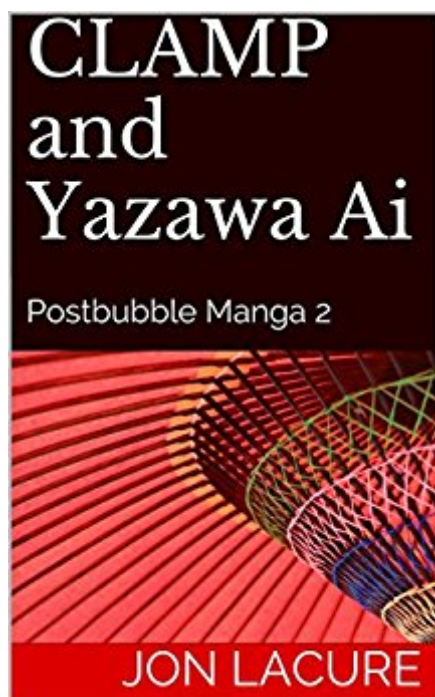


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CLAMP And Yazawa Ai: Postbubble Manga 2



Synopsis

When the Japanese bubble burst in 1991, so did the promise of a good life for those who followed the rules. Restructuring meant the beginning of the end of guaranteed lifetime employment, the traditional backbone of the modern Japanese economic system. The picture is complex but many workers, especially in middle management, were either dismissed or demoted into jobs with reduced responsibilities and pay. Workers who had given their adult lives to Japanese companies felt justifiably betrayed. More importantly, young people lost faith in a system that had betrayed their fathers. It was not long before the shock of this change moved from the news media to the popular media. Graphic novelists began producing works that parodied the old genres where hard work and perseverance inevitably led to success. The first chapter of this book looks at works by CLAMP. Sailor Moon (the subject of the first volume in this series) used Art Deco accessories and backgrounds to create the look and feel of an elegant 1930s jewelry ad. In contrast, CLAMP used organic flowing lines, large empty spaces, and sharp contrasts of light and dark to recall the decadent fin de siècle and Art Nouveau. The contrast between the two worlds of the 1890s and 1930s is reflected in the leading ladies. The languid and sultry Sarah Bernhard is representative of a fin de siècle actress while the witty and independent Ginger Rodgers is a creation of the 1930s. This chapter focuses on three manga by CLAMP. The first is a feminist allegory, Rayearth, with some of CLAMP's most beautiful Art Nouveau character designs. The second is CLAMP's venture into a completely different genre with Cardcaptor Sakura, about a nine-year-old female superhero. Finally, with Chobits there is a subverted shonen genre (aimed at a young male audience), the "Magical Girlfriend." Takeuchi and CLAMP subverted their genres with conventional tropes that were pushed to the point of absurdity. Yazawa Ai's characters read and discuss aspects of their own story, destabilizing and de-naturalizing the shojo romance (aimed at a young female audience). The story no longer occupies the privileged space of narrative convention; instead the metafictional disruptions force the reader into the role of critic. At the same time, the processed and condensed versions of postbubble Tokyo streets, schools, and burger joints frequented by Yazawa's impossibly leggy teens raise questions about the boundaries between fiction and reality. Yazawa's processed digital photographs technically resemble artists working with computers in the 1990s to create digital images, especially photo montage. The purpose of Yazawa's images is not, however, to cause the viewer to reexamine the visual world. Yazawa is using these images from the real world to reexamine the narrative space of the manga. This chapter looks at Yazawa's art from both the bubble era and postbubble period and also the adaptations that attempted to commercialize her art for both television and film.

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