Art Heroes: The Discovery of Japan's Sexual Identity

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By analyzing Japanese animation films and comics created during and after World War II, I hope to have a deeper understanding of how Japan’s trajectory of modernization has helped to shape current definitions of gender, sexuality and fantasy.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Professor Kano for her help as a mentor and advisor for my research.

Keiji Nakazawa’s *Hadashi no Gen* (Barefoot Gen)

Manga Series (1973)

Anime (1983)

Based on Nakazawa’s own experiences as a child during the war. While trying to remain strong, the hero faces changing responsibilities at home and begins to question his loyalty to the government and to his own identity.

Isao Takahata’s *Hotaru no Haka* (Grave of the Fireflies)

Anime (1988)

After their mother passes away, 14-year-old Seita is left to care for his younger sister Setsuko. In facing famine and fear together, the gender roles for boys and girls are molded out of their interactions. Seita takes responsibility and comforts his sister, while Setsuko is depicted as weak and afraid. Both are robbed of a childhood and are forced to grow up quickly during the war.

Tezuka Osamu’s *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy)

Manga Series (1952)

Anime (2006)

A loveable boy robot expresses human emotions and embodies Japan’s rediscovery of identity amidst an ever-growing technological world.

Occupation Period

Post-War Japan

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By Emma Kaufman