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 ***Magic as Metaphor in Anime: A Critical Study (review)***

R. Christopher Feldman

Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

R. Christopher Feldman

Dani Cavallaro. *Magic as Metaphor in Anime: A Critical Study*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010. Pp. 212.

Popular media serve to reveal and shape the cultures in which they are created and consumed. The phenomenal success of Japanese animated films (*anime*) and graphic novels (*manga*) demonstrates the power of popular culture to act as a repository for culturally significant ideas and images. In particular, a large proportion of anime, manga, and computer games employ themes that reveal the importance of conceptions around religion, the supernatural, **[End Page 228]** and the human and nonhuman agents who mediate them, to consumers of these cultural products.

Dani Cavallaro has authored more than a dozen books on anime and visual theory over the last decade, including such titles as *Anime and Memory: Aesthetic, Cultural and Thematic Perspectives* and *Anime and the Visual Novel: Narrative Structure, Design and Play at the Crossroads of Animation and Computer Games*. In *Magic as Metaphor in Anime*, she examines the ways in which stories employing "magical thinking" (p. 3) illuminate important life lessons in contemporary Japanese society. The book is less a study of Japanese ideas about magic than an analysis of the cultural tropes revealed through these stories. In this, her project is more akin to, say, Joseph Campbell than to Malinowski or Evans-Pritchard.

In Chapter 1, "The Frame of Reference," the author begins by stating her working definition of magical thinking as "virtually any kind of nonscientific reasoning that includes an acceptance of the mind's ability to influence the phenomenal realm," a form of reasoning that employs the power of symbols and that is able to find meaningful patterns in the midst of instability (p. 3). The purpose of magic is transformation—of the external world, certainly, but more importantly of the individual. Anime, as Cavallaro explains, is a medium ideally suited for exploring this power, both because of its ease in visually depicting transformation through the "morphing" of people and objects in the frame, and its facility for softening the boundary between the everyday and the supernatural worlds by visually overlaying the literal and the fantastic.

The remaining five chapters draw upon examples from specific anime

to offer a closer reading of the themes Cavallaro finds to be of key importance in these stories. Chapter 2, "Magic Contracts," explores the importance of the interpersonal relationships in these stories. In applying a legalistic concept from the everyday realm to the bonds between the characters, some of whom may be nonhuman, the gap between the worlds of the everyday and the magical is reduced. Such contracts, the author asserts, drive the characters to embark upon the magical quests discussed in Chapter 3, "Magic Missions." These missions take the protagonists on journeys both outward through the environment in which they move (Chapter 4, "Magic Natures"), and inward toward a more mature understanding of their own natures (Chapter 5, "Magic Bildungsromans"), culminating in the transformation of themselves, and often of the worlds around them (Chapter 6, "Magic Destinies").

Magic as Metaphor in Anime is an exploration of the ways in which magical themes and images are employed as literary tropes through which culturally significant messages are encoded. In Cavallaro's reading, these anime impart **[End Page 229]** normative lessons on the importance of personal initiative within the context of teamwork, on understanding and harmonizing with the world around, and on acquiring maturity, to the benefit of oneself and perhaps even the world. The author provides an exhaustive variety of illustrations, comprising more than a hundred different anime, in support of her analysis. In particular, Cavallaro examines the work of famous anime creators like Miyazaki Hayao (*Nausicaä*, *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*), Shirow Masamune (*Appleseed*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Ghost Hound*), and Watanabe Hiroshi (*Guyver*, *Jing: King of Bandits*, *Orphen*, *Slayers*, *Video Girl Ai*, *Hell Girl*), and analyzes a number of key anime including *Aria* (*Aria*, 2005-2007), *Darker than Black*, (*Kuro no Keiyakusha*, 2007), *Ghost Hound* (*Shinreigari*, 2007-2008), *Hell Girl* (*Jigoku Shōjo*, 2005-2008), *Negima* (*Mahō Sensei Negima!*, 2005-2007), and *xxxHolic* (*xxx-Holic*, 2005-2009). The author also draws upon a selection of academic and popular writers, from anthropologists...

quotes one of the most renowned passages of seventeenth-century antirhetoric from Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605): "vulgar capacities . . . see learned men's works like the first letter of a patent, or a limned book, which though it hath large flourishes, yet is it but a letter? It seems to me that Pygmalion's frenzy is a good emblem or portraiture of this vanity" (qtd. 12). In explicating the passage, however, Stark focuses solely upon the allusion to the Pygmalion story of metamorphosis as representative of transformation effected through language, when Bacon writes *The Advancement of Learning* to petition King James I to "advance" experimentalist "learning" in place of the *studia humanitatis*. From this perspective, the surrounding text reflects the antihumanist bent of *The Advancement of Learning*, as the "learned men's works" Bacon refers to represent the writings of those men of "letter[s]" presently favored at court, whose rhetorical "flourishes" the "vulgar capacities," or illiterate, are compelled to admire like "portrait[s]," or images, despite their lack of intellectual substance. Humanists themselves censured the "vanity" of the extravagant rhetorical style known as Ciceronianism, and Puritans, too, advocated plain style in the vernacular as part of the Protestant rejection of the excesses of Latin. So while Stark effectively reconciles the experimentalists' fervent stylistic critiques with their own florid prose styles, the scientific denunciation of charmed rhetoric forms one of numerous successive and related debates on language in the period.

Future work on early modern English rhetoric will benefit from parsing the collective claims of these disparate social, political, and intellectual interests. In uncovering early science's rhetorical bonds to magic, Stark's volume adds notable complexity to the intellectual history linking the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.

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DANI CAVALLARO. *Magie as Metaphor in Anime: A Critical Study*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010. Pp. 212.

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