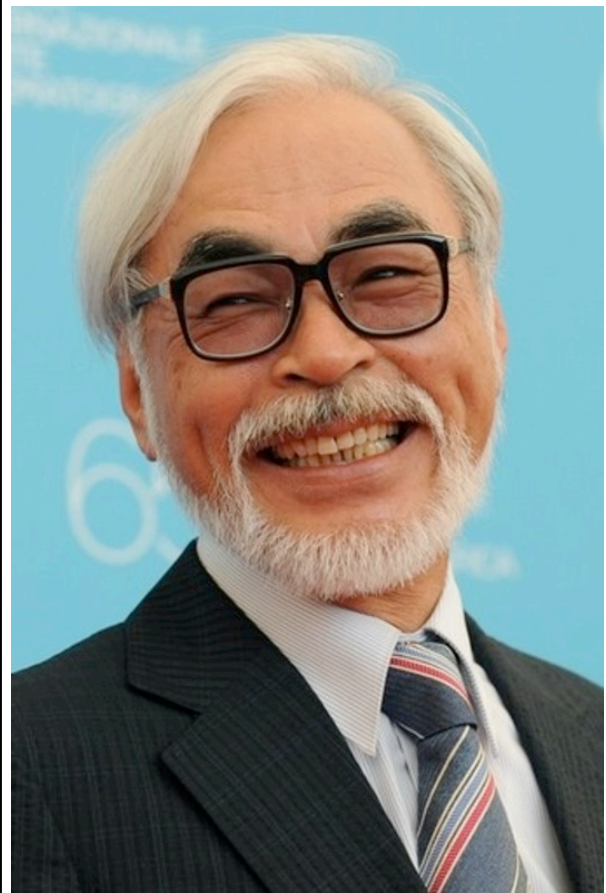


# Reality through Fantasy: Miyazaki Hayao's "Anime" Films ファンタジーをとおして現実を見せる 宮崎駿の「アニメ」作品

Hiranmoy Lahiri

Hayao Miyazaki, who in November, 2013 announced his decision to retire from active film-making, is a name well-known to serious film lovers all over the world. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in August, 2014 announced that he will be awarded an Honorary Oscar (Lifetime Achievement Award) at the Academy's 6th Annual Governors Awards on November 8, 2014. The only other Japanese director to have received this prestigious award was the legendary Akira Kurosawa (in 1990). He will now be in the same league of filmmakers that includes the likes of Jean-Luc Godard, Satyajit Ray and the world renowned animator Walt Disney. As a result of his untiring work, he had earlier received several prestigious awards. His *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (2001; *Spirited Away*) got the Golden Berlin Bear award at the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival, and claimed the Best Animated Feature category at the Oscars in 2003. It was the first 'anime' film, a distinct film genre of Japanese origin, to win an Academy Award. He created numerous films besides this one that deserve recognition and critical acclaim. They are not just simply films of aesthetic and generic ('anime') novelty; they contain the depth of creativity, philosophy and values relevant to modern times as well. It is because of this that we need to look back and consider his achievements in the context of the forthcoming honor to be given to him. This article will specifically try to understand why Miyazaki's films are not just a part of the 'anime' phenomenon but also are works of astounding creativity that carry deep social, environmental and aesthetic undercurrents.



Miyazaki Hayao

Animation studio giants like Disney and Pixar create dozens of high budget animated films that mostly target younger audience - or are mainly meant for family viewings. Animation films like *Snow White* (1937) or *Wall-E* (2008) are watched and loved worldwide. Apart from such adored Hollywood classics, another form of animation was born in the land of the rising sun - Japan. This is known as 'anime'. Encyclopædia Britannica states that this novel

genre was “primarily for the Japanese market and, as such, employed many cultural references unique to Japan.” This genre of animation came into being approximately in the 1950s. Such a form of visual art has its roots in the uniquely Japanese comic books known as *manga*. These animated feature films blended Japanese cultural and aesthetic values with western nuances. Anime was often considered by western critics as a form of ‘mass art’ – which encourage blatant sensuality and eccentric pop culture. But lately anime is watched widely by many as a serious form of art. It is a genre which is not meant for children only. Drama, romance, eroticism, profound philosophy – anime has it all. Drawing as an art form is unique to Japan and it usually uses less computer generated imagery (C.G.I.). Perhaps as a result of this the eyes play an important part in anime – they express a plethora of emotions. Hand drawn shadows play an important part in the animation. It should also be noted that a *manga* and anime creator named Osamu Tezuka (who is popularly known as *Manga no kamisama* or ‘the god of manga’) had helped anime become what it is. He reshaped *manga* into a more cinematic form of art. He was inspired by the French *Nouvelle Vague* films and German films he watched. He wanted to change the static style that was prevalent at that time. He commented, “I experimented with close-ups and different angles, and instead of using only one frame for an action scene or the climax (as was customary), I made a point of depicting a movement or facial expression with many frames, even many pages.” (qtd. in Onada, Power 42) A specific form of anime came into being in the 1980s, perhaps inspired in some ways by the incorporation of cinematic actions and emotional dynamism of Tezuka’s *manga* and anime. This kind of anime deals with serious issues like industrialization, war and global warming. Among the directors who are known to have created this completely different form of anime, Hayao Miyazaki has made his indelible mark in the film world.

Miyazaki's anime films have always evoked the issue of relationship between man and nature, and they almost always carry a subliminal message about the fragility of the balance that exists between them. The Japanese have immense respect for aesthetics and a deep sense of beauty and simultaneously of the transience of things in life; there is a term for this in the Japanese language, ‘*mono no aware*’ which was coined by the eighteenth century Japanese scholar Motoori Norinaga. Lauren Prusinsky observes “*Mono no aware* conveys fleeting beauty in an experience that cannot be pinned down or denoted by a single moment or image. Though fragile, this kind of beauty creates a powerful experience for the observer, since it must be fully enjoyed in a specific period of time.” (27) *Mono no aware* implies a sense of communication between the subject and the object. Antanas Andrijauskas in his article “Specific Features of Japanese Mediaeval Aesthetics” comments that *mono no aware* is “the charm unfolding in the harmony of feeling and reason in which the emotional attitude (*aware*) of the subject fuses with the object (*mono*) being contemplated” (qtd in Prusinski 28). The term, loosely translated, means ‘the sadness or pathos of things.’ Japanese philosophy considers beauty as an experience of the mind and heart. The perfect example of this ideal would be found in nature. Miyazaki’s films portray these values delicately. Documentaries usually portray the problems nature faces as hard facts of life using statistical data and imagery. Miyazaki, however, portrays the fragile relationship in his animation films in a playful, yet somber mood that appeals to the heart of children and adults alike.

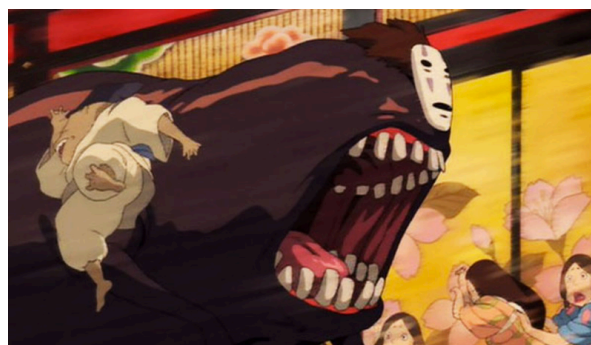
Miyazaki established a film studio called Studio Ghibli in 1985. Numerous films have been made by the studio that is imbued with Miyazaki’s unique style of portraying nature. The success of *Kaze no tani no Naushika* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, 1984) led to the foundation of the studio.



### The Wind Rises

It is among the films which featured his concern for nature prominently. Some of the other films which also deal with the aforementioned subjects are *Tonari no Totoro* (*My Neighbor Totoro*, 1988) and *Mononoke-hime* (*Princess Mononoke*, 1997). In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* Miyazaki portrays an earth devastated by a bionic-nuclear holocaust. The last days of the war were named the “Seven Days of Fire” where man almost destroys the earth’s ecosystem, making the planet’s most parts uninhabitable. We see the surviving factions fighting each other for survival, with only pockets of peaceful land. The earth is populated by a radioactive forest which is hostile and which threatens human survival with poison. This forest (“Sea of Corruption”) is lethal to anyone who tries to approach it unprepared. Nausicaä, the protagonist, is a nature lover who uncovers the fact that the forest is reviving the earth from radioactive pollution through its roots. She also stops mankind from attacking it and thus halts a final apocalypse which will terminate what is left of the planet. No single person is perhaps portrayed as the ultimate villain. Mankind’s eagerness to solve problems, without properly knowing beforehand what the final consequences are, brings on disasters. There are hints in many of his works that indicate violence only exacerbates mankind’s problems. In his latest and possibly last feature length

anime *Kaze Tachinu* (*The Wind Rises*, 2013), after the film’s protagonist Jiro confronts a bully and returns home bruised, his mother tells him that ‘Fighting is never justified.’ In this film, we may surely interpret his nightmare of bombs falling on his plane in his childhood as a symbol of his moral dilemma of designing planes that might not be used for peaceful purposes. In *My Neighbor Totoro* some city children – all siblings – move to a house in the countryside (‘Satoyama’) to stay close to their mother who is hospitalized there. They encounter the friendly forest spirit Totoro, who helps them cope with their distress. He takes them on magical midnight tours which make them receptive to the idea of the value of nature and life. They learn to appreciate the fact that the delayed return of their mother will only make her homecoming much sweeter. This is the philosophy of ‘*mono no aware*’. It can also be observed, in most of Miyazaki’s works, that children are the pivot of the main story arc. Miyazaki once observed that “A five-year-old understands that in a way an adult obsessed with the economy and share prices cannot” and that they have a “purity of the heart” which grown-ups lack (qtd. in McNeill). In his *anime* world, children most often are the ones who have the pure courage and clarity to act in the right way ultimately. Adults help them on their journey forward, but more often than not, children avert disasters or set things right in Miyazaki’s films. Their innocence and purity helps them to achieve that.





## Spirited Away

*Satoyamas* are 'hamlet- mountains' which are maintained by man. These are self-sufficient areas which largely consist of paddy fields and forests. Villagers cut trees, but also plant new ones regularly. The idea of *satoyama* encourages biodiversity and nature preserve, it also portrays the ancient way of Japanese lifestyle. Miyazaki took a major part in the campaign to preserve Fuchinomori, a *satoyama*. His walks in Fuchinomori gave him some ideas that he used in *My Neighbor Totoro*. His much acclaimed film *Spirited Away* (2001) explores the journey of the girl Chihiro, a sulky child, from immaturity to maturity. She ventures into a fairytale bathhouse and through fantastic events involving witches, water and nature spirits learns the meaning of love, maturity and responsibility.

At the end of the film we see Chihiro regaining her freedom and returning with her parents to the world of reality; but she has to leave her best friend, Haku, behind. He cannot cross over to her world. There is a sense of sadness in this scene, yet there is also a sense of completion, of maturity. Chihiro is a different person, but she sees the world more clearly. Here again one can sense *mono no aware*. Patrick Drazen, in his book *Anime Explosion! The What? Why? & Wow! Of Japanese Animation* observes, "'Sen' is another way of pronouncing the first character of the name 'Chihiro.'" Chihiro is called by the name 'Sen' throughout her adventure of the bathhouse in the fairytale countryside, as her name is owned by the witch, the owner of the bathhouse. In the end, Chihiro finds her true identity and learns of the fragile balance between man and nature in the world of reality. Miyazaki, as can be seen, does not create animation films that offer entertainment value only – they carry much deeper values that he perhaps hopes will subconsciously shape a more responsible and caring generation, a generation that reveres

nature, culture, and spiritual values and is concerned about the ongoing destruction of places like the *satoyamas* of this world.

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