

Adam Merry
5/8/13
Graphically Speaking: Manga
Professor Miyake
Final Project Critique

In his work "Cloistered: The Caged Cat Meows," Adam Merry attempts to blend together different visual styles to create a dynamic and engaging story. His distinct usage of photographs instead of hand drawn images set this work apart from other manga that have similar storylines. There is also evidence of his Japanese influence in the occasional usage of Japanese onomatopoeia and the excessively cute depictions of the main character, Whim. However, in the process of creating this amalgam of styles, Merry's work ultimately loses a bit of its focus and is difficult to categorize in terms of genre. This paper will provide an analysis of Merry's visual art techniques and story-telling techniques.

There are no shortage of peculiarities in "Cloistered" and arguably the most prominent is the opposing layout choices. Throughout the work there are many different types of page layout styles, almost none of which can be termed the dominant format. Merry makes use of the single image page with text captions several times, which could be referencing the Kibyōshi style. Despite the variance in image grouping and text placement, there is a feeling of flow from page to page and the playfulness of the story is reflected in the font choice as well as the content.

As is typical with almost all first episodes, the story focuses largely on character development. Over the course of the story the reader gains a sense of the personality of this young and curious cat called Whim. The first several pages center around her fixation on being fed while the latter pages begin to show her interaction with her owner. Although not properly introduced, the reader learns of some of the habits of Whim's owner. It is clear that although she complains about his timeliness in feeding her they share a close bond, nonetheless. This

closeness is evident in the contact depicted between them on pages 3 and 17. Merry is also successful in conveying the inquisitiveness of Whim through his portrayal of her observing and vying for the attention of her owner.

In terms of genre, it seems that this work would fall into the category of slice of life. This categorization is based upon the largely inconsequential nature of the majority of the content. The story lacks an enduring problem and there is no resolution of conflict or climax at the conclusion of the episode. Readers that are familiar with the slice of life genre should find this story entertaining and cute, as might be expected. One question that does arise when reading this story, however, is could it have been told without words? Masashi Tanaka's "Gon" is a perfect example of a story about the adventures of an animal that is told without any text. It is possible that due to the difference between drawing versus photographing living creatures this format might prove more difficult. However, it seems that the work may have been a bit more compelling had it contained stronger images that drove the story as opposed to relying on words to clue the reader into Whim's thoughts.

Another atypical element of this story is the fact that it is printed in full color. The vast majority of manga is printed in black and white and this deviation does call into question even classifying the work as a manga. This is not to say that the images are not beautiful or interesting. However, if Merry was attempting to create a story that was representative of the manga medium the omission of color may have been more effective than full color photographs.

Despite the stylistic anomalies and questionable formatting choices found in "Cloistered: The Caged Cat Meows!" Merry is successful in creating a story that is engaging and interesting to a broad readership. Through the use of multi image panels and concise, innocent and cute dialogue, Merry is able to endear Whim to the reader. The episode ends leaving the reader

curious as to how Whim and her owner interact in other situations and creates a sense of attachment to the adorable, feline protagonist. It is without question that this work does not adhere to all of the common constructs of the manga genre. However, there is evidence of some manga influence in Merry's design of the pages such as the pictures not adhering to all the borders or using onomatopoeia interspersed throughout certain pages. Overall, the story is interesting and entertaining to read, which is arguably its most redeeming quality.