

Antonia Levi, Mark McHarry, Dru Pagliassotti, eds. *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2008. viii + 272 pp. \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-4195-2.

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The academic community has shown an increasing amount of interest in romance literature, in particular in romance novels, during the past decade. With scholars like Lisa Fletcher, Diana Holmes, and Pamela Regis dedicating volumes to the scholarly study of popular romance fiction, and with critical readings of individual works carving out an increasing space in academic publications, romance studies can only expect to grow and diversify into the study of romance in other genres and media. This is what *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre*, published by McFarland, attempts to do—explore issues of romance, sexuality, and eroticism in boys' love, or *yaoi*, literature.

The first collection of its kind in the English language, *Boys' Love Manga* is a compilation of fourteen essays dedicated to discussing and analyzing the implications of the boys' love genre and its readership. The text attempts to create a comprehensive volume that thoroughly analyzes various factors related to boys' love manga by arranging the essays into three major sections. The first focuses on the global publishing market for boys' love manga, the second section offers analyses of the genre and its readership, and the third focuses on "Boys' Love and Perceptions of the Queer."

The first section of the book, "Boys' Love and Global Publishing," focuses on the growth, spread, and commercialization of boys' love as a genre. More informative than argumentative, the section opens with an essay by Hope Donovan which contrasts the gifting culture which allowed fans to be creators and distributors of boy's love manga with the capitalist economies that currently dominate the genre in the U.S. This is followed by an essay by Paul M. Malone which details the evolution of boys' love and *yaoi* fandom in Germany and an essay by Yamila Abraham which sheds light on both the fans and artists who make up boys' love communities in Indonesia. Reflecting the perspectives of a scholar,

a representative of the publishing industry, and a manga artist, this section is by no means comprehensive, but it is an excellent starting point for those wanting to learn about the nuances of the economic and cultural contexts for boys' love fandom at the global level.

Scholars looking for insight into depictions of romance or sexuality in boys' love manga will find the second section of the text, "Genre and Readership," more useful than the first, as will anime and manga scholars interested in issues of romance and sexuality. In this section, the volume emphasizes the connection between boys' love and popular romance research. Contributors M. M. Blair, Dru Pagliassotti, and Tan Bee Kee, for example, draw on Janice Radway's ethnographic studies of the popular romance readership as inspiration for their work, with Blair tracing reader attitudes towards female characters in boys' love manga and Pagliassotti clarifying the structural connections that can be made between the narratives of romance fiction and boys' love manga: an argument he frames with additional help from Pamela Regis' account of the eight essential elements of the Western romance novel. Using a research approach that is closer to the social sciences, Tan Bee Kee's essay on *Weiss Kreuz* fanfiction is the only piece that deals with a specific title. This essayist's notion of romance scholarship may be a bit outdated—the piece relies heavily on research from the late 70s and early 80s and skips over the feminist scholars that other authors in this section rely on—but his comments on *yaoi* as a transgressive genre are quite interesting, and complement an interest in transgression elsewhere in the section, and in the volume more generally.

Two other essays in this section will be of particular interest to scholars of popular romance in other media. As she examines the authors' forewords and concluding comments of boy's love volumes, Marni Stanley draws on psychoanalysis to make the case that women's interest in boys' love manga does not come due to a desire to compensate for what she calls a "feminine lack"; rather, she argues, the genre empowers its female readership sexually and encourages them to imagine transgressive moments of eroticism: a claim that will sound quite familiar to scholars of popular romance fiction. Mark John Isola's essay on *yaoi* and slash fiction, meanwhile, considers the similarities and differences between what he considers to be the Eastern and Western manifestations of the same impulses, so that these two can be seen, in effect, as subsets of the same transnational genre. Isola's piece is particularly useful because it explains the differences in production and distribution of *yaoi* and slash fiction, as well as the economic incentives—or lack thereof—that drive their authors.

The last section of this volume considers issues of homosexuality and homoeroticism in boys' love manga and how they relate to queer theory. Some of these essays discuss specific boys' love titles, which makes for a refreshing change of pace from the ethnographic focus presented up to this point; notably Mark McHarry's piece, which uses the boys' love manga *Song of the Wind and Trees* to discuss how gay identity can be developed through projected experience. Others take a more skeptical approach. Neil K. Akatsuka, for example, explores how the emphasis on feminine agency in these novels enacts a subtle "disavowal of homosexuality" in them, and he questions the actual queerness of the genre. Mark Vicars and Kim Senior offer what amounts to a collection of short essays on a variety of topics related to boys' love, mostly focusing on narrative, reader response, and issues of public reception. Returning to an ethnographic approach, Alexis Hall presents research in order to support the argument that American *yaoi* readers bring their own assumptions of sexual identity into their interpretation of the text while

Alan Williams draws on the scholarship of academics like Mark McLelland and James Welker to explore the appeal of *yaoi* for the gay and lesbian communities. Concluding the volume, Uli Meyer attempts to bring discourse analysis into the analysis of *yaoi* texts, expanding the range of theoretical perspectives used to frame discussions of the genre, its readers, and its fans.

Boys' Love Manga is a remarkably useful introduction to boys' love texts and to the culture of boys' love fandom. It would serve as an excellent text for a course on manga and anime culture, sexuality and media, or romance in popular culture, and anyone who is unfamiliar with the genre or its conventions would be well served to pick up this volume. Seasoned manga scholars may find that it falls a bit short, especially because of its lack of close analyses of individual works; and the inclusion of pieces from authors related to the publishing and artistic industries, which admittedly provides fresh perspectives, also takes away from the overall academic ethos of the volume. As the first text of its type in the English language, however, this volume is a step well-taken in the expanding field of popular romance studies. It should open the door to future, more in-depth scholarship on boys' love manga, and on the production and consumption of popular romance in a transnational context.