

Professor Miyake

Graphically Speaking

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*The Miserable Life of Tierra Starks: Potato Edition* by Tierra Starks is an interesting and quite an odd piece to read. From what I have observed from the manga, if we can actually call it one, is that it focuses on all the troubling yet humorous occurrences she had encountered in her everyday life from the start of her college year to the end of her sophomore year. The yonkoma structured manga encompasses two, four-panel strips on each page and three strips contain a story that occurred in one semester. Meaning there are three strips each for one semester equaling to 12 strips in all and six pages. Starks effectively and creatively did what she intended to in creating the autobiography of her college life, but there are a few errors and matters that show the mediocrity in her work and her lack of following manga structure.

Starting with the structure of Starks's work, she says her work is a yonkoma, a Japanese comic strips structure seen in some manga, but Stark does not follow through with the rules of Japanese manga where the drawings and words are read from right to left. Instead, she puts the strips in the right to left format, but confusingly has the drawings and conversation flow from left to right. The process is odd and throws off many readers who are not aware of her confusing drawing order. It also does not help that Starks does not follow fully with the Kishotenketsu writing technique in a yonkoma, where there is an order in which the story should flow. She instead focuses on telling her story in any flow she wants, ignoring the proper use of having a specific frame containing a specific meaning or scene, unlike most yonkoma artist do. However, it does not affect the flow and understanding of her work, I do not believe the order form is important in this case, but it is an important element of yonkoma structure that should be utilized

as well as the drawing and writing form of right to left. Without these two, it brings forward the question of whether this is a yonkoma or just a simple 4-panel comic.

Bringing back the topic of mediocracy in Starks's work, any reader would be able to notice that Starks is not an artist. Her drawings lack detail, her people are all drawn the same without hands and her backgrounds are sometimes empty with a door here or a building there. For someone who does not put much detail in her characters, she could have added a balancing effect of adding more detail to her background instead. There are frames that are very empty and white because of the simplicity of her characters and blank backgrounds. It would have been nice to see more scenery in contrast to her lack of developed characters.

Besides these main points of criticism, Stark's work was a nice insight into the life of a college student. It is quite controversial and unbelievable for someone at this age or level of education to encounter these problems on a daily basis, but Starks drawings and stories put forward in her work seem realistic and humorous. She does well in trying to allow her audience to understand who she is as a person and what she can bring to the world and her peers. There may be faults in her work, but I would recommend all to pick up her "manga" and to bask in the "miserable" life of a college student.