Title Page: Anime

Definition: Anime from Brewer’s Dictionary of Modern Phrase and Fable

A genre of Japanese film and television animation, also known as Japanimation. It typically has a Science fiction theme and sometimes includes violent or explicitly sexual material. It is usually adapted from popular Manga comic books and in the 1990s accounted for one of the fastest growing US video markets. Its influence is not confined to the realm of pornography and is evident in the Disney film The Lion King (1994). The word is pronounced ’animay’.

Summary Article: Anime
From Encyclopedia of Children, Adolescents, and the Media

Anime, Japanese animated films, although technically similar to the child-oriented cartoon offerings of American animation studios, are distinguished by their adult themes and complex story lines. The word anime, sometimes written as animé to make the pronunciation clear, is a shortening of the English word animation.

The earliest Japanese animated films, which date from 1915, dramatized folk tales using traditional artistic techniques or imitated the pace and humor of Western cartoons. In 1937, under strict government censorship, animators were restricted to producing cartoons for military propaganda.

Following World War II, studios continued cartoon production. However, release of Osamu Tezuka's TV series Astro Boy (1963-1966), based upon his manga (Japanese comic book) series, transformed animation. The series' futuristic, action-packed story line, sparse graphics, and wide-eyed characters set the tone for future anime. Tezuka cited Disney's animations as his inspiration. The adventures of the boy robot Astro Boy, created to replace a scientist's dead son, were immediately popular. Astro Boy also became popular with American audiences. Following Astro Boy, Tezuka (who is considered today to be the father of anime) established animation as acceptable for all ages by creating ever more sophisticated stories with adult themes along with children's entertainment.

Anime are a commercial art form made for specific age groups, though most are for adolescents and teens. All genres found in live action films are used in anime, including children's stories, fairy tales, science fiction, fantasy, historical drama, romance, horror, paranormal, thrillers, and erotica and pornography. The most popular anime combine themes (action, romance, science fiction, etc.) and explore the shifting nature of identity in modern society.

Artistic styles vary widely, though anime studios generally have an established style that the artists follow. Fewer details and frame changes per scene than most Western animation give anime a choppy feeling, though the artists make up for this by also including scenes with many more details and frames for emphasis.

From 1963 to the 1980s, most anime appeared on Japanese TV. In the 1980s, the introduction of video recorders allowed artists to create animation that did not conform to TV requirements for length, number of episodes, and costs. Popular titles were adapted to TV or film formats. Theatrical releases, half of Japan's film output in 1999, have higher production values. The most popular anime combine

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Many of the anime that followed Astro Boy replicated the series use of the science fiction genre, reflecting both society's fears about the destructive power of science and its positive attitude toward technological innovations. These stories were eclipsed by series that explored the problems of a technologically based society and by epics focusing on giant robots such as Gundam. (Originally introduced in 1979, Gundam movies and television series remain popular today.)

One aspect of anime that separates it from cartoons is reality. Heroes often fail or even die, sometimes without any apparent reason. Although this seems harsh, anime fans see it as reflecting real life, in which triumph and justice are not always accorded to those trying to do right and be good.

Though clearly set in an unreal landscape, Hayao Miyazaki's Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, released in 1984, contained themes of environmental destruction that led to its brief banning in some European countries. The film created demand for socially conscious anime in both Japan and the United States. The significant alterations made to the American release, which changed it from a dark story of ecological danger to a rather tame adventure story, also led to Miyazaki's insistence on "no-edit" clauses for future releases. Miyazaki's Spirited Away (2002) won the Oscar for best animated feature-length film at the 2003 Academy Awards, and his film Howl's Moving Castle (2004) set box office records when it was released in Japan.

American imports increased in the 1990s, with some on TV (Sailor Moon, 1995-1997; Gundam, 2001) and others on video or DVD. In 1998, Ghost in the Shell (1995) topped the Billboard video sales charts. Twenty anime series were broadcast on American TV in 2003. Some fans complain that editing to remove objectionable content, generally sex and violence, turns anime into cartoons; these fans prefer DVD releases, which allow selection of original, dubbed, or subtitled versions. Controversial is the prevalence of fansubs (fan-created subtitles) for bootleg series not released in America. Some fans decry this; others claim fan translations create demand for the DVD.

Most American fans are teens and college students. Many American fans consider Katsuhiro Otomo's Akira (1988), which graphically depicts government corruption and individual alienation in modern society, to best illustrate the genre's vitality.

Studies of anime suggest that it can play a positive role in a variety of literacies. A study of the impact of the Pokémon anime series, which was introduced on American TV in 1996, suggests that, far from being detrimental to learning and literacy, anime encourages an active, pleasurable learning experience that can help improve literacy. Studies also suggest that anime, along with manga, are a particularly rich source for the production of fan fiction by adolescents. Fan fiction, or fanfic, is genre of text production in which fans use popular culture to provide a starting point for their own stories. The construction of fan fiction, which is often written in collaboration, allows adolescents to learn to read texts more deeply and contributes to development of their literacy skills.

See also

Japan, Media in, Manga (Japanese Comic Books)

FURTHER READINGS

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Vasquez, V. What Pokémon can teach us about learning and literacy. Language Arts 81 (2): 118-125.

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