cadence Books, 1996.
- ³Tezuka, Osamu. *Adolf: Days of Infamy*. Trans. Yuji Oniki. San Francisco: Cadence Books, 1996.
- ⁴Tezuka, Osamu. *Adolf: The Half-Aryan*. Trans. Yuji Oniki. San Francisco: Cadence Books, 1996.
- ⁵Tezuka, Osamu. *Adolf: 1945 and All That Remains*. Trans. Yuji Oniki. San Francisco: Cadence Books, 1996.
- ⁶Tezuka, Osamu. *Metropolis*. Trans. Kumar Sivasubramanian. Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 2003.