

# Hayao Miyazaki And His Anime Movies

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**Radin-Mačukat, Lucija**

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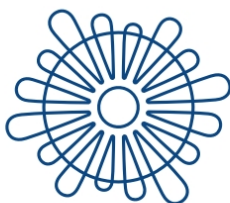
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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

**Lucija Radin-Mačukat**

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Hayao Miyazaki And His Anime Movies

Završni rad

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Zadar, 2018.



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Zadar, 2018.

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## HAYAO MIYAZAKI I NJEGOVI ANIME FILMOVI

### Sažetak:

Ovaj završni rad proučava anime filmove te jednog od njihovih redatelja, Hayaa Miyazakija. Kroz prikaz njegova života i analizu tri filma rad će dokazati važnost ovog redatelja kako za japansku tako i za svjetsku kinematografiju. Usto, dubljom analizom motiva, simbola i pouka korištenih u njegovim filmovima, rad istražuje kako Miyazakijev genij uklapa stilska sredstva u šarolik svijet animea.

Ključne riječi: Hayao Miyazaki, anime, film, Japan

## HAYAO MIYAZAKI AND HIS ANIME MOVIES

### Summary:

This paper explores anime movies and one of its directors – Hayao Miyazaki. Through the description of his life and the analysis of three of his films, the paper will prove this producer's importance for both Japanese and world cinematography. Also, with an in-depth analysis of motives, symbols and messages used in his films, the paper examines how Miyazaki's genius incorporates narrative techniques into the eclectic world of anime.

Key words: Hayao Miyazaki, anime, film, Japan

## 1. *Introduction*

Hayao Miyazaki, Japanese director and producer, has already established quite an enviable career in animation. The worlds and the characters he creates, even from his older films, attract and arouse interest of people from all over the world. Most of his topics are environmental protection and the balance between nature and humanity.

Moreover, among all of his films lies an everlasting reminder on the importance of looking up to the children. He once said that "they are the spirit of hope that will experience setbacks. And they are the answer to our future ... though we may falter, we have not met with destruction." (Turning Point, 452)

The main goal of this paper will be to introduce the readers to Japanese animation. Starting with the sole concept and history of anime, I will then mention the most important anime genres, especially those that are present in Miyazaki's works. In addition, I will offer a detailed view on the life and films of Hayao Miyazaki, ending with an in-depth analysis of three selected films.

Apart from introducing Japanese animation, another important aim of this paper will be to show how Hayao Miyazaki's upbringing, early works and his ever-present ecological awareness shaped his animating career. Therefore, I will focus on the most conspicuous narrative techniques Miyazaki used in his films, like symbolism and anthropomorphism, as well as the recurring images of strong women. In the end, the objective of this paper is to show how not all films, especially animated ones, are produced for entertainment purposes but can carry a strong



message for the viewers, what is particularly evident in Miyazaki's idea of caring for the nature and keeping the balance between it and humans.

## *2. What is anime?*

Anime is a diverse art form, but can best be described as a hand-drawn and computer animation originating in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Since its early development and the emergence of the classic anime style in the 1960s, it has quickly expanded all over the world. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, this animation style was greatly influenced by the novelistic Japanese comic books called manga. Manga is predominantly printed in black and white and, if popular enough, it can get translated in many languages as well as be animated as a series.

Anime would not be what it is now without the works of one of his creators, "the god of manga" himself – Osamu Tezuka. Tezuka established Mushi Production studio which produced TV series and movies of a more cinematic form, apart from the earlier static anime style, according to Lahiri. Some of his most famous works mastering the movement and facial expressions are "Astro Boy" and "Belladonna of Sadness". (2)



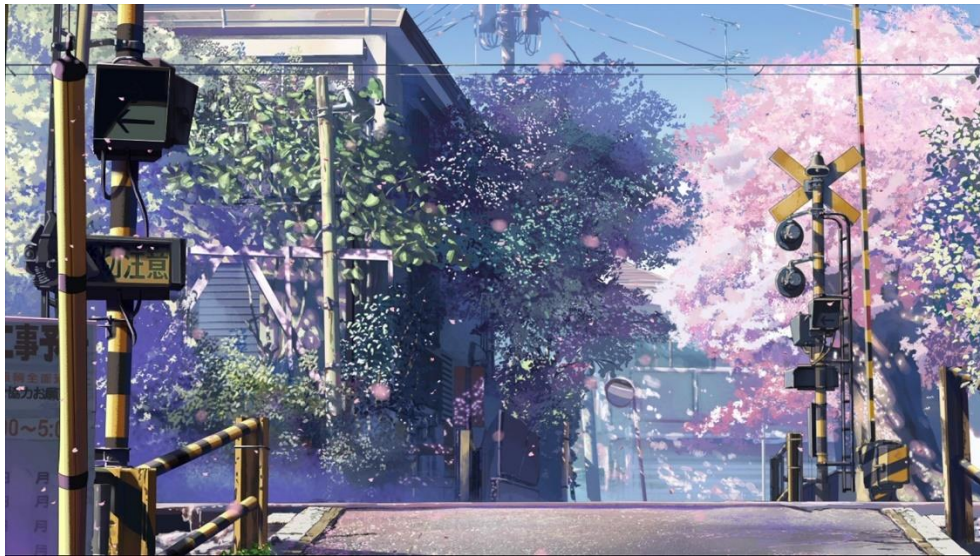
Tezuka, Osamu. "Astro Boy (Book 9)." Dark Horse Manga, 2002

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is recognised as "the golden era of anime". The 1980s marked the time when Japanese animation gained enormous popularity producing anime of robot, cyberpunk and space opera genres. The "Dragon Ball Z" series and the post-apocalyptic film "Akira" that emerged from this period are some of the best examples of Japanese animation. During these years, Hayao Miyazaki founded Studio Ghibli along with Isao Takahata and introduced the world to some of anime classics, such as "Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind" and "Grave of the Fireflies".

The boom of anime continued in the 1990s with Hideaki Anno's "Neon Genesis Evangelion", an iconic anime series set in the futuristic city of Tokyo. The key topics of Japanese anime changed from robots and space, as in "Ghost in the Shell" and "Cowboy Bebop", to superheroes and magical worlds, as in the universally acclaimed "Pokémon", "Sailor Moon" and "Digimon" series.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the rise of manga adaptations, such as ninja-led "Naruto", *shōnen* or teen-boy-oriented series "Fullmetal Alchemist" and sci-fi thriller "Death Note". The animation of this era also seemed to emphasise the Japanese' obsession with manga and anime – namely the *otaku* culture abundant in *hikikomori* main characters or introverts. This period revived high-budget feature-length anime films creating numerous psychological thrillers and mysteries, some of which are "Paprika", "The Girl Who Leapt Through Time" and "Millennium Actress".

Makoto Shinkai, also called "The New Miyazaki", was one of the first Japanese directors to bring forth a more realistically drawn anime, differing significantly from the unusually big-eyed characters and less-detailed surroundings that mostly characterised the classic anime. He produced films such as "5 Centimetres per Second", "The Garden of Words", "Children Who Chase Lost Voices" and "Your Name.", which became the highest-grossing anime film of all time, overtaking Hayao Miyazaki's "Spirited Away".



Shinkai, Makoto. "5 Centimetres per Second." Media Factory, 2007

The period around the year 2010 was marked by the re-release of older shows, as well as the creation of new ones, such as "One Punch Man", "Attack on Titan" and "Hunter x Hunter".

The demand for anime films and series is still high and the Japanese original animation style breaks all kinds of viewing records every year. Although seemingly children-oriented, anime films are much more than superheroes and fantastic worlds. They always carry a profound message, a speck of hope for the future and show the inextricable bond between humans and nature.

### 3. *Anime genres*

Depending on genre, anime can address various topics, generations, levels of register and specific terminology. Feature-length animated films follow the same classification as all other motion picture. Some of the most renowned anime genres, according to Napier (24), are:

#### 3.1. *Action*

This type of anime is most prominent for its abundance of fight scenes and battles. Any film that features rapid character movement and lacks in-depth conversation is likely to be put in this category, as it ensures thrill and enthusiasm. "Samurai Champloo", "Naruto" and "One Punch Man" are examples of action anime.

#### 3.2. *Adventure*

Adventure-type anime is all about undertaking an exciting voyage and discovering all kinds of interesting things along the way. The characters do not usually stick to one place, but travel the world (sometimes even several worlds) in order to solve a set task. Due to the complexity of the character's journey, this kind of anime may extend to hundreds and hundreds of episodes, as well as overlap with other genres. "InuYasha", "Fairy Tail" and "Pokémon" belong to this category.

#### 3.3. *Drama*

If an anime brings the audience to tears, it definitely belongs to the category of drama. As a general rule, drama anime concentrates on delivering emotional connection to the characters. Whatever the hero is feeling, the viewers should understand and sympathise. "Your Lie in

April", "Anohana: The Flower We Saw That Day" and "Plastic Memories" are just a few examples of drama-style anime.

### 3.4. *Fantasy*

Dream-like worlds and indescribable phenomena are typical of fantasy-style anime. Usually, the setting of this kind of anime is a fantasy place where characters live or travel to. The surroundings are mostly too exotic and glaring for the audience to focus on anything else. It is not rare that magical and mystical experiences take place in this anime genre which includes "Sword Art Online", "Paprika", "Fate/Zero" and many other.

### 3.5. *Sci-Fi*

The main topics of sci-fi anime are technological and scientific breakthroughs and the way people deal with them. Machines, medical advancements and modernized weapons are all recurring in anime of this kind. Some of the most popular sci-fi anime are "Neon Genesis Evangelion", "Ergo Proxy" and "Cowboy Bebop".

### 3.6. *Other notable genres*

Some other important anime genres and subgenres are: comedy/slice-of-life, horror, mystery, romance, ecchi (or hentai; sexually provocative scenes), martial arts, historical, military, mecha (robots), music, post-apocalyptic, police and sport.

#### 4. *The life of Hayao Miyazaki*

##### 4.1. *Early years*

Hayao Miyazaki was born on 5 January 1941 in Bunkyo, a special municipality-like ward in Tokyo. He was the second of four sons. His father was an officer in Miyazaki Airplane Corporation, which was run by his uncle.

Hayao's childhood was marked by constant moving due to wars and bombings, first to Utsunomiya and then to Kanuma City. He started elementary school in Utsunomiya City, but later transferred to Tokyo's Ōmiya Elementary School, which then became Eifuku Elementary. Next he entered Ōmiya Middle School, during which he spent his leisure time going to the movies with his family.

After he graduated from middle school, Hayao entered Toyotama High School. At this time he was already eager to become a manga artist and started attending drawing courses. His first interest in animation arose after seeing "Hakujaden" ("Tale of the White Serpent") and falling in love with the leading female character, Bai-Niang. This was Japan's first colour feature-length animation film and it was produced by Toei Animation, the studio where later Hayao will start his animation career.

Hayao then started studying political economy at Gakushūin University and majored in Japanese Industrial Theory. During this period, he enrolled in a children's literature study club, the closest he could get to practising manga drawing.

#### 4.2. *Toei Animation period*

After graduating from university in 1963, he started working at Toei Animation. "Wanwan Chūshingura", directed by Daisaku Shirakawa, was the first film for which Miyazaki worked as an animation artist. His second work was on the TV series "Ōkami shōnen Ken" ("Wolf Boy Ken").

During the 1960s, Miyazaki acted as the union general secretary and the vice chairman at the time was Isao Takahata, director and producer. In the meantime, he worked on the film "Gulliver's Space Travels", TV series "Shōnen Ninja Kaze no Fujimaru" and was the key animator for "Hustle Punch" series. Later he married his colleague Akemi Ōta and moved to another part of Tokyo, Higashimurayama City. There he collaborated with Isao Takahata on the production of the feature-length theatrical film "Little Norse Prince Valiant". Their union activism affected the work on the film greatly, as there existed a fear of not being able to produce feature-length films in the future. This encouraged him to animate another film called "Puss 'n Boots", which was directed by Kimio Yabuki.

#### 4.3. *A Production Period*

Hayao's last work under the wing of Toei Animation was "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" in 1971. Circumstances led him to finding a job at A Production, together with his colleague Isao Takahata. This was also the time when he first went abroad, all the way to Sweden, in order to meet Astrid Lindgren, the creator of "Pippi Longstocking", and work on the new project. His job of location scouting was done, but he was unable to meet Lindgren and therefore the film never saw the light of day. Luckily, the research he did in Sweden would be of enormous help



in the production of another theatrical film, "Panda! Go Panda!", whose success would lead to a sequel called "Panda! Go Panda! Rainy-Day Circus".



Takahata, Isao. "Panda! Go Panda!" A Productions, 1972

In 1973 he travelled again, this time to Switzerland, in order to find the inspiration for the TV series "Heidi, Girl of the Alps". The series encouraged the audience from all around the world to watch literary classics on TV. This world-wide popularity was the result of hard work by three great animators – Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata and Yōichi Kotabe. Hayao did the "screen design" and paid attention to character movement, thus becoming the main layout designer for the film, following the wishes of Takahata, "the director who doesn't draw".

#### 4.4. *Nippon Animation period*

After doing the location scouting in Argentina and Italy, he started working for Nippon Animation, founded by the staff of Zuiyō Eizō. The powerful trio – Miyazaki, Takahata and Kotabe – did another great job on "From the Apennines to the Andes".

Miyazaki's first work as a director was the TV series "Future Boy Conan" in 1978. Further on started the screening of his first animated feature film, "Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro". While helping to train new Telecom Animation employees, he began drawing image boards for what would later become parts of his films "My Neighbour Totoro" and "Princess Mononoke".

Hayao made another trip to Italy for the TV series "Sherlock Hound the Detective", which was a joint production with R.A.I. He also went location scouting in America for the film "Little Nemo", which was later released as "Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland". One of his first media coverages was in an issue of "Animage" magazine devoted entirely to him. This will enable Miyazaki to publish the manga version of "Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind". The unique style, details in drawing and diverse fictional worlds amazed the readers, but also left them wanting more as Hayao preoccupied himself with doing other animation work.

#### 4.5. *Telecom Animation period*

During 1983 and 1984, Miyazaki and Takahata worked on "Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind" theatrical feature. Takahata worked as the producer, while Hayao took care of screenplay and storyboards. After the release of the film, he continued publishing the manga version of "Nausicaä" in the aforementioned "Animage" magazine.

#### 4.6. *Studio Ghibli until today*

On 15 June 1985 Miyazaki, Takahata, Toshio Suzuki and Yasuyoshi Tokuma founded Studio Ghibli, after the Libyan-Arabic word for a "hot, desert wind", signifying that the studio will blow a new wind through the animation industry.

Toei Animation then released the theatrical feature "Castle in the Sky", crediting Hayao for direction, storyboards and screenplay. His next work was the production of "My Neighbour Totoro", which was released by Studio Ghibli at the same time as "Grave of the Fireflies" and was recognised as the "best last film of the Shōwa era" (the period of "enlightened peace" and the reign of Emperor Hirohito).

In 1989, Toei Animation screened "Kiki's Delivery Service", for which Hayao did the original story, direction and screenplay. Later he worked with Takahata on the production of the animated theatrical features "Only Yesterday" and "Porco Rosso". After moving to the new Studio Ghibli headquarters in Koganei City, Tokyo, Hayao directed the short film "Sora iro no tane" ("A Sky-Blue Seed") and Nippon Television Corporation's spot "Nandarō" ("What Is This?"), both produced by Studio Ghibli.

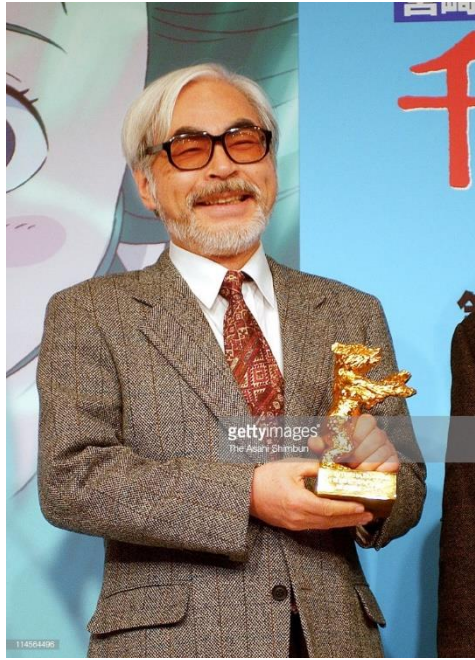
In November of 1992, Miyazaki, Yoshie Hotta and Ryōtaro Shiba published the book "Jidai no kazaoto" or "The Sound of the Winds of These Times", as a result of their discussion on animation. Around this time ran the last episode of the manga "Nausicaä" and Hayao started preparing for the work on "Pom Poko" and "Princess Mononoke". Very soon started the

screening of "Whisper of the Heart", the result of Hayao's production, screenwriting and storyboard animation.

The compilation of Miyazaki's interviews, conversations and essays was published in 1996 as "Shuppatsuten 1979-1996" ("Starting Point: 1979-1996"), by the company Tokuma Shoten. A year after, the same company will merge with Studio Ghibli, becoming Studio Ghibli Company/Tokuma Shoten Co., Ltd. "Princess Mononoke" was released right around that time and established new box office records for Japanese films.

He also travelled to France and Africa (following the journey of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry) and started planning the construction of an art museum in Tokyo. Hayao's next assignments were working on "Spirited Away" and the Ghibli Museum in Inokashira Onshi Park, Tokyo. Not long after that, his long-time colleague Yasuyoshi Tokuma died.

After the release of "Spirited Away" in 2001, Miyazaki was showered with praise for the animation and requests to come promote the film on foreign ground. Between the trips to South Korea, France and San Francisco, he even managed to open Ghibli Museum, serving as the executive producer. In 2002, "Spirited Away" was awarded the Golden Bear at 52<sup>nd</sup> Berlin International Film Festival, as well as best animated feature film at 75<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards in 2003.



Hayao Miyazaki at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Berlin International Film Festival. Getty Images, 2002.

Then started the screening of "Howl's Moving Castle", which was awarded the Osella Award at 61<sup>st</sup> Venice International Film Festival. After the release, Hayao travelled to France and Britain for publicity campaigns.

In 2005, Studio Ghibli became independent from Tokuma Shoten and started working as Studio Ghibli Inc., with Miyazaki as the corporate director. That year he was listed on "Time" magazine's 100 most influential people in the world, was awarded Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement on the 62<sup>nd</sup> Venice International Film Festival as well as Japan Foundation Award.

Hayao also directed three short films - "Mizugumo Mon Mon" ("Mon Mon the Water Spider"), "Yadosagashi" ("House Hunting") and "Hoshi wo katta hi" ("The Day I Bought A Planet").

Ghibli Company later founded Home of the Three Bears, a preschool for the children of Ghibli employees. In the same year, "Orikaeshiten: 1997-2008" (Turning Point: 1997-2008), the sequel to "Starting Point", was published by Iwanami Shoten. Miyazaki was credited as original author, director and screenwriter for "Gake no ue no Ponyo" ("Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea").

In 2010, the Ghibli Museum began screening short films "Chūzumō" ("A Sumo Wrestler's Tail") and "Pan-dane to Tamago-hime" ("Mr. Dough and the Egg Princess") for which Miyazaki did the screenplay. "The Secret World of Arriety" was released that same year. The year of 2011 was marked by a special exhibit at the Ghibli Museum called "The View From the Catbus" and by the release of "From Up on Poppy Hill".

During his last few years of animation, Miyazaki was chosen as a Person of Cultural Merit by the Japanese government and he took part in the release of "The Wind Rises", contributing with the direction, story and screenplay. In September 2013, Hayao announced he was retiring from the work in animation, but still wanted to continue his job at the Ghibli Museum. The fans were not disappointed for long, because after only 3 years he began working on a new feature-length film "How Do You Live?". For now, Hayao is out of retirement and working hard to show that animation can still surprise and intrigue.

## 5. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*

### 5.1. *Inspiration and story*

Miyazaki took the inspiration for the main character from a broken-hearted Phaeacian princess appearing in the "Odyssey". Nevertheless, he found that her representation was more appealing in Bernard Evslin's book titled "Gods, Demigods & Demons: An Encyclopaedia of Greek Mythology", where Nausicaä is depicted as a lively and beautiful girl who loves music and nature. The character also reminded Hayao of a heroine from the Japanese short stories "Tales of the Tsutsumi Middle Counsellor". Again, here she was a princess who loved insects and was considered to be quite eccentric by the community. The two characters merged into one in Miyazaki's mind and consequently produced princess Nausicaä (Turning Point, 283).

It is the 30<sup>th</sup> century and a thousand years have passed since the Seven Days of Fire, a great war that destroyed the land and thus created a poisonous jungle full of enormous trilobite-like insects, Ohms. Nausicaä fights the Tolmekian kingdom that wants to murder these creatures as she is the only one who sees the good in them and the nature. She believes there exists a way to live safely in that mysterious environment, as well as co-exist with the Ohms.

Nausicaä is represented as a Japanese *miko*, a medium, keeping the balance between humanity and the nature. The salvation that was brought by Nausicaä in the end was not meant to be religious, according to Miyazaki, but should act as proof that communication and understanding between the people and the insects was possible.

### 5.2. *The power of a mother*

A lot of Hayao's main characters are powerful women, a possible result of the absence of his very ill mother. He brought these motherly feelings of protection and calmness to Nausicaä, maybe because an otherwise capricious and senseless prince would bring a demise to the natural world.

Motherhood is almost a key element of the film, from the beginning when we realise that Nausicaä is the only one who protects the nature, to the very end where she saves the baby Ohm and brings harmony to the world. She loves, protect and cares not only for her people, but also for the nature and the insects in it, equally. She is the perfect example of a pure heart, *magokoro*.

The notion of the mother to all life, the Greek goddess Gaia, is also prominent in Nausicaä's character. The environment Nausicaä lives in is dangerous and aggressive, eating away the remains of the healthy land. Humanity decides to fight nature in order to gain control over it, but she has different plans. She believes so much in the soul of nature that she does research and discovers that the jungle itself is not poisonous, but is actually trying to purify the earth and get rid of the toxins in it planted by humans in the great war. Through conversations with the Ohms Nausicaä herself becomes part of the nature and gives way to the possibility of us saving our modern world, too.

### 5.3. *The humanity-nature conflict*

From the beginning of the film, the audience is bombarded with scenes of post-apocalyptic nature – deserts, scarce vegetation and the absence of people. It seems like humans and insects



have to fight in order to establish who the superior species is. But, their clash can only lead to the deterioration of the rival, not coexistence. The humans in the film wrongly believe they are to rule the insects and the nature, instead of realising that all beings are part of a greater ecosystem.

According to Miyazaki, when it comes to the war between people and insects, neither of the sides is good or bad, they are both just trying to continue living. Unfortunately, some kind of innate fear, distrust and disrespect of another's home and life appear inevitably throughout time. The balance and the flow between the two - *nagare* – is violated when humans take control and attack the insects, damaging themselves in the process (Starting Point, 284).

All in all, Nakamura believes that Hayao's intention was to show a kind of tomorrow-but-yesterday paradox, when what should be a time of 1000 years after ours, technologically more advanced and conscious future, in fact signifies going back to the beginning, a regression to an outdated life and ideas. We can see a close connection to today's cases of global warming, deforestation and extinction of various species – all of them caused by humans – as opposed to the poisonous air and dangerous jungle from "Nausicaä" that are lethal to the people (Turning Point, 35).

In that sense, Nausicaä embodies everything that is expected of the humanity today – a sense of understanding, care and the desire to coexist without hurting others – therefore making way for progress and survival.

#### 5.4. *The symbolism*

With "Nausicaä" Miyazaki meant to produce a kind of moral fable centring around the environment. As a result, there is a very notable dose of symbolism in the film, particularly concerning nature's elements and human attitude towards them.

Namely, the wind represents a sort of connection between the nature and the people, especially during the scenes where it enables Nausicaä to fly on her glider. It also draws attention to the positive use of natural forces, like windmills in the Valley of the Wind that produce energy. Furthermore, Nausicaä often relies on the wind to know the future by carefully listening to the tiniest changes in the direction or strength of the wind. Basically, the wind symbolises human dependency on nature's elements and harmony that arises from their preservation.

Another important symbolism is related to destruction – via fire (used by people) or spores (used by nature). When a Tolmekian warship crashes and explodes in the Valley of the Wind, fire destroys humanity's attempt to distort nature, but also offers a clean slate in hope of restoring the balance. On the other hand, the toxins from the spores represent a more "positive" result of destruction. Although at the beginning people try to stop the spreading of poisonous forests and spores, Nausicaä later discovers that the residue from the weapons that people used in the war cause the toxicity and the spores are actually participating in their destruction.

In addition to the aforementioned motherly qualities Nausicaä possesses, she represents a connection between the good and the bad, nature and humanity. She is the leader, the messiah, the right path and, despite all the human wrongdoings, she also offers a ray of hope for the better future.

All of these symbols contribute to the morality of the story – to live in peace and harmony with the nature. In return, humanity gets a chance to start over, undo their mistakes and cherish the extraordinary world they live in.



Miyazaki, Hayao. "Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind" Toei Animation, 1984

### *5.5. The two princesses*

As much as nature and humanity are different in this film, so are Nausicaä and her evil opposite Kushana, the Tolmekian princess. While Nausicaä represents harmony and care for the world, Kushana symbolises human arrogance and lack of understanding.

Although technologically more advanced and dominant, the Tolmekian princess still wants to destroy the Sea of Decay, the supposed source of toxins. On the other hand, Nausicaä does not want to decide her next step until she consults with the Ohms and understands the nature of the jungle and the Sea.

Another important fact is that, to represent the nature, Miyazaki uses a very important but usually neglected species – insects. So, by increasing their size and leaving their way of life and behaviour unchanged, he reminds us of their power and significance for the natural world.

From the beginning of the film, it is obvious that Nausicaä presents a very prominent character. She seems to be the only one interested in finding out more about the history of the world, thus realising that the very creators of the poisonous Sea are humans. She becomes the heroine from the legend who saves everyone from yet another devastating war and brings hope for a life in a once purer and safer world.

#### *5.6. The mysterious and ever-surprising nature*

How to predict and control nature if it is always changing? Humans will simply never be able to understand it completely. That is one of Miyazaki's main points from the film. For instance, humans burned the poisonous jungle, but that just made it spread quicker. Next, the Tolmekians tried to kill Ohms, without realising they had special powers that could help people in purifying the earth. Also, Nausicaä falls beneath the Sea of Decay and finds she is able to breathe in this clear environment because the plants are cleaning the soil from toxins.

All of these examples prove that nature is unpredictable and that we should treat it as Nausicaä does – with respect, care and an open heart. That is why "Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind" is one of Miyazaki's most important films. He put all his energy trying to show us that humans can be noble and good as Nausicaä, realising that everything, every plant, every insect, every person is worth living. Our only mission in this unpredictable world is to live that idea and choose the right path.

## 6. *Princess Mononoke*

### 6.1. *The legend and the myth*

The plot of "Mononoke-hime" is set in an actual era of Japanese history, the Muromachi period. This was the time of cultural and folkloric abundance, the time when the *kamis* (spirits worshipped in the Shinto religion) wandered Earth and graced everyone with their presence and wisdom. The film is full of magical elements and deities, but also of labourers and ordinary people.

One of the main characters is Ashitaka, the last prince of a now extinct ethnic group called Emishi. His village is attacked by a demon and, in the process of killing him, Ashitaka ends up with a curse on his arm. In order to heal, he starts a journey that will lead him right in the middle of a fight between the destroyers of the forest, Eboshi and her Irontown, and the protectors, San and her wolf clan.

With this journey Hayao wanted to once more show that there is no clear distinction between good or bad, black or white. Every character in the film is led by his or her own decisions which

can result in a conflict with other people, nature or even gods. The Japanese tradition and legends were a perfect opportunity for Miyazaki to incorporate these deities in a historical plot, making the story more believable. The kamis were there to protect the nature and keep the balance between it and humans intact. When humanity started cutting down the forest to make weapons, the spirits entered an unwinnable war.

"Mononoke-hime" can be seen as a new, modern type of Japanese legend, incorporating both gods and environmental awareness into one epic tale. However, it ends in an open and tragic way, leaving the looks of future to the mind of the audience.

#### *6.2. The good, the bad, the in-between*

What is so clear in the old stories and legends is the binary opposition of the characters, the clear distinction between the benevolent and the malevolent. Nevertheless, the story begins with an old lady advising Ashitaka not to divide everything into good or bad, but to see "with eyes unclouded", to think objectively and take in mind the whole picture.

Like in "Nausicaä", one of the main topics is the conflict between nature and humanity. The nature, specifically the magic forest, is open, inviting and peaceful, while the people in the Iron town are loud, aggressive and angry. What stands between the two is San's character, Princess Mononoke. She was raised by wolves and this is evident in the way she runs, eats and behaves generally. Despite her upbringing, she is a human girl, she can talk and sometimes understand human emotions. This is why she marks the middle between culture, being a normal human girl, and nature, a complete savage belonging to the natural world.

Another "in-between" in the film is Ashitaka, most obvious example being that he tries to mediate the quarrel. In addition, the curse on his arm brought by the demon enables him to have supernatural powers, shifting from an ordinary person to a god-like creature. The same can be applicable to *shishigami*, the forest spirit with human eyes.

### 6.3. *The imagery*

The forest in the film is magical, mysterious, a thousands-of-years-old home of kami and *kodama* (smaller spirits born from the trees). Miyazaki did his best to depict nature as peaceful and majestic, but also protective (particularly in the example of the animals guarding their home and being aggressive to strangers). Moreover, nature produces life, as well as necessary food and materials for the people from the Irontown. But it can also bring death in the form of *shishigami*, hence portraying a kind of constant ambivalence and uncertainty throughout the film, according to Nakamura (71).

The same ambivalent connection can be drawn to Ashitaka and San. Ashitaka is the boundary between a normal boy and a god, while San acts like a wolf but speaks and feels like a normal human being. In addition, other human characters are also represented as self-cancelling in the sense that they get together to fight in the war, but otherwise betray everyone to reach their goal.

### 6.4. *The love*

Although not a typical love story, the relationship between San and Ashitaka is still very important in the film. It represents a necessary alliance of humans and nature, of the cultural

and wild. And even though they separate in the end, it should not be tragic. It simply means that they were not for each other, they belong to different worlds and the best they can do is accept each other's differences and continue living.

Another example of affection in the film can be seen in the behaviour of the she-wolf Moro to her daughter San. Despite their biological and physical differences, Moro loves her daughter as if she were her real descendant. This is clear when she offers Mononoke to leave the clan and go live with Ashitaka, and in the end when she sacrifices herself for San.

The care and love that Lady Eboshi of the Irontown feels for her people, lepers and prostitutes is also very prominent. These are the people rejected by the feudal system, but she still protects them and fights the war in order to provide them with a new and safe home.

#### *6.5. The gender representation*

For his many portrayals of women in anime, as mentioned before, Miyazaki was often called a feminist. This film is yet another example of how two powerful women can take completely opposite sides.

On the one hand, we have San (Mononoke) who represents nature and fights for balance and serenity. On the other hand, there is Eboshi who wants to expand her city and provide the best care for her people. The two women are complete opposites depicting nature and technology, ferocity and culture, but both use power (Eboshi uses weapons and San her physical abilities) to reach their goals.



The two main female characters differ enormously from their historical counterparts. In that period of Japanese history, women did not take part in wars or assume any kind of dominant position. Eboshi and San work more like today's female ideals of power and self-care, reversing the past positions of men and women.

Another important change in the old gender position is putting the male, Ashitaka, in the middle of a war between two women. He wants them to stop fighting and bring peace to the world, which is a far cry from the usual male representation of a leader and an aggressor. By placing the man as a mediator and even hurting him in his quest to end the quarrel, Miyazaki is estranging the conventional representation of men and women and providing an opportunity for the balance between nature and humanity.

To build on this idea, Miyazaki said that he is "not attempting to solve the entire world's problems. There can never be a happy ending in the battle between humanity and ferocious gods. Yet, even amidst hatred and carnage, life is still worth living. It is possible for wonderful encounters and beautiful things to exist" (Turning Point, 16). So, when San and Ashitaka separate in the end because she cannot forgive humans, Ashitaka still promises to visit her in the future, creating a little piece of hope for the peaceful coexistence of nature and humans.



Miyazaki, Hayao. "Princess Mononoke" Studio Ghibli, 1997

## 7. *Spirited Away*

### 7.1. *Greed vs. modesty*

Although full of mature themes and political allusions, Miyazaki reminds us that "Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi" is intended for a young audience, namely 10-year-old girls who are still trying to find their place in the world. The protagonist of the film is Chihiro, a young girl who sets on a journey with her parents in order to move into a new house. Everything changes when her father takes a wrong turn and they find themselves on the boundary between the

spiritual and the physical world. To save her parents from a curse that turned them into pigs, Chihiro has to work in a bathhouse run by an evil she-spirit called Yubaba.

"Spirited Away" takes place in the late 1990s, a period when, according to Hayao, Japanese people were materialistic and blinded by the desire of being rich. He hated Japan for this and wished for the country to become poor again, so that people could see the true value of life. This is visible in Chihiro's family that lives an evidently luxurious life that is quickly taken away from them when her parents are turned into pigs and Chihiro is deprived of her money and possessions (Starting Point, 199).

She later meets a boy named Haku and understands the importance of friendship. Miyazaki wanted to stress that work is also a necessary constant in one's life by "forcing" Chihiro to work in the bathhouse. When Yubaba takes her name and gives her a new one, Sen, Chihiro loses a great part of her identity, which she slowly regains throughout the film. When she cleans a 'stink spirit' of all the things he devoured, Hayao drew a close connection to the materialism that made the Japanese buy and stack things senselessly.

Even though Miyazaki said he hated Japan of that era, he never stopped loving its culture and heritage. Bringing the common issues that arise in the modern world to his home, Hayao tries to draw the attention to the importance of old Japanese beliefs, like animism, that can convince the society to mend their ways.

### *7.2. From materialism to selflessness*

One of the most noticeable changes of character throughout the film definitely belongs to Chihiro. At first, she is shown as a slightly spoiled and whiny kid. She is reluctant when she first starts working at the bathhouse, but her behaviour changes particularly when she signs the contract with Yubaba. All the other characters and their intentions are quite complex, but what stays from the signing of the contract to the end of the story are Chihiro's selflessness, her modesty and her determination.

Chihiro's drastic change is also visible in her relation to No-Face, a spirit she caringly invited to the bathhouse. What she did not know is that No-Face would offer limitless amount of gold for food and eventually start eating the very workers who were attracted by their greed. She, on the other hand, refused to accept gold, thus showing her gradual estrangement from materialism.

Meeting Haku was also an important event because Chihiro went out of her way to help and free him, even at the risk of failing to free her parents. It is obvious that her determination in life is influenced by others and that, ultimately, she will do what means best for the people she cares about, not for her. This way, Miyazaki is trying to reach the modern heroes in the audience, those who still know that money is not everything and that, with this in mind, they can do great changes in the society.

### 7.3. *Your name is you*

Upon signing the contract with Yubaba, workers' birth names are taken away and they are given new ones. This phenomenon makes them slowly forget their identity and they are left to work at the bathhouse forever, under the rule of evil Yubaba.

What are you without your name? This is what Hayao intended to portray with the name changing, which has a deeper meaning in the Japanese culture. The Japanese believe that, if you give someone your name, they will have your soul. It is not rare that parents give their children names in concordance with their wishes for them in the future. That is why, when Chihiro is given a new name, she is separated from her previous life and identity.

Through accepting her new identity, Chihiro sets on a path of regaining her true self that she knows is somewhere inside her.

### 7.4. *Knowing yourself and knowing others*

"Spirited Away" is a great example of a coming-of-age story, throughout which Chihiro has to become more self-aware and mature. We can really see her grow in the first No Face scene. The spirit is crossing the bridge among the crowd, but no one is really paying attention to him. The fact that Chihiro invites him to the bathhouse might be an indication that she alone will be responsible for his development.

No Face does not really seem to notice other people, as well. Only when Chihiro speaks to him or does something kind for him does he appreciate and award that attention by offering gold.

One of Miyazaki's possible intentions with this character was to show how social awareness and acceptance are important in Japanese culture, how it is better to work and make decisions when you are in a group rather than when you are alone.

#### *7.5. The cleansing*

Through the theme of the bathhouse, Hayao alludes to a very prominent act of cleansing, whether if it means cleaning your body or cleaning your soul. For instance, after realising what horrible things No Face has done, Chihiro gives him a herbal cake which causes him to vomit everything and everyone he has devoured. Now he is back to his old self and later finds his place as Zeniba's (Yubaba's good twin) helper, what may indicate that one has to start all over again in order to fix one's mistakes.

Chihiro also passes through the process of cleansing, particularly during her work in the bathhouse. She is first scolded and ignored by her colleagues because she is human (and humans release a weird odour to spirits). But, Haku convinces her that she will no longer smell after eating their food for 3 days, implicating a kind of self-cleaning and implementation into the spirit world.

#### *7.6. The last message*

It is evident that Miyazaki wanted to bring to the audience's attention the modern world problems, like endangered species and environmental pollution. Starting with "Nausicaä", through "Princess Mononoke" and finally with "Spirited Away", he has gathered all his fears and lessons for the future. Nakamura believes that "Spirited Away" is a culmination of all

previous topics and moral tales, therefore becoming one of his and world's best anime movies to this day (80).

"Spirited Away" is the closest to the audience regarding the theme, the age and the location of the story. After a bit more thinking, we realise that the bathhouse is only a metaphor for the society, concretely the workplace. There is always one angry and money-chasing boss (Yubaba), some colleagues (the frogmen), even a few "enslaved" workers (the tiny spider-like *susuwatari*).

All in all, Miyazaki believed that the world was so blinded by consumption and greed, that he had to give some hope for improvement. That he did through Chihiro's evolution from a spoiled kid to a modest heroine. Although more pessimistic, Hayao's understanding of the society is now perfectly realistic. He is not expecting a complete change among the society, but is calling upon the enlightened individuals, encouraging them to "be the change they want to see in the world", even if it means starting a revolution with just one person.



Miyazaki, Hayao. "Spirited Away" Studio Ghibli, 2001

## 8. Conclusion

Having analysed some of Miyazaki's first works, it is obvious how he uses numerous narrative techniques that are typical of literature. For example, the symbolism present in "Nausicaä" is particularly productive, as it depicts elements of nature (wind, fire, plants) as representations of the world's power and perseverance, while their human counterparts represent the man's desire to conquer and dominate. In addition, the character distinction is not clearly black or white. Although at first everyone is driven by their ambition, some characters grow through time and become altruistic.



Hayao's films often feature strong female characters, which were influenced by his mother and some powerful women from Japanese history. But, the most important message deriving from his famous triad of films is the understanding of nature. Through all three of his films Miyazaki shows the powerful nature that people are not to fiddle with. Only through the humanity-nature union is the world going to stay a better place, which is important to memorise now that we are constantly bombarded with scenes of our environment drastically changing and depreciating.

To sum up, anime is an omnipresent type of hand and computer animation, originally from Japan, which has evolved into all kinds of different genres. One of its most famous artists is Hayao Miyazaki, who spent the last 60 years creating and producing many notable anime films, books, essays and poems. "Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind", "Princess Mononoke" and "Spirited Away" are his tree crown jewels, perfectly depicting his love for the environment and Japanese culture.

Although often regarded as the best animation filmmaker in the history of the world, "Miyasan" does not see himself as being much different from others and neither do his friends. The late Isao Takahata has always seen him as "an observer of the world who is aware of social decorum, enjoys nature, warmly encourages young people, raises his grandchildren, places his hopes in the future, and ages in an upright and proper fashion" (Turning Point, 382).

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