

Ken Kaneki's philosophy



The reality of Tokyo Ghoul

The entire story of Tokyo Ghoul is about two different species trying to coexist : humans and ghouls. During the manga, the main message is to learn to know people from another group before judging them and rejecting them, and that's where resides the entire philosophy of the artwork. You should never be afraid of something because of preconceptions you have about it. Ken Kaneki, the main character of the story, embodies perfectly this mentality.

At first, Ken Kaneki is a simple human, living like it and having a very wrong idea of what a ghoul is, like the entire society. His meeting with Lize Kamishiro, a highly dangerous ghoul that tries to eat him, drastically changes his faith. After an accident where both of them brush with death, Kaneki has now become an hybrid ; a new life with a half ghoul / half human body starts for him, with its share of inconveniences.

A very harsh path now opens up to Kaneki, with some major events that are going to shape the character's philosophy and mentality. The core of it is going to be his desire to become a sort of vector between two worlds, between humans and ghouls. From a frightened teenager to a king and leader for the masses, the evolution of Ken Kaneki is also what makes him so interesting and easy to rely on.

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Let's now focus on Ken Kaneki's philosophy mentioned earlier. What defines his mentality the best is the **duality**. During the whole story, he is constantly oscillating between two aspects of his personality. The first one represents his human's part, instilled by his mother, that can be resumed by one sentence of the manga : **“Instead of hurting others, try first to understand their pain.”** Kaneki's only purpose is to avoid hurting others, that's his way of acting right.

The second one, way more selfish and violent, appears for the first time after Kaneki is getting tortured by Yamori. During this memorable scene, he questions the viability of his mentality, and starts to perceive it as weakness. The ghoul's mentality is starting to take over, and can be resumed in one sentence : **“In order to make a good coffee, you must get rid of bad seeds.”** Kaneki now accepts his condition, which means admitting **the weakness of ideals against the cruel necessity of reality**.

The entire complexity of the character is to **find a balance between those two opposite mentalities**, in order to protect the ones he cares about. This dilemma is symbolised by Kaneki's favourite book, *The Black Goat's Egg*, where the main character is balanced between the disgust he feels about his mother — a notorious serial killer — and her legacy he can't reject and ignore. The parallel between this character and Kaneki is quite obvious, embodied by a very strong quote : **“The world is like an egg. In order for something new to be born, the world must first be broken to pieces.”** Violence is the only way for Kaneki to embrace his destiny, to take control of his life. This fatality is however a source of sorrow, that must be overcome to clear a path to happiness.

The application to reality

There's a ton of lessons to be learned from Ken Kaneki's story and evolution through the manga. He is indeed facing a choice we all have to make in our daily life, between following principles to conform with our own ethic and just ignore it to coldly take the object of desire. Both options are confronted with obstacles when applied without shades. You can either fall into inaction and being steeped on, or you become a cold-hearted individual that doesn't consider his neighbour.

An in between has to be found, every one of us has to define what balance is adapted to his own personality, precisely like Kaneki is trying to do during the entirety of the manga. Tokyo Ghoul is telling us how difficult this road can be, but in the end, with resilience and perseverance, the purpose of every human being can be found : happiness.

Recommendations

Demian by Hermann Hesse

It's overall meaning and symbology is similar to that of Tokyo Ghoul. Many quotes from the book fit well within the manga setting, and are inspired by it. For example : “The bird struggles out of the egg. The egg is the world. Whoever would be born must first destroy a world. The bird then flies to God. That God's name is Abraxas.” Abraxas is a god of duality, that fits perfectly with Kaneki's struggle.

Platinum End by Tsugumi Ōba and Takeshi Obata

The duo behind Death Note and Bakuman last artwork has a similar philosophy than Tokyo Ghoul. The main character is indeed often confronted to the same dilemma than Kaneki. His desire of not hurting anyone is often a brake in his journey toward happiness. Should he make an exception in some situations ? By doing so, is he ruining his chances of being happy, making the entire process totally counterproductive ?