

Anthropomorphism In The Texts Of “Buddha” And “Maus”

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Anthropomorphism refers to the attribution of human characters to deities or animals. Both Tezuka and Spiegelman cram their works, “Buddha” and “Maus,” with animal and deity figures that offer human qualities throughout the readings. In Tezuka’s Buddha, the author chronicles his father’s experiences by depicting Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Americans as dogs, and Poles as pigs, among others, to illustrate the tribulations that his father went through before his ultimate death.

On the other hand, Tezuke, the master of Japanese arts, creates his own characters and mixes them with history as he deftly transfers human qualities in the form of emotions to cartoony characters. The works of both authors defied easy categorization and had even seen The New York Times in their review section classify Spiegelman’s work as fiction, a statement they later withdrew after the comic won the Special Pulitzer Prize. In essence, both texts employ anthropomorphism to play a crucial role in depicting how the collapsed boundary between humans and deities or animals serves the larger meaning of each other.

Characterization and Human Experience in Buddha

Buddha was among the last works of Tezuka serialized in the 1970s and mainly focused on the birth and life of Siddhartha. It is not until page 268 that Siddhartha is born, which means that the author uses this space to introduce other characters who play a significant role in his upbringing. To begin with, he introduces Chapra, who had disguised himself as the son of a general to escape his fate. Next is Tatta, an untouchable who has the ability to commune and possess the bodies of animals and whose entire family was killed by the Kosalan soldiers. Then there is Naradatta, a monk transformed into a wild man as a punishment for mistreating animals. Naradatta is on a quest to explain the various portents leading to Buddha’s birth.

Lastly, there is Chapra’s slave mother, who stands by him no matter the difficulties that present. Throughout the story, the characters are engaged in a lot of unexpected experiences, reverses, and escapes in a bid to satisfy the author’s philosophical concern, which is to overcome violence. Although the main themes of the story evolve along various pieces, there are extreme but passionate scenarios of brutality that the author depicts, such as the instance when Tatta sacrifices himself to a snake in order to save the lives of Naradatta and Chapra’s mother. In the volumes that follow, Siddhartha encounters many ordeals, including an encounter with the Hindu God Brahma, who tells him that he

can't save himself unless he becomes a monk, but first and foremost, he must attain enlightenment.

Superhuman Attributes and the Representation of Siddhartha

For Buddha to be depicted as fully enlightened in human form, it is required that his image is pestered with special physical attributes that are only possessed by superhuman beings. The bodily attributes that are essential for any Buddha image are contained in the Buddhist Canon, which offers thirty-two primary features and eight secondary attributes. Examples derived from Mathura depict Buddha as having a well-proportioned body with extremely tall and slender limbs likened to those of a lion king. Other features relate to skin color which is said to be golden blue and emits light from every single pore, dharma wheels in his feet and hands. Features of other parts that could not be presented as images, such as voice, were determined through his enlightenment. In volume four, the search for enlightenment begins when Siddhartha decides to live the practice of austerities in search of wisdom for the remainder of the journey.

While Tatta and Migaila are living in isolation after being excommunicated, Migaila falls ill, and Siddhartha using his supernatural power, is able to suck the poison out of her skin until she is healed. In the meantime, Assaji prophesies his death, and as much as Siddhartha tries to stop his death, his human nature can't save him from being devoured by the pack of wolves upon which he sets himself. After the death of his friend, Siddhartha sets to take a bath in the river, where he meets Sujata, who has now become a fully grown woman, and expresses her love for Siddhartha. Siddhartha turns down her love, and this sends her into a state of depression, and she is later bitten by a snake. In an attempt to save her as he did with Migaila, he enters her consciousness, and it is at this point that the author displays a mystical sequence of events that take place.

To start with, Siddhartha's psyche is represented in his nude human form that remains suspended on a mass of souls, which are illustrated using tiny human forms. In his supernatural form, he catches Sujata, but she escapes. It is at this moment that Brahmin appears to him again and reminds him that he will attain enlightenment once sited under a Pippala. Here, Siddhartha realizes his full potential as a superhuman as well as his ability to control the universe. He manages to revive Sujata back to consciousness, and as much as her family rejoices in celebration, he slips out, and, as told by Brahma, he goes under a Pippala for medication and enlightenment. In the closing chapters of volume four, Brahma finally declares that Siddhartha has achieved enlightenment. "Your name shall be Buddha. Let others call you this!! Farewell, Buddha," he says and then vanishes (Tezuka, 236).

Animal Symbolism and Holocaust Representation

in Maus

Similarly, Spiegelman, in his two-volume masterpieces, manages to present the holocaust ordeal survived by his Jewish father against the Germans. To do this, he successfully applies his acclaimed expertise in comics by portraying Jews as mice and Germans as cats. Other nationalities, such as America, are depicted as dogs, while Poles are represented as pigs. Many people tend to misinterpret the allegorical use of animals in both Maus' volumes to be fiction, but the truth is that the story represents a well-researched piece of work that was based on the experiences of the author's father during the harsh times of Nazism and Hitler's regime. To best understand the comic setting of Maus, it is essential to familiarize yourself with the author's roots in comics and, secondly, acknowledge the position of the author as the son of a holocaust survivor.

The latter factor is a bit problematic because it revives post-memory effects due to his vicarious experiences of trauma as he goes through the stories explaining how his father died. In Spiegelman's narrative, "Maus," which talks about the Jewish mice, was first featured in "Funny Animals" and was intended to create awareness about the rights of animals. With time, Spiegelman changed his intentions from advocating for animal rights using comics to critiquing the racist use of animals, such as in the case of cinemas where black people are portrayed as subhuman. After this, it dawned on him that he would use these comics to fight Semitism, which his father directly experienced. After all, Jewish dehumanization was a result of Nazi propaganda which equated Jews to mice and rats.

According to the author, he preferred the use of comics because they not only offered lowbrow entertainment but were also considered a traditional form of art that promoted the use of visual and verbal elements simultaneously. The marginal status of the medium may be the cause of why there is a high concentration of Jewish artists in the American comic industry. At this point, it is important to note that the Jewish influx in America as a result of increased immigration coincided with the emergence of the comic industry. Jews were considered rats and inferior persons in Germany and were thus moving to America in search of new beginnings as they explored new opportunities offered therein. That said, Americans are anthropomorphized as dogs because they allowed the Jews (considered as rats) to settle just in the same manner that dogs are considered man's best friend. What the Jews found here was an opportunity to express their ordeals through cartoony newspapers.

Conclusion

From the precedent, it is evident that both texts play a huge part in depicting anthropomorphism. Tezuka's piece clearly illustrates how a superhuman takes the form of a human and, through this media, accomplishes the task of enlightenment. Similarly, Spiegelman is able to share the holocaust event, which saw his father remanded by the Nazi and cruel Hitler regime. Initially, his approach to using cartoony figures seems farfetched, but after a much deeper analysis, one is able to realize that the fable of the mice and cats, as well as other animal figures, is not only humorous but also very

“apt.” That said, it is true to assert that the gap that exists between humans and other life forms is great. However, the boundary between these different forms can be reduced by giving human qualities to animals or deities in the same manner as personification, with the only difference being that with anthropomorphism, the qualities are actually manifested.

References

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