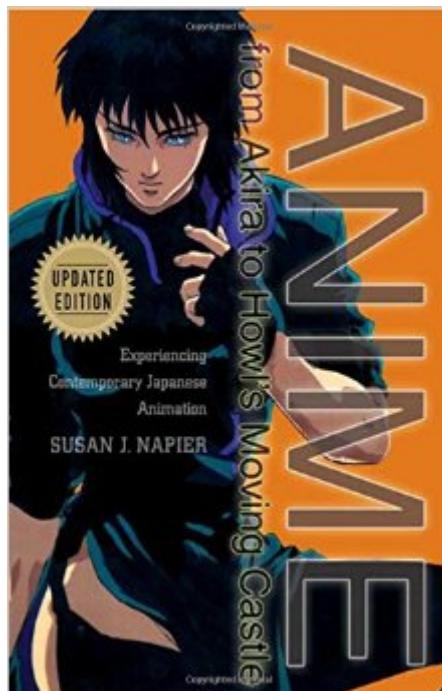


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# Anime From Akira To Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation



## **Synopsis**

This new edition of the groundbreaking popular book is a must-have for both seasoned and new fans of anime. Japanese animation is more popular than ever following the 2002 Academy Award given to Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*. It confirmed that anime is more than just children's cartoons, often portraying important social and cultural themes. With new chapters on *Spirited Away* and other recent releases, including *Howl's Moving Castle*--Miyazaki's latest hit film, already breaking records in Japan--this edition will be the authoritative source on anime for an exploding market of viewers who want to know more.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Susan Napier's book *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle, Updated Edition: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* is a noble attempt at bringing an academic lens to a topic that is so often marginalized. Napier's thematic approach to anime and manga holds promise, but it is her flagrant disregard for accuracy that ultimately makes it impossible to seriously consider this work as truly informative. Napier structures her book around themes that she contends are central to the medium of anime and manga, specifically: the apocalypse, Japanese victim mentality, and the challenge of gender identity. In doing so, Napier succeeds in identifying common themes in anime and manga that, through analysis, can reveal a deeper meaning of many of the works discussed in the book. Particularly convincing is Napier's focus of apocalyptic settings combined with Japan's national mentality of victimization. The author makes a moving case for the freedom that a

post-apocalyptic setting allows creators to comment on social issues that take place in modern day Japan. It would be hard to deny that the image of Neo-Tokyo with its mass of urban metropolis contrasting with a large atomic crater is one of the most engrossing parts of *Akira*. Equally, it is only against the bleak backdrop of utter destruction that *Grave of the Fireflies* could tell such a moving story about two children attempting to live during the firebombing of Japan during World War II. Thematically, understanding not only the value of apocalyptic settings for storytelling, but the history and mentality that help Japanese animators imagine such settings gives readers a deeper appreciation of anime as a reflection of culture. This book deals with gender and sexuality in a less successful, if equally interesting, manner.

Whether it is still relatively new to us, or as Westerners we are close-minded to accept what the overwhelming world of Japanese popular culture has to offer--nevertheless there are not a lot of texts published (academic or otherwise) on the topic. While it is nice to see anime and manga recognized as valid art forms, personally, I don't find Susan Napier to be the one to write about these sorts of things. I was forced to read this book for a class on the visual pop culture of Japan, and although I am not entirely familiar with many of the series she mentions, I still know the difference between a good and bad argument in academic writing. Although she means well and brings up relevant points (like the three types of series: elegiac, festival, and apocalyptic plotlines) and has the occasional interesting and original interpretation or idea (though scarce), the book soon becomes chapter after chapter of Freudian thought and it's not only tiresome, but it makes me question if she is doing this for shock value and sex appeal, or if she truly believes InuYasha's sword is a phallic symbol or the blood smeared on San's ("Princess Mononoke"'s) face is reflective of her menstrual cycle, which Napier uses to instantly suggest she is feminine and fertile, while immediately countering it with counts of San's masculine acts, constantly in this wishy-washy pattern that makes the book hard to comprehend. It was amusing the first time, but it just becomes ludicrous how often she thinks of characters and symbols sexually, instead of for what they are or other possible interpretations, and sees gender as a black-and-white issue, and has to bring it up for every series, regardless of its demographics.

My review will consist of two parts: a review of the actual content first, followed by a review of the physical product. I chose to buy and read *Anime From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* out of a desire to learn more and think critically about something I'm very passionate about, which is obviously anime. I, unlike many of the other reviewers, did not have to read this book for a college course.

Despite this difference, I too share many of their concerns. Although I am ecstatic that whole critical books are being dedicated to anime, this particular one falls short of what it could and should be. I have not seen every anime discussed within the work and, due to reading it independently and lacking friends seriously interested in anime, have not discussed it with peers, so I have to take the other reviewers' word(s) that it misconstrues many facts to fit an argument. I noticed that this was true with some of the anime I am familiar with, such as *Cowboy Bebop*, and therefore am willing to accept that it is also true for a number of the other anime discussed in the book. That the author would get many basic facts about the anime examined wrong is unfortunate and brings into question her authority on the subject, however, I do not feel that it was done with a academically-corrosive intent. I believe it is evidence more of a lack of accurate analysis for certain anime and information regarding them than a lack of academic integrity, as suggested by some of the other reviewers. This is, of course, only my feeling regarding that matter and is based solely on intuition, not investigation. In any case, it is disappointing that one of the "definitive" critical texts on anime is plagued by arguments supported by faulty evidence.

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