



# **“Hayao Miyazaki’s World” ‘Best of’ Booklet**

**Japan in Today’s World Program (JTW)**

**Professor Tamah Nakamura**

**Edited by Bobby Recinos and Hiroshi Kudo – February 2013**

*“In Japan, Miyazaki Hayao is more than just an animation director, he is a thinker and a philosopher”*

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**Hiroshi Kudo**  
**Editor**

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**Roberto "Bobby" Recinos**  
**Editor**

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# **Introduction to “The Best of Miyazaki Hayao's World”**

**By Hiroshi Kudo**

Hayao Miyazaki (宮崎駿) was born in 1941. After he graduated from university, he joined Toei Animation in 1963. The company was the only studio able to produce animation feature films. There, Miyazaki was presented with the chance to work with extraordinary senior animators such as Yasuji Mori, Yasuo Otsuka, Isao Takahata and Yoichi Kotabe. Of special significance was Miyazaki's work and learning process with Isao Takahata. An early collaboration between the two resulted in the birth of the TV animation series, *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974), which enjoyed high interest from audiences. The nature of the program's scenography (western settings) came from Takahata but we can already see Miyazaki's strong hand in that work, which he later built on when producing such features as *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Porco Rosso* and *Howl's Moving Castle*.

In 1978, the cannon of Japanese animation was greatly enriched by a new TV series that would influence the field ever after: *Future Boy Conan* directed by Miyazaki himself. Fans and executives started identifying his name with the idea of “good quality animation” thanks to *Conan* and his previous work in *Hols: Prince of the Sun* (1968), *Lupin III* (1971) and *Heidi* (1974). They recognized Miyazaki as Takahata's chief assistant director, because he had been working as key animator and/or scene designer since before the days of *Conan*. What came next would change anime forever: In 1984 Hayao Miyazaki directed *Nausicaa of Valley of the Wind*, and with it, established the foundation of what would soon become Studio Ghibli. Isao Takahata has been his partner in this extraordinary venture ever since. Additionally, producer Toshio Suzuki, then *Animage* magazine head editor, believed in the project and provided invaluable support and access to significant social capital.

Looking back into Japanese animation history, we can think of several great directors, but I believe that Hayao Miyazaki is the best one among them. His ideas, story development, depth of thought and rich backgrounds are all extraordinary even amidst the best creators and creations. Furthermore, he was able to break-through over the limits of the field of animation, and is now regarded as one of the greatest Japanese film directors ever, together with the

likes of legends Akira Kurosawa, Shohei Imamura and Takeshi Kitano. Today, his talent is admired worldwide.

In fact, a central interest of mine is to understand why Miyazaki is so appreciated and followed internationally. Although there are many popular domestic directors, most of them have not succeeded in projecting themselves overseas. After going through this selection of best essays, I can better comprehend the reasons why Miyazaki has. His stories develop in unexpected ways; his themes are common to every country and people, yet his worldview is based on Japanese national culture. But his 'nationalism' is very peculiar. It means identity based on his own personal roots, and not narrow ethnocentric discourse. In this way, genuine nationalism becomes compatible with genuine internationalism.

Inside this booklet, you will find a series of short essays, which show perspectives usually not familiar to native Japanese people –as they view Miyazaki's cultural elements as obvious and natural- yet at the same time, reveal a deep knowledge of Japanese society, culture and history as well as a strong connection with the master storyteller's purpose. Through this compilation, you will find that Miyazaki and his films are analyzed and described from a multidisciplinary perspective (sociology, psychology, political science, law and so on) and seen through varied theoretical lenses (Jungian Psychoanalysis, Structuralism, Marxism etc.) including distinctive considerations linked with each student's home culture.

I believe this project will surely contribute to the study and lasting acceptance of Hayao Miyazaki and his work, both in Japan and abroad.

**February 2013**

## By Bobby Recinos

To talk about Hayao Miyazaki and his creations is not simply to explore high quality animation. It carries implications that reach much further. It means, really, to fully engage in a critical examination of our world and our own selves. Throughout the years, the Japanese master has produced a set of highly compelling films, TV series and shorts that have, to some degree, shaped the world of those who have chosen to witness his vision. Aimed at children and anyone with a child's heart, his works contain depth and emotion unparalleled in the medium<sup>1</sup> while providing extraordinary entertainment.

Miyazaki's productions often involve familiar and recurrent topics, but they should not be interpreted as a uniform message with a single objective. In fact, Miyazaki's body of work is anything but that. It is defined by the honest depiction of the ambivalent aspects of life and human morality, and his final message is never clear-cut, only guiding us to reflection and allowing us to think for ourselves. As one student brilliantly noted when discussing *Nausicaä*: "[he] never publically proposed solutions to environmental problems. He invites us to an awakening". It is important to note, however, that even if Miyazaki makes extensive use of binary oppositional meta-narratives –the old and the new; Japanese and foreign; reality and fantasy; male and female; self and other; sacred and profane; human and non-human- he ultimately desires not to place such conflicting ideas in a collision course but strives toward a merger of energies. By blurring the line that separates them, a much more interconnected and expansive view of the structure of reality is affirmed; one that is neither shadow nor light, yet *yin* and *yang* at the same time. After viewing his works with open eyes and mind, it is revealed to us that these seemingly contrary forces in fact *require* each other to exist, giving rise to Hayao Miyazaki's world.

Timeless, universal themes such as the importance of family unity and traditional values, the quest for self-discovery, gender justice, the centrality of the

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<sup>1</sup> Arguably. It would be unfair to dismiss other great masters who have also reached the peak of animation brilliance, and produced some of the most lasting masterpieces that we know today. Amongst these, most notably the masterminds behind Pixar led by the likes of John Lasseter (*Toy Story*) and Brad Bird (*The Incredibles*, *The Iron Giant*); American directors Don Bluth (*An American Tail*, *The Land Before Time*) and Henry Selick (*Coraline*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*); British filmmaker Nick Park (*Wallace & Gromit* series); and Japanese virtuosos Isao Takahata (*Grave of the Fireflies*, *My Neighbors The Yamadas*), Mamoru Hosoda (*Summer Wars*, *The Girl who Leapt through Time*), the late Satoshi Kon (*Perfect Blue*, *Tokyo Godfathers*, *Paprika*), Makoto Shinkai (*Voices of a Distant Star*, *5 Centimeters Per Second*), Hiroki Okiura (*A Letter to Momo*, *Jin Roh: The Wolf Brigade*), Katsuhiro Otomo (*Akira*, *Memories*), and Mamoru Oshii (*Ghost in the Shell*, *The Sky Crawlers*). And, of course, the one who started it all, Walt Disney. The editor recommends visiting all of these stellar directors and productions.



spiritual realms, the futility of war, respect and admiration of mother earth and the limitless power of love are but a few of the gems contained in Miyazaki's set of compositions, always available for all those who desire to experience it. It is for these reasons that Miyazaki is observed and studied around the world. Kyushu University is no exception.

In the course "Miyazaki Hayao's World", we have explored four of his most enduring films, all of which feature endearing characters, well-crafted stories and admirable sentiments: **My Neighbor Totoro**, **Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind**, **Princess Mononoke**, and **Spirited Away**. Each of these classic masterpieces contains abundant words to the wise and illustrates themes relevant to us all. The purpose set for the course is to experience his films, identify and interpret the motifs therein contained and share them with the rest of the class via short written essays, usually one or two pages long. The work produced by past students of this course constitutes a set of remarkable insights presented from multifaceted and interdisciplinary analytical viewpoints that have affected the participants profoundly. It became clear that a "best of"-style booklet was more than warranted.

Throughout the following pages, you will find the students' papers that, in the view of the editors, contain distinctive propositions inspired by Miyazaki's passionate storytelling, written from 2010 through 2013. This booklet is composed of four central chapters – one per film- subsequently indexed and allocated according to the dominant narrative found in each of the works that have been selected. In some instances, it may seem that two or more of the papers slightly overlap, but such perception will be diluted after repeated reads, which we are confident will reveal the deepest intentions of the student-writers in a totally unique way. A fifth chapter with other outstanding contributions has been included; these are longer essays that explore Miyazaki and his work considered in its totality.

Whatever the specifics contained in each short paper, the professor has, as a means of guidance, encapsulated the themes of each movie in the following way: through *Totoro* we explore the notion of "Spirituality"; *Nausicaä* provides an excellent platform for discussions on "Nature and Environment"; debates on *Mononoke* are channeled through the lens of "Mythology and Folklore" and finally, *Spirited Away* serves as an ideal starting point for expanding upon issues related to "Identity and Self". These guidelines are not designed to constrict the

student's exploration of Miyazaki's whole message, but only intended to extract an overview of a specific subject –deemed to be richly portrayed in that particular film- through which the students were able to outline the principal trends, issues and symbols relevant to its central topic. Essays that most successfully synthesize, juxtapose and integrate the many components to form a coherent and focused analysis were given priority.

And although Hayao Miyazaki is known as a master animator and storyteller, I believe he uses these fora as a means for a grander purpose. With the same clarity with which he tells a fable, he is aware of the tremendous power his medium and position give him. Ultimately, he seems to understand the threats of current human affairs and strives to turn our heads toward a more inward-looking approach to life. With that he hopes that we, global citizens, work toward a cleaner ecosystem, become closer to our peers and remember our ancient principles, in order to –in the long run- succeed in preserving the balance of our existence. For years he has sought to bring a message of hope and provide that ever-elusive promise of potential betterment for humanity through his wonderful vision and keen eye for human potential. Greed, ignorance, egocentrism and division ought to be replaced by love, spirituality, oneness and selflessness, his opus screams.

Under that light, we simply attempt to join the master storyteller in his effort to make our world a better home; after all “Miyazaki Hayao's World” is also our own. Professor Tamah Nakamura and the editors of this booklet hold high hopes in that through it, students' critical abilities will be sparked, broadening intellectual routes and awakening a zest for more of Hayao Miyazaki and the entire cannon of Studio Ghibli. That said, by no means do we pretend to provide an exhaustive study of those works, as they are primarily characterized by ending but not concluding, merely revealing that the realm of possibilities truly is infinite. In that sense, this compilation can only serve as the starting point for a greater adventure.

Enjoy the journey!

**February 2013**

# Chapter 1

## となりのトトロ

*“Totoro is not just a neighboring cute bear, but  
rather a peaceful kami that lives inside people’s  
hearts hoping to fulfill their wishes”*

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## 1. A Reflection on Ecologism in Miyazaki's Work

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Throughout Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro*, we were presented with images of rice fields, the two girls watching a leaf floating down a stream, a *torii* in the forest, a country house surrounded by overgrown grass and butterflies, the humming of the cicadas, and, most importantly, a mysterious old camphor tree. All of these images, especially the archetypal tree, resonate the divine, not just because they remind us of our youth, but because they embody and reflect something spiritual.

Running along the ideological lines of Shintoism, this ancient belief maintains that a material can never exist without some relation to the spiritual. It holds the view that *kami* or divinity inhabits everything in nature. The sun, moon, rocks, streams, old tress, caves, flowers, animals, and even people of special character or standing are perceived to be the offspring of deities. As a consequence, the distinction between the animate and the inanimate world is considerably blurred as all of nature is transformed into a sentient being.

While this framework of thinking is conveniently valid, the question of whether spirituality warrants equality between man and nature remains to be puzzle. It is clear to us that man regards nature as divine. But what does this say about the relationship between nature and man besides the relationship between nature and the divine? If all of nature is divine, is nature equal to man?

This is where I argue that the film's depiction of spirituality is simultaneously predicated upon the theoretical underpinnings of ecologism – a perspective advancing the claim that man and nature holds equal priority and status.

Although both the terms environmentalism and ecologism are usually interchanged, it bears clarifying that there is thin line that separates these two broad churches. Environmentalism, arguably thought to be one of Miyazaki's recurring animation themes, is an approach that responds to ecological crisis but not necessarily question the fundamental assumption about the natural world. It seeks to protect the environment, not to re-examine our conceptions of it. Ecologism, in contrast, is an ideology that adopts an ecocentric or biocentric perspective of according priority to nature. As such, it is underpinned by two salient assumptions: first, that the human species is not in any way superior to, or more important than, any other species; second, that if we serve and cherish the natural world, it will, in turn, continue to sustain human life.

The characters in Miyazaki's *Totoro* held the view that man and nature constitute an interconnected whole, neither of which is subordinate to the other. They perceive nature spirits as co-equal sentient beings who have to capacity to be friendly and helpful in difficult times. This is evident in the numerous times *Totoro* appeared to both the girls and came to their aid. They regard tress, mountains, and other life-giving forces of nature as spiritual and hence, inviolable like humans. They also treat them nature as if it thrives in a manner similar to humans.

In all of these occasions, the characters assumed an ecologicistic worldview that while man sees nature as divine, nature is not in any way subjugated by man; instead, nature assumes a co-equal footing vis-à-vis man. This recurring pattern of behavior therefore affirms that Miyazaki's sense of spirituality unquestionably borders on fundamental assumptions on the relationship between man and nature, not just between nature and the divine – a fresh analysis that provides us a deeper and a more holistic examination of Miyazaki's *Totoro*.

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## 2. Totoro as a Neighbor: Spirituality Through Simple Shinto And the Nostalgia of Furusato

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*My Neighbor Totoro* was a memorial film for Miyazaki. He was discovered by many film fans through *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*. And with *Totoro*, he became one of the most popular directors in the field of animation in Japan.

When *Totoro* was released (1988), many elderly Japanese who were born in the 1930's or 1940's loved it. In general, those generations had a tendency to dislike animation. However, they saw Furusato in the forest of *Totoro*, which is set in the 1950's Japan, before the "miraculous" economic growth had taken place.

In *Totoro*, people live together with nature, rice fields, forests and mountains. In fact, older Japanese used to live with rice plantations and depended on nature to survive. Back then, people admired nature as Kami. Also, Shinto was the cultural backbone of Japanese people, which included not only religious meanings but also affected the totality of their lives. On one hand Asobi (entertainment) was necessary for people's lives, and on the other, Shinto was life itself. Therefore Shinto and Asobi were inseparable. The joy of Asobi became religious when filtered through the lens of Shinto.

Moreover, modern Japanese have two images about Shinto. One is **simple and natural Shinto**, and another is **political Shinto**. The latter is probably influenced by Bushido's conception of loyalty toward the Shogun. But if scholars investigate the historical concept of loyalty in Japan, they will discover that loyalty was truly meant toward Tenno. They used Shinto as an idea to venerate the Emperor like Sonno-Joi (尊王攘夷- respect Tenno and drive off foreign people) in the Bakumatsu period (the last years of Edo era).

Simple Shinto, on the other hand, is a part of life and it is usually hidden in the form of unconscious things, especially difficult to perceive for people who live in urban locations, separate from nature. Totoro (the character) is the symbol of the natural realm and he exists to bring harmony. Totoro's prayer, when the tree sprouted at night with Satsuki and Mei, is an obvious representation of Shinji (神事), a praying ritual of Shinto. The umbrella is the Onusa (大傘) which is a stick with paper, cloth and hemp. And the shrine symbolizes the borderline between nature and humans and serves as the entrance to the spiritual dimension contained in the natural order. What *Totoro* did remarkably well was that it aroused within many Japanese the ancient identification of humans and nature through the use of simple Shinto and the nostalgia of Furusato.

The Japanese overcame poverty, but lost their basic humanity, kindness, affection and sense of community as industrialization and modernization advanced. Kakuei Tanaka of the long-time ruling party, LDP, destroyed nature with his proposal for remodeling Japan, which comes as an inevitable problem with capitalism. In *Totoro*, as Mei was trying to go to the hospital, many people in the village kindly searched for her, but a couple on a car passed Satsuki by, though they knew she wasn't close to home. In my view, the people of the village offer an image of pre-industrialized Japanese society while the couple embodies post-industrialized Japanese.

Audiences in Japan welcomed *Totoro* as neighbor, as it helped reconnect them with nature and the Kami as well as providing a wonderful opportunity to explore the spirituality of Furusato, which to me represents the lost origins of Japanese mentality.

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### 3. The Importance of Nature-Centric Spirituality

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Spirituality, in the sense of religious and mythical imagery, ideation and beliefs in something beyond immediate reality, is at the forefront of Hayao Miyazaki's film *My Neighbor Totoro*. Although the film does not target a specific religion at its core, it presents to its audience a broader set of values based on “spirituality” and “myth,” with vaguer imagery loosely representative of ideas present in Shinto and other religions throughout Japan. As Jolyon Baraka Thomas discusses in his article *Shukyo Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao's Anime*, the values and moral messages of Hayao Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro* are less directly representative of a specific religious doctrine, but instead of the creator's own values and spiritual beliefs, which have, in turn, been influenced by the prevailing spiritual beliefs of his society (Thomas, 87). As Thomas describes, Miyazaki's own values appear to center around “a type of spirituality largely infused with an environmentalist ethic” (Thomas, 82), and this is evident throughout his films. Specifically, *My Neighbor Totoro* depicts Miyazaki's beliefs on the importance of humans connecting with nature and with spirituality, and the interconnected relationship that they share; in his film, Miyazaki uses the relationship that characters Satsuki and Mei develop with the spiritual being known as Totoro to present to his audience a set of values on the protective and healing qualities of nature on a physical and spiritual level, and furthermore the importance of trust, belief in and care for nature and nature-centric spirituality in childhood and everyday life.

Nature and spirituality are tightly linked in *My Neighbor Totoro*, and in terms of their importance to human beings, one necessitates the other. Miyazaki presents closeness to nature, both physically and spiritually, as important to early human development and personal security, while closeness to spirituality as a necessary source of hope and a means of coping with loss. This is seen throughout the film, but specifically in the beginning when character Mei first meets forest spirit Totoro. Having recently moved to the countryside to be closer to their hospitalized mother, sisters Mei and Satsuki find themselves in what Miyazaki presents as a wondrous land, separated from reality in space and time (an old house in the countryside, filled with cobwebs and dusty treasures reminiscent of a certain Tom and Huck and their adventures). Mei, alone one afternoon, notices a strange animal, and chases it into a forest. In what would otherwise be a very dangerous situation for a four year old child, here Miyazaki presents the forest as benevolent force, specifically when combined with spirituality; when Mei enters the forest for the first time, she encounters the colossal Totoro, a powerful forest spirit, who is more of a comforting, soft, and warm figure than most forest animals of similar size (such as, for example, a bear). Like one would a bed, Mei quickly lays atop his womb-like belly, and soon they both fall into a deep sleep. Now clearly marked as a place of dreams, all around them is lush, wild, uncontrollable green. It is an image the antithesis of human creation, but in the unmistakable shape of a dwelling. Here, nature is presented as a home, a safe, comfortable and *natural* place, one separate from what could be called the “human world” and its often-painful eventualities. The perfectly content face of a small child with the totally surreal presence of Totoro plays an important role in this image, as it links the safety of the forest with a spiritual image of a caretaker, nonetheless one that looks like an animal. In *Shukyo Asobi*, in describing Miyazaki's “environmentalist ethic” Thomas states that Miyazaki's spirituality is concerned with a unifying natural life force (the forest, Totoro) and “the loss in present times of an idealized past where connections between organisms were both stronger and more respectful” (Thomas, 82). Thus, Miyazaki may be connecting spirituality with an older idea of nature, one where comfort and protection could be found in the wild when combined with spiritual appreciation (Mei's instant bond with Totoro). Furthermore, the power of Totoro acts as a more indirect symbol of the

power of nature, of not just physical interaction with nature as beneficial to human beings, but also that belief in and care for nature (in Mei's belief and care for Totoro) will result in comfort and protection.

While such scenes demonstrate a fairy-tale like, protective nature, it is specifically the spiritual that makes them dreamlike and comforting in quality. Although nature is stressed as important, it is not just nature but a spirituality derived from nature that is important. This image of spirituality, represented by Totoro, actually separates itself from nature a few times throughout the film. One particular scene highlights the importance of beliefs and hope through spirituality in the face of a relentless and *harsh* nature. When Mei and Satsuki find themselves waiting much longer than anticipated for their father to return home from their mother's hospital, nature suddenly becomes a much more frightening force; rain cascades down upon the children as they wait by a bus-stop, and behind them the forest is dark and looming, unwelcoming and somewhat dangerous in appearance in contrast with the sparse but warm streetlights. As time passes, discomfort spreads and Satsuki becomes noticeably forlorn as Mei falls asleep on her back, and for the first time in the movie, there is a feeling of isolation and despair; and when the scene is finally brought to a resolution, it is not nature that brings them solace, but the spirit, Totoro. As Dani Cavallaro suggests in his book *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, "throughout the film, the fantastic is posited as a receptacle of energies from which the child protagonists may draw at times of uncertainty or grief" (Cavallaro, 69). Totoro demonstrates this upon his arrival, where with a simple act of kindness by Satsuki (the gift of an umbrella), he quickly brings back smiles to their faces. The rain, previously a harsh and isolating force, is made inert as he stomps the ground and begins to play, and soon the girls' worries also wash away. The scene is made even more lively as a spirit cat bus comes to take Totoro away, and soon after their father arrives and all is once more well with the world. Here, through the "fantastic" Totoro, Miyazaki makes a statement about the importance of spirituality specifically in times of despair, where the spiritual can act as a "receptacle of energies," a source of power to use to cope with and combat sadness. He is saying that it is important to believe in the spiritual (derived from but not dependent upon nature) for one's own health, that perhaps times will come when the harshness of the natural world necessitates spiritual dependency.

In *My Neighbor Totoro*, Miyazaki uses images of a protective but unpredictable nature, and a reliable and comforting nature-centric spirituality, to show his audience the importance that nature and spirituality holds to their wellbeing. For the characters Mei and Satsuki, nature is both wondrous and painful, but necessary for contact with Totoro, a nature spirit and symbol for nature-centric spirituality. By giving Totoro kindness, and by believing in him, the wildness of nature and the world is quelled for the girls. Miyazaki uses Totoro to represent the necessity of connection with nature and care and belief in its power, specifically the hidden or mysterious spiritual binding power it holds, "an immanent life force that binds organisms together" (Thomas, 82). Ultimately, Miyazaki is claiming that it is important to believe in this unifying force of nature, a natural spirituality that can be depended on, that brings things together; doing so will provide a "partner" such as Totoro in the form of spirituality, who will help to not only quell sadness but provide hope and contentment in a sometimes solitary and unpredictable life.

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#### 4. The Search for Roots: Creating a Hybrid Modern Myth Though Totoro

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Miyazaki has said that there is a demand for spiritual context in contemporary Japan, and with this in mind he creates his movies. This is one part of the story, the moviemaker, who sends out a message through the movie to its audience. The message Miyazaki is sending us through the movie about Totoro is that everything in this world has a divine spiritual force and should be treated with respect. An important part of the postmodern world we now live in the usage of history to create something new. In this case, the traditional *formal religion* is transformed into something new, namely *Shinto*. It's made from the ideas of the traditional religion but for a modern individual.

The trees, such as the Camphor tree in the movie, can be seen as a symbol of going back, back to the ancient roots of Japan. Time and space gets flung around and the audience is positioned between the real world and the world *as it should be*. Gaps can be found everywhere, on this subject the gap between *religion* and *religious* is one of the more interesting ones, where *religious* is seen as more modern. Believing in Shinto, makes one fall between religious and not religious, for Shinto, though it is a belief, it is not one in the traditional sense. The reason Miyazaki's movies, such as Totoro, are a given and desirable part of today's Japan is for their transformation of the old, which in the text it's explained as a *hybrid modern myth*. The traditional Japanese myths are reused and once again sprung to life. Totoro is an example of this for he lives in a sacred tree and his powers, such as power of the wind and a giver of life, is both a new and old type of kami at the same time.

*Furusato* explained in English (rather weakly) as *the native place*, is another example of a struggle for the postmodern world, where nostalgia makes glorified version of the old. The traditions and the home create a safety, and to go back to how it used to be becomes synonymous with coming home. This is seen in this movie, where the location (the countryside) and the belief itself are both examples of *furusato*, in both physical and psychological terms.

The scene with Mei crawling in a tunnel chasing the small kami can be seen as a metaphor for the ritual of watching films, the combination of the world how it is (the reality) and the world as it should be (the movie). This other world is right around the corner, and can be found by those who could be our own. The other part of the story is how the audience is affected by this. To see, for example, kami(s) and rituals in a movie can create rituals in real life, some places can thereafter be seen as holy and we see the world differently. This can be viewed as playing, but what it really is religion, and that's where breaking down the word *Shukyo Asobi* becomes interesting for that it's a combination of the words *religion* and *play*.

To live a good and moral life is still key for the Japanese majority, to create a meaning. This can traditionally be found through religion. To not know your roots, which is a part of living in a globalized world, makes you unsure of who you are. The massive amount of information that we take in every day in today's society creates a reaction of *not* wanting to know, at least something. Myths face challenges in the modern world, for example when the whole world map is found, what's left to fantasize about in our reality? To seek a depth can explain why we are drawn against stories about something different and unexplainable. It's the myths that gives meaning to life and humans has always been in need of the great stories.



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## 5. Interpreting Totoro through the Lens of Jungian Psychology

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According to Jungian psychology, the basic motifs of mythology are manifestations of unconscious contents called “archetypes”, that are universal to all people in the world.<sup>1</sup> These fundamental religious ideas and images come to us in states of lowered consciousness, like dreams or reveries, in which unconscious material passes over into the field of consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Through this twilight state of consciousness, they arise instinctively and spontaneously as meaningful products of our fantasy. Jung believed this connection to the unconscious roots of our psyche to be “the essence [...] of all religious life”.<sup>3</sup>

JB Thomas notices that in *Tonari no Totoro* there is a contrast between the cold symbols of traditional institutionalized religion and the spirit world that Mei and Satsuki experience<sup>4</sup>. They transform their everyday reality by instinctively imbuing it with magic and fantasy. The moment they arrive at the old house, they call it a “haunted house”. Random acorns they find fascinate them, and in the dark they encounter soot creatures. The fox statues at the Shinto shrine near the bus stop, however, scare Mei. Acorns and rotting houses hold more meaning to her than the remnants of an old religion. They no longer instill the spirituality that provides a link to our “archetypal foundations”. The spiritual world of Mei and Satsuki, on the other hand, inspires a true connection to nature, because it bridges the gap between the conscious and unconscious. When they wake up after their nightly adventure with Totoro, they feel as if “it was a dream, but it wasn’t a dream”.

The link to the unconscious psyche that religion can provide is essential to our psychological wellbeing, but with every new stage in social or individual development, we are in danger of losing this link and becoming “rootless”.<sup>5</sup> It’s in this condition that the archetypal child motif originates. The child motif represents the “childhood aspect” of the psyche, the “original, unconscious, and instinctive state”. When social progress causes a dissociation between past and present, the child motif functions as a unifier of opposites, by personifying a potential future state in which this conflict is resolved.<sup>6</sup> Reiko Okuhara identifies the character Mei as a representation of the child motif: “Only Mei can combine opposites: the real and fantasy world, [...] human being and nature, the conscious and unconscious.”<sup>7</sup> By using archetypal motifs, *Tonari no Totoro* takes on characteristics of a folk tale or myth. Jung wrote that the ritual retelling of myths about child heroes brings “the image of childhood, and everything connected with it, again and again before the eyes of the conscious mind so that the link with the original condition may not be broken.”<sup>8</sup> JB Thomas argues, in relation to Hayao Miyazaki’s movies, that movie watching can fulfill the function of a religious ritual.<sup>9</sup> Watching the tale of child hero Mei can thus restore the link with our instinctive state and revive the spiritual connection with nature and the transcendent that is missing in the modern practice of institutionalized religions.

In the movie, the connection to the spiritual/unconscious realm is represented by a downward tunnel through the roots of a tree leading towards Totoro’s lair. There are two ways of reaching this entrance: the one that Mei discovers and the Shinto shrine. The Shinto shrine, however, no longer functions as a gateway to the spiritual world. When Mei is lost and Satsuki wants to enlist Totoro’s help, she passes by the torii, but decides to go around and take the newly discovered passage. The disappearance and finding of Mei is a pivotal event in the film. Isolation and abandonment are typical elements in child hero tales. After all, overcoming opposites is a difficult task for our conflicted conscious mind, which doesn’t yet understand the future synthesis and expects it to recede back into unconsciousness. “Higher consciousness, or knowledge going beyond our present-day consciousness, is equivalent to being *all alone in the world*.” Only Mei seems to understand the

importance of bringing the corn to her mother. Satsuki is about to reach puberty and therefore in danger of “losing her roots”. Going to Totoro and finding Mei again means reconnecting with her childhood state and rediscovering spirituality. Mei’s corn is a symbol loaded with meaning. It has healing powers, but is also associated with traditional rural culture. Completing the quest of delivering it, resolves the dissociation between modern life and the spiritual connection to nature of the past.

- 1 C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, Princeton University Press, 1981, 152-153.
- 2 Ibid. 155.
- 3 Ibid, 160-161.
- 4 JB Thomas, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (February 2007), 83
- 5 C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, Princeton University Press, 1981, 157
- 6 Ibid. 164.
- 7 R. Okuhara, *The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children’s Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2006).
- 8 C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, Princeton University Press, 1981, 162.
- 9 JB Thomas, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (February 2007), 78.

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## 6. Spirituality in Totoro Represented Trough Miyazaki's Divine Feminine

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Miyazaki Hayao's work is more inspiring than it is religious, and *Tonari no Totoro* arguably epitomizes that feeling better than any other of his films. The storyteller makes free use of his **intuition and discernment to model the ideal of spirituality** without excessive reliance on dogmatic tools and traditions. From that unbiased foundation, I believe, he builds-on with winks to myth and Shinto symbolism in order to make a cognitive connection with his mainstream audience<sup>2</sup>. The result is a beautifully crafted film that both provides a good time and resonates with the viewer's deepest instincts.

This honest, universal approach helps us, the viewers, experience moments with enough power that decisively affect the way we perceive our reality. Ultimately, our individual and collective existences become central in our minds, compelling us to re-examine our place and role in our universe. Undoubtedly, choosing to tell a story through a protagonist that is a mighty *kami* yet our next-door neighbor without resorting to doctrinal discourse is a wonderful proposition. This allows for the message to flow out from the screen and link seamlessly with the female-energy aspect of ourselves.

Moreover, throughout the masterpiece we examine, it seems evident that the director wants to emphasize the importance of how our priorities should be shaped in this unavoidable material dimension *vis-à-vis* how they really are, causing within the observer to question, spontaneously, the very nature of his or her relationship with mother earth and the spiritual realm. In that sense, My Neighbor Totoro –set in the immediate postwar period-- symbolizes the ideal nature-centered Japan that once was and is no more. Miyazaki has expressed in many occasions that nostalgia is a driving force behind his inspiration; something that truly comes across when experiencing My Neighbor Totoro's extraordinary narrative context and scenography.

**Is the natural order as important as humanity?** An imposing camphor tree taking a seemingly preeminent status than that of humans appears to attest in favor of such speculation. **Could it be that humans are merely one part of nature and not separate from it?** Miyazaki certainly believes so, yet for centuries our species have engaged in “power-over nature” practices, creating disequilibrium in our world. Perhaps, the director purposely created a larger-than-man natural realm to correct that imbalance in the viewer's consciousness, showing his desire that we shift back into the intended “power-with nature” paradigm.

**Are we made of the same stuff as the gods? Are the *kami* somehow equal to humans?** Miyazaki hints to the fact that humans are spirit, though we *inhabit* physical temples, and so we must learn to let go of the illusion of a deity separate from ourselves. There are many telling images in the film: both, the girls and the *kami* collect acorn seeds with comparable impetus reflecting equal regard for the creation of new life. Or standing side by side at the bus stop, facing the same triviality: how to find cover from the incessant rain? This scene illustrates how the *kami* can sometimes travel down to our heavy densities when we long for them with faith and a true heart. Or when Satsuki utters: “we are the wind” after overflying the pastoral landscape together with the *kami*. Indeed, the sisters enjoyed a taste of

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<sup>2</sup> I believe our species nowadays is predominantly “divine masculine”, or male energy-dominated, which constricts the ‘female side’ of the brain (more scientifically, the ‘creative’ side). This male-energy imbalance makes us analytical, direct and logical. That is why widely known conceptual representations have to be included in the film to establish an effective line of communication. Hayao Miyazaki is not a theological articulator, as he has said many times himself but uses these tools as recourse to convey his message effectively.

their divinity, becoming *all* spirit even if just for a moment, learning that they too can step up into higher dimensions through the purity, instinct and imagination that resides in a child's inner essence. In fact, I believe a child is the *par excellence* manifestation of the divine feminine: discernment, faith and intuition override all logic and excess-thought. Not yet corrupted by the filth of the material illusory domains, a child sees through soul and heart, not brain.

**Should we be afraid of mixing with the magical, and the sometimes unexplainably mysterious?** Mei's poised reaction when seeing this giant monster-like creature for the first time (to the point of falling asleep on its belly!) suggests that we shouldn't fear what we don't know or understand, but rather embrace it, as it is too a part of our reality and our own selves. And, **are the material and spiritual all different, or are they interconnected and one can't exist without the other?** The "it was a dream but it wasn't a dream" scene of the miraculous sprouting; or the kami's dwellings in the spiritual dimension appearing and disappearing in the physical world, seem to tell that such duality is not really so, but it's merely a matter of perception and sensibility; virtues that lay dormant only as potential in our weakened divine feminine but appear very much developed within Miyazaki's consciousness.

I believe these questions deserve to be constantly addressed, so that we keep reminding ourselves of the deceitful conditions in which we are forced to temporarily exist, yet the true nature we actually possess. Miyazaki evidently wants to help us shift paradigms, for observing his work, particularly Totoro, resembles walking through a *torii* in that we are leaving the banalities of our impure human context and stepping into the perfect, awe-inspiring realm of the **divine**; understood not as a structured collection of dogmas or beliefs, but as the ability to connect with, and believe in, that benign-greater-than-us something that calls for us to return home and compels us to "grow" or be "better"; whatever that idea invokes inside each of us, individually. He provides us, indeed, with the entrance to *shûkyô asobi* as a first step toward enticing our conscious awareness and remembering who we really are, until fully recapturing our higher divine identity (true-self).

To me, that is what an authentic spiritual experience is all about and the reason why we ought to feel privileged to be participants of Miyazaki's exceptional worldview.

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## 7. Totoro as More than Religious Spirituality

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It is reflected in Miyazaki's 'Totoro' that to experience the spiritual presence of any aspect in nature, this requires a certain aesthetically pure, innocent and perhaps cheerful heart and mind that is commonly associated with children. This emotional, mental and necessary condition neither appears to be one that is easily attainable even amongst children (E.g. Kanta who cannot see) nor is it easily maintainable as one grows up and ages (E.g. Kanta's grandmother who could see when she was young but no longer). This implies that this state is influenced directly by an individual's life experiences. It further implies that certain life experiences have the potential to cast 'cloudiness' into this otherwise 'crisp and clear' state of heart and mind which would render the individual unable to communicate with the spiritual world.

There is no indication in the film that to attain this state of 'spiritual purity', one has to be extremely religious. In fact, the only indication of religiousness is in the scene where Granny is seen praying while the men search the pond for Mei. Although shrines and statues are often seen throughout the film, they usually only serve as part of the background with few if not no interaction with the film characters. This further emphasizes that spirituality is not in the act of being religious but rather refers to the individual's state of mind. Ritual is not strongly emphasized throughout the film either. Ritual movements however are. (E.g. Clasp of hands to statue for shelter and to forest to meet with Totoro, prayer dance to make sprouts grow.)

The protagonists Satsuki and Mei are represented as being individuals who are easily fascinated and have a quick-to-trust disposition. This disposition seems to be the crux that allows Satsuki and Mei to be a part of both the regular world and the spiritual world. This disposition is expressed to be similar to those of the humans of ancient days when the forest and humans were friends. This suggests that to realize the idealized form of spirituality, one has to go back to the 'original' in order to advance forward. The transgression between worlds expresses an element of fun and enjoyment that comes only after attaining this state spirituality. This element of fun is crucial in the establishment of this idealized form of spirituality.

Reverence for the old is another theme that is prevalent throughout the film. Spanning from the respect they have for Granny to the scene where Satsuki, Mei and their father 'greet' the great camphor tree for the first time. The camphor tree is banded and surrounded by many small shrines that further signify its importance (Also the home of the three Totoros). In doing so, Miyazaki deposits an imagined past in Japanese tradition or *furusato*. He believes this to be a state that one can no longer return to. Furthermore, within this past he expresses the existence of this spirituality or harmonized relationship with nature that people used to have but has been lost over the course of time. Miyazaki seems to look back on this 'neighborly relationship' with nature – where nature was once seen as an integral member of the community – with a certain sense of nostalgia. Spirituality is transient and can be easily lost.

Spirituality in Miyazaki's 'Totoro' seems to be significantly linked to this relationship and also used to explain natural forces and phenomena. There also seems to be a hierarchy between the spirits of nature and humans. This is indicative in the meetings with Totoro. All the meetings with Totoro are coincidental except for the scene when Mei goes missing. This intentional meeting is marked with Satsuki praying to the forest to let her see Totoro for help. This action is significant as this suggests that the spirits of nature and in this case, the forest are of a higher status to humans and will exert themselves as and when they like regardless of a human's desire, re-emphasizing the need for it to be treated or acknowledged with a certain

degree of respect and reverence. This is probably something that Miyazaki hopes to instill and influence in the audience's thinking.

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## 8. Shintoism and Entertainment

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The indigenous spirituality of Japan is called Shinto, which can literally be translated as “Way of the Gods”, although from a westerner’s point of view, God would not be the best translation. A Kami, which is better translated as a spirit, or deity, can manifest itself in anything, be that a great ancestor, or more often than not something connected to nature, such as rivers, mountains, and trees. Usually the case is that the phenomenon would have to provoke an emotion such as awe or fear. These Kami are not good or evil, they just are what they are, and as there is no difference between material manifestation and the divine spirit, from a traditional point of view nature and Kami are one and the same.

Totoro, to any viewer who has read about Shinto, is clearly much more than cuddly cute character. Although he is obviously an alternative perception of what a Kami might be, he fits the description perfectly. He is the guardian Kami of the forest, with his own shrine. He has power to bring life, power to control the wind, power to only appear to whom he deems worthy. However, although this might be the case, he appears to be neither good nor evil, not all-powerful, and not all-knowing. Perhaps a way in which this is demonstrated is in the scene where Totoro needs to catch a bus, despite being somewhat magical, he is not above the need for public transportation. The film establishes Totoro’s true identity itself by the lyrics used at the end of the song.

“森の中に昔から住んでいる隣のトトロ・もしも会えたならすてきな幸せが来るわ”

(This can be translated as “Our neighbor Totoro who has lived in the forest since ancient times... If you meet him, wonderful fortunes will come to you.”)

Spirituality is shown in other ways in the film besides Totoro himself. For example, when Mei first meets Totoro, it is after entering his lair through a tunnel made by vines. In Japanese folklore tales tunnels often act as a passageway to another world, which is something Hayao Miyazaki has brought into his own media. There are also small occurrences, which refer to Shinto in the film such as small shrines that are for travelers, not to mention when the family visits the shrine to pay their respects to Totoro after Mei claimed to have met him.

Hayao Miyazaki himself as stated that through his films he only intends to entertain, but as he believes in the importance keeping certain places as pure as possible, and though he may not believe in the existence of actual spirits, he follows the idea that everything should be treasured, as there is a certain life to everything. Therefore it is difficult for this idea not to manifest itself in the films he makes. Clearly, however, judging by the sheer popularity of the film, and also the fact that it has been claimed to be quite influential, it is not just Hayao Miyazaki passing on his views to his audience, but there is actually a market in Japan for what he produces.

A few generations ago, there was the belief that Kami existed everywhere intertwined with nature. These days, as Japan has become much more built up and cities have expanded, Japanese citizens have become very nostalgic about their *furusato*, hometowns, that they can no longer return to. Through a survey, these hometowns are not just about the beauty and the nature that was there, but also often associated with mothers, the love they received their growing up. Hence, one of the reasons that Totoro has become so popular is because of the nostalgia it gives people. Hayao Miyazaki intended only to entertain and to entertain through nostalgia, and as he believes that in the olden days people’s perceptions were that nature and Shinto were intertwined, more so than in modern times, he used the medium of Kami and Shinto to give the feeling of nostalgia to those watching his film.

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## 9. Religious, Unreal and Natural Spirituality

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In the movie *My Neighbor Totoro*, written and directed by Miyazaki Hayao in 1988, and produced by Studio Ghibli, we are presented two children, *Satsuki* and *Mei*, who meet an imaginary animal, Totoro, a hybrid species combining characteristics of the cat, the raccoon and the owl<sup>1</sup>.

As all the movies written by Miyazaki Hayao, *My Neighbour Totoro* is characterized by a very particular atmosphere: imaginary, sometimes sombre, but always poetic, and with always the same main concept, the special relationship between mankind and nature. But one of the very recurring idea here could be the spirituality we sense throughout the movie, and which endow *My Nighbour Totoro* all the magic it contains.

Spirituality can refer to an ultimate or immaterial reality, or the « deepest values and meanings by which people live<sup>2</sup> ». Spirituality is an essential notion for Japanese people, thus, it is a theme often used in movies, and in works in general. In *My Neighbour Totoro*, there is a distinction to be made when we talk about spirituality: it can be divided into several parts, which we could call « religious » spirituality, « unreal » spirituality and « nature » spirituality.

First, the «religious spirituality». When watching the movie, one particular thing that can surprise is the respect towards Shinto. There is this very short moment when *Satsuki* and *Mei* are under the rain, running to not get wet. They shelter under a small altar, probably dedicated to a Shinto God, as there is a small statue and some incense. Then, *Satsuki* makes a small prior to thank the God to let them shelter in this particular place. Also, when *Mei* is nowhere to be found, there are several scenes where we can see the old lady praying the Gods. The movie is basically an animated retranscription of Japan: indeed, Shinto is still very present in today's daily life, and can be found everywhere. These small episodes of « religious spirituality » could be compared with the small temples we sometimes find in the middle of big Japanese cities: still here, never forgotten.

Then comes the «unreal» spirituality, which is probably the most recurring kind of spirituality in *My Neighbour Totoro*. The family believes *Mei* when the small girls tell them that she saw ghost. Ghost and legends are really important, and the old woman is pretty happy to tell the children about the legends she knows. She says this very particular sentence which gives all its meaning to « spirits »: « You can only see spirits if they want you to see them ». *Totoro*, one of the main characters of the movies, is a spirit, and can only be seen by the two small girls. At first he could seem scary, but neither *Mei* nor *Satsuki* are afraid of him. The scene where *Mei* meets *Totoro* for the first time is probably one of the most poetic scenes of the movie: first we think that *Mei* will be afraid by this giant animal, but the small girl sees beyond the physical form of *Totoro*. The two of them share something for the very first time, something that maybe, only a small girl and a spirit could share.

Finally, the «nature spirituality». As we said before, « nature » is an important theme for Miyazaki Hayao. All his works convey the same idea: the special relationship between mankind and nature. In the movie, the scene which best renders this idea of nature-mankind relation is the scene where the family prays for the tree, showing their respect to it. This scene is very short, but again, its meaning is very strong, and proves Miyazaki's will to reconcile nature and mankind through his work.

In conclusion, what we can say is that Spirituality is indeed an important feature of *My Neighbour Totoro*. It helps conferring the movie a very unique and poetic characteristic.

1. Dani Cavallaro, *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, 2006, p. 712. Philip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality*, 2007, p 1-2



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## 10. Religious Symbols in My Neighbor Totoro

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In 1987, during the production of *Tonari no Totoro*, Hayao Miyazaki announced in an interview that in spite of the traditional framework and many elements of the Japanese religious culture present in the film, *Totoro* has nothing to do with religion. However, the references to Shinto and Buddhism seem obvious in the film.

The film takes place during the late 1950's and many details referring to Buddhism or Shinto can be observed. The Japanese religious system is primarily based on the coexistence of two belief systems: Buddhism in Japan has been imported from China and is based on the belief in Buddha and in the reincarnation, while Shinto is a Japanese belief based on animism, according to which each object or each place is inhabited by a *kami*, a divinity. The two religions coexist without opposition to Japan and are complementary. In *Totoro*, the two religions can be argued to be present and coexist.

For instance, when Mei and Satsuki stop near an altar when they return from the school under the rain, a statue can be seen that is seen again later when Mei is lost. This figure is in fact Jizo, one of the four bodhisattvas, which is particularly popular in Japan. It is a protective god who can ensure a long life or facilitate childbirth. It also protects deceased children between their death and their rebirth. Thanks to these various roles, this *kami* is often associated to the world of childhood. It can take many forms, but it is very often represented as a monk holding a stick in the right hand and a jewel in the left hand.

Another point that might be more difficult to notice is conveyed by the elements related to the local beliefs, linked to Shinto. In fact, the Shinto sanctuary is the dwelling of *kami* and can thus take various forms: for example, a forest, a cascade, a mountain. The entry of a sanctuary is signified by various signs in *Totoro* which Japanese people may immediately identify.

When the father brings Mei and Satsuki to the large camphor tree, they pass under a *torii*, a gate marking the entry in a revered space. It symbolically separates the real-world and the spiritual world. Each *torii* one walks through in order to access a temple must be walked through again in the other direction in order to return in the real world.

The giant camphor tree in which Totoro lives, located in the middle of the natural sanctuary, sees its enormous trunk surrounded by a *shimenawa*. It is a sacred cord, made up of large twists of rice straw braided from left to right, bordering a revered Shinto enclosure. It shows the territory of a *kami*, and thus any type of pollution must be excluded. The presence of the *torii* and the *shimenawa* suggest the large tree is holy because a *kami* lives there.

Other signs show us that *Totoro* has roots in Japanese beliefs. When Satsuki and Mei await the bus, we see a temple sheltering a statue of a fox. It is in fact a *kitsune*, the fox representing the Inari divinity. Inari is very popular in Japan and is a loved and feared divinity because it is able to change forms and bewitch human beings.

As a conclusion, *Totoro* is based on different layers of religious comprehension. Miyazaki gives us clues to interact with the various aspects of life and enter a world of wonder, where nature is the means by which Miyazaki brings spirituality.

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## 11. Exploring the Many Notions of Furusato Japan

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The notions of *furusato* will be explored in this essay and how it applies to the works of Hayao Miyazaki's film in Tonari no Totoro. To put it simply, the term *furusato* can mean 'old town' or 'village' but its closer English equivalent is 'home' or 'native place'. It seems that the definition of *furusato* is subjective to the individual as it can conjure up many different meanings and there are many to be found within Tonari no Totoro.

One of the main themes of *furusato* is 'nostalgia'. Some people from urbanized cities are dissatisfied with their current lifestyle and yearn for a life in the countryside due to a lack of spiritual nourishment. Distracted with day to day chores and the demands of a busy lifestyle, for some, leaving the city for the countryside is a luxury. It provides a traditional community which can make them feel more at home. In the opening scene of Tonari no Totoro, Satsuki, Mei and their father are thrilled to be moving to a new place that their father says there's no better place than the country side. The audience watch them go back to basics pumping fresh water and picking vegetables from granny's garden. Watching Miyazaki's film helps to transport the audience back to a time when we were more carefree and in touch with nature. Reaping the rewards of our hard labour was much more satisfying and very nourishing for our spiritual well-being. *Furusato* in this sense is a 'rustic simplicity' where we are immersed in the beauty of nature.

Secondly there is also the idea that *furusato* provides us with a healthy way of living life. The country life provides a means of escape and a way to recover from ill health. The mother in Tonari no Totoro is ill and Satsuki and Mei ask Granny if the vegetables will help cure their mother's illness. To which the Granny responds with great enthusiasm that they will make anybody feel better. The idea of nature helping people to recover providing us with cures to our problems suggests that we have to live in harmony with nature as it nurtures our mind and body.

Other themes in which *furusato* can be linked to is nationalism. In one aspect *furusato*, in terms of nature, is a country side that only belongs to Japan. Often we see meandering rivers along with rice fields, beautiful mountains and so on. In addition, if we take Tonari no Totoro's main theme song as an example, it reminds the audience of Japanese idyllic countrysides which perhaps reinforces a greater sense of pride. Then again it may also serve as a reminder that nature is our original home and that we should take greater care to look after it.

An important aspect of *furusato* is the whimsical magic of folk tales where the adults tell stories to the children of dust bunnies and trolls (totoro). The bond between parent and child is an important part of *furusato*. At the end of the closing credits you see the mother reading a book to the girls which has totoro on the cover. One way of interpreting this is the significance of maintaining a harmonious family relationship. In addition there is also the importance of friendships with the village people where Saseki makes friends before school even starts. Therefore this 'village like ambience' along with healthy relationships within one's family are important contributing factors to *furusato*. The meetings with the people you come across in your new surroundings mean that you allow a new *furusato* to be born. These special people that you meet in your life become a new addition to your life and home in one sense. What home is for many people will differ but in Tonari no Totoro it encapsulates the magic and wonder of the countryside and how it helps to cultivate people's own spirituality.

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## 12. Shinto Consciousness and the Fundamental Connection

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Shinto, the mythological framework within which the Japanese interpret spirituality, is not a codified or structured creation. Rather, it is a naturalistic, disorganised account of the components of our universe, which are collectively defined as the physical manifestations of a pervasive divine spirit. The spirits of particular objects or spaces are personified as *kami*, representative and personal characters, which “inhabit” all objects, creatures, and spaces of the universe. Although there is no fundamental difference between *kami* and that which they represent (all existence ultimately being a spiritual continuum), a *kami* is the active, conscious aspect of an object, which, in the Abrahamic tradition, might be utterly inanimate.

Through this lens of Japanese spiritual tradition, the non-human characters of *Tonari no Totoro* can be understood. There are obvious symbols linking the *Totoro* and their home to Shinto-like spirituality: a *tori* at the entrance to the forest, representing the entrance to a spiritual realm; a shrine beneath the Camphor tree, which is itself indicated as especially sacred by its *shimenawa*; references to *Ō-Totoro* as ‘lord of this forest’. Besides these, there are spiritual manifestations of more abstract ideas. The *Susuwatari* are Miyazaki’s personification of the disconcerting ‘un-lived-in’ feeling that houses can possess. We are told, “[they] live in old, empty houses.” When the girls, nervous at first, shout rudely at them, they hide away – continuing to make the girls anxious. It is only when the family joins together in the bathing scene to laugh, relax, and play together, that the spirits quietly depart. This is clearly symbolic of the family becoming comfortable, and accepting the house – and the house’s reciprocal acceptance of them. At this point, the ‘un-lived-in’ feeling is overcome, and it is natural for the *Susuwatari* to find another home.

*Kami*, as entities, demand respect, and represent a philosophy, which encourages us to respect every aspect of existence, regardless of apparent consciousness. In fact, the existence of *kami* within Shinto can be explained by the efficacy of personifications, in facilitating the paying of respects to seemingly inanimate things. In creating a more personal relationship for the people, a more natural understanding and respect can be achieved for non-conscious things. Likewise, the more deeply something is respected, the more personal it becomes. This is perfectly reflected in *Tonari no Totoro*, where *Ō-Totoro* and his friends become more ‘real’ and more ‘personal’, the more they are respected and accepted. As all *kami* are created and strengthened by the Japanese’ respect and personal acceptance of different elements of the pervasive spirit, so too are the non-human entities, by the humans, in *Tonari no Totoro*. A self-reinforcing idea of fundamental and personal connection to all existence is central to Shintoism, and manifests in *Tonari no Totoro*. Repeatedly, personalised respect for nature is encouraged, by rewarding the girls, whenever they come closer to it, with fun, luck or help.

Although the spirits in *Tonari no Totoro* resemble traditional Japanese spirits in purpose (and somewhat in structure, the catbus being an example of *bake-neko*: a supernatural, shape-shifting cat from Japanese folklore), they are not representations of specific *kami*, neither are they to be considered ‘part’ of Shintoism. Rather, the film and its characters can be understood as Miyazaki’s idealisation of personal relationships with nature – projected, naturally, through a lens tinted with Shinto. Traditional Japanese spiritualism is depicted favourably, in this respect, along with the child’s tendency to personify and interact with their surroundings personally (Mei meeting *Ō-Totoro* during free, relaxed play within nature, O-baa-chan having seen the *Susuwatari* when she was a child). Overall, this gives an impression of yearning or nostalgia, both for times in life, and for times in history, when people were much

more personally acquainted with nature, and – in Miyazaki's interpretation – much better off, for that fact.

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### 13. Childhood Memories as Japanese Spirituality

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Within Miyazaki Hayao's *Tonari no Totoro* (1988), the concept of spirituality is used as a common visual queue, as well as thematic element; instead of *Totoro* holding heavy and unintelligible religious views as perhaps a western film might contain, *Totoro* treats spirituality with a light hand, seamlessly blending *Shinto* tradition and belief with one's nostalgia and memory of childhood, lending spirituality to an ingrained system of beliefs that accompany everyday life with ease.

*Tonari no Totoro* is littered with scenes invoking one's memories of childhood, and imaginings of his or her glorified *furusato*, in this case rural Japan—the young girls Satsuki and Mei frolicking throughout their home and backyard, the sisters exploring outdoors, and feelings of smallness and helplessness when faced with very much adult problems, for example. Instead of *Totoro* featuring a plethora of scenes that simply call back to a universal childhood, however, Miyazaki effortlessly ties these nostalgic notions in with (to Japanese) commonplace knowledge of *Shinto* tradition, effectively blending spirituality and the quintessence of childhood into one inseparable mass. Apart from one scene that directly references *Shinto* practices—the family saying thanks to the sacred camphor tree—and another scene that directly references Buddhist practices—Satsuki saying a short prayer to a statue of *Jizo-sama*—the presence of *kami* or the occurrence of other fantastical experiences are not treated with some religious awe, or are really even directly related with *Shintoism* or Buddhism for that matter.

Never once in *Totoro* are Satsuki and Mei faced with a moral or religious crossroads and forced to discern right from wrong, disassociating spirituality from a rigid doctrine of morals and rather associating it with simple, everyday life. To these girls, being raised with an open notion of what spirituality is and how to interact with it, along with having an innocent and childlike outlook on life, they do not view the fantastical events of the film as a religious confirmation of their beliefs. To Satsuki and Mei, their meeting with a *Shinto* forest god and various other minor *kami* is simply seen as a wonderful experience—not fuel for the religious fires.

Perhaps unbeknownst to Miyazaki himself, by incorporating spirituality into one's childhood and recollections of his or her *furusato*, it becomes apparent that to Miyazaki (and no doubt countless other Japanese) notions of spirituality are irrevocably intertwined with one's home and memories. Even to Satsuki and Mei's father, a well educated man, maintaining a hand in spirituality and respecting whatever benevolent or eldritch powers that may exist in this world clearly plays a role in his life, despite being a well-adjusted adult. Not only does the girls' father encourage his children's exploration of the spiritual side of life—taking them to pray at the sacred camphor tree—both he and the girl's mother seem hardly surprised at the notion of their young children's ability to travel great distances by themselves or to carve hidden messages into ears of corn or to disappear from tree branches several feet off the ground in an instant. Perhaps by allowing spirituality to maintain an active role in their lives, these adults are able to keep young and carefree at heart. Despite *Totoro* taking place some (short) time after World War II, and despite the mother figure dealing with some type of most assuredly potentially deadly illness, with a cheerful and most of all hopeful tone, no signs of gloom or dejectedness are apparent within *Totoro*. Rather, spirituality seems to be utilized as a direct outlet connecting humans to nature and some greater power—a connection that gives comfort and stability to the lives of the characters, and also, perhaps, many Japanese.

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## 14. Religious Imagery in Totoro: A Mere Reflection of Everyday Japan

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Most days, people at 'twenty-something' will do anything to promote their maturity and worldliness, but while watching *My Neighbour Totoro* everyone in the class reverted back to being a child. We 'oohed and aahed' at every twist and turn and were utterly absorbed in the story that unfolded. When I told friends that I had just watched *Totoro* their response was a whimsical sigh, followed by "I love that film". No doubt my generation's faith in the story and our unified admiration of the film could be compared with religious practice. Many of us not only watch it dedicatedly, but preach that others should watch it, visit sacred places associated with the film, offer money in return for *Totoro*-shaped idols, and will no doubt one day force it upon our children. Thus, the treatment of a film as religious is not as far-fetched as it may initially seem. For a generation, many of whom are largely lacking religious beliefs and religious upbringing, it may be argued that this film offers a new outlet for spirituality.

Today, in the majority of developed countries there has been a move away from formal religion to such an extent, that it is suggested that in some countries religion will become "extinct"<sup>3</sup>. Japan is not an exception to this, with the majority of people identifying themselves as non-religious.<sup>4</sup> However, it is also evident that most societies have yet to shed their religious vestiges completely and much of our daily life is influenced by religion. A mere glance at the on-going debate in the United States, on the legalisation of gay marriage makes this abundantly clear. Similarly in Japan, despite being a secular state, you can still feel the pull of Buddhism and Shintoism on everyday activity here.

In that sense, it could be argued that the strong religious imagery in *Totoro* is merely a reflection of everyday life in Japan, used in the story because it is set in Japan and its creator is Japanese. This would explain why Miyazaki Hayao says the film has "nothing to do with...religion"<sup>5</sup> despite its obvious references to Shintoism, such as the sacred camphor tree used in the film and the Torii at the entrance to the hill.<sup>6</sup> These are not only vestiges of Shintoism after all but relics of a more religious time that can be found across the Japanese countryside.

Similarly, the fact that Buddhism can be seen in several instances again may be revealing of its equal cultural significance to Japan rather than religious significance to the film. For example, Mei and Satsuki ask permission to the Buddhist statue to take shelter with it during the rainstorm. They do this despite having previously prayed to the camphor tree at an abandoned Shinto shrine. This may suggest that they revere both Buddhism and Shintoism. However, it could also be regarded as showing their non-religious status since they appear to respect both but identify with neither. This duality, which is common in Japan, shows the complex history of the interlacing of these two religions, which form part of the landscape of Japan.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the use of both religions can be construed as a reflection of Japanese culture.

The use of both Shintoism and Buddhism may also explain the films attraction to audiences across the world. As although, unlike in Japan, these religions do not provide a reflection of other nations cultures, the lack of dedication to a single religion but the influence of many religions is something shared by people across the

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<sup>2</sup> BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-12811197>, (22nd March 2011)

<sup>3</sup> Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Shukyo Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao's Anime*, 2006, p.73

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.83

<sup>5</sup> Oskar Kallner, *Shinto in Anime*, p.12-14

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.3-5

developed world. The melding and normalising of these religions therefore allows the audience to embrace the evident spirituality in the film without feeling threatened or preached to. For example, though Totoro himself is clearly a magical being with powers such as making seeds sprout, he is “not all knowing, nor all powerful”<sup>8</sup>, removing some of the difficult questions usually associated with religion. In that sense, Totoro fills the gap in the market for “the consumer demand for spiritual content”<sup>9</sup> and enables non-religious individuals to share in the sentiments of respected religions.

Despite this, it is important not to overstate the importance of spirituality to this film. *My Neighbour Totoro* is first and foremost a children’s film. Adored by them no doubt because they are enraptured by the simple story, relatable characters and beautiful animation, and not the feelings of spirituality it may endow. However, by satiating his audience’s desire for spiritual themes, Miyazaki has created a new generation who will not be exposed to religion by the ceremonies of Shichi-Go-San or Communion but will instead be baptised in the films of Studio Ghibli.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>9</sup> Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Shukyo Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao’s Anime*, p.83

# Chapter 11

## 風の谷のナウシカ

“Nausicaä not only *has* faith, but has  
the power to *give* faith.”



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## 1. Harmonization of Humanity and the Natural World Through the Spirit of Motherhood

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*Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* is the first animation film that Kinema – Jumbo, the oldest film magazine in Japan, selected as one of the best 10 films of the year (in 1984), and evaluated publicly among outstanding live action films.

Nausicaa mirrors Miyazaki's *Future Boy Conan* (1978 TV animated series) in the setting of its world and characters. The story of Conan takes place in a world after a catastrophic war and the collapse of industrialization. And the heroine Lana, much like princess Nausicaa, is able to communicate with birds. Two societies are therein compared; one, a society in which humans and nature live together. The other contains those whose sole aim is to revive old and high technology. Nausicaa further deepened such theme by considering the idea of an ecosystem.

Miyazaki said that Nausicaa is not a hermit but a woman who lives in human society, and serves as a harmonizer between humankind and nature. She is like a Japanese Miko (巫女), a medium. The Miko communicate with Kami and nature. In *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, the ending of the story is messianic, perhaps because Miyazaki carries this image within his subconscious, but he regretted that the ending seemed religious. In fact, the message should be understood as Nausicaa rescuing the world not as a savior, but as a communicator between the insects and the people.

In Miyazaki's films, protagonists are usually women. Miyazaki's personal experience likely influenced that. He suffered the absence of his mother, who was very sick. Miyazaki projected motherly strength through Nausicaa, who was not only a princess, but also the mother of the valley; maybe because women are usually more peaceful beings than men.

In Shinto, the prime Kami is Amaterasu-Omikami (天照大御神), a female Kami. She represents motherhood. The country of Yamataikoku (邪馬台国), in ancient Japan provides yet another representation of the female spirit. It was ruled by a Queen, Himiko (卑弥呼), who was a medium. In the present days, there are still women mediums, like Itako in Amomori, and Yuta in Okinawa. It is said, they communicate with natural Kami and ancestors. In the film, motherhood seems to be necessary to illustrate the communication between the natural Kami and humans. Princess Nausicaa herself a symbol of motherly harmonization, moved many Japanese audiences.

Miyazaki appears to ponder how the human order can continue to exist together with nature on earth. It is true that humans have culture and seek progress; therefore, they can't live without a degree of destruction and pollution of nature and the environment. But humans must learn to live with a balance of both, **use** and **protection** of the natural realm. For example, in the original *Nausicaa* manga, the setting is different. Both species are genetically modified to adapt to a polluted environment. In this version of the story Nausicaa acknowledges the damage caused to existence by her own kind and the need to understand the idea of sharing the ecosystem with nature. In that sense, ecologism seems only a part of Miyazaki's thought. He is as much in favor of nature as he is in favor of humanity, and that's why he, in my opinion, self-imposes the challenge of considering how humans can live on earth **together with** nature.

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## 2. The Clash of Species and the Deceit of Human Progress

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**Nausicaä's** tone is first presented to the viewer as one in which an evolving state of **war** between two fundamentally antagonistic sides is destined to prevail. Mankind and nature must clash in a fight for supremacy as the dominant species across the planet. This confrontation is to take place in the context of a zero-sum game; as one side gains ground, the other is necessarily afflicted. Ideas like interdependence, equal worth, sharing space or mutual preservation cannot yet be considered.

I will call the causing factor, the “exclusivity syndrome”, by which the human race under a paradigm of “polarity consciousness” wrongly assumes they are **separate from and superior to nature**. As the pinnacle in the process of evolution and the only ones with valuable substance -with *souls*- they *must* be the only kind deserving. Thus, with a strong sense of mission, humanity will stop at nothing until *their* continuation has been warranted, nonobservant of the costs.

Certainly, misguided by treacherous impulses, we have thought far too long that we're bound to choose between the ascendancy of one species over the other, when in fact, both human and natural forces have been designed to **co-exist in harmony**, as members of the same club. We are indeed **equal parts of a greater ecosystem**; nature is our sister and *we* her brother. The ability to interact peacefully and the disposition to share common space is built-into all species. Unlike in Nausicaä's world, our forest is not evil, toxic or corrupted. It is not the enemy. Nature is a living, intrinsically benevolent entity ready to form an alliance with humanity to prevent general extinction. Like Nausicaä, we too can approach the always-willing “Ohms” all around us in a spirit of one-ness and merge toward a unified cause.

Miyazaki has argued that, in the context of conflict, neither side is good or evil but both are just endeavoring to live on<sup>10</sup>. He knows that in order to survive we must of course serve ourselves from nature but we must also learn to identify and accept the limits of our requirements, without excess<sup>11</sup>. It should remain a sustainable circle of life, for if we take more than we give, prospects are dire. And even if human behavior toward *Gaia* reveals an underlying collective assumption that regards her as an infinite resource, the fact is that such dubious postulate is conveniently self-imposed.

In the film, mutual **fear**, utter **distrust**, **unacceptance** of the other's proper station in “their own” territory and **lack of understanding** of each other's condition led to that state of permanent war between mankind and the insects of the forest. This speculative setting is but a projection of our material reality, fatally marked by the inability to recognize and respect the conditions that underpin our existence. We, the “dominant species” are modeling our own downfall by first disrupting the intended flow between humanity and nature –*nagare*- and then ignoring how vital it is to react and preserve our already damaged environment.

This reflection strikes most powerfully however, when put in the context of *human progress*. Our civilization accepts as common belief that achieving evermore

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<sup>10</sup> This is especially clear in the Nausicaä manga and in Princess Mononoke. It must be said though, that while we share Miyazaki's view in that we need to serve ourselves from nature to a reasonable degree, Mother Nature does not need our species in order to create and perpetuate life.

<sup>11</sup> In context, the following quote is relevant: "It's not bad people who are destroying forests... it's not like we can coexist with nature as long as we live humbly, and we destroy it because we become greedy. Even living humbly destroys nature." - Hayao Miyazaki on an interview with fan page [www.nausicaa.net](http://www.nausicaa.net). In the same line of thought, we believe technology can be useful as long as we don't upset the balance of the non-human realms, for there are more than enough resources to advance ourselves and sustain our planet at the same time.

industrialization, high technology, globalization and accumulation of wealth is a sign of human progress. However, in order to achieve that “progress” humanity has established itself upon a vicious cycle of excess and consumerism that is in turn built atop the never-ending requirement of **finite** natural resources. In other words, the perpetuation of mankind depends on preserving the same primary materials that it must consume in order to “move forward”. Could we call this modern man-created contingency, human progress? Where is the value in evolving technologically and industrially if, at the same time, we are devolving spiritually? It’s truly a formula for disaster. Nuclear wars, greed and ecological wipeout are the proven results. Under such light, this “logical” pattern of advancement embraced by the majorities, appears to stand on **fundamental deceptions**.

In Nausicaä, we are shown Miyazaki’s vision of how the 30<sup>th</sup> century will look like if we insist on walking down the path of selfish conquest and destruction of nature. The ensuing result, to him, is a **tomorrow-but-yesterday paradox** in which despite being “a thousand years” into the future, what appeared to be progress (unprecedented technological advances, accumulation of capital, rapid industrialization and globalization) resulted in a regression to the beginning, to a virtual state of nothingness; indeed, a predicament brought upon humankind by the [unavoidable] cleansing figure of the “seven days of fire”.

In tragic similarity, humanity today finds itself desperately wounded. In the film, the jungle is lethal to humans but in our world human action is the lethal element; by destroying the earth we are really destroying ourselves, as we are one and the same organism. Fossil fuels, forests, fauna and clean water are not everlasting; new self-sustaining, clean alternatives to our current *modus vivendi* do exist out there though they are characterized by important shortfalls in both, scientific disclosure and political goodwill. Must we be reminded? That, in this earthly dimension, there is no messiah; no godlike princess, or “man in blue walking on golden fields” who will miraculously correct the journey of men. We must repair the damage done by our own hand! And we must do it now.

To me, Hayao Miyazaki –avid ecologist- believes we are in time to undertake this challenge. He provides us with a hint of what we can do; he is especially trying to connect with the audience at a personal level through the protagonist. **Princess Nausicaä feels great love, faith and connectedness** toward her people, but also toward the insects and the forest, equally<sup>12</sup>. Her keen sense of compassion and empathy for life lies beyond mere morality; it is one fundamental trait of her personality and not imposed by indoctrination or presented to her by favorable circumstances. In fact, she is forced to endure the unendurable and even visit the lowlands of darkness, found only in death, in order to fulfill her purpose. The **intuition, awareness and sensitivity** that through his study Dr. Hayao Kawai attributes to the *Female Consciousness* aspect of the human psyche (specifically, to Japanese mythological archetypes), are permanently manifested through the princess’ actions.

Indeed, the heir to throne of the Valley of the Wind embodies everything that Miyazaki considers humanity should be in relation to each other and most crucially, to nature and the environment. Miyazaki originally envisioned the story of Nausicaä as one of extinction, but as the master’s work progressed, it was revealed to him that Nausicaä was really a story **about coexistence**. I desire we too, can see that the only **sea of decay and corruption** is that which dwells within us when greed, ignorance and indifference take hold. I believe *magokoro* –true heart– is an essential and universal human component we need only to nurture for it will naturally blossom and guide us to reconciliation. Until we are able to identify our true

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<sup>12</sup> It is revealing to see that Nausicaä, evidencing absolute purity, even shows these emotions toward her “enemies”, especially clear in her interactions with Lady Kushana of Tolmekia.

heart and the *magakoro* that also lies all around us, in the fauna, forests, seas and skies, we cannot once again **flow together as one in perfect, infinite harmony**.

If there is one lesson we can take from *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* is that only by striving to ensure the **continuity between humanity and nature** we can guarantee the survival of –not just our species– but of all species.

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### 3. Nausicaä and the Ancient Elements of Nature

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In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Hayao Miyazaki creates a moral fable with nature as its centerpiece. He uses his film as a means to stress the importance of the environment and nature to the continued existence of human beings. To do this, within the storyline he uses representative symbols of nature and human's relations to nature to support his overall claim, and draw a larger moral map at the core of the film. Specifically, he uses the images of Wind to represent communication and harmony between nature and humanity, Fire and Spores together as a means to discuss the ethics of destruction, Nausicaä to represent the ideal human relationship with nature, and the Sea of Decay to represent the consequences of living against it; altogether, they outline Miyazaki's central claim that humans are necessarily dependent upon nature, and must live within its rules and not at its expense.

Wind in Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* represents communication and harmony between nature and humanity. First, it depicts a dependent bond with the natural world; it supports the character Nausicaä and others during flight, enabling them freedom of movement in the skies but with limited control, and at their own risk. Miyazaki also stresses the importance of harmonious dependence on natural resources through Nausicaä's country's use of wind as an energy source, of renewable energy and a positive means of drawing energy from nature. However, it also has a more symbolic representation, in how the wind is what enables Nausicaä to save and to heal with her glider throughout the film, representing a dependency upon a natural force to and also how she uses the wind to predict future events. Throughout the film, Nausicaä stops to listen to the sounds of nature, to the wind as it strengthens or ceases, and gains knowledge of harm that is or is about to be done to life. In the beginning of the film, Nausicaä seems to be warned by a change in the wind that a gunshot has been fired in the forest, leading her to rush out and prevent the chaos that would ensue from damage done to her world's defensive forests. It is through the wind that she senses incoming planes bringing danger to her town, and it is later the ceasing of the wind that leads villagers to predict incoming danger in the form of thousands of monstrous Ohmu insects. Throughout his film, Miyazaki uses the wind as a symbol to stress dependency of humans upon natural forces (flight and energy), and the advantages of such a dependency and of using forces such as the wind to become more in tune with nature.

There are two repeating images throughout the film that Miyazaki uses to discuss "cleansing" as a relationship between destruction and healing; fire in the context of human beings, and spores in the context of nature. Although fire is a natural destructive force, throughout the film it is paired with human action, and represents destruction of human beings and of nature at the hand of other human beings. It also represents cleansing of human beings and human action, although typically not in a positive light; fire is first seen prominently in the beginning as a foreign ship crashes explosively in the hills at the edge of Nausicaä's community. Here, it is paired with a sudden and significant loss of life, but also with a feeling best described as "wiping the board clean" of the wrongful humans traveling with a weapon of mass destruction. This is also seen in the legend of the "Seven Days of Fire," a period of apocalyptic destruction in the past characterized solely by the image of endless fire and a "reset" of humanity and the earth. In these cases, I would argue that it isn't "cleansing" in with a restorative connotation, but that it is more only an elimination of "wrong" or damaging elements. In contrast, spores and toxins in the film represent a more positive sense of cleansing and healing. At first, spores are attributed with disease, death and destruction; Nausicaä and her villagers use fire to "cleanse" their land of the spores, resulting in the incineration of their forests and failing to stop the spread of the "toxins." However, it is later relayed that the spores serve in fact to heal, destroying toxins *originally created by humans* that remain in

the earth. As Lucy Wright describes in *Forest Spirits, Giant Insects and World Trees: The Nature Vision of Hayao Miyazaki*, “In *Nausicaa*, pollution comes not from the reversal of power relations between humans and insects, but in the interruption of the continuity or *nagare* of nature” (Wright, 6). It is not the toxic spread of spores and insects that is spreading disease among human beings. Instead, it is the fault of residual toxins from destruction at the hand of humans, and their incessant fight against efforts at revitalization by nature. Miyazaki is using the images of fire and spores as symbols to discuss destruction as a form of positive or negative “cleansing,” and to demonstrate how the human perspective of “cleansing” differs from real healing at the hand of nature.

Although Miyazaki presents an image of natural, not human, purification, the character Nausicaa acts as mechanism for this healing to occur between nature and humanity. As Wright describes, “As well as carrying the trope of the messiah, the character of the princess embodies certain ideas about how to live with the natural world” (Wright, 6). Nausicaa is a representation of the “right” way for a human being to relate to nature, in her connection to nature through the wind, her understanding of and deep care for all living organisms (interestingly with the exception of a few human beings), and in her active role in protecting nature and perpetuating the continuation of all life itself. She is able to speak to nature and to organisms, and serves as a sole connection between the otherwise discordant nature and humanity. In the end, her connection with nature allows the destructive course of the humans around her to come to a halt, natural healing to continue its course, and for a deeper sense of understanding between humans and nature to develop. Furthermore, her role as a “messiah” is important, because it distinguishes her from other human beings at the time; she is different from the norm, in both her status as a princess and her unique deep, telepathic connection with natural forces and organisms. The “norm” among human beings is thus labeled as inferior or unheroic, setting a moral weight upon her messiah status as a standard to work up to. Her label as a “messiah” of old legend, as a destined hero, creates a sense of absoluteness in her image as a role human being, and in turn a sense of rightness in the human relationship with nature that she presents. However, in addition to serving as a moral standard, Nausicaa also acts as a vehicle of hope in the film, linked with the film's few moments of happiness and also a feeling of the potential for salvation. This is seen intermittently throughout, such as in the beginning with her bond to the animal “Teto,” brief moments of contentment she shares with her villagers in their soon-to-be-destroyed, utopian, ideal community, and, importantly, in the end of the film. As the credits roll, the land is not shrouded in darkness, nor has Nausicaa truly died. Having saved the world through self-sacrifice, she is rewarded with life, and the final scenes show her and her friends moving towards a presumably better life. Nausicaa is ultimately a symbol of hope and potential, a way for Miyazaki to move his tale beyond one simply condemning or cautionary, and tell a story that provides both a means of change and a sense of optimism that this change will come to be.

However, this optimistic image is in constant and overwhelming contrast to a both a sense of dread and wrongness present in human society. This is seen in the symbol of the “Sea of Decay.” The image of spores and the term “Sea of Decay” both refer to the same spread of “toxic” nature in *Nausicaa*, but as a symbol the Sea of Decay represents *human*, not natural, toxin. It describes once more the idea of human misunderstanding of natural forces, and furthermore acts to represent the wrong way of human interaction with nature. A conversation between the characters Yupa, Obaba, Nausicaa and her father illustrate this: “[Yupa] This is a fine valley. Being here calms my spirits. ...The Sea of Decay consumed 2 more countries to the south. Its spreading all the time. And yet war and hunger are everywhere. Nothing but bad omens. Why can't they live as you do in this valley?” To which Obaba responds: “The ocean winds protect our valley. The Sea of Decay can't reach us here.”

In this conversation, first Yupa identifies the calm nature of Nausicaa's home, a community living in a manner harmonious with nature (use of wind as renewable source of energy, living off land without destroying it, etc.). It is then compared to nearby larger kingdoms where the "Sea of Decay," corruption, is spreading, places characterized by belligerence, greed, and a disregard for nature and its wellbeing. This toxin spreads only where there is wrongdoing at the hands of human beings, and indeed, it only enters Nausicaa's home at the hands of corrupt humans (when they bring it with them as they crash in the valley early on in the film). Here, Miyazaki is using this symbol to state that, although humans blame nature, their pain is always their doing; the way they choose to live their life on earth causes them to destroy themselves, a metaphorical "Sea of Decay" that travels like a disease from human mind to human mind. By living greedily and not within the confines of nature, human beings bring about their own devastation.

In *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, Hayao Miyazaki uses these symbols to represent different ethical frameworks to follow in human relationships with nature. He uses Wind as a symbol to represent the positive dependence of humans on nature, and the importance of human connection and harmony with natural forces. He uses the images of Fire and Spores to examine "cleansing" from human and natural perspectives, ultimately describing a human misconception of healing that is antithetical to what is natural, and a right course of natural healing, beneficial to all life, and independent of human action. Next, he uses the character Nausicaa as a symbol to represent ideal human relationships with nature and a moral standard to work up to as a human being. Finally, he discusses the wrong way to life within nature through his symbolic use of the "Sea of Decay". His movie questions human ethics and judgment, and the value of life as it is seen in relative terms. Each symbol works in combination to state the importance of living harmoniously with nature and the consequences of going against it. Through the character Nausicaa, he provides a sense of hope for survival: that it is possible for human beings themselves to change, but it will take spirit and resilience and understanding. It is not a tale condemning our existence but lamenting our current path, ultimately suggesting that we have the power and the potential to live happily so long as we recognize our position on earth and the consequences of our actions.

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#### 4. Rediscovering the Koshinto Ways and the Spirits of Nature

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In *Nausicaä's* film, we can see the world after scientific civilization had broken down and covered with *Fukai* (腐海; means rotten forest), which is harmful for human but in fact it cleans up the pollutants emitted by human beings, who have developed a scientific civilization. And it describes *Nausicaä*, the heroine in this film (or some kind of princess from a small village), who fights to find a way to coexist with nature.

In my opinion, Hayao Miyazaki wanted to propose that we should follow the ancient way of lives strongly related with Japanese, specifically some kind of ancient Shinto (like it existed in *Jyoumon Period* [縄文時代, and in this period, people followed the ways of nature, living on hunting and food gathering]). The ancient Shinto is different from modern (which was transformed after suffering influence of Chinese religion and Buddhism [552 AD] or after being used by the Japanese imperial power [from 300 AD] Shinto in Japan (Oskar). The former one is sometimes called as *Koshinto* (古神道; means ancient Shinto) and includes faith in nature (自然崇拜) and spirit worship (精霊崇拜 or animism). The core belief of it is to follow nature. We can see many symbols of *Koshinto* in this film. For example, there are sacred areas (I think *Fukai* is some kind of sacred area), *Goshinboku* (御神木; we can see in *My Neighbor Totoro*) or *Seirei* (a type of kami [神] in nature; we can see many times in his films, such as *Totoro* or the kodama [from *Princess Mononoke*]). In fact, Miyazaki has said that he hates Japanese religion (in my opinion he hate modern Shinto) but likes animism (*Koshinto*) in an interview (Hayao, 1996).

He seems to be subverting Japan's cultural myth, such as the myth of an idealized ancient Japan living in harmony with nature though the figure of the Emperor, as articulated by *Kokugaku* (国学) (Lucy, 2005). The *Kokugaku*, shows hope that we should follow the imperial throne because it is divine, and it was god who made nature; so if we follow the Emperor, we'll follow nature. I think he doesn't like *Kokugaku's* way to follow nature. In *Nausicaä* we can see some kind of imperial figure in the kingdom of *Tolmekians*. We can understand easily by the film that he denied the way of the *Tolmekians*. And he affirms the way of living of *Nausicaä's* village, which resembles the *Jyoumon Period*.

Also, there're two converse types of aircraft in the film. One is the aircraft used by *Tolmekians'* army, which is industrial type (poisonous energy), and the other used by *Nausicaä*, which takes advantage of wind (clean energy).

In conclusion, through the film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, he wants to portray a way of life where nature and humans coexist in the context of a scientific civilization. That is why we should follow nature as it used to be, like in ancient Japan. Like he said himself in an interview: "The nature is terrible and violent in some cases, so we should be humble to the nature" (Miyazaki, 1996).

References,

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## 5. A Crossing of Boundaries: Deconstructing the Illusion of Opposites

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The seven Days of Fire destroyed the earth. Instead of causing death, a mountain started spreading and animals adapted to the new circumstances. Crossing boundaries like this is something powerful. Everything in life is built out of boundaries and opposites; it's by them that meanings are created. In this movie we find opposites such as man and nature, good and evil, purity and pollution, Japanese and the foreign, old and new and spiritual and unspiritual etc.

Miyazaki is reusing the Japanese cultural history, by for example aiming for the nostalgia of a pure heart, a *magokoro*. A method to reach this is by encouraging a union with other cultures that are foreign to the Japanese society. By making characters that are Japanese based upon the *nihonjinron* and all that it means, and combining it with foreign traits, Miyazaki is changing the view of what it means to be Japanese. This creates transnational human futures. Nausicaä appreciates all things in the world, for that she sees beyond and seeks the *magokoro* in everything. She shows us how to live in harmony with the natural world. She knows the right way to approach to be able to purify, for example by not fighting the Ohmu rage with weapons. To dissolve the boundaries, one must use rituals that are appropriate to the situation. Nausicaä is a purifier embodied and her power lies in crossing borders. Between Nausicaä's home, the valley of the wind, and the jungle, there it lies the lowlands of a sandy desert, where nothing ever grows. It falls between categories, such as the *uchi* and the *soto*, the pure and the impure. The sea of corruption, the toxic jungle, the acid sea and can't live there. The scene in the jungle where Nausicaä and Asbel are pulled down into quicksand turns out the jungle actually is purifying the earth.

Lord Yupa seeks a man in blue that will find the bond between people and nature and lead the people to a pure land, as the legend tells. This can be understood through Miyazaki's beliefs that can be traced back to the ancient form of Shinto, where the continuity between human and nature was primary. Especially his old movies, such as this one, are investigating the mythical connection between man and the natural world. To seek harmony between man and nature, as it used to be. In the ancient times man didn't separate material and spiritual things. The respect for kami shows to be synonymous with man's love for nature, for that kami is described as all beings, no matter what form such as man, bird, or mountain. In these distant times natural phenomena were often given the titles of kami or gods and they sometimes had the ability to speak. This can be explained as a way of combining nature with humanity, how to explain the nature through the human viewpoint. Miyazaki wouldn't describe himself as a believer of Shinto, for what he gives the explanation of that Shinto was meant to bring the country together but instead it created a war between neighbors. *Nagare* is a flow that shows the connection between the divine nature of kami and it's explained as the connection between human and nature, divinity and nature, ancestors and the living and the inner and outer worlds. The pollution in this movie is caused by an interruption of this *nagare*, the flow is stopped because of a war and a separation of the world.

To categorize things like purity of impurity is a way of making sense of the world and it's how we construct the world as a collective that equals culture. What one should keep in mind here is the fact that the world is not black and white. The evil Ohmu saves Nausicaä in the end, for that they have seen her *magokoro* and realized that everything in this world has layers. To seek the *magokoro* in others becomes a way of seeing beyond boundaries and it becomes clear that it's what bonds the opposites that are interesting.

In the ending Nausicaä is stained with blue blood from a hurt Ohmu and is carried on a *field of gold*, which makes her the symbol of the legend that brings peace between all living things. She found the bond between human and the Ohmus, and man and nature are once again reunited, and so is the view one has of others and what one categorizes as impurity. I believe this is Miyazaki's wish, to go back to treating all beings as equals and not draw a difference between what is nature and what is human.

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## 6. On Nature, Human Nature, and the State of Nature

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Whenever we deploy theoretical frameworks or schools of thought in film criticism, we are often in pursuit not just of an analytical make-up that consolidates the plot, tropes, concepts, and assumptions a particular film contains, but also of the latent issues that are often overlooked by the viewers – questions that are usually dispelled in open air due to our sheer fixation with cinematic experience rather than that which is sublime.

For Miyazaki's *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, I'd like to scratch the deeper surface not just of the theoretical foundation that underpin the film but also attempt to answer this single resounding question broadly posed to and yet often neglected by a typical viewer: *What is it in being human that predisposes us to harm nature?* This question is necessarily important in that any form of inquiry on *Nausicaa* boils down to why we do what we do to nature and not on how we do it. Thus, it is only when we engage this fundamental premise of the film that subsequent discussions on it can eventually develop.

That being said, I argue that human nature is intrinsically marked by a chronic tendency to secure as much resources as possible from nature even if it comes at the cost of degrading it. This tendency stems from our enduring appetite to selfishly ensure our own survival in every possible way that humanity can think of – a condition that developed from our fear of relapsing to the brutal, disorderly state of nature that human civilization has already overcome.

Probing into the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, these 17<sup>th</sup> century social contract theorists held the view that the origins of the state, and by extension human civilization, can be traced back to a theoretical device they conceptualized as the “state of nature.” Both of them maintained that before the birth of human civilization, humanity is mired in a society devoid of any political authority maintaining social order and sustaining life. In that state of nature, individuals are abusive, exploitative, and brutish to one another. Also, individuals are devoid of communitarian convictions capable of discerning the inextricable link between humankind and the nature world. This lend itself to the logic that when survival is of primordial concern, the pathological instinct of self-interested human beings is to extract every life-sustaining realm that they can, may it be another individual, forest animals, flora and fauna, and the natural world at large. As a consequence, the state of nature has conditioned human pedigree to instinctively pursue survival and overexploitation, regardless of the means by which they are pursued.

If we deploy this philosophical calculus in the ecological discourse of today, the only difference lies in the economic nuance of “development” in that survival became not the only threshold for exploiting the natural world, but rather as the bare minimum for humanity to pursue development, particularly economic development. The perfect example supporting this is Garret Hardin's “tragedy of the commons.”

According to Hardin's Commons Theory, an ecological “tragedy” arises from a situation in which multiple individuals, acting independently, and solely and rationally consulting their own self-interest, will ultimately deplete a shared limited resource even when it is clear that it is not in anyone's long-term interest for this to happen. Central to his article is a hypothetical and simplified situation based on medieval land tenure in Europe, of herders sharing a common parcel of land, on which they are each entitled to let their cows graze. In Hardin's example, it is in each herder's interest to put the next (and succeeding) cows he acquires onto the land, even if the carrying capacity of the common is exceeded and it is temporarily or permanently damaged for all as a result. The herder receives all of the benefits from an additional cow, while the entire group shares the damage to the common. Thus, if

all herders make this individually self-interested economic decision, the common will be depleted or even destroyed to the detriment of all.

This is where I pull in Miyazaki's *Nausicaa* as a film whose theoretical foundation simultaneously coincides with that of Hobbes, Locke, and Hardin.

The onset of the film settled in after an apocalyptic war destroyed human civilization and the Earth's ecosystem. As a result, not only did the Seven Days of Fire subject humanity to a brutal, unstable, and highly chaotic state of nature, but also conditioned human civilization to pursue survival by any possible means. This is the reason why, time and again, settlers have visited the Toxic Jungle despite its lethal condition.

Meanwhile, as the separate settlements of Pejite, Tolmekia, and the Valley developed, the self-interest of the tribes, particularly Tolmekia, has starkly shifted from mere survival to the total destruction of the jungle – a cinematic trope hinting on humanity's massive desire to control nature, even at the expense of the latter. As a consequence, the Tolmekians' self-interested action of destroying what is common to all the tribes resulted into a tragedy whose implications extend to everyone else.

In all of those occasions, the film has subliminally anchored itself upon recurring notions of a self-interested human nature, a chaotic state of nature, and a horrendous tragedy all factoring-in into the grand equation of how humans behave in relation to nature, in relation to their innate tendencies, and in relation to how their actions towards nature constitute a societal backlash in the long-term. Ultimately, the film forwards the undying message that unless we reconstruct the way we think of and behave towards nature; a harm to the environment will soon backfire as harm to ourselves.

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## 7. Nausicaä and Kushana: Princesses of Symbols

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The film begins by firstly drawing the distinction lines between human civilization and the Sea of Decay, presenting the two as completely different and opposing entities whose relationship is nothing short of volatile. The initial stance depicts humankind as being the victim of nature's atrocities however as the film presses on, both that stance and initial solid division line between the two is gradually blurred.

Fear and empathy of nature are both depicted throughout the film. To contrast this, the protagonist Nausicaa is given an almost doppelgänger opposite in the Tolmekian princess. Though similar in appearances, both individuals have a very different take on the Sea of Decay. While Nausicaa seeks to understand and later respect the Sea of Decay, the Tolmekian princess seeks to destroy it completely. While Nausicaa respects, the Tolmekian princess fears as a result, Nausicaa is able to communicate with the Ohmus and other insects while the latter is virtually helpless.

I refer to a scene where we see a discussion of Nausicaa and Lord Yupa in her secret room. Within, colourful spores grow in abundance but the air is clean. In contrast, the spores shown in the Sea of Decay as well as the village in the opening scene, are poisonous and a pale, sickly, greenish yellow. To a certain degree, this plays out the Japanese concept of 'Idealized Nature' that is Nature that is tamed, controlled and harmless. Otherwise, she is wild, unpredictable and dangerous.

I believe that the Tolmekian princess represents the dominant, destructive but technologically and politically potent aspect of humanity, while Nausicaa represents the harmonious but seemingly not as profitable aspect. This to me is a significant representation of how the battle of Nature versus Humanity is often played out in the real world. Nature is often on the losing end resulting from political and profiteering interests that is seemingly accomplishable only through her destruction. And though powerful, this force is also fearful for 'Nature's wrath'. Hence, they seek to correct the problems but often or not, the remedy relayed is not sufficient to balance out the damage caused. Nausicaa represents the remedial course that is heard yet unheard.

In the representation of nature, Miyazaki has chosen to use the life forms that humans often disregard as being significant to nature, namely insects and microbial spores. In reality, with deforestation and nature destruction, the varieties of species life that are often worst affected are in fact, these very life forms. Thus, through the mere amplification of their size, with little or no alterations to their instinctual behaviour (often moving in groups, calling for help when feeling endangered, etc.), he is bringing an awareness to these otherwise ignored organisms, demonstrating that even an organism as small can bring about a great change in the course of events.

From the beginning, Nausicaa is portrayed as being a 'Special' individual – and later the person of legend would bring humankind into the pure land – that initially for the purpose of healing her father and some of the villages makes it a goal to study the Sea of Decay. As time passes, she realizes that the reason why the spores are poisonous in the Sea of Decay is because the earth they are upon is poisonous. This is when she realizes that humans were the ones who 'created' the Sea of Decay. It seems that Nausicaa is the only one who actually begins to conceptualise as to how and why the Sea of Decay came to be. In other words, humans are at the root of the problems caused by nature. Human intervention is what has led to the current state.

In another scene where Nausicaa and Asbel are sucked via quicksand beneath the Sea of Decay to a vast petrified forest consisting of only bare trees and sand another Japanese concept is introduced. That is the concept of absence. Through the absence of all other life forms and colours, the space becomes beautiful and clean.

The 'purified' forest beneath the Sea of Decay leads Nausicaa to conclude that the Sea of Decay is merely a 'vessel' trying to purify the poisoned earth and is thus not the 'enemy' of humankind. Nature is merely a balancing entity. It strives to ensure the overall survival and livelihood of itself by acting as a purifying agent.

The 'Pure Land' to me is a metaphor referring to having an acute understanding of the workings of the Sea of Decay. The final scene where Nausicaa fulfills the prophecy by running on 'golden fields' in a blue robe, the distinctive growth that we see her attain throughout the film prior to the scene is her increased understanding of the Sea of Decay. As such, she holds the knowledge for humankind to live alongside the Sea of Decay and in doing so help the Sea of Decay to resuscitate a completely pure earth once more.

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## **8. A Reflection on a Nuclear World Order, the Natural Realm and the Spirit of Mankind**

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Humanity has a lot of aspects and it has been the topic of Miyazaki's films for many times. In *Spirited Away*, it was demonstrated as greedy; in *Totoro*, it was care and respect; in *Howl's Moving Castle*, it became courage and love. While in *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, humanity was revealed as arrogance and selfish. In the movie, humans have never thought about communicating and coexisting with the insects. There is hatred between human and insects or even human and human. In a world like that, language is useless, only Nausicaa's spirituality can be the medium among humans, monsters and plants.

In the movie, although Tolmekians got the super weapon, they still can't defeat the insects. It is Nausicaa's braveness and sincerity moves the insects and finally save humans. If the giant insect is the symbol of nature in the movie, we can see that if humans don't respect nature, we will get nature's revenge. No matter how advanced technology we have, compare to nature, we are still weak, small and footy.

This is a parable of the world in 1980s. At that time, Cold War raised a nuclear arms race. Hostility and distrust existed among countries. Once the nuclear weapon was used, there would be a catastrophe for both human and nature. Miyazaki Hayao demonstrated what the world would be like if this had happened in the movie. From boundless desert, strange plants and insects to scary aircrafts, all these horrible images warn us the brutality of the war.

At the end of the movie, Nausicaa comes back to life and turns out to be the mythological figure in blue mentioned in the beginning. From then on people and insects live in peace with each other. I have seen some criticisms about this ending. Some film critics thought it's too ideal and hasty, which could not show the solemn and stirring of the topic. I also think this fabulous ending is a little bit compromising and not assort with the earlier plot. However, it's a revelation of Miyazaki Hayao's concept and hope of how humans and nature can get along with each other.

For Chinese people, nuclear weapons represent the rejuvenation of the country and the development of high technology can make our society more prosperous. However, as the only one in the world who have already experienced the nightmare of nuclear weapons, Japanese people on one hand enjoy the convenience of the advanced technology, on the other hand they worry about the future of the conflict between development and environment. I have read a story of a Japanese astronaut. After returning from the space, he left the busy city and went to countryside to plant trees. He said that when he saw our blue planet from the outer space, he realized what was most important for human beings. In my opinion, this story is quite inspiring as he truly witnessed the insignificance of humanity and the greatness of nature.

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## 9. Interpreting Nausicaä Through the Principle of Gaia

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In the mythology of most cultures in the world, we come across the same concept: Mother Earth. The idea that there is a shared consciousness that inhabits every living thing that surrounds us is an ever-appealing one. The old Greeks called her Gaea, Gaia or Gea, and the ecological Gaia hypothesis or Gaia principle that takes its name from the Greek goddess, has a lot in common with Miyazaki's Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind.

In Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, we encounter a planet that has been all but destroyed by human beings. The biosphere has changed, and new species have developed, such as giant insects and poison emanating trees. This new "nature" is perceived as an enemy by the remaining humans, who have seen how over the past 1000 years, most of the habitable land has been devoured by the "sea of corruption", making life conditions very hard.

Throughout the movie, we see how humans are unable to live with nature, and how they have tried, and try once again, to conquer it. They feel entitled to all that the earth has to give, and have already once managed to almost obliterate it. They are in a sense a keystone species, "a species that has a disproportionate effect on its environment relative to its biomass" (Wikipedia: keystone species).

Nausicaä, a girl with heroine-like qualities, has a different relationship with nature. She is able to see its beauty and complexity, and through scientific exploration, she discovers that the forest is not toxic in itself, but absorbs the toxins humans embedded into the soil, purifying it. The new biota, constituted by the plants in the forest and their protective giant insects, tries to recover earth and make it once again a fit environment for life.

James Lovelock defines Gaia as: "*a complex entity involving the Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet*". In Nausicaä's world, humans are the only ones unaware of this mechanism. She is able to enter the interconnected communication system of the Ohmu, understand the connection that they share with the forest and the earth, and eventually, become a part of that connection herself. She is in charge of changing humanity's view of nature and teach them how to live with it, instead of trying to conquer it. There is something precious and essential in every living thing, and a part of understanding better nature, comes from the understanding that the world can't be divided between black and white, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, since they all form a part of it.

According to the Gaia philosophy, there is a connection between the survivability of a species, and its usefulness to the survival of other species. Here we've become the endangered species. There is no happily ever after, and humanity's survival depends on the path it takes. The story's open ending leaves a message for the audience, making them protagonists too, a story that unfolds in the real world as we speak. It tells us that we are a part of an ecosystem that is striving to fix our mistakes, and that we can do something about it. While raising environmental consciousness among the new generations, it becomes a 'real life' kind of Nausicaä itself.



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## 10. Mankind's Lost Sensibility and the Current State of Disconnectedness

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*Kaze no tani no Naushika* (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind) starts with a scene where a girl makes a venture into a mysterious forest. She always wears her mask on her face because the forest is polluted and she cannot live there for 3 minutes without wearing it. In the end of that scene, she found a beautiful lens from the big insect, which is called Ohmu. The film indicates that nature has both goodness and badness. So, *Kaze no tani no Naushika* shows you the coexistence of humans and nature. Humans sometimes cause damage to nature, and at other times, nature injures humans.

The valley, where Nausicaä lives, is so peaceful toward nature that residents live there using the wind well, such as the wind wheels of a windmill. Their respect to nature also manifests in the way they carefully cultivate their plantations and their care of the forests. They recognize nature as their friend and try to put it to good use. But the idea of the great forest occupying most of their land, generates different emotions. It is a complete evil for them, so they even try to stop their princess from going there. Torumekian armies were crueler: they simply planned to burn down the forest and occupy it. Later, Nausicaä shows her discontent, as she firmly believes that this is the perfect biased idea. When the princess tried to help a boy in the sea of occupation and fell through under the sea with the boy, she witnessed a surprising landscape with her own eyes. The bottom of the polluted forest is a wide space where the air is so clear that they can breathe without their masks. At that point, Nausicaä found the real role of the forest – it is a purifier of the ambient air though it makes it look dirty! Also, the seemingly annoying insects (Ohmu) protect the whole of the “sea of decay” in order to clean their land. She learned that humans can jump to conclusions without seeing the essence of things.

The stupidity of human beings, who consider only themselves, is apparent when we observe their ways and tools. Torumekian armies, for example, planned to completely burn down the forest by using the giant warrior. The warrior itself is not artificial but they scheme to use it in order to bring yet another area under their control. The problem is that the giant warrior is beyond the capacity of human control. It means that he could destroy their own residences and nature, entirely. Nevertheless, they wanted to use it just for winning in war. They can no longer distinguish between what is for humans and not.

Bonus: After the east Japan earthquake and Fukushima nuclear power plant accident in March 2011, Ghibli put up the sign that appears on the picture on the right. It means “We want to make films with electricity that does not come from nuclear plants.” Nuclear power is complete evil for them because they think it causes more harm to humans and nature than it benefits. Their idea of love for nature appears in many scenes of their movies such as *Tonari no totoro* and *Porco Rosso*. But perhaps Nausicaä is the clearest example of that.



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## 11. Wakefulness and Contemplation: Healing Through the Voices of Nature

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There is little doubt that Miyazaki's strong feelings for nature and the environment shine through in his work and especially so in *Nausicaä*. The movie's main plot focuses on the struggle between mankind and nature. Miyazaki himself said the one event that inspired him to write *Nausicaä* was the mercury pollution of Minamata Bay and the following increase of fish stock when people stopped fishing in the bay out of health concerns<sup>13</sup>. The people might have withdrawn, but nature persisted, absorbed the poison and continued on living. In a similar way do the plants in the Sea of Decay absorb the poisons in the earth and survive.

One of several plot twists in the movie is the revelation that "with pure water and soil the plants in the Sea of Decay are not poisonous". The poisons in the soil and water were put there by the humans, who lived before the Seven Days of Fire in a presumably heavily industrialized environment. What is poisoning the people living in *Nausicaä*'s world is ultimately not the plants themselves, but the poison they absorbed from "the ancients".

Another major plot twist is revealed when *Nausicaä* falls down to the very bottom of the forest and finds clean air, water and sand. She realizes that the Sea of Decay is a big purification system and the enormous bugs, and Ohmu in particular, were evolved to protect it. As long as the people struggled and tried to fight nature, nature fought back. *Nausicaä* listened to nature, tried to understand it and ultimately sacrificed herself for the sake of other lives. She respects and sees the value of all life and is rewarded for it by the Ohmu who can see her "sincere heart"<sup>14</sup>.

Both the Torumekians and the Pejites are talking about "restoring the human world". *Nausicaä* and the people in the Valley of the Wind are instead trying to live in harmony with world that is around them. In the end this turns out to be a much more reasonable approach and the only way to actually survive. There is still, however, a distinct line between the human settlements and the Sea of Decay around them. Miyazaki is thus acknowledging that humans and "nature" are slightly separated from each other, even in the most harmonious situations. There is a line between nature and culture (although it might be very thin and fussy) that has existed since mankind first started cultivating crops and thus shaping the landscape around them.

When we care for "the environment" most are motivated by a "care for nature", but when we pollute and otherwise destroy natural environments we are ultimately destroying ourselves; nature will persist. Single species might die off, humans for example, but life will persist. Miyazaki took notice of this when he heard about the Minamata Bay incident and conveys it rather convincingly in *Nausicaä*. This message is even more important today when more and more people are made aware of the possible outcome of global warming, that may or may not be caused by human activity (there is no 100% foolproof way to tell).

To summarize the main message in a few words: Don't fight nature, listen to it. Live and let live. Nature knows best, listen to it.

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<sup>13</sup> Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation: Films, Themes, Artistry*, Stone Bridge Press, Inc., 1999 page 74 from Miyazaki and Callenbach, "Discarding the Future?" *Asahi Journal*, 7 June 1985, reprinted in Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten 1979-96*, Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1997

<sup>14</sup> Lucy Wright, *Forest Spirits, Giant Insects and World Trees: The Nature Vision of Hayao Miyazaki*, *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* Vol. 10, 2005

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## 12. The Purity of Princess Nausicaä: The Idealization of Mankind

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The world to which we are initially introduced in this film seems dominated by a powerful natural force. Immediately, parallels to our own society's relationship with nature are shown: its hazards represented by the harsh environment of the Sea of Decay, its bounties by the discovery and utility of the Ohm Shell, and its consciousness by the enraged (and subsequently placated) Ohm. Indeed, the general structure of Miyazaki's portrayal of nature in Nausicaä is outlined in this first act, and the climactic scenes' conflicts and messages about nature are also foreshadowed in its events.

As a people who take energy from the wind, and resources only as they are given up by nature, those of the Valley of the Wind are generally portrayed as representatives of Miyazaki's ideal of humanity's synergistic existence within nature; Princess Nausicaä being the rarefied embodiment of that ideal, both for the viewer and for her citizens. Within the first act, she demonstrates three facets of her 'ideal' behaviour: empathy (understanding the alarm of the Ohm and of the fox-squirrel); conflict-avoidance (charming and calming the Ohm and fox-squirrel); faith (having patience even when the fox-squirrel bites her). These qualities, and their consequences, as demonstrated throughout the rest of film, will be examined and contrasted with the behaviours of others in each situation.

Princess Nausicaä's empathy is demonstrated continuously, as she consistently treats the creatures of the Sea of Decay as conscious, emotional characters. This can be contrasted to the other humans, who generally regard them as monsters. Other characters are (consequently) usually antagonistic towards nature (not to mention each other), whereas the princess is conflict-avoidant. Due to this depersonalisation of nature, and the simplification of humanity's relationship with it into to a *conflict*, humans generally have no faith in the better nature of the creatures, and of the Sea of Decay itself. Conversely, the princess has discovered the true beneficial role of the Sea, and also realised the reason for Nature's present harshness: *previous human antagonism*.

A good example of these contrasts is the scene after the ship crashes in the Valley. The villagers have found a live insect, and it is extremely distressed, calling for help. They see a dilemma in that killing it would only attract more aggressive insects. The princess shows the dilemma was not created by Nature's antagonistic character, but by the humans' considering of only aggressive strategies. Through empathy, she understands the insect's distress and desires, through conflict-avoidance she draws its anger away from the villagers, and after showing her faith in it, the insect departs toward its home. A similar situation occurs involving the Ohms in the lake, with the downed barge.

The same contrasts can again be noted in the climactic scene: where most characters treat the stampeding Ohms as a tidal wave of destructive monsters, Princess Nausicaä understands their rage; where the others fire upon the Ohms, the princess tries to recover their baby; where the others believe all hope is lost, the princess puts her faith in the good nature of the Ohms, *even when they seem implacable* (foreshadowed by the biting fox-squirrel). After this demonstration of the purity of her character, the Ohms become peaceful, and their power is revealed in a different light, with them healing the princess.

Beyond teaching us his idealised behaviours by simply rewarding the princess' behaviour, while punishing that of others, Miyazaki also makes another clear point: Nature is a mirror, and the benevolence, or antagonism, with which it treats us is directly related to our own behaviours and attitudes towards it. The message here

being that 'conflict with nature' makes as little sense as shooting into the mirror, or the left hand fighting the right.

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### 13. The Jungle in the World of *Nausicaä* as a Symbolic Extension of the Human Body

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Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* is a film about a young heroine working to protect the humble citizens of her valley village. However, the environment in *Nausicaä* – not only how the characters interact with it, but also how it was so whimsically drawn and animated – offers a clear view into Miyazaki's mind and how he views nature. His direction of *Nausicaä* conveys that Miyazaki believes we are far from understanding how to properly interact with nature, and that nature is not a separate entity from that of humans.

"No telling how we'd suffer for even a single insect's death," is spoken early in *Nausicaä*. The wise elders of the Valley of the Wind seem to understand that the environment is not theirs to conquer; that daft notions to kill an annoying insect would result in more pain in the future. In this case, environmental protection is important in the moment, because, biologically speaking, a dead insect can attract more insects to avenge its death. This only requires a small amount of prior experience and knowledge. However, Miyazaki uses this concept to convey that we will suffer for any destruction or disrespect for the environment, on a much more grand scale.

In the Valley of the Wind and surrounding area, fighting decay results in more widespread decay. Humans do not realize that the *Ohms* have mystical and benevolent powers, and instead try to kill them. The humans are trying to rid the planet of the toxic forests, but *Nausicaä* discovers the problem is with the soil, and not with the plants themselves. At every moment in the movie, Miyazaki reiterates that man knows nothing about the environment and is jeopardizing the rest of existence. A child's scab might be itchy, but picking it off does not solve the problem. Another scab will grow in its place. Pick it again. Even the smallest cut can become fatally infected; but what child knows that?

Miyazaki makes several connections between the environment and the human body to paint an even clearer picture. As *Nausicaä* falls through quicksand to discover the pure center of her planet, massive pillars of ancient trees appear to be neuronal networks. She's stumbled the most important and essential place that, like a brain, governs the sustainability and functionality of what is outside. Bugs fly through the air in channels, much like blood cells nourishing every cell of a human body. The world the humans want – bug-free – would likely be as functional as a body without blood cells. When *Nausicaä* recalls a moment from childhood in which she tried to save a baby *Ohm*, the threatening fingers of the villagers wave about, drawn dark, like horrifying tendrils of an attacking insect. Miyazaki's beautifully simple reciprocity explains that humans are the threat they perceive the environment to be. Finally, the humans reach the brink of self-destruction, by foolishly utilizing an ancient warrior that appears to be a malignant tumor.

Miyazaki uses *Nausicaä* as a vehicle to show us that the world around is an extension of ourselves and must be treated as such. If we disrespect our surroundings, the environment will disrespect us back, much like the body attacking a foreign particle. When we nourish our body, it treats us well, just as we benefit from an Earth that we treat with respect. Yet, if we antagonize, the environment will engage an immune response to remove the unwelcome.

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## 14. Miyazaki's Developing Ambivalence Portrayed

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We may realize that *Nausicaa* is undoubtedly the most important film of Miyazaki's, without which the rest of his works cannot be completely understood. *Nausicaa* reveals to us Miyazaki's passions and obsessions, which still exist today. It exposes his predilection and the prototypes that he would come to develop later. But, what makes *Nausicaa* a special movie, this pure energy, this sincerity that Miyazaki expressed in his matter and the portrait of his heroine; incarnation of what humanity can have the most noble. Nature as a theme is introduced through the very Japanese conception of binary rhythms. Uchi/Soto, Tatemaie/Honne; those ideas are based on a conception of the world which is seen to be set on a balance where opposite elements cohabit. Nature is then seen through the wild forest but also through the tamed bonsai...It is in this respect that *Nausicaa* speaks about nature, as the perpetual war for balance and harmony, which is in the movie very fragile, just as it can be felt about our own environment.

Some said that the story announces the arrival of a savior, only to show us that the world does not need to be saved. Some critics were offended by the religious aspects of the story, thinking that the notions were too grand to be believable. The message would be according to them that the environmental crises are better solved by not doing anything.

Miyazaki however never publically proposed solutions to environmental problems. He invites us to an awakening. In the movie, when men fight against the forest, they are likely to prevent the purification of the world and accelerate their own destruction. And their determination and blindness are symbolic systems of mankind which have lost the contact with the roots of their own existence, to the point we believe that we are able to exist without a reliance on nature.

The director himself says that the creation of the *Nausicaa* brought him to think more intensely about the concept of ecology (which I translated from French to English): *"I understand that I cannot explain simply and superficially the relationship between nature and men, or nature in men. However "life" is the way to preserve this "apparent balance" and I can say that it is in our interest as humans to preserve that balance"*.

The whimsical art of the sea of decay is interesting because it is those two things at the same time – whimsical and toxic and binary oppositions

The perpetually changing nature of the planet in *Nausicaa*, being threatening and artificial, but at the same time natural and necessary, goes hand in hand with the ambiguity of the human relationship with the ecosystem. The unpredictable nature emphasizes the interdependence. For Miyazaki, all the forms of life have worth, and men are not outside the chain of the interdependent living beings. He says, *"I will not say that my artistic step is animist or shintoist. But as far as I am Japanese, I regard myself as a biotopist, a follower of the defense of nature and environment, like much of people in Japan. Me, and the biotopists whom I attend, let us consider that if this tree or this fish is at this place, it is necessary to let it live where it is. There is no order to impose on the living beings. We respect nature such as it is, and not such as it should be. We approach the doctrines of Gaïa, "the Nourishing earth", according to which there does not exist difference between alive and it not-alive, Earth and animals."*

It seems to me that Miyazaki exploits these opposing forces, using them as a complex representation of the relationships between men and nature in *Nausicaa*. The relations of men and the natural environment are thus definable in terms of opposition, interdependence and production. The analysis of *Nausicaa* will enable us to see this dynamic perception of the relations between men and ecosystems and

obliges us, since the world has an ever-changing nature based on binary contrasts and oppositions, to end up with the idea of an open ending where the future is unpredictable, where the solutions are not given and where the right path is ours to be taken.

# Chapter 111

## もののけ姫

“Miyazaki’s perception of spirituality is simple,  
it is everywhere; if you have the eyes to see it and  
the strength to feel it.”



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## 1. A Word on Miyazaki's Evolving Worldview as Revealed in Mononokehime

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When we examine Hayao Miyazaki's work, beyond pure entertainment value, we can be confident to find many compelling themes that will likely remain within the viewer. Most significantly, the futility of war, the power of the human spirit, feminism, the ambiguity between good and evil, the importance of Shinto values - which is to say of the kami, nature, purity, family and tradition- and more recurrently, the balance between humanity and the natural order <sup>15</sup>. This last motif, is best represented through *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* and *Mononokehime*, although each with ultimately distinct undertones.

At first glance, we find a fundamental parallelism: in both stories, an ideal of harmony, justice and redemption is personified through the protagonist <sup>16</sup>. According to my interpretation of Princess Mononoke, Ashitaka, by accepting to be a stranger to his own people and embracing his curse (*tatari*) effectively becomes part kami as his 'third eye' fully opens. This is suggested when the creator endows him with superhuman abilities. To illustrate, we can recall the scene where he "fights like one who is possessed" just before meeting Jiko; and when he effortlessly bends Gonza's iron sword. Not all spiritual nor all human, Ashitaka can then move freely between both worlds, assuming his call to act as a mediator between Iron Town's warrior queen and the great spirit of the forest, the *shishigami* <sup>17</sup>.

On the other hand, Princess Mononoke represents the evolution of Miyazaki's ideology when contrasted with Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind. Where Nausicaä triumphs by restoring the harmony between species, Ashitaka fails by not being able to persuade San and the wolves to forgive humans. Nonetheless, even if Ashitaka cannot ultimately "correct the balance of the universe" he manages to conquer his personal demons, perhaps intended as a metaphor aimed at mankind. Observing him accept to suffer his curse "as part of life itself" <sup>18</sup> knowing it will summon his death, and at the same time being able to finally "see with eyes unclouded by hate" is especially telling <sup>19</sup>.

"You cannot alter your fate but you can rise up to meet it," said the Emishi Village's priestess to Ashitaka near the beginning of the film. Miyazaki is trying to speak to a more individualistic and intimate part of the viewer, from a more realistic standpoint <sup>20</sup>. When Jiko says to Ashitaka: "You're under a curse? Well, so what? So is the whole world," the director is insisting on showing that humankind is cursed by a deep misunderstanding of the nonhuman realms -even if not hatred-, so it must suffer continuous struggle and pain. Ultimately, one cannot help but identify such ambivalence expressed through two central figures from the story: the *shishigami*, in

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<sup>15</sup> I would add Miyazaki's cult of flying, probably to illustrate his idea of absolute freedom. Ironically, the film we discuss here is the one -other than (arguably) Ponyo- that does not include any flight scenes.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, I see many parallelisms, not only between both films, but between the characters Ashitaka and Nausicaä themselves. They seemed equally destined to bridge two worlds through incalculable personal sacrifice and a certain sense of 'purpose'.

<sup>17</sup> Here, I consider important to note that the cursed Ashitaka holds further similarities with yet another central character with a foot in both realms: San. She too is an exile to her own kind. The obscurity of the interconnectedness between San's "neither human nor wolf" world (Cavallaro 123) and that of Ashitaka's remains unresolved as reflected in the last conversation between them.

<sup>18</sup> Cavallaro 121.

<sup>19</sup> Although at the end of the movie Ashitaka's physical curse is lifted, he must nevertheless carry San's words of unforgiveness on one hand, and the distrust toward humans as a "thorn" in his heart forever, as Miyazaki himself pointed out.

<sup>20</sup> As opposed to aiming at an outward-focused, communitarian sense of the self from an idealistic view as seen in Nausicaä.

itself the cycle of life, death and rebirth that must prevail; and Lady Eboshi a perfect representation of the intrinsic moral ambiguity of the human condition<sup>21</sup>.

This enigmatic aspect of *Mononokehime* represents, as Susan Napier points out, an important element of ‘de-assurance’ that leaves space for the observer to interpret, something I often perceive and welcome from Miyazaki’s works. Instead of pretending to provide clear-cut answers to the mysteries of life, he only contributes by sparking our ability to engage in critical thought, wherever that leads us.

Furthermore, although the story itself speaks to us in a way that is timeless, Miyazaki did intend to set the plot in the Muromachi period of Japanese history<sup>22</sup>. Although in this case, a mythical and legendary space as reinvented by Miyazaki, including a Jōmon era eastern indigenous tribe that resembles the Ainu (In the film, the Emishi). It’s worth noting that the opening scene seems determined to place the observer, first, in a time long gone by, and second, in an alternate fantastic setting. In any case, Muromachi Japan was characterized by a permanent power struggle between clans, and social uncertainty. The country was not yet unified, so to achieve ultimate victory, the various groups sought to advance in weapons technology and general warfare capabilities<sup>23</sup>. The commercial class was growing and Industrial ambition was in a moment of awakening (clearly embodied by Iron Town and its iron industry), which demanded more territory and resources to support its expansion. People, destroyers of nature and not worshipers of the spirits anymore, having consumed their space, crossed the border to the forest of the kami and took what they wanted by force. Human priorities were at a crisis. There was no connection amongst the clans and now, no connection with nature either.

Particularly, the director’s concern that prompted to draw on a historical context might be identified as the loss of sensibility of the Japanese people (ultimately, as representatives of humankind as a whole) towards the natural order, the spiritual realms and the oneness between us and these (*nagare*), around medieval times. That time marked the shift from a world ruled by the *mononoke* – animal gods- to a world ruled by humans, a world in which people had “changed their value system from gods to money”<sup>24</sup>. Humankind had effectively traded the spirits for the industrial complex as their new God. Thus, it can be interpreted as the point of no-return and definitive loss of Miyazaki’s ideal Japan; a time when the *shishigami* was indeed killed and forgotten.

Moreover, throughout the film, Miyazaki touches –and sometimes dwells– upon different conflicting aspects of human existence, which have great relevance to us. Such as personal and collective identity, multiculturalism, gender roles, social outcasts, oppressed groups and even manages to tell a story of love, however unlikely. These underlying sub-plots might each well deserve a paper on their own, revealing the master storyteller’s depth and sense of purpose. Here, though, we must leave these themes at only a mention.

At the end of the day, the sensation is one of unfulfillment; the expectation is of a continuing war. Equilibrium has not yet been restored, and the message that remains is: it might never be. San bids farewell to Ashitaka saying, “I love you, but I

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<sup>21</sup> A kind, selfless and compassionate savior of the most unfavored, yet a god killer and a destroyer of nature.

<sup>22</sup> Closer to a “thousand yeas into the past” in contrast with the “thousand years into the future” scenography used as setting for Nausicaä. In that sense Miyazaki’s interest might have shifted from an expectation and warning of *where we are heading* to a reflection of *how we got here*.

<sup>23</sup> In yet another relevant metaphor, Ashitaka’s curse that determined everyone’s fate originally came from an iron bullet representing the **inevitable** damage caused to nature by pursuing advancements in industry. We speculate that he suggests a change of approach to acquiring useful technology.

<sup>24</sup> Hayao Miyazaki as quoted by Susan Napier (Anime 237).

cannot forgive humans". As Mark Schilling says in reference to San and the forest gods, "Their long, losing conflict with humans has made them bitter and unforgiving toward their enemies". At least, Miyazaki leaves us with hope; alongside his vision of collapse, he holds a promise for potential betterment. We are left hopeful of discovering reasons to live on, echoing Nausicaä's last words in the manga: "No matter how difficult it is, we must live." Learning to live with pain is still living, after all<sup>25</sup>.

Overall, Mononokehime stands as a flagship of eco-fables and "religious entertainment"<sup>26</sup> in general, for the many powerful moments of awakening it invokes, which ultimately break through to the viewer as 'lessons of virtue' applicable to real, daily life. Watching this masterful epic of legends, gods and magic proves to be an emotionally and intellectually satisfying experience.

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<sup>25</sup> As we can only aspire to articulate this idea as good as the master himself, we leave you with an important quote. As he was delving into the concept for the film –before its release- in 1997, he expressed: "There cannot be a happy ending to the fight between the raging gods and humans. However, even in the middle of hatred and killings, there are things worth living for. A wonderful meeting, or a beautiful thing can exist. **We depict hatred, but it is to depict that there are more important things. We depict a curse, to depict the joy of liberation.**"

<sup>26</sup> See the concept of *Shûkyô Asobi*.

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## 2. The Materialization of Miyazaki's Influences: A Consideration of the Notions that Surround Modern Japanese National Identity

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*Princess Mononoke* is different from Miyazaki's other works. Usually, he makes films aimed at children, which –he hopes– will help them have a good childhood. Therefore, his films are optimistic even if they touch upon serious issues. But the characters and story of *Mononoke* have a tragic feel. It is known that Miyazaki would sometimes have discussions about the Japanese nation, its culture, and history with his friends Ryotaro Shiba (1923-1996), one of the most popular novelists in Japan, and Yoshie Hotta (1918-1998). Shiba, Hotta and Miyazaki were not optimistic about the future of Japan. *Princess Mononoke* is the materialization of such considerations.

In the Ghibli Museum DVD, we can see Miyazaki saying: “I dislike Japan”. Opinion that resulted from the role that Japan played during World War II, when it caused injury to East and South East Asian countries. But he obviously loves the *true* Japan. As Isao Takahata wrote in *Shuppatsu* (Miyazaki's book<sup>27</sup>), the things that Miyazaki criticizes are not always the things he hates. These two opposing tendencies are manifested through *Princess Mononoke*.

Miyazaki's, Shiba's, and Hotta's central concern at their round table, was how Japanese people should live their lives. Such debates and the ideas there arisen, served as the basis for the film. Miyazaki's conflicting views on Japan were expressed in *Mononokehime*, but also –at least for a moment– dissolved, by presenting an alternative perspective of Japanese history and culture; creative exercise in which he felt right at home. Miyazaki built upon Yoshihiko Amino's historical theory and Sasuke Nakao's East Asian evergreen forest culture theory to develop his views. A good example of an orthodox view on Japanese history and culture can be seen in the portrayal of peasants and samurai, in *Seven Samurai* by Akira Kurosawa (But Miyazaki respects Kurosawa and has expressed love and admiration for *Seven Samurai*).

Traditional views on Japanese history are somewhat simplistic. Only dominated by cliché elements, such as rice planting, hard-working peasants and samurai who rule the rest through force. But Amino attempted to remind the general public that it was in fact many kinds of people that wandered through the land: art performers (Kugutsu 傀儡), religious people (traveling priests and nuns) and industrial technicians. All had an important role during medieval Japan. And women too! They worked in many occupations and were largely independent, according to this view. They defined themselves as people of Tenno, and so, were free from taxing. But they were dispersed and segregated with the expansion of the feudal system, especially during the early Edo period. Evidently, Miyazaki tried to reconstruct Japanese history based on Amino's theory. A history with rich cultural elements usually not found in mainstream accounts.

As for Nakao's cultural theory, he argued that evergreen forests flourished from Bhutan, Southeast Asia and South China to West Japan, and that explains why the people from this micro-region ('evergreen zone') share some common cultural elements, like cake of barnyard grass, millet and rice (Mochi), the planting of tea and perilla, sticky foods such as Natto, alcohols from koji (rice, wheat or soybean with a degree of mold), sericulture and lacquerware like Ashitaka's red bowl. Additionally, the traditional clothes worn by the Emishi people in *Princess Mononoke* remind us of

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<sup>27</sup> “*Shuppatsu Ten* is a book that does not tell very much on how to make animation, but instead it shows Miyazaki's philosophy, method of thinking, mentality and history very well”. Taken from online source by editor Recinos on Oct. 2012. Read more at: [http://www.ghibliworld.com/shuppatsu\\_ten\\_nick\\_mamatas\\_interview.html](http://www.ghibliworld.com/shuppatsu_ten_nick_mamatas_interview.html)

a traditional dress in Buhtan. Within the evergreen zone, the theory adds, even if people cut down forests, the trees will grow again relatively soon, because of the warm climate and heavy rainfall. Therefore, we can make a connection between such an idea and Eboshi's tatara: the forests needed to fuel their industry exist in West Japan, an evergreen zone.

But Nakao's theory is based on a different culture, separate from Jomon or Yayoi. This theory doesn't contain the same references as those Japanese ancient cultures. We should be careful in observing that evergreen forests exist only in West Japan yet the Emishi people live on the east. However, Miyazaki combined Emishi people (descendants of Jomon) with evergreen culture. Miyazaki made a statement: that he could break away from the conventional framework of (Japanese) nation, culture and history with this theory. He expressed through the film, that Japanese culture is not closed and contains common elements with several foreign territories. In that sense, the historical and cultural background of *Princess Mononoke* is different from any other Japanese film.

Furthermore, two of the main characters, Eboshi and Ashitaka represent three different type of relations of historical significance. (1) Anti-politic: Ashitaka is Emishi people. Supposedly, they were descendants of the Jomon people and were opposed to the Yamato Court of Tenno from the Kofun to the Heian era. Eboshi belongs to industrial technicians who were opposed to feudal lords. They share the role of opposition in politics. (2) Relationship with Tenno: Ashitaka and Emishi were opposed to Tenno. Eboshi and industrialists were preserved by Tenno. (3) Industrialization and nature: The Emishi were hunter-gatherers, and they lived from products of nature. Conversely, Eboshi destroys forests to make iron. Miyazaki ably portrayed two opposing forces in their relationship: sharing a common trait (both opposition in political sense) and conflicting aspects (Emperor, nature and industrialization).

Another main character, San, is human but was raised by wolves. She is closer to nature than Ashitaka. In this film nature is symbolized through Shishi-gami, who is a Kami of evergreen forest, like Totoro and the Ohmu. Miyazaki is not interested in religious issues, but has sympathy for animism. Takeshi Umehara, philosopher, expressed that Shinto has a double structure. The base is animism from the Jomon culture and the upper layer refers to the Kami and myth and comes from Yayoi culture. Thus, Kami of Shinto came from forest (Jomon) and moved to rice field (Yayoi), then returned to forest. Shishi-gami is the symbol of two aspects, evergreen forest culture and Jomon culture. In that light, San while being human has the ability to see like the Shishi-gami.

In Japanese society egos are contained, because of rice planting history. Agricultural activities need organized people willing to cooperate with each other. Additionally, the Japanese have a polytheistic faith, by way of Shinto and Buddhism. Ego doesn't develop in polytheism, because there are no notions of "absolute" and "confrontation". They tend to think instead in terms of "relative" and "harmonious". If we interpret ego in Japanese myth and folklore through Western theories like psychoanalysis, the findings will be misleading. Western is based on different notions, which makes it inadequate to analyze other cultures, including Japanese. Hayao Kawai used Jungian psychoanalysis, as it is more familiar to Japanese personality and culture than Freudian psychoanalysis. Because Freudian is based on Jewish culture and includes the concept of "absolute" and Jungian has elements of Gnosticism and his theory of "archetype" has plural images. It's more adaptable to Japanese polytheism and sense of "relative".

Western myth and folklore tend to have stories of human vs. human or vs. nature, which emphasize egos. The Japanese idea of ego is presented as adapting with (or in other words, harmonizing with) others and the natural world. But Japan

experienced industrialization and westernization from the Meiji Revolution. Japanese minds were influenced by the change. They incorporated ego into their new identity. Kenji Miyazawa whom Miyazaki loves was a novelist of fairy tales, represented the concern of modern Japanese with ego, like so many other Japanese literature has done. His stories are not only fairy tale but also modern folklore for the Japanese. Ashitaka, San, and Eboshi have egos yet are very identifiable with Japanese culture and history. Miyazaki created modern folklore, not merely succeeding Miyazawa, but also enriching historical and cultural views influenced by Amino and Nakao. Perhaps the master attempted to establish a new Japanese identity with *Princess Mononoke* inspired by his long talks with Shiba and Hotta.

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### 3. The Medium is the Message: Weaving the Historical Fabric Through Fantasy

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In recent decades, there has been a renewed interest on the unconventional modes of pursuing historical scholarship. Issues on whether historians are the sole custodians of our collective past exploded out of the dry confines of academic shelves and emerged to be the central axis of debates between the realist and the postmodernist schools of thought – a broad contention that up to now provokes intense discussion within cultural and media studies.

Emboldened by the rise of deconstructionism and discourse analysis, the postmodernists, particularly filmmakers, contend that all works of art, not just monographs and documented syntheses, can serve as vehicles of historical representations. In contrast, realists hold the view that screen histories are no more than highly dramatized fictions that used the past as “stage set” for romance and adventure. As such, realists maintain that although films could convey symbolic truths, they are merely bastardized renditions of history, and hence are of no utility apart from profit making.

While the thrusts of both sides seem to be diametrically opposed, a closer look at the debate reveals that both argumentative lines took off from a common ground: that history can be represented in a variety of media; it is just a matter of how one medium effectively frames and reframes the past over the other. This lends itself to the idea that the form of a message determines the ways in which that message will be perceived – something that will have far-reaching sociological, and philosophical consequences, to the point of actually altering the ways in which we experience the world. In the words of Marshall McLuhan, “the medium is the message.”

In *Confronting Master Narratives: History as Vision in Miyazaki Hayao's Cinema of Deassurance*, Susan Napier examines how Miyazaki's films offer an alternative way of writing history and creating the Japanese identity. She looks into *Totoro*, *Nausicaa*, and *Princess Mononoke*, among others, to illustrate how Miyazaki has subtly blurred the distinction between the Japanese self and the foreign other. By tracing Miyazaki's visual and thematic motifs in each of those movies, Napier eventually lands on the logic that the director's films create a representation of reality that is recognizable yet familiar. In particular, the article maintains that “the Japanese audience is increasingly becoming comfortable with more varied and wide-ranging identities, not only in the world of fantasy, but also within Japan's history itself.”

This is where I attempt to create a logical extension of Napier's analysis by posing two important questions: One, how do fantasies reframe the historical fabric of our collective past? Two, why even make use of them? By tracing the intersection of media studies, film criticism, and sociological imagination, I argue that fantasy can serve as a powerful vehicle of historical revisionism by interrogating hegemonic narratives of the past and challenging conventional ways of framing it. Hence, fantasy doesn't just subvert traditional conceptions of history, but rather confronts the systemic domination of one historiography over the other.

On a deeper level, this paper also contends that the utility of fantasy stems from its ability to broaden the audience's speculative cognition of a “knowable community,” not just on its visual intricacy and moral grace as what Napier has argued.

In his major work *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci, drew attention to the ascendancy or domination of one element of the system over others, otherwise termed as “hegemony.” According to him, hegemony operates through the dissemination of bourgeois values and beliefs throughout society. It is based upon

Marx's concept of ideology, which acknowledges that the ruling class is not only the ruling material force in society, but is also its ruling intellectual force. Thus, hegemony implies two things: one, that ideas, values, and narratives, are class-specific in the sense that they reflect the distinctive social existence of each class, and two, that the ideas of the ruling class enjoy a decisive advantage over those of the classes, thereby becoming the "ruling ideas of the age." As a by-product, the historical narrative produced by the ruling class stands as representative of a nation's entire history, even at the expense of those who were subjugated to the societal periphery.

Japan's history, for instance, is considerably "top-down" in nature in that the collective past has been largely about the narratives, values, and ideas of the imperial family, the courts, the warrior aristocracy, and the feudal class. Rare are those instances when one would encounter stories about the proletariat's revolution as opposed to the grandiose tales of the samurais and political dynasties. As a consequence, the grassroots narrative of the labor class and the oppressed sectors (i.e. women and farmers) are ideologically stifled, if not totally devalued in the nation's hegemonic history.

What *Mononoke*'s fantasy does, however, is visually engage those ruling ideas and cast a compelling shadow of doubt on hegemonic narratives of the past. It capitalizes on what is already known, and then reframes it with that which is familiar and yet unknown. Moreover, it challenges the deep-seated conceptions of our history and pushes its boundaries to include those who were sidetracked when "history" was still being woven. It brings us back to the Muromachi Period (Dawn of the Iron Age) when Japan was marked by cultural dissonance, *kamigamis* and humans battling each other, and women rather than samurais spearheading protracted revolutions. As a result, the film erodes the ruling ideas that have long woven Japan's history by going into the marginalized stories that never went into substantial historiography.

But the theoretical and visual influence of fantasy doesn't stop there. Whereas historians utilize monographs and archival documents in collecting and interpreting historical facts, filmmakers are left with the potent medium of cinematic corpus to propel their own portrayal of reality. The filmmakers are therefore able to expand the speculative space of a "knowable community" the audience may subliminally know, but is just uncertain of it because it deviates from hegemonic conceptions of history.

The Emishi Tribe, for example, is an empirically verified group of people that thrived in pre-imperial Japan but has never gone down into the nation's dominant historical fabric. But since *Mononoke* has brought this tribe into cinematic life, the audience is bound to speculate on the veracity of its existence. This ultimately shows that the medium that is fantasy is as powerful as the message of the cinematic fantasy itself. While including the marginals to the master narrative already constitutes a message, *Mononoke*'s effective reframing of Japan's past would not have materialized had it not been for the fantasy medium.



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#### 4. Japanese Contemporary Identity Paradoxes Mirrored in the Conflicting Aspects Between Mythology and History

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*Mononokehime* stands out from the rest of Hayao Miyazaki's films because of its unique blend of history and mythology. As seen by the presence of samurai and the introduction of guns, the film was set in a particular period of Japanese history wherein the people were undergoing a transition or advancement from an agricultural sort of living to an industrial one. However, the film's story is not just based on the historical setting of the film. An element of fantasy makes its way into the movie through the appearance of kami and the characters' belief in folktales. Because Japanese history and Japanese mythology were both used in the film, it is easy to say that *Mononokehime* is a film that showcases the different characteristics of Japanese identity.

However, the characters that personify history and mythology are not shown to be living harmoniously together as one might think characteristics of a national identity should. In *Mononokehime*, the representatives of history and mythology are pitted against each other, as humans and kami fight each other for control of the forest. Miyazaki has cleverly used something unreal (mythology) against something factual (history) to reveal underlying problems within the Japanese society. The conflict between history and mythology could represent the conflicting ideas of Japanese identity. Although set in a much older period of history, the film raises contemporary issues about Japanese society, particularly whether the way the Japanese are identified is still how they portray themselves to be or want to be portrayed. Are the Japanese still a people who respect nature and the spirits that dwell in it or are they a nation more devoted to the advancement of technology and their civilization?

Unlike most of its Western counterparts that end its films with a resolution to the story's prevailing problem, *Mononokehime* ends on an ambiguous note. Mononoke and Ashitaka, although clearly attracted to each other, have decided to live apart. Ashitaka stays with the humans to help them rebuild Tatara. Mononoke, on the other hand, continues to live with her wolf siblings because she still cannot forgive what the humans have done. Yet, the two promise to see each other from time to time. The question of whether humans and kami or nature and innovation can exist harmoniously within the film's setting is not answered. This type of ending may seem to deprive the film's audience with any type of closure but this may have been done on purpose. A film without a satisfying ending will hopefully push the viewer to find the ending on his or her own. Therefore, *Mononokehime* is not a film that represents Japanese identity. Rather, it is a question on what it really means to be Japanese.

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## 5. The Legend of Princess Mononoke

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Mononoke Hime, unlike most of Miyazaki's movies, has a concrete historical setting, the Muromachi period in Japan. Historically, this was a time filled with change, where many of today's Japanese traditions were born. It was also a magical era, when the Kamis ruled the forests and people and nature were much closer, and so, by choosing it as the background for his movie, Miyazaki's story and history get tangled up in the audience's mind.

One of the main characters of the movie, Ashitaka, is the prince of a long ago extinct race called Emishi. To protect his people, he is forced to fight a demon, and even though he succeeded, he is cursed. He then embarks in a Journey that has a lot in common with Joseph Campbell's monomyth or hero's journey, a pattern found in classic myths from many countries. In his journey, he sees different sides of humanity, and once again, Miyazaki shows us that there is no right and wrong, good and evil. We see the different ways human beings strive to survive, and how in their path towards a better life, their conflict with nature worsens.

According to Wikipedia, a legend is "a narrative of human actions that are perceived both by teller and listeners to take place within human history and to possess certain qualities that give the tale verisimilitude. Legend, for its active and passive participants includes no happenings that are outside the realm of "possibility", defined by a highly flexible set of parameters, [...], within the specific tradition of indoctrination where the legend arises [...]."

Miyazaki uses Japanese folklore as a foundation that allows the supernatural to become a part of a believable story, thanks to Japanese Shinto. Miyazaki's Kamis have certain human characteristics, but retain their animal ferocity. They are just as complex as the rest of the characters, and in their imperfect personalities, they resemble Greek gods. Miyazaki's Kamis somehow protected the equilibrium between humans and their impact on nature. They were intelligent beings, and their presence, together with a strong forest, made the rest of the animals smarter too. Humans were forced to live within their delimited space, and coexist with this nature that wasn't weaker than themselves. Once humans acquire the power of firearms, this equilibrium weakens, and the Kamis fight a lost battle.

During the Muromachi period, Europeans arrived to Japan, and with them they brought their firearms and introduced bits and pieces of their culture. As a consequence, provincial wars became more deadly, and serious political changes occurred. Somehow and to some degree, in the movie this foreign influence becomes responsible for the lost of the precious equilibrium with nature. The foreign introduced guns kill the Japanese Kamis, by the hand of no other than the Japanese themselves! In the movie's climax the Shishigami's death can be interpreted as his sacrifice for the people, and it could be considered deicide, because there is cycle of death and rebirth. The Shishigami's new existence is a much more passive one, he is no longer flesh and bone, but he is still present in nature, yet since he is no longer seen, the people eventually forgot him.

Miyazaki may change the viewers' perception of a historical past, supporting itself in the beliefs of the people and incorporating these elements of existing folklore into its tale, yet modifying them so that they suit his message. According to Timothy R. Tangherlini, "Legend, typically, is a short (mono-) episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified, historicized narrative performed in a conversational mode, reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs." Miyazaki's Mononoke Hime could be considered a "new" legend itself. A legend that has certain classic Japanese values, and a new type of

values, too. It incorporates strong classically marginal characters, and has a strong environmental message. It doesn't provide a happy ending, or a solution to the dilemma. Just as in *Nausicaa*, he leaves to the audience the responsibility of shaping their own future. For the young audiences, this story can be as true, or even more believable than traditional legends.

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## 6. Princess Mononoke's Structure as Defined by Claude Lévi Strauss's Idea of Binary Oppositions

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In Claude Lévi-Strauss' theories myths consist of *binary oppositions*. The stories revolve around binary oppositions since that are what humans need to understand their world. We can't understand for example "dirty" unless we can compare it with the notion of "clean". In the myths, the story always begins with making the oppositions clear and then progress towards the resolution.

In *Princess Mononoke*, I believe Miyazaki is using binary oppositions to tell his story, just like in the old myths. The story revolves around the black and white oppositions, but also around the grey space in between. To me, it feels like Miyazaki is playing with different kinds of oppositions. That he is twisting and turning them all through the film, to make the audience think. Humans *need* the oppositions to understand the world, yet the fact is that most of the world isn't either black or white. I think this is partially what Miyazaki wants to tell us in this story and there is a cue in the beginning of the film that inclines that. In the beginning Ashitaka is told by the old lady to see "with eyes unclouded". He is asked to not see everything as black and white, to not judge situations too fast, and that is where the story begins. In this text I want to discuss some of the binary oppositions I have found in the film.

One of the most important opposition in *Princess Mononoke* is nature-culture, or nature-man. The whole story is basically based on this opposition. The war is between the humans and the gods, between culture and nature. When Ashitaka first arrives to the land where the story takes place, he meets the vast forests, which look green, fresh and calm. Walking into these old forests with the wounded men, one of the men says "this road will lead us to the other world", marking how they leave the world of men and culture and enter the realm of the gods and nature. Later when Ashitaka arrives at the city the difference from the butterfly-filled calmness of the forest pond seconds before is obvious. In the first scene where we see the Iron Town it looks brown (dirty?), smokes reek from the houses and a lot of noises come from there. We are clearly shown the binary opposition of the calm, green nature and the noisy, brown city. To draw the sharp line in between these two oppositions, the Iron Town is surrounded by strong barriers, spiked stakes and high walls, to shield out the nature, keeping nature and culture distinctly separated.

Just like in the old myths, the story begins with giving awareness of the two oppositions. Then Miyazaki starts to play with them, blurring them, as we progress towards the resolution. One of the elements that stands in between the oppositions and mediate between them is Princess Mononoke. Having been raised by wolves, she often acts like a wolf. The way she runs doesn't seem human like and the way she reacts to Ashitaka's curse (in the scene when she fights Lady Eboshi) is an animal reaction. She does a lot of things that makes us connect her to the world of the animals and the nature, such as sucking out blood from her wolf mother's wound with her mouth and feeding Ashitaka from her mouth with food she has chewed for him. Still, Princess Mononoke is a human being. She looks human, she talks and she sometimes understand the other humans' feelings. Princess Mononoke stands in the grey space between nature and culture, which both shows us the oppositions and shows that even though we use them for organizing the world, everything isn't fixed into these two categories.

Ashitaka is also a mediator between these two oppositions for two reasons. The first obvious one is because he tries to make both sides reconcile with one another. But also, because of his curse, he sometimes moves from the human/culture side towards the animal/nature. The curse gives him inhuman powers, but it also sometimes makes him lose control. Another "in-between"-character is the Shishigami. Even though seemingly being from the world of nature, its eyes look

very human who makes one think that maybe it thinks like a human (since eyes are the mirror of the soul). A final example of a component which stands in between nature and culture is when the hunters disguise themselves in boar's hide. It is slightly difficult for the mind to deal with them, because they look like wild boars but act differently, creating a creepy effect. With this example we can see that being in between two opposites isn't always a pleasant thing.

The hunters in boar's hide are also in between the second binary opposition I want to bring up, the opposition of life and death. The most obvious way in which this opposition is shown is within one character, which therefore also makes it mediator. It is the Shishigami. The Shishigami has the power to both give and take life, which is clearly shown when it walks because then flowers erupt around its feet and then immediately wither. The Shishigami's pond is also an actual grey space in between. At first sight it looks so full of pure life, but when Princess Mononoke goes into the water you realize that the whole area is actually full of bones. The pond is also the place where life is given back to Ashitaka after the gun shot, but taken away from Okkoto, the leader of the boar gods.

Another scene I want to mention is when the Shishigami is decapitated by Lady Eboshi. The first time the Shishigami is shot it momentarily seems to lose power before it moves on as if nothing had happened. It is then being a true mediator between the opposition life and death as something in between the two. In one way this is because since the Shishigami in that moment seemingly can't die it can obviously not belong to the death side of the opposition. But also because it can't die it can't really fully belong to the life side of the binary either, since life is the opposite of death. Because of the opposition, one who can't die can't truly live either. Later on in the decapitation scene, when Lady Eboshi is aiming for the Shishigami for the second time, flowers start to grow on the weapon she is holding. The weapon is a symbol of death and to see life sprouting out from it is a mediating image. Finally, when the Shishigami is decapitated, it moves from the position of holding the powers of both sides of the binary to just represent death. In that moment, the very touching of the Shishigami results in death. Then in the end when the Shishigami is given back its head, life immediately starts to bud again. This is an example which shows how the oppositions are twisted back and forth with during the film. The fact that you don't really know for sure if the Shishigami in the end is dead or still alive is a result of the mediating process between life and death throughout the film. The audience is left in the grey space in between the two oppositions.

Other binary oppositions used in the film are pure-impure, stranger-citizen/friend, woman-man, strong-weak and good-bad. Each one of them deserves one or two paragraphs to be fully discussed. A few examples of the other oppositions though are the curse being mentioned as the "stench of death" (impure) and also the big question in the film of who is actually good and who is actually bad. Among other things, this question concerns Lady Eboshi who wants to destroy all the forest, but sincerely cares for the citizens of the Iron Town.

Finally I want to discuss the very fact that humans tend to organize the surrounding world into binary oppositions. Humans do it to be able to think about the world, because it is easier to think in categories than to perceive the whole world just as it is. Still Miyazaki is blurring the oppositions, making us think in grey and not only in black and white. The film is about the war between the gods and humans, but as a mediator Ashitaka asks "Can't the forest and the Iron Town live together?" The answer he gets from the monk Jigo is "Whose side is he really on?" This shows that it isn't always easy to see "with eyes unclouded". The human mind works in the way of categorizing the world into black and white. Therefore, when watching the film it is easy to find oneself trying to grasp who is good and who is bad, with the question "who do I want to support in this war?" As said though, what I think Miyazaki aims to

do is try to make the audience, just like Ashitaka, see “with eyes unclouded” and to distance ourselves from the urge to categorize. We need to realize that the categories really are just in our minds and not out there in the actual world.

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## 7. Richness of Symbols Through Words and Imagery and the Current State of Mankind

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**How is nature represented in the film? How would you characterize man's relationship with nature in the film? What parallels can you draw between this fictional representation and reality?**

Nature's representation in the film is both rich and complex. Firstly, nature is illustrated as the ancient realm of the *kami*; grand, mystical, beautiful and mysterious as depicted by the mist and the majestic mountain ranges at the start of the film. As Ashitaka explores the forest, this was illustrated in the flowing water, towering trees and dancing butterflies. Nature is also shown to have a playful, peaceful side in the form of the *kodama*, little rattling spirits born from the larger, older trees. Yet, it is also shown that nature has its malevolent side, where the wild animals are hostile toward all men and do war with them. At the same time, nature is also shown to be both a provider/sustainer of life; a huge amount of mined iron and wood was used by the Ironworks to sustain their livelihood. Yet nature is also shown to be the harbinger of death, personified in the *shishigami* and amplified in its headless state as it ravaged the land in pursuit of its head. In many ways, this ambivalence characterizes the portrayal of nature throughout the film and some amount of tension is present, skillfully illustrated by the director as two sides of the same coin.

Secondly, nature is also depicted as being synonymous with the spirit world. This is shown in the presence of the *kodama*, the use of the word *kami* to describe the superhuman animals that inhabit the forest (which can have a plethora of meanings other than god) and the references to spirit related vocabulary like *mononoke*, *bakemono* and *oni* in encounters with phenomena related to the creatures encountered in the forest. The most telling symbol is the *shishigami*, whose material form is that of an animal, more specifically a deer with a human face (*shishi* is the ancient word for wild creatures in general). It had the power of life and death over all forest and *shishi*. This synonymous treatment renders the *kami* and nature almost as one entity, and the power of giving and taking life is impressed upon nature as a whole as well.

The relationship between man and nature is also metaphorically and symbolically alluded to in the film. Again, the sound word *shishi* is used for 2 separate meanings in the ancient Japanese usage, one meaning (philosophical) teacher/master (used by the monk) and the other wild creature, both the deer and the boar, perhaps hinting that nature is man's teacher/master and man and wild animals alike are creatures of nature.

Next, the same word for curse describes the demonic "hex" on Ashitaka's right hand and the land itself (state of mankind). Just as mankind is at war with nature and with itself, the wild creatures are also at war with mankind and plagued with unrest within their own kind. The iron village humans deforest the realm of the first boar *kami* Nago and slaughtered his tribe, and in turn his wrath and agony plagues Ashitaka's right hand to exact vengeance upon other humans in a complete cycle of manifestation of evil. In some ways this creates a perceived connection between man and nature, which both "realms" are but a parallel reflection of each other's true condition.

Symbolically, our dear protagonists also both have an ambivalent side to them just as nature does – Ashitaka does not draw a boundary between himself and the *shishi*, and has a sixth sense for nature while San in many ways unbeknownst to her acts like a human being. Both having complimentary sexes as well as the cementing of their friendship at the end of the film further enhances this sense of connection

between the two sides. Is Miyazaki trying to say that man and nature are in fact one but they do not realize so? Is that why the *shishigami* was presented as having a deer's body but a human face? Unfortunately he stops short of any concrete conclusion.

Some of the parallels between the film and reality are really interesting. Humans are portrayed as being scheming and conniving (including their revered *mikado* (emperor)!); colluding yet betraying everyone at the same time – a portrayal consistent with the *sengoku* period of Japan set in the film, also known as the “great age of turncoats”. In contrast, nature is described as having purity of motive, in a sense their hatred for humans is “pure” and unbending, and the will to battle head-on comes without any hesitation or fear. This quality ascribed to nature is also surprisingly popularly attributed to the image of the ideal samurai, such as those in writings by Hojo Soun<sup>28</sup> and Inazo Nitobe<sup>29</sup>. This does show that there is an influx of ideas historically from impressions of nature into the philosophical ideal of man and from the experiences of men into the idealized impression of nature.

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<sup>28</sup> Steenstrup, C. “Hojo Soun's Twenty-One Articles. The Code of Conduct of the Odawara Hojo”, *Monumenta Nipponica* 29, No. 3 (1974), pp. 283-303.

<sup>29</sup> Cameron Hurst, G. III, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal”, *Philosophy East and West* 40, No. 4 (1990), pp. 511-527.



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## 8. On the Importance of Nature and Love

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As *Nausicaa*, *Totoro*, and *Pom Poko*, *Mononoke-hime* explores the relationship between people and nature. The director has managed to avoid all the demagogic simplification that could occur in this theme. It does not show us ordinary villains abusing nature or a welcoming, simple and kind hero that would save everyone. *Mononoke-hime* is not a film about a basic ecological message. It simply introduces two sides and their motivations. Through an allegorical narrative full of symbols, the author invites us to an awakening. He shows us how men, through their "emancipation", may exclude an essential dimension of their own existence.

There has rarely been such a strong representation of nature in a movie. It is displayed in its entire splendor, its mystery, but also experienced through cruelty when it is shown as threatened. Except *shishigami*, the gods are represented with hostility as they feel assaulted. The nature is in rebellion against men, for whom the only goal has become conquest and destruction, where previously existed respect and fear of the natural elements. In *Mononoke-hime*, nature is the display of an awesome power, but it has experienced gradual decrease as humanity has emancipated. Thus, the gods themselves have been experiencing decrease in size and intelligence over the generations, some losing the ability to speak. Gradually, as the film progresses, one feels how desperate and lost the battle is for nature, especially as the God of the forest remains outside the conflict.

His behavior could be misunderstood and considered as indifference; in fact it conceals some intentions totally alien to human way of thinking. The *shishigami* is more than just divine. He is the incarnation of natural balance. He gives life and death at will, without any judgment or moral value taken into consideration. The attack by Lady Eboshi breaks the balance and leads to a destructive fury, which nothing and no one can stop. This apocalyptic scene where the forest dies, where *kodamas* fall by the thousands and where the decapitated body of *shishigami* is growing immensely, absorbing all life on contact, is truly nightmarish. Like a bad dream, the scene seems unreal and dreadful. But when it ends and when San and Ashitaka wake up, the world has changed forever.

Humanity is another important theme of *Mononoke-hime*. It expresses itself through various sub-themes developed throughout the movie. Love is one of them, but instead of sinking into a trifle romantic history between San and Ashitaka, it in fact symbolizes the necessary and possible alliance between men and nature. Even if it may seem frustrating in its denouement, it reflects the relations between the natural, wild and the cultural, tamed, between attraction and repulsion. Moreover, the conclusion makes that unusual relationship surprisingly beautiful. Ashitaka and San's relationship, as they separate, should not be seen as fatalism, but as the best form of respect for the one's choices. They do not belong to the same world and have different beliefs, but yet they have managed to open each other's hearts. After what they have seen and what they have experienced, they are no longer naive enough to ask for guarantees or promises of an eternal love.

Another example of great affection and love that illuminates the film is the one that is dedicated by San to her mother, the wolf Moro. Although San has never been and never will be a real wolf, Moro loves her like her own daughter. And the evidence of this love takes various forms: Moro will even offer San to leave her in order to spend her life with the Ashitaka. Later, when she had gathered the last of her strength to kill Lady Eboshi, Moro sacrificed herself to pull San from the tentacles of Okkotonushi.

Finally, one cannot help but admire the compassion that Lady Eboshi feels for people rejected by the Japanese feudal system. She has treated lepers herself,

welcomed young women from prostitution and modest farmers, and she gave them dignity and a reason to fight. In her quest for a utopian society where her protégés can live in prosperity and security, she demonstrates real love and compassion.

In *Mononoke-hime*, although the battle between man and nature takes a supernatural aspect, it remains deeply human because it is the site for numerous conflicting loves. Helping the viewer to experience such a monumental tragedy, deep human feelings, collective destiny and moments of intimacy, is one of the greatest achievements of Hayao Miyazaki.

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## 9. The Many Myths of Mononoke-hime Revealed

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The most successful production of Studio Ghibli, *Princess Mononoke*, is quite similar to *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Some common characteristics are found in both movies; conflict of the split world as its main axis of narration, woman protagonist, fight and war between human and nature, also in between people, a forest which symbolizes a pure nature, an antiwar idea, Shinto, and so on. Of course the backgrounds and detailed characters of protagonists are different, and also vivid and extreme war scenes are distinct in *Princess Mononoke*, but the message which Miyazaki Hayao tried to convey is somewhat consistent: the question of symbiosis and conflict between human and nature.

*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* takes its background as the devastated future world; on the other hand, *Princess Mononoke*'s main stage is the era of Muromachi. This epoch was the time of confusion and chaos, which formed the substructure of nowadays Japan. And the most important thing is this; people started to lose their awe and respect for nature, especially from this time. While the iron industry became prosperous, people tried to exploit and have a control over nature. As we easily can figure out, throughout the history people always build their civilization struggling with nature. When people try to exploit the environment, our civilization also will be in danger. But at this point we should not generalize or be biased that the people who try to destroy nature are always the bad. Eboshi, one of the women characters in this movie, tried to destroy the forest and *shishigami*, but we can't judge her as the bad, because she had created a refuge for the ill people. It's not the problem that someone's personality's good or not; even the good can do harm to nature. We should be aware of the fact that our every action can affect the environment. Like this animation thoroughly described the relationship between nature and human, I think it is quite meaningful to look back on our footprints, and take time for self-reflection about our every action.

Except the background, most of the things are totally come from ancient Japan. The director gives us the detailed depiction about Japanese traditional lifestyles, like the steel mill in Tatara, a firelock and traditional costumes, based on thorough historical research. But, above all, some legends and myths are inherent in this movie. Three things are notable among them. The first is 'Ainu creation myth'<sup>30</sup>. Ainu peoples were indigenous groups who lived in Hokkaido. The word 'Ainu', 'Emishi' in Japanese, seems to be originated from the Hokkaido dialect which means 'human'. In this animation Ashitaka is the head of Emishi peoples of Tohokou area, and lots of huge god-animals are borrowed from Ainu mythology. Second, the *shishigami* and *godama* came from Siberian myth. There are so many stories about a deer in this myth, and *shishigami* is the king of the gods who control life and death. Also, the *godama* remind a mythological idea of a human spirit going out into the world by summons of shaman, while they are sitting on branches. Third, it is quite directly implied from the title that a vindictive spirit could be found in this animation. Mononoke is a bad fetch, bearing malice toward people so it tries to distress or harass people. San, also called princess Mononoke, is also a human but has abhorrence for people. She is possessed by the fearsome spirits of nature. As a goddess who preserves the environment, she is a mediator in between nature, whereas Ashitaka is a mediator in between people. And both are also a mediator between human and nature.

At the end of the movie, Ashitaka and San decide to live apart. I think that the society still needs Ashitaka and nature needs San, so they should be remain as a mediator between human and nature. In other words, although *shishigami* return to

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<sup>30</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ainu\\_creation\\_myth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ainu_creation_myth)

life of the forest and the conflict between human and nature is solved by their efforts, but this conflict will not completely ends, so they couldn't live together; they can't achieve a real symbiosis yet. Still, there are some things unsolved and it shouldn't be easily concluded. By trying not to make a hasty decision, we should think about a proper way to solve this complex knot and co-exist with nature.

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## 10. Fusing Cultural Opposites Together to Tell a Universal Story: There and Back Again

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*"I don't try to create according to a particular model of the world...  
My world is one part of a larger world"*

- Miyazaki Hayao

That's why you wouldn't find the *Shishigami* forest on the map, for that it's beyond the physical world, it's in the Japanese history and mind. Even though not historically faithful, the story of Princess Mononoke is one of *what is lost*, rather than *what could be* as we've seen in Nausicaä. Both of these stories stand outside of modernization though, either before or after, interestingly enough. It's as if the absence of modernization brings everything to its edge. In what is lost we see a nature that still has power, where the great woodland god Shishigami rules. It's a forest that is both wild and threatening. By killing the Shishigami, the forest remains but it's no longer full of kamis, and it's safe and tamed. This is something Miyazaki explains as a metaphor for the Japanese people way of seeking control and structure. The forest, symbolizing something uncontrollable is something vital to human kind, for that we need uncertainty. This is what fantasy can bring us. Today's world is full of choices and a constant flow of information makes people bound to relate to it in some way, no one stands outside of globalization. The interest for fantasy, such as the story of Mononoke and the wild forest, can be explained as a desire to experience something deeper, to find something that we *can't* control.

Miyazaki uses history, folklore and fantasy of other cultures in his movies. But the way he uses them differs from the US, or Disney way of doing so. While Disney changes a story to fit its format, and therefore strengthen the *americanesse*, Ghibli instead use others as a way of blurring the distinctions between the self and foreign. It's all about a internationalization, a *kokusaika*. His films are a mix of global culture with inspiration from both the USA and Europe etc., combined with the Japanese myths and gods. Creating something out of these components has sown to be accessible to all post-industrialized countries of the world.

The world of fantasy is hypothetical one, and to visit it can be seen as an escape, even though it is equally much an arrival. To change perspective is something crucial to the human mind, too see your own world from an outside view for example gives new knowledge. Today's postmodern world is outside of history, and the blurring of boundaries that is caused by globalization is also applicable to the world of real and unreal. One part of the interest for fantasy is the fact that it can bring old stories from our past back to life. That fantasy stories are built up from mythology is nothing new, for that it is the earliest form of literature and human kind has always tried making sense of the world by myths. This patchwork of old and new is something typical for the postmodern world, where much is made out of our past. Myths show us a system of stories told in a society and brings something a meaning, a form. The usage of folklore and "history as a vision" makes one recognize the story, yet it seems unfamiliar to us. Miyazaki creates an exotic world inside of the anime basic propensity, which is recognizable to us even though it is unreal and foreign. By doing this he can create an agenda, which includes messages about environmental issues etc. This folklore structure makes the story attractive to both children and grownups, making it both something global and something for all ages.

There and back again is a highlight for how one move between worlds, such as the reality and what is fantasy. You leave your cultures habits and systems and come back with more understanding and knowledge of how others are and who you are. Miyazaki is striving for showing the world as it is rather than simplifying it for the children, as a way of giving them the chance to make their own decisions. To reflect

on other worlds and how meaning is created is vital to us because it makes our world understandable. He shows a darker side, in contrast to for example the Disney way of making films. The parting of Ashitaka and San shows the pain in choosing identities, something that haunts every person in the postmodern world. Although set in the past, this movie shows how complex, full of choices and demands the twenty-first century really is. The text mentions that stories like this can assist its audience in major identity changes and help them in transitions in life that are otherwise difficult to face alone. The choice of who to be can't be done without a view from the outside. To compare yourself to something bigger, for example, or turning history upside down and to change the rules of the society makes your mind expand. It creates a crucial potential for change, just because it's not real and as the everyday life. It's a defamiliarizing vision of the real. Princess Mononoke, as many others of Miyazaki's films, stretches the understanding of the other – the foreign, but also gender issues. Leading female roles with courage and power creates questions about the traditional female role, which is changing the way we think about gender.

Simply put, to travel to the world of fantasy makes people grow and we are many experiences richer – without having to leave the couch, or in our case, the narrow tree benches.

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## 11. Gendered Representations in Princess Mononoke

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The females' role the society of patriarchy traditionally demanded was not only to embrace and endure everything happening to them, but also to support their husband for the great success. However, the modernization has induced women to work in the society competing with men, and then women could be self-reliant as the master of their lives. In this reality, Miyazaki is the one of director who has reflected the modern female on his anime as much as called a feminist. Princess Mononoke has been also regarded as a showpiece of his work in terms of gender.

Two protagonists, San (Mononoke) and Ashitaka, and one antagonist, lady Eboshi appear distinct role play in this movie. San and Eboshi are in hostile relations, nature and civilized human, but they have a similarity to utilize their power with San's ferocious physical ability as well as her sibling, wolves, and Eboshi's military armaments for the purpose of protecting their land and collectivities in their own way. Even though the background of this story is the era of Muromachi in which the Iron Age was coming and this had led industrialized human to face a spiritual shift losing respect for forests and Kami, the female characters absolutely differ in historical women, rather are closer to current feminine ideal who are independent, taking a lead, and active. For an instance, the war was considered as the exclusive poverty of males in the past. However, San, Eboshi and other women in Takara participated in the war as a representative of their collectivities. This means the reversal of playing a role between men and women.

These two characters seem to function as conventional role coded by male but not completely fall apart from conventionally female role. San tried to prevent the boar from becoming demon and was there beside him until her body was swallowed by his demon. Also, Eboshi showed generous aspect when she made a shelter for outcasts and encouraged people suffering from leprosy to live together in the society by teaching them to produce weapons. These are not the male-coded roles but more like feminine traditionally. They encompass gender-neutral role.

One male protagonist, Ashitaka, act as an arbitrator in this war in which women take the lead. It is natural that men attack their enemies and become the main agent of war. Nevertheless, Miyazaki set in the situation that male character keeps making endeavors to halt the war between two women representing nature and human. Ashitaka told San and Eboshi to stop attacking each other and he was shot to almost death in the process persuading them. But, he rose from the dead like a Jesus by Shishikami's power so it means that he still have the responsibility to reconcile nature with human. By putting male as a mediator, this movie defamiliarized the conventional relationship between man and woman and showed us the possibility of coexistence between nature and human.

In conclusion, Miyazaki melted the gender issue into this story and avoided simplistic dichotomy between nature and industrialization developed by human. The structure that two females fought against each other for protecting their base and one male took the role of mediator reversed the gender role and transformed dichotomous nature versus human story to reconciliatory and harmonious story. In the last scene that Ashitaka said 'I will go to see you' to San who couldn't forgive humans, even if the nature and human are hard to get close, we can get a sense of coexistence between nature and human.

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## 12. A Historical Examination of Princess Mononoke's Setting

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Mononoke Hime is full of ambiguous topics, dealing with tradition, Japanese identity in the past and now alike, further with gender and feminism, with history and development, with human world and nature, with opposing ways of thinking and with feelings and characteristics (kindness, greed, respect, independence/autonomy, acceptance, hate, forgiving, revenge). And although the setting for all of these topics is an imaginary world, it can be identified as inspired by Japanese history and human development in general (especially in regard to industrialization, demystifying and rationalizing on the one side and uprising feminism and the conflicts of traditions and development / movements on the other side).

Both, the time and setting in Mononoke Hime change and develop just as the story goes on: leading from the ancient past of Ainu and Jomon culture in the Emishi world with oracles, settings down (from hunting to cultivating) and with some differences in architecture (and with small ruled villages), thorough the journey of Ashitaka to the Yamato world, the later Japan with some kind of movement toward centralization which sometimes is equalized with the female reign of Himiko of the Yamatai, the story continues to the Muromachi age and even further, when firearms and something like industrialization appears and the direction to the presence also can be portrayed in the independent and autonomous feminism of Lady Eboshi. And besides social and political topics like the use of superior weapons (firearm) and ruler ship (the development of autonomous villages and their resistance and the movement and wish for independence like the Japanese *shoen* or the *ikkô ikki* vs. Lady Eboshi who does not want to serve the Emperor but rule the world by herself [=Hideyoshi?] and sets up an own village), there are similarities in religious concerns as well.

While in the movie, the spirits/*kami* is killed and disappears or at least are reduced, in the real world was the ongoing idea of *mappô*, the downfall of the teachings of Buddha; and when Lady Eboshi goes out and kills the deer god, one could easily think of the strictly political and power-focused reign of Oda Nobunaga, who did not care for or respect religious institutions, no, on the contrary, he wanted to prove his superior worldly power over Buddhist religion by attacking and forever damaging the power of Tendai Buddhism with his bloodshed on Mount Hiei (compared to the killing of the deer king and getting its head), while in both cases some traces and remainder survive: the *kodama* and the beautiful nature in *mononoke hime* – and Tendai monks and other temples in reality (even though their power was broken and never fully recovered).

But the major difficulty with the movie is the point, that these ambiguities are not clearly distinguishable and cannot be portrayed black and white nor judged good and bad. Lady Eboshi kills the deer god and wants to rule over nature, but she also cares for ill / *cursed* people and she supports the equality of gender through her feminism. And the brutal or primitive, revenge-seeking San is not the whole picture of her: she also cares lovely for Ashitaka and loves her wolf-mother- not to forget her deep feelings for the forest and nature. And also Ashitaka, who is represented as loving and forgiving everyone and seeking a shared world of humans and nature, also this *superior good* person kills and slashes two warriors in the Yamato world (even though the curse supports this cruelty of course).

And maybe the most ambiguous character remains the deer god: full of destruction, death and chaos – and full of love, salvation and flowering, blossoming, vivid beauties of nature and life. For me, those unclear portraits and neither totally good nor totally bad characters represent the very ambiguous nature of life: there is not a single person ultimately evil or good – everyone hurts or harms, everyone likes someone or something (and if it's even himself/ herself). Every action of destruction or evil has its reasons and motivations – but, just like in the movie, even killing the



deer god does not work, also in real life seeking to understand each other, the thoughtful acts and trying to accept each other and living together rather than fighting each other always works out better and remains superior. For me, Miyazaki vision works very well for real life alike and Ashitaka's way of acting is worth imitating.

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### 13. Revisiting Shoku Nihongi's Mythological Accounts Through Princess Mononoke

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Hayao Miyazaki's feature film *もののけ姫* is set in a fictional world that resembles ancient Japan. The world is dominated by a war between Gods and Men. Gods are represented by Nature, especially animals, and are threatened by humans and their newly found power of steel processing. According to "Miyazaki's Mononoke-hime: The Analysis of a Myth" by Erlijine Runia, there are four major mythological themes in the story that are also found in the Nihongi, an extensive Japanese mythology record.

The first theme deals with women in Japanese mythology. In various instances of the Nihongi, women leading entire armies or armies consisting entirely of women appear. A very straightforward connection can be drawn between the Nihongi tales and Monoko Hime here. In Mononoke Hime an army of women (namely the women of the steelworks) are lead by a single woman (Eboshi-gozen) to protect the steelworks from attacking Gods (Animals that fight against the destructive nature of the steelworks) and other adversaries (Samurai Lords that want to control the steelworks).

Another theme present in the Nihongi is the killing of Gods or Kami. Yamato-dake no Mikoto is killing a God turned white deer that plagued him using a stick. In Mononoke Hime the God of the Forest next to the steelworks is also represented as a deer that turns into a big "nightwalker" at night. The Mononoke Hime God also gets killed (by Eboshi-gozen) resulting in a devastating calamity that almost destroys the world. But this is not the only occasion in Mononoke Hime where a God is slain. Ashitaka, the male protagonist of the story, kills the Boar God in the beginning of the movie.

The Nihongi also contains a story about the extinction of a barbaric and uncivilized people, the Yeminishi. They are depicted as being savages with morally questionable lifestyles (they drink blood and have promiscuous relationships between men and women, for instance) and little sense of honor. Yamato-dake no Mikoto subordinates the Yeminishi with little effort and are replaced near a Mountain (Mimoro). However, they began to cut down all the trees of the (sacred) Mountain and continued their savage life, also threatening other villages in close proximity. On numerous occasions they rise up against the reigning Emperors and are defeated in battle.

In Mononoke Hime Ashitaka's people seem to resemble the tribe of the Yeminishi. Compared to other villages his home seems underdeveloped and their customs archaic. And just like in the Nihongi, the tribe is threatened by extinction since the sole heir to the village leader, Prince Ashitaka, is cursed and will die without being able to produce a heir himself in time. When Ashitaka leaves the village he cuts his hair and the village people are, by custom, not allowed to see him off. From then on he seems to be officially considered "dead" and is not allowed to return.

Another way of looking at it is comparing the women living in the steelworks with the Yeminishi. Since they all seem to have been rescued by Eboshi-gozen from brothels they have been living a lewd lifestyle and their behavior seems disrespectful and savage especially against men. The people in the steelworks are also obviously threatened by extinction because they face danger from the Gods and other Samurai Lords on a regular basis.

Finally the Nihongi contains references to various princesses tending to Gods. Most notably Yamato-hime no Mikoto who takes care of the infamous Amaterasu Deity and her Shrine. In Mononoke Hime the same role is played by San (who is

coincidentally referred to as “Princess” Mono No Ke) who served and tends to the (like Amaterasu female) Wolf Deity, Moro.

# Chapter IV

## 千と千尋の神隠し

*“Through Chihiro, Miyazaki’s utopia of an entirely changed society has been replaced by the thought that the solution is individual. If we want change, it should start deep inside each of us.”*

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## 1. A Noble Aim: Building the Foundation for a Healthy Sense of Identity Since Childhood

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Miyazaki produced *Princess Mononoke* fully based on historical and cultural ideas. *Spirited Away*, on the other hand, is a sophisticated masterpiece that reflects one of his main motifs as a filmmaker: how children grow and develop mentally and emotionally. He often says **“I would be very glad if children watch my films with delight. I hope it will aid them in their healthy growth.”** *Mononoke* was a complex and rich film through which the director expressed his problematic thought about nation, culture, history, industry and nature. In other words, *Spirited Away* was produced by a newly ‘purified’ Miyazaki as a result of his endeavor on *Mononoke* and represents the conclusion of his former works. In my view, *Mononoke* and *Spirited Away* are to Hayao Miyazaki what *Seven Samurai* and *Red Beard* to Akira Kurosawa.

*Spirited Away* takes place in the late 1990s, post-bubble. Miyazaki once wrote during the time of the bubble economy that **“Japan has become a country of abundance and arrogance, and its people corrupted with materialism and mammonism. Our country should be poor again, so that our descendants become pure.”** Back then, there was a trend of thought, called *Seihin* (清貧 poor and pure) after the bubble burst. It meant an appreciation for a life without material excess. Obviously, the Japanese economy declined, leaving the country’s younger generations with the challenge of confronting their sense of identity as the economy changed drastically. When Ryotaro Shiba<sup>31</sup>, whom Miyazaki respected, died in 1996, Miyazaki mourned him deeply and said, **“I’m very sad yet relieved, because Shiba-san will not see Japan become a miserable country.”** Miyazaki foresaw a hard future.

In the first scene of the film, I noticed that one of the shopping packages in Chihiro’s car read ‘Kinokuniya’, the supermarket that sells high quality commodities and foods for rich people. The story is post-bubble, but the family keeps a luxurious lifestyle. Chihiro grew up with material surplus, but she is just a girl and still has the possibility to choose an alternative way of life; one that depends on a pure identity.

When the family entered the zone of the Kami, Chihiro’s parents transformed to pigs with satiation. She immediately lost all of her wealth and became poor. She then met Haku, and understood how precious honest friends are. She gained the ability to trust and feel affection. Miyazaki chose to also emphasize the importance of hard work. Chihiro had to ‘get a job’ in order to stay in the Kami world even if it meant confronting Yubaba. But despite Chichiro’s efforts, Yubaba simplified her name to Sen. In Japan, people say that say spirits dwell in words. Even the basis for someone’s personality can stem from words. And names –words themselves-- come from a particular place’s culture and language. In that sense, one’s name is the essence of the soul, so we could say that ‘Chihiro’ had effectively lost her core identity.

She was overprotected and surrounded by material goods in her human world. In this new world, she gained the understanding of what it meant to live by herself; by learning to accomplish her duty through thought and action. Rin, a worker at the bathhouse said ‘You must first learn to greet’. Although greeting is the first step of communication and understanding, Sen wasn’t aware.

In the two key episodes with the Kami, we can see that she starts to regain her identity, step by step. The Stink Kami was purified, because Sen removed a bicycle stuck in its body. The disposed of bicycle was a symbol of the waste that dominated

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<sup>31</sup> Note by editor: Important Japanese novelist, historian and thinker.

the dynamics of the bubble years and stink is the real nature of materialism, for Miyazaki. There and then, she gained a sense of achievement and delight as others appreciated her efforts. In the other relevant scene, she helped No Face, whose excessive fullness also mimics the patterns of the bubble economy. He wished to give her gold, but she didn't accept. The scene expresses Sen's breaking away from materialism, and gaining a sense of virtue in spiritual communication through the heart, Magokoro. Later, the gold showed its true nature: dirt. Miyazaki clearly thought that excessive wealth is a kind of filth.

Sen then cared for a badly injured Haku in its dragon form, and visited Zeniba in order to save him. She acts not by her material desire, but by sincere affection. Zeniba helped them escape, because she was moved by Sen's sincerity. To have identity relates with opening one's heart to the world, and then the world will open its heart back to the person. Eventually, Sen and Haku recovered their original names and identities.

Miyazaki loves Shinto, but particularly animism in Shinto. He said, **"I have sympathy with animism. Stones, wind and all things have life."** Animism in Shinto came from Jomon culture, and so we understand why he has much interest in Jomon. We can't find manifestations of Shinto in *Nausicaa*, but the film deepened Shinto-Animism consciousness in him, which would be reflected in his further works. As *Nausicaa* had affection to monster-insects, Sen cared for strange figured Kamis, Stink Kami, No Face and Nigihayami-no-mikoto-Kohaku-nushi (I suppose Japanese-Chinese character is 饒速美命琥珀主), Haku's dragon form. Obviously Miyazaki named it from Nigihayahi-no-mikoto (饒速日命), a Kami in Japanese myth. Mononobe (物部氏), ancient military clan, were descendants of Nigihayahi. They supported Shinto and were destroyed by Soga clan (蘇我氏) who admired Buddhism. Haku carries a close relation with Shinto and his injured image illustrates the violation of nature as well as the tragic story of the clan.

Miyazaki said **"I dislike Japan"**, but he obviously loves his native culture and nature. He seems to hope for the resuscitation of his society and culture. Therefore, he seeks to recover ancient Japanese traditions like animism, which underscore Japanese basic cultural identity. His habit of equating the spiritual with a belief in animism on the one hand, and the material with the mammonism that results from capitalism on the other, is the reason why he feels sympathy for Socialism ('Marxism' may not be appropriate because he abandoned the idea while working on the manga for *Nausicaa*, but he still trusts 'Socialism' or 'Communitarianism'). His presentation of the film looks domestic (Japanese-like), but the conflicts therein arisen are common issues to the entire world. It's easy to see why his films are understood and loved by all audiences. Miyazaki doesn't doubt that they key to understanding others lies in the revelation that there is life in everything, equally. Those are the thoughts that Miyazaki wished to convey, for they are necessary to the establishment of a correct personal identity in the minds of children.

I believe Miyazaki makes films for children. But Ryotaro Shiba said to Miyazaki: **"Your films are not only for children, but also for adults who still see themselves as children at heart. People who make good works have such hearts. I never trust the character and ideas of people without them. I watch your films so I don't forget that."** Shiba's words show that audiences find a complement to their identities in Miyazaki's world, no matter the age. Also, Shiba suggested what is precious for human beings, something evident in the process of Sen reviving as the heroine Chihiro in *Spirited Away*. That may also mirror the key concept of 'Magokoro' (translated 'true, sincere and purified heart').

In the last scene, Chihiro and her parents return to the human world. The landscape of the town that can be seen is not comprised of luxury apartments or

modern urban settings, but of unique houses laid out irregularly along narrow streets, slopes and steps at hillsides. It is a nostalgic representation that looks like Onomichi (尾道); city in Hiroshima also depicted in films from Nobuhiko Obayashi (大林宣彦) who participated in an activity of conserving the traditional town and natural landscapes in Tomonoura (鞆の浦) together with Miyazaki in 2006. Both directors seem to love nostalgic towns as furusato where inhabitants live close to each other and can share and enjoy nature's gifts.

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## 2. Heroic Humility and the Plague of Greed

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In *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, Hayao Miyazaki uses the film's characters and their actions to convey a message about the proper work ethic and values needed for a functioning Japanese society. With the film's bathhouse as a representation for the Japanese workplace, Chihiro eventually represents the optimal work ethic, both the manner in which one should act and the positive consequences for society in doing so. Specifically, she demonstrates the importance of working for society before working for yourself, and of putting every effort into your given role. Through Chihiro, Miyazaki may be saying that a humble attitude can even work to counter forces of greed in society, and that an avoidance of impulses of desire and personal interests results in greater personal and more importantly greater societal benefit. Furthermore, Chihiro and characters such as Kamiji portray a sense of core selflessness, one that moves beyond the incentive of reward and is focused entirely on acting for others for the sake of the principle itself. In contrast to the positive ethic presented by these characters, others such as Chihiro's parents, No Face and the bathhouse's workers illustrate improper work ethics and values dangerous to the individual and society as a whole, specifically the destructive and ever-present nature of greed. Together, Miyazaki uses these interconnected moral messages to make a claim about the ideal work ethic and core values as humility and selflessness, the state of society as one teetering on the edge of destruction due to apathy, greed and self-centeredness, and thus the necessity of adopting these ethics for the well being of everyone.

In the beginning of the film, Chihiro is presented as an apathetic, slightly spoiled child of absent-minded and impulsive parents. She whines, at times cries, and at first resists her new world and the position into which she has been forced. However, this quickly changes after she signs a contract to work for the character Yubaba in her bathhouse. The characters and their relationships in *Sen* are complex and their use as moral representations finds inconsistencies, but Chihiro's humility and selflessness, and ultimately determination in action are consistent from her point of entrance into the bathhouse and onwards until the end of the film. She is spirited and diligent in her work, taking on the most difficult of tasks (such as cleaning the stink god) without complaint and with her best effort. Furthermore, she seems to have no knowledge of greed, which creates problems at times in the film but is ultimately what saves her and her parents, whose greed and mindless indulgence (in food meant for the gods) is the source of her misfortune. This is shown in her relationship with No Face, who enters the bathhouse as a result of Chihiro's ignorant kindness. As No Face works his way through the bathhouse, he disguises himself as a wealthy customer, and literally feeds off of the greed of the workers, presenting limitless gold to them in exchange for food.

No Face himself is driven by his desire for Chihiro, and his fundamental loneliness, and this is the source of his uncontrollable expansion. Chihiro, however, never accepts his advances, refusing to accept gold or gifts. More than resistance or self-control, she has no such desire, driven entirely by her interests in saving her parents and her obligations to the workplace. Here, at first Miyazaki may be saying that knowledge of greed is necessary; No Face, greed, was already present on the edges of society (the bridge outside of the bathhouse), but was able to grow because of Chihiro and the bathhouse's lack of recognition and ignorance. Ignoring greed and individual's desires leads to quickly enlarging and increasingly dangerous internal problems in the workplace and, by extension, society. However, acknowledgement is not enough, as attitude defines one's relationship to greed. Chihiro is selfless and humble in action, and is driven not by her personal desires but ultimately her desire for the benefit of others. While she has the personal interest of reuniting with her parents, her motivation changes as she meets Haku and tries to save him later in the



film, even at the risk of losing her parents. Throughout the film, such as with the stink god or even No Face, she acts not for her own gain but for the benefit of others, always resulting in a positive outcome for everyone. Furthermore, her lack of acceptance of No Face (greed) leads to his disintegration, causing him to leave the workplace and return to his original form. Humility at the core of one's being and in one's actions destroys greed and benefits society, and ultimately leads to the achievement of one's personal interests as well, as Chihiro is, in the end, able to reunite with her parents.

This shows not only the importance of humility and selflessness, of putting the needs of others before one's own, but even of sacrifice and working for the greater good with knowledge of the possibility of no future reward. This is seen throughout, but especially in Chihiro and her healing cake and in Kamaji and his train tickets. For cleaning a river god clogged with pollution, Chihiro is given a healing cake, which has the ability to clean the polluted or dirtied. It is a means of reviving her parents, but instead of feeding it to them, she uses all of it to save Haku and to "heal" No Face, sacrificing her only known means of reuniting with her parents for the sake of others. The cake, which could be seen itself as a representation of her selflessness and also a reward for her actions, is used once more for the greater good and not personal benefit. This selflessness saves her friends and quenches greed, but furthermore shows an understanding of acting for others that exceeds the typical expectant relationship between "good deed" and "reward." Even though her reward itself is a selfless one (the ability to save another person), she uses her reward once again to commit a good deed and not for herself. This idea of selflessness as an infinite loop is also highlighted in Kamaji's sacrifice; although he has been saving it for 40 years, he decides to give a train ticket (his one chance to leave the bathhouse) to Chihiro so that she can commit yet another selfless act. Although it is his reward for years upon years of service in work, he parts with it without a second thought for someone else's sake. Neither Chihiro nor Kamaji is acting with a reward as an incentive, but instead to do good for the sake of doing good. It is a more fundamental sense of selflessness, with no thought of the future but instead acting always for others entirely out of principle.

While Chihiro and Kamaji represent functional members of society as selfless and devoted to the well being of others, Miyazaki contrasts this with No Face and the greed of Chihiro's parents and the bathhouse's workers. Once again, the character No Face for much of the movie acts to represent greed, as the opposite of a moral Japanese society. This is apparent throughout, especially in the scene in which Chihiro must clean the river spirit. Before the guest comes, Chihiro asks for an herbal soak token, which she is refused. Here, the man is not letting Chihiro have an easy way out, or to exhibit laziness, and instead insists she work harder to clean the bath without a good token. However, No Face steals the tokens and Chihiro accepts them. No Face has given Chihiro an easy way out of doing actual hard work. When she uses the token, Lin says "Wow! This is a really great ticket! The water is so opaque that you won't even be able to see the dirt underneath!" explaining that the ticket is so good they don't need to do actual work. This exemption from the traditional Japanese work ethic could only have been procured from a societal immoral entity, and this is the pivotal point in the movie in which No Face introduces this societal immorality into the bathhouse. While Chihiro ends up actually needing the token to clean an unexpectedly dirty spirit, the encounter leaves gold pebbles on the ground. The workers scramble for the gold, and No Face sees this and realizes how he can lure people in. This introduces greed into the bathhouse, and sets the course for the rest of the movie. Despite being presented as spirits, the workers seem very human in their action and appearance, and their lust for gold seems fundamental despite their position in a service-oriented workplace. Outside of Chihiro, the workers all have the same basic desire, one that quickly grows upon No Face's (greed's) accidental

entrance. Once again, this suggests a high tendency for greed in the workplace (and society). It may even be suggesting that the workplace as it is in Japan (or anywhere) is one whose participants have the wrong core values, who simply follow the motions of the system without holding it to be important. They cut corners on their duties and fundamentally have self-interest in mind, and because of this greed (No Face) is able to feed and grow off of them to the point of destabilization. No Face and the workers' greed in *Sen to Chihiro* portrays the fundamentally destructive nature of greed on the workplace, and may suggest a dangerous trend in the real-world workplace without the presence of humility and care for the system itself. And through Chihiro, Miyazaki claims that it is only through humility that this destructive course can be repaired.

Hayao Miyazaki uses the characters and events in *Sen* to convey his outlook on what is required of all members involved to be a functioning member of Japanese society. Chihiro begins in a state of mind in which she is blind to greed, and accidentally allows it into the bathhouse. It, being No Face, goes on a rampage, feeding off the greed of the bathhouse society's members, and leaves it in ruins. Chihiro's continued selflessness, which she learns after being forced to by the society, seemingly earns her no reward. This conveys that society functions better if its individuals work for progress and the good of the group instead of simply to further one's own wants. Through her actions, fortune befalls her, and society comes together to help her save her parents. In the end, she exits the fortune world with her parents safe and her morality expanded. Miyazaki seems to hope that here, through Chihiro, he has also expanded the morality of a society he sees to be crumbling under the weight of its desires. He is calling out for humble heroes among the next generation, who know that they are necessarily part of a greater whole, and thus care for themselves by caring for society.

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### 3. Inner Self-Discovery Materialized Through and Epic Outer Journey and a Commentary on Gender Identity

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Hayao Miyazaki requires little space to tell much. Through one of his best films, *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, he gives us a story about growth, self-discovery and hard work, but at the same time, he manages to deliver on many other levels, which contain themes of equal significance. Aside from its purely Japanese nostalgic features and the ever-present comments on humanity's pollution of the environment, universal topics such as the dangers of greed, the importance of one's name, the overlapping ambivalence between seemingly opposites (beautifully portrayed by the Yubaba-Zeniba dichotomy), the bridge that connects humans and gods, and the dark side of self-indulgence (especially gluttony) also earn a spot in this stellar masterpiece of spirits, magic spells and the wonders of imagination.

In this occasion, however, I will turn my focus onto two particular aspects of the movie: the journey of self-discovery and the relationship between names and identity.

#### Growth and Self-Discovery

Despite its many possible angles from which to interpret it, *Spirited Away* primarily stands out as a story of inner personal development represented through a fascinating and magical external journey. This development should be understood as a self-discovery and *not* as a fundamental change of essence. As the movie progresses, the 10 year-old protagonist is able to go deeper into her own self until she is able to find the essential qualities that have always lain within her heart, and that constitute her true higher self. In a way, we could say that the unconscious (pre-Sen Chihiro's unfound qualities) becomes subconscious (Sen's revelations without full awareness) and ultimately fully conscious (the virtues of post-Sen Chihiro). By the end of the film, Chihiro is fully aware of who she really is and has been all along. From this peregrination, I believe it is of utmost importance that we understand pre-sen Chihiro's status as a mirror of us. Too often, our true self is obscured by the traps of the material world, vanity and ego.

This encompassing message is juxtaposed with the director's belief that names hold power. Weak, lost, fearful little Chihiro is forced to visit unknown Sen, who exists only inside of her, to become the assertive, courageous, responsible and independent Chihiro she really is. It's not until she gets a taste of utter confusion and lack of self ("my name is Chi... uh, S-Sen") that she is forced to invoke the true virtues of her character and embrace them as part of growth's inevitable changes. By the end of the movie her body language, attitude towards challenge, and interaction with her parents has totally changed. It appears that Chihiro was indeed allured to an awakening by the realization that "words are our will, ourselves and our power" (Hayao Miyazaki).

The reason why Chihiro is initially portrayed as a more flawed and much less "heroic" female lead than Nausicaä, Satsuki, San and even Kiki is to provide an ideal setting for such an epic inner journey. Upon re-discovering Chihiro and being able to see the real her from a different perspective, she says to Zeniba with excitement: "I just want you to know my real name! It's Chihiro!" Miyazaki then delivers his final message through the good-hearted old lady's mouth: "Oh, what a pretty name! Be sure to take good care of it, dear!" She certainly understood the importance of never forgetting who you truly are.

#### Change of Name and Gender Identity

The importance of one's name is such that it has been deemed worthy of an own science: Onomastics. This suggests that a name is not merely a word used to

identify a person but it has significant substance behind it. In *Spirited Away*, we find that Yubaba dispossesses her workers of their birth names in order to erase their true identities and gives them new names effectively exercising an ownership-like power over them. Here, we are not talking about just name giving but of **name changing**, phenomenon that has deeper implications.

This becomes relevant to us, if we see the parallelisms between Yubaba's *modus operandi* and the way women adopt their husband's surnames after they are joined in marriage. I believe these kinds of traditional conventions –accepted by society as 'normal'- promote gender oppression and perpetuate the fallacy of male superiority. Does Miyazaki hint to the idea of women forgetting who they really are and adhering to their partner's sense of self as a consequence of the subconscious power of renouncing their names? For they are no longer them and of themselves but someone's [wife, woman]. They are indeed often defined by what their husbands do or own. In Japan, this is represented through the *koseki* system practice, where the head of household –usually male- identifies the whole family.

In fact, recent studies claim that women who choose to change their names after marriage are less independent in dictating their own priorities and lifestyles. These women usually defend traditional notions such as the biblical "Eve was made out of Adam's ribs" or common law's "feme covert", whereby the wife is legally incorporated into the husband's identity effectively becoming one: the husband. Conversely, women who have the opportunity to keep their names and choose to do so are perceived to have more autonomy in their own affairs despite being married, probably because they see themselves at a subconscious level as equal and independent individuals.

Last to this topic, I want to note that in the Spanish-language tradition women go as far as to add the word "*de*" meaning "of" before their acquired surname (i.e. Mary Jones changes to Mary *de* Lopez, meaning Lopez's Mary) implying possession or ownership, at least lexically, which ultimately contributes to a negative collective perception of the inferiority of women's role and in some cases, social status. \*\*\*\*\*

To conclude, if I had to take the essence of the totality of Miyazaki's message through some of his films, especially evident here, it would be that today's Japan (and world, for that matter) has been abducted by the illusions of truth, temptations of consumerism and pleasures of excessiveness indefinitely polluting its culture. And because there is no magical bathhouse to go to, the only path to cleansing is through re-assessing and re-defining the role that traditional values should play in choosing priorities, making decisions and promoting policies at individual and collective levels. Susan Napier puts it more eloquently when she argues that Miyazaki's work seems to tell us that: "only the imagination, filtered through traditional Japanese customs and ethics, can offer any possibility of cultural recovery and personal redemption to a humanity trapped in the wasteland of the real" (Anime 183).

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## 4. The Haunting of The Past: Specters, Alternative Space-Time, and the Logic of the Imaginary

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Centuries before the critical theory of deconstruction was deployed as a potent analytical tool within cultural and postmodern studies, the notion of specters and their confrontation with time and temporality have already been vacillating within written works of knowledge.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for instance, created a tear and fold in both Hamlet and Denmark's history in one of its acts, the dialogue of which was aptly cued by the passage the "time is out of joint." In a similar vein, Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* bordered on a multi-linear conception of space-time through its assertion that a "specter is haunting Europe, the specter of communism" – hinting that the spirit of Marx is even more relevant after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the sudden demise of communism.

In those two works, we are particularly reminded of the instability of the present and its openness to ghosts or those figures that can disembark from the past and appear in a time in which they clearly do not belong. We are presented with fragments, repetitions, and remainders from the past that haunt us and reorganize the visual narrative of the film into a seemingly traumatic experience. Apparently, Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* is drawn to that category.

For this essay, I'd like to take a theoretical lift-off from the philosophy of hauntology – a psychoanalytic technique used by Hayao – and go beyond the broad McLuhan's framework of "the medium of the message" by posing two main questions: *What does hauntology bring into filmmaking? And if it's incredibly powerful of a technique, how do understand its logic of specters and production of an alternative space-time?*

These questions lend themselves to the logic that any attempt to fully understand how a fantasy medium alters a cinematic message necessitates looking into the instruments of fantasy itself – ghosts, phantoms, and haunts. As such, this paper argues that specters can serve as potent, imaginative sites where we can interrogate our relation to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and most importantly, explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought. Hauntology, therefore, provides us a visual means by which we could speak of that elusive space between presence and absence, life and death, or in the words of Jacques Derrida, "the non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present."

In his major work *The Spectres of Marx* (1993), Derrida, the French philosopher who developed the theory of deconstructionism, deals with the paradoxical state of the specter, which according to him is "neither being nor non-being." He holds the view that the very concept of "Being" is always haunted – not in the sense of the past returning as a kind of return of the repressed, but rather in a more fundamental sense. He goes on further by saying that the origin of anything, otherwise known as ontology, is "always spectral and is always repetition's first and last time." The idea suggests that the present exists only with respect to the past, and that society after the end of history will begin to orient itself towards ideas and aesthetics that are thought of as arcane or rustic; in other words, towards the "ghosts" of the past.

Meanwhile, the same logic of reasoning, but this time in relation to social life, can be found in Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008). She argues that "haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. While it is neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis, it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great importance." To study social life, one must confront the ghostly aspects of it. Without specifically invoking Derrida, Gordon's

contention is that “that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence,” and that the ghost is the sign that hauntology is taking place. Thus, for Gordon and Derrida, the ghost is not simply a dead person but a social figure; a dense site where history and subjectivity structure social life, the way we perceive the world, and the way we imagine an alternative space-time between absence and presence.

In *Spirited Away*, there’s a great deal of instances where the linear, unidirectional conception of history was challenged by evoking of a sense of spectral nostalgia. Images of filled-in rivers, an abandoned theme park, disenchanted spaces of animate otherness, and communicative encounters with No Face and the Stink Spirit all converge into fragmentary allusions to a seemingly unseen and unaccounted for human realm whose destruction sustains the apparent affluence of urban sprawl and capitalist progression. By reproducing images of ecological violence and gross consumption, the film is able to visually engage its audience, prompt them to subconsciously look into the past, and explore the boundaries between the known and the unknown. It makes us realize that where we have gone so far didn’t materialize without ecological trade-offs. As a consequence, the haunting of the past generates an alternative space-time where both temporality and history are, indeed, no less than out of joint.

Ultimately, what makes hauntology incredibly powerful of a psychoanalytic technique is its ability to make established certainties vacillate through spectral nostalgia – an approach predicated upon the foundations of deconstructionism. While hope, and by extension human action, are things that are often future-oriented, it is only through critical encounters with presence and absence, life and death, and being and non-being that we, as an imagined community, can be truly be certain of where we should be heading. And until we start realizing that, films will continue to serve as vehicles of haunts and specters, prompting us to respond to the past by re-imagining the past.

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## 5. The Concepts of Self, Identity and Hope in Spirited Away

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The film begins by introducing Chihiro, a despondent, seemingly selfish young girl who leaves the city for a new home in the countryside. The introduction depicts her as being unhappy for leaving her friends behind and frustrated that her parents treat her dismissively. However, she also demonstrates a certain 'spiritual sense' relatively early on when she felt fear and initially refused to explore the tunnel with her parents as well as her hesitance and eventual refusal to eat the abundantly appetizing food even though both her parents decided to do so (And despite her father being fully prepared to pay – a condition where most would logically feel comfortable with).

As the events unfold and she is forced into labour in order to free herself and her parents from Yubaba. I refer to a scene where Yubaba is seen absorbing all the characters of Chihiro's name with the exception of a single character, '千' which translates to 'Thousand'. In doing so, Chihiro loses her name and is hypnotized into believing that she is Sen. This brings Chihiro/Sen under Yubaba's control. This begs the first question, why would taking away someone's name leave him or her under someone else's control? Why is the name significant to the creation and conceptualization of a self?

### **The Significance of a Name to Self and Identity**

There is an ancient Japanese saying 'If you give someone your name, they can take your soul. If you give them your birthday, they can control your life (this meant that that person would own the paths to your past and future)'.

The Japanese language is composed of three main systems of writings: kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Kanji reigns as the most popular and most widely used of the three, and hence the majority of Japanese names are created using this system. Thousands of different kanji characters exist, and as a result, one name can often be written using a variety of combinations of these kanji characters. Each character holds a multitude of possible readings and meanings.

As a result, the permutations of names for Japanese children are virtually infinite. While some parents give their children more traditional names, many parents in fact come up with their own names based on a variety of factors. Although there are instances where parents name their children after natural images such as the moon and precious stones. Parents also often name their children based on a wish they have for their baby such as intelligence or prosperity sometimes with some characters representing the results of a fortune telling. Finally, there may be a particular kanji character that the parents really like and they then create a name from the characters. Thus, the bestowing of a given name from the parents to the child is a representation of the hopes and wishes that the parents hold for the life of that child, in doing so, a part of the previous generation is being passed to the next. A name is not merely for identification purposes.

On the other hand, the kanji used in family names are often connected with natural phenomena. Common family names such as Matsuda (pine tree + field), Ishikawa (stone + river) or Nakata (middle of + a field) reveal Japan's agrarian past. Thus, the combination of both the family and the given name give a certain representation of the past, a history and a connection to nature and the spiritual world (family name) and to the bonds that bind a person to his or her family (given name).

As such, I believe that Yubaba's removal of all characters of Chihiro's family name and partial removal of her given name is representative to cutting away all of the bonds that ties Chihiro/Sen to both her past connections with the natural world

as well as all forms of human contact with the exception of her parents. As a result, the person 'Sen' would then be akin to a lone entity that is disconnected from the world altogether, with nowhere to return to or possibly even any memory of the world from where she came from (Since there is no possible way for her to remember her own name if she were to forget completely) and thus would be under Yubaba's full control. (Hence the possible association as to why giving a name would result in losing one's soul.) This forces now Sen to lose her childhood identity, as such all that is left is for her to forge a new identity, move forward away from her childhood (implies adulthood) in order to regain the true self that was lost as well as find once again the bonds with her past.

So perhaps what Miyazaki is trying to convey is firstly, for the current generation to not take their names for granted and appreciate them. As a name – particularly so in Japan – is a representation and conveyance of the hopes and dreams and connections that tie an individual to his/her ancestors, roots and memories long forgotten. Thus, as Chihiro seeks her past ties in the film, there is also I believe a simultaneous allusion. As the film was released in 2001 and elements of the abandoned fairground in the early scenes symbolize the burst of the 'bubble economy', one can argue that Miyazaki is also trying to convey that Japan too seeks to reconnect to her past values since the burst of the bubble economy that came with the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997.

The second allusion is the conveyance of a fragile childhood identity. As previously discussed, with Chihiro being reduced to Sen, she has no choice but to move forward. However, even though she recovers her name at a fairly early stage, she continues to be known as Sen to everyone around her and is given the work that adults (Such as her mentor Lin) are also given. This seems to imply that even though the past is remembered, it becomes just that: a memory. As such, even if one wanted to go back, it is no longer possible as that would mean pretending that what happened in between the two stages of forgetting and remembering as well as the lessons along the way never existed. Once you are aware there is no way that you can pretend that you do not notice it any longer, hence, there is only one way and that is to move forward. (For Sen's case she could not pretend that her parents were not pigs so she had no choice but to forge a new identity and self-awareness in order to save herself and them.)

### **The Significance of Desire to Self and Self-Awareness**

'Spirited Away' is said to be a 'coming-of-age' trope, that the journey and challenges that Chihiro/Sen has to undertake in the spiritual world forces her into a situation where she has no choice but to become more self-aware via growing up and maturing. However, I believe that another character also demonstrates this: No-face.

A full-bodied representation of concepts of self and self-awareness is depicted through both the main protagonist Chihiro and her relationship with the silent, lonely (Quote: '寂しい... 千欲しい...' (Lonely... I want Sen.)) counterpart No-face (カオナシ). When No-face is first introduced on the bridge leading to the bath-house, even though he stands among the various other spiritual entities, he appears to be initially invisible to everyone BUT Chihiro. This perhaps is an early indication that Chihiro/Sen is the pivotal factor to his development.

I believe that this can be interpreted in 2 ways. Firstly, No-face could be a representation of something that is becoming increasingly common as societies in general develop, that is the feeling of being around many but not actually being able to connect with anyone. In the past and in present rural areas in Japan, the concept of 和 (wa) or harmony between communities living in close proximity was critical. As a result, measures to ensure friction-free communication and thus maintain good social relationships were developed (Such as 曖昧 (aimai) the use of ambiguity). This



meant that a member in a community would be likely to communicate with and have a social relationship with all other members of the community. Group cohesiveness and group benefit precedes that of the individual. This type of sociological category – more specifically human association – has been coined *Gemeinschaft* (Translates to ‘Community’) by German sociologist, Ferdinand Toennies.

However, as societies develop and people move from rural to urban areas, the population size becomes significantly higher, however, there is a shift from group to individual mentality meaning that individual needs (education, career, etc.) now take precedence over those of group standards. Hence, although social relationships do exist, they are not as intimate or influential (With technological advancement, face to face communication is becoming less of a necessity). In contrast to *Gemeinschaft*, this type of human association has been coined *Gesellschaft* (Translates to ‘Society’).<sup>1</sup>

The result: Although there are many around you, it is likely that you will still feel alone or perhaps even lost in the crowd. So perhaps, the chord that Miyazaki wants to strike with the audience with the initial projection of No-face is to remind us of what is at stake should we continue to lose dependency on others. That to affirm a social identity and to give a meaning to our existence (*ikigai*), we need the presence of others otherwise we are but ‘empty’ vessels without *ikigai*.

The other interpretation of No-face’s role in the film I believe is to demonstrate what the concept of acceptance means. In this alternative interpretation, No-face can be said to be akin to a ‘blank palette’, like a newborn baby with no sense of social awareness or what moral standards are. I refer to the introductory scenes where he is standing by the bridge as Chihiro enters the bathhouse for the first time and when Sen exits the bathhouse to visit her now pig-parents. Although he is alone, he does not particularly seem to mind until Sen shows him an act of kindness by directly talking to him and offering him shelter from the rain (Likely his existence was being acknowledged for the first time) after which he takes a liking to her and proceeds to try to win her affection or acceptance.

So what is No-face? I refer to the scene whereby Yubaba tells the foreman that No-face is a monster and previously related him to ‘scum under cover of rainfall’. Taking into context that this is the world of gods, more specifically Shinto gods, I believe that No-face represents what monks are trained to be void of during meditations: Desire. When desire is kept under control, it is hidden (Hence, No-face’s true face is always hidden behind a mask and his body drifts between invisibility and transparency). However, if it is tapped, like ripples on a pond, it grows and may go out of control even blurring the lines between right and wrong.<sup>2</sup> (When No-face went out of control, he was opaque, had a pronounced mouth and had hair.) Thus, it is likely that because Chihiro/Sen is a human in the spiritual world, as a human and unlike the surrounding gods, she herself is implied to also have these impure desires within her and can therefore see No-face.

No-face is seemingly innocent as he first helps Sen attain a bath tag, however upon seeing her gratitude he proceeds to shower her with even more bath tags despite the latters’ protests. Upon watching the incident with the river god and observing the workers going into a frenzy upon sighting the appearance of gold, No-face deduces that he would likely be able to gain acceptance (from others but more importantly from Sen) if he were to offer gold.

In true dog-eat-dog fashion, No-face proceeds to ingest a frog, giving himself the power of speech and with it the authority (via wealth) to demand service. Through this act, it could also imply that No-face wants to be among and accepted together with the other kami. That is to say, he wants to be 内(*uchi*) rather than 外(*soto*). This is a strong representation of what and how much it means for a Japanese

individual to be accepted in a Japanese social group. That it is better to be within a group than not.

However innocent it was at first, it became apparent that gradually No-face had trouble distinguishing between gratitude, yearning and actual fondness. When the desired result was not attained, No-face became confused and eventually went on a temper tantrum/rampage. This is a phase that is also commonly associated with adolescent youths as they undergo puberty.

Also, his binge eating seems to imply that he wants something to fill his seemingly bottomless pit. Which also implies that there is a void within him that in spite of having more than enough to eat, wealth (producing gold) and company (the workers serving him willingly) – a condition that is considered enviable by most standards – a part of him remains unsatisfied and therefore empty. This is a condition that is becoming increasingly common in developed societies today, especially among those of the middle-upper class and above income. So a possible interpretation of this is that people need to have their own sense of *ikigai*<sup>3</sup> rather than simply follow in what is deemed as the most ‘enviable way to live’. In this regard, perhaps Miyazaki wants to encourage contemporary Japanese to find their own paths rather than to let someone else decide what is best for them (Especially steps from the government with its incentives and disincentives that can alter their paths without them realizing.)

The word ‘yearning’ seems to have been coined from the Heian period and ‘the soul disappearing’ was called ‘akagure’. That meant the situation in which through the act of yearning, the soul went somewhere, and lost oneself. So perhaps one can argue that as No-face was exposed to the ‘evils’ of the bathhouse in order to gain acceptance from Sen and other, it became unclean to the point where he had ‘lost his original soul/self’. Likewise, perhaps what Miyazaki is also trying to reflect how economic wealth and development has ‘contaminated’ Japan’s traditions to the extent that practices have been forgotten and significances rendered meaningless.

### **The Significance of Purity Versus Unclean to Self**

Chihiro/Sen believes that the bathhouse is the reason as to why No-face became what he eventually became. And upon feeding him the remaining herbal cake she received from the River god, she forces an un-consenting No-face to purge a foul coloured slime as well as the workers he previously ingested and in doing so, restores No-face to his former ‘blank-palette’ self. Prior to his purging, there appeared to be something coursing beneath No-Face’s transparent skin moving almost like a drop of ink in water. As he vomits, this murkiness beneath the skin gradually decreases and disappears completely after he vomits out the frog (The first thing he ingested). In this process, we can literally and visually see his body being cleansed.

As No-Face follows Chihiro out of the bathhouse and eventually finds his place as Zeniba’s helper, he learns from Zeniba from spinning yarn with the help of Bou and the bird that effort and sincerity are what’s truly important between friends as ‘A magic one just won’t do’. This seems to signify that sometimes in order to move in the right direction (especially where social relationships are concerned), one has to start all over again from square one.

Chihiro/Sen too learns the meaning of being sincere (*makoto*) as she gradually overcomes her many adversities. She is first disliked by her fellow workers for being firstly, a human and secondly, being smelly. This appears to be reflecting that humans are ‘dirty’ in contrast to the spirits and gods, therefore giving off a foul odour. However, it is also stated by Haku that Chihiro would no longer smell after 3 days of eating their food, which seems to imply that she would to some degree be ‘purified’ the longer she is exposed to the spiritual environment. However, as Chihiro points out ‘He (No-Face) is only bad in the bathhouse’ so this appears to reverse this

initial stance. So perhaps one can say that because of the debauchery within the bathhouse, it is expected that Chihiro would thusly be made more unclean as the days went by. This seems to insinuate that binary standards exist where the concept of 'purity' is concerned.

Although a bathhouse is typically considered a place for getting clean, a place of turning habit/ritual of washing/purification into pleasure (enjoying the heat of the baths), in Yubaba's bathhouse, it appears that the original ritual has been made unclean by the excessive greed and gluttony embodied by and offered by Yubaba and her workers. As a result, one can argue that as long as these evils (impurities) exist within the bathhouse, the act of cleansing in a spiritual sense becomes redundant, as the bathhouse itself would be tainted and thus require purification itself. This is a practice that is done on a fairly regularly basis in Japan, such as the purification of sumo rings (And the prevention of females from entering the ring) and is perhaps Miyazaki's unconscious reflection of this.

Rituals of purification are also emphasized within the film, such as the use of 'エンガチョ' between Chihiro/Sen and Kamaji after she stepped on the worm that Haku spit out to cut off the connections to the unclean. According to Miyazaki, this is a spell that was used in the old days to purify someone who had come into contact with something unclean (E.g. Excrement). This was done by cutting that someone's joined forefingers and thumb with their palm to symbolize the cutting of the connections to the unclean (This is also shown in the film). Through this we can see that once again, Miyazaki is bringing back a ritual from the past that appears to have been forgotten among the current Japanese youth. So perhaps what Miyazaki is trying to convey is his frustration at how much of the old traditions have been lost as well as his hopes in trying to revive back those same traditions and sentiments.

No-Face was not the only character that underwent the purification process; Haku as well though in a slightly different manner. While No-Face was influenced by the bathhouse, Haku while maintaining his own individuality and morals was also being controlled by the worm that Yubaba snuck into him to control him. As such, Haku was able to perform 'evil deeds (According to Lin)' in Yubaba's stead. The impurity in Haku's case in relation to the real world can be argued to be the authority. (Like Hitler's charismatic authority and its eventual effects on the population) As such, perhaps what Miyazaki is trying to convey is the need for the current Japanese population to be less propagandistic and not to be too influenced by authority expectations.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Significance of Memory (Furusato) and Hope to Self**

Memory is the key throughout the film, and it is all Chihiro has to depend on in order to ensure that she is able to remain out of Yubaba's control as well as to eventually repay the debt to Haku for saving her by in turn saving him. Again this reiterates that the 'past' is something that should not be easily forgotten. This also seems to affirm that with the power of memory everything from the past to present is connected. This connection of shared memories furthermore connects between individuals and is crucial to the development of social relationships and even culture.

At the simplest level of culture is a collection of memories and what the present generation wants to tell the next generations are perhaps instructions for living. Also instructions to adhere to for their own safety, an example would be 'harae', it is the ancient form of 'arau' which is 'to wash' – an act of purification. Washing by water may be a simple act, however through ritualization generations are able to pass down the 'habit' for hygiene as well as a somewhat obsession for purity.

There is an awesome correspondence between how the Japanese interpret scenes of nature. Powerful scenes are able to evoke powerful emotions and feelings. Emotional or psychological realizations are felt and this is when men begin to

subconsciously begin to understand symbolism and imagination. There is a creation of awareness. People are then able to use the same techniques (which eventually leads to ritual) to transmit feelings, hopes and ideas in a similar way. To a certain degree, this explains why the River god is depicted to being higher in status to the other gods in the bathhouse (Water sources to many civilizations are considered to be the source of life) as well as why the Daikon (White radish) god is willing to help Chihiro meet Yubaba to get a job (Since daikon is a common source of food in Japan). There is a ranking even among the gods as well as in comparison to humans. This appears to be with respect to human's aesthetics and survival senses.

The doctrines of Shinto were not passed down through the words and literature of the Shinto priests but through the traditional rituals and the feelings, which they expressed and evoked. Take away all modern sense of propriety and societal veil of the modern age and what it can be reduced to is the dependency on something for survival and the very basic instinctual feelings that arise from that. Out of this is born the notion that it is a 'kami no ari'. Thus for an ancient farmer looking after his rice fields, the wind and the rice fields themselves become 'kami' become they are able to evoke emotions as they mean so much to the ancient folk (for survival in this instance). It is man looking at what he has through the lens of symbolism and imagination. So one can also argue that the various gods that we see in the film (many are duplicates in appearances, E.g. the chicks) is firstly a representation of religion in its barest form and secondly the beginnings of an awareness of self that was created with the beginnings of societies.

Miyazaki plays on this concept of memory as well. In 'Spirited Away', many familiar characters welcome us, the most prominent being the Black soot balls ('Makurokurosuke') that were previously seen in 'My Neighbour Totoro', and Kamaji's face being extraordinarily similar to that of the engineer in 'Laputa: Castle in the Sky'. In doing so, he breeds a sense of familiarity and nostalgia to his previous works with the audience (Assuming they have seen his previous works).

Humble beginnings have led to what we have in contemporary Japan and there is therefore hope that things will only get better. This is also the case for when Studio Ghibli began. Through challenges, successes and failures and by believing in the power of the human spirit through the conduit of history – by looking into the past – there is a possibility for an even brighter future as we can learn from mistakes made. That possibility in itself is hope, but whether or not we can truly embrace that future is another issue altogether. The ending represents this where Haku promises Chihiro that they would meet again but whether or not that actually happens is not shown or given any indication for that matter. This implies that the future is not certain but rather what one makes of it. This once more reiterates the concept of choices and the effect that choices have on our selves and therefore our lives.

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## 6. The Last Link in the Chain of Miyazaki's Criticism?

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*Spirited Away* is this kind of modern tales that not only tells us a wonderful story, but also represents a hymn to humanity and brings us to rediscover all the tiny little corners of our personality. *Chihiro* is, as far as I'm concerned the best Miyazaki has ever done and by far my favorite. It simply represents the coming to an end of a process started with *Nausicaä*. After *Chihiro*, there is nothing else to tell about those themes that used to inhabit Miyazaki tales. *Chihiro* is the closest to us. The settings, the characters, the story, are forms and symbols created to be media in the purpose of conveying his truth. In that way *Spirited away* is the most concrete. It is like Miyazaki has been forging a blade. Starting with a rough shape of ideas with *Conan* or *Nausicaä*, folding the metal in order to give shape with *Mononoke Hime*, and he finally polished the edge itself as he created the most powerful vehicle for his ideas: *Spirited Away*.

In this modern fairy tale, we discover a strange world populated by gods. But we quickly realize that the baths are simply the projection of the modern society and especially the place of work. We can discover a tyrannical and greedy *Yubaba* living for money and profit but we also meet the workers, the frogmen, and the tiny *Susuwatari*, enslaved creatures. Until now *Chihiro* was protected by the family cocoon and was enjoying a comfortable environment. But now she faces a difficult environment and will have to take initiatives and responsibilities. With *Chihiro*, Miyazaki seems to give hope to his audience. *Chihiro* in fact, by his determination and natural character, completely ignore the hierarchy and social boundaries (who else could have dared to climb to the top floor of the baths?).

The director also denounces throughout his film and hyper-consumption society corrupted by money. This criticism appears very early in the movie. It is first conveyed by the *Chihiro's* father, when he decides to stay at the restaurant without even checking for the restaurant staff. He reassures *Chihiro* by telling her that he has his wallet and that even if he has not enough money, he has his credit card. As if money could buy everything, even to forget its shamelessness.

Another major victim of consumerism in the film is "faceless". He thinks he can buy everything with gold it produces: its meals, the attention of his servants and even love. But he faces a *Chihiro* who does not accept his gifts. More than the refusal of his gold, she will tell him he cannot give her what she wants. The "faceless" does not understand that it needs are not necessity, while he eats everything without even being hungry, to soothe his frustration, his need for ever more ... In his despair, he is then eaten by his second personality. It may be noted that in his last moments of disillusion he has hair, which may reflects its transformation, a metaphor to make it more human in his madness. It reflects this avidity for more human beings suffer in a society where goods are in abundance. We do not appreciate what we have but just swallow it all to make more room for new needs.

A third character is indicative of the Japanese consumer society. *Bou*, *Yubaba's* giant baby, embodies, according to *Miyazaki*, "the absolute stupidity of Japanese mothers who seek to be loved at any price." *Yubaba* needs to win so much money so she can spend it all on her baby. She has been a monster, while the baby actually is not but the reflection of her deeds. By making of our children an economic cog, we go straight to a hell we have been created.

Finally what about the staff bathroom, completely taken over by greed? With the arrival of the "faceless" madness of gold seized all these people, so pathetic in his behavior in his condition.

*Miyazaki* seems to have finally experimented our society in all the possibilities it offers. He had imagined in *Conan*, a communal society in the image of

his convictions at the time. Throughout his filmography, Miyazaki's thought became more pessimistic. In *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki seems to have completely forgotten his utopian dreams; there is now a clear look at our society with a realistic and critical approach, despite the imaginary elements of the film. The thought of Miyazaki has truly evolved. The solution is no more collective like it was in *Nausicaä*, but individual. Indeed, the character of Chihiro seems to prove that with great courage and willpower, anyone can get by, even within a society constrained by hierarchies and stereotypical attitudes.

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## 7. The Dangers to Self and Identity Amid Raging Capitalism

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It is obvious to most people that the film *Spirited Away* is a story about a young girl growing up. Inspired by the article “Environmentalism without Guarantees” by Marisol Cortez though, I want to discuss the film as a story of a girl growing up while struggling to keep her own identity and humanity in a world marked by industrialism, materialism and capitalism.

When we first meet Chihiro in the film she is just like any other child. She is still dependent on her parents and follows them in their choices of life. When the parents decide to enter the tunnel in the beginning of the film, she is too scared to be alone and choose her own path in life, thus instead she walks with her parents. Her parents are already integrated parts of the capitalistic, materialistic society, which can be seen, for example, in Chihiro’s mother complaining about that there is nowhere to buy things in the new town they are moving to. As a metaphor we can see that if things continue as they are now, Chihiro too will follow in her parents’ footsteps and be part of the capitalist society. Later when the family has arrived to the world on the other side of the tunnel, Chihiro’s parents eat of the food they find there without hesitation. They eat what they find, assuring Chihiro in a carefree way that they have money and credit card so there is no problem to be found. Put off by her parents’ behavior, we for the first time see Chihiro leaving her parents, in a sense to find her destiny in life. Later on when she returns to her parents they have both been turned into pigs. This image sends an important message in how to interpret their behavior Chihiro’s parents is deeply a part of the capitalist world. They believe they can buy everything with money and they just take whatever (food) they want and exploit the resources without considering the consequences. In one sense, even before being transformed by magic, they were already the pigs of the society and heedless slaves of the capitalist system, devouring without hesitation.

Having clearly seen what materialistic needs can lead you, Chihiro has to find her own strength to survive in the society and free her parents. In the beginning she is scared and when she meets Haku she asks him to stay with her, but he tells that she has to do it alone. And so, trembling, on all four, she takes her first hesitant steps to save herself and her parents, from the magical spells, but also metaphorically from the capitalist society. It isn’t an easy path though, as she will soon realize. When meeting the witch Yubaba for the first time she is told that she would make a lovely piglet or sootball. A non-conformist isn’t allowed to live in the society and the choices Yubaba gives are either to be eaten and absorbed by capitalism like a pig or forced to slave in the system like a sootball. Yet Chihiro is standing on her own two feet now, standing up for herself for the first time, and even though being forced to sell her own name in the process, she starts to more firmly hold onto her human ideals. For the love of her parents she wants to save them, and I believe these original human feelings such as love and instinct are what are competing with capitalism in this movie.

Throughout the film, the danger of falling into capitalism and materialism is always present, for example in form of No-face. The character No-face really is a walking metaphor for the society. In the beginning, he is lurking in the corners, waiting for a chance to eat Chihiro. Later his pursuit of Chihiro gets more and more desperate as he realizes he (the society) is about to lose her (as another slave in the system). No-face is offering her gold, but Chihiro is persistently refusing it, simultaneously refusing materialism and capitalism. At the same time, Chihiro starts to trust her human instincts more, noticing that the dragon is Haku and out of love trying to save him. In the beginning of the film when she was climbing the outside walls of the building she was very afraid, but later on, when lead by her feelings for

Haku and her wish to help him, we can see that she is stronger than before and not as scared of climbing the outside walls anymore.

In the film, there are three strong metaphors for accumulating and exploiting without an end. Firstly we have Chihiro's parents who eat and eat until they, as Haku says, "don't even remember being human". Metaphorically, they have forgotten all human feelings and ideals such as love and instincts, and are just compliant pigs of the capitalist society. Secondly, it is No-face who never seems full, but just eats and eats. No-face is the materialist who just accumulates for the sake of accumulating. He is wailing that he is lonely and he wants to eat to fill the void. But that the void is in his heart and not in his stomach is something he doesn't realize. No-face is the capitalist society that is without human emotions and with just a longing to devour. As a contrast we have Chihiro who even though being offered the things she needs from No-face, the water tags, she declines saying "I don't need that many". Chihiro's need is filled with just one tag and she doesn't accumulate for the plain sake of it. Finally, the last metaphor I want to give is the River God guest that Chihiro takes care of at the bathhouse. Perhaps more obvious than the other metaphors, the River God tells the story of the capitalist society today. Having once been a river with clear water, human beings have thrown their excess, garbage and decay products into the river. They have filled him with the leftovers of their materialistic way of life. Chihiro, the child of two capitalistic parents, has to clean up the mess of the materialistic society and to do that she uses her instincts and strong will. In my opinion, this is an apparent metaphor for how we live today and what kind of world we will pass on to our future children.

Chihiro grows tremendously during the film. In the beginning she was clinging hard to her mother's arm, but towards the end she is facing the consequences of having lead No-face into the bathhouse. In the end, she is in a sense much more mature than the adults, solving problems and independently making decisions. On the train ride she is even telling No-face to behave, after having stopped him ravaging in the bathhouse. In the conclusion of the film, Chihiro still remembers her name, her identity and her humanity and thus she is able to leave the bathhouse and metaphorically the capitalist world. The last scene makes me slightly worried though, because when they are leaving through the tunnel, Chihiro is again clinging to her mother's arm. When facing extreme and apparent danger of losing herself, Chihiro was able to grow strong and hold onto her identity, but the dangers of the capitalistic society are subtle and it is easy to be swept away by the current. Will Chihiro be able to remember her individual emotions and instincts also after entering the real world or will she eventually become a slaving pig like her parents? Because she is clinging to her mother's arm at the end of the movie, I think we can see that even in the real world it isn't always easy to hold on to who you really are. But I hope since she has the lucky charm in her ponytail, that she will continue to remember the importance of preserving her identity and humanity in the world.



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## 8. Lost in Translation: A Swedish Interpretation of a Japanese Master Craft

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The original title *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* can by the Japanese audience be decoded as a capturing by kamis, something taken from Japanese folklore (Shinto). Something that in the English title *Spirited Away* isn't comprehensible, partly because the way it's translated, but also by the lack of background knowledge.

"The film that perhaps captured most attention here in Sweden during the fall is something as strange as a Japanese animation..." (Aftonbladet 27/11/2003). Reading reviews of the film in top newspapers and magazines from Sweden, the word *shinto* is never mentioned, but *witch* and *ghost* frequently are. The fact that it's animated and from Japan is explained as making it *extra fresh and different* and as something the westerners get *for free*. It is even explained as something that (if you didn't recognize Miyazaki) would be suspected to have been created under the influence of illegal substances. While the west is confused and drawing connection to recognizable stories such as Alice in Wonderland, the Japanese audiences see their folklore friends such as the water demon Kappa, the stink spirit Okusare-Sama and river spirit Kawa no kami. For the westerner, this movie as seen as an exotic and non-understandable fantasy world, while the Japanese audience can decode it as anchored in shinto and the Japanese cultural history.

The meaning of the film differentiates depending on our background knowledge. For example, the character Haku is by the Japanese audience understood as something more than a bewitched boy, he is traditional Japanese cultural values embodied, something that's beyond the westerners comprehension. The question is, why is the west so interested in this movie and anime in general, even though they don't have knowledge about the underlying meaning?

And that the west is fascinated by anime is a clear fact. It all began with Pokémon and Gameboy, that has said to be a vital part of *preparing the west for anime*. This movie has had a major effect on the view of anime and after it's Oscar, a global demand for anime began. The foreign minister Taro Aso has described the anime and manga scene as a way of creating warm feelings for Japanese pop culture and in its extension the whole foreign policy. By this we can see that there's a close tie between the anime industry and the way Japan wants to be viewed from the outside.

By this movie, Miyazaki is trying to go back to the time when the world was seen as a parallel universe to the kami, something he explains as waking up the collective memory from a dream sleep. It's a time when everything wasn't reflected upon with a demand for answers and by moving away from written language and instead use more visual, oral and musical parts etc. Miyazaki wants to create a counterweight to the obsession of technology. The supernatural he introduces is explained as filling a need that the commodity experience can never satisfy. It's a shift from written language to the verbal, musical and the poetic, something seen as *eastern thinking*, while conceptualization is seen as *western thinking*.

The anime fascination can be described from what it's not, and the most common comparison is with Disney. Being a part of the anime scene is seen as not being mainstream, and to choose to be *otaku*, an anime or manga fan, can be explained as choosing an identity. The ghostly and gray passengers we see on the train in the movie can be viewed as a metaphor for mankind today. Lost and on their own this world, trying to find oneself. The search for identity is something vital in the postmodern world, and this world can be explained as an answer to this longing.

The fact that this new world is not properly understood is an important part of its attraction. It's a riddle that can't be solved by the western *conceptualization*

thinking. The answer to anime's popularity can be either for its mystical qualities, for that the west can't decode it. So much is lost in translation and is a part of the desire to not know, an effect in the postmodern world where information, choices and rootlessness is a fact. To get lost is one way to explain it, but by for example taking on the identity of an otaku, you strangely enough also find an identity and a place in this rootless world that is our reality.

# Chapter V

## Other Outstanding Contributions

“My understanding of the word *religious* completely changed. Now, I see it as that magic which is embedded in the smallest things we experience.”

*“You must see with eyes unclouded by hate. See the good in that which is evil, and the evil in that which is good. Pledge yourself to neither side, but vow instead to preserve the balance that exists between the two.”*

**Hayao Miyazaki**