

A Yiddishe Manga: The Creative Jewish Roots of Japan's "God of Comics"

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the stylistic and narrative influence of the work of cartoonist Milt Gross (1895-1953) and animation producers Max (1883-1972) and David (1894-1979) Fleischer on Japanese manga artist Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989). Tezuka is considered to be Japan's "God of Comics" who introduced many of the stylistic and narrative conventions that have accompanied manga and made it a leading form of entertainment in post-war Japan. Tezuka himself acknowledged the influences of Gross and the Fleischer brothers, and this has been examined in previous studies. This article, however, focuses on a previously unexplored aspect of this influence: the Jewish heritage which is strongly echoed in both Gross' cartoons and the Fleischer brothers' animated films. The article argues that this heritage, which reflects Gross' and the Fleischer brothers' own background as the sons of Jewish immigrant families in America, is central to the influence that their works had on Tezuka. Elements in Tezuka's works—such as the use of silent panels, identity changes, and the idealization of machinery and technology—are all deeply rooted in Gross' and the Fleischer brothers' Jewish heritage.

Though I could find no evidence that Tezuka was aware of this Jewish influence, an examination of works from the late part of his career suggests admiration for the Jewish traits of these artists: immigrants with no homeland who assimilate into any given culture without losing their own unique cultural identity and who are free of the dangerous nationalism and militarism that led to Japan's involvement in World War II.

KEYWORDS: Manga, Anime, Osamu Tezuka, Max Fleischer, Milt Gross

OSAMU TEZUKA (1928-1989) is widely recognized as Japan's "God of Comics." He is seen as the most prominent comic artist to emerge in Japan after World War II, an artist who played a key role in making manga a leading medium in the country's post-war culture through an enormous output (estimated to consist of 150,000 pages) of works in a wide variety of genres. Tezuka was also a driving force behind the emergence of Japan's post-war anime industry, setting up an animation studio which adapted many of his successful manga works and found audiences for Japanese animation all over the world (Schodt 1996, 233-244).

This article examines the influence of two major personages in the American comics and animation industry on Tezuka's works: cartoonist Milt Gross and animation producers Max and David Fleischer. It argues that the Jewish heritage of both Gross and the Fleischer brothers lay behind many of the style and content elements that influenced Tezuka. The term "heritage" is used in this article rather than "ancestry," because their influence is related less to superficial ethnic characteristics and more to a deeper mentality regarding Jewish immigration, specifically to America. The process of immigration echoes strongly in the works of Gross and the Fleischer brothers.

As this article attempts to show, Tezuka, having never experienced immigration or assimilation into a foreign culture himself, drew upon this heritage indirectly (and probably unknowingly) through the influence exerted on him by Gross and the Fleischer brothers.

Though Tezuka did acknowledge the influence of both Gross and the Fleischer brothers, the Jewish heritage of these sources has yet to be examined in relation to Tezuka. Alongside an examination of Tezuka's active interest in Jewish history towards the later part of his life and career, this article argues that Tezuka idealized the mentality of the Jewish immigrant, as expressed in the works of the artists that he admired.

The Power of Silence: Milt Gross and *He Done Her Wrong*

One of the earliest and largely overlooked sources of influence on Tezuka's work and style is the work of American cartoonist Milt Gross. Born in New York to a family of Jewish immigrants, Gross (1895-1953) gained fame for his newspaper cartoons, comic strips and columns published in the 1920s and 1930s with their many verbal innovations, especially their unique combination of American English and Yiddish. A pioneer in introducing Jewish humor and culture to the general American public, Gross went beyond the ethnic jokes of stage performers. While keeping the use of actual Yiddish vocabulary to a bare minimum, he widely employed Yiddish accent and grammar in the dialogue of his immigrant characters, reflecting their (mis-)understanding of modern American culture, the gap between these characters and their assimilated children, and their views of political and social affairs (Kelman 2010, 1-12).

Gross' most influential work, however, is one which did not feature anything of his famous talent for words. In 1930 he published *He Done Her Wrong*, a book which tells the melodramatic love story of a hunter and a singer

in the snowy peaks of Alaska and of the scheming villain who tries to come between them. In his quest to find his lost lover, the hunter travels to the big city of New Jersey, and his encounter with the wonders of the modern world leads to many comic situations.

What makes *He Done Her Wrong* unique is Gross' choice to tell the story through pictures alone, without a single word of dialogue or narration (except for a few signs with verbal text which can be seen throughout the book). Though *He Done Her Wrong* was not a commercial success upon its initial release, it is widely recognized today as an early step in the development of the modern graphic novel. The book is a parody of Lynd Ward's woodblock-painting novels (among other things), but Gross introduced the far more familiar style of popular comics and cartoons of the era to the idea of a novel told in pictures (Kelman, 44-47). It should be noted, however, that the book did not make use of panels—sometimes several consecutive pictures appeared on a single page but without clear framing to separate them.

A few years after its publication, *He Done Her Wrong* was serialized in a Japanese youth magazine where it was read by a young Osamu Tezuka. Tezuka fully acknowledged Gross' influence and even went as far as pointing out specific design similarities between the scheming villain character in *He Done Her Wrong* and the recurring villainous character of Mr. Egghead in his own stories, as well as a complete gag scene from the book that inspired a similar scene in Tezuka's experimental 1984 short film *Jumping* (Noguchi 2007, 138-146). Additional parallels can be found: for example, there is a similarity between a gag in Gross' book (2005) in which a male character quickly knocks down a gang of goons that attack him and a gag in Tezuka's series *Chikyū Wo Nomu*, translated as *Swallowing the Earth* (2009, 41-43), and likewise between a scene that features the protagonist in a struggle with a bear in *He Done Her Wrong*

and a similar scene in Tezuka's early work *Kuru Beki Sekai*, translated as *Next world* (2003b, 126-127).

The visual similarities, however, are less significant when compared to the influence that Gross' book had overall on Tezuka's work and style. This influence can be traced to two interconnected elements: the wide scope of the story and the ability to tell the story through pictures alone. While non-verbal storytelling served Gross well in drawing physical slapstick gags—probably inspired by the silent comedies of early cinema—it also played a major role in consolidating the plot of *He Done Her Wrong* and determining its scope. The story takes its protagonists on an epic journey from the snowy mountains to the big city and back again, with the visualization of this journey broken down into a series of pictures that replace verbal text. By employing this technique, beyond merely framing the story for his readers, Gross also emphasized the distance that his protagonists cross: the changing visual scenery makes the reader share this voyage with the protagonists both physically and emotionally.

It is this "silent journey" element of *He Done Her Wrong* which most influenced Tezuka. While Tezuka's use of silent panels in slapstick gags is occasionally reminiscent, it is his use of silent panels to visualize passages from one location to another which demonstrates Gross' deeper influence on his storytelling. The most notable example, perhaps, comes from the work that made Tezuka famous: his early graphic novel *New Treasure Island* (*Shin Takarajima*, originally published 1947). The novel, much like Gross' book, was a bold experiment in long-form graphic storytelling; it mesmerizes its readers with two silent opening pages in which the protagonist does nothing other than drive a car (Power 2009, 38-41). It is this opening that sets the tone for the great epic journey that awaits the protagonist and the reader. A later example, taken from the *Dawn* (*Reimei Hen*) volume of Tezuka's life-project *Phoenix* (*Hi no*

Tori), is even closer to Gross' style with its depiction of a character's desperate journey through water which visually recalls the hunter's journey from *He Done Her Wrong* (Tezuka 2003c, 57-60). The true power of silence in both Tezuka's and Gross' work lies in its ability to experience journeys in both space and time through pictures alone.

How is all this relevant to Gross' Jewish heritage? While the artist's other works certainly echoed his Jewish heritage through their verbal characteristics, it can be argued that due to the non-verbal nature of *He Done Her Wrong*, this particular work (and its influence on Tezuka) is far less reflective of that heritage. This argument is countered by the artist Paul Karasik in the afterward to the latest edition of *He Done Her Wrong* (2005). According to Karasik, the many slapstick gags in the book are typical of the collision between the Jewish immigrant and the modern world, as the inability to understand the logic of this world leads to many comical situations. On examining the "silent journey" element, Karasik's argument can be expanded to include the journey segments of Gross' book as a reflection of the Jewish immigrant experience. The great journey from the snowy mountains of Eastern Europe to the wondrous modern city parallels the journey taken by the protagonists of *He Done Her Wrong* and is no less important than what the protagonists actually do once they arrive at their destination.

Tezuka's adoption of the "silent journey" motif demonstrates how Gross' influence went beyond elements of style and delved into Gross' personal narrative. More than simply the passage from one location to the other, the journey reflected Gross' Jewish immigrant mentality of being constantly on the move with no permanent place of residence. This concept was foreign to Tezuka who, as noted above, never experienced immigration himself. Many of Tezuka's protagonists, however, did experience immigration: the above

examples from both *New Treasure Island* and *Phoenix* emphasize the road and the sea, the long way that must be travelled without a clear idea of what lies ahead. In adopting the "silent journey" motif, Tezuka turned many of his protagonists into immigrants, much like Gross' protagonists.

The Roles We Play: The Fleischer Brothers and Betty Boop

If Gross provided Tezuka with a powerful storytelling technique, two other Jewish American creators, brothers Max (1883-1972) and David (1894-1979) Fleischer, provided him with strong templates for both the narrative and visual design of two of his most iconic characters. The Fleischer brothers, born to a Jewish family who emigrated from Galicia to the United States, founded a studio that pioneered many of the practices and innovations related to animation production. From the division of work among animators to technical developments such as the rotoscope (a device used to trace live-action footage for animation purposes). The Fleischers' studio became the leading animation studio in the United States during the 1920s; during the 1930s and the early 1940s (before the brothers were forced out of the studio by their financier Paramount), it provided fierce competition to Walt Disney's rising empire of animated productions (Sito 2007, 85-94). The Fleischer brothers' productions were extremely popular in Japan as well, and this popularity is perhaps best demonstrated through one of the studio's biggest stars—Betty Boop.

Better known today as a merchandising figure, the character of Betty Boop started out as female companion to another Fleischer character, the anthropomorphic dog Bimbo. As a supporting character to Bimbo, Betty Boop had an appropriately doggish appearance, before adopting the fully human look in 1932. With a design inspired by the popular flapper girls of the 1920s—a revealing mini-skirt, boyish haircut and big eyes—Betty Boop became an icon

of the Jazz Age. Indeed, many of the films starring her character were accompanied by jazz hit songs, and the loose, zany nature of the plots in her films—often involving the morphing of characters and objects — has been compared to jazz jam sessions (Austen, 2002, 61-66).

Betty Boop also became a sensation in Japan, reflecting the interest of the country's youth in the life and style of modern western girls. One example of this interest can be seen in the popular 1934 romantic drama feature *Our Neighbor Little Yae (Tonari no Yae-chan)* in which the young protagonists attend a screening of a Betty Boop cartoon (Richie and Schrader 2005, 47-78). Another example is *A Language All My Own* (1935)—a Betty Boop short produced by the Fleischer brothers in response to the popularity of the character in Japan—in which Betty travels to Tokyo and performs in Japanese to an enthusiastic audience, at one point even abandoning her flapper outfit in favor of a Japanese kimono.

A Language All My Own is a good example of the true nature of Betty Boop who was, at heart, a performer. In several films she is portrayed as a singer in bars and clubs or on the stage of vaudeville shows. In other films (such as those discussed below) she plays other characters while clearly maintaining her original flapper persona. It is these Betty Boop characters who most influenced the creation of Tezuka's most renowned and significant female character Princess Sapphire of the series *Princess Knight (Ribbon no Kishi)*. The series, a pioneering work in the *shōjo* (romantic comics aimed at young girls) genre, follows the adventures of a young princess who must pretend to be a male prince in order to inherit her father's throne. The visual similarities between the two characters are obvious: both have a short, curly, boyish haircut and large, round, innocent eyes. Manga Scholar Frederik L. Schodt (2007, 44) has pointed to Betty Boop's design as a major influence on Tezuka's

tendency to draw characters with big eyes, though he likewise acknowledged the influence of others (notably Disney) on Tezuka's style.

More importantly, Princess Sapphire, like Betty Boop, is also a performer. As with Betty Boop who played many roles which all failed to mask her true flapper nature, Princess Sapphire played a masculine role while keeping an obviously feminine look and figure. In the early chapters, for example, the royal family's scheming enemies get a hint of Sapphire's true identity when she forgets to change her high-heel shoes (Tezuka 2011, 28-29). Similarly, in a later episode, the heroine finds herself in a situation where she must attend an event as a woman yet still conceal her true identity, and she assumes an even more feminine disguise by wearing a wig (Tezuka 2011, 42-45). After years of impersonating a male, Sapphire is caught between two gender identities and must wear a costume to truly belong (if only briefly) to either.

While Tezuka was clearly inspired by the all-female Japanese theatre group Takarazuka in creating this graphic tension between the performer and the role she plays (Power 111-127), Betty Boop can be considered an equal influence. Two Betty Boop shorts cast her in a fairy tale pseudo-medieval environment, comparable to that of *Princess Knight*, where her true flapper nature strikes out: *Snow White* (1933), in which she does not even try to conceal her modern nature while cast in the lead role of the famous legend, and *Poor Cinderella* (1934), a more conservative comedy which nonetheless features many anachronistic gags relating to Betty Boop's modern origins (such as the use of modern electric devices in a medieval environment).

Betty Boop's role as a performer who cannot really hide her true nature, which appears to have been inspirational for the creation of Princess Sapphire, is also reflected on two occasions when the Fleischers made direct reference to their Jewish heritage. In the 1932 short *Stopping the Show*, the character

appears as a stage actress who makes imitations of famous performers of the time. One of the performers she imitates is Jewish singer and actress Fanny Brice, and she dons a Native American costume and sings "I'm an Indian" with no attempt to conceal her Yiddish accent.

This gag about the relationship between the actress' true heritage and the role she plays turned out to be true for Betty Boop herself in the cartoon *Minnie the Moocher* released later in the same year. In this cartoon, the audience learn that the character's flapper persona is as much a disguise for her true Jewish identity as the Native American outfit was for Fanny Brice: it opens with Betty Boop at the dinner table with her two Jewish parents (speaking in a heavy Yiddish accent, with her father wearing a yarmulke) scolding her for not eating, when their real criticism of their daughter, it can be assumed, concerns her adoption of the immoral modern American lifestyle. This point is emphasized as the film continues and the heroine runs away from home to a surreal urban jazzy environment.

Scholar Amelia S. Holberg noted how the conflict between Betty Boop's true Jewish heritage and modern American life was very reminiscent of popular Yiddish cinema which often dealt with the culture clash between Jewish immigrants and their new surroundings. She also observed how the jazzy atmosphere often seen in Betty Boop cartoons was inspired by the poor working-class neighborhoods where Jewish immigrants often settled and where such clashes often took place (1999, 291-312).

Much like her creators, born to a Jewish family who immigrated to America, Betty Boop was caught between two worlds: her traditional Jewish family and the modern wonders of urban American life. And like Betty Boop, Tezuka's Princess Sapphire was also caught between two worlds: the traditional feminine role of a princess and the masculine identity she must adopt. The

conflict of identities is expressed through similar graphic means: Betty Boop's boyish haircut was a fashion statement typical of the flapper girls of modern America and a rebellion against the character's traditional background, while Princess Sapphire's similar haircut was meant to give her a masculine look which would distance her from a traditional feminine identity. Betty Boop's identity conflict, rooted as it was in the immigrant experience of cultural clash, became a gender identity conflict for Tezuka's heroine.

The Mechanization of the Human Body: The Fleischer Brothers and Popeye

The Fleischer brothers were also the inspiration for another (perhaps the most) iconic character created by Tezuka: the boy-robot *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atomu*) who bravely fights for world peace. This can be attributed to the Fleischers' fascination with technology; Max Fleischer, who worked as an art editor at the magazine *Popular Science* prior to opening his animation studio, claimed that there is "great art in machinery" (Fleischer 2005, 13). Several works produced in the studio featured robots: the 1932 short *The Robot* featured the dog protagonist Bimbo transforming his car into a robot before jumping into it to win a boxing match (a possible inspiration for the transforming, maneuverable robots seen in Japanese animation many years later); the 1938 color cartoon *All's Fair at the Fair* presented a futuristic vision of the following year's World Fair in New York as a high-tech metropolis in which robots answer all human needs; and, above all, the 1941 film *Mechanical Monsters*, the second in a series of films produced in the studio about the new comic book hero Superman, featured the protagonist fighting against an army of giant, remote-controlled robots and served as an inspiration for many other film makers and animators, including Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki.

It was not, however, one of their robot characters who exerted the Fleischers' strongest influence on the character of Astro Boy, but rather a series of animated shorts adapting the stories of another popular comic book hero—Popeye the Sailor. One hundred and nine Popeye cartoons were produced under the Fleischers' management of the studio between 1933 and 1942. These cartoons featured wild slapstick violence and made Popeye the favorite cartoon hero of the 1930s, more popular even than the big competitor Mickey Mouse. As in the case of Betty Boop, Popeye's popularity was not limited to North America, and the character became a favorite among Japanese audiences as well. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the presence of Popeye's arch-nemesis, Bluto, in the anti-American military propaganda cartoon *Momotaro the Sea Eagle* (*Momotarō no Umiwashi*, 1943) directed by Mitsuyo Seo, one of the few pre-1945 Japanese animators for whom Tezuka expressed respect (Schodt 2007, 58). In the film Bluto is presented as a typically arrogant, stupid and incompetent American military officer in command of the Pearl Harbor base just as it comes under Japanese attack. The parallelization between Popeye's fights against Bluto and the brave Japanese soldiers' fight against the same character (including the use of the "Popeye's bicep" motif, discussed below, for one of the Japanese soldier characters) testifies to the Fleischers' long-standing popularity among the Japanese audience.

Tezuka himself was an avid fan of Popeye, and the character made an appearance in the concluding pages of Tezuka's early science fiction series *Lost World* (Tezuka 2003a, 243-244). Tezuka also clarified the link between Popeye and Astro Boy when he claimed, in comments on the editing that the animated series was subjected to prior to its American broadcast, that the average Astro Boy episode was no more violent than the average Popeye cartoon (Schodt 2007, 58, 76).

Unlike Betty Boop, Popeye was not a character created originally by the Fleischer brothers but rather adapted from the newspaper comic strip drawn by the non-Jewish artist Elzie Segar (1894-1938). While the Fleischer brothers regularly referred back to Segar's strip for new characters throughout their production of the Popeye shorts, they also changed the narrative focus of the original comics considerably. In the original comics, Bluto was a minor character with brief appearances, while in the animated shorts almost every film revolves around the struggle between him and the protagonist. More importantly, while Segar had introduced the idea of Popeye gaining strength by eating spinach in only one single episode from the strip in 1932, this idea became prominent in the animated shorts (Harvey 1994, 167-170). This new focus highlights the greatest influence that the Fleischer brothers' Popeye—as opposed to Segar's original character—had on Tezuka's Astro Boy.

This influence is evident in the many iconic images that show Astro Boy with parts of his seemingly-human body shell open, revealing the mechanical parts inside him (Tezuka 2002, 21-22). These images demonstrate the ideal manner in which Tezuka—at least in the early stages of his career—viewed the mechanization process of the human body, a view which was shared in many ways by the Fleischers. The ideal presentation of the body as a machine is a recurring theme in many of their Popeye cartoons: Popeye can be seen flying by turning his own body into a propeller-like device in the 1937 cartoon *I Never Changes My Altitude*, or simply defying gravity (in a manner recalled in Astro Boy's own rocket-powered flight) in the 1936 cartoon *I-Ski Love-Ski You-Ski*. He also swims like a speedboat in the cartoon *I Wannabe a Lifeguard* of the same year (perhaps inspiring the opening of the original 1963 Astro Boy animated television series which featured the protagonist digging underground in a similar manner). Moreover, much like the iconic image of machinery inside Astro Boy's body, a recurring motif in many Popeye cartoons are the images of

machinery inside Popeye's spinach-powered pumped bicep, notably electric turbines (in the 1936 color cartoon *Popeye the Sailor Meets Sinbad the Sailor*) and armored tanks (in the 1937 color cartoon *Popeye the Sailor Meets Ali Baba's Forty Thieves*). The 1942 cartoon *Many Tanks* even features the complete mechanized interior of the protagonist's body, in a manner similar to Astro Boy's.

These metaphors for the mechanization of the body in the Popeye cartoons became a simple character trait for Tezuka's robot protagonist, but in both cases they reflect the same ideology that considers science and technology a powerful tool in the service of economy and the betterment of human life. Just as Max Fleischer's admiration of machinery led to the ideal consequences of the mechanized human body in the Popeye cartoons, so too Tezuka presented in his Astro Boy stories a protagonist with its own mechanized body who advances the human race toward peace and prosperity—although his stories also explored the other, darker side of technology (Schodt 2007, 119-121; Wassenaar 1989, 20-32).

How is this relevant to the Fleischers' Jewish heritage? Unlike the Betty Boop cartoons, the Popeye shorts largely avoided direct references to Jewish life and culture, mostly due to pressure from the Paramount Studio (the Fleischers' main financier and distributor) to keep things comprehensible for non-American audiences (Cohen 1997, 72). A rare Jewish reference can be found in the 1936 Popeye cartoon *I Eats my Spinach* in which the protagonist is presented as a butcher in a stand where a Hebrew kosher sign is visible. But even without direct references, the Fleischer Popeye films were, much like the Betty Boop cartoons, a love song for the working-class immigrant neighborhoods with their dirty streets, seedy buildings, and cheap hangouts. However, while Betty Boop represented the culture clash between the

traditional immigrant and modern American society, Popeye represented assimilation: the wonders of the "New World" were now represented by modern science and technology that could serve to overcome the daily hardships of life in the poor neighborhoods. This message can be read as an attempt to appeal to a larger audience: the Popeye animated shorts were produced during the Great Depression, and the Fleischer brothers, the children of immigrants, may have wanted to express their faith, even in hard times, in the technologically and scientifically-advanced America. Tezuka took their idealized view of science and technology, grounded in their immigrant experience, to an even greater extreme, presenting it as the answer to the problems of the world and humanity.

Tezuka and the Jews: *Adolf*

Was Tezuka aware of the Jewish heritage of the artists that inspired humor of the indirect "Jewish influence" it had on his own work? There are no references to this, and it can thus be assumed that while he may have been aware of their Jewish ancestry, he was not conscious of the role it had in shaping the many elements in their works that influenced him. It is interesting to note, however, that toward the later part of his career, Tezuka showed an active interest in Jews as a people (if not Judaism as a religion), an interest reflected in the historical novel *Adolf* (*Adorufuni Tsugu*).

One of the final works to be completed by Tezuka before his death, *Adolf* is both a political thriller and an epic historical novel taking place over a period of five decades. It opens with the story of Sohei Toge, a Japanese journalist who is investigating the death of his brother, a foreign exchange student in Berlin in 1936. The story then moves to the Japanese city of Kobe, where bullying by local children brings together Adolf Kamil, the son of Jewish refugees from Nazi

Germany who fled to Japan, and Adolf Kaufman, the son of a senior Nazi diplomat in Japan. The friendship between the two young children turns into rivalry, and eventually bitter hatred, as a result of the search for a mysterious package of documents which could cause the downfall of the infamous dictator Adolf Hitler by proving that he is himself of Jewish ancestry.

The series reveals Tezuka's ideological fascination with the Jews as a stateless nation, as opposed to the established nation-states with their nationalistic, militant conduct which led to such monstrous crimes as those committed by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Tezuka did not hesitate to draw parallels between the two countries, portraying the suffering of Sohei Toge in the hands of both the German Gestapo and the Japanese police (Tezuka 1995, 60-64; Tezuka 1996a, 66-71), along with the crimes committed by the armies of both countries against civilian populations (Tezuka 1996a, 14-16; Tezuka 1996b, 149-155).

Jewish existence, on the other hand, is portrayed in the series as a sane, ideal alternative to the destructiveness of nationalism. In a key scene Kaufman leads Jews on a march to a death camp, offensively referring to them as "roaches." One of the Jews on the march responds by telling Kaufman that roaches will be walking on the earth long after humans have gone from it (Tezuka 1996c, 201-204).

It is easy to mistake such a portrayal of Jews for anti-Semitism, especially since it emphasizes the traits that became anti-Semitic stereotypes: the Jews as a people with no country of their own who thrive at the expense of other people with established national identities and countries. The use of the roach metaphor, in particular, brings to mind anti-Semitic descriptions of Jews as insects or rodents. In the series, however, Jewish existence is idealized; the Jewish ability to adapt to any country, assimilate with other people, and thrive

while not adopting the same destructive nationalism of established nations held a particular charm for Tezuka. Moreover, the ability of Jews to survive—demonstrated by Tezuka's clever inverted use of the anti-Semitic insect metaphor—proves the ability of Jews to preserve their culture while established, militant nations rise and fall. The prophetic words of the Jewish prisoner in response to Kaufman's insult are substantiated in the chapters portraying (very vividly) the destruction of both Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan at the end of the war: the nation states of the so-called "humans" built on the foundations of militarism and hate, fall apart, while the stateless "roach" Jews survive despite all attempts to eradicate them. As noted by Gerald Jones (1996, 7-11), though *Adolf* refers to specific people and countries at a definite time, it does not necessarily reflect Tezuka's negative view of specific nationality but rather his negative view of the concept of nationality in general.

But as Gerald further notes, according to Tezuka, even the Jews finally find themselves caught in the tragic destructive cycle of nationality. Another key scene in the series shows a conversation between Kamil and Yoshio, the son of a senior officer in the Japanese army. Kamil expresses his wish to adopt Japanese militant values so that he can fight for his own people, while Yoshio, disillusioned with the same values after witnessing the atrocities committed by the Japanese army in China, tries in vain to explain to Kamil why his view of Japanese militarism is wrong (Tezuka 1996c, 39-45). Kamil's inability to accept Yoshio's anti-nationalistic arguments is demonstrated in the series brutal concluding chapters, when an older, hateful Kamil, now an officer in the Israeli army, confronts an older, hateful Kaufman, who is assisting the PLO in its struggle against Israel (Tezuka 1996d, 240-246). In the tragic conclusion of Tezuka's epic series, the Jews have abandoned their ideal existence as a people with no country—the eternal immigrant experience of Tezuka's greatly

admired Gross and Fleischer brothers—in favor of the same destructive nationality which caused the downfall of Tezuka's native Japan.

Conclusions

Milt Gross and the Fleischer brothers influenced various elements in Tezuka's works, each influence representing another aspect of their Jewish immigrant heritage.

Gross' *He Done Her Wrong*, representing the very process of immigration, the voyage from one location to another, impacted both the epic scope of Tezuka's works and his use of silent pages. Both elements combined in the "silent journey" motif that Tezuka adopted from *He Done Her Wrong*. More than just a powerful storytelling device, this motif turned Tezuka's protagonists who experienced the journey into immigrants themselves.

Betty Boop signified the cultural clash between Jewish immigrant society and modern America. The character, caught between both worlds, inspired Tezuka's Princess Sapphire who was caught between two worlds of gender identities.

Finally, Popeye epitomized assimilation into the culture of the new world; the wonders of modern science and technology serving as representatives of this world, changing human life for the better and acting as the great equalizers between immigrants and the local population. Tezuka's Astro Boy took this concept further by presenting science and technology as great equalizers of the entire human race.

All three stages—the voyage, the cultural clash and the assimilation—together formed the process of Jewish immigration so greatly admired by

Tezuka in *Adolf*: the ability to travel, to resolve the cultural clash, and finally to assimilate into every culture without losing their original cultural identity or adopting the nationalistic and militant traits of established nation-states. Even if Tezuka was not aware of the Jewish legacy of the influence that Gross and the Fleischer brothers had on his work, his later expressed admiration for that heritage provides a possible explanation for the appeal that their works held for him.

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Notes

¹ It should be noted that though claims of Adolf Hitler's Jewish ancestry remain popular to this very day, mostly due to his father's illegitimacy, these claims are constantly refuted by serious historians. See, for example, Kershaw (1998, 709).

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